

## How Do We Glorify God?

We in America enjoy blessings supernal: peace, freedoms, prosperity, comforts, and more. Only a fool would refuse to acknowledge God for having provided us with so much. It therefore seems right that we attend church on Sundays to “worship” God. Does that passive church attendance glorify God though? In church, teachers and preachers repeatedly say that we’re to live in a way that glorifies God. But how, exactly, does God want to be glorified? If it’s important, we can’t ignore it as just an abstract idea. We need to discuss this, because I fear we don’t really understand what it means to glorify God or how we are to do that. It’s exceedingly important to us because we live now in a culture that seeks to make everyone radically self-absorbed and self-centered – if not actually narcissistic. We need to be aware of our own spiritual state as well as where we need to be.

For this lesson, I draw upon the work of America’s great theologian of a couple of centuries ago, Jonathan Edwards. He had terrific insights that have been picked up mainly by theologians and expositors in the Reformed tradition. R. C. Sproul and John Piper, and probably others, have taken Edwards’ insights and made them accessible to modern readers. But for this lesson, I draw upon a superb, clear yet concise booklet by DTS professor, John Hannah. Let’s begin by thinking about why God created. Then, what man’s creational purpose is, and then how we fulfill it. We’ve mentioned these matters in previous Sunday School lessons, but here let’s put it all together.

God created this cosmos and all that’s in it to reveal His glory (Romans 11:36). Everything that exists is for Him, for His purposes, for His glory. God is excellent, infinitely perfect, ineffably majestic and beautiful in His essential Being. His glory is His absolutely magnificent Person. It shines out from Him. No mortal can witness it and live, it’s too weighty, it’s infinitely great. God knows Himself and He values Himself above all else. He delights in Himself. He loves Himself with a pure love. And God knows this truth: being is doing. Thus, He wills His glory to be found in others. Having an infinitely perfect nature has to express itself outside Himself, thus reflecting His nature. Creation exists to reveal God’s glory.

Let’s be exceedingly careful not to misunderstand this. It is just and right that God loves Himself. He really is the most lovely Being there is. He thinks, wills and acts in conformity to His Nature. God must be true to Himself. We must acknowledge this. And He is an infinite Being, so nothing outside Himself can possibly add to Him. He is not vain, nor does He seek or need to be admired. But He wants His glory to be known so that others can be blessed by it. He desires His glory to be reflected back to Himself; He wants to see it because that is right and just. That’s why He created (or at least one of the reasons that we can adduce).

To study God’s creation is to marvel at His handiwork. (Modern science has turned into an idol to steal His glory from Him.) As we increasingly understand the physical universe, for example, the workings of life and the intricacies and beauty of it all, we can’t help but be amazed at the brilliance and perfections of God. And so, praise Him for it. But the highest form of creation is humanity, and that’s our concern here. We’re not here to live to ourselves. We’ve been made to reflect in our character, that is, in our persons, and in all that we do, God’s perfections, His nature, His glory. This way we not only honor Him, we glorify Him. God seeks to behold Himself in us, His beloved creatures. We were created for His glory (Isaiah 43:7). We please God by reflecting Him, His glorious Person, in our lives. That’s why the Genesis 1 text says that we are the image of God, made in His likeness. As a mirror reflects an image, we’re here to mirror God.

Disobedience and rebellion marred the Creation and provoked God’s severe indignation with humanity. It necessitated the evocation of retributive justice as well as the expression of mercy and grace. Sin gave us a corrupt nature. Sin is thus our deliberate, willful intent and desire to *not* honor God, to not reflect His character. We live in pursuit of our own selfish interests. Instead of living a God-centered life, we live self-centered lives. It’s not evil to love ourselves nor to desire to live happily. But sin has turned us into selfish monsters whose preoccupation, obsession even, is the pursuit of personal happiness. Our very understanding of love is corrupt. We embrace vindictiveness, coveting, envy, and worse. Our motives for all we do are corrupt as are our personal values and desires. We don’t know how to please God, if we could. And we probably don’t care. We suppose we’re good and worthy people, a bizarre delusion. The entry of sin into the world, into the human race, has necessitated a total re-creation of all things. That’s why God in grace has put the Gospel on offer. What’s needed has to come from God Himself.

Modern Christianity in the West isn't biblical, protests notwithstanding. We're not clear on what the Gospel is, and we have a severely truncated understanding of salvation. We suppose that God offers us forgiveness of sins and eternal life when we die, and that by believing in Christ. Well, OK. But isn't that self-indulgent? Doesn't that make Jesus into just a vehicle, a means, for us to achieve a totally self-oriented, selfish end? And doesn't that subtly give us license to live as we please apart from God's will? So let's re-orient things. Jesus is deity, God the Son. The Gospel is Jesus, *everything* Jesus. It's necessary that we have our sins forgiven, yes, but that's *so that* we can be indwelt by the Holy Spirit, *so that* a holy God can be present in our lives for intimate fellowship and *so that* we can be enabled to be conformed to God's own nature. Salvation allows God to impart His likeness to us so that we can glorify Him.

God is only pleased with what conforms to His perfect Person. So we have to be totally different, new persons, God-like in our being and in the lives we lead. Jesus makes that possible. He, by His Spirit, restores God's image and likeness in us. Thus we reflect God's beautiful character back to Him. God's life becomes our life, and He is glorified. But that all hinges on our transformation into Christ's likeness. We must adopt new values, new desires and affections, new ways of thinking and making decisions, and new behaviors. A new character doesn't occur automatically, as if we're a programmable robot. It demands a lot of work and commitment on our part. Over time we develop the perfections that God possesses, so God sees Himself in our character.

To follow Christ means to desire to be like Him. If we know Him, we love Him. And loving Him we trust Him and obey Him. And serve Him as He commanded. And through this – may I call it a process? – that's called progressive sanctification, Christ is formed in us. If our desire is to glorify God with our lives, nothing is more important to us than our sanctification. We are horrified at the sin that controlled us and zealously seek to root it out. We are thrilled at the beauty and goodness of Christ and seek more than anything to be like Him. Our lives are filled with a sense of purpose and of awe at what God is doing. We bear fruit for God, and He is pleased.

To be more specific, sanctification occurs as we absorb the Word into our mind and heart, indeed, into our life, so that we live out the Word of God. It happens only because of the Spirit's enablement, but the Spirit needs to have something in us to work with. And that's His Word. We thus live a God-centered life, or, to say it this way: We walk with God. That is our calling. And that is how we worship.

Many in today's evangelical world would dispute most or all of the above. Non-Reformed theologians, the "Free Grace" people (and the many who lean toward it), antinomians, and lots of others who aren't familiar with Edwards and find his ideas strange if not radical, these and more likely won't accept it. I pity them because, despite whatever excuse they offer, they are missing out on the great purpose of salvation. (And a purpose of creation.) Let me be blunt: If we aren't living to glorify God, then we necessarily are living to glorify someone else. The alternative to what I've presented in this lesson is a self-centered life. Crass selfishness.

The righteousness of Christ is imputed to us (Romans 4-5). That means the likeness of Christ Jesus is ours if by faith we're united to Him. It's God's Gospel gift. It's what justification and positional sanctification is. We therefore glorify God because Jesus glorifies God. Nevertheless [this is what's lost in today's evangelical world], we are expected to be in our character and to live out all that Christ is and wills to do through us. Faith is dynamic, active; it is not passive. It's not a "let go and let God" slogan. To miss this is to miss the point of all Scripture! Progressive sanctification, which is our responsibility, makes our positional sanctification real in the world of time and space. It demonstrates in real life what God has done. And it's proleptic of our future perfect sanctification.

If we have no desire to be like Christ, no desire or commitment to follow Christ, or no desire to glorify God in our lives as He has revealed, something is wrong. I can identify two problems: (1) a profession of faith that is merely empty words but lacking reality. Or (2), more likely it's indifference, pride, love of some sin or idol, self-absorption, and/or worldliness, any of which grieve and quench the Spirit so that there's no sanctifying growth.

Christ Jesus is the greatest reality there is. Nothing is more necessary and important in all existence than being in Him. To know of Jesus yet fail to follow Him in love and gratitude is the most foolish thing anyone can do. We have only this one life, so let's commit to make it count for God.