

FOR THE GLORY OF GOD ALONE (*SOLI DEO GLORIA*) 1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

How many of you have ever visited the Vatican and St. Peter's Cathedral in the city of Rome? An amazing place! Being in that amazing place enabled me to experience the sheer age of Christianity like never before. It's important to remember that the Christian faith didn't spring up a few years ago. It didn't somehow originate in the United States of America. Every believer alive today and every church functioning today is because the Christian faith was passed down faithfully from one generation to the next, year after year, decade after decade, century after century over 2,000 years.

Fortunately, you don't need to have any knowledge of Christianity's history to be a follower of Jesus. Nevertheless, it's helpful to know a few key historical dates. For example, Jesus died, rose again and ascended back to Heaven somewhere between probably 26-30 AD depending on how or when you date His birth in Bethlehem. Do you know what's significant about 313 AD? That's the year that Constantine, a Roman Emperor who had converted to Christianity, mandated religious tolerance for Christians throughout the Roman Empire in what's called the Edict of Milan. It ended the terrible persecution of Christians for almost 300 years and allowed Christianity to rise in power and influence throughout Europe. How about 1054 AD? That's the year there was a major division within Christianity. Over a variety of theological issues, the Orthodox Christian community emerged as a group distinct from the Catholic tradition headquartered in Rome. This includes groups like the Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches. Orthodox Christians are mostly found in Russia and Eastern Europe.

One more key date. Do you know what's significant about October 31, 1517? It's believed on that date – 500 years ago this month – Martin Luther, a Roman Catholic monk, nailed 95 theological complaints – or written theses - against the Catholic Church to the door of the cathedral in Wittenberg, Germany and launched the Protestant Reformation. It was a momentous spiritual revolution whose consequences we still live with today. The Reformation divided Christians in the western part of Europe and transformed millions of people's understanding of their relationship with God. Now around the world, Christians are roughly divided up in these percentages: Catholic – 50%; Protestant – 37%, Orthodox and Other – 13%. But here in America, people who identify as Christians are roughly divided up in this way: Protestant – 65%, Catholic – 30%, Orthodox and Other – 5%. As Baptist Christians, we are spiritual descendants of what happened 500 years ago this very month. So, also, are Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, and many other groups. I mean many, many other groups! 2010 statistics claim there are about 38,000 different Protestant groups or denominations around the world and some 4 million Protestant churches – some of whom don't even belong to any denomination. They're completely independent.

One result of the Reformation was the emergence of five core convictions among Protestant believers called the five *solas*. We're going to consider each of these *solas* over the next five Sundays. Each *sola* is a Latin phrase that emphasized a key distinction between the early Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church. And right here I want to say something important. This message series is not about bashing Roman Catholics! There have been many changes and reforms within the Roman

Catholic Church since 1517. My personal conviction is that the Roman Catholic tradition is an authentic expression of the Christian faith. I've known Catholics who I believe were born again followers of Jesus while I've also known some Baptists I doubt ever had a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. On the one hand, I could never become Roman Catholic – just too many theological differences. On the other hand, I recognize that when it comes to holding on to essential truths such as the Bible being God's Word, understanding God as a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the absolute necessity of a crucified and risen Jesus for my salvation, I often find more agreement with Roman Catholics than I do with many theologically liberal Protestants.

The word *sola* is the Latin word for “only” or “alone” and was used in relation to five key teachings that defined Protestants. They're still relevant today, because we're still called to focus on Scripture, receive salvation by grace through faith, magnify Christ, and live for God's glory. Today, I want you to think with me about *soli Deo gloria* – for the glory of God alone. If all glory belongs to God, none of it belongs to us. It's not *soli meo gloria*; it's *soli Deo gloria*. This shouldn't be some kind of abstract belief we only affirm at church. This is a foundational truth of our faith. This defines how we live. The early Reformers emphasized the glory of God as the goal of life. I doubt many Roman Catholics would object to that truth today, but back in 1517, the posture of the Church made it seem like the goal of life was all about pleasing church leaders, keeping a list of rules, or guarding your own interests in life. It was important to reaffirm *soli Deo gloria!* For the glory of God alone! Let's try and answer two questions. Here's the first one...

WHAT IS THE GLORY OF GOD?

First of all, the glory of God is the sum of all God is. The basic meaning of the word “glory” is to the idea of weight or substance. Yes, if you're carrying around a few extra pounds today, it could be said that you have a bit more “glory” than others! Glory is whatever makes someone or something praiseworthy. The glory of a flower is its beauty. The glory of a strong man is his strength. The word refers many times to a person who's impressive or worthy of respect. Sometimes we refer to a person as having “gravitas.” There's just something influential or impressive about him or her. When he speaks, you listen. When she enters a room, you take notice. God's glory is whatever makes Him impressive to you and me. That's the meaning behind these Bible verses, “Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.... The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory.” (Ps 24:8-10 NIV)

God's glory is revealed in His power. How so? Creation and the natural world reveal God's glory. The Bible says, “The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship.” (Ps 19:1 NLT) You might get thrilled by a majestic mountain view and someone else by the beauty of the ocean. Soon we'll be enjoying incredible fall colors. All of that points to a great God of glory behind everything in this awesome universe. The unspoken but very real message is that God exists, God is powerful beyond our imaginations, and He invites you and me to delight in Him – not just His handiwork. God's power can also be seen in His mighty actions down through history. The Bible is full of those stories. “Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his

righteousness endures forever.... Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Ps 111:3; Ex 15:11 NIV)

God's glory is experienced in His presence. In the Old Testament, God sometimes revealed Himself in a physical way. This was referred to as the glory of God. Often it looked and sounded like an incredible thunderstorm – a thick cloud, flashes of lightning, and great booms of thunder. We see this most often as it related to the Jewish place of worship: the Tabernacle and later the Temple in Jerusalem. We read in the Bible, "When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD.... The glory of the LORD filled his temple." (1 Kgs 8:10-11 NIV) God desired to dwell among His people and to have them experience His reality and splendor. The Bible says that Heaven – our future and eternal destination – will offer the actual presence of God in some kind of observable, physical way. "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." (Rev. 21:23 NIV) Heaven will be illuminated by and filled with God's glory!

But God is more than His power or His presence. God's glory is seen in His character, also. He is the essence, the definition, and the greatest expression of love, grace, holiness, faithfulness, righteousness, and truth. The Bible records an amazing encounter between Moses and God. "Then Moses said, 'Now show me your glory.' And the LORD said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence.'" (Ex. 33:18-19 NIV) Instead of all kinds of thunder, lightning, and special effects that would have blown Moses' mind, God revealed His character to Moses. "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you." In other words, the most glorious thing about God is not his power, majesty, or strength. The most glorious thing about God is how good, kind, loving, merciful, and compassionate He is. God's character: that was - and still is - God's glory.

What else can we say about the glory of God? Clearly, the glory of God is supremely manifested in Jesus. The Bible says of Jesus, "So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unending love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son." (John 1:14 NLT) Bringing glory to God was the life purpose of Jesus. The night before Jesus died on the cross, He prayed to God, "Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son so he can give glory back to you." (John 17:1 NLT) Strange as it may sound at first, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is perhaps the greatest display of God's glory ever. In order for God's plan of salvation to be fulfilled, Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice. He died and rose again in victory over sin and death. He set you and me free from slavery of sin, so that you might enjoy eternal life with God now and forever.

There's something else we must say about the glory of God. God's glory must never be diminished. The Bible says, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to anyone else, nor share my praise with carved idols." (Is 42:8 NLT) God will always protect and preserve His own glory. I realize that might sound a little weird at first because it makes God sound self-centered and self-absorbed. Generally, we don't like self-centered people and the Bible certainly tells us not to be self-centered. Pastor and

author, John Piper, gives a helpful explanation: “God is the one Being in all the universe for whom seeking His own praise is the ultimately loving act. For Him, self-exaltation is the highest virtue. When He does all things ‘for the praise of His glory,’ He preserves for us and offers to us the only thing in all the world that can satisfy our longings.” What’s wrong for us – seeking our own glory – is completely right for God.

Glory is usually associated with God. But human beings can have moments of what can be called glory, too. When David Gibson was a senior in high school, he was voted co-captain and most improved player on his basketball team. At the annual sports assembly he was called forward in front of the entire student body and presented with two trophies, one for each award. It was a day of great pride for David – great personal glory - and he’s kept those two tiny trophies for over 30 years. A few years ago, he drove back to his hometown for a high school reunion. He arrived early, so he walked through his old high school to see what it looked like after three decades. He found the lobby where the sports awards were displayed and looked for copies of the two awards given to him. He found both of them. But he found that in both cases, the name of one of his teammates had been substituted where his name belonged. Now, David is certain that he won the awards. He remembers receiving them. He still has the two trophies at home. But his name wasn’t on those trophies where it belonged.

That’s the way it is with human glory: it fades, it gets forgotten, or it even gets assigned to someone else by mistake. Not so with God’s glory. It’s eternal. It’s forever. It will never fade or be forgotten. God won’t allow it be diminished. It will never be mistakenly assigned to some other god. God and His glory is all that matters. It’s the sum total of who He is. Now, here’s a different but related question.

HOW CAN YOU GIVE GLORY TO GOD?

That’s kind of an odd question, isn’t it? God already possesses glory. In fact, He already has all the glory there is out there to have. How can you give God something He already has? And yet many times in the Bible you’re encouraged to give glory to God or it’s assumed that’s something you can do. Our primary text for today says, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” (1 Cor. 10:31 NIV) There, the Christian leader, Paul, was writing to the Christians in the Greek city of Corinth. They were having a big debate over whether it was OK to eat meat offered as a sacrificial act of worship to one of the pagan Greek gods. How do you do that - eat and drink to the glory of God?

Paul goes on to give them some specific guidelines, but what I want you to observe today are some of the important assumptions buried in that verse. You have the ability to glorify God. You can give glory to God or bring glory to God. You can somehow enter into and experience God’s glory. It’s both a clear command and a joyful task. Everything and anything you do in life can be a way to give glory to God. Therefore, there’s really no division between the secular and the spiritual in your life or mine. “Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” It’s possible to make every act of your life contribute towards the glory of God - even eating and drinking. Every act of life is or

can be just as sacred as prayer, baptism, or the Lord's Supper. So what does that mean? When you give glory to God you don't make some kind of addition to God or to His glory. God lacks nothing and He certainly doesn't lack glory. You can't somehow make Him more glorious than He already is. Instead, it means that you value His glory above all things. It means God has given you the ability to acknowledge, reveal, experience, and demonstrate His glory to the world.

You and I can never manufacture glory on our own. But we can reflect glory. Glory is a by-product of knowing God. The moon doesn't provide its own glow. Instead, it reflects the light of the sun. The scientific term is albedo. It's a measurement of how much sunlight a celestial body reflects. The planet Venus, for example, has the highest albedo at 65%. In other words, 65% of the light that hits Venus is reflected. Depending on where it's at in its orbit, the almost-a-planet Pluto has an albedo ranging from 49 to 66%. Our moon has an albedo of just 7%. Only 7% of the sun's light is reflected by the moon, but it can light your steps on a cloudless night. In a similar sense, you and I have a spiritual albedo. The goal? 100% reflectivity! You can't produce spiritual light. You can only reflect it. We're designed to be glory reflectors, not glory manufacturers. "So all of us... can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord... makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image." (2 Cor. 3:18 NLT)

Here's how you and I can give God glory or bring glory to God in a personal, individual way. You reveal His glory through trust and obedience. Trust is how you begin a relationship with God and also how you sustain it. The Bible says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23 NIV) Sin cuts us off from God, and it makes us want to accumulate glory for ourselves. You begin to give God glory by acknowledging that you can't save yourself and putting your complete trust in Jesus and what He did for you at the cross and the empty tomb. That takes trust. That demands faith. Trust leads right into obeying God. That's clearly another way you can glorify God. You can submit to God's will in all things and be willing to suffer for Him. You can be content with what God has given you and not worry, knowing God will take care of you. You can rely on God for strength instead of relying on yourself. You're called to be selfless and humble. You're called to show love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in your life. None of these things is easy. None come naturally to any of us. But by trusting in Jesus, the transformation of your life is possible. Trust and obedience.

Then, you acknowledge His glory through gratitude and praise. The Bible repeatedly invites you to glorify God by entering into worship. "Give to the LORD the glory he deserves! Bring your offering and come into his presence. Worship the LORD in all his holy splendor." (1 Chr. 16:28-29 NLT) Sure, you can and should do that here on Sunday mornings in the worship service. But don't stop there! Discover the great joy of consciously praising and thanking God for who He is and all that He's done every day and throughout the day be it in your home, your place of work, driving around in your car, doing routine chores, or hiking in the park. Whenever you lift your heart to express thanks to God, you give Him glory. God alone is worthy of your praise, your honor, and your worship. When you give that to God, you glorify Him. Glorifying God is agreeing

with everything He says about Himself. It's acknowledging His excellence and consciously thanking Him for it. Gratitude and praise.

Finally, you demonstrate His glory through ministry and service. Here's what Jesus said, "In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.... When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (Mt. 5:16; Jo. 15:8 NLT) What are you doing today simply because you love Jesus? What will you do later this week simply because you love Jesus? This is the glorious possibility that's now set before you and me. "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10:31 NIV) This isn't about some grandiose act or spectacular achievement. We confuse glorious and glamorous, don't we? This isn't an invitation to do something glamorous or sensational. It's a simple invitation to live a glorious life, and that's the greatest invitation you and I can ever receive. When you pray to Jesus for someone in need, you glorify God. When you have a faith conversation with someone and nudge him or her just a step closer to trusting in Jesus, you glorify God. When you show compassion to someone in Jesus' Name, you glorify God. When you do anything around this building simply because you love Jesus, you glorify God. When you teach a class or help to disciple someone else because you love Jesus, you glorify God. When you serve a needy individual or group out in our community in some tangible way because you love Jesus – providing food or clothing, tutoring a child, or even giving someone a cup of cold water in Jesus' Name - you glorify God. Ministry and service.

Nick Vujcic, a 33 year old Australian man, was born without limbs. Vujcic's parents, devout Christians who planted a church in Australia a year before Nick was born, found it hard to understand how God could use their son's loss for good. But God has done just that. Reading in Sunday School about being made in the image of God seemed like a cruel joke to Nick. He seesawed between despair and begging God to grow arms and legs for him. He contemplated suicide the year he turned 8. When he was 15, though, one story in the Bible answered one of his toughest questions. He said, "When I read the story of the blind man, Jesus said he was born so that God could be glorified in and revealed through him. That gave me peace. I said, 'Lord, here I am. Use me. Mold me. Make me the man you want me to be.'"

Nick Vujcic learned to write using the two toes on a partial foot that protrudes from his body. He also learned how to throw tennis balls, answer the phone, walk, and swim. He invented new ways to shave and brush his own teeth. He even earned double degrees in accounting and financial planning by age 21. He has since become a motivational speaker to Christian congregations in over 12 countries, and he has ministered to over two million people face to face. He also oversees Life Without Limbs, an organization for the physically disabled. His first book was published a few years ago. Nick Vujcic has found many incredible ways to bring glory to God despite the many things he can't do. So can you. God has a place of ministry and service He wants you to fulfill. And when you do, it will bring glory to Him and joy to you. Soli Deo gloria. Because of God's great love and grace – and despite what comes our way in life - live every day for the glory of God alone.