

Soli Deo Gloria (Romans 11:36)

Please turn in your Bibles to Romans 11:36. In the 1640s, some of the finest theological minds ever assembled gathered in Westminster, England, to put together a confession of faith and catechisms for teaching the faith. What they wrote came to our shores with Pilgrims and generations of American kids grew up catechizing (that's memorizing scriptural truth in question and answer format). Our young ones started with Westminster's *Catechism for Boys and Girls*, made for 2-3 year olds and up, and its Q&A format begins: '1. Who made you? God. 2. What else did God make? God made all things. 3. Why did God make you and all things? For His own glory.' The *Shorter Catechism* that came out of England in 1647 was part of the *New England Primer* by 1690, the first American school text book, and it was used until nearly the 20th century in some schools with reading, writing, and arithmetic

The opening question: 'What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.' The footnote lists today's text, Rom 11:36 *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* In the words of the banner behind me, Soli Deo Gloria, glory be to God alone, or to God only be all glory. In God's own words in Isa 48:11 '*For my sake **alone** I will act...I will not share my **glory**...*' (NET). Isa 11:10 talks about God's '*banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be **glorious***' (NIV). I pray His glorious banner in this place will be a rallying point for us and a reminder of our mission to declare His glory to the nations, till the whole earth is filled with His glory.

In the words of the Psalms: 'O nations of the world, confess that **God alone is glorious**' (Ps 96:7 LB). '*Let them praise the name of the LORD, For **His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven***' (148:13 NAS). Ps 115:1 NIV '*Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory...*' (others '***all the glory***' or '*to you **alone**, and not to us, must **glory** be given*'). Or in the words of Jesus He rebuked you who '***receive glory one of another, and seek not the glory which comes from God alone***' (Jn 5:44 Darby Bible).

To end of NT, in the words of Jude: ***All glory to him who alone is God...All glory, majesty, power, authority are his...*** (NLT). Or the words of heaven to God in Rev 15:4: *Who will not...glorify your name? For you alone are holy.* From beginning to end, this is the unifying theme of scripture and history. To the end of time, this is the chief end of man and the universe. This is the central foundational issue of all things. That's why it's in the center on the wall behind me and it's bigger and at the bottom of the rest over the pulpit.

Everything said and done and sung under this banner is to be to His glory alone. Everything falls under this unifying theme of God's glory, *from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* Our church's What We Teach statement has as a defining guiding principle: 'Soli Deo Gloria - to God alone be all glory, none to us, in salvation and all of life (Rom 11:33-36).' Our church Constitution's purpose statement says 'This church exists by the grace of God, for the glory of God, which shall be the ultimate purpose in all its activities.' We could trace that out in our documents, or the Westminster documents, or Reformation history, or even biblical history in many passages, but today what I want to do is look at this theme of Soli Deo Gloria in the book of Romans in the context of this letter.

v. 36 really is an overarching outlining summary of Paul's overall message:

1. All things are from God for His glory
2. All things are through God for His glory
3. All things are to God for His glory

1. All things are from God, for His glory

v. 36 starts '*For from him...*' but that *for* of course connects to what he said *before*. After talking about God's glorious future plans for Israel and nations in v. 33 Paul launches into what may be his greatest doxology, glory to God ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴ *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"* ³⁵ *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

In the context of this book, Paul has just finished 11 chapters celebrating a salvation that's from God alone in His sovereign mercy, not of man. If you look back at Rom 9:15, Paul quotes what God said to Moses "*I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.*" ¹⁶ *So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*" That's sovereign mercy, not based on human free will, but based on God's free mercy that He chooses to give as He wills and v. 23 explains He does it this way '*in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—*'

It's for glory and to reveal or make known the riches of His glory on us who are clay who the Potter makes vessels of mercy. But let's go farther back to Rom 1 to see before glory in salvation, Paul starts with His glory in creation

Rom 1:20 says God's glorious attributes are clearly seen in what He created for His glory, so sinners are without excuse. But v. 21 says *'although they knew God, they did not honor him as God...'* Or NKJV *'they did not glorify Him as God...'* That's a good place to start in talking about giving *glory* to God, it's another way to say giving *honor* to God. And creation reveals the glory of God, the heavens declare the glory of His handiwork in beautiful sunsets. God's eternal power is shown in thunder or lightning storms that preview the wrath of God revealed from heaven as v. 18 says. God's divine nature is plainly shown as v. 19-20 says in the universe, like dazzling starry skies and sometimes stunning eclipses. His invisible attributes are made visible in northern lights that show radiant creativity, or Milk Way splendor of a God of wonders beyond our galaxy. On earth the massive oceans and majesty of mountains show God's immense weightiness or glorious bigness.

Philip Ryken's book *Discovering God* begins with a chapter called 'To God Be the Glory': 'The proper place to begin is with God's glory... "glory" (*kavod*) comes from the Hebrew word for "heavy" (*kaved*)... Eventually, the Hebrew word for "heavy" was used to describe anyone who deserved honor or recognition... What is the glory of God? God's glory is so far beyond our comprehension that it is hard to put into words. Perhaps this is why most books on the attributes of God leave glory off the list. It is not so much an attribute in itself as the sum of all God's attributes. Holiness, justice, goodness, power, truth—every one of the divine perfections adds to God's reputation, and hence to the weightiness of his glory... God is glorious in what he *does*... God is also glorious in who he *is*. He is glorious in and of himself... However, there would be no way for human beings to experience the glory of God's being unless somehow he revealed it. That is why God sometimes gives glimpses of his glory... visible manifestations...'¹

That's what creation does in Rom 1, it shows that all things are *from* God who made all things for His glory. It wasn't from a big bang where nothing somehow became something that exploded and randomly eventually over billions of years turned in to some *goo*, from which eventually evolved the animals we see in the *zoo*, from which eventually came *you*. No, all things we see in nature are from God, for His glory. They're not from evolution, they're from Him. It's to His glory to take Him at His word in Ex 20: *'Six days you shall labor, and do all your work... For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them...'* All things are not made by random purpose-less processes from a goo through the zoo to you. Paul says *from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be the glory*

That takes us to the 2nd point: All things are through God for His glory

All men see God through what is made, v. 18-20 says, but man's problem in v. 21 is not glorifying God as God or not honoring Him, and v. 23 says man *'exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.'* This is a grave exchange, not glorifying the God of life but focusing on what will die. We exchange the God who made us in His image for images we make in ours and things of this world. We exchange the Creator for creatures, the immortal for idols. That's not just true of statues, it's true of all sin. Our problem, Rom 3:23 *'for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...'* Sin is failure to glorify.

Sin is from us and through us and to us, for self-glory, separating us from God's glorious presence forever if we die in our sin. In the garden Adam walked with God in glorious fellowship, but if you turn to Rom 5, the fall of Adam into sin meant all in his family tree now sin and fall short of God's glory. Sin separates from God. It's cosmic treason deserving death's penalty. ¹² *Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.* In v. 13-14 Paul explains from Adam to Moses, even before sin was made known in the Law of Moses, death reigned. There was no death before Adam's sin, that's another reason to reject the idea of millions of years of death before human history (not to mention deep fossil layers with thorns and thistles that Gen 3 says came *after* Adam's sin, part of a cursed world buried in a flood, Gen 7).

Look at Rom 8 where it's clear nature itself lost its original glory to some degree at the fall, not just man's nature. This is my Father's world still, but it's a fallen world now, even it falls short of the glory God intends for it till the day v. 21 says: *that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* [context there is future glory in end times] ²² *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.* Since corruption came in Gen 3, creation longs for that glory, the day when the curse is reversed, it won't fall short of glory, but will fulfill its purpose. God's glory departed man in Eden but it came back to bring man in Exodus.

Look at Rom 9:4. Paul talks about the people glory came back through, His nation for nations: ⁴ *They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises.* ⁵ *To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

v. 4 takes us from Adam to Moses, from sin's alienation in the garden to the adoption of Israel to belong with God. The glory was theirs in OT times, he says, at the time of the old covenant and law, the glory cloud that led Israel through the wilderness was God's presence with His people in a tabernacle where they worshipped. The prophets later saw His glory depart again, but also were told His glory would come in a greater intimate permanent way.² And through the Jews v. 6 says, came the Messiah in the flesh who was God '*...Christ, who is God over all...*' God who is over all came in the flesh, that's what Christmas celebrates. As John 1 says, the One through whom all was created, He who was with God and was God '*became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory...the only God, who is at His Father's side...*'

Glory to God in the highest came when God came in the flesh, so believers in Jesus would see His glory, and so God would dwell among men again. Heaven and nature sang Soli Deo Gloria, in Excelsis Deo when the Creator rested in a manger. Heb 1 says through Him all things in the universe were made, and '*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power*' (v. 3). In the gospels, Jesus never sinned or fell short of the glory of God. He didn't refuse to glorify or honor God. He didn't exchange the incorruptible glory of God for images of lesser things. '*He is the image of the invisible God,*' Col 1 says and for us who made sin's grave exchange is the gospel of His great exchange: He takes the sin of believers, and imputes glorious righteousness!

Jesus prayed: '*I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do*' (Jn 17:4). Then the Lord of glory went to the cross, died for our sin and falling short of God's glory, and rose again on the 3rd day. If you look back at Rom 6:4, it explains in the end of the verse why: '*...Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father...*' In Christ's life, death, and resurrection, all things were by and for and through and to God's glory.

Which takes us to our application: All things are to God for His glory
Rom 11:36 ends *...and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Paul doesn't take us through God's glory in redemptive history for history's sake, he writes this so his readers would apply this in the present. Jesus was raised by the glory of God the Father, but it's not enough to consent to that fact in your head, Paul says you need to confess with your mouth Jesus is your Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead (10:9). Don't be like those in Rev 16:9 who '*did not repent and give Him glory.*'

Paul said in Philippians, every tongue shall confess Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father, so our tongues must begin to glorify Him now. Ps 79:9 shows how: *‘Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; And deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name’s sake’* (NAS). If He has forgiven our sins for His glory, how then shall we live to His glory? Turn back to Rom 1 again and let's walk through how man can glorify God?

1. Be thankful

Rom 1:21 NKJV *‘...they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful...’*

Do you thank God for creation and His common grace in this world? Are you a thankful person? That's who glorifies or honors God as God in v. 21. God says in Ps 50:23 *‘The one who offers thanksgiving...glorifies me...’* Ps 86:12 *‘I will give thanks to You...And will glorify Your name...’* NASB Beyond creation, thank God daily for salvation, spend time in Rom 5, 8, etc.

2. Trust God’s promises

Look at Rom 4:19. God gave a promise that was hard to believe based on what Abraham saw, felt, or knew. 4:19 *‘He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God [i.e., his faith gave God glory] , ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.’*

One of the biblical ways to affirm trust in God’s promises is to say amen as you hear what glorifies God. Paul says *‘to God be the glory forever. Amen.’* And in Rom 16:27 *‘God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.’* 14x the Bible commands all God’s people say amen to affirm God’s truth. Amen, means, yes it’s true, it means you agree and affirm it as God’s truth. Another 14x a NT writer gives God glory and expects readers to say amen. Heaven’s worshippers say in Rev 7:12 *‘Amen! Blessing and glory...be to our God forever and ever! Amen.’* We’re to do on earth as it is in heaven. 1 Cor 14:16 expects ‘amen’ to be spoken in church services as believers see and agree with God-glorifying praise. 2 Cor 1:20 *‘...all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory’* (NIV *‘Amen is spoken by us to the glory of God’*)

We shouldn’t be passive about these glorious and precious and magnificent promises, we should passionately affirm and apply what is His truth, amen?

3. Hope in God

5:2 *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

So there's a hope associated with the glory of God. Hope is future-oriented encouragement and expectation, not mere wishful thinking, but waiting for the glory to come. In Rom 8 Paul shows how hope sustains us in suffering:

*¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with **the glory** that is to be revealed to us...²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

God's glory in this life gives us hope, a waiting and anticipating the future glory that outweighs present sufferings. The end of v. 17 says the children of God who suffer will one day be glorified with Christ. The end of v. 21 mentions a future '*glory of the children of God.*' This hope gives strength for today (He works all for our good, v. 28) and bright hope for tomorrow (He works for our glory eternally with Him in His). v. 30 is clear all believers, all those God justified will be glorified, that's the source of the certain hope in v. 31 that believers can say in response to these things: '*God is for us, who can be against us?*' Suffering friends, hope in God and glory to come.

4. Be in unity in the church

Turn to Rom 15 where Paul gives another application. Rom 15:5: '*May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.*'

With those you struggle with, seek unity for a higher reason: glory of gospel

5. Rejoice in God's glorious mercy

⁹ and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name." ¹⁰ And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."

God is most glorious to us when we are most joyous in Him. Edwards: 'He communicates His glory...in their being happy in God... God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those who see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it...the mutual joys between this bride and [Christ]...and in their glorifying Him.'¹³ Beloved, let's make it our chief end in 2018: to glorify God *and to enjoy Him.* Amen?

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Discovering God in Stories from the Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1999), 15.

² This section is indebted to David VanDrunen, *God's Glory Alone: The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life* (Zondervan "The Five Solas Series - What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters, Grand Rapids, 2015).

³ Jonathan Edwards, "The Glory of God," in *Our Great and Glorious God* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2003), p. 85-86, 92.