

The Glory of God and Romans 1-3

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Thesis

Human beings are capable of recognizing God's glory and are held uniquely responsible for not acknowledging the glory that belongs to Him.

- **Romans 1:18-25, 32** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things... Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (KJV).*

Introduction

Hidden deep within the essential nature of every human being, God has placed the unique ability to recognize glory. It is not a learned behavior. It is woven into the very core of our awareness and is a vital part of the human experience. The ability to recognize those in authority, the awareness of our faults and flaws, our acknowledgement of things that are beyond our understanding and control, or the desire for greatness. These are all tied to our innate awareness of glory.

- **Matthew 6:9** *And yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his **glory** was not arrayed like one of these.*
- **Psalms 8:5** *For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with **glory** and honor.*

While it is true that man was created with the ability to recognize glory in the natural realm, he can also, and more importantly, recognize glory in the spiritual realm. Every person, everywhere, who has ever lived, was created with both an innate awareness of a glorious almighty God, and the natural ability to accurately discern all of His divine character and attributes, His intrinsic glory.

Romans 1 – Man Ignores the Glory of God

It is within the context of man's innate understanding of God that Paul begins to lay out God's case against man—that since man has been created with the knowledge of who God is, and what He does, he has no excuse for not glorifying the one true God.

- **Psalms 19:1** *The heavens are telling of the glory of God; And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.*
- **Psalms 97:6** *The heavens declare his righteousness, **and all the people see His glory.***

Which brings us to our simple definition of the glory of God—intrinsic value.

By the value of God, we mean the sum total of God's attributes and character. His divine nature, which is beyond our comprehension, is the basis of any and all true value. Is there value in justice? Yes, but only because God is just. Is there value in mercy? Yes, but only because God is merciful. Is there value in love? Yes, but only because God is love. Is there value in fairness? No, because God is not fair. Is there value in tolerance of sin? No, because God does not tolerate sin.

By intrinsic, we mean that God possesses all true value within Himself. No one and nothing adds or takes away from God's value. God's glory is more than just a declaration of His perfect attributes, it is something He actually possesses. Notice Christ's prayer to the Father:

- **John 17:5** *Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

He asked the Father to declare, or unveil, His divine nature and intrinsic value which He had possessed from eternity past.

Mankind also has glory, but it is earthly, temporary, limited, delegated by God, and specific to suit God's purposes, as in the case of the glory He has given to men vs. women. First Corinthians 11:7 reads, *For a man ought not to have his head covered, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man.* God also assigned a measure of earthly glory to the various positions of human authority which He created. And God assigned specific people to these positions according to His plans.

- **Romans 13:1** *Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.*
- **Isaiah 14:18** *All the kings of the nations lie in glory, Each in his own tomb.*
- **Esther 5:11** *Then Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons.*

We understand glory, and glory helps us understand the divine nature of God. From the most basic revelation of His glory being creation, to the highest being Christ Himself, God incarnate, God displays His glory to Man. It's no wonder that at the birth of Christ the angels cried, *Glory to God in the Highest!*

Man's Heart Is Evil

In Romans 1:18, Paul described the natural cycle of man's response to the revelation of God's glory, a cycle that happens generation after generation. Unable to deny what God has created, yet unwilling to acknowledge His intrinsic value and sovereign control, man invents and serves lesser gods in His place. Gods that suit their sense of pride and self-worth. Gods that can be satisfied with man's works.

As man shields his eyes from God's ever present brightness, he is content to search for truth in the dark. H. A. Ironside puts it this way in his book, *Lectures on Romans* (p. 29):

Paganism and idolatry are not steps in human evolution as man advances from slime to divinity... The great pagan nations once knew more than they do now. The knowledge of God brought through the flood was disseminated throughout the ancient world. Back of all the great idolatrous systems is pure monotheism. But men could not stand this intimate knowledge of God for it made them uncomfortable in their sins; so a host of lesser deities and divinities were invented as go-betweens, and eventually the knowledge of the true God was entirely lost. But even to-day creation is His constant witness.

**The foolishness that is everywhere in the world today
Is a result of man's unwillingness to glorify the one true God**

Let's look at a short list of human wisdom that opposes the knowledge of God:

- Man evolved from animals
- To thine own self be true
- God is dead
- Money makes the world go round
- Consenting adults in a love relationship

Homosexuals and transsexuals are brave—and normal
Follow your heart
Family first
Male and female are only two ends of a spectrum
Question Authority
Jews are the problem

The fact that in every culture and in every generation, people have held to godless ideas is certainly nothing new, but it serves to prove Paul's point. Man rejects the knowledge of God in order to promote his own agenda. The truth is that man acts out his rejection of God's glory, not merely as a matter of indoctrination or lack of good information, but from the heart man rejects the glory of God.

- **Jeremiah 17:9-10** *The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; Who can understand it?*
- **Mark 7:21-22** *For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.*
- **Philippians 3:19** *Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose **glory** is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*

Sound familiar? It's like reading the morning news, right?

What Paul is eluding to here in the first chapter of Romans is that even though man actively rejects God in his thoughts, he first denies God in his heart. Because it is into the heart of man that God revealed His glory. And that is where our guilt lies, in the inner man, where our convictions are formed. In our hearts, we either accept or reject God. In Romans 10:10, Paul says plainly, *for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.* It's not simply in the mind but in the heart man believes and expresses thankfulness and glorifies God.

At this point some ask, "What about the person who never had a chance to hear the gospel?" The correct response? Paul is not dealing with that question here. Paul is here dealing with the guilt of man and not the salvation of man. What Paul is doing here is establishing the fact that in every age, man is guilty of not glorifying, and thereby rejecting God.

Man Rejects the Law of God

Notice the indictment in the last verse of chapter 1:

- **Romans 1:32a** *Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death...*

Paul is boldly stating that mankind, even apart from the Mosaic Law, knows by nature the judgment of God on their sin. They are fully aware that their actions deserve death. How do they know? Because the law of God and the glory of God are not separate, in fact, God's glory reveals His righteousness and justice. We cannot witness the glory of God in creation and somehow miss His righteousness. It not only surrounds us, it is in us.

- **Romans 2:14-15a** *For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts.*

Romans 2 – Man Attempts to Excuse His Unrighteousness

Paul begins by confronting those who, apart from the Law, attempt to cover their unrighteous deeds by condemning those same deeds in others. But focusing on the unrighteousness of others does not excuse our own unrighteousness, it actually confirms it! Paul says to them in 2:1, *for in that which you judge another, you condemn yourself,* and in 2:3, he elaborates, *But do you suppose this, O man, when you pass*

judgment on those who practice such things and do the same yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? The words of Christ in Luke 6:37 confirm Paul's position, Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned. Adam immediately excused his sin by pointing to Eve. Man points to those around him as if to say, "Why judge me, Lord? Look at what those other sinners are doing." Man compounds his guilt before God by adding the sin of hypocrisy to his long list of offenses.

Paul moves on to expose the hypocrisy of those under the Law, namely, the Jews.

- **Romans 2:17-23** *But if you bear the name "Jew" and rely upon the Law and boast in God, and know His will and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the Law, and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, a corrector of the foolish, a teacher of the immature, having in the Law the embodiment of knowledge and of the truth, you, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that one shall not steal, do you steal? You who say that one should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the Law, through your breaking the Law, do you dishonor God?*

Romans 3 – The Law Exposes Sin

Paul continues the discussion with those under the Law, the Jews, to deal the final blow to the false idea that man, in the flesh, whether Jew or Gentile, can live a life acceptable to God.

Since the Jews had the Law of God written down for them by special revelation, it must mean that by keeping it they could achieve righteousness before God. Right? Wrong! The Law was not given to man to make him righteous, but to prove him to be a sinner! Paul reminds the Jews, out of their own Scriptures, that when God looks upon man, He finds *none that doeth good, no, not one* (Psalm 14:3, 53:1).

- **Romans 3:9** *What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin.* The Jews, like the Gentiles, are guilty before God.
- **Romans 3:20** *because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.*

The end result?

- **Romans 3:23** *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Paul's sums up the argument with this powerful truth. Man is guilty of refusing to glorify Almighty God. Man has refused to acknowledge and submit to God's intrinsic value over his own perceived value and his own personal agenda. And by this refusal, he is plunged into darkness and depravity.

Falling Short of the Glory of God

Have you noticed that, most of the time when Romans 3:23 is quoted, our attention is drawn to the first seven words, *for all have sinned and fall short*, but not particularly to the last four words, *the glory of God*? But what about those last four words and what does Paul mean by choosing the word *glory*? Wouldn't the verse make more sense for Paul to say, for all have sinned and fall short of the righteousness of God? Or the holiness of God? But Paul does not say that. I believe Paul specifically chooses the word *glory* to convey a broader meaning.

As we have seen, *the glory of God* is not only about one or two of His attributes, but about all of His attributes and character. I would like to suggest that to *fall short of the glory of God* is far more than to be in disagreement with God's rules, or to not measure up to His standards. But to *fall short of the glory of God* is to be in a state of complete and total rejection of God's attributes and character, which is His glory, and to place our own value above God's. This is man's dire situation, that he is in a state of complete darkness before God. Isn't that the point Paul has been making for the last three chapters?

- **John 3:19** *And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*
- **John 12:46** *I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.*

God's Glorious Grace

- **Romans 3:24** *Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* Paul now turns the conversation to another aspect of God's glory, His amazing grace. Because of Christ's sacrifice, He makes a way, the only way, for man to escape wrath.

While God's glory demands justice for the unrighteousness of man, it also extends grace. One thing about the attributes of God that should be mentioned here is best described by Charles Ryrie in his book *Basic Theology* (p. 35). Notice how Ryrie described the workings of God's perfections, or attributes:

The various perfections of God are not component parts of God. Each describes His total being. Love, for example, is not a part of God's nature; God in His total being is love. Although God may display one quality or another at a given time, no quality is independent of or preeminent over any of the others. Whenever God displays His wrath, He is still love. When He shows His love, He does not abandon His holiness.

Unlike man, God is able to display perfect justice while at the same time displaying perfect grace and mercy, and never fall into contradiction. *And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM* (Exodus 3:14). Righteousness is not merely a discipline God keeps, it is His nature and character. God is not part this and part that. Just as we see in the person of Christ, being fully God and also fully man. God is perfect and complete in every way. As H. A. Ironside says:

He (Holy Spirit) shows us that God does not save sinners at the expense of His righteousness. In other words, if saved at all, it will not be because righteousness has been set aside in order that mercy might triumph; but that mercy has found a way whereby divine righteousness can be fully satisfied, yet guilty sinners justified before the throne of high heaven ("Lectures on Romans," pp. 15-16).

Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

God declares sinners to be righteous by the righteousness of Christ. It, therefore, is not a righteousness that can fail to fully produce perfect and lasting results. And it is a righteousness that can never be challenged. God did not sacrifice His own righteousness to declare sinners righteous. In other words, God did not place His attribute of righteousness at risk when He declared us righteous, and because we have received His righteousness (not our own) we are assured of receiving the full reward of the righteous, eternal life.

- **1 Peter 1:8-9** *Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and **full of glory**: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.*

And it is His righteousness in us that brings glory to God, a true and lasting righteousness that is ours by faith. God is glorified by declaring us righteous through the righteousness of Christ! To have Christ dwelling in us is more than enough to properly glorify God. God is now glorified in us, and we are no longer under His wrath. Look at the powerful use of the word *glory* in these verses:

- **Colossians 1:27** *To whom God would make known what is the **riches of the glory** of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**.*

- **2 Peter 1:3** *According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath **called us to glory and virtue.***
- **Romans 8:30** *and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, **He also glorified.***
- **2 Thessalonians 1:12** *That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ **may be glorified in you, and ye in him,** according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Closing Thoughts

As we develop in our understanding of the salvation we have received, it is important to see that our salvation does not add to God's glory—it reveals it. His glory is intrinsic and does not change. It is precisely because He is glorious that He allows man to be saved. It is now our privilege to glorify Him.

To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved
(Ephesians 1:6)