

Class 10: Eschatology & Purpose

(To Be Continued...)

30 AD – Jesus tells his followers he will return when they do not expect him, and that no man will know the day or the hour, so they should be continually ready. (Matthew 24:36-44)

44 AD – Theudas convinces 400 to join him in the Judean desert for the end, claiming to be Messiah. Weeks later he is captured and beheaded by the Romans, partially fulfilling his end-times prediction.

53 AD – Some in the Thessalonian church worry that Christ has already returned, and they missed it. Paul reassures them that Jesus will return when they do not expect him, and that no man will know the day or the hour, so they should be continually ready (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).

70 AD – Rabbi Jose of Galilee predicts the end of the world will come 60 years after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He is off by at least 1,880 years.

234 AD – Hippolytus believes the world will end 6,000 years after Adam; which through a series of complex calculations, he determines to be 434 AD.

236 AD – Hippolytus changes his mind, agrees with Lactantius that the world will end in 500 AD, a much more significant sounding year.

(and so on, and so on, until...)

900-999 AD – End of the world prophecies are too numerous to count leading to 1000 AD. The year is a challenging one for anyone thought to bear resemblance to the much anticipated anti-christ.

1000 AD – Annales de Saint-Benoît-sur-Loire foresees the end in 1003, setting off the next wave of predictions.

(and so on, and so on, until...)

1997 AD – Michael Drosnin, Author of “The Bible Code” finds a hidden message in the Pentateuch, predicts the world will be destroyed by a comet in 2012. Some see his choice of the Mayan apocalyptic date as a cynical ploy to boost his odds.

1999 AD – Jerry Falwell says the anti-crhist is probably alive today, and a male Jew. Predicts he will see the end by 2009. Mr. Falwell dies in 2007.

2006 AD – Ronald Weinland publishes “2008 God’s Final Witness”, admitting that if the world does not end in April ’08, he is “nothing but a false prophet”. In May ’08, Weinland’s book goes on sale for \$0.89 on Amazon.com.

In his book Citizen Soldiers, Steven Ambrose writes of the end of World War II in Europe. Christmas Day, 1944, was bright, clear



and cold, and Private Wesley Peyton was enjoying hot food at the front lines when a single German fighter plane came over at treetop level. American machine gunners set the plane's engine on fire. The German pilot turned straight up, then rolled the plane over and bailed out. The watching Americans broke out with roars of approval and admiration for the German's skill. But as the pilot came down in his parachute, Peyton said, "the damned fool upholstered his pistol and began shooting at us. By the time he hit the ground there was hardly enough of him to bury. He shot first; we shot last."

For Peyton, the scene brought "the certainty that we would win the war and I would survive it." He reasoned that the German pilot knew that the war was lost, and that the German pilot did not want to live. But on that Christmas Day, Peyton knew that the Allies would win the war, and that he would go home.

And so it is with us. We live in a furious battle. But with Christmas, the first advent of Christ, the invasion has begun, and the outcome is now assured. The enemy knows the war is lost. We also know the outcome of the war, and that we are on the victorious side, and that we will go home. We are not home now, but one day we will be.

Jesus told us that the Kingdom of God is at hand. We are in the last days. The word "eschatology" comes from the passages of Scripture that talk of the last things - the "last days" (*eschatai hemerai*, Is. 2:2, Mic. 4:1), the "last time" (*eschatos ton chronon*, I Peter 1:20) and "the last hour" (*eschate hora*, I John 2:18).

There are two levels to eschatology. First, there is **individual eschatology**. For the individual, the end of this existence comes with death, which transfers us from this life into another existence. Physical death, the immortality of the soul and the intermediate stage bear discussion here. Second, there is a **general eschatology**. The world as we know it, and the human race, will come to an end. History is not an indefinite and endless process, but there will be a great crisis, and Christ will return to usher in a new age. We will examine in this section the crisis of the end times, the return of Christ, the general resurrection, the last judgment, the consummation of the Kingdom and the final condition of those saved and unsaved.

INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY

Physical Death

Life as we know it comes to an end with death. The Bible speaks of the death of the body, as opposed to the soul. Physical death can be described as a termination of life by the separation of body and soul. The body dies but the spirit lives on. The soul is not annihilated by death. In Ecclesiastes (12:7), we read that "the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." James 2:26 echoes this idea, saying, "the body without the spirit is dead." When Jesus died, the Bible says he gave up his spirit (John 19:30), and when Stephen died, he asked God to receive his spirit (Acts 7:59).

In late 1998, the Unknown Soldier from the Vietnam War interred in Washington D.C. was identified. Using DNA technology previously unavailable, authorities identified the Unknown as Michael Blassie, and his remains were transferred to Jefferson Barracks cemetery in St. Louis. The news reports properly used the word "remains" to



describe the transfer. Blassie's soul had separated from his body at death, and what was left to be interred is only what remains, the body.

Physical death is punishment, "the wages of sin." Since believers are justified, however, and are no longer under penalty, why do we have to die? After all, Christ became a curse for us and so removed the curse of death. Is death necessary? It seems not. After all, Elijah and Enoch did not experience death. But most Christians do experience death. Death produces sanctification. Sickness, bereavement and the thought of death serve to humble the proud, check our worldly concerns and produce in us a mind of humility. And in death we experience the suffering of Christ, often producing great victories where victory hardly seems possible. I Peter 4:12-13 reminds us of the benefits of participating in the sufferings of Christ. "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

The Immortality of the Soul

Job's question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14) is a question of perennial interest. The Biblical answer is a resounding "YES!" The soul lives on after the death of the body. But what is the nature of that life? What happens after we die?

The Intermediate Stage

As we will discuss below, there will be a final resurrection at the end of the world. But what is the situation of the soul after death and before the resurrection? The Reformed position is that the souls of believers proceed to heaven immediately after death. The Westminster Confession says that at death, "The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies." The souls of unbelievers also continue at death. "The souls of the wicked are thrown into hell, where they remain in torment and complete darkness, set apart for the great day of judgment." (W.C. ch. 32, para 1). There is strong Scriptural support for this position; however, it is not without difficulties.

In the Old Testament there is discussion of a place called Sheol, a shadowy region to which the dead descend. For instance, Psalm 89:48 says, "What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of Sheol?" Sheol does not always correspond readily with heaven or hell. Sheol is variously translated as "grave" (as in some translations of Psalm 89) or "pit" or "hell."

But Paul says that he is "willing to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord," and that he has a "desire to depart and to be at home with the Lord." (II Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23.), implying that the transition to God's presence will be immediate. Jesus told the thief on the cross, "**Today** you will be with me in Paradise." In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus went to a place of consciousness in the presence of Abraham. (Luke 16:19-31) The writer of Hebrews cheers believers by reminding them that others of the church "are [present tense] enrolled in heaven" (12:23). There are also Old Testament references, such as in Job and Daniel, which support a life after death in the immediate presence of God. All of these passages indicate after death there is no waiting around in line, no state without consciousness and no place where spiritual exercises must be conducted before entering God's presence.

In the Catholic tradition there is a place of purgatory where the believer works off "venial sins," those committed after baptism, and not resulting in damnation, but requiring purging. The period of purgatory can be shortened by the prayers and masses of the living. Purgatory is supported by a passage in II Maccabees (12:42-45). However, Maccabees is part of the apocrypha, not a book

considered authoritative by the Jews, the early church or the Reformation church. Catholics also believe in Limbus Patrum and Limbus Infantum. The first is a place where the Old Testament saints waited for Christ; the second a place for unbaptized infants. Biblical support for these concepts is weak.

GENERAL ESCHATOLOGY

The Crisis of the End Times

The Bible says that certain events, some cataclysmic, must take place before Christ's return. These include:

- ***The Calling of the Gentiles.*** All nations will have the opportunity to hear the Gospel before the return of Christ. (Matt. 24:14, Mark 13:10, Rom. 11:25) These passages refer to the evangelization of the world as the goal of history. If this is true, missions' work is more than just a casual part of the church's overall program.
- ***The Turning of the Jews.*** Many Jews will come to Christ, and Romans 11:25-29 connects this to the return of Christ.
- ***The Great Apostasy and Great Tribulation.*** Many will fall away in the end times, and many will suffer persecution (Matt. 24:9-12, 21-24, Mark 13:9-22, Luke 21:22-24, II Tim. 3:1-4).
- ***The Coming of the Antichrist.*** There will be one who opposes Christ and his people (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3, I Thessalonians 2:3, 4, Daniel 11:36).
- ***Signs and Portents.*** At the end of the age there will be signs, which include wars and rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes, the coming of false prophets, the working of false miracles and strange signs in the skies involving the sun, moon and stars (Matthew 24:29, 30, Mark 13:24, 25, Luke 21:25, 26).



The Return of Christ

After these signs, Christ will return. The exact time of Christ's return is not known to anyone, "not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only." (Matt 24:36.) The return of Christ will be personal and physical, not just spiritual, as the angels told the disciples, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) His return will be visible to the whole world, and will be sudden (Matthew 24:30, 36-44). And his return will in one sense be very different from his first advent. He will come, not in humility, but in glory and triumph, in royal apparel (Hebrews 9:28). The clouds of heaven will be His chariot (Matt. 24:30), the angels of heaven His bodyguard (II Thessalonians 1:7) and the saints shall be His escort (I Thessalonians 3:13). He will come as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord (I Corinthians 15:25, Rev 19:11-16, Phil. 2:10-11).

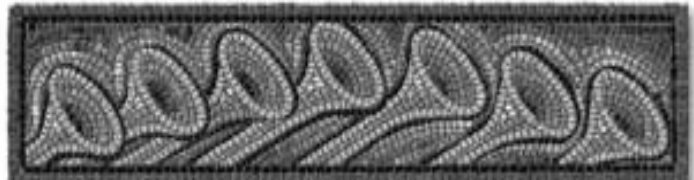
The General Resurrection

With Christ's return, the dead will rise. The resurrection body will be like our present bodies, and yet changed. We will be physical, not just spirits. Jesus was raised physically, as Thomas learned, and Jesus is the first fruit of the resurrection, implying we will be like Him. In Romans 8:11 we are told clearly that our new bodies will have connection to our old bodies, for "He who raised Christ

from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who lives in you." At the same time, we will also be different from our bodily selves. Jesus was different in the resurrection body. Paul refers to the change that takes place as one of sowing a seed and reaping something different, for "the body that is sown is perishable; it is raised imperishable: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body." (I Corinthians 15:42-44) Both the righteous and the wicked will be resurrected (Acts 24:15, John 5:28), although the emphasis in Scripture is on those who will rise to blessing.

The Last Judgment

Following the resurrection there will be a final judgment. This judgment will be the work of a triune God, but Scripture ascribes it especially to Christ. (Matt. 25:31, John 5:27, Acts 10:42, Phil. 2:10) We will all be



judged based on our response to Christ, and be given entrance to heaven or consigned to hell. There will be different levels of reward in heaven, and there will be different levels of punishment in hell. For example, Jesus says that certain unrepentant cities in Israel, which did not respond to him, will be worse off than Sodom, apparently in part because they knew more. While our assignment to heaven or hell is based on our response to Christ, our level of reward in heaven or our degree of punishment in hell will be based on the degree of revelation we received and on what we have done in the flesh. (Matthew 11:22,24; Luke 12:47,48; Daniel 12:3)

Consummation of the Kingdom - The Final Condition of Saved and Unsaved



Hell is variously described as a place from which God is entirely absent, or a place in which God is present, but only in justice and wrath, not love and mercy.

Heaven will be a new creation for the believers. It is described in Revelation 21 as a Holy City of incomparable beauty and light, a place where God will be fully present with His people, where there will be no tears or death or pain.

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

MILLENNIAL VIEWS

Within the church, the order and timing of the events surrounding the end of the world are hotly debated. Many connect the advent of Christ with the idea of a millennium, a thousand years during which Christ will reign on earth, either before or after the return of Christ.

The idea of a millennium is based on Revelation 20:1-6, describing a thousand years during which Satan is bound and the martyrs who have not worshipped the beast reign with Christ. Among those who believe in the millennium, there is division on whether the period is literal, one thousand years, or figurative, meaning a substantial period of time. Those favoring a figurative meaning point out

that Psalm 50:10 says that the cattle on a thousand hills belong to God, and Job 9:3 says that a man cannot answer God once in a thousand times.

Two groups believing in a reign of Christ on earth are categorized by the time at which they believe Christ will return relative to the millennium. Those who believe that Christ will return before the millennium are “**premillennialists.**” Those who hold that Christ will return after the millennium are “**postmillennialists.**”

But there are also large numbers of believers who do not believe that an expectation of a thousand-year reign is warranted at all. These people are referred to as “**amillennialists.**” Those who are classified as Amillennialists believe that the millennium describes the present reign of the souls of deceased believers with Christ in heaven.

Premillennialism

The early church Premillennialists believed in a sequence of events along these lines: The present world would last six thousand years, each of the six days of creation corresponding to one thousand years. Toward the end of this period, there will be persecution and turmoil, and the Antichrist will appear. Christ will appear and defeat the Antichrist, ushering in a period of one thousand years of Christ's reign on earth, corresponding to the day of rest. Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and peace and righteousness will prevail. At the end of the thousand years, there will be the last judgment and a new creation will follow for eternity.

Contemporary premillennialist thought is vastly more complicated. Modern proponents of premillennialism are often Dispensationalists. We have discussed Dispensationalism earlier. In Dispensationalist thought, God deals with humanity on the basis of several covenants and according to several different periods of time, or dispensations. Premillennialism tends to be very literal in charting out the events of the end times. This premillennialism believes in the following sequence of events:

1. Christ may return at any time, nothing further being required for his return. He will return first to take the saints with him in the rapture.
2. For seven years the gospel will be preached, primarily by believing Jews, and there will be conversions and great tribulation. The Antichrist will be revealed.
3. Christ will return again with the saints, the nations will be judged and the Antichrist defeated.
4. For a thousand years the millennial kingdom will be established. Satan will be bound, and there will be a visible kingdom on earth centered in Jerusalem and ruled by Christ and the saints. Worship will be re-established at the temple in Jerusalem. Although there will still be sin and death, this will be a wonderful time.
5. After the millennium, Satan will be loosed for a short season, and he and his allies will make war against the holy city, but will be defeated. Satan will be cast into the bottomless pit, the wicked judged, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

This is a simplified sequence, and assumes all premillennialist thought is uniform. It is not.

Postmillennialism

Growing from Holland in the 1500's and 1600's, Postmillennialism does not believe that Christ will return to reign with the saints on earth during the millennial period. Instead, Postmillennialists see the spread of the gospel throughout the world, and believe that during the end of the present age, the gospel will become much more effective, and there will be a period of rich blessing, a golden age in

which good will be ascendant over evil. At the end of the period of one thousand years there will be a brief period of apostasy, a terrible conflict between good and evil, the return of Christ and the resurrection and judgment.

In modern times this view has become popular among theologians to whom the idea of a gradual perfectionism is appealing. The advent of the millennium is hardly perceptible, and can be evolutionary. To these persons the millennium can be characterized as a utopian period of social order, freedom and dignity, with an increasing emphasis on spiritual good and a decreasing emphasis on materialism.

Amillennialism

Amillennialists point out that the passage in Revelation 20 is the only section in Scripture that explicitly discusses the millennium. Amillennialists say that the kingdom of God is eternal, not temporal, and that we should not expect Christ to reign physically on earth with His saints. Instead, they believe that we are currently in the millennium age, that the souls of deceased believers who are in God's presence are also reigning with God, satisfying Revelation 20. The present form of God's kingdom will be followed by Christ's return, the general resurrection, the final judgment and Christ's eternal reign over the final kingdom on the new earth.

Attached is a chart that compares four positions on the sequence of the end times. No one of these positions is clearly predominant in Reformed circles. The Westminster Confession does not speak to a millennial view. Louis Berkhof in his systematic theology takes the amillennial position, while Charles Hodge and B.B. Warfield are postmillennial. Few Reformed thinkers would agree with the detailed and literal approach of Dispensational Premillennialism.

By whatever sequence of events, we can look forward to the new creation.

Views Concerning Last Things

From H. Wayne House, Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine, Zondervan Publishing. 1992. Used by Permission.

Categories	Amillennialism	Postmillennialism	Historic Premillennialism	Dispensational Premillennialism
Second Coming of Christ	Single event; no distinction between Rapture and Second Coming; introduces eternal state	Single event; no distinction between Rapture and Second coming; Christ returns after Millennium	Rapture and Second coming simultaneous; Christ returns to reign on earth.	Second Coming in two phases; Rapture of church; second coming to earth 7 years later.

Resurrection	General resurrection of believers and unbelievers at second coming of Christ.	General resurrection of believers and unbelievers at second coming of Christ.	Resurrection of believers at beginning of Millennium. Resurrection of unbelievers at end of Millennium.	Distinction in two resurrections: 1. Church at Rapture; 2. Old Testament/Tribulation saints at Second coming; 3. Unbelievers at end of Millennium.
Judgments	General judgment of all people.	General Judgment of all people.	Judgment at Second Coming. Judgment at end of Tribulation.	Distinction in judgment: 1. Believers' works at Rapture; 2. Jews/Gentiles at end of Tribulation; 3. Unbelievers at end of Millennium.
Tribulation	Tribulation is experienced in this present age.	Tribulation is experienced in this present age.	Posttribulation view: church goes through the future Tribulation.	Pretribulation view: church is raptured prior to Tribulation.
Millennium	No literal Millennium on earth after second coming.	Present age blends into Millennium because of progress of gospel.	Millennium is both present and future. Christ is reigning in heaven. Millennium not necessarily 1,000 years.	At Second Coming Christ inaugurates literal 1,000-year Millennium on earth.
Israel and the Church	Church is the new Israel. No distinction between Israel and church.	Church is the new Israel. No distinction between Israel and church.	Some distinction between Israel and church. Future for Israel, but church is spiritual Israel.	Complete distinction between Israel and church. Distinct program for each.
Adherents	L. Berkhof; O.T. Allis; G.C. Berkhouwer	Charles Hodge; B.B. Warfield; W.G.T. Shedd; A.H. Strong	G.E. Ladd; A. Reese; M.J. Erickson	L.S. Chafer; J.D. Pentecost; C.C. Ryrie; J.F. Walvood.

PART 2: THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH GOD CREATED THE WORLD

It is a basic human need to have purpose in life. A bumper sticker popular in recent times states that "He Who Dies With The Most Toys Wins." For this person, acquisition is purpose. Other less materially oriented people seek purpose in work, in family or in noble causes such as the preservation of the environment or relief of hunger or disease. However, very few people on the street can readily articulate their purpose in life. Every Christian should be able to state succinctly the purpose of his or her life.



The first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is, “What is the primary purpose of man?” and the answer is “The primary purpose of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.”

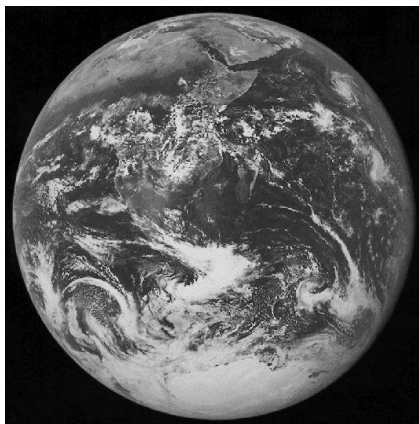
The Westminster drafters had it exactly right. The purpose for which God created the world is his glory and our good. And our purpose is to glorify God by enjoying him forever.

The Reformers had five Latin phrases by which they set out the distinctives of what they believed. Each used the Latin word “*solus*,” meaning “alone.” The Reformers affirmed “Christ alone” (“*Solus Christus*”); “Scripture alone” (“*Sola Scriptura*”); “Faith alone” (“*Sola Fide*”); “Grace alone” (“*Sola Gratia*”); and “To God alone the Glory” (“*Soli Deo Gloria*.”) This last phrase, “To God alone the Glory” was widely understood by Protestants to be the purpose of life. Johann Sebastian Bach, for instance, wrote the letters “SDG” on his manuscripts, short for “Soli Deo Gloria,” or “To God alone the Glory.” Bach wanted no credit for his compositions himself; he wanted God to receive all the credit for the music he composed.

Jonathan Edwards wrote “The End for which God Created the World,” recently republished in God’s Passion for His Glory by John Piper. References to Edwards here are from God’s Passion for His Glory.

WHOSE GLORY?

We tend to put ourselves at the center of all God has done. For instance, on a trip to the mountains we can see a place of beauty where God’s work is displayed in breathtaking views of the stars at



night, in alpine lakes, swift streams, cloudbursts in the peaks and delicate wildflowers. On a trip to the ocean we may see a glimpse of God’s mighty power. And why did God create this world? Each of us believes we are at the center of God’s creation. I tend to think that God created the world so that I would have a beautiful place to work and live and to enjoy. The same holds true for the plan of salvation – I tend to think that God created the plan of salvation for my benefit.

These statements are true, of course. The world is a beautiful place for me to work and live, and I have benefited by the plan of salvation.

We believe we are the measure of everything. The universe exists for us and for our satisfaction. **When we become Christians we see that the world and all that is in it is from God, is governed by him and exists for his glory.**

GOD’S GLORY

What do we mean when we speak of “God’s glory?” The Bible speaks of God’s glory in several respects. The most common words used are in the Hebrew “*kabod*” and in the Greek “*doxa*” (from which we get the “Doxology.”) These words imply weight or heaviness, greatness, gravity or abundance. The words fit God’s character as having gravity or great weight. We say that a deep concept or thinker is “heavy,” (as in the Beatles’ song “He’s so Heavy”) or that a person of repute is a “heavyweight.”

God's glory is his internal excellence. As we discussed in the chapter on Theology, there is no one like God. God is holy, he is self-sufficient, and he is eternal. His purity of character, his power, his omnipotence, indeed all his attributes give him a weight, a gravity which is the source of his glory.

As God is described in the Bible, his character overflows with goodness. This overflow, the **external display of God's internal character is also referred to as his glory.** So Paul would "pray that out of the riches of his glory he may strengthen you..." (Ephesians 3:16) and promise "that my God shall supply all your needs, according to his riches in glory..." (Philippians 4:19) God's provision of strength and supply of needs is the external manifestation of his internal goodness, and therefore displays his glory.

Sometimes God's glory can be **physically displayed.** For instance, when the shepherds in Bethlehem were told of the newborn Jesus, "the glory of the Lord shone about them." (Luke 2:9). When Moses saw just the rear of God, the "Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was" (II Corinthians 2:7).

God's glory may also be equated with its expression of honor and the **praises of his people.** The Psalms commend his people to glorify God by rejoicing in him. And God's glory also may be equated with **his name**, which is to be kept holy, and spread to all the nations. "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth." (Psalm 8:1) "Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake." (Psalm 79:9) **God's fame**, that he is known to the nations, is also his glory.

In summary, then, God's glory is his supreme value, arising from his character, and the outward expression of that character among men.

ALL THAT IS, GIVES GLORY TO GOD

The entire creation gives glory to God. Isaiah 6:3 says that "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is excellent, his glory is above the earth and the heavens." (Psalm 148:13)

The natural world gives glory to God. In the Nineteenth Psalm, the works of God are said to declare the glory of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands." The Eighth Psalm proclaims that "You have set your glory above the heavens, from the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise."

The plan of election gives glory to God. "In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will – to the praise of his glorious grace..." (Ephesians 1:5-6)

All redemptive history gives glory to God. God has worked throughout redemptive history for his own glory. God created man for his own glory (Isaiah 43:7). He frustrated the building of the Tower of Babel as men tried to make a name for themselves instead of God (Genesis 11:4). He called Abram to make Israel a nation in which God could display his glory (Isaiah 49:3). When he gave the Law, God declared that no other gods would be glorified before him (Exodus 20:3-5). God's preservation of the rebellious wanderers in the desert (Ezekiel 20:21-22), the conquest of Canaan (II Samuel 7:23), the establishment of the monarchy (I Samuel 12:19-23), the building of the temple (I Kings 8; 41-45), Israel's return from exile (Isaiah 48:9-11) and the other steps in

redemptive history are taken by God “for his own sake” or “for his name’s sake.” For an expanded description of God’s display of his glory in redemptive history, see Appendix 1 to John Piper’s book Desiring God.

The work of Christ on the cross was for God’s glory. In John chapter 12, Jesus was troubled at the prospect of his own death. But he was strengthened by the purpose of the cross, which is the glory of God. Jesus says that his purpose, like a fallen kernel of wheat, is to spread many seeds, which will glorify God, and God assures him by a voice from heaven that God will be glorified. “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father glorify your name!” (John 12:23-29) Jesus’ death on the cross was to glorify God.

The good works of the redeemed give glory to God. “This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit.” (John 15:8) “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise [glorify] your father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14)

The work of God in missions and outreach give glory to God. At Isaiah 60:6, God proclaims the coming conversion of the gentiles, and says that he will send missionaries “to the faraway islands that have not heard of my fame or seen my glory. They will proclaim my glory among the nations.”

REPROBATION GIVES GLORY TO GOD

All of the above seem to be a part of God’s plan, working within that plan, not in rebellion against God, so it may not be surprising that they glorify God. But could God be glorified by the worst kind of person, by rebels, by murderers, liars, and genocidal maniacs? The Bible says that **even reprobates, the wicked and the unrighteous, those most in rebellion, are for God’s glory.**

How can this be? Proverbs 15:4 says “The Lord works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster.” The proverb says even the wicked exist for God’s purposes.

Of course, we know the outcome at the end of the world. Philippians 2 assures us that at the end “every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.” Note that all people – even those “under the earth,” the dead - and those in rebellion, whether or not willing to honor God voluntarily in life – will acknowledge Christ. And note that our knees will be bent to Jesus to the glory of God.

As an example, the Bible assures that Pharaoh was raised up for God’s glory. “I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord.” (Exodus 4:14) “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: ‘I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’” (Romans 9:17, Exodus 9:16) Of course this happened when Pharaoh and his army drowned. God’s glory is also displayed to God’s

people when God bears with us patiently, but shows his wrath to Pharaoh and others whom God will destroy for their sin. (Romans 9:22-23)

Although this is hard for us to take in, God is glorified in his love when he shows mercy, and God is glorified in his justice when he judges the rebellious. God is glorified in everything. **God is**



glorified in everything, from his creation of the world, to the plan of salvation; he is even glorified in the most rebellious sinner.

GOD'S GLORY IS THE "ULTIMATE END" OF THE WORLD

Edwards says that God's glory is the "ultimate end" of the world, or what we would call the ultimate purpose. The ultimate purpose is that which lies behind everything else, the one most valued.

Suppose you were to drive to the pharmacy to fill a prescription. In going to the garage you might have several purposes, but only one ultimate purpose. Getting the car was a purpose; driving to the pharmacy was a purpose; obtaining medicine was a purpose. But the deeper purpose is for your child to be made well. The "ultimate purpose" is the purpose which lays behind all others.

God is described as "the alpha and the omega" (Revelation 1:8), the "beginning and the end" (Isaiah 48:12), and of course, this is true in time. If God created everything, he existed before anything else, and if everything else will decay and deteriorate, he will be there after everything else. But God is also the beginning and end in purpose for everything. Romans 11:35-36 says "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!" Everything created was created by him. Everything which exists is sustained through him. Everything is to God, meaning that it is for his glory.

God's ultimate purpose in the world is his own glory.

TROUBLING QUESTIONS

Yet several troubling questions arise. Edwards addressed these well.

Is God inappropriately concerned with his glory?

In giving the Ten Commandments, God ordains first that the people shall have no other gods before him, and he says that he is a jealous god. In other words, his first aim in giving the law is that we give him the honor he alone is due. At Isaiah 48, God says that he will do what he wills for his own sake, and that, "I will not give my glory to another." (Isaiah 48:11) As discussed above, God has ordered everything for his own glory. This may make us squirm in discomfort.

In World War II, General MacArthur was the commander of the Pacific front. MacArthur had a considerable ego, and when another general of lesser rank became too popular, MacArthur made sure that the general was "buried" – given an obscure post with no access to the press. The objective, of course, was to make sure that MacArthur received the adulation to which he thought he was entitled. It was not a pretty picture.

Is God like that? Is God inappropriately concerned with his glory? Is God small-minded and selfish in seeking praise and the fame of his name?

Well, we must first recognize that God is truth, and that he will never lie - he cannot do so. And we must secondly recognize that his nature and character are infinitely superior to his creatures'. Jonathan Edwards says, "But if God be indeed so great and so excellent that all other beings are as nothing to him, and all other excellency be as less than nothing and vanity in comparison with his, and if God be omniscient and infallible, and perfectly knows that he is infinitely the most valuable

being, then it is fit that his heart should be agreeable to this – and that he should value himself infinitely more than his creatures.” (p. 169) **In infinitely valuing his own glory, God is not inappropriate. He merely sees things as they are, and acts accordingly.**

But does God really love us?

Another question logically arises here. If God’s glory is infinitely valuable to him, does he really care about us? One might get the impression that God has ordered everything selfishly for his own good, that he does not care about us and even that we are simply puppets in God’s play to display his glory. But **there is no conflict between God valuing his own glory, and his seeking our happiness, our joy in him. In fact, they are the same thing.** God’s character overflows with happiness. God is compared in the Bible to an infinite source of water and an overflowing spring. God’s delight within himself spills over to his creation and his people.

Edwards says, “Many have wrong notions of God’s happiness, as resulting from his absolute self-sufficiency, independence and immutability. Though it is true that God’s glory and happiness are in and of himself, are infinite and cannot be added to... yet it does not hence follow, nor is it true, that God has no real delight, pleasure or happiness in any of his acts or communications relative to the creature or effects he produces in them, or in any thing he sees in the creature’s qualifications, dispositions, actions or state. God may have a real and proper pleasure or happiness in seeing the happy state of the creature; yet this may not be different from delight in his own infinite goodness... (p. 163). God’s respect to the creature’s good and his respect to himself is not a divided respect; both are united in one, as **the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself.**” (p. 249)

God’s happiness overflows to a joy in us as his creation. We are assured of God’s love in several respects. First, although we were deserving of death for our sins and trespasses, both Adam’s and our own, God preserved us and provides all mankind with his common grace.

Second and most importantly, the three persons of the Trinity ordered the plan of salvation from the very beginning. God predestined us to election even before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). Jesus is the lamb slain from the beginning of the world (Revelation 13:8). He ordered good for us from the outset. The cross is the most powerful evidence that God is not far off, acting as a puppet-master. The physical and spiritual pain and suffering of the cross was real, and would only be borne by a God who loves us.

At the right time, the Holy Spirit calls us to declare that Jesus is Lord (I Corinthians 12:3). We are assured that all things presently work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

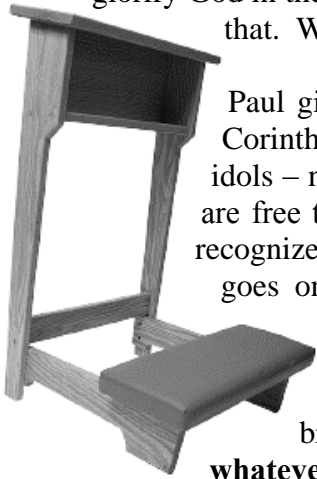
And we know that God has only good for us in the future as we enter into the joy of our master (Matthew 25:21) and live with him in a place in which there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Revelation 21:4).

God has loved us from the beginning by preserving and choosing us, has loved us on the cross, loves us now by his providence and will show his love for us in the future by bringing us to himself completely. **God’s goodness to us is the outworking of God’s internal goodness.**

GLORIFYING GOD: GOD IS MOST GLORIFIED IN US WHEN WE ARE MOST SATISFIED IN HIM.

If the ultimate purpose of the world, and all in it, is to glorify God, then you and I are created for the purpose of glorifying God. Our family and our church are also to glorify God.

How do Christians glorify God? What does it mean to glorify God? Most of us would think first of worship – Sunday worship service, prayer and praise of God, study of the Bible. Of course we glorify God in the act of worship. But glorifying God is both simpler and more difficult than that. We glorify God when we make him supreme in everything we do.



Paul gives us the key to glorifying God in everything in I Corinthians 10. The Corinthians struggled with whether they could eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols – not on its face an issue we would commonly confront today. Paul says they are free to do so, “for the earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.” But Paul also recognized that the eating of meat sacrificed to idols would bother some people. He goes on to say that the Corinthians should not eat the meat if it would cause temptation to anyone else. The more general application of the passage is that a Christian should rein in his freedom for the conscience, or even the weakness, of another. But Paul then concludes the passage with an even broader application to all of life, saying **“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”** (I Corinthians 10:31)

There it is. **When we eat or drink or whatever we do, we can glorify God.** The Corinthians could glorify God by making decisions about eating and drinking with supreme regard for God. When we put aside what we perceive to be our rights, and make God pre-eminent, when we are satisfied in him, we glorify God, whether in eating or drinking or anything else. When God is first in our actions and thinking, we glorify him. When we put him in his rightful place as the center of our decision, we glorify God. To paraphrase the Westminster Catechism, the chief purpose of man is to “glorify God **BY** enjoying Him forever.” By making God the source of our pleasure, our greatest source of enjoyment and satisfaction, we glorify him. To glorify God is to have supreme regard for him in everything.



In one sense glorifying God is simple. God is glorified when he has his rightful place as the ultimate purpose in our lives. God is glorified when we put him first in our family decisions, our relationships, our dating, our ethics, our money decisions, and all else.

But in another sense glorifying God is so very difficult to actually do. Unbelievers unabashedly focus on the creation, instead of the Creator, as the source of satisfaction in life, pursuing satisfaction in pleasure, or money, or status or education or any created thing instead of in God. This makes the created thing an idol.

WE ARE MOST SATISFIED WHEN GOD IS MOST GLORIFIED

It is true that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. The converse is also true. We are most satisfied when God is most glorified. God has made us to be satisfied in him.

Over and over Scripture tells us that we will be satisfied in God. We are exhorted in the Psalms to be joyful in God. “**Delight** yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4) “**Rejoice** in the Lord and **be glad** you righteous” (Psalm 32:11) “**Shout for joy** to the Lord, all the earth.” (Psalm 100:1)

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a treasure hidden in a field. “When a man found it, he hid it again, and then **in his joy** went and sold all he had and bought that field.” (Matthew 13:44) That field, and its treasure, the kingdom of heaven, brings the man more joy than all else the man has. The Beatitudes reflect this same idea. The Greek word we translate “blessed,” *makarios*, also means “happy.” **Happy** are those who have Kingdom values, who are poor in spirit, who mourn for their sinfulness, who are meek, who hunger and thirst for righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Imprisoned in Rome, Paul writes to the Philippians, “**Rejoice** in the Lord always. I will say it again: **Rejoice!**” (Philippians 4:4) He also writes of his achievements, then says, “But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to **the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord**, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in him...” (Philippians 3:7-9) To Paul, nothing fulfills in comparison to knowing Christ.

The writer of Hebrews says, “Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6) What are we to believe about God? First that he exists, and second that **he rewards those who seek him**.

The Bible also spells this truth out negatively – there is no fulfillment apart from God. Consider Jeremiah 2:12-13. “‘Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror,’ declares the Lord. ‘My people have committed two great sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and they have dug their own cisterns that cannot hold water.’”

Or Jeremiah 50:10-11: “Let him who has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. But now all you who light fires and provide yourselves with flaming torches, go, walk in the light of your fires and of the torches you have set ablaze. This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment.” God says that self-reliance and seeking fulfillment apart from God, as the source of that satisfaction, will never work.

Paul says in Romans 1 that to exchange the glory of the Creator for the created world is the ultimate foolishness. “For although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, **they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal god for images** made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” (Romans 1:21-22) Although modern idols may be different, no longer carved images, they are still products of exchanging the glory of the Creator for the created world. Pursuing our gratification in the created world will never truly satisfy.

Even after we believe, because we are fallen, we still pursue our satisfaction in the created world. We believe we will be satisfied when we find the perfect life partner, a career change, children and a larger home. We will actually be most satisfied in knowing God's perfect character and acting out of love for God.

Our passion for gratification is not too strong; instead, it is too weak, for we seek gratification in the wrong things. C.S. Lewis says that, "If we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. **We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.**" (The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses, p. 2)

Nothing else will satisfy us like God. Blaise Pascal said that in every heart there is a God-shaped vacuum. Nothing else can fill that space except God. We may try all other means to satisfaction, but nothing else will substitute for God's presence in our lives, for God has so made us. After all, God says he will not share his glory with another.



We should be clear about this: we owe God our worship, his glory, even if to do so were not to our benefit, because of his character, his perfection and his position as our creator. But in God we also find our greatest good. He is the one who ultimately satisfies our deepest needs.

We are most satisfied when God is most glorified.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS OF GOD'S GLORY AS THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE FOR THE WORLD

So what if God's glory is the ultimate purpose for the world?

God's purposes are his glory and our good. We should seek his glory first, and our good will follow.

God is committed to my good as his glory. God is our good. Knowing him will be our greatest source of joy and pleasure.

The focus of the proclamation of the gospel is on God's character first, our felt needs second. If God's first concern is his glory, that should be our first concern. If our good follows from God's glory, and not from following our own inclinations, we should say so.

God's glory is most manifest in the joy of the saints in him. The magnifying of God and the joy of all people in God is one end, not two.

Sin is both ungodly and foolish. If it is true that we are most satisfied when he is most glorified, then rebellion against God both dishonors him and is eventually hurtful to our happiness.

There is no place for "religion in its place." God is ultimate, not just one stall in the marketplace. Reserving God a Sunday morning worship time is not enough. Family, sports, politics, business,

media, ethics, architecture, the progress of history, all are subject to God. We cannot segment God out of any interest.

God can be glorified in our churches in any number of ways. One church may focus its ministry primarily on evangelism; a second focuses on Christian education; a third on missions. Each of these glorifies God by the work to which they are called. No one of these is the ultimate end; each is a “penultimate” end to the ultimate end, which is glorifying God.

GOD’S GLORY AND OUR OWN GOOD IN SUFFERING

We need to be realistic about this idea of God’s glory, especially as it relates to our good. God’s glory may not always lead to what looks like our good when that good is viewed through the eyes of the world. Both the Bible and modern life provide examples.

Many of the prophets were killed by the people of Israel to whom they proclaimed God’s glory in his righteousness and from whom they demanded obedience. Paul, as a Jew of high repute, was converted on the road to Damascus, and later told the Corinthians of the troubles he endured for the proclamation of the message of God’s glory revealed in Christ – flogged, exposed to death again and again, five times receiving forty lashes, three times beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked three times, in danger from rivers, lowered over Damascus walls to escape enemies, in danger from bandits, hungry, sleepless, cold and naked. As we have seen, Jesus strengthened himself in contemplation of God’s glory as his purpose before the crucifixion.



There are many stories of the redeemed that gave up all for God’s glory – comfort, education, family, liberty, and life itself. Joni Erickson was paralyzed, but has said that she would not go back to health if it would mean losing God’s purpose for her life. Charles Colson went from the White House to prison, but said that the glory of the White House was so much loss compared to knowing Christ. Missionary Jim Elliot willingly gave up his life for the name of Christ, saying that a man is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. Brothers and sisters have been persecuted in much of the world, but have given up family and education and good jobs and liberty for the sake of Christ. God’s glory may not look like our good, as we would understand our good superficially. Yet these men and women set aside what appeared to be their good for the promises that God’s glory is their good.

God’s purpose in creating the world, the church and his people is the display of his glory, and we are most satisfied when he is most glorified.

Additional resources:

John Piper, God's Passion for His Glory, Crossway Books, 1998 (containing Jonathan Edwards' "The End for Which God Created the World").

John Piper, Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist, Multnomah Press, 1986. See specially Appendix 1.

James Montgomery Boice, Romans, Volume 3, God and History, Baker Books, pp. 1409-1480.

Stanley J. Grenz, The Millennial Maze, Intervarsity Press, 1992

R. C. Sproul, Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, Tyndale House Publishers, 1992

Charles Hodge, Systematic Theology, Abridged Version, P & R Publishing, pp. 509-542, 1992

Louis Berkhof, Systematic Theology, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, pp. 661-736, 1996

**ESCHATOLOGY & PURPOSE
QUESTIONS**

10-1. In what way does general eschatology differ from individual eschatology?

10-2. What happens to the soul when we die?

10-3. What events will occur before the return of Christ? (There are six of them - be able to name most)

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

f.

10-4. When will Jesus come?

10-5. Describe Jesus' return - five characteristics.

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

10-6. What do we know about the resurrected believer?

10-7. Who will be the principal judge at the last judgment?

10-8. Will there be levels of reward in heaven? Levels of punishment in hell? What will be the basis of these rewards and punishment, and how does this differ from how one is saved?

10-9. What is the primary difference between premillennialists, postmillennialists and amillennialists? Briefly describe the different positions.

10-10 Do you agree that God's ultimate purpose for **the world** is the display of his own glory?

10-11 Do you agree that God's ultimate purpose for **the church** is the display of his own glory?

10-12 Do you agree that God's ultimate purpose **for you** is the display of his own glory?

10-13 Read Luke 12:32-34. What truth about God's character is set out there? What about our response?

10-14 What does I Corinthians 10:31 tell us about glorifying God?

10-15 How do churches fail to glorify God?

10-16 How does our church's mission or purpose statement line up with God's ultimate purpose for creating the world?

10-17 How do we as Christians fail to glorify God?

10-18 What opportunities to glorify God are presented in **comfortable** times? What dangers are there in comfortable times?

10-19 What opportunities to glorify God are presented in **difficult** times? What dangers are there in difficult times?