

# The Supremacy of Christ and Joy in a Postmodern World

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of embracing healthy biblical doctrine about the nature of God and the work of God in Christ to build strong friendships and churches rooted in truth. It highlights the connection between knowing God truly, experiencing joy in Him, and displaying His glory through sacrificial love for others. The speaker urges against marginalizing doctrine for the sake of friendship, emphasizing the need for the church to be a pillar of truth, joy, love, and the glory of God.*

**Scripture:** 1 Peter 3:18, John 15:11, Nehemiah 8:12, 2 Corinthians 8:1, Matthew 5:16, 1 Samuel 3:21, John 17:13, Galatians 1:8, 1 Timothy 3:15, Colossians 1:27

**Topics:** "Biblical Doctrine", "Sacrificial Love"

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## Description

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## Transcript

My guess is that there are a lot of emergent types here who are quietly watching, looking, who came to see what we would say. And I think what I want to say to you is that my son Karsten turned 34 yesterday. Makes me keenly aware.

That's, give or take a year, Mark Driscoll's age. So, I'm aware that I am now old enough to be the father of probably half the people in this room, including those of you who aren't seeing it our way. And the way I want you to hear this is that I have known, I have tasted what it's like to have a son who's not where I want him to be and still be his father, deeply his father.

And that's kind of the way I feel about all of you. A lot of you are not where I want you to be. And I can still feel a very deep affection for you.

And so I want that to be the feel of this morning's talk. Finally, this was helpful. I just want to share this, get this on the video, to put it right behind my comment about Mark yesterday.

A fellow came up to me down here and said, a most helpful exhortation. And I want to share it with you, because it's just so perceptive. He said, you know, you sounded a warning that Mark can be in danger of exploiting his gifted cleverness and thus perhaps get it in the way of showing that Christ is mighty to save.

That was a quote from James Denny. And he said, you know, Pastor John, Mark is clever at the cultural level. You're clever at the academic level.

And I said, thank you very much. That's very perceptive, which just shows how desperately in need we all are of prayer, right? So, Mark, I heard that, I wear that, and we're all in this danger together. Let me pray one more time.

Father, please help me with my task now. The other brothers have exceeded my hopes. And now I just don't want to drop the tray and break a lot of dishes.

So come and grant me the kind of humility that we are so in need of, and the kind of boldness that we're so in need of. Thus says the Lord, I am the high and lofty one. I dwell in a high and holy place.

My name is holy, and I dwell with those who are of a contrite and humble spirit to revive the heart of the contrite and to revive the heart of the lowly. We really want that reviving. And so humble us.

Do whatever you have to do. Do whatever you have to do to do that. Humble us.

Keep us trusting. Keep us childlike, I ask. In Jesus' name, amen.

I'm going to pick up where Don left off last night, so I invite you to open your Bible to John 17. I had planned to work off this verse before I knew where he was going, so this is a good thing, and I'm glad God worked it like this. John chapter 17, verse 13, this message has grown out of that.

The message is a tree. To me, this is just a little seed, but I think you'll see the connection. The verse goes like this.

John 17, verse 13, But now I'm coming to you, this is Jesus praying, and these things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. Now, the first several minutes of this message is the short version of the whole message, and then we're going to do the long version of the whole message. So the short version comes in two points.

First, Dr. Carson said in passing that this joy in verse 13, he said, was Jesus' joy in doing the will of His Father. Well, yes, but I think you would agree that the source of that joy is deeper than Jesus' doing. It's the seeing of the Father's glory and the being glorified with and in the Father.

The perfect obedience of the Son, according to Hebrews 12, 2, is sustained by joy, not equal to the joy that is set before Him. And the joy that is set before Him is reunion with His Father. See Him.

Be reunited with Him in fullness. So, when He says in verse 13 that He wants you to be filled up with that joy in Him, He means He wants you to enjoy the Father the way He enjoys the Father. That's point number one.

Point number two in the short version of the message is that He says this joy is conveyed from Him, it's His joy, to you so that it becomes your joy by means of Spirit-illuminated, Spirit-ignited, understandable propositions. Let's read it again. Verse 13.

These things I speak in the world now for you to hear and understand that they may have, you may have, my joy fulfilled in you. These things I speak. I speak words.

I speak propositions so that my joy might be fulfilled in you. I speak these things. These things.

Things like you gave me a people out of the world. Verse 6. Things like all mine are yours and yours are mine. Verse 10.

Things like I kept them in your name. Verse 12. Things like I am praying for them.

Verse 9. Things like this is eternal life that they know you. Verse 3. These things I speak in words and propositions in understandable language. I speak them so that my joy would be fulfilled in them.

In other words, Jesus is saying, I'm not toying with you here. I'm not tantalizing you here with this language. These things I speak.

And when the Holy Spirit comes who will be sent from the Father, He will take these things and reveal them to you. He will put fire to this kindling and it will become in your bones a passion for me. That's the condensed version of this message.

Point number one, Jesus' greatest joy is in His Father's glory. And point number two, He shares this joy with us through understandable propositions about Himself, His Father, His work, which the Holy Spirit illumines and ignites so that they become a passion for Christ in us. And the point of this in relation to postmodernism is simply to affirm the precious truth that joy is doctrinally based if it is going to glorify Jesus Christ.

And it's to be in the face of the contemporary debunking of propositional revelation and the debunking of biblical doctrine and the debunking of expositional preaching as though there were some other way to attain Christ-exalting joy. There are many other ways to attain happiness and joy, but not Christ-exalting joy. So, what I would like to do in the rest of our time is preach the long version of this message in ten steps, not two.

So, there will be ten steps in a mounting argument for this short message. So, let's go. Step number one.

God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, this one God, is the only being who has no beginning and, therefore, everything else and everyone else is dependent on Him for His existence and for value and is, therefore, less valuable than God. Now, neither of those two truths that I just summed up is part of the postmodern worldview. Neither God's absolute, independent, eternal being nor His supreme value above us.

But they are biblical, and they are foundational, and if you don't believe them, or if you believe them and hide them, then you will hinder the mission of Christ and the transfer of His joy to others. Moses said to God, If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, What is His name? What shall I say to them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. And He said, Say to this people of Israel, I am has sent me to you.

In other words, God does not get His being or His character from anything or anybody outside Himself. He just is. He just is.

He always was. He always will be. He never came into being.

He never becomes. He is. And therefore, what He is, is self-determined, not by anybody else.

He's just there. We reckon with Him, or we perish. He's the absolute.

There's no negotiation. There's no bartering. He brings us into being.

We deal with Him. He's there. I am Alpha and Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Therefore, there is a difference in value between Him and us that is incalculably great. Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket and are accounted as dust on the scales, behold, He takes up the coastlands like fine dust. All the nations are as nothing before Him.

They are accounted by Him as less than nothing and emptiness. That's Isaiah 40, verse 15 and 17. It is true that He has made us the children of God, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, but that truth you will never treasure as you ought until you believe.

You are incalculably less valuable than God. Oh, that every person in this postmodern self-exalting world would come to say, I am totally dependent on God, and I am incalculably less valuable than God. Now, I paused right here in my preparation and thought about the fact that I'm supposed to be relevant.

What would Mark Driscoll do now? He would just have something so cool to say. So, I'm going to try. Now, the difference, the difference between... It's just there's an incalculable difference.

The difference between what he would do now and what I would do is that I'm going to try to say what I think might link this up with the postmodern mind, and he would have names to put on all this. He would have really yesterday relevant names, so I don't have any of those names. I don't know.

Here's my effort. I would say to the postmodern person who just got rocked back on his heels by all that talk I just gave, I would say, would you watch a football game where all the players are no better than you? Would you go to a movie where the actors could act no better than you can act and where they're no better looking than you are? And he'd be giving names to all this, right? He'd just be... Now, I don't know any of those names. I don't go to movies.

I don't go to football games. I'm just totally out of it. And then I would ask, and would you go to a museum to see pictures by painters who can paint no better than you? And then I would ask, so why are so many people so willing to be shown so utterly inferior all the time? How can we get so much joy out of watching people magnify their superiority over us? And then I would say, would you consider the biblical answer to this? The biblical answer for this strange behavior in our postmodern world is that God made us so that our deepest joys are not in feeling superior but in admiring superiority in others, namely himself, because God is not like a football player, actor, or art.

He's infinitely superior to you so that you could experience a kind of joy that's bigger than you ever dreamed in admiring his superiority. That'd be my effort. I won't pause to do that with each of these ten points, but it is possible, and this conference has helped me to want to do it better.

It is. I do want to do this better. Number two, step number two in the argument.

From eternity, God has been supremely joyful in the fellowship of the Trinity so that he has no discontent or defect or deficiency that would prompt him to create the world. God does not act out of need. He acts

out of fullness and out of ultimate self-determination.

Acts 17, verse 25. He is not served by human hands as though he needed anything since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And then God says it this way in Psalm 50, If I were hungry, I wouldn't tell you, for the world in all its fullness is mine.

Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you, and you will glorify me. Call upon me. I have the resources.

You're bankrupt. I will help you. You don't help me.

I'm bread. You're hungry. I'm water.

You're thirsty. Whether I create or whether I sustain, I act from fullness, not need. I am content in the fellowship of the Trinity.

This is my beloved Son with whom I am, say it, really well pleased. He is really well pleased with his Son. Human language cannot express how well pleased the Father is with the Son.

And he has had the Son in his face forever, enjoying him infinitely and in no need of you at all. Therefore, you were made out of fullness, not out of need. Someday, Jesus is going to say to those of you who trust him, enter into the joy of your Master.

That's a breathtaking statement. What joy does our Master have in his Father and the Father in his Son with all the energy of an omnipotent God? Enter into that joy. Step number three in the argument.

God created human beings in his own image that he might be known and enjoyed by them and in that way display the supreme value of his glory. That is the beauty of his manifold perfections. Bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone whom I created for my glory.

That's Isaiah 43, 6, and 7. God created you not to improve upon but to reflect and display his glory. He gave you a mind and a heart, the capacity for reflection and affection, so that you would not glorify him like mountains do and stars do. The heavens declare the glory of God, but not like you do.

You have a mind with which he designed that you would grasp his glory and consciously then know it like no other being knows it. And then because you have seen it, you would savor it, love it, delight in it, and thus reflect its value. God did not make a mistake when he made us with minds and emotions.

He knew what his main purpose was. His main purpose was, I want my glory to be reflected by being known and being enjoyed. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2, 14. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples. Declare it.

Make it known. Psalm 96, 3. Ezekiel 28, 22. I will manifest my glory in your midst and they shall know that I am the Lord.

Psalm 9, verse 23. Paul says the purpose of God is to make known the riches of his glory for the vessels of mercy. Colossians 1, 27.

God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of his glory. Don't say, oh, that the riches of the glory of God are outside the reach of your finite mind. Many of them are.

Not all of them. He made known the riches of his glory. 2 Corinthians 4, 6. God said, the God who said, let there be light, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

He gave you a brain for his glory to be known and he gave you a heart that it would be enjoyed. Did you know that in the Old Testament, the enemies of God were so aware of this dynamic that they knew how to be cynical towards the remnant? Listen to this. This is Isaiah 66, 5. Your brothers who hate you and cast out my name have said, let the Lord be glorified that we may see your joy.

This was so well known that joy comes from knowing the glory of God. The enemies used it for sarcasm. Is it well known in you? You get it? Your church get it? Why did Jude come to the end of his little book and say this? Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling or stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with rejoicing.

Why did he say that? It's because they knew this. To see the glory of God and apprehend it with our minds is the means by which we come to enjoy it in our hearts. God created us to know and enjoy His glory and in this way display the supremacy of His value.

Now come back to that point in step five, but first we have step four because there's a massive obstacle in the way namely our sin and God's wrath. So step four in the argument. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, came into the world, lived a perfect life, died to bear the penalty for our sins, absorbed the wrath of God that hung over us, rose from the dead, triumphant over death and Satan and evil, all evil, so that all who received Jesus as Savior, Lord, and treasure of their lives would be forgiven for Christ's sake, counted righteous in Christ, and fitted to know and enjoy God forever.

And oh how I wish that simple statement of central gospel truth were not controversial among all who name Christ today. I wish that were the case. It is not the case.

And one of the reasons it's not is because in the postmodern mind, both outside the church and inside the church, there is no place for the truth of the wrath of God. And therefore there is no place for a wrath-bearing Savior, which means there's no place for the gospel. One of the most infamous and tragic paragraphs written in the last three years is written by a church leader who heaps scorn upon this precious truth of the atonement.

And I'll read you this paragraph. The fact is that the cross isn't a form of cosmic child abuse, a vengeful father punishing his son for an offense he has never even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside the church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith.

Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement God is love. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God towards humankind but born by His Son, then it makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil. With one cynical stroke of the pen, the triumph of God's love over God's wrath in the death of His beloved Son is blasphemed.

While church leaders, some of whom some of you admire, write glowing blurbs for this book. God is not mocked. His Word stands firm and clear and merciful to us.

We esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities.

Upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and by His stripes we are healed. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Christ became a curse for us, redeeming us from the curse of the law.

As it is written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. What the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did. Sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh.

Whose sin? My sin. Whose flesh? Jesus' flesh. Whose condemnation? God's condemnation.

This is not hard to see in the Bible, and it is precious beyond words. I don't like to get angry at people who call themselves evangelicals. I don't delight in critiquing people who have major leadership positions in Britain.

Very popular. Nice people. This is not fun.

It's heartbreaking. But what can you do when they attack the center with blasphemous cynicism? What can you do? In our present fallen condition, rebellious as we are, still are, nothing, I'll say it very carefully, nothing is more crucial for humanity, post-modern or any other kind, than to escape the omnipotent wrath of God. Nothing is more important than that.

It's not the ultimate goal of the cross. Escape from hell, escape from God, is not the ultimate goal of the cross. It's just infinitely necessary.

The ultimate goal of the cross. This has been what I've been thinking about for five years now. It's about all I've been thinking about.

What's the ultimate goal of the cross? What makes the Gospel, Gospel? What is the ultimate good of the Good News? And the answer is crystal clear in 1 Peter 3.18. Christ also suffered once the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. That's the goal of the cross. Bring me home to everlasting joy.

Remove all your wrath. Remove all my sin. Impute to me all necessary righteousness that I might come home to this blazing fire for glorious joy of admiration forever and ever and ever.

That's the goal of the Gospel. The fact that the wrath has to be removed is a means. The fact that I have to escape hell is a means.

The fact that my guilt has to be taken away and I need forgiveness is a means. The end is God enjoying God. That's the end.

That's the goal. Now, we're ready for step five in the argument. The enjoyment of God above all else is the deepest way that God's glory is reflected back to Him.

The enjoyment of God terminates on God alone and is not performed as a means to anything else. It is the deepest reverberation in the heart of man of the value of God's glory. That statement changes everything if it's true.

You see how high that elevates joy in the universe. We do good works as a means of many things. We speak good words as a means to many things.

We think good thoughts as a means to many things. We cannot and must not even try to enjoy God as a means to anything. We don't choose joy in God as an act for the sake of something beyond God.

That's not the way joy works. God thought up from all eternity this reality called joy because it carries so much of His value when it happens. Nothing else is like it.

It doesn't work that way. You do not enjoy your wife so that she will make you supper. You do not enjoy playing ball with your son so that he will wash the car.

You do not enjoy a sunset so that you can become a poet. There are no so that's after joy. Now the clapping is just moderate because this is so unknown.

No, no, no, no, you don't need to do that. This is puzzling to people. It sounds very threatening and confusing.

I'm arguing that joy was designed by God as the deepest way to reflect His value. You see how huge. Most of you grew up in places where joy was either icing on the cake.

If it comes, it comes. Just obey. Do your duty.

God gets very little glory from people who obey that way. He does not look attractive. It doesn't say much about Him well.

Don't expect applause for this. This is devastating. Although if you really understand it, you would applaud.

So don't. I don't want to hurt the applauders. It is the very nature of joy to be a spontaneous response to something you value.

Joy comes to you. It rises spontaneously as a witness to what you treasure. And therefore it reveals more authentically than anything what you treasure.

Is that not what Jesus said? Where your treasure is, there will your heart be. Joy is unique in its capacity to witness to what we treasure. Consider this.

There is no such thing as hypocritical joy. There are hypocritical smiles. There is hypocritical laughter.

There's hypocritical testimony about joy. There are hypocritical good deeds. And there are hypocritical kind words.

There is no hypocritical joy. Joy is either there as a testimony to what you treasure, or it isn't there. God knew what He was doing when He created us to know with our heads and enjoy with our affections or with our heart.

And His aim is that we reflect and display the worth of His glory. God created us therefore to enjoy Him because joy is the clearest witness to the worth of what you enjoy. It's the deepest reverberation in your heart of the value that you put upon God.

Step number six. Nevertheless, the enjoyment of God in Christ is the spring of all visible acts of self-denying, sacrificial love that display to others the worth of God in our lives. That's not a contradiction of what I said about there are no so that's after joy.

That's not a contradiction. That there's fruit, we know. That you design your joy for the fruit is a lie.

God can see the reflection of His worth hidden in our hearts' enjoyment of His glory, but God aims at more than hidden reflections of His glory. He aims for His glory to be visible to others and not just to Himself. Therefore, God has constituted us so that our enjoyment of Him overflows in our love to others which is visible.

Here's one of the clearest biblical statements of what I just said. 2 Corinthians 8, 1 and 2 goes like this. We want you to know, you Corinthians, we want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia.

For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty has overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. So grace comes down from God. We want you to know the grace of God Joy has come up, abounded, even though they're poor and there's affliction, so it's not joy in things.

Christianity did not make things go better for them. It made them go worse. Affliction has been added to poverty.

And their joy is indomitable and is producing generosity for people in Jerusalem they don't even know and the wrong race. That's an amazing text. These acts of love that flow from joy in God bring God glory visibly.

So here's the most famous text on that. You all know this. Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds, see your good deeds, and give glory to your Father, not you.

Now, how in the world does that happen? What's the light that if it shone through your good deeds would awaken glory to God, not glory to your ethical prowess? What would that be? I think the answer to that is in the context. That was verse 16 of Matthew 5. If you just go back up through the salt to the verse just before the salt, it goes like this. Blessed are you when men persecute you and revile you, say all kinds of evils against you falsely.

Rejoice! Christianity is so weird. It's so impossible. Rejoice in that day and be glad because great is your reward in heaven, and his name is Jesus.

Great is your reward in heaven. And then he says, So you're the salt and the light when you have that crazy, radical, impossible response to suffering. If the world makes it hard for you to like them by saying false things about you and you cannot rejoice in God, your light can't shine.

You can gut out a few good deeds, and you know who gets the glory? You do. But if the miracle would happen that by deep, profound, Spirit-enabled contentment in God through pain, you rejoice and your love flows from that. In that context, the world's got a problem on its hands to figure that out, and they just

might by grace say, God is great.

Your God must be great because you're not getting your strokes from this situation. I so want to be that way. I so want to be that way.

There's no doubt that the postmodern world, like every world, must hear the Gospel proclaimed and must see the glory of God flowing in many streams of radical self-sacrificing deeds of love that come from that. My point is that joy in God is the headwaters from which those streams of love flow, and that's how the glory of God becomes visible. God looks on your heart when you're enjoying Him, and He is honored.

His will is that the world be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God, not just He be able to see invisible affections, but that the world be able to see the visible sacrifice that flow from those affections. Step number seven in the argument. The last two I don't have any comment about if you wonder how this is going to work.

Number seven. The only joy that reflects the worth of God and overflows in God-glorifying love is rooted in the true knowledge of God. Let that sink in.

The only God-glorifying joy that flows from the mystery of what we don't know about God rises from the projection into the unknown of what we do know. And to the degree that our knowledge is small or flawed, our projections will probably be distortions and the joy based on them a poor echo of God's excellence. Now that paragraph is an intentional response to the postmodern minimizing of propositional truth and biblical doctrine as the foundation for joy.

Nehemiah chapter 8, verse 12 gives a paradigm for how God-glorifying joy happens in the heart of God's people. Ezra had read the word of God to them. The Levites had explained the word of God to them.

And then it says this. All the people went their way to eat and drink and send portions. That means generous.

And to make great rejoicing because they had understood the words declared to them. They were going to make great joy because the minds had understood with the Levites' help through expository efforts the words that Ezra had read to them and generosity was overflowing. That is a beautiful picture of church.

And every one of you probably has tasted it like the people on the road to Emmaus. Did not our hearts burn? Did not our hearts burn within us when he opened the word to us? Oh, I can remember the hospital bed in 1966 when my life got turned around. Praise God for mono! Nucleosis! Lying there listening to Harold John Ockengay open the Bible and finding my heart burn irrevocably with a call to the Bible.

1966, September. September. It's the 40th anniversary.

Twice Jesus said, These things I have spoken to you that my joy might be in you and your joy might be full. Pastors, that's the way it happens. We become ambassadors for those words.

Words, propositions, understandable sentences, flows of argument that open the world to people, to God, if the Holy Spirit is pleased, to ignite and illumine and make them a means of passion for Christ. That's our job. Don't let propositions be mocked in your presence.

Don't let language be belittled. Don't let it become a wax nose cleverly manipulated so that joy is attempted by some other means and truth understood. That was John 15-11.

The other place is John 17-13. These things I speak in the world that they may have my joy fulfilled in them. The main thing that comes through words when the Holy Spirit uses them is Christ, God.

Listen to this amazing statement in 1 Samuel 3-21. The Lord revealed Himself to Samuel by the word of the Lord. Self, by word.

Self, by word. That's 1 Samuel 3-21. Now, the point is that if our joy is going to be Christ-exalting and God-glorifying, it must be rooted in the mind's true perception of the truth about what makes God glorious.

This is our job. If the joy... Say it carefully. If the joy that our people have is not to reflect the goodness of the music, but the glory of God, it must flow through the mind's perception of what is true about the glory of God.

If you say, my joy is in the journey toward knowing, not knowing, you make an idol out of the journey and you make a disappointment out of heaven. Jesus is not honored most by the exploration of various Christologies any more than your wife would be honored by your indecision concerning her character. She would not be impressed by saying, my joy is in the journey in deciding whether you are faithful.

She would not be impressed. Her glory would be diminished. Jesus is honored by our knowing and treasuring Him for who He really is.

He's a real person. He's a fact. A fixed, unchanging reality in the universe.

Independent of how you feel about Him, He's there. Our feelings about Him don't make Him what He is. Our feelings about Him reflect the value that we put on Him.

And those feelings will be a glory to Him if what value we put on Him is based on what He really is, not what He's not. That's why false doctrine is so personally devastating. It undermines Christ-exalting joy.

If our knowledge of Him is wrong, to that degree, our enjoyment of Him will be no honor to Him. Our joy displays His glory when it's a reflex of seeing Him for who He really is. Which raises this question.

I've had this question raised for 30 years, not just recent stuff in the church. So what's the place of mystery? Because when I taught at Bethel, students would come to me and they'd hear me talking more or less like this, and they'd say, What really moves me is mystery. I really feel awe around mystery.

So if I come and I say, I've got something really exciting to say to you, and they say, What? I say, I'm not going to tell you. And they say, Wow. Wow.

I feel strong emotions rising up to honor what you don't tell me. Now, that's cynical. So now let's try to figure out how mystery really works.

Okay? Because there's something to this. People don't say things like that unless there's something to it. Here's the way mystery works.

The Bible says, Now we see in a glass dimly, then face to face. That's mystery. What I know about God is so small compared to what I will someday know about God, it would be hard to describe the ratio.

So what is the function of that statement in the Bible for my emotions about God? How should the unknowing on the other side of the mirror affect the knowing on this side of the mirror? That's the way to

ask the question, I think. And the answer, there are different images. I've used an iceberg image.

I'm going to leave the iceberg aside. I don't like being underwater. I want to use the mountain range image this time.

Getting saved and beginning to read your Bible is like being catapulted that's the wrong image, but deal with it into the mountains, the mountain ranges of God's glory. And you begin to hike and every corner you turn you bow down and you worship because what you're seeing, what you're seeing, what you're knowing, and you come over one cliff and you see a valley, but off in the distance there through the haze are ranges of mountains of glory rising up out of sight into the sky. And you may spend 10,000 years hiking in those mountains and pull yourself up over a ridge 10 million years from now and another one will stretch off in front of you knowing that is impressive.

It has an emotional effect. But it only has a Christ-exalting and God-glorifying emotional effect if that unknowing is a projection out of the true knowing. If you try to imagine another kind of God out there than revealed here in Jesus Christ, your emotions in response to that will not honor the true Christ.

So I back up and I say, I believe in mystery, big time. Jonathan Edwards ended his book on the Trinity with a couple of pages of things he didn't understand yet. And most people criticized him for climbing way too high in the mountains, way too high.

You're going higher than any man should climb in trying to articulate what you're seeing in these mountains. And he apologized by saying, if you only knew what lies out there that I can only dimly see that are projections of what I do see in the Bible, I don't think you would think that way about what I have said. Number eight, step number eight.

Therefore, the right knowledge of God and His ways is the servant of God glorifying joy in God and God glorifying love for people. Having ignorance of God and believing falsehoods about God hinder God glorifying joy and God glorifying love that comes from that joy. And they hinder God glorifying friendships and Christ exalting camaraderie.

Now, the reason for this paragraph is to resist something that I read on the page of Emergent Village. This is a very different take on friendship than what I read there, and I'll read you what's there. You can go find it.

We believe, as the leaders of the Emergent Conversation talking, we believe in God, beauty, future, and hope. But you won't find a traditional statement of faith here. We don't have a problem with faith but with statements.

Whereas statements of faith and doctrine have a tendency to stifle friendships, we hope to further conversation and action around the things of God. That's another world from where I live, precisely for the sake of friendship. Let me ask two questions to those of you for whom that is your skin.

That's what you wear, or maybe your heart. Let me ask you a couple of questions. Number one, are there any statements, statements, which if your friend really believes them, would destroy him? A statement like, Jesus is not God, or God is unjust, or Jesus did not die for our sins, or I don't need to trust Jesus to escape God's wrath.

If there are statements that if a person really believes, I mean really believes, would destroy your friend, then wouldn't denying those statements in his presence and writing out the alternative true statement sustain him in the friendship and not stifle it? That's my first question. Here's my second question. It comes from C.S. Lewis.

Everybody should read *The Four Loves*. It's the most powerful and penetrating book, published in 1960, *The Four Loves*, in which he distinguishes the love of romance, or eros, and the love of friendship, or philia. And here's the way he distinguishes them.

In romance, two people face each other and tell each other how much they like about each other, and that's good. Husbands and wives should do that, and when you're falling in love, you should do that. Face each other and talk about what's drawing you to each other.

That's a good thing. Eros is not evil, but friendship is so different, so different. Friendship, he says, is not face to face, but shoulder to shoulder with a common interest, challenge, beauty, God.

For Lewis, and I think this comes very close to the Bible understanding of friendship, the greater the shared vision out there, pulling us together shoulder to shoulder, not looking at each other, but shoulder to shoulder, the greater the shared vision of God, the deeper the friendship. Oh, I have friends. Friends I'd die for.

Friends would die for me. One of the reasons, I hate the thought of retiring to, you know, New Mexico. It's not just because I hate golf and don't want to go to Punta Gorda, Florida.

For sure, it's like shells. But the reason is because I would like my friends to bury me. I look forward to what those hospital last visits are going to be like.

I mean, I don't want to die. I'd rather Jesus come. I really would.

I think that's biblical. Don't want to be unclothed. I'd rather be overclothed with life.

But I'm probably going to die. That's my eschatology. I don't think the Great Commission is done yet.

That's the reason. And when I do, I want a certain kind of people around me, my friends, because we share a vision of God and a belief in a kind of suffering and what is needed in that moment and truths about the nature of Christ and truths about the cross and truths about wrath and truths about forgiveness and truths about guilt and truths about hell and truths about heaven. I mean, truth is all over these friendships, making them so unshakable and precious and deep and full and rich.

And frankly, I just get real sad thinking about the kind of friendship that's got to be a cut flower. You can maintain it for a little while. It's pretty.

It's pretty. It's got no root in truth. It will not survive.

But worse than the fact that it won't survive is that if you cut it, if you cut it and say, statements only imperil friendships. If you cut it off from truth, that friendship and its joy can't glorify the God of truth. It seems to me that the emergent ethos uproots friendship from the solid ground of biblical doctrine and therefore preserves it for a very short time.

I quoted yesterday, and I'm almost done. I'll quote it again here with tears. Even if an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed.

That's not friendship. You can have tolerance and courtesy and longing for that person who does not share the gospel with you, but not deep friendship. They're accursed, and you're Christ's by grace.

Step number nine and ten, I'm just going to read and pray. Number nine. Therefore, let us not marginalize or minimize healthy biblical doctrine about the nature of God and the work of God in Christ, but rather let us embrace it and cherish it and build our friendships and our churches on it.

Step number ten. And thus, may the church become the pillar and buttress of the truth and therefore of joy and therefore of love and therefore the display of the glory of God and the supremacy of Christ in all things, which is the very reason we were created. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I ask now that you would purify our ways of thinking about knowing, and I ask that you would grant that we would read your Word with humble submission to its earthly propositions, and I ask that you would, by the Holy Spirit, illumine and ignite those propositions so that they become a blazing joy in Christ that witnesses to the infinite value of His worth and overflows in visible love and sacrifice and self-denial for others, all to the end that you would be displayed as supremely valuable in the world. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/VvbJXEb1p88.mp4>

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