

The Kingdom Turn Part 4

KINGDOM PRIORITY



A ReVision Resource

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The Fellowship of Ailbe

Kingdom Priority
The Kingdom Turn Part 4
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Welcome to *ViewPoint*

Welcome to *Kingdom Priority*, part 4 in our 8-part series on *The Kingdom Turn*. This study focuses on the glory of God and seeks to answer the question, Why are you a Christian? *Kingdom Priority* is a *ReVision* Resource of The Fellowship of Ailbe.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We are happy to receive your suggestions for future topics and studies. Contact us at our webpage. And if you're not receiving *ViewPoint* first thing every day, then be sure to register on the website, www.ailbe.org.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 The End of Grace

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5.1, 2

Why are you a Christian?

In the middle of the last century British philosopher Bertrand Russell, stung by the rebuke of Christians in New York State, penned an *apologia pro vita sua* which he entitled, *Why I Am Not a Christian*. In this book he laid out a raft of explanations concerning why he did not find the claims of Christ and the Gospel to be persuasive.

No one need wonder why Bertrand Russell was not a Christian; he explained it all very clearly.

But what about this: What if someone were to ask you why *you* are a Christian? Not so much why you *became* a Christian, or even *how*, but what it *means* to you to be a Christian – that is, why you continue to be a Christian? What your Christian life is *all about*? What's the *reason* or the *substance* of this religion thing? What's your *priority* in life?

What would you say? Would you say that you are a Christian because being forgiven gives you peace? Or allows you to believe that you'll go to heaven when you die?

OK, fine, but what about *life*? What does being a Christian mean for your *life* each day? Do you just go about reminding yourself that you're saved and if you should die tonight you'll go to heaven? What about all the messy, crazy, varied, daily *details* of your life? Why *are* you a Christian, and what does that mean for the life you lead? What are you hoping to achieve or to get out of this?

Where we stand

Perhaps we should consult the Apostle Paul concerning the question of where we stand and why God has seen fit to bring us by grace through faith into eternal life in Christ.

Paul says we have been justified by and before God; He has declared us “not guilty” of sin because our sins have been rolled onto His Son, and we have believed that He bore the penalty for them in our place. We are *justified* before God in thinking that we have access to Him now because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

This condition of being justified before God creates in us a huge sense of relief – peace. We don't have to worry about ultimate condemnation and eternal punishment. Because of what Jesus has done in fulfilling all the righteousness of God and bearing all His wrath, and because, by God's grace, we have believed in Him as Savior and Lord, we are no longer condemned (Rom. 8.1), and “we have obtained access by faith” into this grace in which we stand – the presence and favor of the eternal God!

This peace brings with it great joy. Nothing can separate us from the love God has shown us in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8.38, 39), and so, whatever happens to us in this life, for us to live is Christ, and to die is gain (Phil. 1.21). Justification! Forgiveness! Peace! Joy! This is what it means to be a Christian! This is why Christians are so eager to make known the Good News of Jesus and His Kingdom to everyone they know.

Yes, but why?

But suppose that doesn't satisfy our enquirer. Suppose he tells us that he feels just fine about his status in God's eyes, if, indeed there is a God. And he isn't troubled by guilt or shame. He has a good life, a peaceable life, and plenty of things and friends to make him happy. Are we Christians because we *don't* have any of these

things, and we need something else to make us happy and at peace? Is Christianity a religion for losers? *Why are you a Christian? What are you hoping for in your faith?*

Put another way, the question is this: What is the *end* of grace? What priority does grace establish in us that nothing else can? Why does God extend grace to us, and why do we continue in it? Why does He justify, forgive, and save us through Jesus Christ? Is it just so we can know peace and joy and the hope of heaven when we die? Is His way of bringing peace and joy to humankind just one of many ways?

Or is there something more important, more ultimate, and more *lasting* involved in God's extending His grace to undeserving creatures such as we?

There is. And in this series we're going to explore what Paul means when he says that God has called us, not merely to His Kingdom, but also to His *glory* (1 Thess. 2.12). The grace we have received, enabling us to believe in Jesus Christ and to make the Kingdom turn, brings with it the byproduct of assurance of salvation and a peace that passes understanding. But the grace in which we stand is *unto* something much greater, something much more amazing and tangible: the hope of glory!

We stand in the hope of the glory of God. We are Christians *for the glory of God!* And therefore, if we are to be as adept at living and explaining our life *in* the faith as Bertrand Russell was in explaining his life *without* it, we'd better make sure we have a good understanding – and plausible experience – of what it means to have received grace and to hope in the glory of God.

For reflection or discussion

1. Discuss a time when you have experienced the glory of God. What was that like? How did that happen? What lasting effects, if any, did it bring into your life?
2. Paul says that believers have been “called” to the “Kingdom and glory” of God (1 Thess. 2.12). What does that mean? How would someone know if he or she had responded properly to that “call”?
3. Do you think that some believe look at Christianity as a religion for losers? Why or why not?
4. What is the defining motif, the driving force, the overarching goal and objective of your Christian life? How does that come to expression in your daily walk with the Lord?
5. What are your goals for this study? What do you hope to learn?

Next steps: What do you understand by the glory of God? Ask some Christian friends. What does it mean to “hope” in the glory of God? For what? When? How can we know when we've attained the glory of God? Ask a church leader to help you begin thinking through these questions as we begin this series.

Prayer:

2 Glory in His Face

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4.6

The glory of God

“Glory” is one of those terms Christians use, often without understanding what it means.

We want to “give glory” to God. We claim to see “God’s glory” in certain aspects of the creation – a particularly stunning sunset, for example, or a tiny songbird at the feeder. We sing “glory to God” in our hymns and pray that God will “be glorified” in our lives.

But what do we mean by this? What *is* the glory of God, and where can we turn in order to gain a better sense of what it means to “stand in hope” of that glory?

In the simplest sense, the glory of God is just the presence of God. Where God is, glory is, because God is all-glorious.

However, Scripture points out that, while God is manifesting His glory everywhere, because He Himself is everywhere, not everyone is paying attention. God shows His presence in created things; they bear witness to His wisdom, power, goodness, and love in many different ways (cf. Ps. 19.1-4; Acts 14.17). But most people don’t *experience* the glory God is revealing, in part because they don’t really *care* to, and in part, because they don’t know how.

So God makes His glory *known* to people in various ways. He not only *reveals* His glory, but He *impresses* His glory on people, as a kind of strange, wondrous, beautiful, and even fearful presence that “weighs” on us at certain times and under certain conditions.

We see this from time to time in Scripture when God, Who is everywhere present, suddenly deigns to make His glory known by some natural phenomenon – light, smoke, thunder, lightning, fire, wine – which is *supernaturally exaggerated* in such a way as to astonish whoever beholds it. The result is, people are struck with fear, wonder, and a need to bow down while, at the same time, feeling like this is a really good place to be.

Think of the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. As Jesus was glorified before them, Peter excitedly suggested that they just all camp out there in perpetuity, since it was “good” for them to be there experiencing all that wonder and beauty. Luke tells us he only said this because he was terrified and didn’t know what he was saying (Lk. 9.32-34).

That weighty, glorious presence of the Lord overwhelmed those disciples, filling them with fear and joy, wonder and understanding, all at the same time.

But what does it mean for *us* to stand in hope of this glory? How can we enter into the *experience* of glory, and what difference does that make?

The glory of God in Jesus Christ

As our text explains, the glory of God is to be experienced “in the face” of our Lord Jesus Christ. As those who have been justified by grace through faith, we stand in the hope of glory, and therefore, like the Apostle Paul, we expect to know the glory of God that is in the face of Jesus, with similar effects as the disciples experienced on that holy mountain.

Another passage in this same epistle can help us to find the way into this glory. In 2 Corinthians 3.7-18 Paul teaches that believers should expect to know the glory of God more really, consistently, and abundantly than even Moses did when he was on the mountain with the Lord. Paul mentions two crucial ingredients in this formula for experiencing the glory of God: The Law, or Word, of God and the Spirit of God.

Because we have been justified, we may look into the Law and Word of God expectantly, in the hope of meeting God there in His glory, of encountering Jesus face to face, as it were, and in that encounter experience the glory of God. Paul says that when someone reads or hears the Word of God without the benefit of having turned to the Lord, the glory that's there isn't evident to them. It's like there's a veil over the Scriptures so that those who do not believe just can't penetrate to the glory that is being revealed there. "But," Paul continues, "when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed" and the glory God has invested in His Word can begin to shine forth. Further, just to make sure this happens, the Spirit of God has been sent to "liberate" us from our blindness and guide us into all the truth and glory of God's Word.

Beholding the glory

Elsewhere in Scripture the "face of God" is likened to the Word and Law of God (Ps. 119.135) and the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 39.29). Jesus said that His Words are Spirit and life (Jn. 6.63). He also insisted that all Scripture is about Him (Jn. 5.39), and that, once we have the Spirit, we can expect Him to guide us into all understanding about Jesus, as He is revealed in His Word, and to bring us into the glory of Jesus Himself (Jn. 16.13, 14).

The face of Jesus is the Word of God, illuminated by the Spirit, revealing the glory of Jesus on every page. Scripture holds the revelation of God's glory in the face of Jesus on every page. And all who have made the Kingdom turn *expect* and *hope* that all our reading and study of God's Word will bring us, glory to glory, into that weighty, fearful, wondrous, delightful, and transforming experience of glory with greater consistency and power. Seeking God in His glory is our top priority in the Kingdom of God.

For reflection or discussion

1. Summarize your approach to reading and studying the Bible at this time. What would you describe as the main benefits or results you see from this approach?
2. Meditate on Psalm 119.135. In what sense can we say that the "face of Jesus" is like the Word of God?
3. Meditate on Ezekiel 29.29. In what sense can we say that the "face of Jesus" is like the Spirit of God?
4. How do the Word and Spirit of God come together to present the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?
5. What will it take for your reading and study of the Bible to bring you more consistently into the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ?

Next steps: What do you expect from your time reading and studying Scripture? For what are you hoping? What would it mean for you to hope for the glory that is in the face of Jesus from your time in the Word? Talk with some Christian friends about these questions.

Prayer:

3 Glory in Love

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5.1, 2

What greater glory?

In Paul's mind a close connection exists between the glory of God, in which we hope, and the love of God, which the Spirit enables us to know and to express. God *is* love, John explained (1 Jn. 4.8); so, just as, where God is, glory is, so also where God is, love is, and we may expect to *experience* the glory of God, that awesome and wonderful spiritual weight, as an intensely personal and all-pervading awareness and experience of God's unfailing and unchangeable love.

We stand in hope of the glory and love of God. This is perhaps the primary way we experience the glory of God. Though God's glory takes many forms and witnesses to many aspects of His deity and will, yet the hope in which we stand comes to full realization as it taps into the streams of God's love, flowing in our souls in the Spirit of God.

What greater glory could we know than the love of God within and upon us? Eternal life consists in knowing God and Jesus Christ (Jn. 17.3); it is this *knowledge* of God that enables us to stand in the hope of glory as we gaze into the face of our Savior through the mirror of His Word and Spirit.

Obviously, this is not merely an *intellectual* knowledge. Believers are called to know the love of God in a way that is more than merely intellectual (Eph. 3.15-19), a way that gives us the sense, the experience, Paul says, of being filled up into all the fullness of God.

Into the fullness of God

"Into" the fullness of God, not "by." Though God dwells in our hearts by faith, our hearts and lives cannot possibly contain Him. Part of the hope of glory in which we stand is that we may continue to increase in faith and in the love of God so that, in effect, we grow *beyond* ourselves – beyond our experience or the present state of our souls, our abilities, our personality – into a greater measure of the fullness of God. So great is God's love, and so powerful is His transforming glory, that He actually fills us *beyond* ourselves *into* a greater measure of *Himself*, as we partake of His Word and Spirit and meet Him in the increasing experience of His glory and love.

Surely this is the most wonderful and extraordinary thing any person can hope for or know. No wonder this is *the* priority of every person who has made the Kingdom turn.

What great joy such love engenders, what a powerful sense of security and wellbeing it entails! What boldness it excites, and what eagerness to embark on new adventures of serving the Lord! How this love transforms us into people who love selflessly, consistently, and well! We are Christians, we stand in the hope of glory, so that knowing glory and love, we may refract glory and love to the world around us. To hope in this glorious experience of divine love is to seek and expect it, to prepare for it, to anticipate it eagerly, and to enter into it as often and as fully as possible, by contemplation and resting in the presence of the Lord.

To know this love, this glorious making-Himself-known-in-us presence and protection and approval, is to be crushed with delight, humbled with gratitude, enfolded in mystery, held in divine strength and power, and stretched more wondrously into the image of Jesus Christ. It is to see ourselves, the world, and everything in the world as restored in divine love to pristine newness and boundless potential, and to engage such a world in order to bring forth fruit for the glory and love of God.

To know the love and glory of God is to despise all sin, to resolve on greater love for neighbors, and to long earnestly to sojourn in the Lord's tent always, just like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration.

Glory even in trials

We rejoice to have such honor, such a transforming relationship and experience, held out to us. And we organize and orient our entire lives on the basis and toward the realization of this hope of glory. Even in the midst of trials, setbacks, and disappointments, Christians persevere in the hope of glory until God forms us in *His* strength to be people of proven character and even greater hope.

Because the glory of God is the love of God, and nothing can separate us from His love, the love which He has shown us and continues to show us every day in our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 8.37-39).

“O, love of God, how rich, how pure!/How measureless and strong!/It shall forevermore endure – /the saints and angels song!”

For reflection or discussion

1. How can you see that the “glory” of God and the “love” of God are inextricably connected? What does it mean to stand in the hope of such glory and love?
2. How is T. M. using the word, “beyond”, in this lesson? Have you ever experienced anything like this?
3. Meditate on Ephesians 3.19, 20. What does Paul mean by love that “surpasses knowledge”? What does this have to do with being and making disciples?
4. Paul seems to believe that trials should be a source of hope, not discouragement. Why does he believe this? How does he counsel us to approach our trials (Rom. 5.1-6)?
5. Meditate on Romans 8.37-39. How might you use this verse as a pathway into God's glory during a time of trial?

Next steps: What does it mean, therefore, to hope in this glory and love? How do you experience this hope? How do you express it? Share your thoughts about these questions with some Christian friends. How can you help one another to “hope in the glory” and love of God more consistently?

Prayer:

4 Glory Now and Then

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Romans 8.18

Glory now

The Christian life is, in many ways, just like the life of any other person. It's not all fun and games. It's not even all peace and joy and tramping around praising the Lord, come what may. A bumper sticker I saw not long ago speaks as well to the *Christian* life as to any other life: "Life's a bitch, then you die."

Just because those who have made the Kingdom turn stand in the hope of the glory and love of God doesn't mean they are exempt from or immune to the hard knocks of life. Like our non-believing neighbors, we live in a fallen world. In that world are plenty of struggles, setbacks, disappointments, betrayals, injuries and sicknesses, failures and defeats, brushes with death and death itself.

The only difference between the *Christian* life and any other life is the matter of where we stand as we encounter the everyday trials and difficulties of life.

The glory and love of God are unchanging, as we have seen. Even though the *circumstances* of a Christian's life change, and even become adverse and cumbersome at times, this does not alter the fact that the Christian stands in – has access to, come what may – the glory of God. Believers may, under all circumstances and in every situation, slump down into the loving arms of the Lord and find glory and strength to help them bear up with joy and peace through even the worst life can throw at them.

This is a very real and tangible difference between the *Christian* life and every other kind of life. We do not stand in the hope that our circumstances, status, or stuff will improve, so that we can get out of this funk we're in and get on with enjoying life. We stand in hope of the glory of God, of knowing the presence and welcoming face of our Savior Jesus Christ, and this hope never changes. It is always present and palpable for those who know how to take refuge in it.

Only a glimpse

Those Christians who have learned how to do this will tell you it's a wonderful mystery, that they are able to know peace and joy in every situation, because, while the circumstances of their lives may change, God does not, and they don't trust in their circumstances, they hope in the glory of God.

But they will also tell you that they are fully aware that every such experience of the glory of God is not the *ultimate* end of their life in Christ. A "peak experience," as Maslow would say, of the glory and love of God awaits those who believe in Jesus. A glory is waiting to be revealed that is so great, so far beyond any glimpse of it we might achieve in the here and now, that Scripture is at pains to employ language to explain it.

The "glory that is to be revealed to us" is reserved for the new heavens and new earth, where righteousness dwells. Not even heaven can fully measure up to this glory which is to be revealed. Saints who have departed this life are presently in heaven, fully delighting in doing whatever the Lord has for them there. But they are there in soul only; their bodies await the general resurrection of the dead. And they are there in a spiritual realm only; the new heavens and new earth will see a fusing of the seen and unseen worlds, releasing infinite and unending energies of spiritual beauty, goodness, truth, and love through creatures perfect in every way, into a world which increases in perfection and glory with each passing moment.

The glory which is to be revealed

Heaven, though not our ultimate destination, is pretty amazing in its own right, offering an even more focused and intensified experience of the glory that is to be revealed. So desirable was heaven to the Apostle Paul that he could say, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!” (Phil. 1.21) Paul would take that bumper sticker I mentioned earlier and change it to read, “Life’s a bitch full of glory, then you really begin to live!”

Beyond this world, beyond heaven, beyond anything we can imagine, and filling up eternally into all the fullness of God, a new world is being prepared, and we who stand in the hope of glory *now* stand also in the hope of glory *then*. Glory and now *and* then: This is why we are Christians. Our main priority is to live now so as to know, experience, and express a reality that is, but that is still in preparation – the eternal realm of God’s glory and love. We stand in the hope of this glory every day of our lives. We seek it in His Word, pray earnestly to enter into it, linger and lavish in it as we do, then go forth to live that glory and love in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities (1 Cor. 10.31).

And as we do, we have one eye fixed on the horizon of time. For we know that time will one day run out. History and the world as we know it – full of its bustle, busyness, bitchiness, and brokenness – will one day come to an end, and with it all the circumstances and stuff to which people cling for happiness and hope. But when that happens, the glory that is to be revealed will shower upon and radiate through those who stand in the hope of that glory now, until they are transformed *into that very glory and image of Jesus Christ*, and dwell face-to-face with Him forever.

And even then, even amid all that brilliance of spiritual, personal, creational, and cultural glory, the glory that is to be revealed will increase in transforming love and power, without obstruction and without end.

For reflection or discussion

1. Explain the differences between hoping in glory and hoping in circumstances.
2. “Believers may, under all circumstances and in every situation, slump down into the loving arms of the Lord and find glory and strength to help them bear up with joy and peace through even the worst life can throw at them.” How would you explain this process to someone who was grieving over a loss or struggling with a health issue?
3. List some of the differences between heaven and life here and now:
4. List some of the differences between heaven and the new heavens and new earth:
5. What does T. M. *not* mean by the idea of “glory now and then”? What *does* he mean?

Next steps: What role does “the glory that is to be revealed” play in your daily experience as a Christian? Talk about this with some fellow believers.

Prayer:

5 To Stand in Hope

Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Romans 5.1, 2

The nature of hope

Paul says that we stand in the grace of God; we stand in *hope* of the glory of God. All who have made the Kingdom turn and are saved by grace through faith stand in the hope of experiencing and expressing the glory of our risen and reigning King.

We've been considering the nature and accessibility of that glory, and we now understand that the glory and love of God are available to us, in ever-increasing measure, for ever-expanding expression, both now and in the new heavens and new earth which lie ahead. Glory now *and* then is the Christian's great *hope*; it's the answer to why we are Christians at all.

But what is *hope*? How does hope function in us? To what kinds of actions does hope lead?

It seems to me that, unless we understand the true nature of hope, our looking ahead to the experience of God's glory and love, whether now or in the world to come, will be little more than wishful thinking. For many people "hope" means something like, "Well, I *hope* so; sure would be nice if it did."

But that's not hope, not the kind of hope, that is, in which we as believers stand by the grace of God.

In Romans 8.24 Paul writes, "For we are saved in this hope." OK, got that. Hope and salvation through Jesus go together; if I'm saved, I have hope. Let's read on a bit: "but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees?" This is just a kind of progress check here. Paul reminds us that, unlike most people in the world, we don't hope in things we can *see* but in things we *can't see*. We don't hope in wealth, health, IRAs, favorable circumstances, or the like. All that is simply stuff we can see, and if we can *see* it, possess it, we don't have to hope for it.

What's more, such "seeable" things cannot retain their "hope value." Once we achieve them, we use them, discard them, or we feel the need to add to them with other things and circumstances. Such hope is ephemeral, shape-shifting, and unreliable. No, Paul says, Christians do not hope in things they can see, but in things they cannot see, chief among these being Christ, the epicenter and architect of glory.

Paul continues: "But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for *it* with perseverance." Ah, now we're beginning to understand the true nature of hope. Hope waits. Hope endures. And hope does not disappoint, as Paul says in Romans 5.5, because the love of God never fails. Hope for it long enough, and you'll know it soon enough.

Wait

Hope *waits* for glory and love. Now, again, this is not your standard sit-around-doing-nothing-waiting-till-when-ever kind of waiting. For the Christian "waiting" is an *active discipline*. We wait for the Lord in prayer (Acts 1), by contemplation (Ps. 27), and by doing whatever tasks and duties fall to us in a manner consistent with the Word of God (Acts 1).

We are *waiting* for glory, in other words, when we are *actively seeking to engage* it by and through all these means. Glory doesn't just "happen." It doesn't just fall upon us. David understood that God commands us to *seek* His glory, and that our duty is to get busy "waiting" until He brings us into the goodness and glory we seek (Ps. 27.8-14).

So we wait for the Lord through prayer, meditation, being attentive to His presence and leading in every situation, acting in obedient faith and love, and looking to experience and express His glory and love at all times, in everything.

Endure

And we'll need to be patient in this waiting. We must be prepared to *endure* through our waiting, to *persevere* at it, and that for two reasons.

First, we cannot manipulate God. He makes Himself and His glory known when He will, to whom He will, and in the measure He chooses according to His own pleasure and timing. He is not capricious, and He is not cruel. He waits to make His glory known to those who hope for it when the “dosage” He applies will be precisely appropriate to the need in which we know it. So we must endure at the work of waiting on the Lord, because He knows better than we when and to what extent to bring us into His glory and love.

But, second, we must endure in waiting because the world and all its obstacles, trials, temptations, and distractions is really good at interrupting our waiting and frustrating our hope in the glory of God. Count on it, the more you resolve to wait on the glory of God, and to continue waiting, the more you will be challenged with just how serious you are about this matter. But you must endure, rejoicing in your hope, focusing your mind on it, preparing for it, longing and pleading for it, and not allowing yourself to be deterred or defeated in the waiting.

We stand in hope of the glory of God, and this means we wait and endure, day after day, moment by moment, until we *know* the glory and love for which we hope, if only as a mere glimpse.

But even that, my friend, will make all the waiting and enduring worthwhile.

For reflection or discussion

1. What are some differences between hope and wishful thinking?
2. Meditate on Hebrews 11.1. What are the “unseen things” on which we focus our hope?
3. Do you think that you concentrate enough on the unseen things of faith? Why or why not?
4. What are some disciplines you might use better or more consistently to help make the unseen things of faith more an object of your hope? Give some specific examples.
5. How do “waiting” and “enduring” relate to standing in hope of the glory of God?

Next steps: How would you explain to a new believer what it means to wait and endure in hoping for the glory of God? Share your thoughts about this with a leader in your church, or your pastor. Ask for help getting this straight, and hoping more consistently for God's glory yourself.

Prayer:

6 A World Full of Glory

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. Romans 8.20, 21

Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10.31

Glory all around

The Apostle Paul informs us in these verses that the glory we as Christians hope for, and that we wait and persevere to know and to express, the unseen glory and love of God, is not to be engaged for our own sake. We are being transformed, Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3.12-18, *from glory into glory*. Beginning with the creation, and then extending throughout creation to every situation and person in our lives, God brings us *into* glory in order that we might bring His glory *into* the people and world we inhabit.

God's design – God's Kingdom priority – is that the *knowledge of His glory* should be everywhere manifest – in every situation, to every person, at all times – so that people are confronted with, accosted by, inundated, surrounded, overwhelmed, stunned, and astonished by a reality that can only be explained in the light of Jesus' having risen from the dead (Hab. 2.14).

God is working, from glory to glory, to fill the world with the glory and love of Jesus, Whom Paul describes as the One Who is "filling all things, *in* all things" with Himself (Eph. 1.23).

Let's have a closer look at how this guides us in our waiting and enduring to know the glory of God.

Creation and the hope of glory

The creation is at present subject to a form of futility which prevents it from fulfilling its purpose as a vehicle for glorifying God. This is one of the effects of sin, both that the glory God has "hidden" in creation does not readily manifest itself, and that fallen men are incapable, because of sin, of discovering, enjoying, and celebrating the glory of God in creation. This is a task for royal children, for those who have made the Kingdom turn and stand in the hope of glory (Prov. 25.2; Hab. 1.14).

We who hope in the glory of God, and are being transformed from glory to glory into the image of the Firstborn of all creation, must also consider that it is part of our calling to bring the creation into the redemption and glory which we enjoy as God's children. In order to do this we must give ourselves to this high calling and holy challenge by becoming familiar with the creation, learning the distinct creatures, discovering their contributions to the symphony of glory which is daily being performed around us, and finding ways of making known the glory of God in each creature.

Further, we must take up the duty of conserving and developing creation so as to guard it against further corruption and to give it the freedom to flourish which we enjoy in the Lord. Thus we extend the Kingdom to the entire creation and increase anticipation of the new heavens and new earth, even as we are also preparing for that great day.

Creation is the stage on which we stand and hope in the glory of God. Its props, sets, lighting, and all the rest are in need of some refocusing and refurbishing, so that the glorious purposes of the divine Playwright can be clearly seen. And it falls to us, who stand in the hope of glory, to bring creation *into* the glory in which we hope, by every means, at every opportunity.

Everything and everyone

Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 10.31 could just as well be translated, "So whatever you do, whether you are eating or drinking or whatever you do, do it all *into* the glory of God." That means all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities. We who stand in the hope of the glory of God, and who wait and endure and persevere to *know* that glory – we are not stingy about the experience. We want everyone to know it. We want everything we do to refract it. We want to haul people and situations and things *into* the glory we are coming to know more consistently. We want the knowledge of the glory of God to cover those parts of the earth we inhabit, and so we seek to bring our families, homes, work, colleagues, friends, diversions, time, possessions – the whole shebang – *into* the glory and love of God which we are increasingly coming to know.

Here it all boils down to words and deeds, words and deeds. How and what we talk about, and how and what we do will either contribute to the *staging* of God's glory or the *suppressing* of it. If we don't know how to "work out our salvation in fear and trembling" (Phil. 2.12) so that the glory of God comes to expression in all we are, think, say, and do, then we need to refocus our growth in the Lord, so that we learn to wait and hope for what we should wait and hope for – the glory of God *in* us and *through* us, throughout the world *around* us.

For reflection or discussion

1. Meditate on Psalm 19.1-4 and Habakkuk 2.14. What's the difference between these two verses? Why does this difference exist?
2. Meditate on Proverbs 25.2. Where does your name go in this verse? How does this verse charge you?
3. In what sense is creation the "stage" on which the drama of God (redemption and restoration) is being acted? Do you agree that we should be more concerned about this "stage" than we are? Why or why not?
4. Meditate on 1 Corinthians 10.31-11.1. What does Paul recommend as a way of doing all things *into* the glory of God?
5. "Here it boils down to words and deeds, words and deeds." What does T. M. mean by this? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the best rating you could give, to what extent does your life bring the world *into* the glory of God? Why did you choose the number you did?

Next steps: Make a list of everything you will be doing today. In a word or two, how do you expect the glory of God to come to light in each of these activities? Are you preparing for this, by seeking the glory of God? Share this exercise with a friend, and do it together for a week. Meet at the end of the week to discuss this exercise and what you learned from it.

Prayer:

7 The Progress of Glory

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. 2 Corinthians 3.18

From, into

This is what every Christian *hopes* for, *waits* for, *perseveres* to know, and *longs* to express in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. We stand in hope of the glory of God, and we long to be used of God to help cover the earth with the knowledge of His glory.

It seems to me that the text of 2 Corinthians 3.18 is focusing not on the goal or a single episode of the glory of God, but on the *process* of hoping in the glory of God. If we translate the text just as it is written in the Greek – “*from glory into glory*” – we capture the intimation of outcomes – ever-increasing glory – but we also preserve what I believe to be the central thrust of this passage: Ever-increasing, glory-to-glory transformation into the image of Jesus Christ.

How do we get to this kind of lifestyle, this standing-in-hope-of-the-glory-of-God way of life?

We’ve touched on this already in this series, but in this final installment I want to spell it out more emphatically. Glory doesn’t just happen to us. We must *hope* in it, and that means *wait* for it and *persevere* in waiting until the glory in which we hope becomes the glory we *experience* and the glory we *express* every day of our lives.

What does this entail?

From glory

In order to bring others *into* the knowledge of the glory of God in every area of our lives, we must come *from* glory – like Moses descending Mt. Sinai, with his face aglow – into the world where glory is wanting. Only by coming *from* glory can we bring our world, in all its variety, *into* the glory of God with increasing expression and consistency.

This means more time in prayer and God’s Word, waiting and persevering in seeking the glory of the Lord there. It should also involve some time observing and reflecting on the glory of God in creation. But it will mean more time, and more focus in that time in order to discern, not just the intellectual context of the text of Scripture, or mere description of a landscape or beachscape, but more active, focused seeking the glory of God and relaxing *into* His love.

Look for the telltale signs of God’s presence – His beauty, goodness, wisdom, love, forbearance, compassion, and so forth. Make note of these by writing them down for deeper reflection over the next several days. Interact with God, praying, like Moses, that God would show you His glory and immerse you more completely in His love, that His presence would become real to you and go with you as you set out for your day.

Read, study, meditate, observe, and reflect with a view to encountering God in His glory. Dare to tell God you will not let Him go until He blesses you with a glimpse, a touch, a breath of His glory to revive your soul and expand the horizons of your faith. Then let that glory and love sink in, saturate, and transform your soul as you begin thinking about ways of refracting the glory of God through your life *into* the day ahead.

Into glory

Go *from* glory, lit up by the thrill of it, *into* your daily life, carrying your reflections, plans, and specific courses of action into all your relationships, roles, and responsibilities. How will the glory you have known become the glory you show to others? What does love require of you at your work, in your home, as you stop off to pick up some groceries or drop by the post office? What kindness, what goodness, what excellence, what word of encouragement, truth, or hope? Be alert to every opportunity to bring people and situations *into* the glory you've known, and you will have no trouble glowing with God's presence and love wherever you are, whatever you're doing.

This process – *from* glory *into* glory – defines what it means to stand in hope of the glory of God. But it's also a template for our lives in the here and now, as we prepare for the glory which is to be revealed. One day we will be translated into a place where "Glory!" is the perpetual ambient sound and experience. As we learn to know the glory of God now, our anticipation of the glory which is to come will be heightened, and we'll want others to know what we're coming to know as well.

From glory *into* glory is where we're headed; it's also where we stand as those who have made the Kingdom turn – redeemed by grace, saved by faith, and called into the Kingdom and glory of God.

For reflection or discussion

1. What does the "progress of glory" look like in your own life? Are you realizing progress in glory? How would you like to improve in this matter?
2. What's the difference between reading the Bible and reading the Bible for the glory of God?
3. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 3.7-18. What is Paul suggesting by the phrases, "even more glory" (v. 8), "glory that surpasses" (v. 10), "much more" (v. 11), and "very bold" (v. 12)? How do these phrases challenge or encourage you?
4. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this series?
5. How are you hoping to put that lesson to work in your own life?

Next steps: Keep a little record of your "from glory into glory" experiences for the next several weeks. At the end of the time, set aside an hour for reflection and prayer. Praise God for the way you have hoped in and known His glory. Then get busy preparing for the next few weeks to come. Share this experience with a Christian friend.

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Thank you.