

Series: Seek

Title: Glory

Text: John 8:48-49

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As we continue our study of the use of the word “seek” in relation to the Christian life, it is necessary to turn our attention to the subject of the glory of God. Nowadays, the concept of God’s glory is often spoken of amongst Bible-believing Christians. However, there is danger of cheapening the subject. Some speak of God’s glory a lot, but they don’t have a strong understanding of what is meant by it. The glory of God is left to the realm of the subjective and nebulous.

To dive into this subject, it is first important to define what the terms “glory” and “glorify” meant in the first-century world. The Greek term found in the New Testament (*doxázō*) is one that meant “to make great” or “to make famous.” In the Hellenized world, the word was often applied to conquering Roman Generals who gained notoriety for themselves by conquering and subjugating distant lands. The act of getting or giving glory involved acts of esteeming others, of making another well-known, or of magnifying the reputation of another.

Used amongst early Christians, the term was sometimes applied to the praise or worship of God. We see it used in such a way in Matthew 15:31 and Luke 5:25-26. In such a sense, there is an act of glorifying God that is Godward. That is, one can glorify God by personally worshipping God.

However, there is also an act of glorifying God that is other-ward. In this sense, one leads others to worship God by making God known to others. Jesus spoke of such glory in the Sermon on the Mount, saying, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

As used in Matthew 5:16 and other New Testament passages, the word for “glorify” is one that meant “to give a high status.” Applied to the Lord, it meant “to enhance the reputation of God.”¹ The Christian Scriptures are consistent in their call for believers to glorify God. The book of Revelation reveals that God is the one who deserves ultimate glory (Revelation 15:4). Paul taught that it was part and parcel of the church’s mission to spread the glory of God throughout the world (2 Thessalonians 3:1). Peter explained that believers are to live holy lives for this reason — to make a godly impression on others so that God might be glorified (1 Peter 2:11-12). He also rationalized that this is why God’s people serve and use their spiritual gifts (Romans 12:6-8) within the church — so that God might get glory (1 Peter 4:11)!

The above ideas teach us that the act of glorifying God involves God’s people making Him known to others so that others can in turn worship God. Jesus was concerned about such things when He ministered on Earth. He often rebuked the religious elite of His day because of their obsession with getting glory for self. The Pharisees were known for a religion that was leveraged for the inflation of self-worth. Jesus said, “So whenever you give to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet before you, as

¹ Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 120.

the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be applauded by people. Truly I tell you, they have their reward” (Matthew 6:2). The word rendered “be applauded” is the Greek word that was used throughout the New Testament to speak of the act of glorifying God. It could be said that one is either glorifying God or self though the way in which he or she lives. The only question one faces is, “Who will I glorify with my life?”

Paul encouraged early Christians in Corinth to live for the glory of God. He said, “Don’t you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought at a price. So glorify God with your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). For the Christian, this idea of glorifying God involves one making the existence, attributes, and works of God known to others. One has said it means “...to render conspicuous and glorious the divine character and attributes of God.”²

Jesus and the Glory of God

Jesus Himself expressed great concern for the glory of God. Once while He was engaged in a debate with the religious muckety-muck of His day, He said, “I do not seek my own glory” (John 8:50). Jesus’ admission revealed that He saw it as His purpose in life to glorify God by fulfilling God’s will for His life.

The above words from Jesus were uttered within the gospel of John. It seems that John had a keen interest in the glory of God. He used the Greek term for “glorify” on a number of occasions. It is not without significance that He used the word on several occasions to speak of Jesus’ role in glorifying the Father through His earthly ministry (John 13:31-32; 14:13; 17:1, 4).

Additionally, John used the word frequently to speak of the way the Heavenly Father can be glorified through the lives of His disciples. In doing so, he revealed several pathways by which Christ-followers bring glory to God. First, John revealed that the prayers of disciples can glorify God (John 14:13). Second, he showed that disciples can give glory to God through holy living (John 15:8). Third, he indicated that the Holy Spirit in the lives of God’s people is ultimately what produces glory for the Lord (John 16:14).

When Jesus spoke of His desire to glorify God, He said, “I do not seek my own glory” (John 8:50). Our Lord uttered such words for a reason. He intended to give a reply to His opponents. They had accused Him of being demon possessed (John 8:48). Jesus flatly told them “I do not have a demon.” Though our Lord was often slow to defend Himself (Isaiah 53:7; Matthew 27:14), He felt compelled to do so, since His opponents accusation was blasphemous.

Jesus’ opponents had no way of explaining His miraculous healings and powerful teaching, so they ascribed it to the demonic realm. We see a similar charge leveled against our Lord in Mark 3:20-30. In both instances, Jesus strongly countered the charges against Him. His reason in doing so was simple. He was zealous for the glory of God. Accusations that attributed His work to the Devil were serious because they robbed the Lord of the glory He deserved!

² Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 481.

People Pleasing and the Glory of God

Jesus words in John 8:50 were also intended as a rebuke to His opponents. Though they leveled spiritual criticisms at Jesus, they were the ones who were actually guilty of a spiritual crime. They were addicted to a man-centered, people pleasing form of religion that was bent on getting glory for self, not the Lord. Jesus had been more direct in His pronouncement of such sin earlier in John's gospel, rebuking His opponents by saying, "How can you believe, since you accept glory from one another but don't seek the glory that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44).

In his gospel account, John would later describe the people-pleasing nature of false Jewish religion in Jesus' day, saying, "...the Pharisees...did not confess Him, so that they would not be banned from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than praise from God" (John 12:42-43). If God's people want to see the glory of God grow in their lives, they must make sure they don't have a religion centered on self.

Some live by a form of Christianity that is little more than a means of self-aggrandizing worship. The emphasis is on what others think, how to be more successful in life, and what God can do for the worshipper. Even battles with sin and struggles can sometimes be a self-driven effort to make one feel better about self, or to secure a more comfortable life. The Bible warns us of such man-driven religion. The focus of our spiritual lives is to be the Lord, not man. Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and discipline" (Proverbs 1:7). As we strive to know the Lord, may we aim to have a pure religion that makes the renown, fame, and reputation of the Lord its goal.

The Garden of Eden and the Glory of God

Before we look more closely at Jesus' interaction with His opponents, it is important to note the origin of humanity's fascination with self-glory. According to the Bible, getting glory for self was actually the sin that led Satan to rebel against God. Isaiah 14:12-14 speaks of such things by likening Nebuchadnezzar's pride (Daniel 4:30) and glory-seeking behavior to Satan's pre-Earth downfall. Though Satan was previously a majestic angel who worshipped in the presence of the Lord before the creation of man (Job 38:6-7), he was instigated by pride when he saw the Lord's affection for humanity. Thus, he incited a band of demons to rebel. His intent was to snatch glory for himself (Isaiah 14:13-14).

Eventually, Satan would coax Adam and Eve to join in on his demonic conspiracy. The first sin in human history was driven by a desire to "be like God" (Genesis 3:4), to get glory for self. Such was a reversal of God's original intent for humanity. Though humankind was made in the "image of God" (Genesis 1:26-27), in order to glorify God upon the Earth (Genesis 1:28-31), humanity perverted the Lord's original intent. With a soul turned inward, man and woman rejected God's original plan and chose to live for self-glory, as opposed to God's glory.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism has famously remarked on the Lord's original intent for humankind by saying, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." All sin, at its root, is a departure from the Lord's design for humanity. Sin is, in essence, a snatching of glory for self and a stealing of glory from God. This sin is known by the simple designation "pride."

One could say that pride is the sin of living for self-glory over God's glory. John called such sin "the pride of life" in 1 John 2:16. Far from being a simple inflated view of one's own importance, pride involves the blasphemous exhalation of self over God. In his renown work "Mere Christianity," C.S. Lewis regarded such glory-seeking pride as the root of all other sins. He said, "The essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride...It was through pride that the devil became the devil...It is the complete anti-God state of mind."³ In light of such truth, it is no wonder that Scripture implores us — "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore, submit to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:6-7).

Learning to Glorify God

Learning to live for the glory of God is a part of the normal, Christian discipleship process. Growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus (2 Peter 3:18) involves a lifetime of renouncing self and pursuing Christ's glory. It is for this reason that Jesus mentioned a denial of self in His classic synopsis of what's involved in following Him. He told His disciples, "If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

The question we face is one of "how?" Is there anything believers can do to direct their souls away from self-glory to God's glory? While the battle for our affections is a tough one, there is truth within Scripture that can help. From Jesus' words in John 8:48-59, we find that a pursuit of God's glory is built on three convictions.

CONVICTION #1: JESUS' DIVINITY

First, living for the glory of God requires a clear view of Jesus' divinity. Some deny that Jesus was really God. Others are shaky and unsure about the fact. A careful investigation into New Testament claims reveals that the early church regarded Jesus as divine (Matthew 20:19; John 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15-18). In addition, Jesus' own words reveal that He regarded Himself as being God.

In John 8, Jesus staked an obvious claim on divinity. In addressing His religious opponents, He said, "Truly I tell you, before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Our Lord's words were a response to opponents who swore allegiance to Israel's foremost patriarch. Through His language, Jesus intended to exalt Himself above Abraham. The Greek of the New Testament depicts Jesus as literally saying, "I, I am."

The Greek translation of the Old Testament that was popular in Jesus' day (Septuagint) used the exact language of John 8:58 in its rendering of Exodus 3:14, a passage in which the Lord told Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you." In using the language of Exodus 3:14 of Jesus, John made a clear assertion concerning Jesus' divine nature. He depicted Jesus as making a claim concerning divinity.

It is important to clarify that neither John nor Jesus meant to say that Jesus was simply under divine influence. The language of John 8:58 was used of Yahweh. It involved a title that differentiated the Lord from all other "gods" and idols of the ancient world. It emphasized the Lord's eternal (1 Samuel 15:29; Psalm 93:2; Habakkuk 1:12)

³ Lewis. C.S. *Mere Christianity*. (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1980), 109-110.

and self-existent nature (Isaiah 41:4; Psalm 90:1-2). By saying “I, I am,” Jesus depicted Himself as being a part of the eternal Godhead.

Counterfeit forms of Christianity — liberal Christianity, Mormonism, Jehovah’s Witnesses — deny Jesus’ divine nature. They do not regard Him as being the eternal, self-sufficient, and self-existent God. Such professors of religion make the same mistake as Jesus’ first-century religious opponents. Lest there be any doubt occurring the nature of Jesus’ claim, consider the response of His adversaries in John 8. John said, “... they picked up stones to throw at him” (John 8:59). Our Lord’s opponents tried to stone Him. Why? Under the Mosaic Law, stoning was a capital punishment for the sin of blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16). Jesus’ adversaries rightly knew that Jesus claimed to be God.

This brings us to our current point — in order to glorify God, we must have a firm conviction concerning Jesus’ divine nature. A Jesus who is not God cannot save anyone from sin. A Jesus who is merely a good man, an effective teacher, a brilliant leader, a self-help guru, or a benevolent personality does not have power to transform souls, changes lives, and liberate humanity from sin and all of sin’s consequences. Such a low view of Christ has no compelling force to generate true repentance, conversion, and godliness. It is for this reason that Charles Spurgeon proclaimed, “Away with the religion that has little of Christ in it. Christ must be Alpha and Omega, first and last.”⁴

CONVICTION #2: CHRISTIAN SALVATION

Gratefulness for God’s work of salvation is foundational to a zeal for the glory of God. In the context of His debate with the Jews concerning the glory of God, our Lord said, “Truly I tell you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death” (John 8:51). Jesus’ words provided a simple synopsis of the work of redemption. In short, Christ’s salvation involves a rescue from the death sin produces.

Returning to the Genesis account of the first sin is helpful here. In Genesis 2, the Lord gave His law to Adam and Eve. He told them, “You are free to eat from any tree of the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for on the day you eat from it, you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:16-17). Most are aware of the rest of the story.

The first man and woman violated God’s law and ate forbidden fruit. When they did, they immediately died in a spiritual sense (Genesis 3:8). They also gained the capacity to die physically. After distributing additional consequences on top of death, the Lord expelled the couple from paradise and His presence (Genesis 3:22-24).

Because of Adam and Eve’s sin, all of humanity has been infected with the spiritual disease of sin. In addition, each is subject to sin’s most grave consequence — death. The Bible says, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). Christ came to Earth to reverse the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin. The Bible says, “For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

⁴ Spurgeon, C.H. *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 1880; 26. (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 2005), 388.

It is worth noting that gospel promises were present in the Garden of Eden. As the first man and woman reeled in the aftermath of their transgression, the Lord announced that one would come from woman who would crush the head of Satan (Genesis 3:15)! Adam understood the Lord's promise. When it came time to give a name to his wife, as he had done with the animal kingdom (Genesis 2:19-20), he "named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all the living" (Genesis 3:20). Adam's name for Eve was a demonstration of his faith in a Promised Deliverer! Though he had experienced death because of his sin, he had faith that the One who would come from the woman would bring life!

Immediately after Adam's profession of faith in Genesis 3:20, the Lord "made clothing from skins for the man and his wife" (Genesis 3:21). The coverings masked the shame Adam and Eve experienced because of their sin (Genesis 3:7, 11). The production of such clothing required the sacrifice of an animal; thus, blood was shed in order to make a covering for Adam and Eve's sin.

Such things looked forward to the future sacrifice of Christ as the basis of salvation. The shedding of the blood of animals set a precedent for future sacrifices for sin (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 9:22). In the New Testament age, believers are rescued from sin and its consequences in a way similar to Adam and Eve. Though the first man and woman looked forward to what Christ would do, modern believers look back to what Christ has done. In the end, both are saved via the same means and from the same malady. Christ's work on behalf of sinners rescues believers from spiritual death (Revelation 20:14-15)!

It may seem strange that Old Testament saints like Adam were saved by the same method as modern believers. However, reading on in John 8 reveals that Abraham was also saved in the same way. In responding to His opponents, Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). According to Jesus, Israel's foremost patriarch foresaw the coming of the Messiah. The man had undoubtedly heard gospel promises that had originated in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15). In faith, He believed in the Lord's Promised Deliverer. He exhibited his faith through his willingness to follow the Lord from his homeland (Genesis 12:1-4). He also exhibited his faith through his willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-19).

The New Testament teaches that Abraham was justified before God because of his faith. Paul said, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness" (Galatians 3:6). James also gave witness to Abraham's salvation (James 2:21-22). Though the Patriarch lived before the time of Jesus' life on Earth, he experienced the salvation New Testament believers experience.

Jesus said Abraham "rejoiced" in his experience of salvation. The Greek word underlying English translations of the Bible is one that meant "to be overjoyed."⁵ Our Lord's testimony highlighted one of the foremost results of Christian salvation. Those who know Christ are given grace that causes them to "rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:8). Such joy leads them to live lives that glorify God.

⁵ Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 204.

These things teach us that Christian salvation is a foundation for a life that is centered on the glory of Christ. To live for the glory of God, you must first know the salvation Christ gives. Have you experienced the forgiveness of sins? Have you trusted in the Promised One, as Adam and Abraham did? When you know you are forgiven and right with God, you will do what Abraham did. You will rejoice in Christ. Your life will be marked by an overflowing joy. Such joy will bring great glory to God on this Earth.

CONVICTION #3: OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD

A final conviction that propels one to glorify God is seen in John 8:51. Jesus told His opponents, "Truly I tell you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." Our Lord's language was strong in the original Greek of the New Testament. He introduced His pronouncement by using what has been called a "double amen." Literally translated, John 8:51 reads, "Amen, Amen, I am telling you...." Jesus' employed a teaching method that was famously used by first-century rabbis. The double amen was used to attest to the utmost veracity and truthfulness of a rabbi's teaching. Jesus employed the formula to emphasize the importance of "keeping" His word.

The word translated "keep" in John 8:51 is one that meant "to guard" or "to observe."⁶ It was often used of the activity of a Roman guard (Matthew 27:54). The word was often used amongst the early church to speak of obedience to Christian doctrine and truth (1 Timothy 6:14; James 2:10; 1 John 2:3-5, 3:22, 5:3). Jesus employed the term in John 8:51 to convey how obedience to the gospel leads to eternal life.

In speaking of the importance of obedience, Jesus placed the term for "word" in an emphatic position. The original language literally reads, "If anyone the word of me is keeping...." For our Lord, obedience to His teaching was a fundamental aspect of the Christian life. Later in John's gospel, He would use the same language of John 8:51 to say, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. The one who doesn't love me will not keep my words. The word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me" (John 14:23-24).

To glorify God, God's people must cultivate a diligent heart allegiance to God's Word. They must make it their priority to personally apply His truth to their lives. One has said, "Obedience to God's commands is of major importance to true religion. It was in the Old Testament and it is in the New Covenant... Obeying commandments and doing good works are vital to Christianity."⁷

Mere emotional, cultural, or traditional forms of religion do little to advance the glory of God. It is a devotion to, and dutiful application of, the truth of God to one's life that brings transformation. Such a transformation is then used to magnify the Lord on the Earth. Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

⁶ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 203.

⁷ Chantry, Walter J. *Call the Sabbath a Delight*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 71.