

# *It Is Written*

*A weekly publication of the  
Junction Highway church of Christ in Kerrville, TX.  
Vol. 22                      September 24, 2017                      No. 39*

## Stealing Glory From God

*by Dan Gatlin*

As Moses was leading the children of Israel through the wilderness, they came to the wilderness of Zin where the people started complaining once again. This was a desert without water. They hadn't stopped to consider that God has been providing for them all along. They had witnessed the 10 plagues, and how God destroyed the Egyptian armies. They had seen how God protected Israel and were told that they were being led to the Promised Land. Yet, they still didn't have faith.

Numbers 20:3-5 says, "And the people contended with Moses and spoke, saying: 'If only we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! Why have you brought up the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our animals should die here? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt, to bring us to this evil place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates; nor is there any water to drink.'" Then the Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals" (v. 8). Moses didn't do exactly what God told him to do. "And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them'" (vs. 10-12). By taking partial credit, Moses dishonored God placing himself as God's equal. The consequence of this sin was that he would not be allowed to go into the Promised Land.

Moses' sin was twofold. First, he was told to speak to the rock, but instead he struck the rock. Second, he took partial credit (glory) for something God had done. He was merely God's instrument and the source of nothing. As a leader of Israel, it was vitally important that God be fully honored and glorified. No man should lower God to our level nor elevate himself to God's. Yet, what Moses did can be duplicated today. We can take glory away from God when we do the following.

**1. Preach ourselves rather than Christ crucified.** The desire to be popular has long been a temptation for men (especially for some preachers). So, the message is softened to be pleasing to the ears, rather than what is needed for the soul. Paul wrote, "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). The goal of preaching should be to glorify God. If a preacher decides to take a little glory for himself, how is that different from what Moses did? Again, Paul said, "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:22-24). And again, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

The first step toward this kind of compromise is when a preacher decides not to preach on a bible topic because it will be unpopular. Personal reputation becomes more important than truth. Some truths are simply unpopular (Jn. 6:60-66). The preachers' responsibility is to teach it, no matter the consequences (2 Tim. 4:2-4). Preaching the "whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27) is not for cowards. When cowards occupy the pulpit, the whole truth is not taught, and God is robbed of the glory He deserves.

The goal of preaching should not be to get people to say, "That man is a great preacher," but rather, "Our God is a Great God!" "And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (1 Cor. 2:1-2)

**2. Attempt to gain influence.** While some are motivated by popularity, others are drawn to power and influence. Paul warned the Ephesian elders, "For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29-30). Diotrephes was this sort (3 Jn. 9-10). He had to control what took place in the congregation, even to the point of rejecting an inspired apostle. Sadly, the spirit of Diotrephes lives on today.

Paul told the church in Philippi, "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Thayer defines "selfish ambition" as "1) electioneering or intriguing for office, 1a) apparently, in the NT a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and fractious spirit which does not disdain low arts 1b) partisanship, fractiousness." Men have split churches to get their way or to gain and retain power. When a man takes on authority not granted to him through scripture, Christ is dethroned. Christ is the head of the church (Eph. 5:23). "To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever. Amen" (Jude 25).

**3. Change God's word.** The bible is an expression of who God is. It is how He has chosen to reveal Himself and His will to us. Man might be able to conclude that God exists through observing nature (Ps. 19:1-6), but we can only know God through His revelation. Paul wrote, "But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious" (2 Cor. 3:7-11). Both the law of Moses and the law of Christ are glorious, though "the ministry of the Spirit" exceeds and excels in glory.

When men change God's word or fail to preach "the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), they rob Him of His glory which is found in His word. A growing trend in religion today is to not talk about sin, or to soften the message so that the sinner is never truly convicted of his sin. How can a man be converted without feeling godly sorrow (2 Cor. 7:8-10)?

**4. When men establish human religious institutions.** The church was no last minute thought, but was according to God's eternal purpose (Eph. 3:10-11). It is in the church that He is glorified, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21). When men decide that their ideas are better or more efficient than what is revealed in the word, God is robbed of His glory because the church is robbed of its proper work. But if we follow the pattern (Heb. 8:1-5), the church can properly glorify God as it does its work.

**5. Boast of our accomplishments.** Some are concerned with magnifying themselves or "building a legacy." This is simply human pride. Paul was put in the unenviable position of having to "boast" to the Corinthian brethren. He was uncomfortable doing it, but there were those in Corinth who questioned his authority as an apostle. He writes, "I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing." (2 Cor. 12:11). He was not magnifying himself, but defending the authority that Christ had given him. To the Galatians he said, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14). The boasting of religious leaders in the denominational world is common. Let it never be so among God's people.

Robbing God of His glory has dire consequences, as Moses learned. Let us be humble enough to give all glory to God, without reserving any for ourselves.