

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FALL SHORT  
OF THE GLORY OF GOD?  
ROMANS 3:23 IN BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

DANE C. ORTLUND

ABSTRACT

Evangelical teaching tends to take Rom 3:23 as teaching universal human sinfulness due to every individual coming short of God’s own glory. This article suggests that while the Bible clearly teaches universal sinfulness, this particular text in Romans is making a more specific point—namely, that all of humanity sinned in Adam’s sin, and as a result we are lacking the fullness of the image of God with which we were originally vested in Eden. The meaning of the text could be rendered: “All sinned [in Adam], and are thus lacking the glory-image of God.” As our basic identity is transferred from being in Adam to being in Christ, that glory-image is decisively (if not fully) reinstated in us, as Paul goes on to say in Rom 8:29–30. This reading of Rom 3:23 is carefully considered by looking at the text of Rom 3:23 phrase by phrase, and then the reading is considered by broader considerations of the flow of Romans, Second Temple Jewish literature, and the Bible as a whole.

---

We do not want merely to see beauty.... We want something else which can hardly be put into words—to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it.

C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory”

I. *Introduction*

“**F**or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).<sup>1</sup> What does this text mean? It is quoted frequently in evangelical discourse, perhaps more than any other single text, to demonstrate universal sinfulness. Do we understand it correctly?

In general terms the truth of the verse is obvious. Cornelius Plantinga’s *Not the Way It’s Supposed to Be* displays compellingly the ways our world and our

---

Dane C. Ortlund is Executive Vice President for Bible Publishing and Bible Publisher at Crossway in Wheaton, IL.

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

own lives are marked by a profound and far-reaching sickness, a haunting darkness that, like one's shadow, cannot be eluded.<sup>2</sup> One hardly needs a Bible, but only the news headlines, to see this. The shock we feel at the horrors alive and well in this world is tempered only by the relentless consistency with which CNN puts them before us. And of course we see the tragedies of sin not only outside us but inside us. Every ethnic group, every class, both genders, all ages—each of us without exception is infected with the soul-twistedness of sin. “All have sinned ...”

But specifically, in this text, what does Paul mean? If we asked the apostle to fill out what he means in Rom 3:23, what would he say? What does it mean to “fall short of the glory of God”?

A common understanding of this text is that God's own glorious greatness and perfection is a standard out ahead of us of which, because of sin, we fall short—“as the archer comes short of the mark, as the runner comes short of the prize,” as Matthew Henry put it three centuries ago.<sup>3</sup> Evangelical teaching frequently reads this text as referring to God's own perfect resplendence as that of which humans come short.<sup>4</sup> This reading is made explicit in some translations, such as the NLT: “everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.” Below in Table 1 are renderings of Rom 3:23 in several English translations, which are notably consistent.

The meaning made explicit in the NLT is a common understanding of what it means to fall short of God's glory. Other interpretations exist, though they are not always easy to categorize neatly. Anthony Hoekema takes falling short of God's glory to mean failing to glorify God, but the Greek wording would be

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> *Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume*, ed. Leslie Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1961), 1760.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1902), 97; Donald Grey Barnhouse, *God's Remedy: Expository Messages on the Whole Bible Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen Press, 1954), 77, 89; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 102; John F. MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Ephesians* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 54; John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 214; Charles Stanley, *The Gift of Forgiveness* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 31; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 220; Tony Evans, *What Matters Most: Four Absolute Necessities in Following Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 309; John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 36; Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011), 57; Kenneth Boa and William Kreidenier, *Romans*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Holman, 2000), 107; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 120; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 355–56, 358–59; Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 279 (taking Rom 3:23 as specifically meaning to “violate God's laws”); D. A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway 2010), 55.

Table 1: *Translations of Romans 3:23*

NA28	πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον καὶ ὑστεροῦνται τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ
ASV	for all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God;
ESV	for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
HCSB	For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
KJV	For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;
NASB	for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
NET	for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
NIRV	Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory.
NIV	for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
NKJV	for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
NLT	For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.
NRSV	since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
RSV	since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

a strange way to communicate this.<sup>5</sup> Paul has just spoken of the human failure to glorify God in ch. 1, doing so with straightforward Greek syntax (1:21). Stanley Grenz takes the meaning of falling short of God's glory in a particularly communal direction: "we do not live in accordance with the principles of the community of God."<sup>6</sup> From a historical perspective, Jonathan Edwards takes "the glory of God" in this text as the reward of having God's glory conferred upon humans after perfect obedience, which we fail to attain.<sup>7</sup> Calvin, Otto Kuss, and William Hendriksen read "the glory of God" in 3:23 as God's approbation or approval of humanity.<sup>8</sup> Luther reads the text as meaning "to lack" God's glory but then takes the text in a somewhat predictable Lutheran direction, understanding God's glory to be his righteousness, so that the text means,

<sup>5</sup> Anthony Hoekema, "The Reformed Perspective," in *Five Views on Sanctification*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 75.

<sup>6</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 198.

<sup>7</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 26 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957–2008), 20:458; similarly 19:171; 23:216; 24:992.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 140; Otto Kuss, *Der Römerbrief*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Regensburg: F. Pustet, 1963), 1:114; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980–1981), 1:129n94.

“They have no righteousness of which they could glory before God.”<sup>9</sup> Cranfield understands the text to mean that sin causes all people to fail to have “illumination by the divine glory.”<sup>10</sup>

My argument in this article is that Rom 3:23 is most fruitfully understood when the Greek text is taken in a straightforward way and when the text is placed in a whole-Bible trajectory of the closely associated notions of sin, glory, and image, all in a framework of inaugurated eschatology under the two representative heads of the first Adam and the last Adam. When we read Rom 3:23 duly attuned to how subtly pervasive this broad redemptive-historical framework is throughout the Pauline corpus, I suggest we see that Paul has in mind God’s glory as vested upon humans made in his image. When Paul says “all sinned” (an aorist and not, as many translations may lead one to think, a perfect) he means exactly what he will unpack two chapters later—in Adam, “all sinned” (5:12). I further suggest that the meaning of the rest of the verse is that sin has caused us to *lack* in some degree the glory of God—that is, the divine glory with which humanity was stamped in Eden, the *imago dei*, was defaced, disfigured, deformed.

Some contemporary scholars allow for this interpretation, though without developing it.<sup>11</sup> Yet much scholarship and much evangelical preaching and writing continue largely to ignore the possibility of this reading. Moreover, I would like to advance the discussion by plugging Rom 3:23 into the sweep of Romans as a whole and attempt to bring greater clarity regarding Paul’s understanding of “glory” in this letter. To make the case we will move through the verse, considering first the phrase “all have sinned” (πάντες ... ἥμαρτον), followed by “fall short” (ὕστεροῦνται), and then “the glory of God” (τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ). We will then consider whether our proposed reading fits naturally with Paul’s broader argument in Romans, Second Temple Jewish literature, and the sweep of the whole Bible. We will thus move from micro to macro considerations in weighing the proposed interpretation.

## II. Exegetical Reflections on Romans 3:23

### 1. πάντες γὰρ ἥμαρτον

Every translation provided in Table 1 above renders the aorist verb ἥμαρτον as “has/have sinned,” giving the sense that the sinning was a past action with

<sup>9</sup> Luther: *Lectures on Romans*, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 115.

<sup>10</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975–1979), 1:204.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 226–27; N. T. Wright, “Romans,” *NIB* 10:470; Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 618; cf. 646.

a particular present effect, much as the perfect (in both Greek and English) often denotes. To translate the text as simply “all sinned” may seem at first glance ambiguously punctiliar: “For all sinned, and fall short of the glory of God.” This may seem awkward, as “all sinned” (as the aorist should generally, though not mechanically, be rendered) makes it sound as if Paul is referring to a particular moment in time at which everyone sinned, as distinct from a more general statement that “all *have* sinned.” Yet people have of course not even lived at the same time; how could they have sinned at the same time? Moreover, “all sinned” sounds collective (as if all sinned *together*) as opposed to “all have sinned,” which sounds more like a reference to everyone having sinned in their individual lives.<sup>12</sup>

Yet what if a particular moment in time, of collective sin, is precisely what Paul means? I do not wish to deny for a moment the broader theological truth, attested elsewhere in Paul, that indeed every individual has sinned in his or her life (e.g., Gal 3:22).<sup>13</sup> But given what we will see with regard to the meaning of the rest of the verse, it is likely that by “all sinned” Paul means that *in Adam*, all sinned. Adam’s transgression plunged the whole human race into death and darkness. In him, “all sinned.”<sup>14</sup> Here it is crucial to bring to the forefront of our reflection the apostles’ fundamental hermeneutical presupposition of *corporate solidarity*, by which the one stands for the many and the many are represented by the one.<sup>15</sup> As goes the head, so go the people (e.g., 2 Cor 5:14).

A key piece of evidence encouraging this reading is the next instance of this exact phrase. In Rom 5:12 we find Paul saying again πάντες ἥμαρτον: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned [πάντες ἥμαρτον]....” Here, using the same phrase as in 3:23, Paul unambiguously asserts that in Adam’s sin

<sup>12</sup> Hence Bénétreau’s perplexity at the aorist here: “On pourrait s’étonner de l’emploi de l’aoriste *hēmarton*,” concluding, “Mais on sait que certains aoristes considèrent une action en elle-même sans qualification temporelle” (Samuel Bénétreau, *L’épître de Paul aux Romains*, 2 vols. [Vaux-sur-Seine: Edifac, 1996–1997], 1:102n2). One might not be astonished, as Bénétreau is, if one adopts the reading proposed in this article, a reading which renders the aorist quite natural.

<sup>13</sup> Ridderbos’s discussion remains a distinctly penetrating analysis of universal sinfulness in Paul’s theology (Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 93–100).

<sup>14</sup> Contra Bruce, *Romans*, 102; John Murray, *Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 112; Erwin Ochsenmeier, *Mal, souffrance et justice de Dieu selon Romains 1–3: Étude exégétique et théologique*, BZNW 155 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007), 169. The Adam connection in Rom 3:23 comes through especially strongly in Erik Peterson, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Würzburg: Echter, 1997), 81.

<sup>15</sup> See esp. G. K. Beale, “Positive Answer to the Question Did Jesus and His Followers Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts,” in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 392; Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 53. Ochsenmeier misses the significance of the hermeneutical axiom of corporate solidarity when he is reluctant to see an Adamic connection in 3:23 and says, “Il s’agit ici d’un contexte au pluriel” (*Mal, souffrance et justice*, 169).

the whole human race sinned.<sup>16</sup> The precise way in which all sinned in Adam in 5:12–21 is variously articulated, but the core point is plain—in our first father, Adam, all humanity “sinned.”<sup>17</sup> Might not this whole-Bible connection be what Paul means when he uses the exact same phrase two chapters earlier in the letter?<sup>18</sup> After all, Paul clearly has the whole OT on his mind while penning 3:23, given his reference in 3:21 to “the Law and the Prophets” (cf. 3:31). Fitzmyer resists any Adamic connection in 3:23 since Paul “is not yet expressing himself in the terms he uses in 5:12–21.”<sup>19</sup> But this fails to appreciate the deeply embedded and often subsurface whole-Scripture framework out of which Paul is ever thinking.

## 2. καὶ ὑστεροῦνται

The above interpretation of πάντες ἥμαρτον becomes increasingly plausible as we continue to move slowly through the verse. Paul says that all sinned καὶ ὑστεροῦνται God’s glory. As with the previous phrase, here again the translations are remarkably consistent. Of the 12 translations provided in Table 1, ten of them render ὑστεροῦνται as “fall short.” Only the KJV’s “come short” and the NLT’s highly interpretive “No one measures up” diverge from the predominant rendering, though the NLT’s rendering makes explicit how readers of the other translations often understand it.<sup>20</sup>

The situation is different when considering modern translations in other languages. We cannot be exhaustive but consider just French and German. I consulted six French translations, for example, five of which render ὑστεροῦνται with *sont privés*<sup>21</sup> (are deprived of, lacking, bereft, bereaved), and only one

<sup>16</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 331; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 275–76; Wright, “Romans,” 526. In English translations of Rom 2:12 it may look as if Paul uses the same language of “all sinned” as in 3:23 and 5:12, but 2:12 lacks any form of πᾶς.

<sup>17</sup> Bavinck has a typically elucidating treatment in Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003–2008), 3:83–85. See also Donald L. Berry, *Glory in Romans and the Unified Purpose of God in Redemptive History* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 52–53.

<sup>18</sup> Among those who meaningfully associate πάντες ἥμαρτον in Rom 3:23 with 5:12, see J. R. Daniel Kirk, *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 105.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 347.

<sup>20</sup> A notable historical diversion is Thomas Cranmer’s own translation of this text, rendered in a way that may fit the reading of ὑστερέω I am proposing: “All have offended, and have need of the glory of God” (*Miscellaneous Writings and Letters of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. John Cox [Cambridge: Parker Society, 1846], 129; quoted in Ashley Null, “Thomas Cranmer’s Reading of Paul’s Letters,” in *Reformation Readings of Paul: Explorations in History and Exegesis*, ed. Michael Allen and Jonathan A. Linebaugh [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015], 227).

<sup>21</sup> *French Bible en français courant* (n.p.: Société biblique française, 1997); *La Bible de Jérusalem* (Paris: Cerf, 1973); *French Louis Segond Version 1910* (Ontario: Online Bible Foundation and Woodside Fellowship, 1988–1997); *Nouvelle Édition de Genève* (Geneva: Société Biblique de Genève,

with *et n'atteignent pas à*<sup>22</sup> (do not attain to). The German translations are more mixed, beginning with Luther's 1545 rendering of ὑστεροῦνται with *mangeln* (to lack). Some German translations continue with *mangeln*<sup>23</sup> / *ermangeln*<sup>24</sup> (to lack) or *verloren*<sup>25</sup> (to lose); others with the very different *reichen nicht*<sup>26</sup> / *erreichen nicht*<sup>27</sup> (not to reach) or *verfehlen*<sup>28</sup> (to miss); and others in between (*erlangen nicht*,<sup>29</sup> *entbehren*,<sup>30</sup> *verspielen*<sup>31</sup>). My point is simply that however one understands the interpretive traditions in French and German scholarship, the translations of these languages make immediately plausible the argument I present in this article.

The consistent “fall short” among English translations is noteworthy on two counts. First, as most commentators observe, the verb is in the present tense and should be understood as communicating sin's ongoing plight. Second, more importantly, we should consider whether “fall short” or “are falling short” captures the right sense in the first place. A more frequent meaning of ὑστερέω in the NT is “to lack,” which overlaps semantically with “to fall short” but carries a distinctly different denotation. I suggest that while “fall short” is perfectly valid as a translation, at an interpretive level one must understand what is being communicated, and to interpret ὑστεροῦνται as “are lacking” makes immediate sense of this text. From a lexical perspective, BDAG sanctions the meaning of “lack, be lacking,” including when used with the genitive, as in Rom 3:23.<sup>32</sup> The denotation “lacking” does not contradict “fall short”; rather, “lacking” makes explicit what “falling short” actually means, since ὑστερέω refers most immediately to *what* one is or has, while the English “falling short” refers, in its most basic sense, to *where* one is.

This verb ὑστερέω occurs sixteen times in the NT and consistently denotes the lacking of something, both in the Pauline corpus and throughout the NT:

---

1975); *Traduction Ecuménique de la Bible, édition à notes essentielles* (Paris: Cerf, 1988).

<sup>22</sup> *The French Darby Version* (Valence: Bible et Publications Chrétienues, 1991).

<sup>23</sup> *The German Lutherbibel 1912* (Dordrecht: Importantia, 1995). Also Heiko Krimmer, *Römerbrief, Bibel-Kommentar 10* (Stuttgart: Hänssler-Verlag, 1983), 111 (equally allowing for *verfehlen*).

<sup>24</sup> *Münchener Neues Testament Version 1988* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1998); *NeueLuther Bibel* (Wollerau, Switzerland: La Buona Novella, 2009); *Die Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments nach dem Urtext Übersetzt von Franz Eugen Schlachter* (Lausanne: Genfer Bibelgesellschaft, 1951). Also Heinrich Langenberg, *Der Römerbrief: Der heilsgeschichtliche Missionsberuf der Gemeinde und der paulinische Lehrtypus* (Hamburg: Schriftenmission Langenberg, 2003), 89.

<sup>25</sup> *Einheitsübersetzung der Heiligen Schrift* (Stuttgart: Katholische Bibelanstalt Verlag, 1980).

<sup>26</sup> *Das Neue Testament und die Psalmen in Deutscher Fassung* (Meinerzhagen: Verlag FriedensBote, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> *The German Darby Unrevidierte Elberfelder* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1905).

<sup>28</sup> *The German Schlachter Version 2000* (Lausanne: Genfer Bibelgesellschaft, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> *Elberfelder Bibel revidierte Fassung 1993* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1984).

<sup>30</sup> *Die Bibel: Die Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Bundes: Vollständige deutsche Ausgabe* (Freiburg: Herder, 2005).

<sup>31</sup> *Zürcher Bibel*, 2nd ed. (Zürich: TVZ, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> BDAG 1044. Note also the noun form, ὑστέρημα, which also denotes lacking something, such as in 2 Cor 8:14; 11:9; Col 1:24; 1 Thess 3:10.



the rich young man lacks just one thing (Mark 10:21), the younger son lacked what he needed in the far country (Luke 15:14), the disciples are sent out without travel equipment and yet lacked nothing (Luke 22:35), the Corinthians are not lacking in any gift (1 Cor 1:7), God honors the body part that appears to be lacking (1 Cor 12:24), God's faithful are lacking in the sense of being destitute (Heb 11:37). Particularly instructive is Phil 4:12, where Paul speaks of being in lack as opposed to abounding (*περισσεύω*). If "falling short" were the primary denotation of *ὑστερέω* in this text, one would expect Paul to set as its opposite *καταλαμβάνω* or a similar verb giving the sense of "attain" or "accomplish," not *περισσεύω*.<sup>33</sup>

The twenty occurrences of *ὑστερέω* in the Septuagint (including OT Apocrypha) provide further support for rendering *ὑστεροῦνται* as "are lacking." Two instances in Numbers denote "refrain from" (Num 9:7) or "fail to keep" (Num 9:13; similarly Sir 7:34), and sometimes the best way to make sense of the word is to understand it in temporal terms such as "fleeting" (Ps 39:4 [LXX 38:5]) or "to be delayed" (Heb 2:3). In most cases, however, as reflected in the majority of translations, some form of "lacking" works best, and sometimes is the only intelligible option. Thus the LXX consistently uses *ὑστερέω* to denote various kinds of lack—lacking clothes (Neh 9:21), lacking nothing we desire (Eccl 6:2), lacking oil on the head (Eccl 9:8), lacking sense (Eccl 10:3), lacking wine (Song 7:2 [LXX 7:3]), general lack of material needs (Sir 11:11; 13:4; 26:28), lacking strength (Sir 11:12), or lacking wisdom (Sir 51:24). And, as I am suggesting for Rom 3:23, sometimes the reference is to a lack in some spiritual or moral way (Ps 23:1 [LXX 22:1]; Dan [Th.] 5:27; Pss. Sol. 18:2).

All this need not wholly exclude the meaning "fall short" in Rom 3:23, and indeed "to fall short" remains the rendering of choice for some NT instances of *ὑστερέω*, such as 2 Cor 12:11, where a translation of "lacking" would not make sense. But the guidance of BDAG, the frequency with which "to lack" makes for the more sensible reading throughout the NT and LXX, and the considerations presented in the rest of this article incline me toward preferring "are lacking" as the most sensible interpretation of Rom 3:23.

### 3. τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ

We note next what it is that Paul says is lacking: the *δόξη τοῦ θεοῦ*. Once again this is consistently translated, usually as "the glory of God," with the exception of the NIRV's synonymous "God's glory" and the NLT's paraphrastic "God's glorious standard." This latter rendering makes explicit a common assumption about what the verse means: human sin results in coming up short of God's perfect standard. Yet if *ὑστεροῦνται* is read "are lacking," such a meaning of *τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ* becomes unintelligible—"all sinned and are lacking God's standard."

<sup>33</sup> Noted by Heinrich Schlier, *Der Römerbrief: Kommentar*, HThKNT 6 (Basel: Herder, 1979), 106.



Generally speaking in Paul, the glory of God refers to God's own resplendence, magnificence, weightiness, honor.<sup>34</sup> What we must bear in mind here is that Paul often speaks of *δόξα* not simply as God's own glory but as God's glory implanted upon humans<sup>35</sup>—in essence, that is, the image of God.<sup>36</sup> Where in the cosmos is God's glory actually, tangibly, seen and felt? In the created order, to be sure (Ps 19:1), but more particularly in humans, the rulers of the created order.<sup>37</sup> “Die Ehre oder Herrlichkeit Gottes,” as Langenberg puts it, “ist das Schöpfungsziel Gottes mit dem Menschen, der Beruf des Menschen als König der Schöpfung.”<sup>38</sup> Humanity is how God makes himself visible.

At this point it is vital to bear in mind that Paul closely links, at times even seeming to make roughly synonymous, “glory” and “image” (e.g., 2 Cor 3:18; 4:4).<sup>39</sup> The strongest text in this regard is 1 Cor 11:7, where Paul calls man “the image (*εἰκών*) and glory (*δόξα*) of God.” We should also note the close correlation between the three themes of glory, image, and Adam in 1 Cor 15:40–49, noting especially that v. 48 asserts the reinstated image of Christ in the *present* time, which is relevant to our study because we are suggesting that Rom 3:23 should be interpreted as speaking of a present lack of God's glory (on which more below).<sup>40</sup> In Rom 8:29–30 conformity to the image of Christ is the

<sup>34</sup> See R. B. Gaffin Jr., “Glory, Glorification,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 348–50. Perhaps somewhere in the background is the theme of honor/shame of the ancient Mediterranean world, but likely not to the degree claimed by Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 279–80, for whom the honor/shame motif controls his reading of Rom 3:23.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), 313–14. Also in accord with my argument regarding God's glory in Rom 3:23, see Otfried Hofius, “The Adam-Christ Antithesis and the Law: Reflections on Romans 5:12–21,” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 183–84. Yarbrough's excellent treatment of *δόξα* in Paul handles the notion purely in terms of God's own glory (Robert W. Yarbrough, “Paul and Salvation History,” in *The Paradoxes of Paul*, vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], 322–26). Schlier notes that Paul never states explicitly what he means by *δόξα* (*Römerbrief*, 257).

<sup>36</sup> Throughout this article I take image to refer most immediately to mankind's mandate to rule over the earth and multiply as God's sub-rulers on his behalf (Gen 1:28), though this focus on the functional element of the image is not to sideline the more relational or substantial elements of the image such as thinking, loving, and relating, since these uniquely human capacities are integral to the fulfilling of Gen 1:28 (see Ryan S. Peterson, *The Imago Dei as Human Identity: A Theological Interpretation*, JTI Sup 14 [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016]).

<sup>37</sup> A point made strongly by Franz J. Leenhardt, *L'épître de saint Paul aux Romains*, CNT 2/6 (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1995), 59.

<sup>38</sup> *Römerbrief*, 89.

<sup>39</sup> See esp. Ridderbos, *Paul*, 69–78; Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 43–46. John Murray notes the Pauline association between “image” and “glory” in commenting on Rom 3:23 (*Romans*, 113).

<sup>40</sup> V. 49 is trickier due to a textual issue—some manuscripts read “we shall also bear [*φορέσωμεν*]” the image of Christ, while other manuscripts read “let us bear [*φορέσωμεν*]” the image of Christ. The external textual support heavily favors the present, hortatory reading (*φορέσωμεν*). Regardless of which reading one takes, v. 48 is unambiguously oriented to the present.

goal of predestination, calling, justification, and glorification—the last of which likely refers not exclusively to future glorification but to glorification in terms of inaugurated eschatology (hence the aorist as the other verbs in the verse). That is, those united to Christ have been glorified in a decisive way, having the image fundamentally restored to them, while still awaiting the consummating final accomplishment of that glorification/image restoration.<sup>41</sup>

Among those supporting the prospect of ὑστερέω meaning “to lack” God’s glory in terms of the *imago dei* are Dunn,<sup>42</sup> Seifrid,<sup>43</sup> and Beale,<sup>44</sup> and from a broader historical perspective Chrysostom,<sup>45</sup> Goodwin,<sup>46</sup> and Bavinck.<sup>47</sup> Donald Berry’s excellent recent monograph ties in Rom 3:23 to Adam in a rich whole-Bible way, yet seems to revert back to the more popular view that it is a failure to glorify God (rather than lacking it ourselves) that is the plight of 3:23: “This failure to value God’s glory supremely and to live in accord with his glory is the essence of sin. Thus, to sin is to fall short of the glory of God.”<sup>48</sup> Others likewise explain God’s glory in Rom 3:23 in terms of the failure to glorify God.<sup>49</sup> Yet while this is surely close to the heart of sin, failure to bring glory to God is not what this text is about, except perhaps indirectly; this text refers directly to humanity’s loss of divine glory.

Reading ὑστεροῦνται as “are lacking” and “the glory of God” as God’s vested glory-image is not to suggest that the image is entirely gone, but rather that it is critically disfigured. In Gen 9, *after* the fall into sin, murder is prohibited on the grounds that mankind is God’s image (Gen 9:6). Therefore the image cannot have been entirely lost in Adam’s sin. When Paul uses ὑστερέω in Rom 3:23, he must mean that the glory-image of God is grievously marred while remaining fundamentally present.

A key point in my argument is that Paul is not simply saying that sinful humanity presently lacks the glory that they will one day receive back in the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>50</sup> Rather, sinful humanity presently lacks the

<sup>41</sup> On this reading of Rom 8:29–30, see Dane C. Ortlund, “Inaugurated Glorification: Revisiting Romans 8:30,” *JETS* 57 (2014): 111–33.

<sup>42</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 93–94.

<sup>43</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, “Unrighteous by Faith: Apostolic Proclamation in Romans 1:18–3:20,” in *Paradoxes of Paul*, 115n26.

<sup>44</sup> G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 456.

<sup>45</sup> *Homilies on Romans* 7 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 11:377); quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 100–101.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 2:90; 4:316; cf. 6:460; 10:425.

<sup>47</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:549.

<sup>48</sup> Berry, *Glory in Romans*, 53.

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Langenberg, *Römerbrief*, 89–90.

<sup>50</sup> As Kühl puts it: “an die Teilnahme an der Herrlichkeit Gottes in der künftigen Vollendung zu denken ist” (Ernst Kühl, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* [Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1913], quoted in Kuss, *Römerbrief*, 1:114).

glory that we were meant to have in *this* life. While sin robs us of this glory, in Christ we can have it restored in a decisive if not final way. In other words, the glory we are lacking outside of Christ is an eschatological glory, but that is not to say it is an exclusively future glory (what Schlier nicely calls “die kommende Vollendungsherrlichkeit”<sup>51</sup>). For those in Christ, the glory that in Adam has been decisively (though not fully) lost is decisively (though not fully) re-implanted when we are united to Christ. And one day the image-glory will be fully re-instated, in an escalated and invincible way, beyond what even Adam could ever have known.

### III. *Romans 3:23 Considered in Light of Romans, Second Temple Jewish Literature, and the Whole Bible*

We turn now from micro analysis of Rom 3:23 to macro analysis of how our proposed reading fits more broadly into the literature of which it is a part—Romans, Second Temple Judaism, and the whole Bible.

#### 1. *Paul’s Broader Argument in Romans*

Our suggestion at this point is that Rom 3:23 should be understood as “All sinned [in Adam] and are lacking [as now defaced] the glory [image] of God.” How does this sit with the rest of Romans? A brief tracing of the glory theme through Romans indicates that this understanding of Rom 3:23 fits naturally with the broader sweep of this letter. We will move crisply to avoid getting bogged down and to retain a focus on 3:23.<sup>52</sup>

In ch. 1 Paul condemns humanity thus: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (1:22–23). Here the apostle refers to the glory of God and, as in many Pauline texts, associates it closely with the notion of image (εἰκῶν). Paul’s point in this text is not that humans failed to glorify God, though he will say as much in 1:25. His point in 1:23 is that humans tragically exchanged their divinely given glory-image for the idolatrous earthly glory-image devoid of what is divine—exchanging the likeness of God for the likeness of created things (cf. Ps 106:20). This is human glory in view.<sup>53</sup> Note that Paul uses the Greek word *ὁμοίωμα* to speak (literally translated) of “the likeness of the image of mortal man,” picking up on the language used in LXX of the early chapters of Genesis where God creates man in his image (cf. Rom 8:3). Indeed, in Gen 1:26–28 not only are *ὁμοίωμα*

<sup>51</sup> Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> John Barclay translates Rom 3:23 as “All sinned and lack the glory of God,” in accord with this article, but does not expound upon his decision beyond his own immediate purpose, which is to focus on the gift of God in Christ that counteracts this sin (John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015], 474).

<sup>53</sup> Rightly Morna D. Hooker, “Adam in Romans I,” *NTS* 6 (1959–60): 305.

and εἰκῶν both used to speak of man as God's image,<sup>54</sup> but the various kinds of creatures in Rom 1:23 are listed, as those over which mankind is to rule.<sup>55</sup> According to Rom 1, mankind has chosen not to image God and rule over mortal creatures but to image mortal creatures and be ruled over by sin (cf. Rom 6:12–23).

Already in Rom 1, then, Paul has described sin in terms of the loss of the glory-image.<sup>56</sup> Paul picks up the theme of glory in ch. 2, where he identifies δόξα as worthy of being sought (2:7) as well as the reward of those who seek it (2:10).<sup>57</sup> Here again, though not explicitly connected to image, Paul clearly speaks of human glory, continuing to prepare the reader for the possibility of human glory being the referent in 3:23. In 3:7 we have a clear instance of δόξα as referring to God's own glory and honor, and the same goes for Abraham "giving glory to God" in 4:20.

An intriguing case presents itself early in ch. 5, as Paul ponders the assured blessings of justification in Christ, through whom "we have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God [καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐπ' ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ]" (5:2). Though some take this reference to glory to be the glorification of God himself,<sup>58</sup> others are probably right to see the believer's future glory in view—the glory of God given in Eden, lost in the fall, and one day to be finally reinstated with heightened escalation in the new earth.<sup>59</sup> Some therefore rightly connect the glory lacking in 3:23 with the glory hoped for in 5:2.<sup>60</sup> Both refer to the glory vested upon humanity—lost according to 3:23, to be restored according to 5:2. Thus the "not yet" aspect of human glory is in view in 5:2. The close tie between believers' future glory and hope in 8:21, where it is explicitly human glory, supports this view of 5:2, where glory and hope also converge.

After a reference to "the glory of the Father" in 6:4, ch. 8 refers twice to the eschatological glory that will be obtained by those in Christ. Paul speaks first of "the glory that is to be revealed to us [τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι εἰς ἡμᾶς]" (8:18) and then of creation's final liberation and obtaining of "the

<sup>54</sup> LXX Gen 1:26a: καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ' εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν.

<sup>55</sup> LXX Gen 1:26b: καὶ ἀρχέτωσαν τῶν ἰχθύων τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ τῶν πετεινῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τῶν κτηνῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς καὶ πάντων τῶν ἔρπετων τῶν ἐρπόντων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

<sup>56</sup> Käsemann has a brief but excellent discussion of Rom 3:23, tying it into Rom 1 and into Romans as a whole (Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 94–95).

<sup>57</sup> Schlatter connects the δόξα of 2:10 with that of 3:23, taking both to be referring to glory as God's final goal for humanity (Adolf Schlatter, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief*, 5th ed. [Stuttgart: Calwer, 1975], 142).

<sup>58</sup> E.g., Stott, *Romans*, 140–41 (mentioning human sharing in glory but emphasizing God's own glorification); John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 60.

<sup>59</sup> Moo, *Romans*, 302; Schreiner, *Romans*, 254–55.

<sup>60</sup> Leenhardt, *Romains*, 59; Légasse, *Romains*, 259; Frank J. Matera, *God's Saving Grace: A Pauline Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 122; Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 456.

freedom of the glory of the children of God [εἰς τὴν ἐλευθερίαν τῆς δόξης τῶν τέκνων τοῦ θεοῦ]” (8:21). For our purposes we simply note that again Paul speaks of human δόξα. The common translation of εἰς ἡμᾶς (8:18) as “to us” ought not to obscure this point, as we remember the fluid semantic range of the preposition εἰς; this is a glory to be revealed *in* us. This is not to the exclusion of the sight of divine glory (“to us”), but apprehending God’s glory is not likely the foregrounded meaning in 8:18. It is human suffering that is being assuaged by the coming glory, so it makes sense for it to be human glory in view (cf. 2 Bar. 15:8). Moreover, Paul refers unambiguously to human glory a few verses later in 8:21.

Romans 8 later refers to the believer’s glorification (8:30), another clear instance of human participation in divine glory.<sup>61</sup> We mentioned this passage above in noting Pauline connections between glory and image. Now we note that because this text speaks of an accomplished glorification for those in Christ (in an already/not yet way), *Rom 8:30 should be read as healing what was disfigured in Rom 3:23.*<sup>62</sup> Remembering the close link in Paul between glory and image, the apostle would likely say that “glorified” in 8:30 is virtually another way of saying “conformed to the *image* of his Son” in the previous verse (8:29). The glory-image lacking in 3:23 is restored in Christ according to 8:30.<sup>63</sup> Entering this world in Adam and thus fallen, lacking the divine glory that was fully ours in Eden (3:23), that glory returns to us as we are united to Christ; we are “re-glory-fied.” Our fundamental identity transfers from the image of the first Adam to the image of the last Adam (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:45).<sup>64</sup> And when this last Adam comes a second time, our glory will surpass what even the first Adam could have enjoyed.

The next reference to glory is 9:4, which again is human glory, though used in a much more ethnically circumscribed way as Paul reflects on the blessings of Israel, including “the glory [ἡ δόξα].” Given the other ethnically charged items in Paul’s list of blessings such as “the covenants” and “the giving of the law,” this δόξα is being used in a different way than in ch. 8. Here it likely refers to God’s tabernacling presence with Israel in the OT.<sup>65</sup> Twice more in Rom 9, both times in v. 23, Paul refers to glory, and again it is human glory in view. To get the flow of thought we begin in v. 22.

<sup>61</sup> Contra John Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 188, who takes Rom 8:30 as referring to the believer one day finally perfectly beholding God’s own glory.

<sup>62</sup> Ortlund, “Inaugurated Glorification,” 111–33.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38A (Dallas: Word, 1988), 485.

<sup>64</sup> A fulsome treatment of Christ as the latter-day image of God and second Adam is found in Krimmer, *Römerbrief*, 223.

<sup>65</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 484, and see OT references listed there connecting glory to God’s temple/tabernacle.

What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory [ἵνα γνωρίσῃ τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ σκεύη ἐλέους ἃ προητοίμασεν εἰς δόξαν] ... (Rom 9:22–23)

The second use of δόξα here clearly refers to glory in which humans participate, prepared for recipients of God's mercy. It is most natural to take the first occurrence of glory in the same way. In both cases Paul is speaking of a divinely granted glory in which believers participate. The final three occurrences of glory in Romans all refer to God's own glorification (11:36;<sup>66</sup> 15:7; 16:27).

The point of this brief trek through Romans is to note that while Romans contains some clear expressions of Paul's desire that God be glorified, this letter is even more replete with references to human glory—glory exchanged (ch. 1); glory sought (ch. 2); glory anticipated (ch. 8); glory given in the past and prepared for in the future (ch. 9); and (I suggest) glory lost (ch. 3). In each case it is human glory—granted by God, reflecting his own radiant rule, but human glory nonetheless.

I conclude that to read Rom 3:23 as speaking of that God-given glory now lacking in sinful humanity fits naturally with the broader sweep of Romans. We will consider the sweep of the whole Bible, too, after reflecting on a handful of intertestamental Jewish texts.

## 2. *Second Temple Jewish Literature*

A key piece of evidence in the proposed reading of Rom 3:23 is a constellation of intertestamental Jewish texts (c. 200 BC–AD 100). Such texts should be illuminating, not determining, of the meaning of the NT; the apostles must be allowed freedom to give new meanings to old categories and go off in different directions from their Jewish contemporaries in light of the coming of Christ.<sup>67</sup> We should also beware of treating “Second Temple Judaism” as a monolithic entity.

With these reminders in place, we observe how Second Temple Jews commonly spoke of glory in ways that accord with the argument of this article. The intertestamental literature freely speaks of glory in human terms (e.g., Bar 4:1; 1 Macc 3:3; 11:51; 2 Macc 14:7; 1 Esd 5:61; 3 Macc 2:16), especially in the Apocryphal book Sirach, which frequently associates wisdom and glory (e.g.,

<sup>66</sup> We might note that Paul does use the verb δοξάζω on the human plane in 11:13 to refer to glorifying his own ministry.

<sup>67</sup> See Samuel Sandmel, “Parallelomania,” *JBL* 81 (1962): 1–13; Hans Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 3 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990–1995), 1:258–59; Richard Bauckham, “The Relevance of Extracanonical Jewish Texts to New Testament Study,” in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 68–73.

Sir 3:10–11; 4:13; 5:13; 10:22; 44:2, 7, 13, 19; 45:2–3, 26<sup>68</sup>). In the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha human glory remains the minority of references to glory, with the majority referring to God's own glory. In Josephus, a much greater proportion of references are to human glory (e.g., *Ant.* 1:275; 2:268). In all this literature, however, and in Qumran too as we will see, human glory is spoken of freely and at times makes explicit the very meaning I am suggesting for Rom 3:23.

Specifically, the common understanding comes through fairly transparently that the present human plight is alienation from the glory-image with which God originally stamped humans in Eden.<sup>69</sup> Thus in the Apocalypse of Moses, Eve eats of the forbidden fruit and then cries out to the serpent, "Why have you done this to me, that I have been estranged from my glory with which I was clothed?" (Apoc. Mos. 20:2–3).<sup>70</sup> She then cries out to Adam and speaks of the way her transgression has "brought us down from our great glory" (21:2). Upon Adam's partaking of the forbidden fruit, he then likewise turns to Eve and remarks, "You have estranged me from the glory of God" (21:6). Taking the three texts together, the fall into sin is here understood in terms of the divestment of the glory-image with which Adam and Eve were fully clothed in the Garden.

Philo speaks in *On the Special Laws* of the regal right to boast in "incontestible glory, the signal of my irreproachable sovereignty, created after the image and model of the archetypal royal power of God" (*Spec. Laws* 4:164). Here the themes of glory, creation, and image cohere. Another intriguing text is in 4 Esdras, where the Lord tells Ezra to say to the people, "I will take back to myself their glory, and will give to these others the everlasting habitations" (4 Esd 2:11) and in the very next verse alludes unambiguously to Eden: "the tree of life shall give them fragrant perfume, and they shall neither toil nor become weary" (2:12). This is another indication of the Edenic provenance of human glory (similarly 8:51–52). A similar association occurs in Philo, who discusses Adam's naming of the animals and refers to "the glory and honor due to the firstborn" (*QG* 1:20).

---

<sup>68</sup> Sir 44–49 is an especially interesting case, as these chapters recount some of the key OT figureheads; though Adam is not mentioned, the chapter begins by asserting, "The Lord apportioned to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning" (RSV). It is difficult to discern with certainty but perhaps a reference to Edenic glory ("from the beginning") is in view here.

<sup>69</sup> On this conviction in Second Temple Judaism, see Käsemann, *Romans*, 245; Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 485; Gaffin, "Glory, Glorification," 348; Bénétreau, *Romains*, 246n1; Jürgen Moltmann, *The Future of Creation: Collected Essays*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 125; Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 442.

<sup>70</sup> The clothing metaphor here is especially intriguing, as it is the same metaphor used by Paul in 1 Cor 15:49–54 (using the verbs *φορέω* and *ἐνδύω*) to describe the inaugurated eschatological donning of Christ's image. Cf. Jung Hoon Kim, *The Significance of Clothing Imagery in the Pauline Corpus*, JSNTSup 268 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), ch. 10, esp. pp. 197–200. The same clothing image is used by Paul to speak of resurrection in 2 Cor 5:1–5, but there the focus is on future resurrection (the not yet) and not, as in 1 Cor 15:48–49, the present (the already).



The Qumran materials likewise speak of Adam's glory, while also implicitly speaking of Adam's loss of glory.<sup>71</sup> Three texts are worth mentioning.<sup>72</sup> First, the *Community Rule* speaks of the way God will "instruct the upright in the knowledge of the Most High and teach the wisdom of the sons of heaven to the perfect of way. For God has chosen them for an everlasting Covenant and all the glory of Adam shall be theirs. There shall be no more lies and all the works of injustice shall be put to shame" (1QS 4:22–23). Here Adam's fall into sin appears to be implied in the reference to perversity being gone, but in any case the clear ascription of glory to Adam is noteworthy, which will apparently be restored to the upright members of the Qumran community. Second, the *Damascus Document* identifies "those who hold fast" to "a sure house in Israel" built by God as those who "are destined to live forever and all the glory of Adam shall be theirs" (CD 3:19–20). Here Adam's Edenic glory is the eschatological hope of the community. Finally, the *Hodayot* provides the following promise: "Thou wilt deliver all those that are corrected by Thy judgments.... Thou wilt cause them to inherit all the glory of Adam and abundance of days" (1QH 17:15). Once again, restored Adamic glory is promised to the faithful.<sup>73</sup>

Perhaps the most striking Jewish text for the purposes of this article is a passage in 3 Baruch (a document difficult to date but perhaps composed a few generations later than Paul<sup>74</sup>). There we read that prelapsarian Adam was clothed in the glory of God but that he was stripped or divested of God's glory upon sinning. "Adam through this very tree obtained condemnation, and was divested of the glory of God" (3 Bar. 4:16). The Greek text reads: ὁ Ἀδάμ δι' αὐτοῦ τοῦ ξύλου τὴν καταδίκην ἔλαβεν καὶ τῆς δόξης θεοῦ ἐγυμνώθη. The final phrase is particularly instructive for our purposes, as Adam is said to have had the glory of God divested or stripped from him upon eating of the forbidden tree (using γυμνώω, the Greek verb meaning to strip or unclothe). As Leenhardt puts it in reflecting on some of these Jewish texts, "la gloire est le vêtement des justes."<sup>75</sup> This is an unambiguous articulation of the event in Eden which I am suggesting leads to the present state of what Paul calls "lacking the glory of God."

<sup>71</sup> For these translations I have used Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin, 1997).

<sup>72</sup> On these texts, see also C. Marvin Pate, *The Glory of Adam and the Afflictions of the Righteous: Pauline Suffering in Context* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1993), 67–77.

<sup>73</sup> Crispin Fletcher-Louis considers the same Qumran texts I have just mentioned (Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, STDJ 42 [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 88–103). He integrates these texts on Adam's glory into his broader project that seeks to show that the Qumran community believed that humanity in its prelapsarian state is divine or at least angelic. While the Qumran community certainly venerated its leader in distinct ways, Fletcher-Louis fails to account for the possible reading that the lofty statements of prelapsarian Adam reflect his gifted glory-image, reflecting God's own glory yet remaining fully and only human.

<sup>74</sup> See the useful remarks of Daniel C. Harlow, *The Greek Apocalypse of Baruch (3 Baruch) in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity*, SVTP 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 11–16.

<sup>75</sup> *Romains*, 59n5.

We cannot be exhaustive in the scope of this article, but it is clear from this brief survey that the Jews freely spoke of human glory, that they associated it with the theme of image, and that they considered Adam's sin to have resulted in the loss of Edenic glory.

### 3. *The Sweep of the Bible as a Whole*

Before concluding our argument it is worth reflecting briefly on the degree to which our reading of Rom 3:23 would fit in to the broader storyline of Scripture.

We have seen that to the ancient Jewish mind Adam was vested with glory at his creation. He was the image of God; not divine, but fully human, and thus reflecting God's own resplendent rule in the mandate to be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). In trusting Satan's word over God's, he plunged the human race into sin and shame. At the same time, the image of God was deformed but not eradicated, as clear from subsequent texts that continue to speak of humanity as the image of God (Gen 9:6; cf. 5:3).

The rest of the Bible, from one perspective, is simply the quest to get back the glory-image. Key here is the tabernacle/temple motif, through which God restored his glory among his people despite their sinfulness. (Eden was the first temple, though there was not any need before the fall for a demarcation between God and sinful humanity, as the temple with its various demarcations represents.)<sup>76</sup> As redemptive history unfolds, it is the priest in particular who represents the Adamic glory of God in his vestments and role.<sup>77</sup>

Subsequently throughout the OT we are given reinforcing clues as to the meaning and significance of the Adamic glory of humanity, a glory lost but one day fully to be restored (Ps 7:5; 21:5; 57:8; 106:20; Isa 17:3; 28:5; 43:7; 46:13; 48:11; 60:1–2, 13; 62:2; Jer 2:11; 13:11; 33:9; Zech 11:3; 12:7). God “will die Herrlichkeit wiederherstellen.”<sup>78</sup> Humanity's final future is not categorically new; it is Eden restored. And we must immediately add that this restoration is not simply a return to Eden but an elevated state of final invincibility.<sup>79</sup> The

---

<sup>76</sup> See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004).

<sup>77</sup> On which, see esp. Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), ch. 2; Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 85–90.

<sup>78</sup> Krimmer, *Römerbrief*, 111, commenting on Rom 3:23, but wrongly identifying glorification as justification or righteousness (a tendency among German commentators, including Luther himself [*Lectures on Romans*, 116]; also, e.g., Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 107; Peterson, *Römer*, 81–82).

<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Richard Gaffin for interacting with me on this point and clarifying my thinking via personal correspondence. This restorative dimension of grace is perhaps the key contribution of Herman Bavinck (*Reformed Dogmatics*, passim; Jan Veenhof, *Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck*, trans. Albert M. Wolters [Sioux Center, IA: Dordt College Press, 2006]). Similarly, Herman Ridderbos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), 154–55. Most recently, note Brian G. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics*, Studies in Reformed Theology 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

final state, won by Christ and given freely to those in him, surpasses even the bliss of Eden.

A particularly instructive text is Ps 8, a passage considered significant to the apostles as clear from their quotations of it (1 Cor 15:25–28 and Heb 2:5–10). Here David says that in creating humanity God “crowned him with glory and honor [כבו והדר / LXX δόξη και τιμή]” (v. 5). The next verse, picking up on Gen 1:28, then reads: “You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (v. 6). What is vital to note here is that David not only says that God vested humanity with *glory* at creation, but he also picks up on the central OT passage that states God vested humanity with his own *image* (Gen 1:26–28). Even more remarkably, just as Gen 1 then goes on to enumerate the creatures over which mankind has been placed in dominion, so too does Ps 8 (vv. 7–8), alluding to Gen 1;<sup>80</sup> and then in Rom 1 these groupings of animals are listed as the images for which sinful mankind has exchanged the glory of God (Rom 1:23). I suggest that this image-glory—granted in Eden, lost by the first son Adam (Luke 3:38), anticipated in the Israelite cultus, and longed for in the prophets—is that which Paul says in Rom 3:23 we presently lack.<sup>81</sup>

How is the glory-image restored? God sent a “last Adam,” the final tabernacle (John 1:14) and temple (John 2:19–22),<sup>82</sup> his truly firstborn Son (Rom 8:29) as opposed to an adopted “firstborn” son (Exod 4:22),<sup>83</sup> the very image and likeness of God (Heb 1:3). When God opens sinners’ eyes to the gospel, what do they see? According to Paul, they see “the light of the gospel of the *glory* of Christ, who is the *image* of God” (2 Cor 4:4; cf. Col 1:15). Jesus Christ is the consummative recapitulation of the glory-image of God. United to him, believers enjoy by grace the already/not yet restoration of that image (1 Cor 15:48–49; Col 3:1–4, 10), because the glory that the Father gave the Son, the Son gives to his followers (John 17:22). In him, we are transformed “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18; my trans.). Eschatological glorification “[ist] schon jetzt geheimnisvoll in ihren Anfängen vorhanden.”<sup>84</sup> Believers enjoy an inaugurated

<sup>80</sup> See the insightful comments in this regard in Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973) 67–68.

<sup>81</sup> Ridderbos links glory in Rom 3:23 with Gen 1:26–30 (*Paul*, 71), as does Krimmer (*Römerbrief*, 111), and there seems to be a tendency among the French commentators to be especially clear on this point (e.g., Bénétreau, *Romains*, 102; Légasse, *Romains*, 258). Cf. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 101–3.

<sup>82</sup> In John 1:14 not only is it said that in Jesus God “tabernacles” (ἐσκήνωσεν) among us but also uses the language of seeing his “glory.”

<sup>83</sup> This is not to deny that Jesus himself was adopted by the Father in the “from below” perspective of his human messianic accomplishment, in a way that fully upholds the “from above” perspective of his eternal and ontological deity as the Son, as David Garner has recently argued (David B. Garner, *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2016], 173–218). It is simply to marvel that God would send his own Son from heaven to restore the glory-image to sinners.

<sup>84</sup> Schlier, *Römerbrief*, 106.

glorification. With the first coming of Christ, the great End descended upon this earth.

In Revelation (the NT book with the highest number of occurrences of εἰκῶν [10] in the repeated warnings not to worship the beast or its image), the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven “having the glory of God [ἔχουσαν τὴν δόξαν τοῦ θεοῦ]” (Rev 21:11). And the kings of the earth bring their glory into the New Jerusalem (21:24)—that is, the “glory and honor [τὴν δόξαν καὶ τὴν τιμὴν]” (21:26; cf. Ps 8:5) with which mankind was originally crowned in Eden and which God has been working to reinstate since Gen 3.

#### IV. Conclusion

Romans 3:23 is the bottom-line explanation for why we pack stadiums for football games, pay thousands of dollars for liposuction, and meet with psychologists to plumb the depths of the haunting sense of shame we feel. We lack glory, and we know it. At every turn in everyday life we see evidence of the truth that we know, deep within, that we have lost our true glory, our real selves. We feel keenly our sense of alienation from who we were destined to be.<sup>85</sup> We seek to fill that void any way we can, even vicariously through enjoying the glory of others. The message of the gospel, from the perspective of this article, is that in Christ, our glory is given back to us.

Romans 3:23 is often cited to demonstrate universal human sinfulness. Has it been quoted so frequently that we have largely become inoculated to considering afresh whether we are understanding it correctly? Evangelical teaching frequently assumes that Paul is referring to God’s own glory as that of which humans fall short. I suggest that while this is a true statement theologically, Paul likely has something more specific in mind in this particular text. Paul writes that “all sinned and are lacking the glory of God.” In Adam all sinned, and the tragic result is that the divine glory with which humanity was vested in Eden—the *imago dei*—went into meltdown. As 3 Baruch puts it, Adam was “divested of God’s glory.” Romans 3:23 is lamenting the tragedy that we have been unclothed; the image has been effectively stripped. The last Adam re-clothes us. The loss of glory that has plagued mankind since Adam’s fall is restored in an inaugurated way for those in union with Christ and in a consummative and escalated way in the new earth (Rev 21:11).<sup>86</sup> United to Christ in this fallen

<sup>85</sup> Reflecting thoughtfully on the “bürgerliche Anständigkeit” (“bourgeois respectability”) which we tend to seek to fill the lack of God’s glory, de Boor remarks: “Gott aber hat uns ein ganz anderes Ziel gesetzt: nicht menschliche Anständigkeit, sondern göttliche Herrlichkeit” (Werner de Boor, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, Wuppertaler Studienbibel [Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1973], 98).

<sup>86</sup> Richard Gaffin’s most recent explication of union with Christ is particularly lucid (Richard B. Gaffin Jr., “The Work of Christ Applied,” in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016], 268–90, esp. 280–90).

world, sinners unite once more with Edenic glory—they are re-glory-fied—in an already/not yet way.

Pascal famously wrote that we fallen humans are “glorious ruins.” This is precisely Paul’s view of things. We were created with glory. We were ruined. We are being restored to that glory. This is why, as Lewis remarks in the quote at the head of this article, we long not only to see beauty but to pass into it. Later in his essay he goes on to say that “if we take the imagery of Scripture seriously,” we must see that “God will one day give us the Morning Star and cause us to put on the splendour of the sun.” Lewis says:

At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendours we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumour that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in.<sup>87</sup>

Romans 3:23 is the apostolic articulation of Lewis’s point that we are “outside” now. And Romans goes on to explain how, in Christ, we can indeed mingle with glory—decisively now, and finally, one day soon, upon Christ’s return.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (New York: HarperCollins, 1949), 42–43.

<sup>88</sup> I would like to express my thanks to Chris Bruno, Richard Gaffin, and Nicholas Piotrowski for their instructive comments on an early draft of this paper.