

Seeing the Glory of God

John 1:14-18

- ¹⁴ And the Word **became flesh** and dwelt among us, and we have **seen** his glory, **glory** as of the only Son from the Father, **full of grace and truth**.
- ¹⁵ (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'")
- ¹⁶ For from his fullness we have all received, **grace upon grace**.
- ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; **grace and truth** came through Jesus Christ.
- ¹⁸ **No one has ever seen** God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

SEEING GOD

Gazing upon God. It is the heart's cry of contemporary worship. Last night in a local worship service near you, a concert-like atmosphere not that unlike the children of Israel singing and dancing at the foot of Mt. Sinai had hundreds of Christians raising their hands, closing their eyes, and boldly singing, "There must be more than this | O breath of God come breathe within ... Consuming

fire fan into flame. A passion for Your name | Spirit of God fall in this place Lord have Your way | Lord have your way with us ... Leave us abandoned to Your praise | Lord let your glory fall, let your glory fall.¹ Then they sang, “I want to know You | I want to hear Your voice | I want to know You more | I want to touch You | I want to see Your face | I want to know You more.”² Then they sang, “When I look into Your holiness | When I gaze into Your loveliness | When all things that surround | become shadows in the light of You.”³ Finally, they close the set, “I caught a glimpse of Your splendor | In the corner of my eye | The most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen | And it was like a flash of lightning | Reflected off the sky | And I know I’ll never be the same | Show me Your glory | Send down Your presence | I want to see your face | Show me Your glory | Majesty shines about You | I can’t go on without You, Lord.”⁴ Then they climbed, as the last song says, down from the mountaintop and back to life. They went home, went to sleep, woke up, and everything is back

¹ From the song, *Consuming Fire*. Lyrics: Tim Hughes. Hillsong.

² From the song, *I Want To Know You (In the Secret)*. Lyrics: Sonicflood.

³ From the song, *When I Look Into Your Holiness*. Lyrics: Wayne and Cathy Perrin. ©1980, Integrity's Hosanna! Music.

⁴ From the song, *Show Me Your Glory*. Lyrics: Mark Lee, Marc Byrd, and Third Day. ©2001 New Spring Publishing.

to life as usual. And **there must be something more**. The spiritual high was gone.

Isaiah says, “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord” (Isa 6:1). He says “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne ... [in] the temple.” The angels were singing, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (*kavod/doxa*)” (6:3).⁵ He says, “The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke” (Isa 6:4). Here you have Isaiah “seeing” God, in the temple, full of glory; hearing the Word, in the temple, filled with smoke.

Isaiah 6:1, 3	Isaiah 6:4
<p><i>saw</i> the Lord in the <i>temple</i> full of <i>glory</i></p>	<p>at the <i>voice</i>[★] and the <i>house</i> filled with <i>smoke</i></p>
	<p>★ Targums: “voice of the Memra”</p>

⁵ The Isaiah Targum actually says, “I saw the glory of the Lord resting upon a throne... and the temple was filled by the brilliance of his glory ... and in his mouth there was a speech which he took before him whose Shekinah is upon the throne of glory” (Isa 6:1, 5). Thus, the Jews interpreted what Isaiah saw explicitly as the glory of God. See John L. Ronning, “The Targum of Isaiah and the Johannine Literature,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 69:2 (2007), 260.

This story is similar to that of Moses, only Moses did not see the Lord in heaven, but on earth. We learn that “The LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11a). This would occur, the passage says, “When the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent” (33:10). They would see the cloud standing at the tent, and Moses would talk to God face to face. Yet, this did not satisfy Moses. For just a few verses later he asks God, “Please, show me your glory” (33:18). This same request will come up in John 14 when Philip will ask Jesus basically the same question (“Show us the Father”).

Are these stories the same as the songs above? Did Isaiah approach God and beg him to show him the fire from heaven? Is that what Moses wanted? Was Moses really a secret mystic? **Martin Luther** spoke of an implicit theology in the soul of every human being. He called it a **theology of glory**. People want the glory. You can tell by these songs. They want to climb up into heaven to glimpse God “in the nude” he said. People can do this in a variety of ways. Luther referred to them as “**ladders**.” As the kids song goes, “**We are climbing, climbing, climbing Jacob’s ladder**,” even though no human being is actually climbing

the “ladder” in the text! Teach them young and when they are old, they will not depart. Such is what we see today in some contemporary worship.

There are several ladders that Luther speaks about. One is the *ladder of speculation*. This is the idea that we can glimpse God through our *reason and philosophy*. Most cults start as speculative thoughts about God that he has not revealed in his Word. One is a *ladder of merit*. Merit seeks to climb up to God through *works* or *will*. It is the human effort to “reach up” to God. Merit is an attempt to get God to like you for what you do, even though your effort is full of sin and is offensive. Merit is an attempt to reconcile yourself to the divine, to appease him through your works.

The ladder of these songs is the *ladder of mysticism*. Mysticism seeks to “*experience*” God, to encounter him through supercharged emotions, altered states of consciousness, extra sensory perception, or direct personal encounters. Rather than seeking communion through the ordinary means of grace (think about the language here of the Supper as “communion”), people want communion in extraordinary ways, exciting ways, powerful ways. Because so much American worship is now taken up with

seeking mystical experiences of God, we are finding more and more that biblical worship is offensive, boring, and irrelevant. Mysticism is a theology of glory at direct odds with the theology of Christ and his cross. You can't have both.

Climbing ladders is our natural impulse and we do it for our glory. I was reading a recent *National Geographic* magazine this week and came across an almost inconceivable story. In Sept. 2008, 23 year old **Alex Honnold** free soloed Half Dome in Yosemite in 2 hours 50 minutes.

Half Dome, Yosemite National Park, California



To put that in perspective, the first technical ascent was in 1957. It took three men five epic days of sleeping on the side of a cliff wall each night, a thousand feet above the

ground. Free soloing is the art of climbing using no ropes and no gear except chalk for your hands. If you fall, you die.

When you watch shows on this, the climbers tell you why they do it. It isn't for the money or the power, but **for the glory**. **Ascending ladders is too easily for our glory, not God's**. It is the glory to be the first climber to ascend a route, or to do it a new way. I started wondering, what is this glory? Fame? Perhaps a little. Respect? Certainly some. But more than anything else, it is a **type of worship**. Those in this profession worship these people for being the first, and those people gladly seek the worship. There is little other reason to be the first.

It is tempting to desire our own glory as human beings. It is also tempting to think we seeking God's glory, when it is actually we are seeking our own, for the kind of power encounters people desire with God empower ... THEM—or so they think. If the glory of man is to climb up; the glory of God is to descend down. God did this for us in the person of Christ. For, as you will see, Christ is the Glory of God. You want to see the Glory of God? Look to Christ.

The Tabernacle of Witness

Notice how John begins this section. “We have seen his glory” (John 1:14). To see God’s glory is not inherently bad. Yet, notice how John ends the section. “No one has ever seen God” (vs. 18). The theme of this little section is seeing God. John presents us with a paradox. On one hand, “We have seen his glory.” On the other hand, “No one has ever seen God.” If you want to see God and live, then you must understand how the paradox works. That is what I want to help you do this morning.

Let us return to Isaiah and Moses. First let me ask, where did they see the LORD? Isaiah saw the LORD “in the temple.” This is the temple in heaven, the archetype of all other temples. Isaiah saw the Lord in a vision given by God. One could call this a mystical encounter, except that Isaiah was not seeking this experience, and when he received it, he wanted to die. Rather, it was shown to him. It was not Isaiah climbing a ladder up to God, but God lifting Isaiah up to him.

Moses saw the LORD on the mountain. He literally had a mountaintop experience. This mountain was also a temple, for it was the place where God had chosen to rest.

The Psalm says, “The earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain, before God, the One of Sinai ... The chariots of God are twice ten thousand ... the Lord is among them; Sinai is now in the sanctuary” (Ps 68:8, 17).

Mostly, Moses saw the LORD *in the tent*. It was called the tent of meeting, or as translated many times by the LXX, “the tent of witness” (*skēnē marturiou*). Remember this idea of a tent of witness. The tent was also God’s sanctuary, the place where he chose to make his Name known.

This does not change in the NT. **John 1:14** explains this to you in a profound way. It says that the Word “dwelt” among us. This is the word *skenoō*. It is used in the OT to translate the Tabernacle (see above). Literally it says that the Word “pitched his tent.” This was predicted in the OT. “Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live (*kataskenoso*) among you” (**Zech 2:10**; cf. **Joel 3:17**; **Ezek 37:27-28**).⁶ John is saying that God has chosen the place where the Word would meet with people on earth. You want to meet with God, you go here, in this NT “tabernacle.”

⁶ See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 130.

Now notice **vs. 15**, “John bore witness (*martureō*) about him.” You have a tent and now a witness. The tent of witness. This is not accidental. Who was John? This is the second time he has come up in this prologue and very soon we learn more about him. Notice **vs. 19** says, “This is the testimony/witness of John.” It says that the Jews sent **priests** and **Levites** from Jerusalem to ask him “Who are you?” Why priests and Levites? Because John was himself a priest and a Levite. He was one of their kin. We learn in his genealogy in **Luke 1:5** that his Father was a Levite from the line of Abijah (see **1 Chron 24:10**).

Why is this important? For one thing, it was the Levite’s job to take care of the tent. Listen to this verse from the LXX, “And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tabernacle of witness was the tent and the veil, and the covering of the door of the tabernacle of witness.” The Levites took care of the tabernacle of witness. John, the Levitical priest is now the witness of the NT tabernacle! Do you see what John is doing? John the priest is tending to the tabernacle of witness.

How does John do this? It says that he declares something. He has a message. At this point, what John says is, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after

me ranks before me, because he was before me” (John 1:15). This sums up all that the Apostle John has said about Jesus as the Word, the Light, the Life, the Name, and now, the Glory. Jesus is the Glory of God.

Seeing God’s Glory

Let us return again to Isaiah and Moses. What exactly did they see? Isaiah 6:1 says, “I saw the LORD,” but the Jewish *Targum of Isaiah* says, “I saw the glory of the Lord resting upon a throne ... and in his mouth there was a speech which he took before him whose Shekinah is upon the throne of glory” (Isa 6:1, 5). *Shekinah* is a term just like Word (*Memra*) that is personified in the targums.⁷ *Shekinah* is an Aramaic word that refers to the “dwelling” (Heb: *shakan*) of God in glory. Because it is not a Hebrew word, it is not found in the OT *per se*. But the idea certainly is. You can clearly see this in Isaiah 6:5. Jesus certainly agrees, as John tells us later that “Isaiah saw [*Christ’s*] glory and spoke of Him” (John 12:41).⁸

⁷ See Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002).

⁸ Ibid.

You can see it all over the life of Moses as well. For example, “And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled (*shakan*) on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple” (Ex 40:35). Regarding the time when God allowed Moses to see his glory this is what we learn. God says that he will show him his backside and preach a sermon to him, but that he cannot see his “face” or he will die. Or to put it another way, he will be allowed to “see” the “Word.” This will be the glory of God for Moses.

All of this—the Word, the glory, the dwelling—comes together in John 1:14 in a remarkable way. The NT tent for the Word of God is the flesh of Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh and dwelt (remember that *Shekinah* translates the OT idea of “dwelling”) among us. John tells us exactly what he and the others saw. “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” The glory (and the Word) is also what Moses and Isaiah saw, and as such, we have to say they that saw Christ. Jesus said so about Isaiah, and Hebrews says so about Moses, “He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward” (Heb 11:26).

God's Glory: Exit Stage Right

But something was different for John and others, and it needed to be different, for something had happened to the glory in the OT after Moses and Isaiah died. In the days of **Ezekiel**, the glory of God was no longer seen. In the days of the exile, the glory of God actually leaves the temple and Israel to itself. The glory no longer dwells in the sanctuary. Ezekiel shows this glory-departure in stages. First, the glory enthroned upon the cherubim over the Ark (**Ezek 8:4**). Then the glory goes up from the cherub to the Temple threshold (**Ezek 9:3; 10:4**). Then it hovers over the cherubim at the entrance of the East Gate (**Ezek 10:18-19**). Then it stands over the mountain east of the city (**Ezek 11:22-23**). The glory of God has literally “**left the building.**”

Glory: The Word became Flesh

Now, John is telling us that finally, after almost 600 years, the **glory of the LORD has returned** and the people have seen him. This is an incredible turn of events, a moment of supreme **grace** for a people that had not

witnessed the glory of God in centuries. Yet, there is a major difference. The difference is how the glory came this time. It was “in the flesh.” The Word became flesh. “Flesh” was his new tent, his new sanctuary, his new dwelling. This was new and unique in all the long history of the world. Though the Word had always been here, though the glory had shown himself to the people of old, now the Word becomes flesh and they saw his glory.

One could hardly think of a more offensive word to Greeks than to say that the Word became “flesh.” Flesh was often thought of as very inferior to spirit. The Form in heaven, said Plato, that was the real. This material stuff is nothing but a cheap copy. Many Greeks desired to escape the body of flesh because they viewed it as evil. For the Word to become “flesh” is to make the Form of the Logos dirty. Perhaps our worship songs are reflecting too much of this Greek idea. To a Jew, flesh is not “dirty.” Rather, it is simply a word that describes frail humanity. Adam is the first being to be called “flesh” (Gen 2:21). This “flesh” was created “good.” Still, the idea of the Word incarnating like this was unheard of, though the prophets testify to it a hundred times.

The glory of God was seen now **as a man** (*homosapien*). He became a human being. Most of the time, his glory was hidden. The flesh was a tent to hide the Glory which dwelt therein.⁹ Sometimes, the glory could be tangibly seen, such as at the **transfiguration**¹⁰ or when he appeared like a ghost walking on water. The glory was especially visible when his temporary body gave way to his **resurrected** body.¹¹ But I think John has in mind seeing the glory even in times when it does not appear so visible, when it is cloaked and veiled. There was nothing particularly exciting to look at. Isaiah says, “**He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him**” (**Isa 53:2**). Yet, even when he was not showing them the power of God, Jesus was the Glory of God. That never changed, whether he was transfigured, resurrected, or incarnated. Even in his most frail, humble moments, he was the Glory of God.

⁹ The language of the body as a tent is used to describe us too. The Apostle Paul writes, “**We know that if the earthly tent which is our house it torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**” (**2 Cor 5:1**). The idea of the body as a tent is not that the body is evil or something to be escaped, but that it is temporary and will not last forever. We will be transformed into a new kind of glory with new bodies, just like Christ was at his resurrection.

¹⁰ John was among the three who saw Jesus transfigured (Matt 17:1) and he says “we” have seen the glory. At the transfiguration it says they saw his face shine like the sun and his clothes become white as light (17:2).

¹¹ Jesus prayed, “Glorify me, Father, in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world was” (John 17:5).

Let us return to **the paradox**. The glory of God can be seen, but God cannot be seen. If this is true, how then can it be said that the glory of God is God? How can John say that that he and the others have seen God when he says that no one sees God. This is a question that baffles most Christians today, such that they are not satisfied with Christ at all. It baffled his own disciples and Jesus was not too keen about that. That makes it vital to understand.

Monogenes Son, Monogenes God

One reason is given by the Baptist. “**He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me**” (**John 1:15**). John the Apostle has said much about this in the prologue already. This glory has always been. Another reason is directly related to this one. The Glory of God, the Word made Flesh, is “**the only Son from the Father.**” The older English translations say that He is the Father’s “**only begotten.**” This is a very important idea, so we need to spend some time on it.

Jesus is God’s son. The word is *monogenes*. Jesus is the *monogenes* Son of God. This important word is found **John 1:14** and **John 1:18** and only seven other times in the entire

NT, three of which are also in John, including the most famous verse in the Bible.¹² Notice again that the ESV and older translations differ. The former says, “**the only Son,**” while the later, “**the only begotten Son.**” There is quite a difference between “the *only* Son” and the “only *begotten* Son.” Which is correct? *Mono* means “one” or “only.” The question is where does *genes* originate? That question explains the different translations.

Two ideas have been proposed. Both have their merits. The older idea is that *genes* comes from the word *gennao* meaning “**to beget, bear.**” Hence, the only “begotten” son. This actually finds support in the context, as he has talked quite a bit about being children “**born of God.**” **Vs. 13** says, “**who were born (*gennao*) not of blood...**” The word does seem to be used with the idea of being begotten.¹³ A main problem with this idea is that it is difficult (impossible?) to understand something being (as the creed puts it) “**eternally begotten**” or procreated or born. Just ask Jehovah’s Witnesses who think it must mean that he was created.

¹² John 3:16; 18; 1 Jn 4:9.

¹³ See Philo (below). Also Lee Irons, “The Eternal Generation of the Son,” <http://www.upper-register.com/papers/monogenes.html>.

The word “eternal” would seem to be a cause, but the word “begotten” would seem to be an effect. How can Christ be both a cause and an effect? If he is God, how could he be derivative, caused, or after anything? My mind can’t wrap itself around that, and pretty soon you start to feel like Paul in Romans 11 who has gotten himself in over his head. Just because we can’t understand it, though, this doesn’t mean it is impossible. In fact, this idea actually seemed to ground Christ’s deity in the ancient creeds.¹⁴

The other idea is that *genes* comes from the word *genos* meaning “unique, class, kind.” The ESV and other translations, using this idea, say, “only Son.” The main problem with this is also found in our context. There are clearly other sons of God here (John 1:12-13). Saying that we are “children” of God and that he is the Son of God is a terrible attempt to solve the problem. Another problem is that the word *monogenes* is used in other places to refer to children that are clearly not only-children.¹⁵ For example,

¹⁴ As Athanasius put it, “Nor is the Son's generation like a man's from his parent, involving His coming into existence after the Father. Rather He is God's offspring, and since God is eternal and He belongs to God as Son, He exists from all eternity. It is characteristic of men, because of the imperfections of their nature, to beget in time; but God's offspring is eternal, His nature being always perfect.” From J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Fifth Edition (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), p. 244; cf. Irons, *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Sometimes the word is used for only children: cf. Jdg 11:34 LXX.

Hebrews 11:17 calls Isaac Abraham's *monogenes*; yet Abraham had another child—namely Ishmael.

The point is, Jesus is different. What makes Jesus—the Son of God—different? While we “become” sons of God (through adoption; **Rom 8:23**; **Gal 4:5** etc.),¹⁶ Jesus is the Son of God, and always has been. What he became was flesh, not Son.¹⁷ Thus, I think the ESV needs to add the word “unique” or something like that. Indeed, God has other sons, on earth and in heaven¹⁸. Jesus is different. Jesus is unique. How so? Basically, as *monogenes* Son, Jesus is the exact imprint or image of the Father. **Colossians 2:9** says, “In [Christ] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.” **Colossians 1:19** says, “In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.” **John 1:16** adds, “From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.” So Christ is the fullness of God. This is because of his status as God’s son.

[As the *monogenes* Son, he alone bears God’s image this way. We are image bearers, but he is The Image. Maybe

¹⁶ I tend to think that the heavenly “sons of God” must also have this status given to them as a gift of grace through something like adoption. However they achieve the title, it is not eternally or by nature.

¹⁷ The word “become” is the word *ginomai*, which is also related to *genos*. At the very least, this is a wordplay.

¹⁸ i.e. Gen 6:4; Job 1:6; 38:7; Ps 82:1 etc.

Philo was onto something when he said that as image bearers, we bear the image of the Image of God; that is of the firstborn son.¹⁹ This is so much the case that he can tell Philip with a sign, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father” (John 14:9). Or he can tell the Pharisees, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30).] You *must* be satisfied with Christ, because he is for us God in the flesh. Even if there be other sons, no other son is like this Son. Not Christians, not the heavenly sons of God, not saints gone into glory, none in heaven or on earth have this status. The Word made flesh is utterly unique. He is the unique son of God. No one else is like him. That is the point.

This uniqueness is further demonstrated in vs. 18 where the word is used again. Here, he is actually called the *monogenes theos*: only begotten/unique God.²⁰ Just as there are other sons, but he is unique, so also if there be other so-called gods (1 Cor 8:5; cf. Ps 97:7; 138:1 etc), he is the only God of his kind. He is in a class all by himself.

¹⁹ For example, “No mortal thing could have been formed on the similitude of the supreme Father of the universe, but only after the pattern of the second deity, who is the Word of the supreme Being” (Philo, *Ques Gen* 2:62); whom he calls “the eldest son ... firstborn (*protogonos*) ... he who is thus born (*gennaos*), imitating the ways of his father” (*Conf Lang* 63).

²⁰ The textual variant *monogenes uios* (son) has a long tradition, but the United Bible Society gives “God” rather than “Son” a {B} rating (in other words, very confident). See Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.)* (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 169.

He is species unique, for he is both *monogenes* Son and *monogenes* God. This is a remarkable proof text of Christ's deity.

What Does he Reveal?

He Makes the Father Known

Since he is unique, he stands alone. Since he is uniquely Son and uniquely God, he alone is able to bridge that gap between God and man for us. He alone is able to show you the Father, to represent him perfectly. The Word made flesh reveals God to you. Let me show you how in the rest of what we have not yet discussed together.

Since we are in **vs. 18**, let's stay there for a moment. This verse says that he is "at the Father's side." Other translations say "in the bosom of the Father." Both ideas are used in the OT. The Proverb says of Wisdom who was also eternally with God, "I was beside him, like a master workman, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always" (**Prov 8:30**). Commenting on this verse the Rabbis thought of **Numbers 11:12** as an informative, "Lying in the bosom of the Holy Blessed One and singing

song with the serving angels, as it says, ‘I was his nursling/, or, and I was his little child/, or, I was his betrothed, and I was daily his delight, playing before him at all times.’”²¹

The idea of being at the Father’s bosom shows the tender relationship that the *monogenes* God has with God eternally. Standing at his side shows that they are equals.

This status allows him to “make [the Father] known.” Only Christ can do this, because only Christ is the fullness of the Father. John says the *monogenes* God who is at the father’s side, has made the Father known to us. You want to see God, look to Jesus. You want to see the Father, see the Son. Christ allows us to see the Father without seeing the Father, for no one has ever seen God. He shows us what the Father is like. If we see him, we see the Father, we see God, we know God. Therefore, we are to be supremely satisfied in Christ, in Jesus the Word made flesh who dwelt among us. To know him is to know God. To not know him is to not know God.

He is full of Grace and Truth

²¹ Aboth de Rabbi Nathan (ed. Solomon Shechter; 1887; repr., New York: Philipp Feldheim, 1967), 91. The Fathers According to Rabbi Nathan (trans. Judah Goldin; Yale Judaica Series; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 126-27. The Rabbis had in mind Torah. John has in mind the Logos. For commentary on this see Daniel Boyarin, “The Gospe of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John,” *Harvard Theological Review* 94:3 (2001): 283-84.

What, primarily, does he reveal to us about the Father? Two things: **Grace and truth**. “We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, *full of grace and truth*” (**John 1:17**). The grace that he shows us is the grace of the Father. Grace basically means getting something good that you don’t deserve. It is “**demerited favor**,” where we actually deserve the opposite of grace! It is a shower of blessing upon the wicked. It is the kindness of God to his enemies. It is the longsuffering he has with your sin. It is the forgiveness he grants when you repent, though your repentance is full of sin too. It is the righteousness he gives to the unrighteous. It is the faith he bestows and the good works he predestines that you should do. It is eternal life that you have now and the resurrected life that you await. It is union with Christ as his mystical bride and with the church. It is all of these blessings and more, blessings that are from the Father, and seen in the fullness of Christ “grace upon grace.”

It is also “**truth**.” **Vs. 17** contrasts Moses with Christ, law with grace and truth. We Reformed people make much of this distinction, but let us think carefully about this. First, **let us not make too much of the contrast**. Moses was a type of Christ. They are not polar opposites

in every way. The law is also full of truth. In fact, it *was* the embodiment of truth, until Christ came in the flesh. The law was not false, not a lie, not evil. Indeed, the giving of the law was a gracious thing by God to his chosen people. As it says, “What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?” (Deut 4:7-8).

Yet, the law was not incarnated grace and truth. The law never gave anyone power, never showed people mercy when they broke it. As much as he may be like Christ in many ways, Moses is not Christ. Therefore, **let us make much of the contrast**. Some of you clamor for laws, rules, and regulations. You feel lost without them. You should get them in church, but you should not want them to be the final word in church. You should learn laws, but you should feed upon Christ.

The Christian culture today, including a great many so-called “Reformed” Christians have completely destroyed this dichotomy that is right here in the Scripture. Law came through Moses. But grace and truth came

through Jesus Christ. Christ alone shows you grace, because Christ alone kept the law.

Conclusion

To think that someone can see the essence of God is to think that someone could stare at the noonday sun and not go blind. It is to think that someone would walk into an inferno and not get burned. God is a consuming fire. Tragically, most people today—and that includes many Christians—do not stop to think about the essence of God, what it is, and why they can't see it. Many of our contemporary songs beg for God to show them his essence, even singing about this fire and glory—but apart from Christ.

You cannot take for granted that people will just “know” that Christ is the glory of the Father when songs like this are sung, because this goes against every fiber of our being. Ask anyone who walked with Jesus and they will tell you how confused about all of this they were until they saw his resurrected glory and he opened their eyes to the truth. To sing about seeing the glory apart from the humble Son of God who came in the flesh and died on the

cross is to ask God to kill you right there on the spot. It is only by his grace that he does not do it.

Unadulterated glory and the essence of God is simply not knowable. People who think they have seen it have been deceived. Evil spirits con Christians with subtle lies and this is one of the biggest, because through it we feel so good. The result is the spiritual equivalent of a drug addict. We need more and more spiritual highs at greater and greater intensity to get *bring back that lovin' feeling*. It makes people write, "There must be more than this."

There is! It is the glory of the suffering Christ. It is the glory of Christ as seen in his humility, his incarnation, and his cross; the glory of Christ in the means of grace—word and sacrament. This may not be a personal magical power encounter, but it is deeply and widely satisfying. Those who look to Christ do not need the spiritual drug, because they have the true power of the true God given in truth and grace to them. The true God sustains them, keeps them steady and level and grows them into maturity. Are you satisfied in the only unique Son of God? Have you seen his glory? Christ is all you need. John will spend the rest of his book telling you why. The witnesses have

testified about God's dwelling with men on earth. Look unto Him and see the Glory of God.