



Tim Pauley
PO Box 58403, Charleston, WV 25358
304.767.8430
tim.pauley@capitolcom.org

Sola Deo Gloria

Romans 11:36

Montani Semper Libera – “Mountaineers are Always Free”. This is the official motto of the great state of West Virginia, officially adopted in our state constitution in 1872. It reflects both the founding of our state and the character of her citizens.

Sola Deo Gloria – “Glory to God Alone” – is the motto of all those who seek to follow Jesus Christ. It reflects the very reason God brings sinful people into a right relationship with Him and the very purpose in life of those who trust in Him. As we consider great words of our faith, we should contemplate what it means for us to live and strive to bring glory to God alone.

At the time of the Reformation, believers seeking a more biblical approach to faith and life developed five Latin statements or mottos to describe their beliefs. “***Sola Scriptura***” or “***Scripture Alone***” declared that God’s word is the only authority for faith and practice. “***Sola Christus***” or “***Christ Alone***” proclaimed that our salvation from sin comes only through Christ and His work and that He is the only way of salvation. “***Sola Gratia***” or “***Grace Alone***” affirmed that salvation is only through the grace of God and not because we do anything to earn or deserve it. “***Sola Fide***” or “***Faith Alone***” asserted that being made right with God comes only through faith, not by any works we might do. These are capped off by the final motto, “***Sola Deo Gloria***” – “***Glory to God Alone***” – the belief that all things are for the Glory of God. This is most clearly stated by Paul in his letter to the believers in Rome:

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36

This is how Paul closes the doctrinal part of his letter to believers in Rome. He has shared clearly how all people, whether pagan, moral, or religious are sinners and stand condemned before a holy and righteous God. Yet He demonstrated His love in that while we sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). When we repent and put our faith in Him, we are no longer condemned, we are adopted into His family, we are given the Holy Spirit, and we have the assurance of all His wonderful promises (Romans 8). All of this was done to bring Him glory. All things, especially the plan and work of salvation are from God, through God, and to God, and are done to bring Him glory forever.

Paul repeats this thought in the closing of His letter:

...To the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen. Romans 16:27

In Ephesians Paul tells us that all that God has done for us and given us through Christ was done “***for the praise of His glory***” and “***for the praise of the glory of His grace***” (Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14).

Peter also wrote of how God is glorified:

...So that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:11

Jesus Christ is the Greatest Example of Both the Glory of God and Glorifying God

As we approach the Christmas season, we are reminded that Jesus Christ, as He took on human nature to live, suffer and die, and rise again for us is the greatest expression of God’s glory! John wrote:

...The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14).

The writer of Hebrews tells us that ***Christ is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of God’s nature*** (Hebrews 1:3).

It is the amazing truth of the Christmas message of the incarnation – of God the Son taking on human nature – that we see the greatest expression of God’s glory. We also know that Jesus was the greatest example of glorifying God. At the end of His ministry and His earthly life, Jesus could say to His Heavenly

Father, *"I have glorified Thee on the earth"* (John 17:14).

Two Aspects of Glorifying God

There are two aspects to consider when we contemplate what it means to glorify God. There is the glory that is intrinsic to God – that which is His very nature and character. God's glory is the expression or manifestation of His person and His presence. Several times we see the visible manifestation of His glory such as the burning bush (Exodus 3), Moses on Sinai (Exodus 19, 33), the tabernacle and the temple (Exodus 40:34, 2 Chronicles 5:14), and Jesus at the transfiguration (Matthew 17).

Then we have the call for all of God's creation to give glory to God. This does not mean we can add to or increase God's glory. It means we recognize and acknowledge His glory and seek to make it known to others. We are clearly commanded to seek to glorify God in all that we do.

For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Cor. 6:20

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Cor. 10:31

How Do We Glorify God?

The first item of the Westminster Catechism – the series of questions designed to teach biblical and gospel truth – is:

Question: What is the chief end of man?

Answer: The Chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Many years ago, the English pastor Thomas Watson wrote about this statement, encouraging us how we might go about living in order to truly glorify God.¹ He wrote that glorifying God consists of four things we should pursue: appreciation, adoration, affection, and submission.

APPRECIATION – As we look at the glories of creation we grow in our appreciation of the glory of God as creator of the universe and all that we see (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20). As we learn about God through our reading of the Bible and hearing the preaching of the Word, we should grow in our appreciation of all that God is – His nature, character, attributes, and above all His plan of salvation for sinful people.

ADORATION – As we grow in our appreciation of God, we will come to adore and worship Him. We certainly worship Him as we gather with fellow believers in our churches, but we should seek to express our adoration and worship every day if we are to glorify God as we should.

AFFECTION – If we are to glory God in our lives, we must love Him above all things. To glorify God is to love Him, and we glorify Him most when we love Him more than anything else in life.

SUBMISSION – We glorify God when we dedicate and lives to Him and stand ready to serve Him. We glorify Him not only through our adoration and worship, but by our obedience to His will and His word.

Watson goes on to share 17 practical ways we can glorify God in our lives. Here are just few.

We glorify God when we aim purely at His glory.

We glorify God by genuine confession of our sin.

We glorify God by believing Him and His promises.

We glorify Him by standing up for His truth.

We glorify God by suffering whenever we see His glory suffer.

We glorify God by walking cheerfully (joyfully) in our lives.

We glorify God by praising and worshipping Him.

We glorify Him by living holy lives.

Watson sums up what it means to glorify God:

The glory we give God is nothing else but our lifting up His name in the world, and magnifying Him in the eyes of others.

We should seek to better know God's glory as we join with Moses in praying, "Lord, show me your glory". We should seek to glorify Him – making His glory known in our lives.

Johann Sebastian Bach added the letters SDG, representing Sola Deo Gloria – "To the Glory of God Alone", at the end of each of his compositions. Let us strive to "sign" each action and aspect of our lives with that same thought as we seek to glorify God in everything we say and do.

¹Watson, Thomas. *A Body of Divinity – Contained in Sermons on the Westminster Assembly's Catechism.*

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