

Sermons through

Romans

A Doxological Benediction

Romans 16:25-27

Part Four

With Study Questions

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Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began 26 but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith – 27 to God, alone wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen (Romans 16:25-27).

The Ultimate Egoist

While in seminary a fellow student wrote a paper entitled (if I recall correctly), *God, The Ultimate Egoist*. Egoism is an ethical theory which states that self-interest is the foundation of morality. In other words, 'if it's good for me, it's good'. I never read the paper. But the mere title spoke volumes.

Even the most noble of human beings read the Bible with some notion that the message contained in it will be good for him or her. But as we read it, we come to realize that man is not the central character in it. From Genesis to Revelation the Scriptures continually place their spotlight on the Triune God; and most specifically on Christ. As if the glorification of Christ would be the summit of all accomplishments in heaven and on the earth.

In the 1640s, over one hundred of the finest theologians in the world gathered to discuss, and come to an agreement on, what the Bible actually taught. Having met over a thousand times in a six-year period, they arrived at a conclusion about what the Scriptures taught regarding man's chief and highest end. The overwhelmingly unanimous conclusion was that

Man's chief and highest end is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever.

This was not a difficult conclusion to draw. Both implicitly and explicitly, it is the consistent and repetitive message of the Holy Scriptures.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen (Galatians 1:3-5).

Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen (Philippians 4:20).

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:17).

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen (2 Timothy 4:18).

to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Hebrews 13:21).

To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:11).

To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen (2 Peter 3:18).

To him be glory forever. Amen (Romans 11:36).

The Scriptures present even the inanimate contributing.

...the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:12).

In heaven and on the earth, angels and men participate.

...and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen" (Revelation 7:10-12).

If God were a mere man, if Christ were a mere angel, if the Holy Spirit were a created entity, this unambiguous and repetitive theme of glory to the Triune God would fall under the classification of a psychological disorder to the highest degree. History is cluttered with men who would be God; Pharaohs, Caesars, Fuhrers seeking self-deification. History, almost without exception has classified them as madmen.

My favorite Christmas card of all time was one on which the cover displayed photos or paintings of history's powerful tyrants. The cover read (something to the effect), *There Are Many Men Who Wanted To Be God.* When you opened it there was the manger with the words, *But Only One God Would Become A Man.*

Of course we are much too sophisticated today to assign deity to mere men. Or are we? We may not use religious words. We may not bow the knee or sing praises. But we are surrounded by individuals, communities, systems of thought and ideologies which demand our allegiance and get it. They may not gather in a church (although the First Church of Atheism has ordained ministers and gatherings), but they have their evangelists, they have their confessions (though generally opaque and shrouded with ambiguity). And they unapologetically put forth their egoism.

Their anti-Christian creed of self-interest is probably best summed up in the words of an Irish reverend (the clergy is not immune to believing and promoting falsehoods) and philosopher, Francis Hutcheson. In the early 1700s he coined a phrase which still resonates with the pervasive egoism of the twenty-first century. His political philosophy was:

...that Action is best which accomplishes the greatest Happiness for the greatest Numbers; and that worst, which in like manner occasions Misery.

This seems to take a higher moral ground than pure egoism. Something is not good because it is good for me. It must be good for us. At least most of us. At least the majority of us. But maxims like this only work on a thoughtless people. Employing a simple experiment—a test—to see if this holds water, easily shows how flawed this method is. What if the action which accomplishes the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers is that of stealing from or oppressing the minority?

My point here is that egoism in some form is inevitable. There is a person, thought, ideology, system, philosophy, etc., which will pursue the throne. And it will seek to convince you, me and all creation that it is in our best interest to bow our knees, yield our allegiance and give it glory. Its desire is to be our god. And its insistence that there is no god should be our first clue to its deceptive nature. Perhaps it is unwitting, but every person who argues against the Triune God or any god at all, will proceed to spend the rest of the conversation seeking you to acknowledge their position as the one to which you must submit.

Only Wise God

This last verse in Romans is translated in various ways in different Bibles. In the NKJV and KJV it reads **“To God, alone wise...”** In the NIV, NASB and ESV it reads **“to the only wise God...”** The latter translations might carry a more accurate sense of the verse. It is literally **“to alone wise God’ *mono sopho theo***. These latter translations carry a more accurate sense because they leave room for the inevitable false gods which govern the natural man. It is not merely that God is the only wise one. That is most certainly true. And any wisdom had by man is a derivative wisdom given by God. But He is the only God who is truly wise.

The glory due the Triune God should not be thought of as a mere imposition of power from a ruthless and unreasonable deity. So often God is portrayed that way. As if He is a divine bully seeking to quell the moral, intellectual and technological advancements of a world that would do just

fine if He would simply quick flexing. But the flexing of God's divine providence is our only chance, our only hope.

When God is glorified it is like the center of a tent being pulled to the top of the post. All of its parts are raised as well. This is only true of God. For God's glory is not to be separated from God's wisdom. Is God the Ultimate Egoist? Can He say, "If it's good for me, it's good"? Maybe it wouldn't be worded quite that way. It would be more accurately conveyed that goodness can only be defined as good because it is an extension of God's own character. In other words, God is good, and things can only be defined as good because they reflect that goodness. And the same can be said for wisdom.

True wisdom comes from above. James so beautifully explains:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace (James 3:13-18).

And finally, all access to the true God, to the only genuine wisdom and authentic glory is through Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus Christ

If mankind is to have hearts that are encouraged, knit together in love and the full assurance of understanding of God's mysteries, and the wisdom not to be deluded by pithy and enticing arguments, it is to be found in Christ, "**in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge**" (Colossians 2:4).

And it might be said that the greatest work of Christ is just the opposite of egoism. Because that which was worst for Him was best for us.

For He became sin that we might become the **“righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21)**. The only way we can glorify God and enjoy that glory **“forever”** is through the One Mediator, Jesus Christ. Matthew Henry sums it so elegantly:

All the glory that passes from fallen man to God, so as to be accepted of him, must go through the hands of the Lord Jesus, in whom alone it is that our persons and performances are, or can be, pleasing to God. Of his righteousness therefore we must make mention, even of his only, who, as he is the Mediator of all our prayers, so he is, and I believe will be to eternity, the Mediator of all our praises.

Questions for Study

1. What is egoism? What is the chief end of man (pages 2, 3)?
2. Why is it good to give glory to God (page 3)?
3. In what ways do people seek glory for themselves? Why is this harmful (pages 4, 5)?
4. Analyze the quote from Hutcheson on page 5. Is it sound? Explain (pages 4, 5).
5. From where does true wisdom come? Why is it important that we attached the wisdom of God to our understanding of His power and glory (pages 5, 6)?
6. How is God's wisdom and glory accessed by fallen humans (pages 6, 7)?