
Glory to God Alone

DAVE BAST

When Johann Sebastian Bach finished one of his compositions, whether of a massive choral work or an orchestral suite, or even just a song, he would often write three letters at the bottom of the final page: SDG. Bach was not just a great composer, perhaps the greatest of all time; he was also a Christian believer and a church musician. In his church compositions, Bach gave expression to the great evangelical doctrines of the Reformation, but even in his secular works, Bach wanted people to know why he did what he did. Everything he produced was SDG, which stood for *solī Deo gloria*, for God alone the glory. That is our subject today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

and I am Dave Bast; and here we are, Scott, at the end of another series of *Groundwork* programs, this one celebrating the Reformation on its five hundredth anniversary in particular with programs on the great doctrines or truths that the Reformers insisted on, deriving them all from the Bible, that was one of them; scripture alone as our source of faith and our rule for practice; and by grace alone through faith alone is our salvation; in Christ alone; and today we come to the final of the *solās* or the alones.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this is really the summation of it—the exclamation point on the whole point of everything in the Bible, the whole point of what the Reformation wanted to bring back to a Church that had wandered away from some of these teachings; and what it all comes down to at the end is an utter desire to give God alone all the glory through everything we do, say, our worship, the shape of our living; it all has to be like a giant, giant thank-you card to God for his salvation and to want to give him the glory alone; and it is something that we were created to do, really, and we fell away from that, but even in ancient Israel there was this sense that you have to know who you are. You are not God, so you want to give God all the glory.

DAVE BAST

Yes, we picked what I guess you could call a theme verse for this program. It is Psalm 115:1. Actually, I have a personal reason for loving this verse in particular. It is the verse that is inscribed on my father's tombstone. He was a minister of the Gospel and he kind of lived and proclaimed this same message, where the Psalmist says this:

Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness.

So, that is the idea. Not to us, not to us, but to your name alone, God, be all the glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is something that somebody who has been converted can say. We talk about conversion; when we turn away from ourselves...what has sin done to us...what was the original temptation that the serpent in the garden beguiled Eve and Adam with? You will be like God; you will be important; you will know good and evil; it is all about you. Well, we have often also said that pride is kind of the primary deadly sin, and what is

pride? It is being me-centered instead of being theo-centric—centered on God, which is how we were created to be—we become meocentric or usocentric...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Where humanity is the measure of all things and we overinflate our own egos, our own importance. We worship ourselves. We love looking in the mirror at ourselves. When you are converted, though, you are brought back to who God made you to be in the first place, and that is somebody who is centered on him.

DAVE BAST

Right; St. Augustine, in fact, described our original sin of pride as resulting in each of us being...we have been throwing a little Latin around in this series with the *solas*, but here is another phrase that he used: *Incurvatus in se*. We are curved in upon ourselves, our gaze naturally. We kind of put ourselves on the throne, the throne of our hearts, which should be occupied by God, is instead filled with ego. So we need, as you said, to be converted, to turn around, to turn outward; and one of our documents that explains the faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, we have often referred to it, in this series in particular because of its emphasis on Reformed theology, but it describes conversion as having two parts, basically: There has to be a dying of the old self and a coming to life of the new. The one is negative and the other is positive; that egocentric way of life, the old self...I have to actually crucify it in New Testament terms. It is really radical. I have to put it to death so that God can take his rightful place in my life and I can center on him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Paul talked about that in Colossians Chapter 3, where he said put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature: Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed; you used to walk in those ways, but now you must rid yourself of all such things. Do not lie to each other, and so forth; and he says: You put on a new self, which is being renewed in knowledge and in the image of its creator. So, the image of God, in which we were created, and that got distorted and smeared and polluted when we sinned, it gets shined back up again as we get more and more like Jesus.

DAVE BAST

The problem, though, is we have these wonderful New Testament admonitions of crucifying your old self or putting it to death or taking it off like a dirty set of clothes and putting on a new, clean set of clothes in Christ that is more God oriented, but the problem is, our old selves don't stay dead.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, they still get some kicks.

DAVE BAST

And the new clothes continually get dirty again as we revert over and over. There is a great line I came across once in Martin Luther, the earliest, and in some ways greatest of the Reformers, at least at the beginning, who said... You know, his great enemy was the Pope, but he said once: I fear myself more than any pope, for in my heart there lives a pope called self. And that is the thing, if we are really, truly going to live our lives for the glory of God that is the thing that we have to get over; that pope called self that lives inside each of us. The thing that skews our thinking so that it is always about me, it seems to be. You know, somebody cuts me off on the freeway and I get mad because that is my space, or somebody takes the piece of pie I had my eye on, you know, and I start to inwardly complain and grumble: Argh, I wanted that! It is so often we reverse the words of the Psalmist, don't we, and we say: Not to you, O Lord, not to you, but to *me*, to my name give the glory.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have noted before that theologians like Robert C. Roberts, and others have said the core...and it comes up all over the New Testament...the core Christian virtue, the thing that makes us most like Jesus is humility; putting others before ourselves; thinking of others more highly than ourselves. Not surprisingly, that is where the devil works on us the most, to undercut our humility by reasserting our own ego: My rights, my privileges, it is all about me. If that really is the core virtue, humility, it is no wonder that that is what we struggle with the most.

DAVE BAST

Right; getting out of love with our own reputation and being more concerned about God's reputation. In a way, that is what glory is all about. It is about reputation, and we want God's to be enhanced, we want him to receive the credit, we want to learn how to give up our own hunger and lust for that, but it is hard—it is hard. I remember somebody asking me about my conversion, and I replied: Well, I don't remember the first time I was converted, but the last time was the other day.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right.

DAVE BAST

It needs to happen over and over again; and in just a moment we want to look at a story from the Old Testament of a man who learned that lesson the hard way.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this fifth and final program in a series that has been dedicated to looking at some of the great teachings of the Protestant Reformation in the Sixteenth Century; and we have been thinking today about how we want to do all things to the glory of God, and we were just saying, Dave, that one of the main results of conversion if we gain conformity to Christ is that we will be humble, and we will put God on the throne of our hearts and not our own egos; but we have been saying that is pretty tough to do, and even those of us who succeed to do it some days fail another day...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And there is a story in the book of Daniel of a great king, Nebuchadnezzar, who struggled with this.

DAVE BAST

Right; and you know, some of us may remember Bible stories from Daniel, some of the most famous Bible stories, like Daniel in the lions' den, certainly; there is none bigger than that; or we remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the three Hebrew young men who were thrown into the fiery furnace for their refusal to bow before the king.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they survived by a miracle, which made the king, who had asked that you only worship me (Nebuchadnezzar). Nebuchadnezzar said: Oh, that was such a miracle, that if anybody speaks against the God of Israel then they are going to have to deal with me. So, it looked like he had turned a corner.

DAVE BAST

Exactly, but here is what happened in the very next chapter. The king had another dream...he tended to have these dreams, and Daniel would interpret them for him...and then we read this from Daniel 4, beginning at

verse 29:

Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, ³⁰he said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power, and for the glory of my majesty?” ³¹Even as the words were on his lips a voice came from heaven, “This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar; your royal authority has been taken from you. ³²You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals. You will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

³³Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and he ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird. ³⁴And at the end of that time, I Nebuchadnezzar raised my eyes toward heaven and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High, I honored and glorified him who lives forever.

So, what happens to people who get full of themselves as Nebuchadnezzar did? Well, they won't raise their eyes to heaven, and so God says: Fine; you don't want to look up to me, you can look down at the grass. I will put you on all fours. You know, I am reminded that there is a curious passage, I think it is in one of John Calvin's commentaries, and it might have been on either Psalm 8 or Psalm 19, where we are celebrating the wonders of the stars and the sun and the moon, and Calvin said: You know why God created human beings to walk on two feet as opposed to going around on all four like the animals? It is so that we can lift our eyes to heaven and give praise to God for the splendors of the sun, moon, and stars. Here Nebuchadnezzar does not want to do that so God puts him down on all fours and said look at the dirt for a while; and when he comes to himself, the first thing he does is raise his eyes to heaven.

DAVE BAST

There, exactly; so, he becomes a kind of animal. His nails grow to be long claws like a bird; he, as you said, Scott, goes on all fours like some kind of animal of the forest; and he loses his sanity. As he says later: When my sanity was restored. So it is as if to say egomania or an excessive worship of one's self is a kind of insanity. You forget the God who is over all and who, in fact, has given you the ability to do whatever it is that you do. Some years ago I remember this kind of raised a bit of a flap in conservative news circles. President Obama said about a certain business: You did not build that—you did not do that business; and people took it as a criticism of entrepreneurship or initiative, but really he was simply making the valid point: Nobody is completely self-sufficient...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

Nobody does it entirely on their own. We all need help; we have all had help; so why would we claim so much for ourselves? Why would we think we are the center of the universe?

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, I am reminded that in Paul's pastoral epistles, I and II Timothy and Titus, he frequently writes to these young pastors to tell the people in their congregations to be self controlled. That comes up a lot—self controlled; and the Greek there is the word *sóphroneó*, which literally meant to be in your right mind...to be self controlled...to not indulge your every whim...to give glory to God and keep God in mind...that is to be in your right mind, as opposed to being, as my mother used to say, out of your ever-loving mind, by doing things that are just kind of insane...crazy...self centered. Be in your right mind. Once Nebuchadnezzar can raise his eyes again to God, his sanity was restored.

DAVE BAST

Yes; because his biggest problem was he forgot God. At the end of Chapter 3, as you say, when impressed by the story of the fiery furnace and God's deliverance, he acknowledges God; but then, a year later he has forgotten him already and he is full of himself.

So, one of the most beautiful passages, I think, in the Old Testament about the importance of remembering God is from the book of Deuteronomy Chapter 8, where God is warning, through Moses as the people are on the verge of entering the Promised Land...God is warning them: Now look, you are going to settle down there and things are going to be pretty good for most of you...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

And the danger then...when things are going well, that is the danger when you might forget.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, in the wilderness they were dependent on manna and miracles like water from a rock, but once you start baking your own bread and you have your own smartly-dug well, you might say: Look, *I* did this...this is, you know, what I deserve; and that is why the great theme of Deuteronomy is remember and do not forget.

DAVE BAST

So, here for example: Deuteronomy 8:10: When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. ¹¹Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day; ¹²otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, ¹³and when your herds and flocks grow large, and your silver and gold increase, and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God... ¹⁷You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me;" ¹⁸but remember the Lord, for he it is who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant.

So yes, there it is.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Remember and do not forget.

DAVE BAST

Who give it to you, really?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Nobody is a self-made individual. Nobody gets by in life just doing it all for themselves. We all are dependent on God; remember that so you will give God the credit that is due him. He is the giver of all good gifts, so give him the glory every day; and that is something I think that we all really struggle with. It does not mean that we have to pretend we have nothing to do with it. God works through our efforts...

DAVE BAST

Right, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Of course, we are supposed to work. We are not just supposed to sit around with our hand out; but even when we do something well, we see that in context. Sometimes you see a musician...people are applauding at the end of a concert...they keep pointing to heaven like, oh, don't thank me at all. It is like, no, you were a good steward of your gift. It is okay that you get some credit, but just give the ultimate credit to God.

DAVE BAST

A friend of mine used a pretty neat analogy, I thought. He talked about a figure skater at these big competitions like the Olympics, when they really nail a program, people will throw bouquets of flowers on the ice...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And these little kids go skating around, scoop them up and hand them to the star, and the star smiles and takes them. Yes, you can take the bouquet when someone throws one your way. You can say thank you; you can be gracious and feel good about it. You do not have to downplay your own abilities or skills, but then you pass the flowers on; you hand them to Jesus, as my friend said. You turn, and in your heart, or perhaps expressly you say: God, really, the credit is yours. You are the one who enabled me to do this.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And practically speaking...and that is how we want to conclude the program...there are some practices we can put into our lives; habits of heart and mind that we can inculcate into ourselves to help us do this more naturally, and we will conclude by looking at that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and we are concluding this program, which is focused on how is it that we can lead lives that give all the glory to God alone? Let's just consider a couple of practical things, Dave, that we can do. The first thing that we can do is something that we do anytime, if we are in a church tradition that regularly recites the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed, the first thing we can do is make it a regular practice to confess or profess the idea that there is just one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and it is not me.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There *is* a creator; I am a *creature*; and that is who we are, and so we rehearse this every time we recite a creed, we rehearse and remind ourselves there is a God and I am not it.

DAVE BAST

And he is God over all; he is the one God who created heaven and earth and everything in it, and that means that glory is his by right. He has earned it; he deserves it; I don't. To be a creature and to recognize oneself as a creature is, in my opinion, the first step toward mental and spiritual health because you recognize: I have limits; I have a given nature; it has been determined by the Creator; it has been sort of put within me; I don't make up who I am...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is actually quite countercultural to believe that today because one of the curious modern symptoms of really going off the rails spiritually is this idea that I can completely invent who I am, what I am; it is all up to me; I have...freedom means the opportunity or the ability to define my life completely for myself outside of any external constraints put upon me; and that is just crazy. That is kind of spiritual suicide.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, it is idolatry, but the Bible would say an out-of-your-mind way to live. Yes, another great confession that spun out of the Reformed era and the Reformation is the Westminster Confession that says right off the bat: Why are people here? What were you made for? And the answer: Well, to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

DAVE BAST

Which both go together...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

I mean, those are not two different things, because it is *when* we glorify God that we will come to enjoy him who is the source of all good and all joy and all delight and all pleasure; so yes, remind yourself that you are a creature and you were made for this purpose, to give God glory; and that in that act you will find your meaning and your joy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and that also will lead to the second thing that we can do and must do regularly as Christians; so, we rehearse, we confess, we profess that there is a great sovereign God and we are his creatures, and then that leads naturally to the act of worship. We worship God in well-constructed worship services. We sort of summarize and rehearse all over again the whole history of salvation...creation and salvation...and we are reminded that there is a great God, to whom we owe all the glory; and so we get together and we do things like we sing and we pray and we glorify God. That is worship, and we do that regularly because it is a great way to embody who we are.

DAVE BAST

We have had quite a bit of scripture in this particular program, which is great, but here is a little bit more from one of the great worship psalms of the Bible, Psalm 96, and just listen to this as a way of giving God the glory that is due to his name. So the Psalmist says:

¹Sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord all the earth. ²Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. ³Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. ⁴For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise. He is to be feared above all gods.

SCOTT HOEZEE

⁵For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens. ⁶Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary. (And then here is Psalm 96:7...and one of my former pastors opened every worship service this way) Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations; ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. ⁸Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. ⁹Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth.

I remember when I was a kid that word *ascribe* was not a terribly familiar word, but basically it just means give it all to God. Give God his due.

DAVE BAST

Yes; there it is. The Psalmist is modeling for us the kind of behavior that we should be wanting to do ourselves as those who have been saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, according to the scriptures alone...all these wonderful themes that we have been sounding through these programs. The great thing about the Reformers...they were not perfect, they did not have all the answers; you know, we do not idolize them any more than anyone else...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

But they were filled with the sense that it is all God all the time. It is all on him. It is all for him. And that really is the revolution that we need to undertake. We need to confess that truth—profess that truth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I think it is a good time to remind ourselves...you know, the Reformation kind of created Protestants who then pitted themselves against Catholics, but another great tradition of the Reformation is another Latin phrase: *semper reformanda*—we have to continually reform ourselves because we are always tempted to get in the way; even the Church, even us pastors, even the pomp and circumstance of worship can distract us and make us think: Oh, didn't we hold a good worship service? Didn't I preach a good sermon? We have to be always reforming ourselves; and one of the main things that means is that again and again and again, through worship, through humility, we keep coming back and saying: I want to give all the glory to God alone.

DAVE BAST

Not to us, not to us, O Lord, but to your name give the glory for your steadfast love and faithfulness. *Soli Deo gloria*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast, and we hope you will join us again next time as we dig deeply into the scriptures to lay the foundation for our lives. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com and let us know scripture passages and topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/glory-to-god-alone>

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