

God Glorified Through Human Dependence

1 Peter 4:11

Introduction: Glorifying God is at the very heart of biblical Christianity. In most orthodox catechisms it is the answer to the first question addressing what life is all about. For example, the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* begins with this question: “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.” So life, in its very essence, is about glorifying God. There is nothing more central to why we exist. Most Christians’ prayers include something about glorifying God in all they do and say. We realize that we are to live our lives to His glory. **1 Corinthians 10:31** says, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God.” We all know and understand that this is central to the Christian life.

So we understand from the Scriptures that Christians are to live for God’s glory in absolutely everything that they do. The reason this is so is because *God created and saved us for this very purpose*: namely, to bring glory to His name. Understanding this truth about why we exist is foundational and vital. The more I study the Scripture, the more I see that God is at the center of all that He does. He is central in creation. He is central in His providential control of the universe. And He is central in salvation. All of reality is about God and His glory. And, although this truth needs to be proclaimed, most Christians will acknowledge it. The bigger problem is not so much in the recognition of the truth but in its application. Unfortunately the concept of “glorifying God” is often left to just a superficial, theological talk. We lack a practical understanding of how this should influence our everyday lives. What does glorifying God look like? How do we accomplish it? What does one need to think, feel, believe, or do in order to glorify God?

Before we address these questions, there are a couple more basic questions that need to be addressed: (1) what is the glory of God, and (2) how is God glorified?

First, *what is the glory of God?* The glory of God can be defined as *His unique excellence*. It is the sum total of all of His perfections. His glory then is His love and mercy, His justice and truth, His immutability and infiniteness, His wisdom and power. These attributes or perfections are God’s glory. Where do I get this from? Well, the data is immense, but let me suggest one text. In **Exodus 33:22**, God tells Moses that His glory will pass by him. Then in **34:6-7** the Lord passes by and proclaims, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth, who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” I conclude then the God’s glory is the manifestation of who He is.

Second, *how is God glorified?* God is glorified then as He *displays His perfections*. He was glorified *in creation* by displaying His inscrutable wisdom and incredible power. He is glorified *in providence* by His sovereignty and love and wisdom in orchestrating the events of human history. He is glorified *in redemption* as shows His wisdom in satisfying His infinite wrath and justice in such a way that He is able to manifest His love and mercy and grace and forgiveness. So *God glorifies Himself* then by simply acting, *by putting Himself on display for all to look at and see His greatness*.

So back to our original question: *What does glorifying God look like? How do we accomplish it?* There are many answers to this question, but I would like to just focus on one that is addressed in our text, **1 Peter 4:11**. Let's turn there and read it together.

1 Peter 4:10-11 – “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

This passage is about spiritual giftedness and how to use those gifts to serve others and be channels of God's grace to others. If you are serving by speaking, then speak God's Words, not your own. If you are serving by your activity, then serve in God's strength, not your own. Why? The goal is clear: *so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ*. The goal is the glory of God. The means is speaking the Words of God and serving in the strength of God. I'd like to focus on the second part of the verse and really try to answer the question of how we can glorify God by serving in the strength of God. *What does it mean to serve in God's strength?*

So I'd like to unpack the phrase “if any man minister, *let him do it* as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ,” and look at how we can glorify God by serving Him in His strength. That's the heart of my message this evening.

It is the clear implication from this passage that there is a serving God which gives God the glory and there is a serving God which does not. The former is a serving which leans upon God for strength and the latter is not. We want to find how to do the former and avoid the latter.

What is this strength? We hear talk often about doing something in God's strength rather than doing it in our own strength. What does that mean? And how can we know if we are serving in God's strength.

2 Corinthians 12:9 is a helpful text which helps us to understand what this strength is. It reads, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my **strength** is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

This strength, then, is basically synonymous with God’s grace or God’s power or enablement. We are speaking then of the gracious enablement of God to obey and serve Him. This strength is the ability to do what God wants us to do.

The question naturally arises, if we are to glorify God, and if glorifying God requires that we live and serve in God’s grace and strength and enablement, then how to we partake of this?

Before we answer this question, there are *two foundational truths* that must be affirmed, one about us and the other about God. These can be seen in the following questions: Why do we need God’s strength in the first place? Don’t we as Christians have the ability to do everything that God wants us to do? The answer to that is a resounding “NO”! Even as Christians, who have the Holy Spirit residing within, we still do not have the ability to serve God in a way that brings Him glory.

Foundational Truth #1: Christians are utterly incapable of independently serving God.

Let me suggest a few texts that will bring us to that conclusion:

John 15:5 – “I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for *without me ye can do nothing.*”

This statement is just as true for the believer as it is for the unbeliever. The unbeliever is powerless to do good without being connected to and drawing from the Vine, and the believer as well has no strength that does not come from the Vine. All of our strength and ability comes from outside ourselves. That is where we must continually look for it. So believers can do nothing without drawing their strength from Christ.

Galatians 5:17 – “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that *ye cannot do the things that ye would.*”

Again, we see very clearly that the believer cannot Himself do what He should do because there is this internal conflict with the flesh. Left to himself, the Christian will sin. He himself is insufficient and unable to serve God in a way that glorifies God.

Foundational Truth #2: God is entirely capable and sufficient of providing for us all the grace and strength we need to effectively serve Him.

Let me suggest just a few texts from the Corinthian epistles that teach this point.

1 Corinthians 15:10 – “But *by the grace of God* I am what I am: and his grace which *was bestowed* upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet *not I*, but *the grace of God* which was with me.”

Paul gave God the full credit for everything good that he had accomplished. He said that every last bit of it was not because of me, but because of God and His grace.

2 Corinthians 3:5 – “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

Nothing that Paul and the apostles did that was of any value came from themselves, but it all came from God. The conversion and growth of the Corinthians was not an occasion for Paul to boast, because it was all of God.

2 Corinthians 9:8 – “And *God is able* to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.”

Though this verse deals specifically with financial giving, there is a general principle here that is clear. Our ability to serve God is a result of God’s ability and grace.

2 Corinthians 12:9 – “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

This is the passage of Paul’s thorn in the flesh. Paul was weak and unable to serve God in himself. But God assured Him that His grace would be sufficient, and that Paul’s very weakness would actually be used to exalt God’s power even more. Because of this, Paul could delight in weaknesses because Christ’s power would be more clearly seen and He would receive the glory.

So the two foundational truths are: (1) **Christians are utterly incapable of independently serving God**, and (2) **God is entirely capable and sufficient of providing for us all the grace and strength we need to effectively serve Him.**

Let’s stop and review what we have covered so far. Life is about glorifying God. But how is it that we can glorify God? We saw from our text that we can glorify God by serving Him. But that service must be a certain kind of service, that is, a service that is

accomplished in the strength of God rather than in our own strength. We sought to answer the question of how we do this by first affirming two foundational truths: (1) man is entirely unable in and of Himself to serve God in a way that glorifies God and (2) God has all the grace and strength necessary for us to serve Him.

This leads us then back to the question: *How can we partake of this grace and strength?* This really is at the heart of the entire issue. It does us no good to have good theology and a proper understanding of doctrinal truth if that does not translate into a changed life. Glorifying God does not happen simply by knowing certain things.

So how then does the Christian receive the grace and strength of God to serve God in a way that glorifies God? Well, the two foundational truths are certainly the starting point, but we must go further. Without affirming those, we will not know that we are even in need of grace and where to look.

Readily acknowledging that God can give or withhold His grace freely as it pleases Him, He has chosen certain means by which that grace is given. While there are more than just two, I would like to focus on the primary two means of God's grace.

GOD GIVES HIS GRACE AT THE THRONE OF GRACE.

The first primary means of grace is prayer.

Hebrews 4:16 – “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

The presence of God, the place where He dwells, is described as a place of grace. We are commanded to approach God in prayer for the very purpose of partaking of His mercy and grace. We have needs, and God has grace to meet those needs. At just the time we need it (which really is all the time, yet in different proportions), God's grace is there and available if we simply come and acknowledge our need and ask for it. And what we need to recognize is that it is available on the basis of the work of Christ. That is the significance of the phrase back in 1 Peter 4:11 “in order that God may be glorified *through Jesus Christ*.”

So God has chosen to glorify Himself as we realize our insufficiency and His sufficiency so that we come to Him and ask Him to supply the grace and strength we need to serve Him. This is how we serve God in the strength which He supplies—***a continual dependence upon God for the grace He gives through prayer***. God-glorifying people are God-dependent people and God-dependent people are praying people.

Illustration: Preaching at the nursing home.

Application: Do you want to glorify God with your life? How is your prayer life? Without a life of continual dependence on God through prayer to enable us to serve Him, God will not be properly glorified through our lives. A prayerless life is an independent life, which essentially says, “God, I don’t need you.” Certainly such a life will not bring glory to God. To glorify God properly, we must acknowledge to God in prayer our need of Him and His grace. This exalts Him.

GOD GIVES HIS GRACE THROUGH THE WORD OF GRACE.

The second primary means of grace is the Word of God.

Acts 20:32 – “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the *word of his grace*, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

While this isn’t a direct reference to the Bible, the concept equally applies that the message of God and His saving grace in Christ contained in the Scripture is a message that builds up and strengthens its hearers. But how exactly does the Scripture impart grace to us. Is it some kind of mystical process that takes place just simply by having a Bible and casually reading it?

2 Peter 1:2 – “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you *through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.*”

This text unfolds for us the specific relationship between God’s Word and God’s grace. God’s grace is poured out to us in abundance through the knowledge of God and Christ. That is, as we read about and meditate upon who God is and what He has done for us in Christ, God gives us grace to serve Him.

2 Peter 3:18 – “But grow in grace, and *in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.* To him *be* glory both now and for ever. Amen.”

This verse doesn’t make the connection quite as clear, but in light of the earlier verse, I would argue that the pursuit of grace and the pursuit of knowledge are not two separate pursuits. We grow in grace by gracing in knowing. We meditate on the person and work of Jesus Christ and God imparts to us grace and the enablement to serve Him.

So God has chosen to glorify Himself as we realize our insufficiency and His sufficiency so that we come to His to supply the grace and strength we need to serve Him. This is how we serve God in the strength which He supplies—***a continual dependence upon***

God for the grace He gives through the Word. God-glorifying people are God-dependent people and God-dependent people are Word-saturated people.

Application: So how is your study of the Scriptures? Are you taking time daily to seek God and the grace He gives through the Word? Do you want to glorify God with your life? You cannot do that apart from a continual seeking of God's grace by meditating on the Word of grace. To go through a day without setting your mind on God and His Word is to live independently of God.

So let's review a little. The goal of our lives is to bring glory to God. One of the ways that we can bring glory to God is by serving Him, not in our own strength, but in the strength which He supplies. We do this by first acknowledging our inability and secondly by affirming God's ability. We then manifest this God-dependence and receive His grace through prayer and the Word. Lives that glorify God are lives that are given to serving Him in His strength, received through the Word and prayer. So prayerlessness and Wordlessness mean gracelessness. We will lack the ability to serve God rightly and He will not receive the glory through our lives that He deserves.

I think oftentimes Christians will look at the busyness of their day and rationalize in their minds that they do not have enough time to seek God's grace through the Word and prayer. Let me show the foolishness of such a mindset with an illustration. This mentality, which pervades so much of professing Christendom, is comparable to a man who has an all-day trip to make by car that says, "I have such a long way to drive today that I don't think I will have time to stop at the gas station and fill up." Now, please excuse my comparing the grace of God with the fuel in a car, but I think you see the foolishness of such reasoning. A long trip necessitates more gas, not less; so a busy day is a day that requires more of God's grace, not less. Martin Luther realized this, which he demonstrated by saying once that he had so much to do that he would spend the first three hours of the day in prayer.

Let me close this discussion with illustration from Matthew's account of the feeding of the five thousand. It was getting late and the crowds were still following and listening to Jesus. The disciples suggested that they send them away to go get food for themselves. But Jesus said, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." The disciples were astonished with Jesus' command. They knew that they did not have sufficient means to meet the needs of the people. They were affirming the first foundational truth, but they had forgotten the second foundation truth, that God is sufficient.

So why did Jesus tell them to do something that they couldn't do? He commanded the disciples to do something that they could not do in order to teach them their inability and His ability—in order to magnify His greatness.

We daily face things that we cannot accomplish in our own strength, at least not in a way that glorifies God. We need to learn the lesson that the disciples had to learn. *We are unable, but God is able.* We need to live lives of continual God-dependence as we seek the grace and strength of God continually through prayer and the Word. In this God is glorified supremely.

Let me close with a few applications.

Application:

- 1) Have you been consciously seeking to live every day as a day for God and His glory? Is God at the center of all of the pursuits of your life, or are you? Is glorifying God your chief concern? When you wake up in the morning, are you reminded that the day is about God and His glory? When you eat your meals, when you exercise, when you work, when you fellowship, when you relax, when you sit down in front of the TV, is God the center of your life, or are you? If God and His glory is not central, you need to repent of it as sin and give God His rightful place as central and supreme.
- 2) Maybe you have been seeking to live a God glorifying life, but you are doing it in a way that glorifies you rather than God. You are relying on your own strength rather than God's strength. You live your life and serve with confidence, not in God, but in yourself. Your attitude is, "I can do this," rather than, "God can do this." You need to acknowledge your inability and utter dependence upon God for His grace and seek to live a life of continual God-dependence, realizing that the only service that truly magnifies God is the service that makes little of our ability and makes much of God's.

Conclusion:

Life is about glorifying God. One way we do that is through serving Him in His strength. We must acknowledge our weakness and His strength as the only way to accomplish His will and serve Him rightly. Then we must live lives of God-dependence, lives which are manifested through a continual seeking of God's grace through the Word and prayer. Let us live God-dependent, God-glorifying lives!