

Our Highest End

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[0 : 00] Romans 11, verse 33 to verse 36, hear the word of the Lord. Amen.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray and ask God's blessing on our time together in the scriptures. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you that you've freely given him unto us, O Lord. And we thank you, O God, that in him, Lord, we are united to each other, O Lord, to one another. And of course, O God, to you. And so we now pray, O God, as we sit and listen with ears of faith, O God, to your word.

We ask that you'd open our eyes. We ask that you'd open our hearts, Lord. We pray that you'd open our minds, O Lord. And we ask, O God, that you'd help us to hear your word. We do pray and ask you these mercies in the precious name of Christ our Savior, the thanksgiving.

Amen. You know what? I think it's quite cool. As I was just preparing for this message this week, I thought it was quite cool that we're about five minutes, as we are seated here every morning, we're about five minutes away from the Parliament of South Africa.

[1 : 27] I tried to determine how long it would take me to walk from here to there, but as you can imagine, it wouldn't be that long. Maybe some of you have done that exact thing. But we're very close and near to the Parliament.

And I thought, imagine that Parliament would enact a legislation or somehow make a decision or send an email, as basic as that, to every pastor in the city center, requesting of them to answer this important question.

Parliament requesting all the pastors in the city center to ask this, to answer this important question. What is the chief end of man? What is the highest end of us as human beings?

And Parliament sends this email around and all the pastors gather together to try and flesh out and work out this particular answer to this question. Well, that's exactly or basically what happened in the 17th century, when in 1643, English Parliament, the Parliament of England, called together and directed an assembly of pastors and commissioners to further the reform of the Church of England.

And part of their work of reformation was drafting the Westminster Standards. The document that we quoted a portion of in our service this morning was drawn up as Parliament called together these ministers, these divines, as they were called, these preachers.

[3 : 01] The reformation was drafting, or the further reformation of the Church of England was enacted by drafting of the Westminster Standards. And one of the documents in the Westminster Standards is called the Shorter Catechism.

There's the Confession of 33 chapters, there's the Shorter Catechism, there's the Lodge Catechism, there's the Public Directory of Worship, there's various other documents in what we call the Westminster Standards.

But the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, as you well know, and I'm sure you're able to recite it, is this very question. What is the chief end of man?

What is the chief end of man? And this is where I'd like us to go this morning. This is what I'd like us to think on and focus on. What is our highest end?

The question touches on our most fundamental goal and purpose in life. It addresses the most essential pursuit of man.

[4 : 04] It comes to the very core of our being, to the heart of our aspirations, and the central matter of how must we order our lives.

How must we order our lives? In other words, there can be no more important question for us to consider. What is the chief end? What is the highest end of man?

The question is practical. It touches on what on earth are we here for? The question is meaningful. It gives us an answer by which we can define ourselves.

These pastors, working at the request of Parliament and gleaning from the whole of Scripture, bringing the witness of the Bible to bear on this question, these divines who drew up this document, they gave this answer to the question.

What is the chief end of man? They answered, the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

[5 : 11] Basically summing up the words of the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 11, that from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.

To Him be glory forever. Amen. I want to focus on that first part of the question this morning, and next time we can consider the second part of the question.

But the first part of the question is to glorify God. And that's what I want us to think about very briefly this morning. What does it mean to glorify God? What does it mean to pursue this end for which we were created, namely the glory of God?

If it is that this is our highest end, if it is that this is our chief goal in life, what does that mean? What does that look like? Well, let's look at Scriptures and the Bible in general to kind of come to an understanding of what it means.

Isaiah 43, and I'm going to quote a few passages of Scripture, and this won't necessarily be an exposition of a single passage, and so we'll go all over, but we'll try and be faithful to those texts that we are looking at this morning.

[6 : 23] And so you're welcome to note down the passage, or if you are fast enough, turn there in your Bibles. Isaiah 43 verse 7 says, where God speaks through the prophet Isaiah, and he says, Bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory.

And I want you to see that this is not just an answer that we see in a 17th century document, but this is an answer that comes from the very word of God, where God says, I created everyone, every person, male and female, I created all of you, all of us, God created us for His glory.

Here God speaks in Isaiah, and He declares that He has created us for this very purpose. Our lives, our existence, they find their most basic, and their most ultimate purpose, when they are ordered toward Him.

When they are ordered toward God, as the Puritan Thomas Watson wrote, God must be the ultimate end, the terminus ad quim, if you like a bit of Latin, the ultimate end, God must be that for us.

Therefore, we are most full and most complete when we set ourselves toward Him, when we aim for Him. We do not define ourselves by looking to ourselves, instead we define ourselves by looking to Him.

[7 : 49] For what is the clay without the potter? And what are the creatures without the Creator? That old reformer, John Calvin, in the beginning of his Institutes, when he opened it up, he begins it like this, quote, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts toward the God in whom he lives and moves.

Because, says Calvin, it is perfectly obvious that the endowments which we possess cannot possibly be from ourselves. Know that our very being is nothing else than subsistence in God alone.

In other words, we can't understand ourselves if we do not understand God. We can't understand ourselves if we do not define ourselves in relation to God. We cannot know ourselves if we do not know God.

This is freeing to us because this world, and even in our world that we have and created for us, we often get lost on what matters most and who matters most.

We often prize things that are transient, fleeting, finite, momentary, at the neglect of him who is eternal, glorious, the all-powerful creator God.

[9 : 10] We have ample examples in the Scriptures of those who sought vain things, of those who had empty ambition. Take, for example, the man who stored up for himself all the riches, and that very night that he prepared to receive his riches, God demanded his soul.

Take, for example, the rich young ruler who could not part with his wealth to follow Christ. Or take, for example, Judas, who walked with Christ and yet betrayed him for three pieces of silver.

We lose ourselves in what the preacher calls chasing after the wind. Well, what does it mean to glorify God? What does it mean to glorify God?

Let's consider this particular question. In order to understand or find out the answer of what it means, we have to note what it does not mean. Right? We must first look at what it is not.

What is it to glorify God? Begins by understanding what it is not. And so, to glorify God does not mean we give God something he does not have.

[10 : 16] To glorify God does not mean that we offer God something that he is deprived of. It doesn't mean that we're giving him something where there's a deficiency in his being.

There's no lack in God. We're not giving him something that he lacks. And so, when we give God glory, we are not supplementing any deficiency in God whatsoever. Right?

We often speak of giving God glory. Give God the glory. It's not wrong for us to say that. It's not wrong for us to speak or think like that. But this way of speaking must not cause us to think that we are giving something to God that he does not have.

God has what we call an intrinsic glory that is essential to his nature, essential to his being, to who he is.

He is the God of glory. Glory is therefore not accidental to God. It is not coincidental to his nature. He is the God of glory.

[11 : 19] He is full of glory, the scriptures teach us. He is glory. Yes, the Bible helps us understand. Without glory, he cannot be God.

We can lose honor. We can lose honor as human beings and still be human beings, but God cannot lose his glory and still be God. This is why he says, my glory I give to no other.

He shares with us from the riches of his goodness and kindness, but he does not share with us his glory. It's not up for grabs. In fact, we could say it was this very reality that tempted Lucifer.

He coveted the glory of God to his own destruction and damnation. And so when we say we glorify God, we are not giving him something that he does not have, right?

God speaks through Job in Job 41 verse 11. Who has first given to me, asked God, that I should repay him. Think about that.

[12 : 20] Consider that to your life. God asks this bold question, who has first given to me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the hole, heaven is mine.

In our passage, Romans 11, who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid. What does it mean to glorify God? Well, firstly, it means that we're not giving him anything that he does not have.

But what does it mean? What does it mean, positively speaking? Well, it means to live and speak and think and feel and act in such a way that honors God in his holiness, righteousness, truth, love, mercy, and goodness.

It is to live in such a way that promotes and reflects and points to and honors God. It is to live in a way that seeks to reflect his infinite worth.

Our actions mirror his holiness. Our speech mirror his righteousness. Our thoughts mirror his purity.

[13 : 32] Our decisions mirror his wisdom. And in living in such a way, we are glorifying God. We are glorifying God. And so we have this overarching biblical truth that our greatest pursuit, destiny, destiny for us is to live in a way that mirrors the glory and magnificence and splendor and wonder and the majesty and the greatness of God to reflect and mirror that.

That's destiny. My self-preservation, friends, brothers and sisters, my self-preservation is not destiny. My personal aims and satisfactions are not destiny.

My happiness is not destiny. My preference is not destiny. God's glory is my destiny. God's glory is my pursuit.

We can attain all of these things and still not have arrived. But we reach our destiny when we pursue the glory of God. Conversely, we dishonor God when we're not living up to this and we sell ourselves short when we're not living up to man's chief end.

The second question I want us to consider is how is it possible for sinners to glorify God? How is it possible for sinners to glorify God?

[14 : 59] In answering this question I want to make this point. God glorifies himself by making it possible by working in us so that we can glorify him.

God helps us, assists us, empowers us, makes it possible for us to glorify him. This question addresses a deep problem and challenge for us in this great pursuit.

How can fallen creatures, how can fallen sinful creatures, which is what we are, how can fallen creatures glorify God? Well, let's consider this very briefly.

The Bible shows us and our experience testifies that we are fallen creatures. We have a corrupted nature. If you wondered what is wrong with you, maybe you never wonder what is wrong with you, but if, you know, for the two or three people that are here, if you wondered maybe what is wrong with you, the Bible calls that you have a sinful nature.

It is a corrupted, fallen human nature that God created us good and sinless, without sin, but we have fallen. We have got a sinful nature, a corrupted nature, a human nature that is corrupted by sin.

[16 : 13] Naturally speaking, then, we cannot please God. naturally speaking, then, we will not please God. There is a defect in our affections for God and there is a defect in our volition, our will towards God.

We cannot and we don't want to please God naturally speaking. This means we incur the righteous judgment of God for rebelling against our creator and transgressing his laws.

We pray this morning, forgive us for our trespasses, right? That means we have trespassed something and that is the law of God, the perfect righteous standard of God.

The Bible teaches us that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Did you see how the Bible connects our fallenness with the glory of God in that because we have fallen, because we are sinful, we fall short of the glory of God.

It is a challenge. Sin impedes our pursuit of this highest end. You have heard about defeating the ends of justice, right?

[17 : 24] You've heard that expression. Well, in our sin, we defeat the end of our destiny. God's response to our fallenness is to glorify and honor His righteousness, His justice, and His holiness.

He must preserve the integrity of His holy law by honoring its penal requirements. He cannot be like us, break the law, merely gloss over our sins and think nothing of it.

This will be, quite frankly, for God to deny Himself. God cannot deny Himself. The Scripture thus speaks, the soul who sins, Ezekiel 18, the soul who sins must die.

Romans chapter 6, the wages of sin is death. But because of His great and unconditional love for us, for ruin and fallen sinners, in His infinite wisdom He devised a plan before the foundation of the world to honor His righteousness and to celebrate His love.

A plan to rescue us, a plan to love us, a plan to uphold His righteousness. This plan of divine wisdom and unconditional love was to send His Son, John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, will not come on the receiving end of His judgment, will not perish, but have everlasting life.

[18 : 57] He sent His Son to take the place of guilty sinners, sinners living in defiance of Him, in rebellion to Him. Christ was born in the flesh yet without sin, to save sinners by living in perfect righteousness and dying a substitutionary death on the cross.

The hymn writer expresses it beautifully when he says, in my place condemned He stood. In fact, the prophet Isaiah says, the punishment that brought us peace was placed upon Him.

So on the cross, Jesus satisfies the wrath, the judgment that was ours. He takes it upon Himself. Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

In Christ, by faith in Christ, we then receive mercy and grace and more than that, more than having our guilt removed, by faith we receive the free gift of righteousness.

Again, as John Calvin remarks, he says, it is not that we are righteous, but that we, though unrighteous, by faith are reckoned, counted as righteous.

[20 : 12] If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away, behold, the new has come. Did you see how destiny now, this pursuit of the glory of God, this reality from which we fall short, did you see how God is now making this more possible, more of a reality, how God is saving us, removing the guilt, giving us a new nature, and in the words of Paul, making us new creations.

That is the invitation of the gospel, that is the invitation of Christ to you, that you can become a new creation, that you can shed yourself, as it were, of that fallen nature progressively, but as far as it concerns God, because of Jesus, you can be regarded, reckoned, counted, by faith as righteous, as righteous, because for our sake, Paul says, God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we become the righteousness of God, and here God works to his glory, and I have to get in our confession here, because the Westminster Confession, chapter 11, is beautiful in just bringing all of this together, listen carefully, I quote, Christ, by his obedience and death, did fully discharge the debt of all those that are thus justified, and did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction of his father's justice in their behalf, yet, in as much as he has given, was given by the father for them, as his obedience and satisfaction accepted in their stead, both freely, not for anything in them, their justification is only of free grace, that both the exact justice and rich grace of

God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. The gospel calls, the gospel call to every human being is that if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you'll be saved, you'll be rescued, you'll be ransomed,!

you'll be redeemed! Faith is how we receive and rest in Christ's perfect work. Those who believe are brought into the family of God, sealed with the Spirit of God and by that same Spirit of God we now cry Abba, Father, Father.

This is how God glorifies himself, this is how God preserves his glory in our salvation. God has honored his righteousness and his justice by punishing sin in his son, God has honored his love by making a way for sinners to be saved from perishing, God has honored his wisdom by planning a salvation so glorious and so majestic in his eternal counsel, God has honored his mercy and grace, whereas if he did not make a way of salvation, there would exist no opportunity for us to see his mercy and his grace.

[23 : 14] Therefore, as many of the older theologians have argued, there is more glory revealed in saving sinners than in damning them. There is more glory of God revealed. So now because of God's saving work in Jesus, we see the excellency and we see the strength and we see the wonder of his mercy and his grace.

God is committed to glorify God and through Christ's atoning work and the Spirit's indwelling presence, he enables all those who trust in Jesus to live for his glory, to actually pursue destiny and to attain their highest end.

How do sinners glorify God? Through trusting and resting in Christ, our Savior and our Redeemer.

And just finally, I want to look at the last question. First question, what does it mean to glorify God? Second question, how can fallen sinners glorify God? Trusting and resting in Christ.

And then, final question, what are ways, practically speaking, that we as believers can glorify God? And we'll just go very quickly through this in the next two, three, four minutes.

[24 : 32] Pray for me, we'll get there. I'm on my third point, so we're doing good. Well, how can we glorify God? Well, firstly, we glorify God when we trust in Christ.

When we turn to Christ, when we confess Christ, our salvation, Paul teaches us in Ephesians chapter one, our salvation is to the praise of His glory and grace. So God is glorified in our salvation, in our confessing Christ.

Living apart from Christ is living short of the glory of God. Understand that. The appeal to you this morning, if you do not know the Lord and if you're outside of the Christian community, the appeal to you is that you can be brought in, you can be brought near, God can do for you what He's done for me, what He's done for us, not by my own works or own righteousness whatsoever, but by Christ alone, God can make it so that you glorify Him.

Because you're currently falling short of that. There's an inherent self-centeredness in living in rebellion to Christ. It is a life that seeks its own glory, seeks its own pleasure.

man's chief aim, chief end, is to glorify God, but those who live in sin and rebellion have a distorted aim. They live for self, and that is not the way the potter created the clay.

[26 : 00] It's not the intent. It's not creation design. It's ontologically, for those who prefer bigger words, it's ontologically difficult and wrong, for those who prefer smaller words.

It is, we've been created to pursue the glory of God. You're selling yourself short. You're living below the goal, the aim. You're chasing after the wind in the words of Solomon.

The psalmist keeps, or helps us address this when he writes, not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to your name be glory. To your name give glory. Paul writes, that one day every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God.

Bowing to Christ and confessing Christ is to the glory of God. So confess Christ, that is how we glorify him. Secondly, we're going very quickly through this, in growing in Christ, growing in Christ.

It is not a one-off, one-off act of confessing Christ, or one-off act of bowing the knee at one time in your life, but a continuous, consistent, and faithful, confessing, and bowing to him.

[27 : 13] In 2 Peter chapter 1, Peter helps us where he shows us how we grow in our faith by adding virtue upon virtue. Remember the passage in chapter 1? And then add to brotherly kindness, add, you know, goodness, and add all of these other wonderful graces that he speaks about, how the Christian grows.

And then at the end of 2 Peter chapter 3, he says, grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to the glory of God. Growing in Christ, growing as a believer, glorifies God.

Glorifies God. Stagnant Christian lives are not God glorifying. While the angels rejoice in heaven, that one sinner turned to God.

The God of heaven and earth is glorified when that one sinner gives him and herself the constant growth in godliness. Thirdly, in confessing Christ and growing in Christ and in all our practice, very general, in all our practice, the Christian life is lived before the face of God, right?

Coram Deo. Before the face of God we live our lives. And that's a beautiful way of understanding how we live out our life. We're not living it out just on occasion before God.

[28 : 29] We're living all of our life out whether we are in church, whether we're at home, whether we're at work, whether we're at with friends and socializing. All of life is lived out Coram Deo, before the face of God.

So everything counts. Everything counts. The Christian faith is not an occasional faith. The Christian faith is not a part-time religion. The Christian faith is a faith that touches on how we eat and how we drink, which is why Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, right?

So whether we eat or drink, and then he gives you a more general word, whatever. Do it all to the glory of God. Quickly, number four.

Impurity. Impurity we glorify God. Another aspect of our lives as well. All things are done before God. Things common. Things general. We must also acknowledge that things in private, discreet, and personal, even in that sphere of our lives, must also be done for the glory of God.

In other words, our purity, how we handle our bodies, must be for the glory of God. In this world, we have a great problem where people want full, complete, bodily autonomy.

[29 : 50] But the potter still has right over the clay. Friends, there's a way in which we handle our body. Our bodies care for our purity and express even our sexuality that must glorify God.

Listen to this, 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 19. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own.

You are not your own. You are not your own. For you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Glorify God in your body. Number five, in perseverance. 1 Peter chapter 4, verse 16. If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

If anyone suffers as a Christian, 1 Peter 4, 16. If anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. Suffering for the truth, for Christ, because you're a Christian, is another way in which we glorify God.

[30 : 59] The greatest suffering ever experienced, namely by the Lord Jesus Christ, led to the greatest reflecting of God's glory ever witnessed. Facing the imminent reality of the crucifixion, of suffering on the cross, we read in John 12, Jesus' words.

Now is my soul troubled. What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour, but for this purpose I've come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.

Then a voice came from heaven, I've glorified it, and I will glorify it again. Did you see how Jesus' suffering was a way in which the Father was glorified? God was glorified. Jesus showed us that suffering for God's sake brings glory to God.

Number six in our witness, 1 Peter chapter 2, 12, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

There's a way in which our witness, the way we live our lives before people, especially before those who are not Christians and those who do not believe in Christ and confess Him, there's a way in which we live our lives that would draw them out to give glory to God.

[32 : 15] There's a connection between our witness and God being glorified that we need to be mindful of. And then second last point, in true worship, in true worship.

There's an interesting account in the book of Leviticus where two men attempted to offer worship to God and it was, maybe you're aware of it, maybe you've read it, you know, it was false worship that they offered and God was not pleased.

We read about this in Leviticus chapter 10 verse 1, listen carefully. Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and unoffered, unauthorized fire, strange fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them.

And fire came down from before the Lord and consumed them and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, this is what the Lord has said, among those who are near me, I will be sanctified and before all the people I will be glorified.

And Aaron held his peace. They were offering strange worship, worship that God did not authorize, worship that God did not command, a way of seeking to honor God that was not according to God's revealed law and will.

[33 : 32] And when we worship God according, as we do in our service on a Sunday, when we worship God in singing, in reading the scriptures, in confessing our sins, in listening to the preaching, we are glorifying God right now through the element of listening to the preaching of God's word, through the element of listening, of singing along songs.

These are explicit scripture of words from God that he has commanded us to do. And so glorifying God can seem like this, you know, oh, I have to prepare myself for this, but you've been glorifying God already from the moment you came in here, when you sang, when you prayed, as you're listening, when you partake, you're glorifying God.

Finally, in our integrity, Joshua 7 verse 19, then Joshua said to Achan, my son, give glory to God, give glory to the Lord of, the Lord God of Israel, and give praise to him, and tell me now what you have done, do not hide it from me.

Did you see the parallel there? Do you see the connection between those verses? Do not hide. Do not hide what you have done. Do not conceal the truth. Do not be pretentious, but give glory to God.

The opposite of being pretentious and hiding things, concealing the truth, the positive opposite is to glorify God. Live in integrity.

[34 : 55] And so as we conclude, what I love about the way the Shorter Catechism answers this question, and we've seen now from the scriptures also, it not only says our chief end is to glorify God, but it also says to enjoy him forever.

And next time, I think there's going to be a next time this month, next time I want us to look at what does it mean to enjoy God. But as we conclude, glorifying God is an end to great joy.

To great joy. To glorify God is not a burdensome, tiresome exploit. To glorify God is a wonder, a joy, a privileged delight. Glorify God and enjoy him.

It takes into view the invitation of Jesus with which I conclude, come to me all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Let's pray.