

Talk 1: God's zeal for his glory

1 Dry leaders need reformed theology

One of the things I try to do each year as a pastor is to meet up with each of the leaders on our leadership team, one on one. We'll go and have lunch or coffee somewhere, and I'll try to get a feel of how they're going in their ministry.

And quite a few times, as I talk with these Bible study leaders, and especially team leaders - those who've been at it for a number of years. They confide in me that really, they haven't been not going so well. Yes they're a Bible study leader - but for months now they've been feeling empty and drained. They are dry. Yes they lead other Christians - but they themselves are just hanging in there. And really they've been thinking about pulling out of ministry for a while.

And maybe that's you. And if that's the case, then I think you are not alone. This weekend we're going to see that actually, many Christians have learnt a kind of Christianity that leads to a very dry and lifeless Christianity. One that's driven by duty and obligation and effort - and I'm really glad you've come along this weekend.

Because this weekend I've been asked to speak about something called Reformed Theology, and what Reformed Theology means for ministry.

But even when people asked me before this retreat I was really hesitant to tell them that I was going to talk about Reformed theology, because I know that the moment I do so their eyes start to glaze over and they start to get very bored. Because they think they know Reformed Theology. And what's more, Reformed Theology sounds really boring.

But brothers and sisters by the end of this weekend what I hope you can see is that Reformed theology, which at the moment sounds really dull and you wish you hadn't come, this theology is going to refresh you like you never expected it would. Reformed theology will ignite and transform the whole way you do your ministry in a way that you never thought it could.

2 Reformed theology - misunderstood!

When I was younger I was a fired up Calvinist. Because Calvinism was this robust philosophical system that made so much sense to me. John Calvin was a reformer who was actually born 500 years ago this year. He became the chief reformer in Geneva up in Switzerland, he wrote a lot of books, and his name became attached to a way of reading the Bible called Calvinism, which is another name for Reformed Theology. And I was a very proud Calvinist.

But I had no idea what Calvinism was about. For me it was all about the total depravity of man and the sovereignty of God in salvation. And perhaps for you, when you think of Calvinism, probably what you think of is TULIP, the five points of Calvinism. Five points which historically have summed what Reformed or Calvinist people see that the Bible teaches about salvation. There's a list of them in your booklets: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints. And for a lot of people this is what Reformed theology is all about. Calvinism is captured in these five points.

But TULIP is not what being Reformed is all about. TULIP is what the enemies of the Reformed faith thought we are on about. In Holland among Protestant Christians there was a man called Jacobus Arminius who came to disagree with some of

Calvin's teachings. And a group of his followers became known as Arminians. And they put their disagreement down on paper, a document called the Remonstrance. And what was it they disagreed over? It was these five points that they identified as being sticking points for them.

In 1610, this was their position, and what you have there is in a different order to what they wrote. But this is what were arguing. They said, (1) Conditional election: God determined to save in Christ those who, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, shall believe on this his Son Jesus. (2) Universal atonement, that Jesus died for everybody, yet no one actually enjoys this forgiveness except the believer. (3) Natural inability, that man does not have saving grace in himself, and needs to be born again through the Holy Spirit. (4) Resistable grace, that anything good must be ascribed to the grace of God, but that this grace that God sends on people can be resisted by that human. And (5) Uncertainty of perseverance, while people get incorporated into Christ, it is possible for people, by forsaking Christ, to become devoid of grace.

That was their position, and in the end there was an international council to sort out this disagreement called the Synod of Dort, and the Synod of Dort ended up agreeing with the Reformed Christians and not with those of the Remonstrance. And from their five point summary someone came up with the acronym TULIP.

But you need to understand that TULIP is not really what Reformed people think about being Reformed - it's actually what those who disagree with us at one point in history thought we are on about.

It's like you when want to understand about the Trade Unions, what they are and how they work. And you go and talk to the Coalition. You go to Malcolm Turnbull's office and you sit down, and you ask him all your questions about the Trade Unions. And he tells you what he thinks about Trade Union movement. And some of it is true, but it's not quite there. The essence is kind of missing in what he says because he is philosophically opposed to the whole idea of the Trade Union movement.

Or you're at work and one lunchtime you talk to a friend about your weekend and how you were at church. And they say to you, "Oh so you're very *religious*, are you? You must be a very *spiritual* person." And we feel very awkward, we um and ah, we don't know how to respond. Because that's not really what Christianity is all about for us. They think it is. And yes you could use those categories to describe Christianity. But by doing so you lose so much of the heart, the reality of Christianity.

In the same way if you think that TULIP is what being Reformed is all about, you are seriously mistaken. Yes it captures some things, it captures some true things about Calvinism. But actually it misses the real point. It doesn't actually capture the heart of Calvinism. Because its enemies have never really understood it.

Here is a quote from AN Martin. And he warns us about TULIP. He says that,

"The so-called Five Points of Calvinism are cast in a negative form and can in some ways be misleading. Nonetheless we cannot change the course of history, and so the Five Points have come down to us and we must learn to live with them. Take the last four points - unconditional election, particular redemption [Christ died

to save specific people], the efficacious call of God and the persevering work of God in all whom he has called and joined to his Son: What is the focal point in all of these? The ultimate focal point, of course, is the display of the glory of God's grace, as we read in Ephesians 1; but as the immediate focal point, how is that glory displayed? By what means? By the taking of totally depraved creatures and making them wholly men and women in whom the very likeness of God's Son can be seen."

AN Martin, 16.

TULIP is all about the sovereignty of God in salvation. Which is true. Yes, we uphold that. The Remonstrance are right about that. But the heart of Reformed theology isn't actually about the sovereignty of God in salvation. That's only one part of it.

And you can see from the quote that Reformed theology is actually about the glory of God. God's sovereignty in salvation, yes, it's a part of that, it's one of the most important ways that we see and experience the glory of God. But it's not the whole of Calvinism.

I drove up to Katoomba in a car. And a car has wheels - usually four of them, plus a spare. Wheels are an integral part of the car. But a car is not about wheels. And, if all you have is wheels, you don't actually have a car. And in fact you can be a person all about wheels. You could be a dedicated collector of wheels, an expert about wheels, even. But you actually miss the point entirely.

Here is another quote, this time about John Calvin.

Even today, the popular caricature of Calvin is that he centered his entire system on a fatalistic predestinarianism and that he ruled the city of Geneva with an iron hand. Calvin's theology is nothing of the kind. While he did teach the predestining grace of God, it was the furthest thing from fatalism, and the doctrine of predestination was only one element of a much larger vision, centered on the glory of God.

William Edgar, *Truth in all its glory*, 45.

What this means, brothers and sisters, is that you can have Christian leaders who think they are Calvinists - there are people who think they are Reformed because they believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation, they believe in the inability of man to be saved. They see these things clearly in the Bible and believe in it, they teach these things. But in reality they've missed the point of being Reformed all along.

3 Reformed theology and the glory of God

I said before that John Calvin ministered in Geneva - but he wasn't always there. There was actually a point in time when the people in Geneva had enough of them, and kicked him and the other reformer out of their city. And when they did that, the Roman Catholics noticed. Their reformer was no longer there. And so in 1538 Cardinal Sadoleto wrote a letter to the town leaders of Geneva, theologically challenging this whole reformation thing. Trying to win them back to Roman Catholicism.

The town leaders were freaked out and so they sent this letter to Calvin. And Calvin sprang into action. Within a week he'd written his answer, winning back the confidence of Geneva who welcomed him back with open arms.

Here is a quote from his *Reply to Sadoleto*. Calvin wrote this,

It is not very sound theology to confine a man's thought so much to himself, and not to set before him, as the prime motive for his existence, zeal to illustrate the glory of God. For we are born first of all for God, and not for ourselves. As all things flowed from him, and subsist in him, so, says Paul, they ought to be referred to him. I acknowledge indeed, that the Lord, the better to recommend the glory of his name to men, has tempered zeal for the promotion and extension of it by uniting it indissolubly with our salvation. But since he has taught that this zeal ought to exceed all thought and care for our own good and advantage, and since natural equity also teaches that God does not receive what is his own, unless he is preferred to all things, it certainly is the part of a Christian man to ascend higher than merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul. I am persuaded, therefore, that there is no man imbued with true piety who will not consider as insipid that long and laboured exhortation to zeal for heavenly life, a zeal which keeps a man entirely devoted to himself and does not, even by one expression, arouse him to sanctify the name of God.

John Calvin, *Response to Sadoleto*.

What he's telling Sadoleto here is that it is wrong to talk about Christianity as though it was all about your salvation, your good, your benefit. That's not true at all. If you do that, you have a defective theology. That is to put yourself at the center of your theology.

No, "we are born first of all for God, and not for ourselves", he says. We exist to illustrate the glory of God.

Here is another quote from Calvin.

Assuredly, the thing at which I chiefly aimed, and for which I most diligently laboured, was, that the glory of thy goodness and justice, after dispersing the mists by which it was formerly obscured, might shine forth conspicuous, that the virtue and blessings of thy Christ (all glosses being wiped away) might be fully displayed. For I thought it impious to leave in obscurity things which we were born to ponder and meditate.

John Calvin, *Reply to Sadoleto*

Can you hear that, this is why God brought us to life, this is what we are born to ponder and meditate - the glory of God's goodness and justice.

Here is BB Warfield and he's echoing all of this. And he says that a Calvinist is someone who has seen God in Scripture, glorious, and who loves the glory of God.

It lies then, let me repeat, in a profound apprehension of God in his majesty, with the poignant realisation which inevitably accompanies this apprehension, of the relation sustained to God by the creature as such, and particularly by the sinful creature. The Calvinist is the man who has seen God, and who, having seen God in his glory, is filled on the one hand with a sense of his own unworthiness to stand in God's sight as a creature, and much more as a sinner, and on the other hand, with adoring wonder that nevertheless this God is a God who receives sinners. He who believes in God without reserve

and is determined that God shall be God to him in all his thinking, feeling and willing - in the entire compass of his life activities, intellectual, moral and spiritual - throughout all his individual social and religious relations is, by force of that strictest of all logic which presides over the outworking of principles into thought and life, by the very necessity of the case, is a Calvinist.

BB Warfield, *Calvin as a Theologian and Calvinism Today*

Can you see, brothers and sisters. The center of Reformed theology, the heart of Reformed Theology, isn't actually the sovereignty of God (even though that's part of it). It's not TULIP (although TULIP does summarise important things). Brothers and sisters, Reformed theology is actually the glory of God. It's about seeing that, and loving it, and allowing that vision to capture and transform your life. All your life activities, your thinking, your working, your resting, in fact Paul will say your eating and drinking as well.

4 God's zeal for his own glory

4.1 God does all things for his own glory

We're going to talk more about what that kind of vision does to your Christian life tomorrow. We're going to see what a massive difference it makes. But right now we're going to see that this preoccupation with the glory of God isn't just Calvin. God himself is zealous for his own glory. And what we discover is that God does all things for his glory.

He does the work of creation - for his own glory. Here is Psalm 19,

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they display knowledge.

³ There is no speech or language
where their voice is not heard.

⁴ Their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

Psalm 19:1-4 (NIV)

First and foremost, creation displays God's creative genius. And this is what you sometimes see God's people doing in the Bible. In Revelation chapter 4 we have a famous passage that many of you know from Two Ways to Live. In Revelation we see the heavenly throneroom, and there are all these people surrounding God. And listen to what they say:

¹¹ "You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."

Revelation 4:11 (NIV)

What they are praising God for is not his salvation at this point - that will come later on. But here it is because he is the creator of all things. God designed and created planets and galaxies. Yabbies and mice - all these things exist - for his glory.

Almost all of us have had the privilege to study. And yes, you could get really good marks. You could really understand the

intricacies of the human body. And maybe even do some really useful research that genuinely helps people. But if your studies do not fill you with awe and fear for the Lord God, then fail. I know you got a distinction from your lecturer. But where it really counts, fail.

See, creation isn't really for us. Those flowers you smell, the food you eat, it's not really for your enjoyment. It is enjoyable, it's a wonderful creation. But God primarily intends it to showcase his glory.

What about his work of redemption. What about when he saves the Old Testament people of Israel. That great work of bringing Israel out of Egypt, surely that was for their sake of Israel. No, it's for God's glory. Exodus 14,

⁴ "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelites did this.

Exodus 14.4 (NIV)

And later on that chapter God declares,

¹⁷ "I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. ¹⁸ The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen."

Exodus 14.17-18 (NIV)

Why does God take his people Israel out from Egypt? Why does he harden the heart of Pharaoh and have Moses do all the things he does in the name of God? What is his purpose in

doing all these things? Is it so that he can have a people of his very own? Well, in a sense, yes that's true. But here God reveals his final purpose. It is so that he will gain glory for himself.

Turn with me please to Romans 3 in the New Testament we have this:

²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [so notice that sin is defined in terms of God's glory] ²⁴ and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this [why?] to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- ²⁶ he did it [why? what is the reason?] to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Romans 3:23-26 (NIV)

And that reason in verse 25 and verse 26, is entirely about God. It is to display his justice. It is to exercise and show out his glory. That is why God saves.

Turn with me now to Ephesians 1. Ephesians 1 talks a lot about being 'in him' and 'in Christ'. And it's right for us to take note of that. But there is something even more significant. In Ephesians 1 Paul also tells us the final purpose for God doing all the things he does.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might

be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:11-14 (NIV)

Could you hear it come up, not once, but twice? Can you see, buried there in all those words, that little phrase, 'for his name's sake'. Only a little phrase, and it's so easy for us to miss. But that small phrase gives us the final reason, the final landing point for why God works salvation.

Here is a quote about Calvinism.

Calvinism emphasises salvation and evangelism but not as ends in themselves. Calvinists believe salvation is a means to an even greater end - the glory of God. The glory of God is the purpose for which God created humanity and for which he saves a great multitude out of humanity.

Reisinger, Allen, *Beyond Five Points*, 152.

This weekend our topic is On Solid Ground. And so you can ask the surface level question: why did Jesus die? and you get a surface level answer: it's so that he can save sinful people from their sins. But then you can go deeper. You can ask, why does he do that? you can get right to the very bottom: why? he does all things for his name's sake. And *that* is the basement for every act that God does. That is the Solid Ground, the foundation for *everything* God allows to happen, through all

time, in all places. That is the tremendous thick line that stretches throughout all of history and ties it all together. God does all things for his glory.

4.2 God is jealous for his own glory

But not only that, we also discover that God is jealous for his glory. Isaiah 42,

⁸ "I am the LORD; that is my name!
I will not give my glory to another
or my praise to idols.

Isaiah 42:8 (NIV)

Numbers 20, the Israelites have escaped from Egypt and are hungry and thirsty and want some water. And God tells Moses to speak to the rock - and in his anger he takes his stick and smacks it twice. And the water rushes out. And because of that Moses is unable to lead Israel into the promised land. He has to die, only getting to see it from a distance. Why? Because he did not honour God as holy in the sight of the Israelites.

And there are other verses too, which we can't get to. But this is what God is doing in all he does. In all these passages. What is of utmost concern to him, what he loves most of all, is not actually his creation. What he cares about ultimately isn't even his own people, the people of God. It is his own holy name. What he pursues relentlessly, is his own glory.

Well what about things like salvation? What about Jesus? Doesn't that show us that God is concerned about people? Doesn't that show that he cares for me? That show that I matter to God?

Brothers and sisters God saves because it glorifies him to do so. Not really because it's better for us - which it is. But because it leads to greater praise for his holy name. See at the center of everything. Everything that God has done and is doing in this world, it is all about the glory of God.

See we like to think we're really special, that God is better of with us. That he needs us. But God doesn't actually need you or I to praise him. Luke 3, Jesus says that God can even raise up children of Abraham out of stones. In Luke 19 the disciples, a whole crowd of them are praising Jesus, as he arrives into Jerusalem. The Pharisees don't like it and say, 'make them stop.' And Jesus says, 'I tell you, if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.' We're not as special, we're not as central as we think we are. God's glory is what is central. We are merely his servants - his worshippers - whose job it is to see, and to love him, to be in fear, and awe and wonder and his infinite majesty.

See, we think that when we become a Christian, God is right there with us, to give us good things. To shower us with blessings and health and a place in that course at university. But really what God desires for, what he pursues relentlessly, is the glory of his name.

5 Making sense of tough questions

And once you understand that God's glory is at the center of everything, it makes sense of all kinds of things.

See, one of the big struggles people have is, how can a loving God send people to hell? Because you know if *people* is of utmost value, then what's God doing sending people off to hell? How can he do that? We know that people are precious to him, because he sent Jesus to die for them, so if people really are so precious, why isn't everybody saved? See, a big question. But

you can already see can't you, that they've gotten Christianity all wrong. Because they think God is most concerned about people. He's not: he is more concerned for his glory. And he is glorified in salvation, just as he is in judgment. Because all of creation sees just how holy and awesome and merciful he is. Once you put God's glory at the center, and not ourselves, it makes sense.

Something else is heaven. In Revelation John has a vision of heaven and he sees a vast multitude surrounding God and praising him. And maybe you think, well that's not so great. That just sounds tiring to me. Hopefully that singing session doesn't go for too long, so I can get on to the real goodies of heaven. So I can see my dead wife or husband again, so I can jack myself into the heavenly fun machines, and start having the time of their lives. Yeah, that's what I'm really looking forward to. But the problem is, that's not how heaven is described. And Jesus says in Luke 20 that there is no marriage in heaven. And we think, what? How terrible! And so you know Christians have tried to come up with all sorts of ways around that. But that's because they put people at the center. They put my marriage, my pleasure. And they can't see that finally seeing God in all his perfection, in all his glory, and praising him. worshipping him. adoring him. That's what all of creation is about. Not your pleasure, but God's glory. And in heaven, creation becomes what it was meant to be.

Or perhaps you wonder what else there is to do with life. Because church is frankly kind of repetitive. All preaching tells us to do is to a) becoming a Christian, and then b) bringing your friends along to church. And that seemed to be all that the sermons they heard were saying. What else was there to the Christian life? Is that all there is?

And so that's why for many of us life can degenerate into work. That's what our life is about. And when we get ourselves into a good job, a good career, and when we are there in the company, and we are super productive, when we are indispensable, when the boss thinks we're doing such a fine job - that's when we feel on top of the world. Or maybe for you it's sport. Or finally getting to have sex. Or having the approval of our parents. When that happens, that's when we think we are most satisfied, most fully actuated. Most true to our being.

But we have been created to see more and more of the wonders of his grace, the awesomeness of his It's growing deeper and ever deeper in your love for God. It's worshipping God with awe and reverence. It's fearing God with a godly fear. That is growth and progress in the Christian life - and in our third talk on Sunday we're going to see that's what we want to be doing in our ministry.

6 Cultural blindness to the glory of God

True Christianity has the glory of God at its very center. The glory of God seen in the face of Jesus. Here is 2 Corinthians 4, and Paul says that,

⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:4-6 (NIV)

What Satan wants to do most of all is obscure the glory of God. To hide that from view of people. But in the gospel, as Jesus Christ is preached, God is shining the bright, clear light of his glory.

"This is how God makes a man a Calvinist. In one way or another he gives him such a sight of his own majesty and sovereignty and holiness as the high and lofty One, that it brings with it a deep, experimental acquaintance with human sinfulness personally and in terms of our own generation. It brings experimental acquaintance with the grace of God, an intimate acquaintance with the voice of God, an utter resignation to the will and the ways of God."

AN Martin, 9

For God, his own glory is paramount. He pursues that relentlessly, he protects it jealously. What about you, brothers and sisters? Is your face at the center? Is your enjoyment of life at the center? Your honour? Your career? We are made for the glory of God, that is why we have eyes and mouths and brains and souls. That is why we can learn and speak and count and earn. Not to build wealth and experience life - that is a wasted life.

We have eyes and ears to read and see the glory of God. We have brains to understand a little of how massive God must be. We have hearts to be full of awe and fear and worship. We have mouths and language to share our awe with others. And a life that does that, even if you are incredibly unsuccessful in everything else in life. That is a full and pleasing and successful life.

We are *most* human, we are *most* energized, most useful, *most* true to our created nature, when we are seeing God, when we adore him. And worship him. And only desire to give him glory. Because once we see properly. Once we see that God is immense and worthy of glory and honour, that is what we have really been created for. What our true purpose is. And it makes us humble. And loving. And patient.

I used to be a proud Calvinist. That's because I thought I thought it was all about a robust system of thinking. I was wrong: it was really about seeing the glory of God.

And once we see - not just with our minds - but with the eyes of our heart the glory and majesty of our God. We grow to be God-fearing men and women. People who fear God and not man - what can you do to me? We become people who are humble and thankful - not arrogant or full of pride. We become people whose prayers are full of praise and worship to the God who is indescribably glorious.

Talk 2: Two ways to live

1 Dutiful Christianity

Last night we started off by looking at Reformed Theology. And we saw that for Calvin, and in fact the Bible, it's not actually about predestination (though that's a part of it). It's not fundamentally about the sovereignty of God in salvation or TULIP (though those are important). Instead, Reformed Theology is first and foremost about the glory of God. And we saw, didn't we, that's what captivated Calvin. But more than that, we saw from the Bible that again and again, God himself is zealous for his own glory. Calvin simply saw that. Here is a quote from BB Warfield, who says of Calvin that,

Into the heart of none more than into his did the vision of the glory of God shine, and no one has been more determined than he not to give that glory to another.

BB Warfield

And we said that Reformed Theology is what we actually need to because there's actually a different kind of Christianity out there. A different kind of Christianity that is very popular. You will find it in a lot of our churches. But it leads us into a very dry and stale and lifeless Christianity.

And that is a Christianity that is focussed on duty and obligation. A Christianity that is driven along by hard work and effort. And for many of us, that is what we are used to.

The problem is actually worse for us as Chinese Christians. Because we actually inherit a culture that is strongly influenced by Confucianism. For over two and a half thousand years, the teachings of Confucius shaped and moulded and influenced the

thinking of Chinese nation in all manner of ways: in how families operate, in how people thought of themselves in relation to others, in what makes someone a good person. Confucianism has been a huge influence on the Chinese - and you may not think so, but it even influences us in the second generation. It's just part of how we are, part of the operating system that we inherit.

One of the things about Confucianism is that it puts lots of focus on you performing your role in society. So you might be a father, a son, a soldier. And personally, you might have all these feelings about your role. But the important thing is to be a dutiful father. Perform the functions required of you, a son. Discharge faithfully all that is required of you as a soldier.

And once we become a Christian, we can unknowingly import that into our Christianity. And so Christianity, which started off being about grace, which started off with us loving God - slowly becomes all about duty. And obedience. And loyalty.

Watch Chinese movies and this is what the heroic characters are like. The valiant soldier who dies, carrying out his orders. The policeman who heroically does what is required of him. The father who carries out his role, despite the great personal cost. Those are the heroes of Chinese movies, they lean towards obedience and duty.

But have you noticed the things we say to each other in a Chinese church? Have you noticed how we *also* lean towards obedience and duty?

"Look at that man," someone says to you. "He has cancer, and yet he is setting up tables for church."

“Look at that woman,” says another. “She is in hospital dying, and yet she is still doing her duty by sharing the gospel.”

“Look at those missionaries, they give up so much to serve God. I could never be like them.”

And all these statements would be said with great reverence. With awe and humility for these great ones, because we are nowhere close to that level of godly self denial. And in fact if you actually just wanted to be miserable and selfish - yet you force yourself to do your duty to share the gospel, wow, that's even *more* dutiful. How wonderful that she does *that* for God!

You see brothers and sisters, we lean towards duty and obedience. We have to be very careful. Because that can lead us to embracing a form of Christianity that is poison to our souls.

2 Boundary and center

In Deuteronomy chapter 5 we have the ten commandments. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Observe the Sabbath day. The ten commandments - and they gets a lot of attention, don't they?

But then in Deuteronomy 6 we have the greatest commandment.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵
Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 (NIV)

You can think of chapter 5 as being like the boundary that runs around the outside, marking out an area.

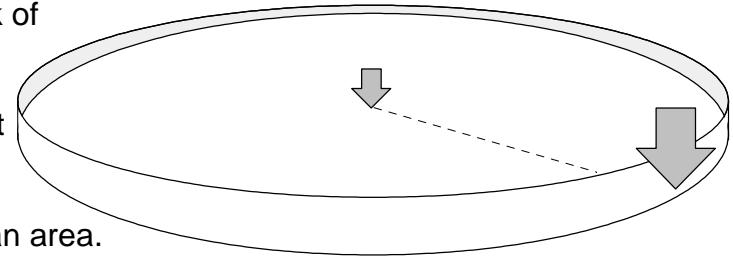
Chapter 5 is like a boundary fence, keeping people in and out, making it clear what was too far. But chapter 6 is far away from the boundary - it is very center of that area.

Now, it's true, the people of God were meant to avoid all those things in chapter 5. But that didn't mean they were actually pleasing God. Because you could be scrupulously making sure you were *just* on the right side of the line. You could be an *expert* at knowing *exactly* what was allowed, so you could get as close as you could to that line without crossing it.

But chapter 6 was to be the center of Israel's life. They weren't meant to be living anywhere they wanted to within the circle, camped out as close to the edge as possible: *just* managing to avoid adultery, *scraping* past the mark on being idolatrous. No, God's people were meant to live in the *center*. They were to love the Lord their God, with all their heart and soul and strength.

And it's in chapter 6 that you have those instruction to tie it onto their hands and foreheads. It's *chapter 6* that has the command to write this on their door frames and their gates. That they must very sure to impress onto their children - *that* was to be their life!

And what's more, it's only when you love God alone, that those things on the boundary actually make any sense. It's the love of



God at the center that gives meaning and purpose to all those commandments! Because if you are a person who loves God, then all those things on the boundary makes absolute sense - you will want to stay far away from them!

But what happened was that Israel didn't live in the center. They couldn't really - only a few of them actually had the Holy Spirit. On the whole Israel lived far from the center, camped *right out* on against the boundary - and often on the other side.

And already you can see that a Christianity that is only about obedience and duty. A Christianity that does not have a love for the glory of God at its center - there is something seriously wrong with that.

You know in the gospels there was actually a group of people who were very good at following God's rules. They were very good at duty and obedience. They knew exactly where that boundary was. They were scrupulous at making sure they were on the right side of that boundary. What do you think Jesus thought of them? Here is Matthew 15:

¹ Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, ² "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

³ Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' ⁵ But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' ⁶ he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the

sake of your tradition. ⁷ You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

⁸ " 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

⁹ They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' "

Matthew 15:1-9 (NIV)

I've often thought that if I lived at the time of Jesus, I would probably have been a Pharisee. Because look, here is a religion of obedience and duty. And in their case, very good obedience. Pharisees were excellent at living out God's rules. And that's what we like! But the problem was that their hearts were far from God. They believed in God, they obeyed God - but they did not see him as glorious, they did not love his glory.

Brothers and sisters, the danger for you is that for many years, you may have had a Christianity purely of duty. and obedience. You do the things you do as a leader because it's the right thing to do. You go to the things you go to because it's expected. And you love for God - well, that's around somewhere. Like an old souvenir. Forgotten at the back of a drawer.

We once loved God, we once were in awe of him when we first saw him in the gospel, glorious. Gracious. We learnt in the gospel that Jesus died for us, to make us his new people. And he was worthy of our worship and adoration. But over the years, slowly, we have allowed other things to obscure our vision of him.

He is like an imposing and majestic snow capped mountain that we see from far away. At the same comforting and frightening.

But as time goes on, we put up buildings and ornaments which little by little obscures our view. Gardens and sculptures and amusements. Buildings and extensions. And before we know it, we'd forgotten all about that mountain. And instead of being awestruck and captivated by that mountain, instead all we see around us, completely obscuring our vision, are all these other things.

Brothers and sisters instead of seeing God in all his glory and being filled with love and adoration, like seeing that snow-capped mountain. Instead of *that*, slowly, *other* things have obscured our vision. Like church meetings. And ministry. And church politics. And the many things that we do as Christians, like coming here, going there.

And pretty soon our spiritual lives become dry - it's no longer about the Lord, our eyes are not fixed on his glory, we are not eager to see his face again - no. Instead all we see are the things we know we just have to do. Am I reading the Bible every day. Am I praying for at least five minutes every day. Am I avoiding smoking. Am I avoiding going out with a non Christian boyfriend or girlfriend. We fix our attention on being godly. On doing the right thing. The boundary. And all the joy and amazement that we once had is sucked out of our spiritual lives.

Many years ago I was driving a friend home from youth group. He lived quite a long way away and so we had a long time to talk in the car. And as we drove through the night he started to open up. He started to share about how dry *he* was as a Christian. How *he* had no more joy in his Christian life. How he was running on willpower, to do the things that he *knew* were right - like reading the Bible. But he was just about ready to give up.

And you know what? I wonder if secretly, you share his experience. For all the evangelistic confidence and Bible study know-how you have, for all your knowledge of Bible facts and how to get things done at church. Despite all that, you are running ... empty. It's only been willpower that's kept you going so far - and that's just about to go.

As we drove back to my friend's house I spoke about the gospel. He already knew the gospel, he was actually on a team that did evangelism. But together we heard again about how gracious God was, that Jesus would bear the weight of our sins on himself. We talked about the majesty of God, his holiness. And when we reached his house all those things which clouded his view were no longer there. Christianity was no longer about meetings and agendas and forcing himself to read the Bible - it was about the Lord.

3 What is the glory of God?

And what he saw, brothers and sisters, was the glory of God. Which brings us to the next point. What is this glory of God that we're talking about?

What my friend was seeing was the excellence and the worth of God. He saw again the goodness of God in freely accepting a sinner like himself. But it's not just that, it's also his dignity, his holiness, his creative genius, his beauty. These are aspects of God's being.

But in the Bible the glory of God can also mean physical manifestations of God's character. Which is kind of an extension of the first category. Because God's excellence and worth is so strong and concentrated that sometimes it even takes on a kind of physical form. In Exodus 24 they saw the glory of God visible as fire on top of the mountain. In 1 Kings 8

when they dedicate the temple, the glory of the Lord fills the temple, and what actually happens is that a thick cloud filled the whole temple so that the priests couldn't do their work. In Luke when the angels appear to the shepherds, "the glory of the Lord shone around them". What does that mean? Is that a piece of God's character on the ground over there? Of course not. It somehow shows itself in a physical form. If this afternoon I am merciful to you, my mercy doesn't become visually apparent and shine brightly against the wall. But with God it does.

And thirdly what God's creatures do is we "give God glory". What does that mean? Do we hand over to God more quantities of mercy? Do we give him more smoke for the cloud, more light to shine around? No. This is when we see the glory of God, and we reflect that back to him in loving him, in our adoration and awe and worship. And I don't just mean singing. When we live godly lives, and put sin to death, when we evangelise and do these things with a heart that sees him as mighty, *that* glorifies God.

And you can consider these three things as a kind of loop. One: God is glorious in his goodness and holiness. Two: that glory is so strong it somehow becomes tangible so that people can even see it shining. Three: we see his goodness and holiness, and he is glorified as we love him, and fear him. We have been created for God's glory. That is our place in the history of God's glory.

4 The centrality of the glory of God

4.1 Not seeing the very obvious

And I have to confess that in the past when I was reading the Bible, the glory of God was just something that I never really noticed. I'd pick up a Bible passage like Ephesians 1 and I'd

learn about how I'm united with Christ. And there were all these, what seemed to be throwaway lines about the glory of God. And I would just skip by them, because they weren't so important. I kind of just took it for granted.

I was looking for new theological insights that I needed to know. Commands that I should go away and obey. Promises that I could take and believe. But in reading the Bible that way, I never noticed that all of these things were only secondary things. It was only much later that I realised these throwaway lines about the glory of God that I skipped over were actually the telling me the primary things. The glory of God was actually the ultimate reason for all that God is doing.

4.2 The glory of God consists of his holiness and mercy

Turn with me to Exodus 33 and 34 now. Moses asks to see the glory of God.

¹⁸ Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."

That's an astounding thing to ask. What was he thinking?

¹⁹ And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

²¹ Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. ²² When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

And so in the next chapter God does it. He shows Moses his glory. And here it is. But as we look at this passage, look carefully. What is it that is on display when God is there showing his glory to Moses? What is on display?

[...] ⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. ⁶ And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, ⁷ maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

⁸ Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped.

Exodus 33:18-23; 34:5-8 (NIV)

What is on display? It is the compassion and grace of God who is full of love and faithfulness and forgiveness. *And* it is also the holiness of God who punishes the guilty. Those are the two wings of the glory of God. And you need to understand that - God's wrath and judgment doesn't detract from his glory, it adds to it.

And when we come to the New Testament, when we come to the cross. God's holiness in punishing sin. And his mercy in saving sinners. Those two things come together on the cross - glory and glory. Here is John 17, and listen to what Jesus looks forward to.

¹ After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

"Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

John 17:1-5 (NIV)

As Jesus draws close to the cross what is on his mind is the glory.

4.3 The danger of robbing God of his glory

We're going to skip over point 3 there to go straight to point 4.

4.4 The scandal of sharing God's glory!

Because one of the astounding things we find in the Bible is that the God who dwells in unapproachable light - astoundingly. He wants to share his glory with us. I got a lot of passages there, but I just want to look at the one from 2 Thessalonians. Paul says,

¹³ [But] we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. ¹⁴ He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 (NIV)

1 Peter 5, we will share in the glory to be revealed. Colossians 3, when Jesus returns, we will appear with him in glory. Brothers and sisters, how astounding is that. To know that one day, we aren't just onlookers of God's glory. We aren't just awestruck admirers, playing our part in the loop of God's glory - somehow. We will also share in the glory of God.

5 Two kinds of ministry

Over the page now. Calvin wrote a catechism for Geneva. A catechism is a series of question and answers that a minister and a child would go through. And they used it to teach the basics of Christianity to every child in the city. This is how his catechism starts.

Q: What is the chief end of human life?

A: That men should know God by whom they were created.

Q: What reason have you for saying so?

A: Because he created us for this, and placed us in the world, that he might be glorified in us. And it is certainly proper that our life, of which he is the beginning, be directed to his glory.

Catechism of the Church of Geneva (1545)

And you can probably already hear echoes of another Reformed catechism that will come later on in history. But this is what Calvin wanted to impress on every child. That we are created for the glory of God. And this is the solid ground, the bedrock of all things.

But brothers and sisters, that's not the only vision of ministry. I want to share with you two visions of the Christian life. Two

ways to live the Christian life. One that is driven by obedience and duty. One that is, unfortunately, very common in our churches, very common in Chinese churches.

And another: Christianity captivated by the loveliness and awesomeness of God. Captivated by the glory of God. We can call it Reformed theology if it helps but the name doesn't really matter.

You can see there on your outline a table with those two columns. I'm a bit hesitant showing this to you, because it's very much a work in progress. What I've done here is just chosen eleven aspects of Christian life down the left hand side. There's no real order, and I could have added a whole lot of other things also like how a person thinks about *giving*. How a person thinks about *suffering*. Or what a person *looks forward to in heaven*. But this was an exercise for me to bring together in one place what I think is wrong with a lot of our Christianity. And what is right. What is very right about reformed theology.

Maybe you can have a go at that yourself. Take those three things, and try and think: what would you put in those two columns?

Take prayer. For some people, prayer is something that we really ought to do. And so we make ourselves ask God for things that we're going to do anyway. Our prayers are all about asking. But for those who see and love the glory of God. Prayer becomes one of the chiefest ways we glorify God. The prayers of these people are marked by adoration.

Take Bible reading. For some it's something that we gotta do, we know that Christians do read the Bible, so we make ourselves to do it, even though we don't quite get why. Because after all, we already know what's in it. But for those who love the

glory of God, we read hungrily, in order to fire up our love for God. We delight in those passages that don't tell us anything new! But which magnificently show us God in his goodness and holiness.

Take evangelism. Again, we hate it, it's awkward and scary, but we know that we've got to do it. Because people ought to become Christians. But again for those who have seen the glory of God. Who have found their satisfaction in him. It is just natural and instinctive to call others to come and see what we have seen.

And I probably need to point out lest I get into trouble that it's not necessarily the case that the left hand column is entirely wrong. It's just that without the right hand column as well, without the heart, all you have is the shell of Christianity.

Brothers and sisters, I worry that for a lot of us, we are theologically reformed. We believe intellectually that, yes, God is sovereign in salvation. We might believe four and a half, maybe even five points out of TULIP. But we saw last night, didn't we, that Reformed Theology wasn't actually about TULIP. It wasn't just about predestination - it's actually about seeing and loving the glory of God. That is reformed theology. And I worry that a lot of us who think we are reformed, actually have a Christianity that is only obedience and duty. A Christianity that is camped right out on the boundary, keeping just on the right side of the border. A Christianity that tries hard at doing all the right things - evangelism, prayer, Bible reading - but is not at all about the glory of God.

And what happens if you have a Christianity that is dry, and hard and burdensome. It's all about hard work. It's all about trying harder. There are even some pastors who delight in

highlighting the hardness of the Christian life. But over time this Christianity slowly grinds you down into a fine, dry powder.

I shared this table with some of our Bible study leaders about a month ago and they were very struck by it. We called this the 11 Thesis, because there are 11 points, and just like Luther's 95 Thesis that he nailed up to the church door in Wittenberg, they wanted to take it and nail it to the door of every Chinese church in our city. Because we lean so much toward duty and obedience, don't we, brothers and sisters. Our Christianity is so much about doing it because it's the right thing to do.

Here is a quote from Leslie Newbigin. He says,

I suddenly saw that someone could use all the language of evangelical Christianity, and yet the center was fundamentally the self, my need of salvation. And God is auxiliary to that. Whereas for a Christian brought up on the Bible, the figure of God, Yahweh, this formidable, inescapable, masterly figure is so deeply engraved in our minds, that a Christian could never have said that. [...] I also saw that quite a lot of evangelical Christianity can easily slip, can become centered in me and my need of salvation, and not in the glory of God.

Leslie Newbigin

That is not the Christian life that Jesus promised. In John 10 Jesus says that he is the gate for the sheep, and those who go through him will find pasture. He has come that they will have life, and life to the full. Brothers and sisters can you see that the things that we do, like prayer, like Bible reading, like evangelism. Like forgiving one another, like turning from sin, on the right hand column these things have life! There is a vibrancy and a stamina and a colour there that is altogether missing if all

you have is a dutiful Christianity. And brothers and sisters this happens as we grow to see and love the glory of God.

Here is 1 John 5:3, John shows us what happens when we love God. It flows out naturally into godly behaviour.

³ This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome

1 John 5:3a (NIV)

If all you have are commands, they are burdensome. They are a chore, a dry and stale religion. You get people who resent having to put on a front every Sunday. You get leaders who wish they didn't volunteer. You get people who give grudgingly, who serve half-heartedly, who pray disinterestedly.

But these people here in 1 John 5, they have a heart that loves God. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, says Deuteronomy 6. For those people who live at the center - his commands are no longer burdensome, they are a joy. They will pray with delight. Give freely. Volunteer and serve with gladness.

Brothers and sisters. Bible study leaders. Fellow pastors. What is your ministry like? What are you preaching? Sometimes your pastors can be your very worst enemies here. I know for myself that it's the easiest thing in the world to write a sermon on prayer: God tells us to pray, we don't pray enough, we need to pray more. And people feel weighed down by that obligation - and they *like* it because they're Chinese. "Good sermon, pastor, I really have to pray more." Easiest thing in the world to write a sermon like that, and I know. I've done it.

In the end if the Christian life is lived, energised by the strength of my own arms, moved by the strength of my own discipline,

my own hard work. Then the glory of that life comes to me. But. If a Christian life is lived, captivated by *another*. Astounded by the excellence and worth of *God*. And if that great and clear vision moves me to die, gladly, that others might also see - *that* glorifies the God whom I love. It brings *him* glory.

In Acts 7 what did Stephen see when he was about to be stoned to death? What vision was given him? The ten commandments? What did he see?

⁵⁵ But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

⁵⁷ At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, ⁵⁸ dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Acts 7:55-58 (NIV)

What was it that sustained him at that terrible hour? Duty? No. It was the same thing that must sustain us in our ministry back in our home churches. The same thing that must give our Christian living energy and stamina. The same thing: a vision of the glory of God.

Talk 3: Ministry and the glory of God

1 Made for God's glory

Augustine was a Christian thinker and leader who lived in the fourth and fifth century. But to the great sorrow of his mother who was a Christian, for many years he wandered away from her faith. Very far away, in fact. He joined a group of people who devoted themselves to extreme hedonism, to sexual excess. For many years that was his life. Until one day, by the grace of God, and to the great happiness of his mother, he became a Christian.

At the end of his life he wrote a book called the *Confessions* and this is what he writes,

You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.

Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1

After all his years of trying to find pleasure in sex, Augustine discovers that he is most fulfilled, his heart is most at rest, when it is praising God. That's because, that's what have been made for. And that's what we've been seeing all weekend isn't it brothers and sisters?

Yesterday we looked at the *Catechism of the Church of Geneva* written by John Calvin. Today a more famous one. This is the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, and you probably know how that first question and answer goes:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Westminster Shorter Catechism (1648)

This is what God has made us for. Here is Isaiah 43 where God is talking about Israel. And he says,

^{6a} Bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the ends of the earth--
[because they're currently in exile]
⁷ everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made."

Isaiah 43:6a-7 (NIV)

And we are to be a people who are zealous for the glory of God. There are a number of verses there, but I just want to focus on the one in Matthew 6. That's the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus tells his disciples,

⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:

" `Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:9-10 (NIV)

And did you notice: the very first thing it asks for is that God's name be hallowed, or made holy. When Jesus teaches us how we should pray, the very first thing that lifts off from our hearts is a desire that his name is made holy.

And so can you see, number 1, we are *created* for his glory. But then, not only are we created for his glory, number 2, we are also *saved* for his glory. And so we are actually most true to our design. We are doubly true when we are a people full of genuine praise and awe for his majesty. You know, we are actually most useful, when our hearts freely sing his praises. When you walk on your way to work, and look up you sense how beautiful the trees are. And a simple, unplanned prayer of praise leaps from your glad heart. That is worship. And that is what you were created for.

2 How do we glorify God?

But if we have been made for God's glory, how do we actually go about doing it? How *do* we glorify God? Because chances are, when you were in high school your parents told you, "Tom. You go to your room and do your study okay. You must glorify God by getting good mark in HSC." I'm sure many of us have heard that - and it just sounds corrupted to us. We see right through it. But how *do* we glorify God?

This passage isn't written down in your notes, but here is Romans 15:5-6. Paul says,

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 15:5-6 (NIV)

How do they glorify God? With one heart and mouth. Paul is talking about them as a group glorifying God together, which is why he says 'one'. But notice that it involves both the outside

and the inside. Both the act, in this case what they do with their mouths, as well as the inside, a heart that treasures Christ.

Compare that to Matthew 15, a passage we read yesterday. If you remember Jesus was talking to the Pharisees. And he says of them that they honour God with their lips, but their hearts are far from him.

And so there is no act that is in itself glorifying to God. Giving money in itself does not glorify God. Serving as a missionary in a difficult mission field does not in itself glorify God. Getting a good mark in the HSC by itself does not glorify God.

It comes down to what is happening on the inside. John Hannah says,

What then, is true virtue or righteousness? True virtue is rooted in an inward perception of the holiness and beauty of God. It is an outward vision that turns our inward delights and desires away from self for self's advantages to God for God's sake alone. This renewal begins in the human mind as the knowledge of God through the Word of God by the Spirit is revealed to it. It results in the heart's affective perception of the beauty and wonder of God's very being. It emanates from the heart, the seat of man's being, from seeing such a knowledge of God that we desire to be like him. Thus true virtue involves our consent and willingness of heart to love, enjoy and conform to God's character.

John Hannah

3 Minister by showing people the glory of God

3.1 The kind of people we want to grow

And so brothers and sisters, this is the kind of person we want to grow in our ministries. Obviously, it's not just people who know stuff - like the teachers of the law in the Gospels. It's not just people who outwardly conformed to God's will - like the Pharisees. Brothers and sisters what you want to grow in your churches, in your Bible study groups, are people who see and love the glory of God.

And for that not just to become a slogan that we dutifully pull out. "Oh yes, we do it for the glory of God." But to echo through all the hallways of our life.

And this is what we find in the Bible. In 1 Cor 10:31 Paul says that whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, you should do it to the glory of God.

In Romans 12 Paul tells us to offer up our whole bodies as living sacrifices. This is our spiritual act of worship. And so our whole lives are to be lived as worship to God.

And this is what Calvin wanted. Here is a quote from Calvin. He says,

We are God's: let us therefore live for him and die for him. We are God's: let his wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's: let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward him as our only lawful goal. O, how much has that man profited who, having been taught that he is not his own, has taken away dominion and rule from his own reason that he may yield it to God!

John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.1.

That's the kind of person we want to grow. Not just good people. Or loyal people.

But people who love the glory of God, who are jealous for God's glory, who are humbled and emboldened by their vision of the glory of God.

3.2 Show people the glory of God

How do we go about growing that kind of people? In 2 Corinthians 3 and then 4 Paul shows us how we do this. And the power that it has. We start in 2 Corinthians 4. Paul says:

¹ Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:1-6 (NIV)

See how *do* you grow people? Do you *trick* them into growing? Do you *manipulate* them into growing? Force them into some kind of accountability structure so that have no choice *but* to be godly?

Paul says, no: we renounce such ways. We don't need such ways. In fact all we do (v.2) is we set forth the truth plainly. We just tell them.

But what do we tell them? We tell them about Jesus. Verse 5, 'we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord'. That is what we are holding up in our ministry. That is what we are showing them. And as they turn and gaze upon Jesus. Verse 6 tells us that God (in their case at least) makes his light shine into their hearts and they see his glory.

And brothers and sisters the reason why he doesn't need to use trickery and manipulation is because this kind of ministry is very powerful. This word about Jesus is tremendous and overwhelming in its power.

Go backwards now to the previous chapter, chapter 3. Because in chapter 3 Paul tells us just how powerful it is.

¹² Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. ¹⁶ But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

2 Corinthians 3:12-18 (NIV)

What Paul is doing is contrasting two covenants. The old covenant, where you have the face of Moses, veiled. It did have

some glory, but a fading glory. And the hearts of people remain veiled when that's all they have.

And there is the new covenant, where you have not the face of Moses this time, but the face of Christ (4:6). In this covenant, our hearts aren't veiled, instead God shines his light into our hearts. This word of Jesus is powerful - from it we see God's glory in a massive way.

And what's more, Paul tells us that as we see this glory, so we also reflect it more and more. This glory doesn't leave us unchanged. No, it has a profound effect. It transforms us. From one degree of glory to another (3:18).

Paul has massive confidence in the preaching of the glorious Jesus - which is why there's no need to trick them or manipulate them. Paul has enormous trust in the power of this word, not just to inform people, but utterly transform them!

Brothers and sisters what are you doing in your ministry? What are you teaching? Rules on Christian living? How we have to be prayerful? How we should not be greedy but give with generosity?

I mentioned last time that when I used to read the Bible, I would pull out all these things that had to do with me. My blessings, my obligations, stuff that was new to me. But somehow I was blind all those, seemingly throwaway lines, that were everywhere, all over the Bible, which spoke of the glory of God.

Have you forgotten to show people Christ in all his glory? so that they may see it, and themselves become transformed by the glory that they see? You see brothers and sisters, this is how transformation happens in the lives of people. Just like last night, Sam's question on how we get a person to stop being

greedy, we don't just tell them to stop being greedy. We show them the glory of God. That is *our* ministry technique. That is *our* strategy. It makes no sense to the world. But this is what we do.

And so when you do your Bible teaching, brothers and sisters. Whether that's for high schoolers, or workers, or little kids. What you want to do is to show them the beauty of the mercy of Christ. As you go through your teaching programme, highlight for them his majesty and holiness. And how we must love and fear God. And you model this for them as well by the manner of your life. This is what I do with my little girl when I talk to her about God. "Do you know, Rebecca that God made all these trees. Isn't he wonderful?"

Sometimes the things we say casually and informally, the things we say after the Bible study has finished, that can have more impact on people than the things we say in the Bible study itself. And so you teach your group, not just with the Bible study you wrote. Afterwards, did you know, you're still teaching them - by how you talk about your job. By the way you speak about Jesus, by the things you reveal that you are longing for. By the things that you show that you detest.

Make sure that in your Bible teaching you are showing people the glory of God.

3.3 This is how we grow people who will fight sin

Over the page now, and point 3, by this, we grow a people who will fight sin. Here is Colossians 2, and in Colossians Paul is talking about that form of Christianity that looks really good, but is only about obedience. And look at how powerful he says it is. Verse 23 Paul says,

²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Colossians 2:16-23 (NIV)

Paul says, it's no good at all. It lacks any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Brothers and sisters, people are transformed, not when they apply their effort and discipline and force themselves to look away from pornography. They are transformed - when they see the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 3). That is what transforms us! As we see that greater glory, *that* is what makes us drop those idols of our heart.

In your booklets is a quote from Calvin, and he says that,

When it has once taken possession of their hearts, it leaves no place at all first either to pride, or arrogance, or ostentation; then either to avarice, or desire, or lasciviousness, or effeminacy, or to other evils that our self-love spawns.

John Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.7.2.

See this is how we fight sin. We gaze at the glory of God. And then we find there is no place for anything else.

There is no place for pornography. Last year at SALT retreat a brother in Christ shared with me about his fight with pornography. And he said that before he became a Christian it was really hard for him and his friends. But when he saw the glory of God in the face of Christ - when he became a Christian

- he just stopped. His friends kept struggling and struggling. But for him there was something he loved more.

When we gaze at the glory of God we find there is no place for the Chinese love for face. I'm sure that you've seen a lot of the politics that happens in a Chinese church. You've seen some of the things that can happen because leaders at our churches love their face, and they must preserve their face at all costs. How sometimes people are hurt, truth twisted, whole ministries have to suffer - because someone has to preserve their face!

But you know what, that hasn't always been the case with Chinese Christians. Did you know the first few Chinese who became Christians in Macau because of the ministry of missionaries like Robert Morrison, they had a really hard time. There were only a few of them who became Christians, and their fellow countrymen thought that these Chinese who followed this foreign religion, they were traitors - they were worse than traitors. It was said of them that they didn't want any face: *pu yau lien*. They were beneath being civilised humans. It was as though they didn't care about their face any longer.

And that's because when they came to Christ, their face was no longer at the center of their whole world. God has now taken up his rightful place at the center. And they found themselves astonishingly liberated from having to protect and build their face.

Brothers and sisters, face behaviour can be very ugly in a church. It's really sad to see it happen in a Chinese church. Yet it happens so often. How do you fight it? Tell them to stop? No, you show them the glory of God in the face of Christ.

4 Minister, having seen God's glory

And finally, brothers and sisters, point 4. So far we've been talking about the content of our ministry. What it is that we say to people. What we're looking at here is ourselves as leaders. And we minister - having seen God's glory. That vision of the glory of God drives us on and on in our ministry. This is what leadership is. Leadership isn't just telling people what they ought to do this, don't do that. Instead, we lead, having being captivated ourselves with the glory of God - and calling on people to come and look!

Just say your youth group leader takes you aside afterward and says to you, "Listen, I've got an important job and I want you to do it. What you got to do is you need to stand here and try and get people to go through that door. Okay? Your duty is to get people through there." And then he goes off and leaves you alone.

So here you are, standing where he told you to stand, looking around uneasily. You sigh to yourself. Along come your friends, and you groan inwardly. But you psych yourself up and make yourself tell them, "hey guys? There's a door there that they really should investigate." And they look at you strangely, it sounds like someone's forcing you to do this! And so they go off and leave you alone. Then along come some people from your work. And half-heartedly you mumble something to them about the door. They stop and stare at you, and they smile politely before moving on. And you groan to yourself: what a burdensome duty you have!

But some of you are very good, you'll do it for a long time, because you have great determination. You're convinced that it's the right thing to do, and you're a very dutiful person.

And then I invite you to come and stick your head behind the door. "Come on, you have a look." And so you come over, we open the door, and you look in - and your eyes open wide. You cannot believe your eyes, you are astonished at the amazing sight just behind that plain wooden door. Who would have guessed! This is just incredible, you think to yourself!

One of your other friends is walking past - and you rush over and almost knock them down. You grab them by the shoulder and you shake them. "Hey! You won't believe this! Just behind that door! Just there! You gotta come and look!"

Why look here, there is someone else who has seen that treasure behind the door - you can see the smile on their face. And you rush over, thrilled to find a kindred spirit. "Isn't it great! Isn't it wonderful," the both of you say to each other. "Who would have thought?"

You hear someone else way out there, and you just have to share this revelation. So you rush all the way over, you knock over chairs and tables to tell them what is just behind that door! They simply can't miss out!

Now brothers and sisters, before, and after, you are doing exactly the same job. Before and after, you are doing *exactly* the same task - you are inviting people to go through that door, aren't you. The task is the same in both case. But. They are galaxies apart from each other.

What is different? This second time around it's no longer a burdensome duty. No longer are you forcing yourself to do it because you have to, because it's the right thing to do. No, brothers and sisters. This time around it is a delight, it is sheer pleasure to point people to that door. You are driven, you are propelled, having seen the greatness behind that door.

You see, brothers and sisters. Having seen a vision of the glory of God. Being captivated by God's glory, that is what drives Christian ministry to have real endurance, to have monumental joy and abandon.

And the whole character of your ministry changes, it gets fire and passion when the eyes of our heart glimpses the awesome glory of God. And in the Bible this is what we see. Luke 14 evangelism is great news about a lavish banquet. In Matthew 13 the gospel is fabulous treasure hidden in a field, it is that one pearl of great value we had been searching for our whole lives.

In 1 Peter 2 Peter triumphantly announces that we are:

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

And being a people who have received such an awesome treasure. Who have come out from gloomy darkness to bask in the wondrous radiant bright light of his gospel. We now declare his praises.

And people often wonder, is that talking about evangelism? Or is that talking about worship? Or edification? But you know what the three things are exactly the same. These three things flow from exactly the same heart, it's just that with worship you are talking to God, with edification you are talking to Christians, and with evangelism you are talking to non Christians who are walking past.

But in all three cases, it starts from a heart of that sees with clarity the loveliness and majesty of God. It starts from eyes that were once in gloomy darkness, but now have been opened to see the glory of God.

Earlier I think I mentioned Luke 14. And in Luke 14 Jesus tells a story about a man who takes a long time preparing a lavish banquet. And he calls his invited guests to come and enjoy his banquet - and astoundingly, they don't come! And so the servants are sent out to bring all the crippled people and else in.

That's just a metaphor to help us to get a sense of what the kingdom is like. It is like a *lavish* banquet that you get invited to. With the tables groaning with all the very best food. And what we are doing is calling people to that table.

But have you noticed, brothers and sisters, that the way we evangelise is often like a burdensome duty. And to our non-Christian friends, it sounds to them like we're saying to them, come and eat cardboard. It's good for you, you must eat it, even though it's bland and tasteless and boring. Come and eat.

Because that's what Christianity seems like to them. Their image of Christianity is that it is boring and lifeless and insipid and dull. Worse: that it's rules and commandments, grim obedience and burdensome duty.

And have you noticed that the way we minister to one another is to intellectually go over together all the points of why the kingdom is like a banquet. And even though we are talking about a banquet, it sometimes sounds and looks as though we're chewing cardboard. Forcing ourselves to eat this tedious food. Dutifully taking bite after bite for God.

Brothers and sisters, we need to see him clothed in Scripture, in all his majesty and kindness and ask that God would grow us in our love for him. For that love to grow and eclipse even our love for bargains, and cars, and good food. So that we see him again, as glorious and worthy of your worship, worthy of your life.

When that happens, our conversation will drip with that love. Jesus says that out of the overflow of man's heart, his mouth speaks (Luke 6.45). In our Bible study groups, people won't just *hear* us talk about our love of Jesus in the Bible study, but everywhere. Your friends will see that your passions have changed. There's something different about you, you just don't seem talk about cars in the same way you used to.

The work of the kingdom is to call people to come and taste of this banquet. We go out into the city if we have to, down the streets, into the alleys. We travel far and deep into the countryside if they are there, to call everyone who will hear to come and sit and feast on what is satisfying and delightful and astounding. The work of the kingdom is to call blind people to come in to a wonderful banquet hall, to call men and women with no taste to come and eat their fill at this table. We invite people everywhere, with no sense of smell to enjoy the aroma of Christ. That is our work - the work of the kingdom.