



Romans 11:33-36 "Soli Deo Gloria" By Jody May/Mike Clark

Romans 11:33-36 - ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴ *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"* ³⁵ *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

INTRODUCTION –

We come now to the last of the 5 Solas - Soli Deo Gloria. It has been said that a grasp or an understanding of the first four Solas leads naturally to soli Deo gloria. It's also the case that a loss of concern for God's glory undermines and eventually casts off the other solas.

What distinguishes the Reformed faith from all others is that it strives to understand all things in such a way that God alone receives the glory.

Calvin begins his Institutes with an interesting paradox. He points out that in order for us to understand who God is, we must understand something of who man is. But it's likewise true that in order for us to understand who man is, we need to understand who God is.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism begins with this question – What is the chief end of man? Answer – Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

But we could also ask – What is the chief end of God? Answer – God's chief end is to glorify Himself and enjoy Himself forever.

Our theological system is built on the pursuit of God's glory for the simple reason that the God of that theology is consumed with the pursuit of that glory.

Now the text before us is remarkable for several reasons and one of the reasons is the position it occupies in Romans. The doxology comes as the end of chapter 11, after Paul has laid out the great theological sections of that book.

Paul finds himself in exaltation after 11 chapters into his letter where he has been preaching to the church in Rome on who they are in chapter 1 and for the next 10 chapters he has expounded on who God is! And Paul answers some really important questions.

- How is man saved?
- By what power are we brought to faith in Jesus?
- How can we become Holy?
- Where are we headed?
- How can we be sure of getting there?



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– All the truth of the Solas up to this point!

Paul has explained our hopelessly lost condition due to sin. He has explained the work of Christ in rescuing us from God's wrath, the permanent nature of our salvation in Christ, and what God is doing in world history.....

....how he is using the rejection of Jesus by the Jews to bring the gospel to the Gentiles, and how he will yet work among the Jews as a people.

But when Paul gets to the end he doesn't glory in what he knows and has been able to explain to others, but in how little any of us actually understand God.

He is overcome to the point where in the middle of the letter he stops and proclaims in v.36b, "To Him be glory forever. Amen." – or in the words of the reformers "*Soli Deo Gloria!*" – To God alone be the Glory!

All things in life and history, good and bad, has happened and will happen to bring God glory!

Now Martin Luther had a major part in the first four Solas, but the last one was emphasized by John Calvin.

Calvin was born in 1509 and its not long after that that Martin Luther nails the 95 theses in 1517. John Calvin studied law and while he was studying law he was pulled into theological studies.

Between 1533 and 1534 he writes his first rendition of the Institutes of Christian religion. He becomes very unpopular in France because of the strong opposition of Catholicism and so he flees to Geneva.

While he was in Geneva, there was a man named William Farrell, a local pastor there trying to get his Protestant church going. And William goes to Calvin and asks for his help in starting this Protestant church.

But Calvin didn't feel called to do this. He felt called to study and write books and wanted to be a seminary professor. And Farrell pronounced damnation on him if he did not help him.

Well, that night Calvin feared for his soul and later went to Farrell and agreed to help him.



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So, Calvin began his career as a theologian and then became a pastor. And many of you may have experienced this kind of thing where you think your life is headed in one direction and the Lord steers your life in the opposite direction. So be prepared for that to possibly happen.

So, Calvin as he works off of Luther's works, Zwingli's works, he comes to an understanding of Scripture. He sees that all things are done for the glory of God and should point to that and that is where man will find his happiness, his completeness.

This is what Paul was seeing in Romans as he wrote the Scriptures.

And I know its Pastor Jody and Pastor Bill's hope as well as the other elder candidates that this series propels you to not leave here and be done with the reformation, but that you would continue to read about it, process it, and think big picture and see how God's glory has changed everything by this time in this event.

Because coming out of the reformation it wasn't just a fight against the Catholic church but everything changed. This was the moment that God had built up and it got to the point and God pushed it over.

During this time, Luther was reforming his church and there were some things he agreed with on the Catholic Church's teaching and there was some things he disagreed with.

We can say he definitely disagreed with them on justification by faith.

On the other Calvin wanted to go further and go all the way back to the early church father's around the time of the 3rd and 4th centuries, especially to the writings of Augustine.

This became the top mantra during the reformation because the church had stolen God's glory, and had adorned herself with God's glory so that she controlled the world. The church actually looked like Eve trying to wrestle leadership from God!

Biting the fruit that the devil had offered her.

1. What is God's Glory and why you should care!

So, what is God's glory?. Well, Moses asked to see God's glory – you remember the account in Exodus 33?

Exodus 33:17-19 – *17 And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." 18 Moses said, "Please show me your glory."*



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19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

"The glory of God is the holiness of God put on display. That is, it is the infinite worth of God made manifest. Notice how Isaiah shifts from "holy" to "glory": "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" ([Isa. 6:3](#)). When the holiness of God fills the earth for people to see, it is called glory." – Piper ¹

Holiness is taking something and removing it from the common and placing it into the uncommon. So the more Glory one has the more one cannot be ignored. **The more one is ignored because of their glory the more you are in error for it!**

You **don't sit down at a wedding** and turn your back to the bride and start looking at your phone during her walk down the aisle because all the glory in that room at that moment is hers! And **the more you ignore it the more error/sin you are incurring!**

The most supreme being in the universe never leaves the room so at anytime we take our focus off of Him it is our neglect, our folly, our ignorance, our self-indulgence, our attempts at glory seeking all of which means it is our Sin! So here's the dilemma we find ourselves in:

Psalm 50:22 (ESV) - Mark this, then, you who forget God, lest I tear you apart, and there be none to deliver!

Isaiah 42:8 – I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

Isaiah 48:11 – For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

Sadly, there are many people in the world who cannot glorify God and actually try to take glory from God. Unbelievers cannot glorify God because they are trying to glorify themselves.

They are doing what Nebuchadnezzar was doing. You remember when we were in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 4:30 - The king answered and said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?"

¹ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/soli-deo-gloria/>



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When God caused Nebuchadnezzar to be lowered from the pinnacle of human pride and glory to the baseness of insanity, it was God's way of saying that this is what happens to all who suppress the truth about God and take the glory of God for themselves.

In contrast, think about Psalm 8. It begins and ends with the words: O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth, while the middle part talks about the created order.

The beginning and ending of the psalm teach that everything begins and ends with God, rather than with man.

Psalm 8:3-8 – When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

These verses put man at a very interesting place in the created order – lower than the angels, but higher than the animals.

This is what Thomas Aquinas saw when he described man a mediating being. He is like the angels in that he has a soul. But he is like the beasts in that he has a body.

The angels have souls but not bodies, while the animals have bodies but not souls. (I'm sure there are some who will disagree with that last statement).

But here's the point – although man is mediating being, created to be somewhere between the angels and the animals, in Psalm 8 he is nevertheless described as being somewhat lower than the angels rather than as being somewhat higher than the beasts.

This means that he is destined to look not downward to the beasts but upward to the angels and beyond them to God, and so to become increasingly like him.

However, if we will not look up, if we put ourselves in the place of God, as Nebuchadnezzar did and as people do today, then we will inevitably look downward and so become increasingly like and behave like the lower creatures.

We will become beast like which is exactly what is happening in our society is it not?



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People are acting like animals or even worse!

But God's Glory was shown in the life, death and victory of Jesus to grab your attention and say, "This is the best God has put on display for you to grab your focus or 'glory –seeking efforts' off yourself!" AND while it is the best display on earth it is not the only thing that gives glory and there is still more to come!

Therefore the righteous and just thing to do for those that ignore is for God to ignore them = HELL!

This is the seriousness and awesomeness of God's Glory!

Now, let's go back to the text and expound on the Glory revealed to Paul through Scripture Alone, that we need to believe by Faith Alone, that will be Given to us by Grace Alone, through the work of Christ Alone. So that **GOD RECEIVES GLORY ALONE!**

2. How God is Glorified and our (Im)Proper Response!

Romans 11:33-36 - ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

Paul in reflection says, "**Wow! - We can't see the end to what God knows, it is an unsearchable thing!**" Then he exclaims, because of that no one can argue with him about what He does!? How are we all doing this morning with not telling God how we would do something? **OR, Are you ok with how God does something? How about in your life?**

Paul was ok and he just got done writing about how the Jews were cut out so the Gospel could come to the Gentiles. This is something Paul would never have been ok with before living life with Jesus because he tried to stomp out the Gospel in his first years of ministry!

But Paul has spent time, years with Jesus learning how He works, seeing that how he was created was to serve God uniquely for a task, and has come to trust Him with His life and His plans.

But even now in this writing of his letter he's still getting insight from the HS on what God is doing!

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord,
 or who has been his counselor?"

³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him
 that he might be repaid?"



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It sounds like to me Paul is building up his argument here as if to say, if someone was able to give to the Lord something He needed (counsel) or wanted (repayment) then you might have a foot to stand on to tell Him what you think.

So first, does God need counsel? – NOT according to v.33 and
Does God need to be repaid? – NOT according to Eph. 2:7 Immeasurable riches in Jesus in eternity / Rom. 3:23-25.

We need to understand that **if we can answer 'YES' to any of these things:** Can I know the extent of God's Wisdom, Can I understand Him fully, Can I offer Him Counsel, Can I give Him something He does not have, **THEN He would have to share with me something He said in Isaiah He would never share... Glory!**

Isn't this, if we are honest, where we hit the proverbial curb all the time!? Are we not tempted to have a problem with how God chooses to do things in our lives? And sometimes we give in to that temptation.

But listen - **All lives are God's Lives", they're His not ours!**

It shows in our prayers, it shows in our attitudes, it shows in how quick we are to repent, it shows how we are quick to talk bad about those that frustrate us and how slow we are to accept responsibility for our feelings and our anger.

We believe that if God would do things differently then it would be better, the question is for who?

Even now wrapped up in rebellion and our desire to take from God Glory and build ourselves up that because God has promised in His word not to let that slide that is the same promise to save you BECAUSE that means for His people you get the gentle correction of ongoing discipline and not eternal wrath and damnation when you die.

3. God must be Honored Rightly for His Glory and our HOPE!

Our Hope is built into the completed work of Christ and how He lived of which He gives a statement on how to do it here.

Matthew 6:33 ESV

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.



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Jesus taught us in Matthew 6 to seek first the Kingdom and His Righteousness and all things shall be added unto you. These are the physical necessities of life and **when we stop trying to dictate the physical necessities God demonstrates we will actually be filled up on spiritual necessities.**

Jesus grew in faith because He saw that the more He pursued God's plans the more His physical needs were met and the less He cared about them.

John 4:32 - But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."

You see God is about to be glorified most when are delivered to the moment of 'we just don't get it!'

There's a time of disillusionment for God's people BUT TAKE COMFORT because it is followed by the dawning of a bigger plan! And it is in the dawning that God shows us He has been involved in the process all along and that you grew in your faith and you gain joy because you are seeing God and He's real to you now!

And when you see God's hand everywhere in your life you will fully see Jesus displayed wearing the Glory of God.

Hebrews 1:3 ESV

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...

Then because God has made Jesus the ultimate revelation of glory, not the working in your life, but the working in everyone's life through Christ's glorification, you begin to see your place in the universe.

Do you know what your place in the universe is? To bring glory to God. We too were made to bring Glory to God!

That's why when we question God, and that's ok to question Him, but we should check our attitudes at the door. There's a way of asking that says, I don't understand please show me more of who you are and there is a way that says I don't think you are right in doing that!

Where are you in your attitude with God today? Because your attitude tells you if you are focused too much on the physical necessities of life and not on the spiritual ones.



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When we become focused on the Spiritual Necessities then Paul's words make sense to us because we agree with them!

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Now this last verse is not the only place Paul wrote this.

1 Corinthians 8:6 - *Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.*

Ephesians 4:4-6 – *⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Yet Romans 11:36 seems to stand out from these other verses as a particularly succinct statement.

Let's think about what this means.

First, what does "All things" mean? Well we can start by saying that all things includes the creation. It includes the physical universe as well as intangible things such as truth, virtue, and the gospel.

John Murray writes – *"God is the source of all things in that they have proceeded from him; he is the Creator. He is the agent through whom all things subsist and are directed to their proper end. And he is the last end to whose glory all things will redound."* – John Murray.

The creation is from God and through God. But the most important thing is what comes next: It is for God's glory too.

This is the point of one of the most important writings of Jonathan Edwards, the seventeenth century New England preacher who was America's greatest theologian.

It's called "The End for Which God Created the World." Why did God created the world? And why did he created mankind to inhabit it?

Edwards wrote – "It could not have been because of some need or inadequacy in himself, since there is no inadequacy in God. God cannot be improved. Nor could creation have been demanded by anything outside of God, because there was nothing outside of God before creation. No external power could have caused God to act, because there were no other powers.



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Only his own overflowing nature and delight in the revelation of his nature could have caused it. Because of who God is, God did not merely wish to be all-powerful, holy, faithful, and true. God wanted to exhibit these qualities, so he created the world to manifest his great glory."

The psalmist expresses this beautifully when he looked up and declared –

Psalm 19:1 - *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

If God created the universe to display his glory, he must have created us for the same great purpose, since we part of the creation.

The Bible is filled with statements that God's glory is the ultimate reason for our creation.

Isaiah 43:7 – *"Everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."*

Speaking of the final restoration of mankind later in Isaiah, it says that God will do it "that he may be glorified (Isaiah 61:3).

So, to sum up this verse - All things and all circumstances, the good the bad and the ugly, are **FROM** God under His Sovereign Control.

All things good and bad must go **THROUGH** Him for judgment and to be used in His ways of doing things to bring about His will.

All things will ultimately point **TO** Him whether in rebellion or in obedience at the throne of Christ, every knee will bow.

To Him alone be all the Glory Forever – Soli Deo Gloria! AMEN