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Our Chief End: Glorifying God

What is man's chief end? Or another way of putting it: for what purpose have we been made?" If we use the Westminster Shorter Catechism #1 we would say, it is "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." And that is exactly right.

Isaiah 43:6b-7a, "Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth, everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory..."

Isaiah 43:21, "The people whom I formed for Myself, will declare My praise."

Truly, the greatest and most profound thing that a person could ever do is to glorify God. And yet, what does this mean?

We sing about it! Most in the church would recognize that we have been saved to "glorify God."

Ephesians 1:5a, 6a, "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself... to the praise of the glory of His grace..."

It was the glory of God that motivated and moved Christ when He walked the earth 2,000 years ago, Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45. And it is the glory of God that must move us today! That is what Paul thought:

Galatians 1:5, "To whom be the glory forevermore. Amen."

Philippians 4:20, "Now to our God and Father be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

Ephesians 3:20, "To Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen."

2 Timothy 4:18, "To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

And in our passage this morning, Paul wrote this:

Romans 11:36b, "To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

You must see that this phrase constitutes a prayer on the part of Paul. He is expressing his longing for God to receive from all of creation the glory and honor that is His due- and NOT just for a moment or even a day, BUT forever! In other words, it was Paul's longing to live in a world where every atom at every moment is actively engaged in glorifying God. Accordingly that was his longing when it came to the child of God!

But again we are left with the question: What does this mean? What does this look like practically? Gloriously, the passage before us answers that question.

As most of you know, Paul was a man consumed with the Lord's work.

1 Corinthians 9:23, "And I do all things for the sake of the gospel, that I may become a fellow partaker of it."

And yet, he wasn't a LONE RANGER. He was committed to doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way. And that "way" was through the support and prayer of the local church (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-27; Ephesians 6:19-20). In fact, so important was the local church that he called it "the

pillar and support of the truth” in 1 Timothy 3:15. In other words, if the gospel is going to stand and remain in this generation, it will only be through the working of the local church — which is why Paul relied upon the local church for support and prayer!

Now in the process of doing the Lord’s work, Paul was burdened with the West: SPAIN (Romans 15:24). Yet this presented a problem. None of the churches which had supported him heretofore were far enough west to serve as an effective missionary base for Spain. The telephone and the airplane were quite a few years off. Thus, Spain’s distance was just too far for any of his known works to help him. Thus the only church that could serve as an effective missionary base for Paul was the church in Rome.

Yet this is where the problems arose. For while Paul had never been there, the rumors about him no doubt had. James and the other Christians in Jerusalem related to Paul about the Jews in Jerusalem:

Acts 21:21, “And they have been told about you, that you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs.”

Thus, if Paul was going to be accepted by the Christians at Rome and be helped on his way in Spain, he needed to show that what he was preaching was not fanciful, error, heresy, or something he had made up, but truth!

That is why Paul wrote the book of Romans. In it he details the glorious gospel he had preached throughout the ancient Near East. And so in Romans 1-3:20, he speaks of the universal sin of mankind, that no matter your background, social standing, race, or religion “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In Romans 3:21-26, Paul speaks of the glorious news that on account of our sin (Romans 3:23):

- God became man, Romans 3:21-22.
- Lived a perfect life, thus fulfilling the law of God, Romans 3:24.
- Suffered and died in our place, Romans 3:25-26.

Truly, on account of Christ alone we are saved! In Romans 3:27-5:21, the apostle speaks of the fact that all that he had just presented was confirmed by the Old Testament, Romans 4. Then he describes many of the benefits that are ours in Christ today, Romans 5. In Romans 6-7, Paul discusses how the Christian’s holiness naturally flows from their salvation. In Romans 8, he turned again to the saving benefits of the cross of Christ: specifically and most fundamentally, “No Condemnation!” Every benefit we have in Christ this day begins with this glorious truth!

In Romans 9-11, he then discusses the Old Covenant Jew, his need for Christ, and his relationship with the Gentile. In essence, Paul says that in the amazing wisdom and knowledge of God, Christ NOT ONLY suffered for the Jew and the Gentile, BUT ALSO has used both groups

to make jealous the other THAT He might bring them together to form a people whose very existence testifies to the incredible mercy and grace of God!

It was this context — God’s saving work on our behalf — that serves as the background for Paul’s words here:

Romans 11:33-36, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things...”

And with this we are brought to Romans 11:26, “To Him be the glory forever.” ἀὐτῷ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν; The key word here is “glory.” To understand this word is to understand Paul’s prayer. And so, what is meant by the “glory” of God in the Bible?

In our day, it is common to take this as a statement that to God alone belongs all PRAISE. And that is appropriate. The word for “glory” in the New Testament is δόξα (*doxa*) which translates as honor, glory, and praise. Essentially it is making much of God. Yet this is only a fraction of the full implication of what is meant by this phrase. As you know, “glory” has the primary meaning of “weight, heaviness, or substance” in the Bible.

- Eli was a fat man- a man of כָּבֵד (*kabed*)!
- As such, he did NOT give “glory”- כָּבֵד (*kabed*)- to God, which ultimately was his undoing.

1 Samuel 4:18, “And it came about when he mentioned the ark of God that Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy [כָּבֵד (*kabed*)]...”

“Glory” in the Bible speaks of substance or heaviness. Thus, as an exercise of the creature in relation to the Creator, the statement, “to Him be glory forever”- conveys a two-fold activity: It not only implies ascription of due praise/making much of God. But also — AND PRIMARILY — it speaks of a life lived in light of the weightiness and substance of God’s being. And so, to say “to God be the glory” is primarily to assert one’s longing for every creature to live in light of the substance of God’s being.

And yet, what does that mean? Let me put it this way, the question of glory in the Bible is a question of influence- or rather, by what are you influenced? If when you are on the JOB and your boss walks by and you stop playing and act like you are hard at work, then at that moment it is your boss who is influencing you. And thus from the Biblical perspective it is your boss to whom you are giving glory. If when you are SPEEDING IN YOUR CAR and you spot a policeman and immediately hit the brakes, then at that moment it is the Policeman who is influencing you. And thus from the Biblical perspective at that moment it is to the police that you are giving

glory. If when you...

- Buckle under peer pressure.
- Compromise for the sake of another's opinion of you.
- Lie to protect yourself or your reputation.

Then at that moment you are giving glory to something other than God.

We see this in the Bible as well. "To God be the Glory" is

- Moses standing before the most powerful man in his day, the Pharaoh, and yet neither faltering or stumbling! Why? Because GOD is what "weighed heaviest" on his mind.
- Joshua leading the people of God- who were ignorant of warfare tactics and lacking weapons of war- into the Promised Land to do battle with fortified cities, and yet NOT flinching. Why? Because GOD was his "peer pressure."
- Elisha surrounded by the Arameans in Dothan and yet not being frightened or concerned for he knew God was his protection, hope, and shield (2 Kings 6:17-19).
- Job, after spending 40 chapters struggling in his relationship with God, nevertheless "retracting in dust in ashes" because he had beheld the living God (Job 42:5-6)!
- Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar at the cost of their lives, and yet NOT shrinking back... because, through the eye of faith, they saw the greatness of the majesty of the One who went with them.
- Isaiah and Ezekiel being yoked with the difficult calling of proclaiming the character and will of God to a generation that would not listen, yet never shrinking back! Why? Because throughout their ministry they were ever mindful of the One who went with them!
- Christ NOT wanting to go to the cross YET submitting to the will of the Father (Luke 22:42) because, "...the justice *due* to [Him was] with the Lord, and [His] reward with [His] God" (Isaiah 49:4)!
- Paul faced a trial in his flesh for which he prayed three times for God to remove it. God's response was to tell the apostle that "His grace was sufficient for him"- In other words, Paul didn't need to be healed for he had God as His portion! In response, Paul said, "...Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me!" (2 Corinthians 12:10b)
- Stephen standing before the religious leaders of His day and powerfully witnessing to the truth, and YET holding fast to God's word, though his life was in peril! Why? Because he beheld the glory of GOD and it was that which moved him.
- The Apostles, the Prophets, and countless saints throughout all of church history who- to borrow from the book of Hebrews (11:35-38) were tortured, not accepting their release. Experienced mockings, scourgings, chains and imprisonment. Were stoned, sawn in two, tempted, put to death with the sword. Went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated, wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. And yet, NEVER falling back because of the weight and

magnificence of their God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who had called them and sent them out into the world as His servants!

From all of this I want you to see that “to God be the glory” is a prayer for all of mankind to exalt God by submitting to and living in light of His greatness! In fact to express it negatively, we would use Exodus 20.

Exodus 20:7, “You shall not take the name [or the “character”] of the Lord your God in vain [which means ‘lightly’]...”

The question of God’s “influence”- or the weightiness of His being — is directly in view here. Negatively we say, “Do not take God’s character lightly.” Positively we say, “To God be the glory.” Yet either way, we are expressing the same desire! “To God be the Glory” & “Do not take God’s character lightly” is a life bound and moved by the magnificence of God- His wants, His desires, His praise, and His will! That is Paul’s prayer in this verse, “To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Now what does this mean in our lives today? “To God be the glory forever” means that who God is and what He has done will be that which influences all that we do on this earth and in our lives. A. W. Tozer, speaking ultimately of the glory of God, wrote this:

The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of ten thousand temporal problems, for he sees at once that these have to do with matters which at the most cannot concern him for very long; but even if the multiple burdens of time may be lifted from him, the one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down upon him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled one upon another. That mighty burden is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably. (Holy 10-11)

That is what is meant by “To God be the glory!” When the greatness of our God becomes that which influences what we do on a day-to-day basis — His love, mercy, justice, holiness moves us. It is then that we are living for the glory of God! When the weight of the being of God becomes that which determines our wants, thoughts, and desires, truly it is then that we are living in light of His glory! And when we are moved NOT by the seen, BUT the Unseen our affections, hopes, joys, and rewards are determined by God and NOT ourselves. It is then that God alone is receiving the glory in our lives!

And thus we must see that Paul’s words here are much more than just an irrelevant statement of a religious man in a moment of spiritual ecstasy. Rather, this verse is a profession of Paul’s devotion to live in light of God’s being AND a prayer for all to do likewise!

Now there are numerous ways in which to apply this passage, but let me mention a few,

To God be the glory as individuals means that His word and majesty is that which dictates what

we think about, what motivates us, and what offends us. We judge everything in light of His approval and not our own or our society's! To God be the glory in our families means that as parents we strive to raise a generation which will NOT bow the knee to the latest fad, peer pressure, or the thoughts and speculations which war against God — BUT by God and His word! As Individuals we endeavor to make our households a place where God dictates our values, desires, motives, and dreams (2 Corinthians 10:5).

To God be the glory in our church means that His word will be that which dictates what we do, why we do it, and how we do it. We will exist NOT merely for

- The evangelizing of the lost.
- The creation of a fellowship in which to feel at home.
- The growth of our ministries.
- The providing of exciting and relevant worship.

BUT for the glory and honor of our King!

And yet, if we simply apply this passage to ourselves or our families or our churches, we have failed to interpret this text correctly. For notice that Paul wrote, "To Him be the glory forever" he was NOT writing this in the context of:

- Our thought life.
- The family.
- The church.
- Workers on the job.
- Students at school.

Though certainly this text would apply in these areas. RATHER, Paul wrote these words after describing the unsearchable and unfathomable grace of God that

- Forgive sinners.
- Reconciles man to God.
- Takes away the wrath of God.
- Restores fellowship between God and man.
- Grants the glorious expectation of co-reigning with God throughout eternity!

Again, look at the context.

Romans 11:32-33a, "For God has shut up all in disobedience that He might show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!..."

And so, what does "To God be the glory" mean in Romans 11:36?

Finally, “to God be the glory” is a prayer for God’s people to be moved by God’s love and be changed by His mercy. God’s grace should be the chief influence in our life --- NOT our duty, kind intentions, self-esteem, or labors in the cause of Christ. We should relate to God on the basis of what Christ has done as opposed to what we have done for God. And we need to be mindful that in and through all things, *Christ has regarded our helpless estate, and has shed His own blood for our soul!* (Rice)

References

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