

GLORY

GOD'S GLORY-SHOWING REQUIRES GLORY-GIVING

“Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.” Ezekiel 1:28

God's goal is his glory, but this needs careful explanation, for it is easily misunderstood. It points to a purpose not of divine egoism, as is sometimes imagined, but of divine love. Certainly, God wants to be praised for his praiseworthiness and exalted for his greatness and goodness; he wants to be appreciated for what he is. But the glory that is his goal is in fact a two-sided, two-stage relationship: it is, precisely, a conjunction of (a) revelatory acts on his part whereby he shows his glory to men and angels in free generosity, with (b) responsive adoration on their part whereby they give him glory out of gratitude for what they have seen and received. In this conjunction is realized the fellowship of love for which God's rational creatures were and are made, and for which fallen human beings have now been redeemed. The to-and-fro of seeing glory in God and giving glory to God is the true fulfillment of human nature at its heart, and it brings supreme joy to man just as it does to God (cf. Zeph. 3:14-17).

“Glory” in the Old Testament carries associations of weight, worth, wealth, splendor, and dignity, all of which are present when God is said to have revealed his glory. God was answering Moses' plea to be shown God's glory when he proclaimed to Moses his name (i.e., his nature, character, and power, Exod. 33:18-34:7). With that proclamation went an awe-inspiring physical manifestation, the Shekinah, a bright shining cloud that could look like fire, white-hot (Exod. 24:17). The Shekinah was itself called the glory of God; it appeared at significant moments in the Bible story as a sign of God's active presence (Exod. 33:22; 34:5; cf. 16:7, 10; 24:15-17; 40:34-35; Lev. 9:23-24; 1 Kings 8:10-11; Ezek. 1:28; 8:4; 9:3; 10:4; 11:22-23; Matt. 17:5; Luke 2:9; cf. Acts 1:9; 1 Thess. 4:17; Rev. 1:7). New Testament writers proclaim that the glory of God's nature, character, power, and purpose is now open to view in the person and role of God's incarnate Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:14-18; 2 Cor. 4:3-6; Heb. 1:1-3).

God's glory, shown forth in the plan and work of grace whereby he saves sinners, is meant to call forth praise (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14), that is, the giving of glory to God by spoken words (cf. Rev. 4:9; 19:7). All life activities, too, must be pursued with the aim of giving God homage, honor, and pleasure, which is glory-giving on the practical level (1 Cor. 10:31).

God would not share with idols the praise for restoring his people, for idols, being unreal, contributed nothing to this work of grace (Isa. 42:8; 48:11); and God will not share the praise for salvation with its human subjects today, for we too contribute nothing more to it than our need of it. First to last, and at every stage in the process, salvation comes from the Lord, and our praise must show our awareness of that. This is why Reformation theology was so insistent on the principle, “Glory to God alone” (soli Deo gloria), and why we need to maintain that principle with equal zeal today.

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