

# Soli Deo Gloria

By Todd Pruitt

Is there a purpose for which we can live that is truly meaningful? Has God given us a reason for being? In recent years we have heard a lot about purpose. That is a good thing so long as we understand THE great purpose of life and Who it is that has given to us that purpose. The fact that our purpose comes from outside of us is essential for our understanding. As long as we think that our purpose comes from us it will tend to exalt us. And this is the trap in which humanity seems constantly to be ensnared. Left to ourselves we will always seek ascendancy. Apart from the humiliating grace of God we will always seek to be made much of. Into this dilemma the Westminster divines spoke well when they wrote in their *Shorter Catechism*:

Q: What is the chief end of man?

A: Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.

There is freedom in those words; freedom from the tyranny of self. The Reformers who gave us the other "Solos" we have covered in this series of articles summed up all of their theology and all of their living with this one final triumphant cry: *Soli Deo Gloria* which literally means "To God alone be glory". The Psalmist cries, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory" (115:1). God's glory, not ours, is our chief aim, our highest purpose in life.

*Sola Scriptura, Sola Gratia, Sola Fide, and Solus Christus* are all trumpeted in Romans chapters one through eleven. That lengthy text is the Bible's most complete theology of sin and salvation: the human condition (1:18-3:20), justification by faith alone in Christ alone (3:21-8:27), as brought about and completed by God's initiating grace alone (8:28-11:32). After this theologically thick treatise on the nature of salvation it is as if Paul cannot contain himself and he literally breaks into song. Romans 11:33-35 is a doxology (literally "a word of glory"):

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor? Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?' *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever. Amen.*"

Fifteen hundred years after those words were written, John Knox, Jan Huss, Martin Luther, and John Calvin helped ignite the Protestant Reformation. But why did the church need reforming? Because God was being robbed of His glory by the very people and the very body that should have been trumpeting it. *Soli Deo Gloria* became the chief battle cry.

The paradox of *Soli Deo Gloria* is that what satisfies me most is found in making much of God. If God is our highest good then it would be evil for God to make us the center of attention. If God is our highest good then God does us immeasurable good to direct us to HIS glory. Jonathan Edwards wrote, "True saints have their minds, in the first place, inexpressibly pleased and delighted with...the things of God. But the dependence of the affections of hypocrites is in a contrary order: they first rejoice...that

they are made so much of by God; and then on that ground, he seems in a sort, lovely to them.” We distort the nature of God and the true source of joy when we imagine that God is supremely interested in our own esteem. But our joy in God depends on esteeming God. This is the same paradox behind Jesus’ promise that whoever loses his life for Christ will find it. Whatever we seek, if it is outside the bounds of directing glory to God alone, will ultimately leave us empty. On the other hand, loss and even suffering, when used by God for His glory can lead us, in the end, to rejoice.

Tragically though, the church often succumbs to the temptation to make man the center of all things. Observe the way the church is marketed today and ask, “Who is at the center?” Is the greatest concern in our worship a style of music offered to please a particular market niche? Are themes of sacrifice and repentance conspicuously absent in our preaching so that we will not offend? Is our preaching the faithful declaration of God’s Word or has it degenerated to seminars on skills for successful living? As the church, we are the earthly stewards of God’s glory and if His own people will not give Him the glory due His name then God will call it forth from the rocks and the hills.

*Soli Deo Gloria* is not an activity confined to the borders of the church. It is to be the theme of our lives. Johann Sebastian Bach signed all his musical compositions, both secular and sacred with the monogram “S.D.G.” He even had it engraved into the organ at Leipzig where he composed many of his scores. Are we aware that all of our working, playing, creating, loving, eating, conversing, and even sleeping should be done for the glory of God? Let us engrave “S.D.G.” into the depths of our hearts so that whatever we do whether in word or deed the cry will go out from our lives in undiluted refrain: *Soli Deo Gloria!*