

## Why Not Glory to God Alone? by Pastor Marty

In this final issue of my examination of the Solas, I am discussing *Soli Deo Gloria*, the concept of “Glory to God Alone.” This newsletter is going to have to take a much different approach than the last four because I am not aware of any heresies related to glorifying God. *Sola Scriptura* has been used to justify erroneous personal interpretations of Scripture, *Sola Fide* has been used to avoid responsibility when it comes to actually acting like a Christian, *Sola Gratia* has been used to excuse continued sinful behavior, and *Solus Christus* has been used to streamline Christian theology and practice in a few ways that might not be beneficial; however, identifying errors related to giving all glory to God is a gigantic endeavor because God indeed does deserve all glory. Unlike the last newsletter, I cannot even use the concept of giving glory to the different Persons of the Trinity as a foundation because *Soli Deo Gloria* does not specify glorifying just the Father or just Jesus or just the Holy Spirit; it is all about giving glory to God. Nevertheless, whenever human beings are involved, there is always SOME way that things can be perverted, misdirected, or misunderstood, so the goal is to figure out how we—as men and women created in God’s image but living with a sinful nature—are able to mess up anything as universally true as the truth that God is the only one who deserves all glory . . . along with all honor and praise and thanksgiving and everything else we have to give. If we ponder that question for a few minutes, we can easily discover the answer: it is that giving glory to “God alone” actually does become a problem when it is used as a diversion to shift our attention away from something else that needs to be addressed.

***As fallen beings, we can even use “glorifying God” as a means to hide from the truth.***

In the last four newsletters, I suggested Prima instead of Sola because it affirms that there can always be a time when anything can be taken to an extreme. Suggesting that glory should go to God first and foremost is clearly true. However, it is also true to a very significant degree that God through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit really is the only One who actually deserves to get glory. Indeed, that is extremely biblical. Ultimately, everything that is good and right and true is from our Heavenly Father—as James states. Even the very best deeds, attitudes, or beliefs in the human race are there because we have been created in His image and sustained by His Spirit. If we look back to Adam and Eve before the fall (when they had no sin in them), all the goodness there was still because of their creator. In the very beginning, God declared, “Let there be light”; every single electron of light that has, is, and will ever be since then is a direct result of that creation. In the same way, God deserves the glory for every iota of goodness and truth that ever has existed, does exist, and ever will exist. All the glory goes to Him.. Lucifer fell because he wanted to get some of the glory that is due to God alone. That way lie dragons.

***Lucifer fell because he wanted some of the honor and glory that belonged to God alone.***

However, with some careful consideration, we can see how even such a clearly positive attitude can become problematic when the word “alone” gets applied in a way that it should not be. In order to address this, I want to identify a verse that describes glory being applied correctly to another. Proverbs 25:2 states, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.” Some might argue that the glory referenced in this verse is different than the glory the reformers were describing when they proclaimed *Soli Deo Gloria*, but it is precisely the confusion that results from our interpretation of words and their meanings that we are discussing in the first place. Solomon is telling us in this proverb that there is an intentional divine design in creation where part of God’s nature is to hide something *for the purpose of it being found* while part of man’s nature is to find something *that is*

*meant to be found.* The word “glory” here, for those who wonder, is the same Hebrew word used in other places, such as in Isaiah 6:3 where the Seraphim state that “the whole earth is full of His glory.” We might be able to infer from this scripture that God gets glory when His creation reflects His glory by doing what He intended us to do. In other words, there is a glory associated with our glorifying God.

***There is a glory associated with our glorifying God by doing what He made us to do.***

There is a significant verse in the New Testament that also suggests a similar concept. In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he declares that God grants eternal life to those “who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality” as opposed to those who are selfish and disobedient. He says many similar things before declaring that creation itself—the plants and animals of the earth—are waiting for “the glory of the children of God.” There are numerous scriptures in both the Old and New Testaments that describe specific aspects of glory being given appropriately to people ... and even Jesus Himself ascribes a glory to the flowers of the field and the birds of the sky. None of these verses give the slightest indication that God’s creation receiving glory negates or detracts from the glory that is ascribed or deserving to God Himself. On the contrary, there is a sense in some of the verses that we are encouraged to seek glory and honor by doing those things that actually glorify God in the process.

***It seems God wants us to seek glory by doing things that glorify Him in the process.***

It has often been said that every sin fits under the categories of the 7 deadly sins, all of which stem from pride, the first sin. Of all the sins, pride is often the most insidious because those who have it the most recognize it the least. However, many in the Church today fail to realize the most deceptive form of pride: false humility. This iniquity is not limited to blatantly arrogant claims of humility by those who know themselves otherwise; it is also widely active through well-meaning Christians who believe that accepting compliments and affirming their God-given talents and abilities is evil. These believers are quick to deny anything actually good within themselves and often spend significant energy putting themselves down. In the process, they do not realize they are not only taking pride in their sinfulness but also rejecting their identity as holy children of God. Feeding and dwelling upon the sinful nature is a sure-fire avenue to keeping it not only alive and well but also largely in control. True humility involves an unashamed and accurate honesty about our strengths as well as our weaknesses. Dismissing those blessings is actually refusing the glory that glorifies the God who put those blessings within us in the first place. When we are not able to openly affirm the blessings God gives us, we minimize His works.

***When we deny the blessings being given to us, we fail to give Him the glory He is due.***

During the medieval period, it was often recognized that self-acceptance was a virtue necessary for living a Christian life. They understood that loving oneself in an appropriate manner was vital because self-hatred or self-deprecation impeded a person’s ability to fully receive all of the grace that God offered. As I have mentioned in numerous prior newsletters, when we have a poor image of ourselves, it is much easier to give into temptation and sin because we already view ourselves as dirty and sinful. In contrast, Paul commanded us to walk “as children of light” in a dark world. When we view ourselves as holy, righteous, and royal children of the King of kings, we are much quicker and much more determined to resist temptation. As a notable theologian explained, viewing temptations as a normal part of our nature makes it much easier to give in than if we viewed them as intentional interference by demonic forces. Whether or not a temptation actually is demonic in its origin, viewing it as such can motivate us to resist it as an unnatural activity. Our self-image truly does affect how we live our lives.

***Viewing sin and temptation as foreign to our nature powerfully motivates us to be holy.***

Of course, there absolutely are times when complements require us to redirect the attention of the giver from ourselves to God. King Saul allowed himself to receive the glory belonging to God alone, and it led to his downfall: once he tasted illegal glory, he craved it all the more. Another specific time receiving glory is described in a negative way is in the context of it being taken outside of its reflective context. One significant example of this is when Nebuchadnezzar fails to recognize that all of his might, glory, and splendor was a gift from the God of Heaven—even after Daniel explained the meaning of the dream God gave him. He was turned into a beast until he learned his lesson. Another example is found when Herod gets struck down for neglecting to give glory to God after the crowds ascribed godhood to him. This seems to suggest the crowd praising him for his eloquence might not have been a problem if he had humbly admitted before the people that any special talent or ability he had was given to him as a gift from God. Affirming our abilities is not a problem when we acknowledge that they are from God.

***Accepting compliments for our abilities is fine if we acknowledge they are from God.***

Another potential problem with *Sola Dei Gloria* is that it may hinder our ability to give gratitude and honor to those who deserve it. I explained in another newsletter how thankfulness and gratitude is important for receiving all that God has for us; similar to forgiveness, it enables us to receive freely. It is not exactly the same, but there are scriptural commands that we give respect and honor to those that God has put in authority over us. If we are apt to consider honor and glory in terms of God alone, it is not a stretch to recognize that we may not treat others as He would want us to treat them. In this case, having an unbalanced concept of glory could result in two potential errors: on the one hand, we might not value others to the extent that we should, leading to loving others less; on the other hand, we may value others more than is appropriate, idolizing or becoming dependent on others, resulting in less of a wholesome relationship with God Himself. There is no objective formula for identifying exactly what we should do here; instead, we have to take the time to evaluate our attitudes and ask God to change us. As we grow in true humility, seeking to glorify God by being exactly who He created us to be, we will begin to intuitively know when to accept a complement, when to redirect it, and when to give one. As Augustine explained it, we need God to set love in order in our hearts so we will know how to live.

***We need God to set love in order in our hearts so we will intuitively know how to live.***

As I have previously done in this series, I want to suggest that we may better understand what God desires of us if we think of glory being to God “Primarily” instead of “Alone” since human nature has an aptitude for missing contexts. Of course, all glory does go ultimately to God; however, that does not mean we treat others or ourselves without the honor and respect God would ask of us. As is true for all of the *Solas*, there were justifiable abuses and concerns that led the reformers to redirect people to focus on God. The problem since then is that we have sometimes gone to the opposite extreme: in an attempt to restore the authority of Scripture, we may lose accountability; in an attempt to clarify the place of faith, we can easily lose responsibility; in an attempt to recognize grace, we might lose our realization that we are made in God’s image; in an attempt to elevate Jesus, we could forsake the great benefits of personal relationships with the Father and the Spirit; and in an attempt to affirm that all glory ultimately belongs to God, there is the possibility that we actually neglect giving Him all the glory that is due Him. As is often the case, simply having good motives or intentions does not automatically negate the possibility of making a mistake that results in negative results. As true Christians, we have to desire to live as disciples of Christ in all the ways He commands—not just the ways we find easy or comfortable. Sometimes, we have to examine and evaluate what we have been taught so we can see if it really lines up with what God requests of us. True reformation begins by changing our own hearts.