**Pursuing the Glory**

 **Romans 3:23** – All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. **Rom. 2:7** – To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. NIV

I’ve discovered there are several ways Ro. 3:23 can be interpreted. Probably most just emphasize that it means we’ve all failed to obey God, and we’ve done wrong things, which is true enough. But it can also be translated as saying we’ve all missed the mark and we’re deficient of God’s glory, destitute, or bankrupt of His glory, we miss the target and fall short of His glory, so that we don’t attain it or measure up to it, we’re not fulfilling it and therefore, not fully realizing the purpose for which we were made.

I love philosophy and have been taking an online lecture series from Hillsdale College. The professor says Aristotle seems to have thought “the good” was sort of the goal, the ultimate aim of something. So a good knife would be one that really is sharp and fits your hand well, so that you can really cut well with it. Plato’s idea of the forms is interesting too. There is a form of knife or tree or triangle, or human. The ideal, the goal or end for which each is made. Nothing here on earth, according to Plato and Aristotle, but also Paul, is fully realized. Even our bodies, amazing as they are, are defective in various ways. We’re defective physically.

We’re also defective mentally. Our minds are not used as well as they should be, for the purposes for which they should be. We also have mental illnesses and lapses, and we can’t remember, or we damage our minds/brains with alcohol, or lack of study and discipline.

Then there is the moral dimension. I thought it was so interesting that Aristotle saw virtues as sort of the ultimate aim or purpose for which we’re made. So becoming virtuous would be training or conforming yourself more and more to the purpose or goal for which God made you. Being virtuous isn’t just a matter of rules we have to obey so we’re not thought of as a bad person or so God won’t punish us or something. There’s more to it than that. It’s actually more about not being fully realized, being fully what you were meant to be.

Anyone who isn’t “realized” in the sense of being and doing all they were really meant to be and do won’t be fully happy either, because there is this purpose we were made for sort of built into us, programmed into us by God. The more we conform to that design, the happier we’ll actually be. If we waste that or don’t even know about it, or we do things against the blueprint, so to speak, it results in harm to us that can be manifested in many ways. We could be harmed physically, but also mentally, emotionally, or spiritually. We might not even know what we’re doing wrong, but we won’t be fully content or fully “realized.”

It seems to me sex is a great example for us. Secular people think Christian morality is old-fashioned and prudish, as if God were a Cosmic kill-joy who just doesn’t want us to have any pleasure. But actually, He designed our sexuality to be maximally pleasurable. People have the notion that the devil is the sexy one, but he’s a spirit who never has had sex nor can he! Sex was altogether God’s idea. But it has a divine purpose or glory. It’s supposed to be the expression of love between a man and woman, only enjoyed when there is a commitment to one another and what naturally comes of sexuality, children. The purpose of sex is human pleasure, yes, but also, ultimately, and obviously, reproduction. The whole idea of reproduction involves many years of dependency, so we have to take responsibility for any children, we have to train and raise them so they’ll be productive and responsible people and realize their purpose too. That’s why we must be responsible when it comes to sex. Those who engage in it must be able to work, to love and train any children, to have self-control and discipline. Both sexes have to restrict their sexual appetites and stay faithful to each other. Homosexuality is obviously against the original purpose, so it’s out of order and leads to physical and emotional harm. Fornication is obviously not safe, not responsible, not good for children. Bestiality or other perversions are totally against the design and purpose.

So sexual sin isn’t because God doesn’t want us to have fun. Sexual sin is falling short of God’s glory, of His glorious plan for us and our sexuality. It leads to all sorts of problems.

This is the idea for all sorts of areas of life, be they how we treat our bodies or how we relate to/with one another, what we spend our time or money or working lives on, etc.

The glory of God is what we were made for. Sin is falling short of that glory. Again, we think of the glory of God as being this idea that *He* is glorious; He’s brilliant light, there are cherubim and seraphim around Him, millions of other angels, a crystal sea, etc., etc. Of course, God in His very being, His essence, is truly breathtakingly beautiful and glorious. That’s why all those beings in heaven sing holy, holy, holy all the time! The glory of God does refer to His glorious nature, for sure.

But when Ro. 3:23 says we fall short of His glory, it’s mostly talking about this other idea of not meeting up to what we were made for. The Bible says God designed the whole universe to glorify Himself. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament or the skies show His handiwork (Ps. 19). I recently saw a worship video with the words in front of a time-lapse video of beautiful scenes out west, where the sun goes down behind gorgeous mountain scenes, the stars and the Milky Way revolves overhead, meteorites flash by. It takes your breath away. When we see any gloriously beautiful scenes of nature, the same thing happens. We’re awe-struck! That’s because all of creation shows forth the glory of God. And if what He made is glorious, then He certainly is even more glorious.

And we ourselves were made to glorify God because absolutely everything was. God made all that He made to glorify Himself, to reflect His glory, to manifest it, to display it. That includes all human beings as well as the planets, the stars, the mountains, the snowflakes, waterfalls, coral reefs, flowers, birds or whatever other beautiful things we see around us.

We were made to glorify God and enjoy Him forever, to actually partake of God’s glory. But when Adam and Eve sinned they lost that glory, and we inherited that fallenness from them. When Paul says we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, it means we’ve let our “lights” go out. It’s like a lantern in which the smoke has clouded up the glass, so the light doesn’t shine out as it should. That’s what it means to fall short of the glory of God.

Genesis 6 says God was grieved that He’d made man, because every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. He was so saddened by that, because He’d made us to glorify Him, and we were no longer fulfilling our purpose. What was meant to be beautiful, as human beings reflected God’s glory and loved one another and went about doing what He’d made them to do, was now ugly and horrible and sad.

In Revelation 21:24-26, it says that kings and all the nations will bring their honor and glory into God’s holy “city,” the New Jerusalem. I think that is also a picture of what I’m talking about here today. They will be born-again kings, and nations of born-again people. The image of God will have been restored in them. Their short-comings will have been atoned for and washed away by the blood of Christ, so now, all that is good in them, all that they were meant to be, will shine forth, and they’ll “bring” that glory into the city. Each of us will shine like stars when we’ve been redeemed, restored to the glorious way and purpose for which God originally made us. Phil. 2:15 says if we’re walking with God, we shine like stars now in the midst of a darkened world.

It’s interesting that Jesus, on His last night on earth before the crucifixion, prayed that God would glorify Him so He could glorify the Father (Jn. 17). That’s what we’re to pray too, “Hallowed, honored, revered, glorified,” be thy name. Jesus said in that prayer that He had glorified the Father through His ministry on earth (vs. 4), again, doing something we’re all to do. In vs. 22, He said He had given the disciples glory during His time with them. He also prayed that they would see the glory He’d had with the Father since before creation (Jn. 17:24). He’d been glorious in heaven before coming to earth, and then His glory was veiled in flesh (Hark the Herald says “veiled in flesh the Godhead see”). On the Mount of Transfiguration, His glory shone through for a brief time. The disciples got just a tiny glimpse of His glory, but it was enough to motive the rest of their lives! They were willing to die for the glory of God after that.

You see, we were made to bring glory to God in everything we are and do. That’s the purpose for which God made us! Our sin puts the lights out, blocks the light from shining through. And that keeps others from seeing aspects of God He intended to be seen through each one of us. It also harms us and makes us feel guilty or empty, or like we don’t fit, don’t have a purpose, or aren’t doing what we were made for. There’s this emptiness or sense of frustration, and we often don’t even know why. It’s why the U2 song, “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for,” sung by Bono, resonates and was so popular back in the 80s.

We need to recognize that we’ve all sinned and fallen short of the glory for which we were designed. We also need to know what Jesus has done to address this problem. His death and resurrection means we can be forgiven, our slate wiped clean, our lamps can be trimmed, the glass cleaned, new oil poured in, the wicks can be trimmed, and we can begin to fulfill our purpose to a greater degree, no matter how far off track we’ve gone!

We were made in the very image of God, and we were made to shine forth His glory. If we don’t understand that and aren’t seeking to line up with that purpose for which we were made, we will never find peace and satisfaction. We’re not living up to our purpose and calling. But there’s still time, while we yet live! I want to urge us all to ask God to restore His image in us through Christ and His Spirit. To ask God to help us realign our lives with His calling. We’ll never be perfect reflections in this life, but we’ll have eternity to improve!

I want to close by praying over us Eph. 1:15-21

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. NIV

Final hymn: #381, Open my eyes that I may see. Pretty amazing that Charlie chose this without my input!

2 Cor 3:17-18 – 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. NIV

Rom. 2:7 – To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. NIV