

STUDY 4

Fallen Short of the Glory

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INTRODUCTION

We have seen in the preceding studies that Man was created in the image of God to reign before God and under his rule. In pursuing this regal endowment, humankind would reflect God's glory. Now we come to face the episode which entails our tragic loss of glory. Can we face it? How could we face it and survive?

For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:22–23).¹

This verse is often used by Christians to prove to other people that they are sinners, especially in evangelistic endeavours. However, can this succeed as a means to push people to salvation in Christ? Do we really know the lethal reality of our state apart from our being justified in Christ?

We can use a text like this to show people how far they have fallen short of what they should be. We can use the law to expose moral deficiency and failure. Indeed, one of the services of the law is to reveal sin (Rom. 5:20; 7:7ff.; Gal. 3:19). However, who can summon people to consider God's covenant law in an abstract way, in a way Paul warns us not to use it? Is it a good thing to ask Christians first to become unconverted Jews and to follow the law in order to push them from that point to what could never be a knowledge of their real sin? For sure, we can make people feel guilty enough to take measures to propitiate their guilt in remorse or engage therapists to assist them repair the damage to their self-understanding.

Through this study we will see that from our standing before God, we know the glory of being a human being, and that it is only before God we know the loss of this glory. Sin can only be known through our relation to the one who has judged and vanquished it (Ps. 51:4; John 16:8–11; Acts 2:36–38). Everything is measured by the shattering revelation of the invisible Judge in whose hands lies our condemnation and justification. (I will come back to the office of the law when it is grasped wrongly and used to justify ourselves.)

We will deal with the indispensable component of preaching that is to bring the knowledge of our lost glory to people in a saving way. 'We must preach sin from a

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all Scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version.

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relation to grace, or else we will stir up great anger and defamation' (Geoffrey Bingham).²

GOD'S GLORY AND OURS IN ROMANS 3:22–24

'Note that here is the very centre and kernel of the Epistle and of all Scripture' (Luther).

God's Righteousness Is the Shape of His Glory

In his righteousness, God confronts the world to hold it to account, within the horizon of the restoration of the creation to a new Eden. This is the manifestation of God's glory. God's glory cannot be reduced to abstract analysis or a proposition. It is the excellence of his being, revealed in creation, demonstrated in his faithfulness and loving kindness, exercised in his judgement of wrongdoing and evil powers, and in his free decision to justify sinners (Exod. 33:17–34:9).

Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, Is 'the image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15), the Exact Representation of God's Nature and Is the Radiance of God's Glory (Heb. 1:3)

The glory of humankind as created is derived from God and reflects his likeness without it being an extension of his divinity. We understand this from the creation of Man in Genesis 1–3 (cf. Ps. 8). But we can see the glory of Man more clearly in the second Adam, the Son of man in Hebrews 2:5–18, which quotes Psalm 8 to support Jesus as the man crowned with glory and honour. He is the true man into whose likeness believers will ultimately be transformed. God's glory is displayed in the faithful deeds of Jesus Christ. This point is seen in Romans 3:21ff., 'But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed . . . the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ [or, the faithfulness of Christ]'.²

Sin Is the Opposite of What God Has Done in Jesus Christ

In Christ, God poured himself out in loving service to take away our sin and sickness. What Adam, as the son of God, did was followed by Israel, the world and Christians who forget who they are. He and we act in defiance to the will of God, violate his covenant and proudly usurp his reign.

Jesus, on the other hand, humbled himself, leaving nothing in reserve in order to bring us back from our terminal self-absorption. As our human brother, he actively sought to hear the Word of God and seek the Father's will. He obeyed the command of God to fulfill his calling. Our sin is laziness and sloth. We do not actively seek to know God's will. We complain about waiting on God too long and we pursue our own plans for self-advancement and prominence.

As servant and Lord, Jesus reigned as he lived the truth of God, resisting sin until he shed his blood. But, sin is falsehood that shows itself in unbelief. Fundamentally, sin undermines what is true. It destabilises the Word of God and makes use of deceitful inventions to justify itself. Falsehood produces destruction.

² I have intentionally not given the source of some smaller quotes.

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Sin Universally Unites All Humanity

‘There is no distinction, since all have sinned.’ This is the cause and dissolution of every human distinction. No group of people can rationalise their situation to consider themselves above the masses, no matter if they have had mystical experiences, are humanitarian, pious, or Christian.

The universality of sin is connected with the universality of God’s judgement and the free gift of being declared righteous. God’s righteousness is the truth behind and beyond all human righteousness. God declares that his enemies are his beloved children. When we are enabled to hear nothing but the Word of the Judge, we know that we stand assuredly before God.

All Fall Short of God’s Glory

Some have the idea that to sin is to shoot an arrow at God’s glory but not reach the mark. This would define sin as our failure in the approbation of God (cf. John 12:42). The Greek word for ‘fallen short’ means to fall behind, to come late, or better in this context, it is to lack or to be wanting. We can interpret it to mean that our sin is choosing another treasure (cf. Rom. 1:23–25), and that the false gods we choose are always the reflection of a false and all too human self-exultation. These gods can never be servants. They are not capable of giving themselves up to participate in the suffering of human creatures and dying the death that the creatures deserve. Those who choose such gods become like them. Their gods have no true glory and their devotees suffer the loss of their true human being. Geoffrey Bingham sums it up in personal terms:

When I, Man, sought glory for myself in the temptation that took place in Eden, I coveted God’s glory for myself. In the most dreadful of all acts, and in the most presumptuous pride, I sought to have glory equal with that of God, not merely reflecting His glory but wishing to possess it! That was when I became most inglorious. Dread came to me, holiness departed from me. I became a craven creature, fearful of God, conscious of my nakedness. Wild panic gripped me, and I tried to cover my inglorious state by cosmetic measures.³

INSTEAD OF REIGNING, WE ARE ABJECT SLAVES

Those who have robbed God of his glory find that the work entailed in discovering their identity, vocation, and security enslaves them (for example, those who engage in the exploits of ‘virtual reality’).

Genesis 2:25 says of humankind’s original innocence, ‘The man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed’. Freedom for humankind lies at the basis of the nuptial meaning of the body. The human body with its sexual expression presents the man and the woman in full freedom from any constraint of their body or sex. Right from the beginning, we were a source of fruitfulness and procreation within the natural order, having the capacity to express love. (See ‘The Glory of the Body’, John Paul II.)

Loss of glory is a loss of the human experience of honour. Having cast God out of our hearts in order to be gods, the first consequence is the discovery of mutual shame

³ Geoffrey Bingham, *Man Of Dust! Man of Glory!* NCPI, Blackwood, 2006 (1986), p. 131.

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(Gen. 3:7). Shame reaches the deepest level and shakes the foundations of our existence. The depth of shame Adam and Eve felt for each other is seen in their hiding from God. Having now the knowledge of good and evil, Man tries to cover the real origin of fear with the shame of his nakedness. This signifies the collapse of the original acceptance of the body as a sign of our personhood in the world. Our somatic unity is broken. We face difficulties in identifying with our bodies. We hide from one another with our bodies, with what determines our masculinity and femininity. From this we understand the power of lust, which has its origins in the depths of the human spirit and can be explained as a lack.

We now begin to see the meaning of the frightening words of Jesus. ‘Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin’ (John 8:34). So great is our loss that we have to use all means at our disposal to regain our glory. We compound it by using body nakedness perversely to cover our naked spirits. Dominance and power are features of our culture in relationships, politics, religion and civil society. Such is the power of our lust for emotional satisfaction and control that the more we try, the more intense it becomes.

Having rebelled against the gracious reign of our true King and faithful Shepherd we become scattered, bereft of true succour, with no future and without hope. In order to secure ourselves against personal and corporate disorder we tend to seek leaders, or shepherds and kings, to give us direction and protection. We are prone to expect divinity from them. The shepherds may want to assert themselves and invent ways to accrue glory. They do this by feeding on the sheep, promising victory but becoming tyrants. The people of God become a prey of those who promise to solve their dilemmas. Elected leaders may scatter the sheep, leaving them wounded and not healed (Ezek. 34; Matt. 9:36). Jesus said that the devil is not a murderer on the one hand and a liar on the other, but he begins his murderous work by lying. Falsehood is always self-destructive. False shepherds will always destroy because they manipulate the truth:

Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel; for the LORD has an indictment against the inhabitants of the land. There is no faithfulness or loyalty, and no knowledge of God in the land. Swearing lying, and murder, and stealing and adultery break out; bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore the land mourns and all who live in it languish; the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing . . . My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge . . . The more they increased, the more they sinned against me; they changed their glory into shame (Hosea 4:1–8).

Pastors and pastoral workers are shepherds of God’s flock, and their calling is to tend the flock and to exercise oversight, not by lording it over those in their charge (1 Pet. 5:1ff.). The shepherds will not heal the wound of the people if they treat it as a mere scratch or pretend it does not exist. ‘A Pharisee who prays can indeed become a missionary, but not a missionary of the Kingdom of God’ (K. Barth).

Indeed, we can resort to using God’s law as a means of covering our shame and glorifying ourselves. As a modern day Pharisee, we can have the law and draw comfort from obeying it. The revelation of God’s justifying sinners through the cross of Jesus Christ is what brings the impact of the law to us. In the light of the Gospel, we see that the law exposes the exceeding sinfulness of sin in us (Rom. 7:7–12). What is shown intensely to us is the incorrigible nature of the deceit which uses God and his law to clothe itself with a contraband glory. By grace, we will see that with unbelievable audacity we covered ourselves with our own righteousness, rottenness through and through.

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Humanity that is fallen short of glory is enslaved to sin from which no human devices like positive thinking, spirituality, religious education or humanistic progressive reasoning can free us. We are offensive to the glory of God, bringing upon ourselves his righteous judgement and wrath (John 3:16ff; Rom. 1:18ff.).

Loss of glory implies that sin is a debt run up by us, a moral debt that we cannot repay. The forgiveness of our sins by God is his remitting and giving back to us what we have owed him. Forgiveness is remission of what has been recorded in writing, namely our lives, and a great stroke is drawn through the whole that reads, 'Paid in full'. To do this the God of glory assumes responsibility for our lives, our actions, our debt, our death and us.

REGENERATION

Restoration of our human glory is bestowed to us out of God's sheer goodness and love. God justifies us by revealing and executing his sentence against us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:23–24).

God loved with such strength and depth that he provided his unique Son, one unlike any other, one who is a constituent part of the divine being. In the *giving of his only begotten Son*, God gives no less than himself (John 3:16; 1:18; 1 John 4:10).

As our elder brother, Jesus redeemed us by paying off the debt that had brought us into slavery (Rom. 3:24). His humanity is vicarious, as he lives our life, in our place, in utter union with us. He does what we have not done, freely doing the will of the Father in covenant obedience. One man's obedience in a fallen world is more than equal to all of our disobedience and wickedness. At the age of twelve, 'Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor' (Luke 2:52). The Greek word for 'increased' is a nautical expression meaning to progress, or more significantly to beat one's way forward against all odds. For Jesus this means that he cuts his way forward blow by blow. Jesus the Son bent back our twisted humanity as he increased in wisdom and stature. This was the glory of his reign, not in heaven but on earth.

In obedience he assumes responsibility for our lives, our actions, our debt, our death and us. He inherits our sin and suffering. He refuses Satanic temptation to contradict God. As sin is Man's denial of himself in the face of the grace of his heavenly Father, so obedience is the affirmation of himself as a son in the face of the Father in heaven. In total identification with humanity, Jesus puts himself on the same level as sinners when he comes forward at the penitents' baptism offered by John on the banks of the Jordan River (Matt. 3:13–17).

As the Lamb of God, Jesus bears the actual working sins of the world in his body (John 1:29; 1 Pet. 2:24). As our substitute Jesus suffers our shame and disgrace as he is nailed to a criminal's cross, becoming the greatest sinner of all time (Luther). The elect and beloved Son of God becomes the rejected one who endures the curse of God by being abandoned and descending into hell:

The wrath of God which is the fire of his love has taken him away and all his transgressions and errors and follies and faults and crimes against God and his fellow man and himself, just as the whole burnt offering is consumed on the altar . . . (K. Barth).

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In our fraternity with Christ, we the guilty are put in the right by being condemned in him. This is the truth of the matter. We are freed from sin's condemnation by being condemned and our loss is recovered through Jesus' death and resurrection (Rom. 3:23ff.; 8:1–4).

Furthermore, Christ bestows his true humanity to us and with that his glory, living his life vicariously through us, making us new creations in him (1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Cor. 5:19; 21; Gal. 2:20f.; Phil. 1:21).

Therefore those who receive the incredible abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life now on earth and look forward to the complete glorification of their humanity (Rom. 5:17; 8:11; 1 John 3:1–3).