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T H E
P R O T E S T A N T
F A I T H

TO GLORIFY GOD

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A person's motives are the things which give value to his actions. We know our own motives, but what other people's motives for their actions are we have to judge as best we can from those actions themselves. It is important to remember that God judges our actions by their motives. Thus in 1 Samuel 16:7 we read "Man looks on the outward appearances but God looks on the heart". Left to ourselves, apart from God's Holy Spirit in our hearts, all our motives are more or less selfish, and so the actions which spring from them cannot be fully approved by God. The Christian however should be different. He is to follow the example of Christ and by God's grace, to be free from selfishness and so to be fully approved. The motive on which the Christian is to act is the glory of God. Thus in 1 Peter 4:11 St. Peter writes "In all you do, may God be glorified through Jesus Christ" and in 1 Corinthians 10:31 St. Paul says "whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God". Here we have an all embracing motive which should underly all our actions and activity, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God".

It is a very simple motive, once we understand what it means. To glorify God means to show or to make plain His character and nature. Every action of a Christian should reflect God's character and make it clear to others. Our actions should express God's nature as He is in Jesus Christ. But if we are to glorify God, that is, if we are to show by our attitudes and actions what His character is like, we must know what that character is, and use this knowledge as a measuring rod for assessing our own actions. It is not easy to summarise in a word God's gracious and majestic character, but we might say that He is a loving, upright Sovereign, an almighty Father who

provides protection, provision and peace. The Bible makes clear that God controls every event, so that not even a hair falls from our head apart from Him. We are inclined to think that this is an exaggeration, but of course, it is not. God controls every event. So He is able to protect us completely, and has promised to allow nothing into the lives of those who trust Him, which will be too much for us or against our true interests. He guards our going out and our coming in, as the Bible puts it. And He not only supplies protection but also provision - He gives us our daily bread and every other need. He knows what we need and He supplies it. But perhaps the most important and distinctive gift that God gives to those who trust Him is peace - the peace of a quiet conscience through the forgiveness of sins. Our Lord Jesus Christ by His death on Calvary has taken away the penalty of our sins and has removed the barrier that sin creates between us and God. If we put our faith in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour our sins are quite blotted out from God's sight and we have peace with God, where before there was only enmity; and peace also with our own natures. Through forgiveness, we have peace in our conscience and peace on the day of judgment. Protection, provision and peace, for those who know Him, flow from God's loving and righteous sovereignty, so that when we say that our motives should be to glorify God we mean that all our actions and attitudes should express and reflect this loving, righteous, sovereign character of God. .

In applying this yardstick to church doctrines we see immediately how some come short, for they tend to obscure rather than make plain God's character. Thus the custom of praying to the saints, or to the Virgin Mary, obscures God's love,

as it suggests that He is not ready to hear our prayers, but that we need to pray via some human being as a mediator on our behalf instead of coming directly to Him as He invites us to do. Similarly pilgrimages in order to pray in front of a certain image, or in a particular place, obscure rather than glorify God's character, as they suggest that the place makes the prayers holy and more acceptable to God, as though He were unwilling to hear our prayers, wherever we pray, or as though He were more partial to prayers prayed in front of an image of which He was particularly fond. I illustrate this from a pamphlet I bought in a Roman Catholic cathedral recently, entitled "The Miraculous Child Jesus of Prague (It is printed with imprimatur). The pamphlet is about an image of the child Jesus, which is in a monastery in Prague. On page 12 we read "With this image the blessing of God entered the monastery in a striking manner". The booklet relates how through civil connotations the statue lost its hands. Subsequently a monk praying before the statue "distinctly heard the following words 'Have pity on me and I will have pity on you. Give me my hands and I will give you peace. The more you honour me the more I will bless you". p.17. Such teaching obscures God's nature as He has revealed it to us in the Bible. It does not glorify God. In the same way any doctrine which undermines the free character of salvation obscures rather than glorifies God's character. On the other hand, the Gospel of John 3:16 expresses God's character perfectly, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have everlasting life". Here we see His love in the greatness of His gift and in its freeness. God asks nothing from us in return except faith in Him. Thus, to preach the Gospel of free forgiveness of sins in Christ, is to glorify God, because there is no better way of making plain His character in that He has in love and righteousness provided free forgiveness, though at great cost to Himself. But if the preacher turns aside from preaching the Gospel of Christ's death on our behalf and spends his time on other topics, not directly related to this, he is to that extent missing his

opportunity of glorifying God. Worse still, if he teaches that forgiveness of sins is to be obtained by our merits alongside of those of Christ he has fatally obscured the loving character of God which the gospel of the free grace of God in Jesus Christ so perfectly expresses. This is the fundamental objection to the Roman Catholic doctrine of merits and good works, which are said to be required before forgiveness may be obtained from God.

If we place our own merits, whether good works, or church going, or almsgiving, or whatever it might be, alongside those of Christ as essential elements of our salvation we have obscured the graciousness of God's provision and so have robbed the gospel of its most glorious feature of being the expression of God's loving, righteous and sovereign character.

But this yardstick of doing all to the glory of God must be applied not only to Roman Catholic teaching but also to our own protestant church activities. Too often our motives centre on ourselves, and our activities are undertaken for our own self expression, our own achievement rather than for the expression of God's character for His glory. We identify ourselves with the progress from a material point of view of our church or denomination and much of our efforts and objectives are motivated by a desire for self expression and the sense of creative achievement. But to all activities we are to apply the simple rule of 'Do all to the glory of God'. There is a particular temptation in the realm of fund raising to use methods, which are successful from an immediate point of view in enabling projects to be undertaken, but which obscure God's character of loving, righteous, sovereignty. The one test to apply to every church activity, is this: Is

God's character seen more clearly through it? Does it conform to the command "Do all to the glory of God"? For example, a building, in itself, cannot express God's character, but the actions which bring the building into being can do so, or on the other hand they can obscure it. If there is risk of the latter it is more to God's glory to be without the building, whatever the foundation stone may say!

The same considerations apply to the way we order our private lives. Daily faith in God and in His promises of provision, protection and peace is the fundamental way of glorifying Him, because there can be no clearer way for us to show what we believe His character to be than by trusting Him. Every day there are numerous situations in which we can trust and obey God, and so glorify Him. If we keep vividly before us this motive, we will find that it is an effective way of countering our natural selfishness. It will also prune away a lot of unnecessary and anxiety producing activity in church life.

But we need to remind ourselves again that we cannot glorify God unless we know Him, for we cannot manifest and express His character by our attitudes and actions unless we know what that character is, nor can we trust Him unless we know what His promises are. Thus our own reading of the Bible, and the faithful preaching and expounding of the Bible by the ministers of God's Word are essential if God is to be glorified in our lives and in our church, and if we are to follow St. Paul's injunction "Whatever you do do all to the glory of God".

10th November 1963.

23/63