

The Sovereignty of God

Part 3: God's Purposes

The Display of His Glory and Excellence – The Ultimate End

God created the world for many purposes. Indeed, everything He created fulfills a specific purpose in His grand scheme for the ages. As we have already seen, all things work out in conformity with His sovereign purposes.

Proverbs 16:4: The LORD has made everything for its own purpose, Even the wicked for the day of evil.

Question #62: For what most basic reason does every created thing (even the wicked) exist? _____

Now, consider these verses:

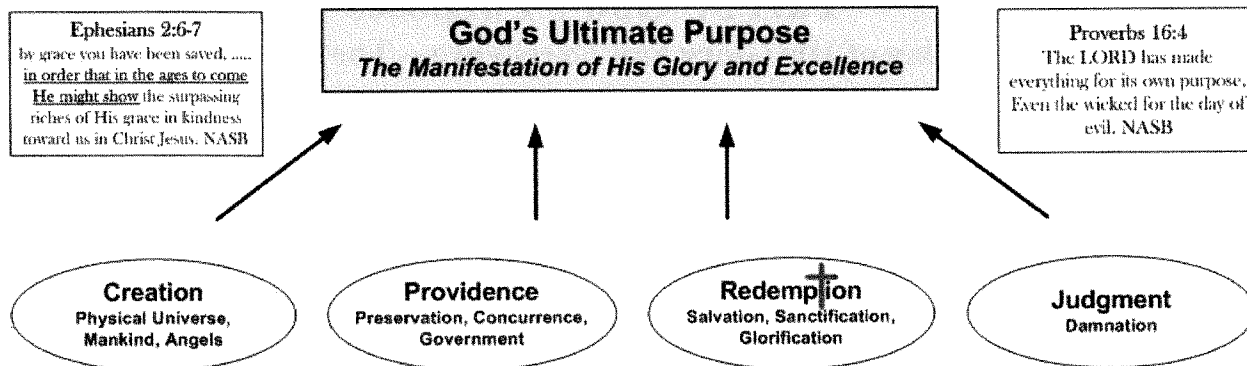
Ephesians 1:11-12: ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been **predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** ¹²**to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Question #63: According to Ephesians 1:11-12, how did we obtain an inheritance? _____

Question #64: According to Ephesians 1:11-12, for what purpose (end) did we obtain our inheritance? _____

Ephesians 1:11-12 reveals that although the salvation of the saints was predestined according to God's purpose, the salvation of the saints **is not God's highest purpose.** God's predestination of the salvation of the saints was **"to the end that we.....should be to the praise of His glory."** Note well that the salvation of men and women supports the higher purpose of the **praise of the glory of God!** How then should we answer the question: What is God's **highest** purpose in creating all things? In other words, what ultimate purpose do all of God's other purposes serve? To paraphrase the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: What is the chief end of God in creating all things? The following chart clearly shows us the answer.

“The chief end of God in the creation of all things is to manifest the Glory and Excellency of His own nature as God, and to express through creation, providence and redemption the manifold perfections of His divine character”



ALL PURPOSES OF GOD SERVE THE HIGHER PURPOSE OF THE DISPLAY OF HIS GLORY!

The chief end of God in creating all things is to manifest the Glory and Excellency of His own nature as God, and to express through Creation, Providence, and Redemption the manifold perfections of His divine character.

Question #65: Is the idea presented in the chart a new one for you? _____ If so, what is your initial reaction to it? _____

Dear reader, God is a Being of such awesome wonder and exquisite beauty that the expression of His being is the highest and most glorious concept conceivable. Furthermore, *reflecting God's character and nature in an intimate personal relationship with Him* is the most fulfilling and exhilarating of all human experiences. Thus, this is the highest purpose for which we were created. As the Westminster Catechism states, "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever." This assertion is well-supported in Scripture.

1 Chronicles 16:28-29: ²⁸Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, **Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.** ²⁹**Ascribe to the LORD the glory due His name;** Bring an offering, and come before Him; **Worship the LORD in holy array.**

Isaiah 42:12: **Let them give glory to the LORD,** And declare His praise in the coastlands.

Isaiah 43:7: Everyone who is called by My name, **And whom I have created for My glory,** Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

Psalms 99:9: **Exalt the LORD our God,** And worship at His holy hill; For holy is the LORD our God.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20: ¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? ²⁰**For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.**

Matthew 5:16: **Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

1 Peter 2:12: **Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation.**

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

Question #66: From the above verses, list several *specific ways* in which we are commanded to give God glory. _____

The Bible consistently subordinates all human purposes to our ultimate purpose of glorifying God. Dear Reader, here is the meaning of our lives! The Lord Himself taught the same thing when He answered a Pharisee's question by identifying the great commandments. He said all the Law and Prophets (in other words, the whole Old Testament) are summed up in these two commandments.

Matthew 22:34-40: ³⁴But when the Pharisees heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they gathered themselves together. ³⁵And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, to test Him, ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷And He said to him, **“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”** ³⁸**This is the great and foremost commandment.** ³⁹**The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’** ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

Here Jesus tells us that the chief purpose for our existence is to *love God*, i.e., to worship Him with everything within us. The meaning of worship is **to ascribe worth or value to something**. Consider this definition in relation to God's highest purpose for us. God seeks to manifest or show forth the excellence of His character and commands us to love, praise, and revere Him. Sin, therefore, is an abominable failure to fulfill our chief end because it doesn't reflect love for God and, consequently, doesn't glorify Him. Therefore, it fails to fulfill the high purpose for which He created us. This is also why even one sin violates the whole law of God. When we Christians sin, we fall short of our chief end of glorifying and enjoying God. And He takes action immediately to get us back on track! He faithfully convicts us of our failure and drives us to confess and repent through the work of His Holy Spirit. When we respond in love to His conviction, we return to glorifying God by reflecting His merciful forgiveness to those around us.

James 2:10: For whoever keeps the whole law and **yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.**

1 John 1:8-9: ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹**If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.**

Question #67: In your own words, describe how repentance and confession of sin glorifies God. _____

Question #68: Explain why the fact that repentance and confession of sin glorifies God and must not be used by a Christian as a license to sin. _____

God's highest purpose is NOT the salvation of mankind.

Many people mistakenly believe that God's highest purpose is the salvation of men and women. They wrongly reason that since we are created in God's image and are therefore the pinnacle of His creative work, God's highest priority must be preventing us from falling into damnation. This idea is foreign to the Bible's teaching, however. Scripture affirms that God ordained the fall of mankind from eternity for His own immutable purpose and by His eternal decree. He purposed from the beginning for mankind to fall, so that He could redeem some to eternal life while others were damned. How can we be so sure these are God's purposes? Because this is in *fact what happens*, which is the definition of God's sovereign will. Everything that unfolds in the course of history must be the outworking of the sovereign decree of God. Not only is this reasonably inferred by a common sense understanding of sovereignty, but the Bible plainly states that God is responsible for the fall and that He planned redemption from before the creation of the world.

Romans 9:14-24: ¹⁴What shall we say then? **There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!** ¹⁵For He says to Moses, **"I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."** ¹⁶So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth." ¹⁸So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. ¹⁹You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" ²⁰On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? ²¹Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use? ²²What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? ²³And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, ²⁴even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

1 Peter 1:20-21: ²⁰For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you ²¹who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Question #69: How do people mistakenly believe that God's highest purpose is the salvation of mankind? _____

Question #70: How do Romans 9:14-21 and 1 Peter 1:20-21 affirm that God purposed from the beginning that some would be redeemed and others would be damned? _____

Many who claim that it is God's will that all men and women be saved quote the following verses:

1 Timothy 2:3-6: ³This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴**who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** ⁵For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.

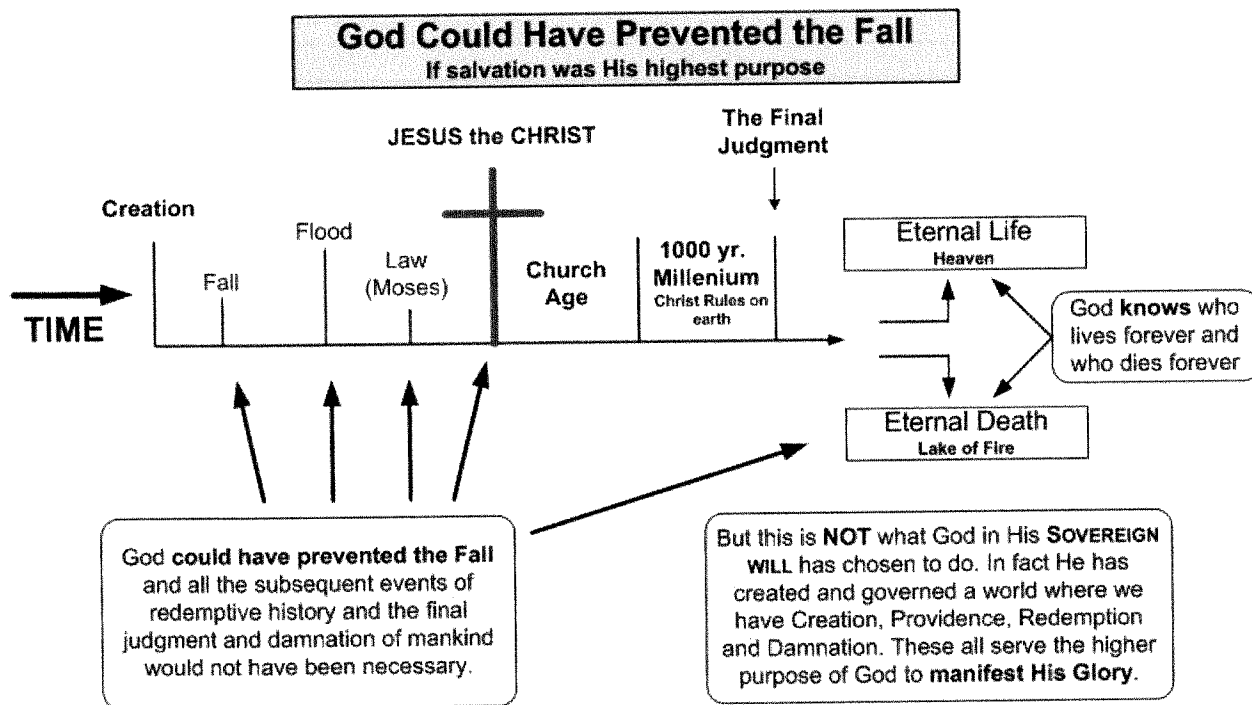
2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**

Romans 11:32: For **God has shut up all in disobedience** that He might show mercy to all.

They fail to consider, however, that if God's highest purpose were to save all mankind, then that is exactly what God would do. God would not have shut up all people into disobedience if He desired to save them all; rather He would have simply prevented the fall from happening. He could have done this in many ways, not the least of which would have been to NOT create the tree of the knowledge of good and evil nor to give a law not to eat from it. These verses then, simply reflect the **moral will** of God.

God does not delight in the death of anyone, even hardened sinners (Ezekiel 18:32). However, He will judge and damn hardened sinners because doing so displays the excellence of His goodness, justice, and wrath. So even though in His **moral will** He does not delight in the death of the wicked, in His **sovereign will** He demands it. God allows what He hates to accomplish what He loves. Consider the following quote from **John Piper**: *"The misery and the suffering that judgment brings upon the impenitent, in and of itself, does not delight the heart of God. He is not malicious or bloodthirsty. That's what Ezekiel 18:32 is warning us NOT to believe about God. Rather, when He brings judgment on the impenitent and unbelieving and wicked, the delight that He takes in that act is delight in the vindication of His justice and His truth and righteousness, and the value of His name which has been profaned by unbelievers. God's heart is capable of grieving over the misery and the sin, considered in and of itself, of any unbelieving lost person (Ezekiel 18:32), while at the same time, rejoicing and exulting exuberantly in the vindication of His righteousness and His name as He destroys them in hell (Deuteronomy 28:63). If that does not fit together in your own mind and heart, you are finite and God is infinite. Do not shape God into your limited image, let the Holy Scriptures stand, and may God build His true character in your heart and in your eyes."*²¹

²¹ John Piper, "The Pleasure of God in All He Does," Sermon: February 1, 1987. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see: John Piper, *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, Appendix: "Are There Two Wills in God? Divine Election and God's Desire For All to be Saved." (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2000), 313-340.



Question #71: How can God *not* delight in the death of the wicked while acting decisively to destroy them in hell? _____

God's Glory displayed in all things

Consider then, how God displays His glory in all things. Listed below are a few of the divine excellencies that are seen in the works of God.

- **The creation of the universe** reflects His power, wisdom, beauty, and perfection.
- **His providence** reflects His power, wisdom, grace, mercy, patience, and omnipresence.
- **The salvation of His people** reflects His love, grace, mercy, goodness, and justice.
- **The damnation of the wicked** reflects His goodness, justice, wrath, and power.

Dear reader, when we consider the almighty power and wisdom of God, we must respond with worship and awe! **The Scripture plainly teaches "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things."** God is indeed the beginning, middle, and end of all that He has purposed to do.

Romans 11:33-36: ³³Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ³⁴For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who became His counselor? ³⁵Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? ³⁶**For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.** To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Numerous biblical texts explicitly state that God seeks His own glory. Listing them all would take several pages and examining them all would be exhausting. Here are just a few of them:

Isaiah 48:9-11: ⁹**For the sake of My name** I delay My wrath, **And for My praise** I restrain it for you, In order not to cut you off. ¹⁰Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested

you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹**For My own sake, for My own sake**, I will act; For how **can My name be profaned?** And **My glory I will not give to another.**

Isaiah 43:7: Everyone who is **called by My name, And whom I have created for My glory**, Whom I have formed, even whom I have made.

Jeremiah 13:11: “For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,” declares the LORD, “that **they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory**; but they did not listen.”

Psalms 106:7-8: ⁷Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Thy wonders; They did not remember Thine abundant kindnesses, But rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. ⁸Nevertheless **He saved them for the sake of His name, That He might make His power known.**

Romans 9:17: For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate My power in you, and **that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.**”

John 7:18: He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but **He who is seeking the glory of the One who sent Him**, He is true, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Matthew 5:16: Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, **and glorify your Father who is in heaven.**

John 12:27-28: ²⁷“Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But **for this purpose I came to this hour.** ²⁸**Father, glorify Thy name.**” There came therefore a voice out of heaven: “**I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.**”

John 17:24: Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, **in order that they may behold My glory**, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.

1 Peter 4:11: Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; **so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever.** Amen.

Let us learn then: the **Bible plainly declares** that chief among God’s purposes is the pursuit of His own glory and the fame of His great name!

Question #72: Describe your initial reactions to the Bible’s teaching that the display of God’s glory is His highest priority in everything that He does. _____

Question #73: What specific changes in your priorities, attitudes, and pursuits are in order as you seek to live each day in the light of this biblical teaching? _____
