

The Book of 2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 4:7

Last week I mentioned at the very start of the session that the word “glory” is used in many different ways in the scripture. I also said that I had detailed many of those definitions along with the corresponding verses, but I could not recall where I did that. Well, for those of you who are interested in seeing that list, it is in the 1 Corinthians study, session 12. In that session I give 27 different ways the word “glory” is used in the Bible, along with the verses that use it that way.

Session 32: The Excellency of the Power

Sometimes people misunderstand when we talk about this issue of being conformed to the image of God’s Son. When we talk about how the word is working in us, people may take that as us being prideful or setting ourselves up above others. If they are right, then we need to change that. But if we are not boasting of ourselves, but calling attention to the glory of God shining in us, that is how it is supposed to be. This is supposed to be made manifest, not hidden, as though no one should notice. That is the whole point; to put the life of Christ on display.

But we do not keep the knowledge of “the glory of God” to ourselves, as though we alone have this secret knowledge and no one else can have it. That was the whole idea behind Gnosticism; they claimed to possess a hidden knowledge no one else had. But for us, we are putting “the glory of God” on display, and for several reasons which I would like to discuss.

Firstly, we put our sonship lives on display so that God’s workmanship in us reveals His power to transform us, and His goodness is transforming us from what we were, to who we are in Christ. This brings God glory in the sense that as we are transformed by Him, we are bringing honor to God, we are exalting Him, and we are showing Him to be worthy of our praise and love.

Coming back to the issue at hand, sometimes, as we talk about sonship, edification, and sanctification, people may get the idea that we are bragging pridefully about ourselves or setting ourselves above others as though we are

somehow better than them. Firstly, we can never allow that to be the case: sonship is not an issue of pride. We are who we are by the grace of God, and there is nothing that we can attain to as sons and daughters which is not available to every saint.

Even so, this kind of misunderstanding is exactly what was happening to Paul. On the one hand, Paul was accused of being so unorthodox in his doctrine, yet at the same time, they accused him of being egotistical and self-promoting.

Their attitude is like this: “How dare Paul think his doctrine is better than someone else’s! Where does Paul get off talking about being changed from glory to glory, and then have the audacity to say that this can only happen by his doctrine! What gives Paul the right to say there is no other way to be truly edified? How dare Paul insinuate that he has something I don’t have. That looks very egotistical to me. Paul is just being prideful, and therefore, I reject him and his message.”

It is true that if we aren’t careful, our flesh will become prideful over godliness taking place in us. We can never allow ourselves to boast in ourselves, but we do (and must) boast in God the Father and the Lord Jesus for the glory that shines in us. If we grow in grace, if we mature in the faith, if we are being changed from glory to glory, then the credit goes to God, because while we may engage in the process willingly and eagerly, the actual spiritual work that gets done in us can only be done by God. Any transformation of our inner man takes place because of the work of God’s Spirit and God’s word.

When I say God alone gets the glory; that is not to say that God did the spiritual work in us without our cooperation, or against our will, or without our knowledge. No, we knew exactly what was going on, and we were cooperating with the process intelligently and on purpose. Are we somehow exalted because we took God’s offer of edification? No.

Do we praise a drowning man for clutching the life preserver that was thrown to him? No, we praise the rescuers. Do we applaud the starving man because he eats the food set before him? No, we applaud those who provided the food. In the same way, we glorify God for the spiritual things which conform us to Christ, not ourselves. We are the ones who need the life of Christ being lived in us.

Without God doing His part, no one gets saved no matter how much they believe, and no one gets edified no matter how much they read and study the Bible and pray. Without the work of God in our inner man, Christianity would be just like every other false religion in the world.

Think of how pagan religions work. Pagan religions mistakenly observe the effects of living in a fallen world as the displeasure of their god. They don't get rain when they need it, a tornado sweeps through and destroys property and lives, they lose a conflict against their enemy, a plague sweeps through causing sickness and death, a failed business venture – these are all interpreted to mean the gods are unhappy.

To escape these things, people engage in some elaborate ritual or ceremony, which usually involves lewdness (the very opposite of godliness). Think of the children of Israel at the golden calf, dancing naked, the Bible says: “to their shame.” Thank God that is not what has been given to us. Instead, we have the mystery of godliness, Christ living His life in us, changing us from glory to glory as we are conformed to His image.

When we glory in what is ours in Jesus Christ, and in the work that He does in us (for we are His workmanship), as we glory in how God is changing us by making godly creatures who can now think like He thinks, and do things His way, and labor with Him in what He is doing, we are not bragging on ourselves, we are boasting in God. And hopefully we are doing it in such a way as to reveal the glory of God and provoke others to want it too, which brings us right back to our topic. We glory in the work God is doing in us for these reasons:

- 1) To reveal the glory of God and exalt the Lord Jesus

The second reason God's wants the work He is doing in our inner man to be put on display is:

- 2) To demonstrate to us the power of His grace to change us and conform us to the image of Christ

God doesn't want us to live our lives guessing or hoping that we are growing spiritually, or that His will is being performed in us. Edification is observable so

that we can see the spiritual work being done in us. And that work is not seen by our opinion, but there are checkpoints in God's word by which we can measure ourselves and our progress. The experience of seeing the doctrine work in us gives us confidence for the future as we encounter new doctrine we need working in us.

There is a third reason God wants to put his workmanship in us on display:

3) To encourage other saints in two particular ways:

a. To continue in the glory of God

For those saints who are also involved in sonship, we are trying to challenge and encourage each other to continue in this process. We are not jealous over effectual working of the word in our fellow saints, but we rejoice over that which is happening in their inner man. Think about how you can encourage another saint in whom you can see the doctrine working.

b. To provoke to jealousy other saints to edification. We do so to show those who may not know "the glory of God." We want the glory of God to shine in our hearts so we can manifest it to all who see us, in hope that someone who does not know about it, will see it and want it for themselves. In a sense, we are "provoking them to jealousy."

Today, in this dispensation of grace, God is making known to us His glory through His Son, Jesus Christ, and at the same time, He is changing us from glory to glory as the knowledge of the glory of God shines in our hearts.

I want to say one more thing about the glory of God, and by this I don't mean to hurt anyone's feelings, but I want us to understand the truth of the matter. So here it is: technically, we cannot add to God's glory. There is nothing we can do by any means that will add to the glory God already possesses. We can do some things which reveal His glory, but that is a different thing and it is worth thinking about.

Even when we allow the life of Christ to be lived in us, even as we present our bodies a living sacrifice, even as we obey the doctrine, we do not add glory to

God. When we live the doctrine, we are pulling back the curtain to reveal a glory which God already possess. What we are doing is putting that glory on display.

We point to the glory God already has. The whole point of the Christian life is to be conformed to the image of God's Son. Who gets the glory for that? We don't, God does.

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The Most Important Decision