

## God's Glory Alone Romans 11:33-36

### Introduction

What is the number one goal of your life? What is the main purpose of you and me being alive on this planet? No-one is here to make up the numbers or be simply an accident of parental intimacy! Your existence on earth was planned by Almighty God before you were born; not only before you were born, but also before the world was created God intended you to be alive at this time in history. The seventeenth century Protestant Church catechisms had this key question: 'What is the chief end of man?' [Why are we here?] 'To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever'; How do we see that in the world He has made and how do we give glory to God that He deserves? The apostle Paul expressed in prayer these words: *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!* <sup>34</sup> *'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?'* <sup>35</sup> *'Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?'* <sup>36</sup> *For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen* (Romans 11:33-36). In summary these verses teach us these truths:

#### 1. Everything comes from God *For from Him... are all things* (Romans 11:36a)

Genesis 1:1 is an incredible summary of the bringing into existence the worlds as we know it. *In the beginning God created [bara 'creation out of nothing'] the heavens and the earth.* At the end of that opening passage in Genesis 1:31-2:1 it states: *God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.* Or as Paul puts it in Romans 11:36: *For from Him... are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen.* If your worldview is not centred on God then it is an inaccurate perspective, like looking down the wrong end of a telescope. You could do that with the utmost sincerity but you would never see the world as God intends you to. There are many bible verses that take a God-centred approach to life. For example: Psalm 79:9-10: *Help us, God our Saviour, for the glory of Your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake.* <sup>10</sup> *Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"* Even in a Psalm of penitence about the shortcomings of Asaph the writer and his fellow citizens of the Holy Land, there is a God-centeredness in his appeal. It is not primarily about improving things for me, but honouring God that is foundational in this petition. What really matters is the glory of God. This is the mind-set of a person who has grasped why we are here on earth. It is all about Him. The more I honour Him and glorify His name the more fulfilled my life will be because I am getting closer to God's original purpose for my life. The unknown author of Psalm 115 contrasted the folly of worshipping the idols of contemporary society with acknowledging the one true God. He wrote: *Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to Your name be the glory, because of Your love and faithfulness.* <sup>2</sup> *Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?"* <sup>3</sup> *Our God is in heaven; He does whatever pleases Him* (Psalm 115:1-2). There are people who will do anything for a few minutes of fame or infamy, but what next when it is over? For the Christian who has a completely different perspective we do set goals and take delight when they can be accomplished in our careers or for a few of us in our sporting accomplishments, or maybe in our family circles, but supremely the overarching purpose of our lives is to honour the Lord in the way we conduct our affairs.

(a) The ability to reject inappropriate influences Martin Luther and the other Protestant Reformers wanted to change the trajectory of focus from the Roman Catholic Church as central in people's affections to putting God back on the throne of their lives. The church and its activities may have been the setting for their service of God, but they wanted to reaffirm a

greater divine focus in their lives. This seems a minor matter, but in practise there was an important point being made. When God has the highest place in our lives it allows us to say 'no' when requests are made that are contrary to His will. In Luther's day the selling of indulgences, a fundraising scheme that was quite immoral, claiming to reduce your relatives' time in purgatory after death, was being promoted in his homeland. Martin Luther was concerned about the dishonour this brought to God's name and so he raised his voice in protest. The challenges we face today will be over other things, but the principle is the same: how does God view this proposed idea or activity? If it could bring dishonour on His name then we will decline to participate in it, because our ultimate loyalty is to Him rather than to anyone or anything else. Paul highlights this same point in Romans 1:18-21 with respect to behavioural choices: *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness,* <sup>19</sup> *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* <sup>20</sup> *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.* <sup>21</sup> *For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* For the Sixteenth Century Reformers all the other 'solas', Scripture alone, Christ alone, Faith Alone, Grace Alone, are anchored in the supreme conviction 'God's glory alone'. God's glory is the combination of His attributes revealed to us; His glory will give heaven and His new created world the fragrance and the beauty that makes it so attractive to those weary of living in a sin-marred world. On earth we catch small glimpses of His glory; then more of its fullness will be grasped. The prophet Habakkuk was longing for that day when in Habakkuk 2:14 he wrote: *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

(b) **The ability to make right choices** We all have many choices to make each day, though most of them are mundane and of limited significance. However, over our lifetime we have a smaller number of decisions to make that have a major influence on the future of our lives, especially concerning relationships and career options. When our supreme focus in life is to glorify God then when, for example, we are considering a serious relationship we will want to say how would the Lord view the choice before me? Is it honouring to Him to make this choice? In our families we have only so much time in a given week. When we are choosing priorities of what is most important do our children and grandchildren see that the Lord has the first place in our time and schedules? It is about a way of life. In our careers or looking for jobs, although sometimes we have very difficult choices to make, or no choice at all, it is always right to make it as matter of prayer and to ask the Lord where we have choices—*which option would be most glorifying to Him?* Sometimes there is no difference between the options 'on the table' so it is not a significant issue in that instance, but having the right godly frame of mind as we approach choices will help point us in the direction we should go through the leading of the Holy Spirit within us. Too many Christians have made ship-wreck of their spiritual lives and sometimes other areas of their lives too by too quickly getting into inappropriate relationships or making the wrong career moves. We may in the latter case have more money and material possessions, but Jesus reminded us about what is most important in Mark 8:36-37: *What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?* <sup>37</sup> *Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?* When we are truly convinced that our supreme goal is God's glory alone then it is easier to grasp how we ought to live our lives and the type of choices we make. Is this your supreme goal?

## 2. **Everything comes through God** *For...through Him...are all things* (Romans 11:36b)

The lens through which we see the world as a Christian should be formed by God's revelation in the Bible. (a) **In our praises** The Psalms are a rich resource not only for our prayers but also for our praises. Psalm 57:9-11: *I will praise You, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of You among the peoples.*<sup>10</sup> *For great is Your love, reaching to the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*<sup>11</sup> *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; **let Your glory be over all the earth.*** Psalm 105:1-4: *Give praise to the Lord, proclaim His name; make known among the nations what He has done.*<sup>2</sup> *Sing to Him, sing praise to Him; tell of all His wonderful acts.*<sup>3</sup> ***Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.***<sup>4</sup> *Look to the Lord and His strength; seek His face always.* Psalm 108:1-5: *My heart, O God, is steadfast; I will sing and make music with all my soul.*<sup>2</sup> *Awake, harp and lyre! I will awaken the dawn.*<sup>3</sup> *I will praise You, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of You among the peoples.*<sup>4</sup> *For great is Your love, higher than the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*<sup>5</sup> *Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; **let Your glory be over all the earth.*** Psalm 113:1-5a: *Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, you His servants; praise the name of the Lord.*<sup>2</sup> *Let the name of the Lord be praised, both now and forevermore.*<sup>3</sup> *From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets, the name of the Lord is to be praised.*<sup>4</sup> *The Lord is exalted over all the nations, **His glory above the heavens.***<sup>5</sup> *Who is like the Lord our God, the One who sits enthroned on high...* Do we spend enough time praising the Lord for who He is and the glory of His name? Do we take sufficient delight in giving Him the honour due to His holy name? We find it easier to say thank you for personal answers to prayer, but this is on a wider scale than my relationship with God as we acknowledge His acts in the wider world for His glory. Praise and worship and adoration of the Lord, or meditating on His attributes is something many of us spend less time doing than we ought to do. The Psalmists give us a good example of what they do. May the Lord help us to truly honour His holy name as He is worthy of all our praises!

(b) **In our perception of the world** God is glorified through all His actions not just the ones that we take particular delight in, such as an amazing answer to prayer for a healing from sickness, or help with our school examinations and getting the grades we need, or a deliverance from or through difficult circumstances. The Bible speaks of the entire universe being the sphere of God's operations. He is not just interested in the 'spiritual things' that happen. God takes delight in our use of our talents and abilities. We tend to focus here on art or music or some form of craftsmanship, but in God's eyes it goes much further to include all legitimate activity that we do well in our daily work- if our goal in life is to glorify Him. It gives a dignity to the most mundane of occupations when our service is for Him supremely not just our employer. When nations act justly or otherwise God in His divine providence is recorded as blessing or punishing them. Isaiah 26:13-15: *O Lord our God, other lords besides You have ruled over us, but Your name alone do we honour.*<sup>14</sup> *They are now dead, they live no more; their spirits do not rise. You punished them and brought them to ruin; You wiped out all memory of them.*<sup>15</sup> *You have enlarged the nation, O Lord; You have enlarged the nation. **You have gained glory for Yourself;** You have extended all the borders of the land.* We need to be careful in labelling the rise and fall of nations in these terms as we cannot be certain what God's plans are for particular nations at any given time in history. However, the Bible is clear that God does work in the political sphere raising up rulers and nations for His glory. Habakkuk was shocked to find that God raised up the Babylonian empire to execute His judgement on the nations (Habakkuk 1:5-11). The most extraordinary example in the Old Testament was the prophecies concerning Cyrus King of Persia. He was an extraordinarily benevolent and enlightened ruler of first his nation and then empire, but he was not a follower of the God of Israel. Yet He was described in this way in Isaiah 44:28-45:2a, 45:4-6: *Who says of Cyrus, 'He*

is my shepherd and will accomplish all that I please; he will say of Jerusalem, "Let it be rebuilt," and of the temple, "Let its foundations be laid." This is what the LORD says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armour, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: <sup>2</sup>I will go before you... For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen, I summon you by name and bestow on you a title of honour, though you do not acknowledge Me. <sup>5</sup>I am the Lord, and there is no other; apart from Me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me <sup>6</sup>so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides Me. I am the Lord, and there is no other. We may never know the significance of wider events in the world, but rest assured God is at work for the glorification of His name. We cannot reconcile where divine sovereignty and human responsibility begin and end on the world –that will be forever a mystery, but both assuredly are absolutely true. What we may see before us may look like random purposeless events, but this is not the case.

(c) **In the Redemption of His Church** (Ephesians 1:3-14) Paul wrote these amazing words: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. <sup>4</sup>For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love <sup>5</sup>He predestined us for adoption to sonship<sup>1</sup> through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will— <sup>6</sup>**to the praise of His glorious grace**, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. <sup>7</sup>In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup>that He lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding, <sup>9</sup>He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, <sup>10</sup>to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfilment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.<sup>11</sup> In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, <sup>12</sup>in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be **for the praise of His glory**. <sup>13</sup>And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,<sup>14</sup> who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to **the praise of His glory**. We are created in His image to have fellowship with our Creator and Redeemer made possible through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Paul lays out God the Father's wonderful plan for the salvation of His people brought into effect through the work of Jesus on earth and then through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit within us, first bringing us to faith and then assisting us in our growth in grace as we seek to become more like Jesus as we go on in the Christian life. Can you see evidence of God's work in your life? Do you sense something of your growth as a believer since you first put your faith and trust in Him? I hope each one of us can do so. Here are some amazing blessings that flowed from Paul's lips in one very long sentence! The joy that overflowed in His heart as the scribe had to work hard to keep up with his quill pen to put down on parchment the blessings that were being described. The incredible blessing that is ours to be a child of God is truly amazing. The incredible privilege that an unworthy sinner like me and you is a recipient of God's amazing grace; this work was accomplished primarily for God's glory.

The centrality of glorifying God is seen in the words of the prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17 on the night before His crucifixion. The opening words in John 17:1-4 make this very plain: After Jesus said this, He looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the hour has come. **Glorify Your Son, that Your Son may glorify you.** <sup>2</sup>For You granted Him authority over all people that He might give eternal life to all those you have given Him. <sup>3</sup>Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. <sup>4</sup>**I have brought You glory on earth by finishing the work You gave me to do.** <sup>5</sup>And now, Father, **glorify Me in Your presence with the glory I had with You before the world began.** Our salvation is in Christ alone and we rightly acknowledge that fact, but what Jesus did for us was for God's glory alone.

We may be the grateful recipients of the blessings, but we are saved to honour our wonderful Lord and Saviour. We live in a self-centred world where my desires, my needs, my whatever, take centre-stage. This is not how God wants us to live. He wants us to lift up our horizons to see a much bigger picture of our amazing God and what He is accomplishing in the world in the salvation of His Church. Why do we work hard to grow in Christlikeness? Jesus in John 15:8 gives us the answer. *This is to My Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples.* As an earthly parent we can take pleasure when our children win a prize at a school awards ceremony or an event on the sport's day or in some other context; our heavenly Father takes great pleasure when one of His children on earth grows in their faith on earth or takes new steps in their spiritual journey. For the Protestant Reformers the intentional recognition that this is for God's glory alone that we are living here in this part of His creation gives greater clarity to our attitudes and attainments and the goals for which we aim in the remaining years we have left on this planet.

**3. The Glory of God in His final triumph ...for Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen (Romans 11:36c)**

The final victory of God at the end of the age is assured. We are fortunate in the book of Revelation to catch some glimpses of the final triumph of the Lamb in the mission to redeem a people for Himself to the glory of God the Father. Revelation chapter four is a vision John the Apostle had of the throne of God the Father in heaven. In the vision he heard all kinds of creatures praising and honouring God and truly glorifying His holy name. Revelation 4:8b-11 states: *Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come."*<sup>9</sup> *Whenever the living creatures give glory, honour and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever,*<sup>10</sup> *the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:*<sup>11</sup> *"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being."* In the age to come we will truly and fully live God-centred lives, but we start here by seeking to give Him first place in our lives. This is not just when all is going wonderfully well, but also to trust Him through the difficult times of our lives as well. In Romans 4:20-21, in a context where Abraham and Sarah had been struggling to come to terms that they had been unable to conceive a child despite the promises of God concerning a future heir, Paul wrote these words: *Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,*<sup>21</sup> *being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised.* Abraham had many faults, but he also had many virtues, including this confidence in a great and awesome God. I have had a number of occasions as a pastor when I was planning to visit someone going through extremely difficult times and wondering what on earth I should say to seek to encourage them. Instead, I have come away humbled and blessed by hearing some wonderful declarations of trust in the Lord.

It is not in the sin-damaged 'now' that we will see the full experience of His glory, but beyond this life we will have our breath taken away by the beauty and majesty of our glorious God. Paul Himself wrote about the contrast between our present struggles and future blessings in Romans 8:18-21: *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*<sup>19</sup> *For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.*<sup>20</sup> *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope*<sup>21</sup> *that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.* To see a little glimpse of the future led Paul to overflow with joy with the words of Romans 11:33-36: *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His*

paths beyond tracing out! <sup>34</sup> *‘Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been His counsellor?’* <sup>35</sup> *‘Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?’* <sup>36</sup> *For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen.*

#### 4. **Five primary ways to glorify God**

(a) **Worship** Take time each day even if it is a short time to meditate on His Word, including a little bit of the time on some aspect of His character, as revealed in the Bible. Take time each Lord’s Day to gather to worship with His people as a priority. We can make time for the most important things in our lives. He is worthy of all our praises and more besides. Let us acknowledge the seriousness with which we want to glorify Him by ring-fencing time with Him week by week. For those with full diaries we know that things only happen if we fix those slots in the diary. Make the first entries our planned time with God.

(b) **Fellowship** God placed us in human families for fellowship and mutual support. He also placed us in church families. Let’s make time to spend with one another in our church family. There will be particular time for close friends, but as we gather on the Lord’s Day make a point of saying hello to someone you don’t know as well in the Church. Over a few years you can get to know a little almost everyone who comes along to the church – if there is the intentionality of making the first move to speak to one another. We will have eternity to share together in glorifying God, but why not make a greater attempt to show love to His family here on earth, by giving others just a little of your most valuable possession your time and attention.

(c) **Becoming like Him** Maybe over Christmas / New Year, or whatever time is best for you, to look over the past year and ask yourself –how am I growing as a Christian? Is there something I can focus on improving this year? Maybe keeping a journal or diary for personal reflections might be helpful. In II Corinthians 3:18 Paul wrote these amazing words: *And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

(d) **Service** I thank God for the many people in this church who are engaged in some form of Christina service and ministry. In fact, I am deeply grateful to many who serve in a variety of capacities each year. However, you may be here and at this time you are not committed to some form of service. Can I encourage you to get involved –there are so many practical ways we can serve the Lord. I thank God we can give our tithes and offerings, but offering some of our time and abilities can be so significant to those blessed by our service.

(e) **Witness** The greatest way we can glorify God is by leading someone else to faith in Jesus. However, it starts with a heart committed to praying for specific people who need Jesus. Who are you praying for at this time? It also can involve words of witness where appropriate as we share something of our story of God’s Work in our lives. On the threshold of another new church year may we have a sense of expectancy of God at work in our midst transforming lives for His glory. *For from Him and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen* (Romans 11:36).