

The Glory of God

In and Through us

By Steve Pruitt

During a family gathering one year at Thanksgiving my Aunt Becky organized a game for the married couples to play. The rules of the game were set up much like the old “Newlywed Game” that aired on television several years ago. Each spouse was required to answer a number of questions the way they believed their partner would answer. Most of the questions were simple like favorite color and favorite sport. Some were a little harder. When the scores were tallied Renae and I had answered every question right. Even the couples who had been married longer than us didn’t do as well. In fact no one did. At this one of my cousins remarked, “You guys spend too much time together.”

It has been said that when a man and woman live together for a few years they begin to look like each other. Well, my wife and I don’t look like each other physically, but we do share many things in common. Our theologies are the same, and we think alike on a number of issues including politics. We have learned how the other would respond to certain questions and circumstances that come on a daily basis. Most of what we know about each other we have learned over time by just being together. We are so much a part of each other that we would be pretty much lost without the other.

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* (2 Corinthians 3:18) What I believe Paul is saying is that when we gaze upon God’s glory the Holy Spirit changes us little by little into God’s image. We gaze into God’s glory in worship, bible study, prayer and fellowship. We gaze into God’s glory as we see Jesus Christ for who he is and have a vibrant relationship with him; as he becomes our highest treasure. As we gaze upon God’s glory we become like him; we bear the fruit of his likeness.

Whatever we spend our time gazing upon or focusing on we will become like. Whatever has our attention has our affection; it is what we worship. History has proven that man becomes like the object he worships. The Scythians who overthrew Rome are a good example. Their chief gods were bloodthirsty and cruel hero-gods. They believed that one of their hero-gods killed himself after he had massacred much of the human race. Therefore, those who were not killed in battle frequently committed suicide fearing that to die a natural death would exclude them from the favor of their god.

Another example can be found in Paul’s day in the city of Corinth. The Corinthians worshiped the goddess Venus, called Aphrodite by the Greeks. She was known as the goddess of love. The most sacred people in the temple of Venus were the prostitutes who were consecrated for her worship.

The psalmist understood the concept of becoming like the object being worshiped.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat. Those who make them become like them; so do all who trust in them.

Psalm 115:4-8 (ESV)

When man, who was made to glorify his creator, exchanges that purpose to glorify the created, he is in serious trouble. The children of Israel found that out when they made a golden calf and claimed that it was the image of their God who brought the out of Egypt (Exodus 32:8).

Psalms 106:20 says, *They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox that eats grass.* Moses had the Levites execute about three thousand men and then the Lord sent a plague on the people.

Paul began his letter to the Romans with a warning of what happens when man glorifies something or someone other than God. In Romans 1:20 Paul says that God's invisible attributes, (his glory) his eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen in what he created. But man in his foolishness did not honor or glorify God. Paul wrote, *Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.* (Romans 1:22-23 ESV) And so the downward spiral begins.

God gave them up to impurity (Romans 1:24); God gave them up to dishonorable passions (Romans 1:26) then God gave them up to a debased (worthless, rejected) mind (Romans 1:28). Man was filled with all kinds of evil and the end was death (Romans 1:32). Not only those who commit these sins worthy of death, but also those who approve of them.

Do you believe God's takes his glory serious? The writer of Hebrews wrote, *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?* (Hebrews 10:28-29 ESV)

We become like what we worship and we bear the fruit of what we become. Furthermore, what we worship is what we glorify. What we glorify is our god.

In Psalms 29:2 we are exhorted by King David to *Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.* The Hebrew word for glory in this passage means weightiness. How do we give the Lord the weight that is due his name? David completes this verse with another exhortation; *worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.* Though the second part of this verse may be a totally separate exhortation, my perception is that it completes the first part of the verse. We might say that one way to give the Lord the weight or glory due his name is to worship him in the splendor or beauty of holiness.

The Amplified Bible renders this portion of Psalms 29:2 this way; . . . *worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness or in holy array.* The Hebrew word for beauty in this passage means decoration. So it could be read, *worship the Lord decorated in holy array.* For the believer today this is not speaking of outer ceremonial garments but a holy life before God. Jesus rebuked the Laodicean church for being lukewarm and counseled them to clothe themselves in white garments (Revelation 3:18) which represents purity and holiness.

Most likely you have heard someone say, "He's the splittin' image of his father." We worship our heavenly Father by being decorated in holy array; living holy lives before others. God is holy and he commands us to be holy like him (1Peter 1:16). When we live holy lives others get a picture of what our Father is like. This is one way he receives the glory due his name. Without holiness we will not see him (Hebrews 12:14) nor will others see him in us.

Years ago I read a book by Kay Arthur in which she wrote that to glorify God means to give the world the correct opinion of what God is like. In other words the thing that brings God glory is for others to look at our values, character and behavior and say, "That is what God is like." The objective of our life is to point to him, to make him known, to make much of him. We were created for his glory (Isaiah 43:7).

We display the glory of God or show others what God is like in at least two ways. One of those ways is by bearing fruit; Jesus said, *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.* (John 15:8 ESV) When Jesus said this he was talking about staying connected to the vine. He is the vine we are the branches and apart from him we can do nothing (John 15:5). If we stay connected to him we will bear fruit that looks like him (John 15:4). If we don't we want. The branch only bears the fruit of the vine to which it is attached. If we are attached to a good tree we will bear good fruit. If we are attached to a bad tree we will bear bad fruit (Matthew 7:17-18).

To rebuke the chief priests and Pharisees for their unbelief, Jesus used a parable about a vineyard owner whose tenants would not give his servants the fruit of his vineyard. Finally the tenants killed the owner's son. Jesus' message and ministry was rejected by these religious leaders and as a result they did not bear the fruit of his kingdom. Their plight was that they had the kingdom taken from them and given to others who would bear the fruits of it (Matthew 21:33-44).

What kind of fruit are we to bear? Paul wrote to the Philippians, *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the **fruit of righteousness** that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.* (Philippians 1:9-11 ESV) Paul wrote to the Galatians, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* (Galatians 5:22-24 ESV)

When we bear fruit God prunes us so that we bear more fruit (John 15:2). God disciplines us so that we may yield the fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11). The more fruit we bear the more like Christ we become. We are changed from glory to glory into his image.

God is also glorified in us as we obey what he has commanded us to do. If we love him we will keep his commandments. As we keep his commands our love for him will be displayed to others. They will see how important he is to us, so he is magnified in our lives.

We magnify God the way a telescope magnifies objects. A telescope takes a really big object that looks small and magnifies it so that it looks more like it really is. As we make much of God by our love for him in obeying his word, we take a really big God who might look small to someone else and make him look more like he really is; which is big. Our goal is for people look at us and say, "So that is what God looks like. I didn't know."

Another way that we display the glory of God is by doing good works. Jesus said, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16 ESV) Before Jesus was crucified he said to the Father, *I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.* (John 17:4 ESV) What work did he do? He pointed people to the Father by preaching the gospel of the kingdom. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out demons and feed the hungry. He demonstrated the attributes of the Father by showing compassion to the broken and having authority over nature. John wrote this about Jesus turning the water into wine: *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.* (John 2:11 ESV) Before he raised Lazarus from the dead, Jesus told his disciples, *This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.* (John 11:4 ESV) He later told Martha, *Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?* (John 11:40 ESV)

The miracles Jesus performed manifested the glory of God. He told his disciples, *Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.* (John 14:12 ESV) The Greek word used greater in John 14:12 means greater degree or more. If the work that Jesus accomplished displayed the glory of God, then our mission is to display the glory of God by doing the works Jesus did.

Jesus himself said that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in all the world as a witness to the nations before the end (Matthew 24:14). Before Jesus ascended to the Father he left that mission to the church by commanding them to make disciples of all nations, baptize them and teach them to observe what he commanded them (Matthew 28:18-20). What did he command them? Among many things, to do the works he did (Luke 9:1; 10:1).

I cannot find a verse in scripture that tells us that we are to no longer pray for sick, raise the dead, cast out demons, feed the hungry, clothe the naked or preach the gospel. I have yet to see in scripture where the gifts of the Spirit have ceased to have relevance. It does seem that we

don't see gifts of healings and miracles occur with the same frequency as in the New Testament. But, that doesn't mean they don't happen at all and it doesn't mean that we want see a revival of that same power in the future. And it doesn't mean we are to stop believing.

Let me ask you; Are there still lost people who need to be saved? Yes. Then we should continue to preach the gospel. Are there still sick people who need prayer? Yes. Then we should continue to pray for the sick believing they will be healed. Are there still people who are in bondage to demonic forces? Yes. Then we should continue to engage evil spirits as they manifest. Are there still hungry people who need feeding and naked people who need clothing? Yes. Then we should continue to feed and clothe those in need. Jesus finished his work, but ours is not yet complete and it won't be until he returns. Our work is to display the glory of God. And every display of God's power and love brings glory to him.

Before his ascension, Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit as a helper. He said, *He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* (John 16:14) The Holy Spirit was given to us as a guarantee of our inheritance to praise of God's glory (Ephesians 1:14) He came to produce fruit in us so we would look like Jesus. He brought gifts to us so that we might do the works of Jesus. When you have the proper balance of the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, you have a proper display of the glory of God; you give the correct opinion of what God is like and God is fully glorified.

The church is desperate for the glory of God to once again fill the temple; the world is desperate for the glory of God. Leonard Ravenhill once said, "That world outside there is not waiting for a new definition of Christianity, it's waiting for a new demonstration of Christianity." The world out there needs to see the life of Jesus being lived out in the church. The world needs to see the works of God being demonstrated by a church full of the fruit of the Holy Spirit. When that happens and the glory of God is manifested, people change. By doing so the prophesy of Habakkuk can begun to be fulfilled which says, *For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* (Habakkuk 2:14 ESV) Once we have experienced the wonder of his glory we will be ruined to everything we have known as church.

The Westminster Catechism says, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and fully to enjoy him forever." The purpose of our existence is the glory of God. It isn't about us; it's about him. *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* (1 Corinthians 10:31 ESV)

Let's ask ourselves: Can people look at my life and say that me and God spend too much time together? Am I bearing fruit that points others to the Father? Am I doing works that points others to the Father? Am I living our lives for the glory of God or are we just holding on until Jesus returns?