

THE GLORY OF GOD

A narrative biblical theology necessarily features the glory of God. From the outset of Israel's history, without any direct appearance of God (Deut. 5:4, 5; Exod. 33:18-23), his glory proceeded from him to appear in various expressions (Heb. 1:1). As an example, Moses stood in the presence of God's glory when he saw the burning bush and spoke with God (Exod. 3:1-19). At the end, God's glory most vividly and dramatically appeared in the First Advent (Heb. 1:2) and will appear in the Second Advent of the Son of God. Ryrie identified the revelation as a *sine qua non* of Dispensationalism yet called it "a rather technical matter." This is the case because all biblical theologies feature God and his glory. But Ryrie's viewpoint more specifically related to "the ultimate purpose of God" in biblical history. "The Bible itself clearly teaches that salvation, important and wonderful as it is, is not an end in itself, but is rather a means to the end of glorifying God (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14)."¹ John F. Walvoord shared the same conviction: "The larger purpose of God is the manifestation of His own glory. To this end, each dispensation, each successive revelation of God's plan for the ages, His dealing with the non-elect as well as the elect . . . combine to manifest divine glory."² Thus Dispensationalism is a narrative biblical theology in which God determines to ultimately reveal his glory for the good of those he chooses, for those who love him. Thus the title we've chosen for this overall narrative theology is "Drawn by God's Glory."

To understand the choice of this goal, it is helpful to begin with the term *glory*. To speak of God as *glorious* is "an expressive use"³ of language. Whereas the object of referential use of language is to clarify and convey an idea, "the object of expressive language is . . . to respond to an experience. It is the language of imagination of poetry and of worship." So when we speak of the glory of God we are not only saying something *about* God, but we are also saying something about how we respond *to* God.

"The noun *kābôd* derives from *kbd*, which denotes 'heaviness' and in the spiritual sense – 'honor' and 'respect.'"⁴ This word is bivocal, expressing both a stimulus (the dignity of the person spoken about) and a response (the esteem due his greatness). In a biblical theology featuring the story of God the ultimate goal is to talk about God's dignity in light of all that proceeds from him and it is to express our esteem for *the One who is the hero of the Bible's story*. So our worship is an intended aspect of this goal.

God's Glory as David Saw It

¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 38-41.

² *Ibid.*, 40, 41.

³ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 25-30.

⁴ Moshe Weinfeld, *kābôd*, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. VII, ed. Botterwick, Ringgren, Fabry (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1995), 23.

Few have given expression to esteem better than David in the psalms and few psalms have appreciated the range of thought in an Old Testament theology than Psalm 8. Kidner describes Psalm 8 as celebrating *God's glory* with a masterly economy of words in a spirit of mingled joy and awe, He summarized the point of the psalm to bring to light "the *unexpectedness* of God's ways in the roles God has assigned to the strong and the weak (2), the spectacular and the obscure (3-5), the multitudinous and the few (6-8)."⁵ God's glory is also highlighted at the beginning and end of the psalm which gives expression to this overriding theme: "How excellent is your name' (8:1, 9). His name is excellent because he identifies with the weak, the obscure and the few. From a human point of view, the opposite would be *expected*. His excellence is not just in compassion but in ultimate victory as well.

Thus, implied in God's ways are the ones he chooses to **partner** within **covenant**. The weak, the obscure, the few are sufficient because God has **partnered** with them. In David's mind the **partnership** is the **covenant** union God had with Israel. It is the **partnership** God initiated with David himself, the youngest and the least likely son in his family. For God revealed a **covenant promise** with David and his house assuring his descendants that an eternal throne and kingdom in Jerusalem would be established (2 Sam. 7:12-17). As time passed, and king after king failed to measure up to David, the **partnership** would need to involve an *unexpected* offspring. So as the story continues into the New Testament, a *virgin conception* is an *unexpected* but *necessary* birth which caused no small surprise. David's psalm would imply that God would **partner** in the even more intimate way with the weak until his adversaries are deflated. This personal **partnership** was recognized by Scripture from the outset (Gen. 3:15).

That **partnership** is implied by the use of a personal pronoun, "the God whose *glory* fills the earth is *our* Lord" (8:1, 2). What David means by the personal pronoun is not that man possesses the Lord. It is even more than affirming a relationship with the glorious God. In view of man's insignificance, the LORD is *our* LORD because He has chosen man (8:3-8) to complete his plan. God's *glory* is evident in the paradox between those who are advocates of God (the weak) and those who are opposed to God (the avenger). "His praise is chanted on high yet acceptably echoed from the cradle and the nursery."⁶ This reality continues to be present in the story in the crying, nursing Moses (Exod. 2:1-10) and in the vulnerable infant in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:8-18). The fragile continuation of the story barely survives in the innocent lives of these infants who are at the vortex of arrogant but threatened rulers. Then the Lord quotes this passage when the voices of children were denounced by the religious leaders in authority in the Temple (Matt. 21:15, 16). "So the startling contrast of verse 2 makes the proper impact. With all the earth and heaven proclaiming God in verse 1, the rising discord of *foes . . . enemy . . . avenger* presents a challenge which God meets with 'what is weak in the world.'"⁷

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 66.

⁶ *Ibid.* 66.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Weinfeld also interprets passages where *kābôd* is related to evil and human obscurity. “Job is challenged to deck himself with majesty and dignity, glory and splendor (*hōd w^ehādār*) like God – which is naturally impossible and tread down the wicked so that they hide in dust.”⁸

“During Israel’s wandering in the desert, the *kābôd* is revealed to inform the Israelites of God’s will, usually immediately after their revolt or rebellion against their leaders (Ex. 16:10, Nu. 14:10; 16:19; 17:7 [16:42]; 20:6). God intervenes by manifesting his *kābôd*; there follows a divine message to Moses in the tent of meeting . . .”⁹

God’s Glory as David Anticipated It

In the obscurity of man, “the *kābôd* of Yahweh is conceived as a blazing fire surrounded by a cloud (Ex. 24: 16f; 16:10; 40:34f; Nu. 17:7; [16:42]; Ezek. 1:4; 10:4). The cloud is an indispensable element of a theophany. It serves as a cloak to protect against mortal danger of viewing the deity. Only Moses, who can look upon God face to face (cf. Nu. 12:8; Deut. 34:10), may enter this cloud (Ex. 24:18). To other Israelites God reveals himself only wrapped in clouds. Unlike Moses, they see only the flames that blaze within the cloud (Ex. 24:17).”¹⁰

It is in this perspective that David raises the question: “*What is man?*” (8:3-8). The very fact that David raises the question provides evidence about what distinguishes man from the whole array of stars and other creatures mentioned in the psalm. He has an awareness of himself in contrast to the animal creatures and of himself in distinction to God. Kidner suggests that the question is raised in self doubt¹¹ of man’s role. That is further enhanced when he adds, *or what is the Son of Man?* That question implies his anticipation of the future that may only intensify the self doubt. When compared to the grandeur of the heavens, with the moon and stars, it would seem unexpected that God was intentionally aware of man. Yet David realized from Israel’s history that God always had Israel in mind and was attending to her with concern. Otherwise how would Israel have survived? This is evident in the covenant **partnership** that God had committed himself with Abraham and now with David. Compared to the expanse of the universe and man’s insignificance, this plan seems so improbable (8:3, 4).

At the same time, David addressed his Creator as *our* Lord. And this personal relationship alluded to Genesis 1:26. The personal pronoun implied a shared personal image that God had determined at creation. Appropriately the MT positions the image of man lower than that of *God* (*elōhîm*), yet compared to the other creatures man is still crowned with a share in God’s glory and honor. The LXX translation takes the word for *God* in its rarer, generic sense, to mean supernatural beings, i.e. “angels.” Hebrews 2:7, 9 follows that translation and

⁸Weinfeld, *kābôd*, 30.

⁹Ibid., 34.

¹⁰Ibid., 31.

¹¹Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 67.

takes *little* to mean “*for a little while*.” This legitimate translation takes the sense to refer to the time of a fallen creation rather than to refer to a comparison between Creator and creature.

As in the case of Hebrews 2:7, 9, “the New Testament opens up fresh aspects of this passage.”¹² The question that David asked is the occasion. When the covenant partnership with Israel failed, God made another unexpected yet necessary move. While not abandoning Israel, God enhanced his **partnership** with the Son of Man. At birth, as the son of Abraham, as the Son of David, the Father **partnered** with his Son, the second Person in the God head. For the divine Son became the Son of Man; two natures united in One Person. This **partnership** is then explained by Paul in Philippians 2:5-10. The *attitude* of the Son is highlighted because it was the **core of partnership** and because it is the basis of God’s **glorification**. Lightfoot paraphrased the passage to give expression also to a believer’s *partnership* with God: The Son though existing before the worlds in the eternal Godhead, yet *did not cling* to the prerogatives of His divine Majesty, *did not* ambitiously *display* His equality with God. **But** *divested* Himself of the glories of heaven and *took upon* Himself the nature of a servant, assuming the likeness of man.

Nor was that all, having thus appeared among men in the fashion of a man, He *humbled* Himself yet more, carried out His obedience to dying nor did He die by a common death: He was crucified, as the lowest malefactor is crucified, as He was *humiliated* . . . so also He was *exalted* . . . raised . . . and . . . given a name and dignity above all else.¹³ As the Son allowed the Father to bring him into glory, so the Father used the Son to display his own greater glory. This is partnership. Alone neither would have experienced the same degree of glory. The Son could have displayed his equality with God had he remained in heaven. And that glory would be equal to the Father in heaven. But together the Creator, on behalf of fallen creatures, provided what fallen creatures could never have realized for themselves. And this work of a new creation for the elect was realized in the **partnership** of the Father and the Son. And this impossible provision displayed unanticipated **glory**.

From the Son’s point of view, he *divested* Himself or *emptied* Himself to allow the Father to rule over and through him. What does this mean? It does not mean that he stopped being God. Rather, He did not display his own prerogatives as God, on his own. He relinquished the independent use of his divine attributes, apart from his Father. “During the reformation the discussion centered on the possibility of Christ emptying Himself of the attributes of omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence without affecting essential deity.”¹⁴ This discussion was thoughtful but there is clear evidence that Jesus saw himself as the Son of God. After healing the lame man, Jesus spoke of this miracle to the Jews; “My Father is still working and I am working also” (John 5:17). He speaks of himself as doing the same work as the Father. No mere human could speak this way. The Jews responded; “He was calling God His own

¹² Ibid.

¹³ J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Macmillan, 1913), 127.

¹⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor Books 1986), 260.

Father, making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18). Jesus’ words do not make him someone he is not, but rather, his words speak of existing realities.

At the same time, he was aware of his humanity as Man (Matt. 12:32). Luke speaks of his growth, “the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom” (Luke 2:40). This describes human development. And so related to the discussion of Reformers, he lived throughout his days in one body, not omnipresent, yet he healed at a distance. Concerning omnipotence, Jesus experience weakness; he was weary and slept, was hungry, and in the end he died. So while speaking of himself as God, he also experienced very human experiences.

Glory in Conflict with Satan

It was in the wilderness, being tempted by Satan, that he pronounced that he would live as man. Quoting from Deuteronomy, he identified himself with Moses’ instruction, man does not live by bread alone . . . man does not tempt God . . . man shall worship God only. As a man, he performed miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit with whom he was anointed (Luke 4:18-21, quoting Isa. 61:1, 2a). As he would say, “the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what he sees the Father do, for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (John 5:19). So the Father shared omniscience with the Son that allowed the Son to see life as the Father sees it. At times he would see in his human condition as he saw Nathaniel when he was out of sight (John 1:48). In the Spirit’s power, he was given authority over Satan and his domain (Matt. 12:25-30). It was though after resisting the temptations, Jesus had bound the strong man.

At the climax of Jesus’ ministry, the Father’s purpose for the Son was reversed. Now the Son would submit to Satan and to death (Matt. 26:36-46). Yet Jesus assured his disciples that “the ruler of this world is coming and he has nothing in Me” (John 15:30). In fact, he assured the disciples that the Spirit could convict the world “of judgment because the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:11). This would become a reality in the resurrection and would be the begetting of the Son to eternal life (Psa. 2:9). Jesus did not act for his own interests but out of love of the **Father** (John 14:31). And the **Father** acted out of love for the Son and so that He may give eternal life to as many as the **Father** has given the **Son** (John 17:2).

The Gospel of John introduces another aspect of the display of God’s glory in the same **partnership**. This display featured the progress of revelation originating with the **Word**. At first was the **Word**, the **Word** was with **God** and surprisingly the **Word** was **God** (1:1). The **Word** spoke creation into existence and then appeared in history to speak. At the end, he appeared becoming flesh and dwelt as in a tabernacle, living in the flesh among the Jewish remnant. The glory appeared to those willing to hear, to observe and to conclude that God’s glory was present in the fullness of grace and of truth (1:14). As the **Word**, he spoke on behalf of the Father: “my teaching is not mine but his who sent me” (7:16). And his message was **true**. Still that message was always delivered in **grace**. Meeting the **Word** was like Moses meeting the

LORD, “compassionate and gracious, and slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth” (Exod. 34:6, 7).

In the fallen world, those wanting to be heard often compromise *truth*, supposedly to satisfy *grace*. At the same time, those who speak forthrightly, who use *truth* as a blunt instrument, tend to ignore *grace* and trample over the concerns of others. Only in that uncompromised fullness of grace and truth did the **glory** of God appear in human flesh, in spite of the fallen world.

Glory in the Revelation of God

Thus, Jesus spoke and acted in an undiminished expression of *grace* and *truth*. Perhaps the most vivid display of both virtues, appeared for both one in need and for a group who came out of malice, in John 7:53–8:11. In arrogance, the scribes and Pharisees sought to trap Jesus by forcing him to make judge the woman caught in adultery. There was little question that she was guilty, yet in failing to bring the man, the bias of the religious leaders was evident. As a result, Jesus faced a dilemma: if he condemned here he would associate himself with their unrighteousness. If he excused her, he would disregard Moses and the law.

So acting out a sign, Jesus stooped to write and to rewrite in the dust as God had written and rewritten the law (Exod. 24:12; 34:1-4). Israel broke the law forty days after the first ratification of the covenant law. *Truth* came in writing the law. *Grace* came in the rewriting of the law.

So in similar fashion, Jesus confronted the gathered leaders with *truth*: those who accuse another of sin worthy of death must be the first to throw the stone. By this means, they would face their responsibility of executing another. When Jesus stooped a second time in *grace*, he allowed them to file out after they realized their guilt of using the woman’s sin for their own purposes.

After the woman was left alone with Jesus, in *grace* he allowed her to leave without condemning her. At the same time, he confronted her with the *truth* to sin no more.

Jesus’ glory was revealed as he ministered as God had acted in the original giving of the law, full of *grace* and full of *truth*. There was no compromise nor concession.

Following the historic ministry, Jesus knew that “the hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.” (12:23). Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it will remain alone-in the glory of that single grain. However, if the grain dies, then it grows and multiplies the grain (12:24). When he is lifted up in crucifixion, he will *draw* all to himself (12:32). He is promising to display *grace* and *truth* on the Cross. As that is realized by those with eyes to see, they will be drawn to believe that Jesus is none other than the Lamb of God (1:29, 35).

So Jesus turns to his **Father** who alone will bring help. For in death Jesus faced the loneliness of isolation from the Father in the pains of evil. But for this very reason had he come to this hour (12:27). Jesus acted in the **truth** of the prophet's **word** and in **grace** on behalf of the fallen world. At the same time, he believed in the **grace** of his Father, to act in the **truth** of his promised **word**. In light of this reality, the **Son** prayed to the **Father** to **glorify** the Father's *name* (12:28). And immediately in response the voice from heaven spoke that he had both *glorified* himself in Jesus historical ministry and he would glorify himself again, as the ruler of this world will be cast out (12:28, 31). The unique perspective of the Gospel of John is the kissing of **grace** and **truth** in both the **Son** from the **Father** and the **Father** from the **Son**.

In his humanity, Jesus' anxiety is not settled in on moment of prayer but only resolved as he continued with the Father in John 17:1 and 5: "Father, the hour has come, *glorify* the Son that your Son also may *glorify* you . . . O Father *glorify* me together with yourself, with the *glory* which I had with you before the world was." The **Word** which spoke the creation of our world into existence, now continues to speak and act so that a new creation is brought into full reality.

Conclusion

David realized that *God's glory* shone brightest in the darkest night. That is not man's way. Man's greatness is his own grand display of himself. *God's glory* is the brightest in partnership within those in the deepest need.¹⁵ So for a narrative biblical theology to see the ultimate end of history as God's glory, it is not seen in God's serving his own interests. It is rather that his partners in spite of their weakness and disillusionment in sin will be blessed by the full display of God's glory. This is the point Paul had in mind when speaking of the peril of human life in a fallen world: "all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). So the ultimate purpose of God's history is to share the fullest revelation of himself with his own. This may be a reason for God creating a good creation in which evil is permitted. It is that world in which the fullness of God's glory is most evident.

¹⁵ This is similar to John Piper's oft-repeated maxim, "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him." See John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 25th anniversary ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2011).