

came into the world, full of grace and truth, the one in whom there is life, the “life that is the light of men” (John 1:4).

Conclusion

Solus Christus is a culturally unfashionable message because it holds that there is an absolute truth, and Jesus is that truth. Moreover, since Christians have an exclusive claim to truth in Christ, other belief systems must be or incomplete or at least partially false. Such exclusive truths have always been difficult to maintain. Ancient Jewish-Christians wanted to add to the doctrine of *Solus Christus* that becoming a Jew was necessary for salvation. They were wrong, and the Early Church rejected this position (Acts 15). The Medieval Church wanted to add to the doctrine of *Solus Christus* to say that human beings cooperate in their salvation by doing good works, participating in the sacraments of the church, and seeking the mediation of priests and saints. The great Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century rejected this view, returning to the pure biblical view that salvation was won by Christ alone. Today, many Christians would set aside the doctrine of *Solus Christus* because it seems intolerant and arrogant in our religiously pluralistic world. But if we do this, we will deny a fundamental truth of the gospel.

The apostle Peter, standing before the Sanhedrin and in danger of imprisonment, torture, and death, said it as clearly as it has ever been said: "There is no salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

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Soli Deo Gloria

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Glory to God alone, *soli deo gloria*, is the crown on the other Reformation principles: the Bible alone, Christ alone, grace alone, and faith alone. We might consider the principle of glory to God alone to be the glue that holds the rest of the principles together, maintaining their cohesion and interdependence. It is the center of the circle that brings together other principles in order to unite them and make them consistent. Christ is the center, glory to God alone the goal.

The principles that salvation is through Christ alone, by grace alone, and through faith alone, without any human additions, affirm that glory is to God alone and not in any way to be shared by human beings. Also, the fact that the Bible alone is the source of ultimate authority without any mediating role played by church traditions or clergy, who might add to the word or interpret it according to their own ideas, is a further confirmation that glory is due to God alone. If human beings through the church or the person of the pope were to play an intervening role in man's salvation, this would undermine the principle that God alone is owed glory. God is the creator, preserver, savior, goal, and purpose of life, which is why God declares, "I will not yield my glory to another" (Isaiah 42: 8). These words are not a divine exercise in self-love; rather, they are a declaration of the nature of the universe, whose origin and purpose are found only in God. God is "all in all."

The Reformers' Interpretation of God's Glory

During the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Catholic Church never denied the importance of the Bible, faith, grace, or Christ for human salvation. The theologians of this era agreed that these

were crucial to salvation, but they did not argue that they alone made salvation possible. In effect, they did not use the Latin word *sola* to describe them, a point upon which the Reformers would later insist.

While the Reformers professed that the Bible alone has authority for understanding spiritual truth, Catholic theologians added other authorities to the authority of the Bible – namely, church traditions and the pope. These authorities stood on an equal footing with the Bible in that they interpreted the Bible and, in effect, added to its teachings. In the end, the Bible no longer stood *alone* as the Church's authority.

And while the Reformers professed that justification is through faith alone, Catholic theologians taught that justification is through both faith and works. Hence they fundamentally changed the Church's understanding of Christ and divine grace.

They did not speak of God's glory alone. While the Reformers would profess that glory is to be given to God alone, the Catholic Church professed in effect that glory is due not only to God but also to other things or people. Still, it did not deny glory to God.

At the Second Council of Nicaea (787), the church defined different levels of giving honor – in effect, glory – in worship:

- (1) *Latria* is the worship that is due to God alone
- (2) *Hyperdulia* is the veneration that is due to the Virgin Mary
- (3) *Dulia* is the veneration that is due all saints other than Mary

Faced with these teachings, the Reformers presented an exclusive understanding of the glory that is alone due to God. For example, Martin Luther says, “Glory is to God alone, and it is impossible that God would share his glory with anyone as if it

were to be held in public ownership.”

In his commentary on John 6: 65, Luther says that we give glory to our Lord in Christ and that He alone has glory and honor. He adds, “This is the reason why faith is glorified: it recalls the divine works, how great they are. These divine works are represented in the Lord Jesus’ work – his life, passion, and death. By comparison, our human works are nothing, so we owe to God alone glory and honor, for He is everything and we are nothing.

Moreover, John Calvin spoke of several different aspects of glory. One of them is the glory of God revealed in creation, which Calvin describes as “the theatre of divine glory.” In every part of the world we see glimpses of the divine glory. He adds, “Wherever you turn in this world there is nothing, not even a single moment, that doesn’t provide at least a glimpse of the divine beauty, and because we cannot comprehend the magnificence of the created things that surround us, we are awed by the greatness and enormity of the glory of the Lord our God.”

Also, Calvin sees the glory of God in the creation of man in the image of God, and he sees it in the revelation of Jesus Christ, and in His passion, death and resurrection.

The English reformer Edward Lee (1602- 1671) defines God's glory as “the infinite greatness of the Divine Self. It is the real greatness of God. It is God’s nature.” This concept focuses on the inner or self-glory of God, which calls for praise, worship, honor, and love from everyone. Thus, God is glorious in Himself because He is omniscient, omnipotent, and all loving. Lee also explains that God’s glory appears on the outside. This exterior glory appears in the His creation of heaven and earth, including all the living things on the earth. God’s glory also appears when human beings and angels start to know God, loving, obeying and praising him forever.

Calvin and Lee agree that, when the creation, and human

beings within creation, give glory to God, this doesn't add new greatness to Him; rather, creation and humanity can only observe God's glory in its wholeness and greatness and respond to it with praise. In this regard, Calvin warns believers to glorify God through our worship, behavior, testimony, family life, or political attitudes. We should approach all of these in such a way as to give glory to God alone. This warning was given lest these practices might put limitations on the glory we owe to God by shifting the focus to man in how glory is offered. Giving glory to God alone must be based upon God in Himself and His works, not on man's response to what God has already done.

The first question asked in the Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646) is "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." The Westminster Catechism focuses on the reason for man's existence. The reason is not found in man himself but rather in God, who created man in his image and likeness. When God created man, he was a true image of the Divine. The purpose, goal, and pleasure of man were to worship God and enjoy a relationship with Him. But falling in sin, man's focus shifted from God to himself. Following the fall, human beings considered how they might become great and how they might gain happiness apart from God. In effect, they wanted to become like God.

God is glorious in Himself, and it is impossible that anything He created, not even man, could become more glorious than God or add to His glory. Glorifying God means that we reflect God's Glory. The creation proclaims the glory of God, which is the purpose of its existence. It has no other choice but to glorify God.

In the case of man, God granted to human beings the great privilege of glorifying Him because they wish to do so just as Christ. In the same way, Christ, who is God's glory on earth, glorified the Father while He was on earth because He wanted to do so. This privilege is related directly to the *solus*. Every human

being, whether a believer or non-believer, is an instrument giving glory to God. For those who are saved, God's glory is manifest through His mercy and salvation, while for those who are perishing, God's glory is also manifest in them when He fulfills His justice through their condemnation and thereby establishes His justice. Hence God's glory is manifest both in the salvation and the condemnation of human beings. Admittedly, these are difficult and complex ideas.

Biblical Theology and God's Glory

The Reformation's focus on the glory of God led to a careful study of the Bible that sought to trace the glory of God as it was developed in the Old and New Testaments. Studies in biblical theology shed light on the meanings of the concept of glory in the Bible especially as it relates to God's presence, worship, mission, and – the zenith of this glory – Christ Jesus.

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament that we translate as *glory* is *cabod*, which literally means “heaviness or weight.” It is used to describe the material prosperity or good reputation or good background of a person. The word is also used metaphorically to describe the troubles of a nation or a person. But the use of the word in the Old Testament, when referring to God, has the meaning of dignity, nobility, honor, high status, virtue, prestige, greatness, and perfection.

The Greek word in the New Testament that we translate as *glory* is the word *doxa*. Like the Hebrew word *cabod*, it refers to high glory. But it is often used in the New Testament to describe the nature of God by grace through His great works, primarily in the proclamation and presence of the person of God in Jesus Christ: “The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being” (Hebrews 1:3). The word *doxa* carries all the meanings of the word *cabod* and adds to it the meaning of manifesting beautiful perfection and resplendent power. It also bears the meanings of brightness, brilliance, and

greatness.

The Bible uses the term glory in two ways: the first, as a necessary attribute of God; the second, as a visible revelation of the presence of God among His people.

As a necessary attribute of God, the concept of glory carries an ethical significance that includes holiness. Hence the biblical writers lament that man “falls short of the glory of God” (Romans 2:10). Furthermore, the Bible describes God as the “Father of glory” (Ephesians 1: 17), source of all glory, king of glory (Psalms 2), and God of glory (Acts 7: 2). Also, He does everything for “the glory of His name” (Psalms 79: 6; Isaiah 18: 11), and He is jealous for His glory and will not give it to another (Isaiah 42: 8). The greatness of this glory is manifest in nature, and it is the theme of man’s praise and exaltation of God.

The use of the word glory can also refer to the presence of God on historical occasions in the Old Testament. This presence is sometimes accompanied by lightning, thunder, and fire. When this occurs, God's glory is expressed by the Hebrew word *shekhina* (see Exodus 40: 27, 34; and Numbers 9: 15, 16). The signs of His presence were seen by Abraham in a smoking oven and burning torch (Genesis 15: 17), and by Moses in “lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain and the sound of a trumpet” (Exodus 19: 9, 16- 18; 24: 15- 18, Deuteronomy 5: 5) and in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exodus 13: 21, 22).

After building the tabernacle, God’s glory appeared over the ark, which became a symbol of God’s glory. When the Tabernacle was taken away in the time of the priest Eli, his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, names Eli’s grandson Ichabod, which means “the glory has departed from Israel” (1 Samuel 4: 19- 22). The glory did not reappear until the temple was built, and after the prayer of Solomon, the glory of the Lord filled the house of God (2Chronicles 5: 13, 14).

Later the glory of the Lord left the temple, the city of Jerusalem, and the nation. Through the prophet Ezekiel, however, God promised to return the glory once more. In fact, the glory returned in Jesus Christ who “dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1: 14). The New Testament is full of the signs of Christ’s glory, which can be seen in His life, miracles, the transfiguration, and glorification of the father. But this glory was never more marvelous than it was at Calvary, where God’s full revelation of Himself appeared. The cross was the greatest manifestation ever of God’s glory as it demonstrated His grace, love, holiness, beauty, strength, and power.

Christ’s glory is also seen through His passion, wherein God revealed His love for humanity through the suffering of his son. And through this glorious presence, God provides man with healing, support, salvation, and mercy. The passion shows that He is able to identify with man in his suffering.

But the cross wasn’t the end. Eventually, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14), and the heavenly city will be filled “with the glory of God” (Revelation 21: 10- 11). Consequently, the glory of God in the Bible reaches its apex in Jesus Christ.

Applying the Concept of the Glory of God

The Christian understanding of the glory of God can be seen in worship, conduct, mission, discipleship, the work of the Church, and more. But we will limit this study to three applications: human conduct, worship, and missions

(1) God’s Glory and Human Conduct

The Reformers related the concept of God’s glory to an honest Christian’s conduct. Since God dwells in the midst of His people through the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Glory, He ensures the

glorious inheritance of the saints. Believers are invited to show God's glory through their conduct, so the world will see this conduct and glorify God. Hence Christ called his disciples and all believers to glorify God by how they live, and the apostle Paul repeated this call, urging the Church to live for the glory of God. For example, Paul writes, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10: 31) (see too Ephesians 1: 5- 14).

If, on the one hand, sin is falling short of the glory God and idolatry is misdirecting the glory that belongs to God alone, (Romans 3:23 and 1: 23), then on the other hand, faith, repentance, obedience, and steadfastness in the midst of suffering glorifies God in the life of the believer.

Luther taught that human beings should give glory to God alone and that they should humble themselves and never attribute anything to themselves. For we are not worthy to take credit for anything. Luther criticized man's pride, saying, "No one wants to be nothing or in a state of doing nothing, but everybody is satisfied and content with oneself. This is where all troubles and disturbances on earth come from."

Luther believed that the key to establishing peace on earth is man's denial of himself and his giving all glory to God. Luther says,

Peace on earth will diminish if glory to God isn't given. As Solomon says, "By pride comes nothing but strife" (Proverbs 13: 10). Peace on earth is inevitable when God's glory is perceptible. Why do people get upset if they are told that nothing comes from them and that all they are, all that they have, and all that they can produce comes from God? They should simply rejoice and be happy because they have a generous God.

The Westminster Confession of Faith urges us to glorify God in everything. Glorifying God doesn't just happen through practices we call spiritual, such as singing hymns, serving others, and preaching the gospel; rather, it occurs when each Christian strives to glorify God through daily works; in the factory, company, school, or a profession. Human beings who desire to glorify God should try to perform every activity in a way that is pleasing in the eyes of God. Doing work properly and even enjoying appropriate entertainment glorifies God in the same way that worshipping him on the Sabbath or witnessing to non-believers pleases Him. Therefore, Christians should strive to live as disciples in all that they do so that in every aspect of their lives God will be seen and glorified. Everything in a Christian's life should be done to honor God and glorify His name. And all should be done in Christ.

The Church has been grievously mistaken in the past when it has stooped to glorify man rather than God. When we deprive God of His seat at the center of the life of the Church and put ourselves in this center, we steal God's glory.

Self-centeredness destroys communities and churches. The believer, servant, or leader who makes himself the center of attention and seeks to place the spotlight on himself, his talents or achievements, steals God's glory. In all vocations, the focus should be on what one can offer as a servant to live out the call that God has given. It should not be on what a person can gain in privileges, status, finances, or other benefits. If a person's service is directed to his own accomplishments, if he attempts to attract all the attention to himself, if all goals point to him, and if all the glory is to advance his name, God will not be pleased. God is jealous for His glory, and every time a biblical figure (such as, Nebuchadnezzar or Herod) tried to deprive God of His glory, divine punishment was issued. As faithful Christians, let's not deprive God of His glory because He alone should be given glory: *soli deo gloria*.

(2) God's Glory and Worship

Both Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frederic Handel wrote compositions entitled "The Glory of God Alone." They understood that worship that glorifies God alone is the ultimate goal of the Church, and it is what God longs for in His people. During worship, the Church is humbled before its master as a community and as individuals. In worship the Church gives God His rightful reverence, honor, and glory. In worship, the focus is completely on God, who He is, and what He provides us through his Son Jesus Christ. In worship, the Church celebrates the glory of God by praising Him. In worship, the Church remembers the words of God in the Bible and declares its submission to Him and His word. In worship, the Church testifies to the world about the truth of its God. Every opportunity to worship should carry an evangelistic content, telling those from the outside about the God who is being worshipped. Worship shows His glory, love, grace, and salvation in Christ Jesus. In worship, God's presence is shown in a spiritual way so that His people rejoice and His works are shown in them. Properly done, worship a service the church offers – a sacrifice of praise, almsgiving, and practical assistance to others.

In our day, there is much confusion about God-focused and man-focused worship. Worship focused on God holds God's glory as its single purpose (1 Corinthians 10: 31), while worship focused on man evokes man in the worship of God. The latter can be noble in purpose, but it should never be the goal or center of worship.

Worship focused on God will please God, not man. God-centered worship can be detected in its content and orientation. For example, God-centered worship will include evangelism as part of the worship service. It will not be the goal of worship, but it will be an observable part of the service.

The gospel presented in worship should focus on the message of the cross and passion of the Lamb of God. On the other hand,

worship focused on man presents an easy gospel, one that doesn't speak of man's corruption, sin, and the cross. Yet the gospel that does not address the issue of sin is a gospel that is trying to please man.

Worship focused on God is characterized by the unity of attendants around God. He is the One to whom all hearts are turned so that they may please Him, while worship focused on man has for its goal a time of entertainment, which seeks to make the worshipers feel good.

In worship focused on God, the worshipers express their need of God alone, while in worship focused on man the worldly needs and desires of people come first and often there is little or no mention of man's real need of God. Since man was made in the image of God, he draws his ultimate value from this divine imprint. But worship that focuses on the value of man apart from God is misguided; it attempts to raise up man, when it is God who should be elevated.

Therefore the invitation to worship presented in the service is a call to glorify God alone. This can include celebration, testimony, and service, but it should always witness to the glorified God who dwells in the midst of His people.

(3) God's Glory and Mission

After the Reformation, the theology of mission (missiology) developed considerably, and one of the most important elements of the new mission theology was a focus on the relationship between mission and the glory of God. We can find a strong relationship between the concepts of God's glory (as previously mentioned in this study in creation, salvation, worship, and glorification) and God's mission to the nations. Mission theology affirms that the glorification of God is the ultimate goal of mission.

The concept of mission as a glorification of God has been

known since Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676), who described a triple goal for mission: the renewal of sinners, the planting of churches, and the proclamation and glorification of divine grace. However, the contemporary Dutch theologian Jan Jongeneel considers this triple goal as a modification of the main goal of mission, which he defines as renewal, church planting, the reunion of persecuted believers, the re-establishment of weak churches, and the unifying of the divided ones (including material consolidation).

The concept of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God, has become popular in the modern church. In this view, mission is God's nature and He is its source. Christians are called to work together with God in pursuit of His mission, which includes the objective of glorifying God alone. This teaching focuses on the concept that God's glory is the ultimate goal. It is an expression of God's will for man. The primary reason for the Church and for mission organizations is to achieve the intention of God.

In the early 19th century, the emphasis on the glory of God and mission seemed to drop from many sermons, and it was replaced by a gospel of individual personal renewal. Yet seminal theologians before and since have emphatically affirmed the centrality of mission. The theologian Herman Bavnick says, "God is the purpose of the mission which establishes His glory and Kingdom." John Calvin observes that the glory of God is the essence of mission. And Lamin Sanneh says, "The church's participation in salvation is the Church's glorious work. By this participation the glory returns to God."

In the second article of the Frankfurt Declaration on mission states, the "Glory of God is the first and ultimate goal of missions in the whole world, and the declaration of the sovereignty of His son, Lord Jesus Christ." Peter Beyerhaus, the main writer of the Frankfurt declaration, points out that the primary goal of the Bible's promises isn't to meet human spiritual and material needs; it is God, the great creator and the greatest savior. In the same

way, the purpose of sending the church into the world is, first and foremost, to glorify the triune God. If we want mission theology to be in harmony with the Bible, then glorifying God should be at the forefront of our theology and practice. The study of mission was developed not just as a response to God's call to His people in the Great Commission or as a desire to share the gospel of personal salvation; rather, it was focused on the relationship that exists among mission, worship, and the glory of God.

In this regard, John Piper affirms that “mission isn't the Church's objective. Worship is the objective. Worship is the fuel and the objective of the mission.” He adds, “all of history moves towards a supreme goal, which is the warm worship of the Father and the Son among all the nation's of earth. Mission isn't the goal but the means to accomplish it. Therefore, mission is the second greatest human activity in the world.”

One of the watchwords of mission is “Glorify God and make Him glorious. Worship God and make Him worshiped.” The meaning here isn't simply to sing hymns or to perform other practices common to worship. Rather, worship is a spiritual experience characterized by fellowship, harmony, and communication with God. Christopher Wright adds, “mission exists because of worship, and the church's worship is active and distinct through mission. Worship is a continuous reminder of the necessity and inevitability of mission as a response and extension of God's prior mission, just as our worship and praise are a response to God's prior work.”

Mission emerges from the principle of God's glory and the return of this glory to Him. For mission and all of its activities and features, glorifying God is the main and supreme goal. Michael Green says, “Church growth, the salvation of souls, and humanizing society aren't the real objectives of mission; rather, it is glorifying God on earth as in heaven.”

Conclusion

In order to succeed in glorifying God as a church, both in our country and in the world, we must be true to the principle of *solī deo gloria*. We must apply it to our personal lives as disciples of Christ and see that it is realized in the life of the Church. Above all, the Church must put this principle in practice by its devotion to the *missio dei*, for the work of mission is indispensable to the Church if it is to accomplish the purpose for which God intended it. The apostle Paul stated that purpose as clearly as anyone ever has: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*" (emphasis mine, Philippians 2:10-11).

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