

GALATIANS 1:11-24

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² **And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.** ²³ **They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."** ²⁴ **And they glorified God because of me.**

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

To bring glory to God—What Christian wouldn't want to do that?

So we look at our lives and see where we could do better. God is not given glory in our sin, so we'll clean that up.

Pride, that's a sin. So we'll consider how we've built ourselves up as being something we're not, how we put on a false face so no one can see any weakness in us, how we've even torn others down to make ourselves look bigger, and we'll stop that, so that our lives can bring glory to God.

Envy, that's a sin. We look to what others are given that we are not, we question how they can be more deserving than we, as if God hands out gifts according to who's deserving instead of according to his own good pleasure, and we try, instead, to be thankful for the gifts our Lord bestows upon us, we turn away from our envy, so that our lives glorify God.

Gluttony is a sin. So we look at where we've mistreated the Lord's gifts of food and wine, used them not as good gifts, but purely for our enjoyment, or for a crutch, and we'll cut that out, so that our lives can bring glory to God.

Lust is a sin. So we'll consider the passions of our hearts, our desire to have things apart from our Lord's gift of the union of husband and wife, and we'll cut that out, so that our lives can bring glory to God.

Anger is a sin. Anger at those who have wronged us, at those who think they're better than we are, wrath at a world not practicing justice. We'll turn from our anger and instead commend our lives and our world to the Lord who alone is judge, so that our lives can bring glory to God.

Greed is a sin. So we'll consider our desire for always more—more money, more square footage, more time to play, more anything that we happen to be looking at—for always more than what the Lord provides, and we'll knock that out, and be content with what we have, so that our lives can bring glory to God.

Sloth, that's a sin. *Sloth* and *Despair*, as we refuse to look at God's gifts, enmeshing ourselves in how bad everything can be, how empty tomorrow looks, how things always seem to go wrong in this sinful world, and we sit in laziness, for instead of looking at our lives with eyes of hope, we despair for things not working out as we would demand. We'll stop that, too, and start looking at our lives with eyes of thankfulness, so that our lives can bring glory to God.

In the history of the church this has sometimes been referred to as the seven deadly sins. They are all in the Bible, of course, though not listed in one place like that simple list of seven. But if we can be done with the sins, we can finally live a life of improvement and bring glory to our God.

To which, Paul would say,

No. Not so fast. You want to bring glory to God? You think you can do it by living a Christian life, or a spiritual life, or any other kind of pious sounding life you can concoct? No so fast. There will be glory in that, but it won't be glory to God. Angels will be rejoicing in your effort, but it won't be the holy angels.

Paul, when he was still known as Saul, was a Pharisee. A world renowned Pharisee, and this Saul could teach anyone how to improve their life according to the Law. And bring glory to God by keeping the Law.

But that day on the road to Damascus, Saul's whole façade of Law-righteousness was torn down like a cheap cardboard house. Acts 9:1:

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Saul *had* to be persecuting these Christians. These Christians wouldn't try to make themselves righteous before God by following the Law. They wouldn't listen to his teaching about how to improve their spiritual life, about how to prove their godly purpose in life, about how to glorify God with the way they lived.

So he breathed threats and murder against the Christians. It was for their own good, according to Saul's way of judging lives by the Law. These Christians needed to be made to glorify God by following the Law.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me,
said the Lord Jesus from Heaven. We notice that the Lord says that for Saul to persecute Christians is actually for Saul to persecute *the Lord*.

You helped stone to death my servant Stephen for preaching the Gospel,
The Lord is saying,
but your attack, Saul, was against me.

You've chased down Christians, imprisoned them, confiscated homes and businesses, killed them, but your attack, Saul, is against me.

You've taught Christian families to live pious lives, to improve their piety in order to glorify God, but your teaching of works-righteousness, Saul, is an attack against me as you tear down my teaching of grace.

Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me,
said the Lord Jesus from Heaven.

But all Saul was doing was trying to glorify God by living a life under the holy Law and coercing others to live by the Law also.

So there will be a reversal. Saul's Law-righteousness is not glory to the Lord; it's rubbish. God will not be glorified by how Saul lives his life, by any work Saul does; so there will be a reversal.

Saul will now be known to the Church as Paul. Saul's life under the Law will be left where it belongs—with the demons. Now known as Paul, he has a new life—life born of the promise of Paul's Baptism, life bestowed by the Gospel, the life of a heart cleansed by God and now, finally, at peace.

Paul's new life will be marked not by Paul telling people how they must improve themselves under the Law, but by Paul standing in front of Christians and confessing to them that he is the one who helped murder innocent Stephen, who chased down Christian families, confiscating their homes and businesses and putting them in chains, he is the one who at every point tried to put people under the Law, tried to live by it himself, and all the while, did it in order to bring glory to God.

And he is the one who never did bring glory to God, for no sinner can bring glory to God by trying to act like he's not a sinner.

Now, standing in front of Christians, Paul proclaims how the Lord Jesus came to him, convicted him of his sin, spoke his Gospel to him, forgiving his sins, including his past persecution of innocent Christians.

Now, by Jesus' grace, Paul is able to tell Christians that he, Paul, *though least of the Apostles, though a man deserving no gift at all from God for the murder and havoc brought upon the Lord's people, though a man who tried to live according to his own worthiness, he, Paul, now stands in front of Christians with nothing to portray to them but Christ crucified. And I now live only by his grace alone, but his grace is sufficient.*

For I would have you know, brothers,
said Paul,

that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But ... he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

[Galatians 1:16]

In that, God is glorified. Galatians 1:24:

I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

said Paul,

They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they *glorified God* because of me.

What does it mean to bring glory to God in our lives?

Glory to God is not in a Pharisee or, for that matter, in you or me coercing anyone to follow Christian principles of how to live, or any other portrayal of the Law.

Glory to God is not Saul living a pious life with no visible sins, nor you or me outwardly ridding our lives of sin. We are sinners, and for a sinner to rid his life of sin is a demonic lie.

Glory to God is Paul rescued from his life of Law, freed from his guilt, forgiven of his sin. True glory to God is when the people Paul's repentance and his joy in the forgiveness of sins, and they then glorify God because of Paul living in grace.

God's glory is found in us, too. In our repentance and forgiveness, God is glorified.

In our being turned away from our own righteousness and to his gift of righteousness, to his grace, God has no higher glory than this.

In us being turned away from our despair and hopelessness, and finding our joy in our Lord's Gospel and his promise of the resurrection of our bodies, in this, God is glorified.

In sinners such as Paul, and such as those Galatians, and such as you and me and our families being gathered to the Name of Jesus to receive his Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins, in this, God is glorified.

In Christians rejoicing in forgiving one another, in praying for each other, in delighting in the unity we have in our Lord Jesus, in this, God is glorified.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.