

What is Glory

And Why Does it Matter?



Glen Scrivener

Introduction by Justin Schell

A pastoral note to the saints in MICC:

This is a long, but important collection of short articles which I commend to you, and which we are distributing to the pastors at this week's ICC Pastors' Retreat in Teisendorf, where Glen Scrivener will be our featured speaker.

Please take time to read and reflect and search the Scriptures.

As we are digging deeper into our understanding of the gospel and how the gospel changes everything, the insights from Scripture in these pages point us to the reality that if our "gospel-centeredness" isn't making a difference in how we see our relationships to one another in the body of Christ, with others in our cities, and with the peoples of this world, then we may have walled off the gospel in what we think is a safe place for treasure in our hearts.

The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Son.

The gospel declares that the spreading goodness of the love of God in Trinity has come to this world to gather a kingdom of believing men and women joined in union with Christ, who are also in pursuit of enjoying communion with Christ, and opening up doors of opportunity and mission to take this good news where it has not yet been heard, ultimately for the display of the glory of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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What is Glory? and Why does it Matter?

JUSTIN SCHELL • GOSPELCHURCHMISSION.COM • MARCH 13, 2017

Last year, I read Michael Reeves' wonderful little book *Delighting in the Trinity*. In it, he spends just a few pages showing how the Trinity, particularly the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, shapes our doctrine of God, including the attributes of God like Holiness, Wrath, and Glory. I want to focus some thoughts, reflections on the last one: GLORY. Very briefly, he declares that God's glory is His outgoing love. THAT is what God's glory IS.

This was new to me. To my shame, I must admit that I've never taken on God's glory as an object of study. Nor was it covered in any particularly way during my time in seminary. Like many younger reformed evangelicals, I've always looked to John Piper for an explanation of God's glory and why it matters, but what Reeves was saying was a departure, at least in part, from Piper's approach. I wanted to know more. But, where to turn?

I've listened to many of Reeves' sermons since then. I have found several where he introduces this idea again, but in most of them, he doesn't cover much more ground on this issue. There is one workshop called *Matters of the Heart: How to Enjoy God*¹ where Reeves unpacks it further, with the assistance of Jonathan Edwards. It may be a good place to get a first look at what I'm talking about.

That brings me to the real point of this post. Glen Scrivener has taken up the idea (I don't know if he got it from Reeves or vice versa or some other way) and helpfully interacted with it quite a bit. So, the rest of this post will be a bit of an annotated Bibliography of Scrivener's Doctrine of God's Glory.

GOD'S GLORY ALONE

The first place to start is his post entitled "God's Glory Alone Sermon."² This is a sermon from a series on the Five Solas of the Reformation. The first half of the sermon

¹www.theologynetwork.org/christian-beliefs/the-holy-spirit-and-christian-living/matters-of-the-heart-1--how-to-enjoy-god.htm

²<http://christthetruth.net/2010/08/30/gods-glory-alone-sermon/> [see p. 4 of this booklet]

reviews the first Four Solas and introduces the fifth through the story of David and Goliath. About 2/3 through the sermon, Scrivener says:

The living God is Giver. And it's this very grace that is His glory. But what does that word mean really? Glory. It's a big bible word. What is God's glory?

The rest of the sermon answers that question, primarily through John's Gospel. In short, Scrivener answers the question thusly:

Wind the clock back all the way through time, before creation, back and back and back into the depths of eternity and you will find Jesus with His Father loving and serving each other in the power of the Spirit. That's what the trinity has ALWAYS been up to. That IS the eternal life of God. So on the cross, when we see Jesus giving Himself up to the Father we see the eternal glory of God. At the cross when we see the Father GIVING His Son to the world, we see the eternal glory of God. The cross IS God's glory. And it's the glory of infinite SELF-GIVING love. God's glory is His grace. It is His very "Godness" to give Himself away to us and for us.

You really should read/listen to the whole thing though. OK, so that brings us to a definition, but I wanted to interact more with this understanding of God's glory, and there's (thankfully) no shortage of this on Scrivener's blog, including his posts and *quite a bit of good interaction in the comments*. So, the rest of this post is an attempt to give you an idea of how to explore this treasure.

SERIES: WE DID IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF LOVE

Well, Scrivener put together a series of posts to wrestle through "what is God's glory?" Not only is this series named after a great song³ from the greatest decade [80s] of music, it's also a great next step in the journey of discovering what God's glory is all about.

In Part 1, you are invited to look at a selection of verses/passages that will help frame the conversation.⁴

In Part 2, he begins to interact with John Piper's classic understanding of God's Glory and why it may not be the best way to think about/talk about it.⁵

Part 3 takes digs deeper into the differences between what Scrivener is proposing and Piper's approach.⁶

Part 4 digs into more scripture so that we aren't just looking at it from the Gospel of John, and then Part 5 digs into Ephesians 1 as a final study.⁷

³[Peter Cetera, "The Glory of Love"] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pIYfgXKloMU>

⁴<http://christthetruth.net/2010/04/21/we-did-it-all-for-the-glory-of-love-part-1/> [see p. 13]

⁵<http://christthetruth.net/2010/04/22/we-did-it-all-for-the-glory-of-love-part-2/> [see p. 14]

⁶<http://christthetruth.net/2010/04/23/we-did-it-all-for-the-glory-of-love-part-3/> [see p. 15]

⁷<http://christthetruth.net/2010/04/27/we-did-it-all-for-the-glory-of-love-part-4/> [see p. 17] and <http://christthetruth.net/2010/05/08/we-did-it-all-for-the-glory-of-love-part-5/> [see p. 19]

MORE INTERACTION WITH JOHN PIPER

Now, I want to be sure to highlight how much Scrivener spends genuinely praising John Piper for his life, his ministry, his influence, and theology. He even shares an embarrassing moment when he tells Piper that he's his biggest fan and then realizes he's just behaved like a fanboy (in first link below)! Even in the comments sections, it seems that any time Scrivener interacts with a commenter (and the topic involved Piper's theology of God's glory) who is new to the site, he makes sure to reiterate his appreciation for Piper. Not only that, but his comments on Piper are always respectful, so don't get the sense from me that he's just a Piper-hater. Those folks exist. Scrivener isn't one of them. So, here are some links to explore:

*Why I am a Trinitarian Hedonist*⁸

Piper's Theology of Glory (this is a shorter version of the next one)⁹

God is not a Narcissist (He gets the Trinity involved here in a very helpful way, as you've probably seen already... and more to come below)¹⁰

One of the questions that arises in this discussion is the nature of God's love for us. Piper would say that God's love for us is primarily seen in making it possible for us to love Him (therefore glorifying Him). So there is a boomerang effect where the intention is that we would make much of God. Many have posited squirmy reactions to this, but it's *Piper*, so they don't speak out for too long. But, I think this Reeves/Scrivener approach ("God's glory is His grace" in the word of Jonathan Edwards) actually does greater service both to God's fame and to his affection for his people. Scrivener interacts with this question in his *God Loves God more than God Love Us?* post.¹¹ And just for fun, here's a short, wonderful quote on *Why Does God Love Us*.¹²

TRINITY SHAPES EVERYTHING

In his post called *Beginning with the Creator?*¹³ Scrivener is super-helpful to show why the *Trinity* must be the starting point for understanding God's glory. And why starting anywhere else is detrimental/dangerous. Read it! You'll thank me! For more on this topic, see his *Oneness and Threeness*¹⁴ post and his *You and Me, We're Not so Different Really*¹⁵ post.

So, how do I wrap up this tour through Scrivener's writings on the glory of the Triune God? Well, I guess by saying that you should spend more time over at Christ the

⁸<http://christthetruth.net/2009/11/19/why-i-am-a-trinitarian-hedonist/> [see p. 22]

⁹<http://christthetruth.net/2008/12/16/pipers-theology-of-glory/> [see p. 24]

¹⁰<http://christthetruth.net/2007/11/26/god-is-not-a-narcissist/> [see p. 25]

¹¹<http://christthetruth.net/2008/12/17/god-loves-god-more-than-god-loves-us/> [see p. 27]

¹²<http://christthetruth.net/2009/10/29/he-loves-us-because-he-loves-us/> [see p. 28]

¹³<http://christthetruth.net/2009/11/19/beginning-with-the-creator/> [see p. 30]

¹⁴<http://christthetruth.net/2007/11/24/oneness-and-threeness/> [see p. 33]

¹⁵<http://christthetruth.net/2008/02/02/you-and-me-were-not-so-different-really/> [see p. 36]

Truth. I may eventually do a similar post looking at his writings on Mission. But, I'll also say that this understanding of Glory; namely that it is the outgoing love of God, that it is His grace, His cross... that it is the Gospel, which Paul calls the "knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus," changes things. Look at the overflowing love of God! Oh what a God we have! Oh, what a beautiful Father! Oh, what a glorious Son! Oh, what a majestic Spirit of overflowing love! Glory isn't an abstract, glowing blob of awesomeness... it's the love of God on the move! That changes everything!

God's Glory Alone

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • AUGUST 30, 2008

We're like a little kid coming to God saying "Oooh, salvation, let me have a go!" And like a Good Father, God says, "No, no, put salvation down. Glen, I've told you a thousand times, PUT SALVATION DOWN. It's too big for you. You'll break it and it'll break you." And we say "Aww but I wanna do it, let me, let me, let me. All the other gods let their people save themselves!!" And our Father says "Yes, but that just shows they're not really gods are they? Now put salvation down!"

His Grace guarantees His Glory... ...Because His Glory is to give.
 Audio here [http://christthetruth.net/audio/GodsGloryAlone_GS.mp3]

INTRO: DAVID AND GOLIATH:

Christ alone—David—The Spirit filled King—ALONE won victory that day
 His own brothers opposed him

He didn't even wear Saul's armour—it was all down to David

Grace alone—He won victory for mutinous troops

They didn't deserve David to fight for them

There was no cheerleading squad behind David.

His own people despised him.

Faith alone—All you need do is LOOK to your Champion

The look changed everything—it turned defeated deserters into conquerors

When they SAW—they shouted and surged forward (emotion and good works)

Scripture alone—The bible is the herald of David and his victory

The bible is NOT about how you can defeat your own giants.

It's NOT combat techniques so that you can do it LIKE David.

It's NOT motivational pep talk so that you can do it FOR David.

It's the announcement of good news—DAVID DID IT FOR YOU

All to God's Glory alone

Which of the Israelites could boast on that day? Who had contributed to David's victory? Who had helped David? Who got a thank you in David's victory speech? *Couldn't have done it without my worthless brothers!* David conquered only in the Name of the LORD Almighty.

The victory was the LORD's and the LORD won it through His Spirit-filled King, and through Him alone. So to God be the glory.

No-one else can boast. The LORD and His Spirit-filled Christ won the day—no-one else can boast. To God be the Glory—to God alone be the glory.

And that's just a fundamental bible truth. It was the first line we sang this evening: Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb (Rev 7:10). Salvation is God's thing. The Father Almighty and His Spirit-Filled Christ achieve everything. Salvation comes from the LORD (Jonah 2:9). Salvation is God's thing. It's not our thing. It's something that He works. And He just brings us into it as a completed thing.

We're like a little kid coming to God saying "Oooh, salvation, let me have a go!" And like a Good Father, God says, "No, no, put salvation down. Glen, I've told you a thousand times, PUT SALVATION DOWN. It's too big for you. You'll break it and it'll break you." And we say "Aww but I wanna do it, let me, let me, let me. All the other gods let their people save themselves!" And our Father says "Yes, but that just shows they're not really gods are they? Now put salvation down!"

"Fine!" we say. And hopefully we let God work salvation for us through His Spirit filled King and we just receive it as a gift. And when we just receive salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone then we understand that it's all to God's glory alone.

Martin Luther, who rediscovered these liberating truths back in the 16th century, he had a mentor named Staupitz in his monastery. And when Luther explained the gospel to Staupitz, Staupitz said:

It pleases me that the doctrine which you preach ascribes the glory and everything to God alone and nothing to man.

That's what we're on about tonight. I've just got two points tonight.

His Grace guarantees His Glory...

...Because His Glory is to Give

The gospel of grace means all the glory goes to God. But the gospel reveals to us what this glory means—the Glory OF God IS His amazing grace, to give and give and give to the unworthy. Hopefully as we go along those points will start to make some sense.

HIS GRACE GUARANTEES HIS GLORY

Since ancient times no-one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides you, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him. (Isaiah 64:4)

Among a world full of gods who claim to be gods—there's only One true God. And the mark of this true God is that He works and His people wait.

All the other gods, who aren't really gods, they wait while their people work. That's how all human religion works: humans work, god waits, sitting back on his throne, distant, examining the work, waiting to be impressed. That's human religion—humans work, god waits.

But Isaiah says that the real God is the One who works while *we* wait. "He acts on behalf of those who wait for Him." It's the total reverse.

Human religion has humans working for a waiting god.

The bible has God working for His waiting people.

Human religion has humanity centre stage doing it all while God idly watches.

The gospel has God shooing us off the stage and making us sit down in the audience to watch Him work salvation for us.

That's what marks Him out as the true God, and that's what's so different about the God of the bible: He acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.

Why does He do it that way? Well we all know the phrase "If you want a job done properly, do it yourself!" That's what He's said earlier in Isaiah:

The LORD looked and was displeased that there was no justice. He saw that there was no-one, he was appalled that there was no-one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him. (Isa 57:12-16)

If you want a job done right, do it yourself.

The LORD *has* to work salvation for us because we are so sinful. And so, it's as though God says to Himself, if you want a job done right, do it yourself.

So His own Arm works salvation for Him. Many theologians have spoken about the Trinity as God with His two hands—The Father has His Son and His Spirit. Often the bible speaks in those terms—the LORD saves with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. And so theologians have taken up that language and said, Yes, the Son in the power of the Spirit works salvation for God.

Jesus is the Mighty Arm of the LORD, empowered by the Hand of the Spirit to work salvation for us and to draw us to God.

If you want a job done right, do it yourself. And that's what God has done.

Jesus has come in the power of the Spirit and lived the life we should live and then died the death that we should die and He does it standing in our place, on our behalf, as

our substitute. And after bearing the penalty and curse for all our sins He rises up again and says to us “I’ve done it all—I’ve lived your life perfectly, I’ve died your death completely, now just come to me and receive my new life beyond sin and death and curse and judgement. I’ve saved you, come claim it, call on me now, trust me and you can have it all as a free gift—best of all you can have ME as a free gift.

And if we’ve got an ounce of sense to us we say “Yes please.” And we simply receive Jesus who has completed our whole salvation Himself—to God be the Glory!

That was the message of Paul’s letter to the Romans. Turn to Romans 11:33. This letter is all about these gospel truths—we’re saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. And here’s the conclusion to that main body of teaching in the letter.

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor?” “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen.

I just love verse 35, it’s such a slap down to anyone who thinks they can earn God’s salvation. “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”

There are those ridiculous advertisements that ask “What do you give the man who has everything?” And the answer is usually something ridiculous like Old Spice. Or a razor. Seems a bit paltry to be honest. But what if someone literally did have everything, what could you give them? First you’d have to steal it from them, you couldn’t buy it off them, where would you get the money from—it’s all theirs. Then you’d have to wrap it with their own wrapping paper, put it in their own envelope and ask them for the postage to send it.

It doesn’t work. “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”

You cannot give anything to God looking for repayment. And if you find yourself demanding repayment from God, you’re barking up the wrong tree. You must have the wrong god. Any god who owes you isn’t God!! Think about it—any god who owes you has somehow gotten in debt to you. How did that happen?

No the living God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the LORD who actually owns the universe doesn’t owe you. He refuses to relate to you on a basis of earning and merit. He doesn’t owe you, He’s not in debt to you and you cannot give Him anything that’s not already His.

Now does that mean we can never offer God anything at all? Well it depends on how it’s done. A child can give a finger painting to their Dad even though the paints, the paper and the child all belong to the Dad and the Dad will love to receive it. But that’s not a transaction, the child is not looking for repayment. The child doesn’t then think—

ok Dad, now you owe me. No that's just a free expression of love and it thrills the heart of the Father.

Children can express love to their Father and the Father will receive it with joy. But if you step out of that mentality and start treating God as a Paymaster who you work for and impress so that He will repay you because now He's in your debt, you've got another thing coming.

“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen.

It's all His. And we have everything on loan. God gives and He gives and He gives. And He's never in our debt, we are always in His.

Every god who acts like a Paymaster, doling out repayments for good behaviour, is a false god. The true God has it all and never repays anyone. He just gives and gives and gives—that's His nature as the true and living God. His grace means Glory. We know that He is truly the glorious God because He is always the gracious Giver.

When I was a teenager I went to church, I went to youth groups, I went to camps, I knew all the right answers to the questions, I thought of myself as a Christian. But you know my picture of God? I thought God was the One who waited for me to work. Arms folded sitting back waiting for me to impress Him.

The Garden of Gethsemane haunted me.... Night before Jesus died, praying before the Father, saying “Your will be done!”

And I thought—*that's* what I need to do. I need to go and do it like Jesus. Or at least do it for Jesus. Because that's what true devotion to God looks like, right? I need to pray to God like I've never prayed before, lay down my life for God like I've never laid it down before, say “Your will be done” God and REALLY, REALLY mean it.

You know what I was doing don't you? I was effectively saying, “Jesus, step aside, and watch me save myself.”

So I did, I must have prayed a prayer of life-long commitment to God a thousand times in my teenage years. “God save me. God take my life. God use me. God, Your will be done. I'm yours. Fill me. Have me. Do with me what You want.” And I finished praying, and you know what I felt? Nothing. Absolutely nothing.

So I prayed harder. And I thought—well Jesus prayed outdoors in the garden late at night. So do it like Jesus! So I started sneaking out of the house at night and finding scary places in which to pray these prayers. And nothing seemed to happen. So I got down on my knees and that didn't seem to work. So I got down on my face, and pressed my face into the dirt and prayed—“O God save me. God take my life. God use me. God, Your will be done. I will work for You. I will be obedient for You. I will serve You come what may.”

And this time, you know what happened? Nothing.

This was very disheartening for me. I expected a light to appear or a funny feeling in my stomach or a voice to speak or something. I got nothing, so I banged on the door louder and louder. Eventually I gave up and concluded that God clearly didn't want me. So I decided I didn't want Him and drifted away for a good few years.

But you know what I've come to realize? I was banging on entirely the wrong door. I was praying to entirely the wrong god.

I was approaching God on the basis of MY great devotion, MY heroic submission, MY pledges of obedience.

I was acting like I was in any old human religion: I was going to be the One who worked, and God was going to be the one who waited. I might have called myself a Christian, I was being thoroughly pagan. I might as well have been a Muslim. I might as well have called out to Allah. My approach to God was far more faithful to Islam than it was to Christianity.

Whenever we thrust ourselves forwards as the faithful ones, the obedient ones, the ones who work while he waits—we fall into pagan religion and the living God *refuses* to be engaged that way.

The Heavenly Father longs to receive children into His family with heart-melting tenderness and compassion. He holds out His Son to us and says receive Jesus. Don't do it like Jesus. Don't do it for Jesus. Jesus did it for you. He has His arms wide open for you, receive Jesus and in Him receive His Spirit, receive salvation, receive righteousness and forgiveness and eternal life. But if we're treating Jesus like He's the example showing the way, then we're seeing ourselves as the workers and God as the One who waits to be impressed and we're banging on entirely the wrong door.

No the true God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, will not be made into a paymaster. The living God is Giver. And it's this very grace that is His glory.

But what does that word mean really? Glory. It's a big bible word. What *is* God's glory? This brings us onto our second point...

HIS GRACE GUARANTEES HIS GLORY... BECAUSE HIS GLORY IS...

I wonder how you'd finish that sentence. God's glory is, what? Come up with a mental picture of God's glory? What do you imagine?

Well literally the word glory in the bible is a word for weightiness, heaviness, substance, mass, gravity. God is the most weighty being in the universe.

Everything else is insubstantial by comparison to God. It is chaff, grass, dust, vapour. But God is heavy, He has weightiness. He is substantial. If you weigh the whole world, the whole universe on a scale with creation on one side and the living God, Father Son and Holy Spirit, on the other—creation is, by comparison, light as a feather. On the

other hand the living God has infinite weight and substance and gravity and reality. Glory is the substantiality of God—Glory is the Godness of God. Glory is what makes God God. So what is that? How do you finish that sentence “God’s glory is... what?” What is it that makes God God??

Turn to John 1

John begins by telling us that all things were made by God through His Word, Jesus Christ. And then in v. 14: The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Glory is something that Jesus has. And it’s something that Jesus brings to us from the Father. 2 Corinthians 4:6 says that we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So whatever glory is, we see it when we look at Jesus. And this verse finishes by telling us that Jesus is full of grace and truth. That will be a key part of what glory is.

Flick on to John 2:11—Jesus has just turned water into blood-red wine and verse 11 is the summary: This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

So glory is a display of who Jesus is and it elicits faith. When you see glory in Jesus, you trust Him.

Flick on to John 8:54: Jesus replied, “If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me.

That’s interesting. Jesus says He will not glorify Himself. Whatever glory that Jesus reveals—and remember He’s the One who reveals to us the glory of God—it’s *not* about self-promotion. Sometimes people talk about God’s glory as though God were constantly self-obsessed. Rubbish. God is the very opposite of self-obsessed. The Father has eyes only for the Son. The Son has eyes only for the Father. There are no mirrors in heaven. Jesus absolutely refuses to glorify Himself. He is not self-obsessed, self-promoting or self-exalting. The glory of God is a thoroughly *other*-centred, outward going, selfless glory.

But where do we really see this glory? Flick on to John 12:23: Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.

We’ve been waiting for this all throughout John’s gospel. Jesus keeps talking about His hour and He keeps talking about being glorified. And we think, when is the hour, and what will it look like for Jesus to be glorified? Well have a look, verse 24: I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

Jesus is talking about His death. He’s talking about dying like a seed that goes into the ground and then rises up with new life. Jesus’ glory will be His death.

And this is one of the deep ironies of John’s gospel. Christ’s glory is His cross. Look on down to verse 32: But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.”

That sounds very lofty language doesn't it? Jesus is going to be lifted up?

We sing about this stuff in church don't we "We want to see, we want to see, we want to see Jesus lifted high..."

"Open the eyes of my heart Lord, open the eyes of my heart, I want to see you, to see you high and lifted up."

Well what are we singing about? When Jesus talks about being high and lifted up, what does He mean?? Verse 33: He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die. Jesus is high and exalted and lifted up on the cross. And that's His glory. His death is His glory. His cross is His throne. His execution is His exaltation.

What does the glory of God look like? Some imposing throne-room and no-one can get close because it's so shiny? Is that the glory of God?

No according to John, the glory of God is Jesus, arms out-stretched, bleeding and dying for us the unworthy. Glory!

That's the Godness of God! That's the weightiness, the gravity, the substance of the eternal God! Jesus bleeding and dying to save the very ones who cause His death. That's astonishing glory!

I don't know what picture of glory you came up with in your head when I asked you. We tend to think of imposing, shiny, self-exalting kinds of glory. God's glory is the cross.

Don't believe me, flick on to one more verse in John 17:5. Jesus is minutes away from being arrested, He'll be dead within the next 24 hours and so He prays:

And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began....

Jesus is about to pour Himself out completely in obedience and love. Obedience to His Father who sent Him to save and love for us who He's about to die for. And He says this is the *glory* I've shared with my Father from before the world began.

Wind the clock back all the way through time, before creation, back and back and back into the depths of eternity and you will find Jesus with His Father loving and serving each other in the power of the Spirit. That's what the trinity have *always* been up to. That *is* the eternal life of God. So on the cross, when we see Jesus giving Himself up to the Father we see the eternal glory of God. At the cross when we see the Father *giving* His Son to the world we see the eternal glory of God.

The cross *is* God's glory. And it's the glory of infinite *self-giving* love. God's glory is His grace. It is His very Godness to give Himself away to us and for us.

He *is* love (1 John 4:8). He *is* love. He *is* overflowing generosity and kindness. He *is* that. The cross proves it.

What picture of God do you carry with you? We all have such distorted pictures of God? What kind of monster do we think sits on the throne!? What kind of tetchy head-

master? What kind of angry sergeant-major?

The Scriptures on page after page tell us to look to Jesus and in particular Jesus on the cross and the Scriptures say “*There, there* is the glory of God. *There* is the Godness of God. *That’s* what your God is like, arms wide open, praying for you, groaning for you, bleeding for you, dying for you.” Uproot and destroy those other versions of ‘God’ that float around your mind. *Here* is God. *Here* at the cross—here is the eternal glory of God. You can’t go deeper. The Lamb is at the *centre* of the throne—push through to the depths of Godness and you have the bleeding sacrifice. And He’s bleeding for *you*. *That’s* God. *That’s* your God. Annihilate those other visions of God. Consign them to the deepest pit of hell from whence they came. They are not God. The true glory of God is Christ and Him crucified.

I never told you the end of my story.

One day someone explained the garden of Gethsemane to me in a way that rocked my world. He showed me what’s completely obvious when you think about it. He told me that Gethsemane was not Jesus showing me how to give to God.

Gethsemane was Jesus giving Himself to God *for me*. It was Jesus stepping onto centre stage and saying “Glen, shoo! Get off, get off the stage and into the audience. Watch me work salvation for you. I will obey for *you*. I will serve for *you*. I will suffer for *you*. I will bleed for *you*, I will die for *you*.”

I wasn’t supposed to put myself in Jesus’ shoes and do it like Jesus. Or even to do it for Jesus. If I’m in anyone’s shoes in that story, I’m in the shoes of the disciples. And what are the disciples doing as Jesus prays? They are asleep. But that’s me. I’m not the obedient one, I’m not the faithful one, I don’t work, while He waits. He comes and works salvation *for me*. And I’m helpless, hopeless, unworthy and sinful. But it is *His* Glory to save wretches like me.

To God be the glory great things He has done
 So loved He the world that He gave us His Son
 Who yielded HIS life an atonement for sin
 And opened the lifegates that all may go in.

Praise the LORD.

We Did It All for the Glory of Love: Parts 1-5

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • APRIL 21, 2010

Yes I want *that* song infecting your brain.

We'll live forever, knowing together that we did it all for the glory of love

Now there's a line fit for the triune God! As I'll try to show below, it's a pretty good summary of God's motives in creation and redemption. God's life and work is an other-centred, outward-focussed, spreading goodness. The Father, Son and Spirit do all things for the glory of love. This is starkly different from 'the love of glory' —especially where 'glory' is defined apart from love!

So in this post I want to show that "the glory of love" is God's motivation in all things. Later I'll show why "the love of glory" is not God's motivation according to the bible—at least not how it's popularly framed. Our God does not sing: "I did it all for the glory of me!"

But first, here's just a little survey of love as the centre of God's life and action in Scripture (notice number four!):

God's being *is* love. 1 John 4:8,16

The Father loves the Son. Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 12:6; John 3:35; 15:9; 17:24; Ephesians 1:6; Colossians 1:13

The Father hands everything to the Son because of love. Psalm 2:7f; Isaiah 42:1; John 3:35; 5:20

The Father glorifies the Son *because He loves Him*. John 17:24

The Father predestines and elects us in Christ because of love. Ephesians 1:4f; Isaiah 55:3

The Father creates out of love. Colossians 1:16

He chooses the patriarchs out of love. Deuteronomy 10:15

He makes and keeps covenant with His people because of love. Ezekiel 16:8; Isaiah 54:10

He redeems Israel out of love. Deuteronomy 7:8; Isaiah 63:9; Jeremiah 31:3; Hosea 11:1

He leads Israel because He loves her. Exodus 15:13

He plants them in the land because He loves them. Psalm 44:3

He relents from judging time and again because of love. Numbers 14:19; Ps 51:1; 106:45; Hosea 11:1-9; Jonah 4:2

He will provide future redemption from all sins because of love. Psalm 130:7f

He saves because He loves. John 3:16; Titus 3:4f

The Son is given to us because of love. John 3:16; Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2,25;
1 John 4:8-10

We're adopted because of love. Ephesians 1:5f; 1 John 3:1

We're regenerated because of love. Ephesians 2:4f

We're forgiven because of love. Revelation 1:5

[Part 2] Last time we saw that the triune God does everything for the glory of love.

This is different from the love of glory. 180 degrees different.

And so—you saw it coming a mile off—I want to argue that John Piper's popular teaching on this issue is both wrong and damaging. (I've written previously on this here, here, here, here and here—and a few other places too!)

As I see it, Piper would have God to sing, "I did it all for the glory of me."

So, for instance, he begins his first appendix to *Desiring God* with the statement:

In chapter one I said God's ultimate goal in all that he does is to preserve and display his glory. I inferred from this that he is uppermost in his own affections. He prizes and delights in his own glory above all things. This appendix presents the biblical evidence for this statement.

First, notice the complete lack of a trinitarian dynamic to any of his formulations. I realize that he's also become aware of a deficiency here, but I still don't think he's carried out the revolution of 'glory' that's demanded by a thorough-going trinitarian re-formulation.

Second, notice that this glory is the solitary, sedentary glory of the philosophical theist, not the other-centred, self-giving glory of the gospel God.

And so, before he launches into a bible over-view of glory, Piper makes an absolutely crucial move. He seeks to define the "glory" that God is so zealous to pursue:

The term "glory of God" in the Bible generally refers to the visible splendor or moral beauty of God's manifold perfections. It is an attempt to put into words what cannot be contained in words—what God is like in his unveiled magnificence and excellence.

What do we make of this definition of 'glory'? Again there is no hint of trinitarian love here. There's no hint of cruciform sacrifice (cf. glory in John). No hint of redemption or saving activity. In fact, no hint of *activity* at all. Here is a solitary and sedentary glory.

But think of how the bible introduces 'glory' in the book of Exodus. First, the Warrior LORD is 'glorified' through the defeat of Pharaoh and salvation of Israel (Ex 14:4,17,18). In that redemptive act God is glorified—even glorified in/by *Pharaoh*. This means that glory is not something *behind* the salvation of the LORD—a static divine splendour to be later enjoyed by the redeemed. No His glory is *in* that very judging/redeeming. It's a dis-

play of who He is, not something He gets once redemption is over. On the other side of the Red Sea, the ‘glory’ the Israelites sing about is completely bound up in that deliverance, His wonder-working redemption (Ex 15:10-13). Then in Exodus 16:7 we meet a Person *called* “the Glory of the LORD”. And He appears to the Israelites again and again under this title. When Moses asks the Unseen LORD to show him His Glory (Ex 33:18), He declares His grace-filled name (Ex 34:6f; 23:20). Only after this do we read about the Glory filling the tabernacle (Ex 40:34ff). And even here it’s not simply a shiny brilliance, but a Person we have come to know and He’s accompanied by the Shekinah cloud which pledges the LORD’s guiding and redeeming love.

Now let’s consider Piper’s far more philosophical language of perfections etc. It makes me want to ask, *Perfection? God is perfect in what? In magnificence? What kind of magnificence? What is this Godness of God that ‘glory’ describes?* The fact that Piper sets up a definition of ‘glory’ apart from trinitarian considerations or an examination of gospel events prejudices the whole scheme from the outset.

In this appendix (and virtually every time he makes these arguments) he will list an armful of Scriptures about God’s pursuit of His glory. (This is why I did my own biblical survey of God’s motives [in part 1]). But Piper only allows those verses to tell us *that* God pursues glory. He doesn’t allow those verses to tell us *what* the glory is. He’s let the philosophers do that job.

You see, if ‘glory’ is the ‘excellence’ of a solitary, sedentary deity, then pursuit of this glory will look a certain way. But what if ‘glory’ was an active, redemptive, Personal, trinitarian, self-giving love? What would God’s pursuit of this glory look like? It would look like the very opposite of a self-exalting glory.

Next I will look in more detail at what it means for God to act for the sake of *this* kind of glory.

[Part 3] Just a post to put two and two together.

- A) God does everything in creation and redemption for love—that was my first post.
- B) Love in the bible is sacrificial, self-giving, other-centred service. (Think 1 Cor 13)
- C) The bible also speaks at times of God being motivated by the display of His glory—this is what Piper highlights so often.

Do we agree to these ABCs?

If these things are true, it seems there can only be three possible conclusions. And two of them are very unlikely:

- 1) The glory motive is more foundational than the love motive.
- 2) The love motive is more foundational than the glory motive.
- 3) God’s glory is His self-giving love.

Now I am not interested in entering a debate between 1) and 2). On this issue, much of what I hear is people falling off either side of the wrong horse.

1) says “Easy-believism takes you to hell. The prosperity gospel takes you to hell. Christ is not your ticket to other stuff—He *is* the Gospel.” And to all that we say, “Amen!” But then this side continues, “So it’s not about God making much of you. It’s about God freeing you at the infinite cost of His Son to make much of Him.”

Well now, hang on. Why the opposition between God’s making much of us and our making much of Him? Is that really a helpful distinction? And doesn’t it crumble under its own weight the minute you say “at the infinite cost of His Son”? i.e., Aren’t you admitting that the way you are freed is precisely in God making *infinitely* much of you

2) says in opposition: “Dude—read your bible. God is love. God loves the world. Christ is for us. Faith means not offering anything but simply receiving God’s love for us in Christ.” And to all that we must say, “Amen!” But then this side continues, “So I am the point. I am the good news (as Rob Bell has put it). I’m worth it. Let’s focus on me now, after all God does.”

And of course this is horrible and must be rejected.

Now in my Christian experience I don’t think I’ve seen very much 2) at all. I’m surrounded by 1) not 2). John Piper on the other hand feels the problem of 2) very keenly.

From Piper’s most recent sermon entitled “How much does God love this church?” he confesses that:

I am more concerned about nominal hell-bound Christians who feel loved by God, than I am about genuine heaven-bound Christians who don’t feel loved by God.

I understand and sympathise with this concern. And I love the passion of Piper here—you can’t listen to this sermon without loving the guy more.

BUT... is it really the case (as he contends in the sermon) that he has to balance his preaching emphases between these two poles—i.e., God making much of us and us making much of God? Haven’t things gone astray when those are seen as opposing points of a swinging pendulum?

Why don’t we say 3)? God’s glory *is* His self-giving love. And so we preach, “Christ is 100% for you. He took your humanity and lived your life and He died for you rather than live without you. He valued *you* higher than His own life. Isn’t that glory? Isn’t *He* the Lover who’s captured your gaze? Aren’t you now freed from self-centredness by appreciating His self-abandonment?”

I really do believe we can have our cake and eat it here. But maybe that’s the arrogance and innocence of youth. But for my money, the gospel to the saved and the unsaved is the same. The glorious gospel of the Happy God who loved us more than His own life—this is the power to save the self-absorbed and to comfort the dry believer.

Anyway, listen to Piper's latest sermon (or read but listening is far better—he's an incredible preacher). [http://www.desiringgod.org/download.php?file=http://cdn.desiringgod.org/audio/2010/20100418_audio.mp3] See if you don't spot that same false distinction. For my money Piper's opening question simply isn't the frame in which to have the discussion.

Do you feel more loved by God because God makes much of you, or because God, at great cost to his Son, frees you to enjoy making much of him forever?

It's just not the battle between 1) and 2). Instead God's grace *is* His glory. When we preach the true grace of God, this is the power (in fact the only power) to save the nominal Christian. This is the power (the only power) to liberate the self-centred Christ-user. We only ever love because He first loved us.

[Part 4] We've thought a little bit about how glory language is introduced in Exodus. Of course John's Gospel makes for a fascinating study in 'glory'. [<http://christthetruth.net/2009/11/07/some-more-thoughts-on-glory/>] But it would be too easy to camp out in John and refuse to engage the other 'glory' Scriptures. So let's think about three other key texts in the glory debates: Isaiah 42; Ezekiel 36 and (in the next post) Ephesians 1. If you've got others on your mind, raise them in comments:

Isaiah 42:1-8

Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One in Whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations. ²He will not shout or cry out, or raise His voice in the streets. ³A bruised reed He will not break, and a smouldering wick He will not snuff out. In faithfulness He will bring forth justice; ⁴He will not falter or be discouraged till He establishes justice on earth. In His law the islands will put their hope." ⁵This is what God the LORD says—He who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, Who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it: ⁶"I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness; I will take hold of Your hand. I will keep You and will make You to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles, ⁷to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. ⁸"I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give My glory to another or My praise to idols.

Usually it's only verse 8 that's quoted in the glory discussions. But the context is crucial. Here is the Beloved, Spirit-filled Servant of the LORD. And He Himself is a covenant for the people. The love of Father for Son spills over to the whole world and this is all a

part of the integrity of the Creator. The Maker of the ends of the earth will bring reconciliation through His Servant. Therefore—verse 8—He will not accomplish His creation-reconciliation project through anyone other than His Beloved, Anointed Son. And this very commitment is the commitment to be the over-flowing, self-giving God of redemption.

So, no self-centred glory here.

What about, Ezekiel 36:16-32

¹⁶The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁷“Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds. Their ways before me were like the uncleanness of a woman in her menstrual impurity. ¹⁸So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. ¹⁹I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. ²⁰But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.’ ²¹But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. ²²“Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. ²⁴I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. ²⁵I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. ²⁸You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.... ³²It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.

You will notice here that the issue is the ‘name of the LORD’s holiness’ which is not exactly the same as ‘glory’—but they’re pretty connected I think everyone will agree.

The “name” of the LORD has always been the gracious, saving character of the Gospel

God (Ex 34:6-7; see also Num 6:23-27). It's the name that is in His Divine Angel and, again, is expressed through His deliverance of the people (Ex 23:20-23). This name dwells in the temple (Ex 20:24; Deut 12:5) and just as the priests are to put the name on the people (Num 6:23-27), the people are meant to reflect the name out to the nations.

In Ezekiel, the LORD's Glory (Christ) has departed from the physical temple (ch 8-10) because the Israelites have profaned it (5:11). Yet He Himself has been a sanctuary for the people (11:16)—in exile *with* His people! And He promises that He will return as the LORD's Servant—the True King David—to make His sanctuary with His people forever (Ezek 37:21-28).

But here in chapter 36, the Israelites have not 'sanctified' but rather 'profaned' the name of the LORD's holiness. God's people—as the priests He has made them to be—ought to be reflecting out to the world that same out-going goodness of God which they themselves have received. Instead they do the very opposite. And the thing that really profanes the name is that the saved people of God have become the wicked and exiled people of God (v. 20). The LORD has tied His name so closely to His people that when *they* are profaned—He is profaned. He has chosen to be so at one with His people that His destiny and reputation is bound up in their destiny and reputation.

And so He makes them know that this salvation He is about to work is His gracious initiative and not something they've provoked either by their goodness or their badness. It's certainly not that the Israelites have cleaned up their act enough for God to save. And it's not even that they are now so pitiable that God goes soft on them. What moves Him to act is His fierce determination to be *this kind of saving and forgiving God*. His gospel name will be vindicated because that is simply **who He is**.

And in fact verse 23 says the LORD will vindicate His *holiness* by saving a wretched people! What kind of holiness is this that is expressed when renowned offenders are treated with extravagant grace? This holiness is not the holiness of 'splendid isolation' but of gospel grace.

So again, these verses are not proof that God is, after all, self-centered. The very opposite. All that He does is motivated by a gospel character that will not be thwarted even by the worst opposition of His own people. His name, His glory and His holiness are not considerations that would keep Him from engaging His wrath-deserving people. They move Him out into costly, shame-bearing, sacrificial redemption. Because His grace is His glory.

UPDATE: Dave Bish has some great thoughts on Ezekiel 36 just posted. [<http://the-bluefish.org/2010/04/your-god-is-egotist-ezekiel-36.html>]

The series so far: [Part 5]

Part one—God does all things for the sake of love

Part two—Glory according to John Piper

Part three—God's glory is His love

Part four—Isaiah 42 and Ezekiel 36

Ephesians 1 is sometimes wheeled out to support the notion that God does all things for the sake of a self-reflexively, self-interested glory (stole the phrase from Michael Jensen). Well let's have a look. (Father, Son, Spirit, us.) [color coded in post]

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love ⁵He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves. ⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. ⁹And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, ¹⁰to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. ¹¹In Him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of Him Who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will, ¹²in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of His glory. ¹³And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴Who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of His glory... ²²And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be Head over everything for the church, ²³which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills everything in every way.

An eternal torrent of Spiritual blessings flow from Father to Son—by the Spirit comes election, predestination, adoption, redemption and grace. And as they are lavished on the Head, so they flow to His body, the church.

The Father's generosity towards the Son is described as the lavish riches of His grace (see here for more on 'riches' in Ephesians [<http://christthetruth.net/2009/07/28/daddys-rich/>]). The riches/wealth/substance/weightiness/glory of the Father is an overflowing profligacy, an out-going being towards the Son. But, more than this, the overflow towards the Son has the church in view. Even before the foundation of the world, the church is foreknown as **internal** to the love that God *is*. The other-centredness of the trinity is not a holy huddle exclusive of us. The triune God refuses to be God without us.

As we reach the end of the chapter we almost dare not believe what we read. Is Christ really appointed as Head over everything *for the church*? Is the church really the fulness of Christ? There are many purpose clauses in this chapter—do we dare to take seriously *these ones*? Of course Paul is not suggesting that we fill an otherwise empty Christ. He fills all things. Yet we must take these verses seriously. In His divine initiative there is a determination for the Head to be fulfilled in His body.

Therefore whatever glory we ascribe to *this* God, it cannot be the glory of *self*-exaltation. In fact verse 6 tells us in no uncertain terms what His glory consists in. It is the “glory of His grace which He has freely given us in the Beloved.” What we will praise into all eternity is the grace of a Father who from eternity past has determined to do all for the glory of love. The repetition of the phrase “to the praise of His glory” (v. 12 and 21) can only be understood in the context as a short-hand for this lavish, other-centred benevolence.

Now certainly this means that we are to praise God. And certainly it means that this praise is intended by God. But this is not at all the same thing as positing a self-centred God.

The steps of the argument that precede the statement “God does all things to the praise of His glory” are absolutely crucial. If the first few steps are things like: God’s the best so by definition He must exult in the best or he’d be an idolater—then the praise of *this* glory would be to join in His self-exaltation. But if the steps in the argument are something like: God’s triune love and election of the church in Christ reveal the glory of other-centred love—then the praise of His glory is joining in His other-centredness. Very different.

Put it another way—the argument is not, God loves God therefore you should love God. The argument is God loves you, you should love God.

Or again, it just isn’t the case that we make much of God because God makes much of Himself. We make much of God because He makes much of *others* (His Son and us *in* His Son) and **that** is His glory. Hallelujah.

Why I am a Trinitarian Hedonist

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • NOVEMBER 19, 2009

You might think I have it in for John Piper. You'd be wrong. I once spotted the great man at the back of All Souls (he'd come to hear John Stott preach). I came bounding up to him after the service intending to tell him that I'd quoted him in my sermon that morning. But for some reason I decided that this would be proud—as though I was bragging about being a preacher. (I know that's nuts. But not as nuts as what happened next). Having rejected my opening gambit mid-bound, I found myself in front of him with nothing to say. And what did I blurt out? I can't quite remember it exactly but it was something very close to "I'm a big fan."

Can you imagine a less Piper-esque line?? He didn't know what to say. Which made two of us. The whole embarrassing situation was only resolved when my wife, God bless her, held out her hand and asked him about his trip.

If you ever catch me shaking my head ruefully and tutting, chances are these 90 seconds are running through my head.

Anyway, I love John Piper. I'll never forget a mission trip to central New South Wales in early 2002. I'd just read *Desiring God* and the idea of a happy God and that my satisfaction in Him was the way to glorify Him—it was truly liberating. And I remember being inspired to greater service by my enlarged appetite for joy. In 40 degree heat, I spent my time carrying around trays of ice-cold water for everyone and beaming at the thought of my reward (Matt 10:42).

And I loved (and still love) quotes like this from the opening of chapter 4:

Disinterested benevolence toward God is evil. If you come to God dutifully offering Him the reward of your fellowship instead of thirsting after the reward of His fellowship, then you exalt yourself above God as His benefactor and belittle Him as a needy beneficiary—and that is evil.

In 2003 I ran a discussion group on *Desiring God* and enthusiastically recommended it. But with one significant caveat. Chapter 1! I didn't like chapter 1. I lacked a lot of the vocabulary to articulate what I didn't like, but I didn't like it. And neither did *anyone else* in the discussion group.

Chapter 1 sets out the foundation for Christian Hedonism—the happiness of God. But the happiness of God is defined explicitly in terms of His self-centredness. "The chief end of God is to glorify Himself." And this God-talk was not really trinitarian. In fact, talk of God pre-eminently loving Himself came *before* talk of how the Father loves the Son. *First* His happiness is spoken of as the glory of His unrestrained sovereignty, the

magnification of His own divine perfections etc. *Then* Piper turns to say “one of the best ways to think about” God’s self-glorification is to think about the Father-Son relationship. Why? Because the Son is the Father’s *Image*, therefore loving the Son is a way of God loving Himself.

Do you see the logic? First it is asserted that God loves Himself—and this is supported largely on philosophical grounds (i.e., God’s the best, He’d be unrighteous to value anything higher than what’s best, ergo He must be supremely interested in Self). *Then* he turns to Trinity and says, “See? God loves His Image—He’s a self-lover.”

But if we *begin* with Trinity then the Father’s love for the Son reveals not a *self*-centredness but an *other*-centredness. God is happy not because He is self-absorbed (no-one—not even God is happy in self-absorption!). God is happy because He is other-centred. There is an over-flowing life of mutual self-giving in the triune relations. *That* is the happiness of God. And *that* is what we are invited into.

So once we’ve made that correction I am happy to call myself a Christian Hedonist. (How could a hedonist be other than happy to be so!?). I continue to see problems in Piper’s doctrine of God and I still want to challenge the ‘glory’ which he speaks of. But I’ve very much valued his teaching on hedonism. And I think it can be strengthened (not weakened) by the insistence that happiness is found—from top to bottom—in self-giving love.

Anyway, if you want to see how I ran the *Desiring God* discussion group—the hand-outs are here. Session 1 is where I diverge from the book.

[<http://www.christthetruth.org.uk/DesiringGod.htm> (bad link)]

Piper's Theology of Glory

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • DECEMBER 16, 2008

Stephen Murray alerts us to Tony Payne's reservations about Piper. [http://solapanel.org/article/whats_our_message/] You can read Piper's seven theses about God's glory here. [<http://stephenmurray.wordpress.com/2008/12/15/payne-on-piper-and-the-glory-of-god/>]

In response Payne wonders...

Is Piper's message so centred on God and his glory (and our enjoyment of God in his self-glorification) that Jesus has become a mechanism by which this takes place, rather than the central focus of the message? Where does the centrality of the Lordship of Christ fit into Piper's proclamation?

I share these reservations.

Here's a couple of paragraphs I've adapted from a post I wrote last year...

If someone says (as Piper does) "The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy displaying and magnifying his glory forever." we ought to ask, 'What does 'God' refer to in this sentence?'

It surely cannot refer to the trinitarian life of Father, Son and Spirit—that communion is the essence of self-giving. The trinitarian glory has *nothing* to do with self-centredness. And it cannot be referring to the Father for He has committed all things into His Son's hands (John 3:35). It mustn't be speaking of the Son, He only ever glorifies the Father. (John 4:34). And it can't be speaking of the Spirit, He simply takes from what is the Father's and the Son's and makes it known (John 16:15). So what does "God" refer to in the sentence "God's chief end is to glorify Himself"? Clearly this understanding of God is one abstracted from considerations of the trinitarian life. Yet as my post here argues—the living God cannot for a second be abstracted from considerations of trinitarian self-giving. The only God there is is the Trinity! The One God is precisely and without remainder the Father, Son and Spirit united in sacrificial love.

When, for instance, the LORD says in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols" it is only because He has been glorifying His Servant for the last seven verses—"Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One in Whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations..." (Isaiah 42:1ff). The Father glorifies His Son and anoints Him with His Spirit. *Therefore* He will not give that glory to another. This is the very opposite

of self-love. Instead His other-centred glory requires that He be exclusively committed to His Son in holy love.

God is not a narcissist. A proper doctrine of the trinity guarantees it. And wherever God is portrayed as a narcissist you can guarantee that a defective trinity is lurking in the background. And where trinity is deficient it's because our doctrine of God is not *centred* on Christ.

My main problem with Piper's theses is that Christ's Person and work are not foundational to the argument. The theses appear more to be logical deductions derived from a notion of 'glory' at odds with the cruciform glory He reveals.

Now to defend Piper's position the following two points are usually made.

1) "Of course Christ is central to this discussion. He's not been left out of the argument, He is *fully* this Glorious God."

Well let me suggest that we mustn't define 'God' first and then fit Christ onto this Procrustean bed. Perhaps see this post [<http://christthetruth.net/2008/02/02/you-and-me-were-not-so-different-really/>], or this one [<http://christthetruth.net/2008/01/28/let-jesus-be-jesus/>] or... well... everything I've written.

2) It is Christ's work and His work alone that brings us into an enjoyment of this glory. Well good. But the cross isn't the bridge to glory. The cross is the divine glory. There's quite a difference.

Anyway, I love John Piper. LOVE him. I once spotted him unexpectedly at the back of church and got so star-struck I found the words "I'm your biggest fan" flying out of my mouth! Can you believe it?? And the silence afterwards was hands down the most forehead-slapping embarrassing moment of my life. But few people have affected me as deeply in my Christian life as John Piper. I'm a fan ok. It's just that little old Glen with his two-bit blog sees problems that's all. But what do I know. Any thoughts?

God is not a narcissist

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • NOVEMBER 26, 2007

Ok—just one more digression before we get back to missions. This flows on from our discussions about the trinity...

I'm a bit slow in my travels around the blogosphere so I apologise that this is about a week out of date. But, Ben Witherington (recently-ish) managed to get 83 comments on a post called "Is God a narcissist?" He was reacting against a Piper-ist, Schreiner-ist theology that says "The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy Himself forever."

Being a good biblical (NT) theologian he made excellent points on the meaning of *kabod* (Hebrew) and *doxa* (Greek) and the difference between this and God's Name

(which is about vindicating His reputation). I've skim-read the comments as much as I'm going to but nowhere (as far as I can see) do people discuss the *trinity*. This is kind of surprising!

Growing out of our discussion about One-ness and Three-ness, one of the chief conclusions to be drawn is the fact that God ought never to be thought of in anything approaching unitarian terms. The One-ness of God does *not* connote a single centre of action or personal consciousness in God. Yet when a theologian asserts that "God's chief end is self-glorification" then almost certainly a doctrine of the one God, divorced from trinitarian reciprocity, is in view.

We ought to ask all such theologians "Which Person of God are you speaking of?" They surely cannot be referring to the trinitarian life of Father, Son and Spirit—that communion is the essence of self-*giving*. God is love. And they surely cannot be referring to the Father for He has committed all things into His Son's hands (John 3:35). They mustn't be speaking of the Son, He only ever glorifies the Father. (John 4:34). And they can't be speaking of the Spirit, He simply takes from what is the Father's and the Son's and makes it known (John 16:15). So what god are they speaking of when they say "His chief end is to glorify Himself"? Clearly the "God" referred to here is one abstracted from considerations of the trinitarian life. Yet as my last post was trying to argue—the living God cannot for a second be abstracted from considerations of trinitarian self-giving. The only God there is is the Trinity! The One God is precisely the community of sacrificial love between Father, Son and Spirit. (see also The Cruciform God)

When the LORD says in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols." it is only because He has been glorifying His Servant for the last seven verses—"Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One in Whom I delight; I will put My Spirit on Him and He will bring justice to the nations..." (Isaiah 42:1ff) The Father glorifies His Son and anoints Him with His Spirit. *Therefore* He will not give that glory to another. This is the very opposite of self-love. Instead His other-centred glory requires that He be exclusively committed to His Son in holy love.

God is not a narcissist. A proper doctrine of the trinity guarantees it. And wherever God is portrayed as a narcissist you can guarantee that a defective trinity is lurking in the background. Next time you hear such a theology, ask yourself what doctrine of the trinity is being espoused here? Has this theologian conceived of God apart from the communion of the Three? Almost certainly they have—and a selfish God is the outcome.

Two verses from John to finish: Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me." (John 8:54)

"All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you." (John 16:15)

God loves God more than God loves us?

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • DECEMBER 17, 2008

In comments, Ed brought up this claim for consideration: *God loves God more than God loves us.*

I'll jot down a few thoughts and then make way for Bobby's comment at the bottom which nails it in about a tenth the space it takes me. (Which again proves how horribly prolix I am!)

I have two problems with this dictum 'God loves God more than God loves us'.

One is that an unhelpful divide is being introduced into our conception of God's triune love on the one hand and His love for us on the other. Union with Christ and participation in God will not be allowed fully to flower in our thinking if such a dictum is axiomatic.

The other problem I have relates back to yesterday's post about glory. If the glory of God is the cross, then self-sacrificial, other-centred love is not an addendum to a foundationally self-centred glory. Love for the other is the glory of God all the way down to the bottom, so to speak.

To flesh out the first issue...

I reckon the Upper Room discourse (John 17 included) is indeed a very fruitful meditation on the nature of the Father-Son glory and its relation to us. It's stunning to say but as the Father has loved the Son, so does He love us and that even the love the Father has for the Son has been placed in us. The mutual indwelling—Christ in us, us in Christ, the Father in Him—makes problematic a discussion of a *separate* love of God for God and God for us.

Now of course there may be distinctions that could, at some point, be flagged up. Things like,

they are the initiators, we are simply the recipients.

their love is the original, we're just included in it.

they are in by nature, we by grace

(before union) they could do without me but not without each other.

Those kind of things. But now that we actually dwell within this trinitarian life and, as Peter says, 'participate in the divine nature,' I think there's a significant danger of introducing unhelpful divisions into our thinking if we say 'God loves God more than God loves me.'

We are in God and God loves us in a way inextricably bound up with His own life and glory. Because of Christmas, the Son became what we are so that we become what He is. Now the Father cannot but love us with that very same love with which He loves

the Son. To speak of ‘more’ and ‘less’ at this point threatens the reality of union—bride to Bridegroom, body to Head, branches to Vine.

It seems natural to speak of God’s life on the one hand and then ours on the other. But from all eternity the divine intention has not been separation but inclusion. Through God’s glory—the cross—we are taken into His very being.

And this leads to the second issue. When we consider how it is we’ve been included in God’s life, we are shown an astonishing depth to the love of God. He crushed the Son to provide refuge for His enemies. He gave up His Son to save the world. He did not spare His only Son in order to spare sinners. Christ endured hell so that we would not, forsaken so that we would be accepted, etc, etc. And if this is both our definition of love and of glory, well...

I think all these considerations—which you will agree are the very heart of the gospel—make us think again. ‘God loves God more than God loves us’ sounds completely, naturally sensible. But the gospel always makes us rethink the ‘natural’ and the ‘sensible.’

And here’s Bobby’s comment:

I think T.F. Torrance nailed it when he said, paraphrase: “that God loves us, more than He loves Himself,” which the cross proves. Of course this is assuming a very high view of the *assumptio carnis* (assumption of flesh/humanity—the incarnation)... and that humanity, through the incarnation, has been reconciled into the very life of God (cf. 1 Cor 6:17)... so that when Torrance says what He says, He’s not endorsing a Christology from below, but clearly from high, high above.

To respond to Piper’s sequence, as noted by Ed, this assumes a rather *inward curved* view of God... which just won’t do—that is, if the cross actually reveals anything about the *being* of God.

He loves us because He loves us

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • OCTOBER 29, 2009

I wasn't a huge fan of this paragraph quoted on Tony Reinke's blog (as my comment makes clear).

D.A. Carson talking about his book—*Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Baker, 2008, 1156 pgs)—to Collin Hansen in a *CT* interview (2/8/08):

...Sometimes Christians understand progressive revelation in a fairly mechanistic or linear fashion: More truth simply gets added to the pile, to make a bigger pile of truth. But this “mystery/revelation” tension shows that often something is actually there in the Old Testament text (according to Jesus and his apostles) that was not seen until the coming of Jesus made it clear. The most obvious example is the fact that interpreters of Scripture before the coming of Jesus did not happily put together the Old Testament promises of a Davidic king with Old Testament suffering-servant passages to anticipate a king who suffers, a king who would reign from a cross.

But I love this one: Thomas Manton, from a sermon on John 3:16

Love is at the bottom of all. We may give a reason of other things, but we cannot give a reason of his love, God showed his wisdom, power, justice, and holiness in our redemption by Christ. If you ask why he made so much ado about a worthless creature, raised out of the dust of the ground at first, and had now disordered himself, and could be of no use to him? We have an answer at hand, *Because he loved us*. If you continue to ask, But why did he love us? We have no other answer but *because he loved us*; for beyond the first rise of things we cannot go. And the same reason is given by Moses, Deuteronomy 7:7-8: ‘The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because you were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people; but *because the LORD loved you...*’ That is, in short, he loved you *because he loved you*. All came from his free and undeserved mercy; higher we cannot go in seeking after the causes of what is done for our salvation.”

Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton*, 2:340-341.

Huh?

Huh?

That's what I'm talkin about.

Beginning with the Creator?

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • NOVEMBER 19, 2009

Here's the John Piper quote I've been discussing:

And so the biblical mindset starts with the assumption that God is the center of reality. All thinking starts with the assumption that God has basic rights as the Creator of all things. He has goals that fit with his nature and perfect character. Then the biblical mindset moves out from this center and interprets the world, with God and his rights and goals as the measure of all things. (1992 Sermon)

In my last post on this I raised the following kinds of issues about that first sentence:

- Of course 'God' is central—theo-centrism is inescapable. The big question is 'which theos? which God?'
- Our all-consuming passion to be centred on God says nothing about whether God's ultimate passion is to be consumed with Himself.
- To map our 'should's onto God commits an anthropocentrism every bit as dangerous as the person who thinks God should exist for their sake.
- God-centredness must be our response to Him—but there is no 'must' about His own Self-regard!
- Therefore theocentrism is indeed our theological method—but it's not necessarily our doctrine of God.
- To determine our doctrine of God we need to look to His revelation of Himself. (John's gospel might help here).

And it's with those issues in mind that we turn to the second sentence. Piper says "All thinking starts with the assumption that God has basic rights as the Creator of all things."

His self-confessed starting point is God the Creator. Those who've been following Peter Leithart's recent posts on Athanasius might be hearing alarm bells.

Athanasius identified Arius's problem at precisely this point. He said:

It is more pious and more accurate to signify God from the Son and call Him Father, than to name Him from His works only and call Him Unoriginate.

Arius began with God the Creator. At the centre of his thinking was a God who was defined by creation (and defined in *opposition* to it). Now at the heart of Arius's problem is that this definition of deity *begins* by excluding Christ from full membership! If "God = unoriginate" then the Son (whose origin is the Father) must be less than fully divine. Arius will never get to a proper christology, because he has not *begun* with a proper christology. We must begin defining God's being as a life that includes the Son as 'God

from God'. Only that will allow us to make sense of Christ. But also—only that will help us to make sense of creation.

One of Athanasius's arguments was that Arianism makes Christ dependent on creation and not the other way around. God—who, remember, is definitionally and *down to His bootstraps* (so to speak) in opposition to creation—needs a mediator in order to create. An Arian account of transcendence will not allow God to interact with creation and so Christ is the first creature who is made precisely so that God can create. Christ is an exalted but nonetheless created mediator for the messy job of making icky matter. Do you see—for Arius, Christ is dependent on creation. It is God's desire for creation that causes Christ.

But the exact opposite is the case for the trinitarian. It is the Father's eternal love for Christ that causes the universe. There is a love for the Other in eternity that is spread abroad in creation. Here we see that creation is grace. There is not a needy Creator standing behind the world whose ultimate goal is to 'get what's coming to Him'. Rather at the back of the universe is a God who is *already* overflowing as a Fountain of love.

If we begin with Father, Son and Spirit rather than 'Creator' it becomes clear that before and behind creation is fullness not emptiness—offer not demand. Creation is a product of, and a testimony to, an inherent *out-going-ness*. There are no depths to God's eternal being that are deeper than this 'spreading goodness' (as Richard Sibbes would say, see Ron Frost's excellent blog: spreadinggoodness.org). Whatever *needs* we might dare to speak of in God (and if we're trinitarians we *must* speak of a Dependent God) we must be equally clear that such needs are met by the dynamic reciprocity of the Persons in their mutual in-dwelling. In these triune relations it's God who meets God's needs. It's God who upholds and satisfies God's rights. Or in other words—all that the Father demands, the Son accomplishes in the power of the Spirit. It is this out-going and other-centred life that pre-dates, causes and shapes creation.

Therefore the principle of creation is the *other-centredness* of the Father, Son and Spirit. When we begin with trinity we see that *creation is ultimately testimony to what God is pleased to give, not what God demands to get*.

And this is where I'd disagree with the way Piper sets things up. He begins with God the Creator who has rights. And this is a crucial decision.

I'm not suggesting for a second that he's Arian or anything of the sort. But I am saying that Athanasius has shown us a better starting point and set us on a better trajectory. If we head out in error by just a degree, the divergence down the track can be considerable.

When Piper begins with 'rights-bearing Creator', His glory will be readily identified with *getting His rights*. And then, once we bring to bear the utterly Scriptural notion of God 'acting for His own glory', what do we have? We have God doing all things for the sake of getting. What is ultimate to God is, apparently, His desire to maintain His rights.

What do we want to say in response? Well—for one thing glory as revealed by Christ and Him crucified is radically different to this. At the cross we see that glory is not about what God ‘gets’ as much as what He gives. And this is really where our different starting points have brought us. Beginning with ‘Trinity’ and ‘grace’ will get you to this cross-shaped definition of glory. Beginning with ‘Creator’ and ‘rights’ sets you off in a different direction. Getting to the cross from here will take a grand cross-country detour and something will get distorted somewhere.

Now, let me be clear, God indeed acts for the sake of His own glory. In fact He does all things for the sake of His own glory. That’s totally biblical and it’s not at issue. The issue is—what *is* this glory? And I’m saying it’s God’s utter *self-giving*. As CS Lewis says, “Self-giving is absolute reality.” So when God does things for His own glory—He’s declaring that what moves Him from the depths of His being is a radical and blood-earnest *other-centredness*. It’s not that we get the grace and God gets the glory. It’s that God’s *grace is* His glory.

Craig, a regular commenter here, gave an excellent illustration recently. He said he was once walking down a corridor ahead of a woman. He stopped and held the door open for her. She scowled and said “I hope you’re not holding the door open because I’m a *lady!*” He said, brilliantly, ‘No, I’m holding it open because I’m a gentleman.’

That’s what I’m talking about! When the LORD insists that He’s acting for His own glory, He’s declaring to the world that He’s not *responding* to our worth or lack of it. Instead He’s acting according to His *own* loving purposes. He loves us because He loves us. He’s a Gentleman! That’s why He creates, that’s why He redeems. It’s His very nature to be out-going, self-effacing, sacrificial, other-centred. *That* is His glory.

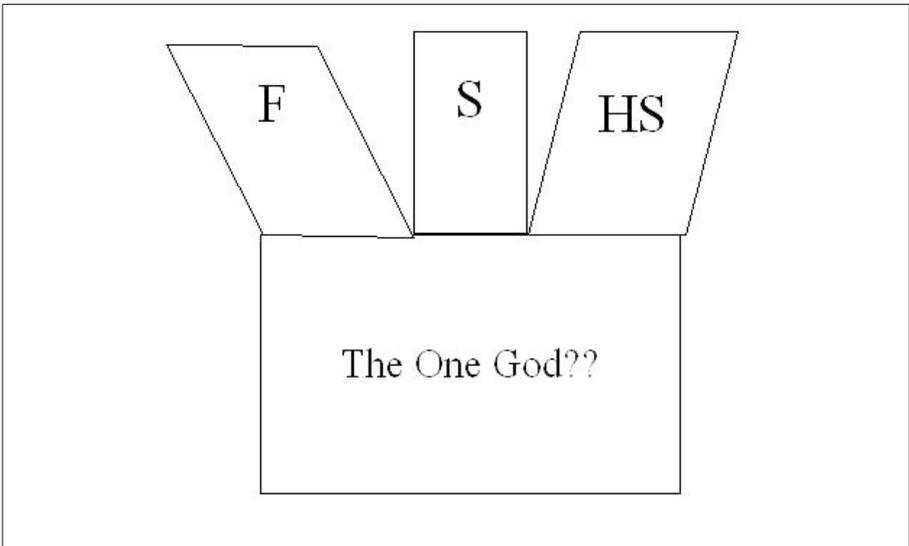
Oneness and Threeness

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • NOVEMBER 24, 2007

I remember a friend asking me what I thought God was doing before the creation of the world. I answered “They were enjoying one another.” He looked very quizzical and then said, “....Oh! You mean the *Trinity!*” I remember thinking “Well yes, what god were *you* thinking of?”

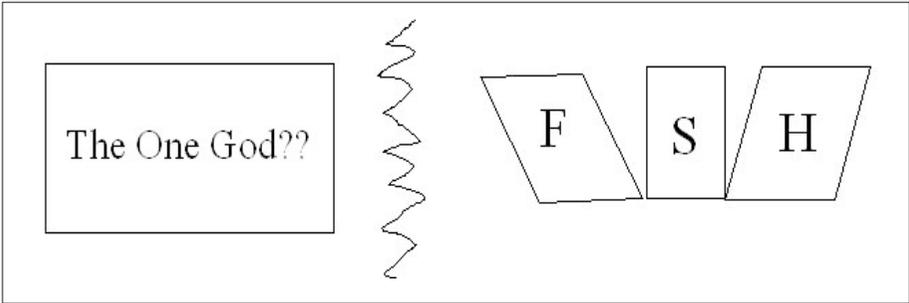
Yet many will think of God in ways that are divorced from the lively interaction of Father, Son and Spirit. What about you? How do *you* think of God’s pre-creation life? His OT activity? His work in providence? His divine attributes? Do you naturally and enthusiastically conceive of these as the out-flow of the mutual relations of Persons? Is your account of these *shaped* by trinitarian inter-play? Or do you try to conceive of these as, to all intents and purposes, unitarian activities to which we add trinitarian nuances (when we discuss salvation).

Another way of asking this is—how do you think about the relation of Oneness and Threeness in God. Is it like this? (Forgive the very amateur graphics/formatting)



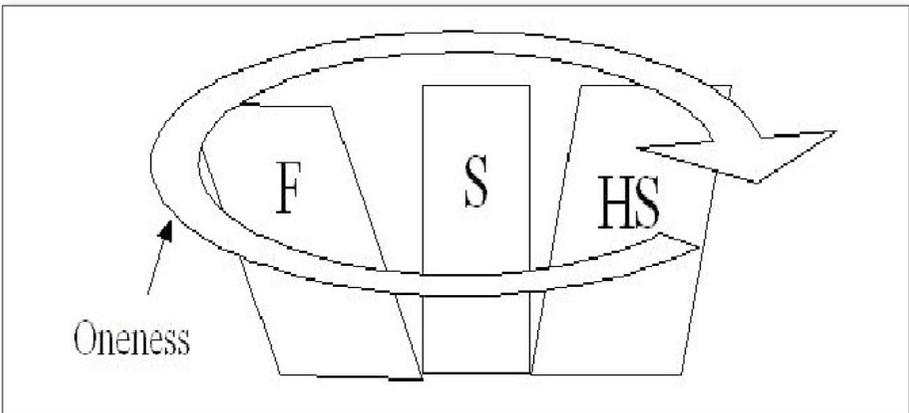
Here, Oneness is defined as the substrata—the substance of God underlying the Persons. The fundamental truths about God are cast in unitarian terms. To this is *added* multi-Personal considerations. Is this how you consider the interplay of Oneness and Threeness?

Or what about this view:



Here Oneness and Threeness are laid side by side. We consider ‘De Deo Uno’ and De Deo Trino’ but separately. We can even subscribe to phrases like “the equal ultimacy of the One and the Three.” Yet what we mean by this is a commitment to hold two fundamentally incommensurate doctrines of God together. It can even foster a refusal to let the Threeness of God define the Oneness. Here the One God is not constituted by the relations of the Three—Oneness is something else (divine simplicity, aseity etc etc). And the Three do not find their particular identities in the Oneness communion. No. Instead Oneness and Threeness remain unco-ordinated. It’s a tri-unity by forcing One and Three together not because the ‘tri’ and the ‘unity’ mutually inform one another.

But what about if we saw things like this...



Here the Oneness is precisely the mutual relations of the particular Persons. And these particular Persons find their identity in the communion that *is* God’s Oneness. “God’s being is in His communion” (John Zizioulas). The Three are three *in* their Oneness (not considered apart from it). The One is one *in* the Threeness (not considered apart from it).

This is truly a trinity. Here the 'tri' and the 'unity' are maintained from precisely the same perspective. Here is a real 'equal ultimacy of the One and the Three.'

The benefits of such a perspective? Many—I hope to blog on many more in the fullness of time. But for now (since we're in the middle of a series on mission)—we see that our doctrine of God, whether considering 'De Deo Uno' or 'De Deo Trino' is always a doctrine of the interplay of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is always an investigation of the economy of salvation in which the Three are disclosed. It is always 'Gospel' theology. The God of missions is a Gospel-alone God who is served in the world by a Gospel-alone mission.

“You and me, we’re not so different really”

GLEN SCRIVENER • CHRISTTHETRUTH.NET • FEBRUARY 2, 2008

There’s often a point in the crime drama where the bad guy tells the cop ‘You and me, we’re not so different really.’ Well there are two baddies in the history of trinitarian theology who really aren’t that different: Arius and Sabellius. Arius was the *subordinationist*. He defined the One God such that Jesus could not fit in. Instead Jesus had to take His place under the One God. Sabellius was the *modalist*. He defined the One God such that Jesus was absorbed in, losing everything that made Him distinctly Jesus. Instead Jesus was just the mask that the One God wore occasionally. But you know—Arius and Sabellius weren’t so different. They both had a doctrine of the One God that couldn’t cope with Jesus. It was Jurgen Moltmann who really nailed this in my thinking. Check out this quote from *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*:

A pre-conceived doctrine of the One God means “Christ must either recede into the series of the prophets, giving way to the One God, or he must disappear into the One God as one of his manifestations.” (p. 131)

Here are the errors of Arius and Sabellius—and Jesus gets either squashed down or squished in. The distinct Person of Christ will always lose out when ‘the One God’ is defined without Him. Arius will allow Him to be Jesus and not God, Sabellius will allow Him to be God and not Jesus. But fundamentally these errors are not so different because both prefer a pre-conceived ‘One God’ to Jesus.

This leaves us no option but to begin with a doctrine of God that expressly includes the mutual relations of Father and Son. Nothing else will allow Jesus to be Jesus *and* God. Moltmann helped me to see what was at stake in this. To begin with a definition of God that doesn’t already include the distinct Personhood of the Son means either Arius’s or Sabellius’s error. And, at the end of the day, they’re not so different.

This is why Moltmann says:

...the doctrine of the Trinity is not only the deification of Christ; it is even more the Christianization of the concept of God. God cannot be comprehended without Christ, and Christ cannot be understood without God. If we are to perceive this, we not only have to reject the Arian heresy; the Sabellian heresy must be dismissed with equal emphasis.” (pp. 131-132)

Christ will never fit into a ‘God’ defined without Him. We must begin with Him or else we will never honour Him properly. The errors of subordinationism and modalism are simply the result of falling off either side of the wrong horse. We must begin with Christ.

A Missionary Glory and a Glorious Mission

GLEN SCRIVENER • UNION THEOLOGY • 2017

The highest of all missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission... nor love for sinners... but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ.

So said John Stott in *The Message of Romans*. These three motivations for mission are easily recognised. We can imagine the first two motives embodied as missionaries, one stoically obedient to the command of God, the other passionately expending themselves for love of the lost. Both are conducting a good and godly ministry, yet still there may be tension between them—one emphasises concern for God, the other concern for the nations.

A third missionary steps forward. This one is chiefly characterised, not by a grasp of the Great Commission, nor an open hand towards the world. Here is someone who is already gripped. There is an impetus from above which does not merely command them, it captures them, sweeping them up in a zealous love for the world. For this missionary, let's call them Paul, there is no trade off between obedience to God and love for the world. The love of Christ has compelled them and now they participate in his ministry to the world (see 2 Cor. 5:14-21). This is the glory which not only motivates mission, it creates mission because it characterises the very heart of God. When seen in this light we realise that there is, for us, a glorious mission because there is, in God, a missionary glory.

God's glory is not simply a different quantity, it is a different quality to ours.

A MISSIONARY GLORY

Perhaps the idea of a missionary glory sounds peculiar. We are accustomed to think of glory in terms of self-regard. Human glory is self-centred, so we naturally think of divine glory as a souped-up version of our own narcissism. Yet when we turn to a biblical portrait of glory (in this article we'll concentrate on Isaiah), we see that God's glory is not simply a different quantity, it is a different quality to ours. The difference between God's glory and ours is not in the amount of self-regard God has! The difference is not that he's allowed to be selfish whereas we are not. The difference is that his glory is self-giving while ours, sadly, is not.

To see this we need to understand the basic Hebrew concept of glory. The word *kabod* means weight or heaviness. It is the substance of God, the very stuff of his Godhood. So then, in what does God's 'Godness' consist? As evangelicals let us seek to answer that question with the Scriptures in our hands and with Christ at the centre. Here are three windows Isaiah gives onto the life of God.

From Israel's perspective, we hear of God's Spirit-filled King:

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him —
 the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
 the Spirit of counsel and of might,
 the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord —
 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11:2-3)

From the Son's perspective we hear this:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
 because the Lord has anointed me. (Isaiah 61:1)

From the Father's perspective we hear him declare:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
 my chosen one in whom I delight;
 I will put my Spirit on him. (Isaiah 42:1)

The life of God is not a static self-regard but a dynamic, delighted flow from the Most High to his beloved Servant in the joy of the Spirit. God's 'Godness' is other-centred. So it is no wonder that we see this glory overflowing. In Isaiah 11 we see the Spirit-filled King give justice to the poor and needy and set the world to rights. In Isaiah 61, he proclaims good news to the poor, the broken-hearted, the imprisoned and the mourning, restoring the ancient ruins. In Isaiah 42 he tenderly cares for the weak while establishing justice to the ends of the earth. God's glory is a missionary glory—one that begins in eternity but which 'fills the whole earth' (Isaiah 6:3).

In this context God declares that his glory is exclusively focused on his servant:

'I, the Lord, have called you in righteousness;
 I will take hold of your hand.
 I will keep you and will make you
 to be a covenant for the people and
 a light for the Gentiles,
 to open eyes that are blind,
 to free captives from prison and
 to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness.

'I am the Lord; that is my name!
 I will not yield my glory to another.' (Isaiah 42:6-8)

Having glorified his Son for seven verses, the Father declares that he will not glorify another. The glory of God is shared with this Son by this Spirit and in no other way.

This is why John 17:2 is not a contradiction of Isaiah, it is virtually a quotation of it: ‘Father, glorify your Son that your Son may glorify you.’ In God, glory is a shared reality but only in a strictly Christ-centred way. God’s glory is a missionary glory because the Father glorifies his Son in the zeal of the Spirit. But this glory is not a self-contained self-regard. In the words of Richard Sibbes, it is a “spreading goodness.” For this reason Jesus can pray regarding his people: “I have given them the glory that you gave me” (John 17:22). Once again, Jesus is not contradicting Isaiah, he is proclaiming Isaiah’s fulfilment. The Spirit-filled Servant has come and God’s glory is found, uniquely, in him. Yet in him there is enough glory for the whole world.

A GLORIOUS MISSION

According to Isaiah, the Spirit’s flow is from the Father to the Son, then from the Son to us and out to the nations, making even the deserts bloom (32:15; 35:1). The way of the flesh is different. Throughout Isaiah we meet ‘old Israel’ who lifts herself up by her own efforts—most wickedly, by her own religious efforts (1:10-31; 2:6-22; 10:33-34; 24:1-23; 29:13-16; 58:1-14). But God’s glorious salvation judges all those who lift themselves up and, beyond such a judgement, he raises those who are bowed down (12:1-3; 25:4-9; 35:1-10; 40:1-11; 59:15-21). Having raised the lowly, God includes them in his own radiant purposes:

Arise, shine, for your light has come,
and the glory of the LORD rises upon you.
See, darkness covers the earth
and thick darkness is over the peoples,
but the LORD rises upon you
and his glory appears over you.
Nations will come to your light,
and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

The link here between glory and light is instructive. It is a spreading goodness, a conquering brightness, a compelling attraction. Just as the LORD’s glory enlightens us, so we become light. Just as the Sun of righteousness rises upon us, we become dawn and the whole earth is drawn to our splendour (v. 8). God’s missionary glory transforms us and presses us into service in his glorious mission.

For this reason the godly ‘direction of travel’ is not up-and-in. That is the way of the flesh. The way of the Spirit is down-and-out—it is a receiving of God’s light and a shining forth into dark places. There is therefore no ‘balance’ to strike between love for the lost and obedience to God. There is ultimately no trade-off between mission and worship, between mission and holiness or between mission and glorifying God. Through

God's missionary glory we are included in God's glorious mission.

Some imagine that they 'glorify God' by standing apart from sinners and declaring 'I am holier than thou' (Isaiah 65:5). Yet such an outlook stands condemned and has done since Isaiah's day. Such people are not merely failed missionaries, they are failed worshippers. God says 'they are smoke in my nostrils,' because his glory is not to stand aloof. His own glory is revealed three verses earlier: 'All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people' (Isaiah 65:2). God's glory is cruciform, it is self-giving, it is missional and by God's grace we participate. Now in the Son and by the Spirit, we too hold out our hands, we too become cruciform, self-giving and missional, we too shine the light of Christ to the ends of the earth. Glory!

GOD'S OWN GLORY

If God's glory is self-giving that may prompt a question: What does it mean for God to act for his own glory and not for our sakes (e.g. Ezekiel 36:22-32)?

A friend of mine tells a neat story which illustrates the difference. He was walking along a corridor towards a set of double doors. Behind him he heard high-heels so he held open the door for the woman following. On her way through she narrowed her gaze and said, 'I hope you're not opening the door because I'm a lady.' He replied 'No, I'm opening the door because I'm a gentleman.' It's the sort of riposte you almost never think of in time, but it illustrates our point here perfectly. My friend acted selflessly not because of what the woman was like but because of what he was like. So it is with God. He is not a hopeless romantic who cannot help himself. He's not a sucker for a damsel in distress. He's a gentleman. He acts in selfless grace not because of what people are like but because of what he is like. This is what it means for God to act not for our sake but for the sake of his glory. The initiative is his. He determines to be the ultimate and original self-giver. This is his glory. His hand is not forced, his heart-strings are not pulled, rather his heart is already set zealously for Christ, the Servant. Therefore he will save because it fundamentally expresses his true identity. It is his glory to be missionary.



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