

THE NATURE OF GOD

God is glorious (Exodus 15:11; Psalm 145:5). His glory consists in the overwhelming and overflowing beauty which stems from the sum total of all His attributes working together in perfect harmony. God is perfect in His holiness (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 6:3; I Peter 1:16), justice (Psalm 99:4; Luke 19:7-8; Hebrews 6:10), wisdom (Romans 11:33; I Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:10), power (Isaiah 44:24; Job 9:12; Jeremiah 32:17), grace and mercy (Ephesians 1:6-7; 2:4, 7-9; Romans 3:24), and love (I John 4:7-8, 16; Romans 5:18; John 3:16).

THE MOTIVE OF THE GLORY OF GOD

God not only is glorious, He loves His glory with infinite intensity (Isaiah 48:9-11) and therein lies His righteousness (Romans 9:14,15; Exodus 33:18,19). For God to be righteous, He must love what is best; therefore His ultimate loyalty must be to the maintenance and manifestation of His own glory. In other words, all that God does, He does for His own name's sake (Ezekiel 36:20-23). God created humanity for His glory (Isaiah 43:7,21); God redeems sinners for the praise of His glory (Ephesians 1:5-6, 12, 14; Romans 3:26; 15:7); God empowers Christians to live for His glory, both individually (I Corinthians 10:31; I Peter 4:11) and corporately (Ephesians 3:10); and God's ultimate goal for His people is that they might see and enjoy His glory forever (John 17:24). His ultimate will or plan for history is that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge and the glory of God as the waters cover the sea" (Hebrews 2:14,cf. Numbers 14:21). But God's unswerving zeal for His own glory does not mean that God is unconcerned about man's welfare. No, God's mercy and grace toward undeserving sinners in Christ is the apex of His glory (Romans (9:22-23). And the greatest possible good for man is to see God face to face, just as He is (I Corinthians 13:12; I John 3:2) and to behold the beauty of the Lord (Psalm 27:4). In fact, God's absolute faithfulness to His own glory manifests itself in God's absolute faithfulness to His covenant promises (His glory is at stake in whether He keeps His word or not) and thus it becomes the ultimate ground of our assurance (Psalm 143:1, 11; Daniel 9:14-19).

THE REVELATION OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST (New Covenant Theology)

God, before the foundation of the world, purposed to manifest his glory in an unfolding way. This eternal purpose would be accomplished in and through Christ Jesus our Lord (see Eph. 3:8-11). This is the heart of what is called New Covenant Theology. The name *New Covenant Theology* is a label given to what the God-breathed Scriptures unveil for us. *Theology* comes from two Greek words: *Theos* - referring to the one true and living God; and *logos* - the word or expression or revelation from and of this glorious God. The *New Covenant* is the very Word or expression or revelation of God. At the very core of the New Covenant is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. This is what was foretold by the prophets of God. "*I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house.*" (Isa. 42:6-7) "...*I will preserve You and give You as a covenant to the people. ...*" (Isa. 49:8). Jesus is the Word - the *logos*. "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:1, 14)

Thus, in the term *New Covenant Theology* we declare that God, for his own delight, has revealed himself and manifested his glory ultimately in the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ and his complete and perfect work on the Cross through which he has established a New Covenant in his blood. (Heb. 1:1-3) Prior to the incarnation, all of history and all of Scripture had progressively been moving toward and aiming at the great day of Christ and the New Covenant reality that would glorify God forever and ever. This was God's eternal plan, worked out through the creation of a physical world and universe; a way of going public with his glory in an incredible way for his own delight (Eph. 1:9-12; 3:8-11). This resounds to the praise of the glory of his grace!

God foretold the new thing he would do, and in the fullness of time, he did it (Is. 42:6-9; 43:19; 45:21-25; 46:9-13). He established the Lord who reigns over a kingdom of redeemed people upon whom the Spirit has been poured. These kingdom citizens relate to God on the basis of a New Covenant in which Jesus himself is their High Priest, Judge, Shepherd, King, Prophet; their very life! (Gal. 4:4; Acts 2:36; Heb. 7:22; 8:6; 9:11; 10:14)

All of God's previous revelation, including the Mosaic era, anticipated and led to the coming of Christ (Gal. 3:19). Even that Old Covenant was a "shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Col. 2:17; see also Heb. 10:1). *"For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us."* (2 Cor. 1:20) Thus, the pinnacle of God's unfolding revelation comes to us in the New Testament Scriptures, in the face of Jesus Christ. Behold Immanuel! What fullness of joy comes to those who were born blind when they behold the Lord Jesus Christ. To God be the glory! *"For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* (2 Cor. 4:6) Here in the New Testament Scriptures, the Spirit, through his chosen apostles, gives us our Lord's words about the mystery of Christ, *"which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men"* (Eph. 3:5). The two testaments proclaim the same message, but from differing standpoints. The first, sometimes using veiled and symbolic language, points forward in anticipation and the other, in clear and unmistakable terms, declares completion/accomplishment. Thus, we must read all of Scripture in light of the New Covenant, established in Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:17; Luke 10:23-24; 24:27, 44; John 5:46; 8:56; Heb. 10:7). We must read Scripture in context. The Bible needs to be understood and communicated not only in its parts, but also in the whole. *"For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God."* (Acts 20:27)

Since there is one Divine Author behind all the human authors of Scripture, it is essential that we seek to understand how all the parts of Scripture fit together to communicate the whole purpose of God. It seems consistent with God's revelation that true biblical theology is the recognition of God's purpose, unfolding and weaving its way from Genesis to Revelation on the timeline of redemptive history, culminating in Jesus Christ. Dr. D.A. Carson, in *The Gagging of God* writes, "Each major strand [of biblical theology] must be woven into the fabric that finds its climax and ultimate significance in the person and work of Jesus Christ." [(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 545] New Covenant Theology aims to pass on the vision and purpose of God in Christ, so that students of the Word will not only learn to understand Scripture in its parts, but will gain and cherish a breath-taking sense of the Christ-centeredness of all of Scripture.

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

The God of the Bible is the creator of the whole visible and invisible universe and He is the sovereign ruler of it. From all eternity, He freely and unchangeably, in His most holy wisdom, ordained whatsoever comes to pass. To use the words of Paul, God does "all things according to the counsel of His will" (Ephesians 1:11), having sovereign control of all events from the events of rulers and nations (Daniel 4:25, 32, 34-35) to the flight of a sparrow (Matthew 10:29). In particular, God's sovereignty is worked out in the area of salvation. To ensure that the salvation of sinners abounds to the praise of God's glory, God saves His people by grace alone apart from works,

lest anyone should boast (Ephesians 2:8-9). The sovereignty of God's grace is seen in God's unconditional election of His people out of the mass of sinful humanity for salvation (Romans 8:29, 9:6-23; Ephesians 1:4), the glorious atonement of Christ which actually accomplishes the salvation of God's people (I Peter 3:18), the irresistible grace of God's effectual call (Romans 8:30; I Peter 2:9) and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26ff; John 3:4; Titus 3:5) which enable and move a person to respond to the gospel of Christ in saving faith, and God's persevering in grace with his saints (I Peter 1:5; Jude 1; John 10:28-30; Philippians 1:6) so that His people will in fact persevere to the end and be saved.

THREE WAYS TO LIVE

There are three ways to live - the irreligious way, the religious way, and the gospel way. The Bible presents the gospel as the antidote to irreligion and religion. Luke 15:1-2, 11-32 illustrates these 3 distinct ways. There are two worldly approaches to God which are wrong and will leave you lost and alienated from God:

- * Moralistic approach (elder brother):
- * Relativistic approach (younger brother):

The only way to approach God is on the basis of sheer grace.

The gospel is, therefore, radically different from both irreligion and religion. Irreligion operates on the principle of self-acceptance, and obeys "self" as lord. Religion operates on the principle: "I obey, therefore I am accepted". The gospel operates on the principle: "I am accepted through Christ by sheer grace, therefore I obey."

THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE

Who Jesus is and what He has done provides both the motive and the means to true Christian spirituality. The Gospel is to be applied to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working, and behaving. The Gospel changes people from the inside out. Christ gives us a radically new identity, freeing us from both self-righteousness and self-condemnation. He liberates us to accept people we once excluded, and to break the bondage of things (even good things) that once drove us. In particular, the gospel makes us welcoming and respectful toward those who do not share our beliefs. Bringing the gospel truth to bear on every area of life is the way to be changed by the power of God.

We never "get beyond the gospel" in our Christian life to something more "advanced". The gospel is not the first "step" in a "stairway" of truths, rather, it is more like the "hub" in a "wheel" of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's but the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom. We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is *the* way we grow (Gal.3:1-3) and are renewed (Col.1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom.1:16-17).

It is very common in the church to think as follows. "The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience." But Col.1:6 shows that this is a mistake. Both confession and "hard work" that is not arising from and "in line" with the gospel will not sanctify you--it will strangle you. All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them "*to the word of his grace, which can build you up*" (Acts 20:32)

THE COMBINATION OF HEAD AND HEART

In the Christian life, emotions are crucial and thinking is crucial. God is not honored by either an unfeeling, joyless, loveless intellectualism or by an unthinking, uncritical emotionalism. Both are needed - minds that are gripped by the truth of God acquired through the serious and rigorous study of Scripture, and hearts that are on fire with intense emotions of love for God and His glory, awe of His majestic holiness, gratitude for His mercy, and fear of His wrath. In the final analysis, what God wants most is our hearts. That was the problem with the Pharisees - they honored God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him (Matthew 15:8). One of Jesus' most chilling threats was to professing believers who had no emotions toward God. They were neither hot nor cold - they were lukewarm. And Jesus promised to spit them out of His mouth (Revelation 3:15-16). But the way God longs to reach our hearts is through our minds. It is through the truth of Scripture that we become transformed people through the renewing of our minds (Romans 12:2). This truth comes through the discipline of careful reading of the text (Ephesians 3:4) seeking to find the author's intended meaning. The role of the Holy Spirit is not to add anything to the text but to make the heart of the reader humble so that he or she will welcome and embrace the truth (I Corinthians 2:14). Thus our position could be summed up as follows: "The heart is crucial, through the head."

CHRISTIAN HEDONISM

The chief end of man is to glorify God by enjoying Him forever. Because God's mercy to His people is the apex of His glory, enjoying the benefits of that mercy in faith honors and glorifies God. The faith that glorifies God is a happy, hearty trust. Therefore, joy in God is essential to honoring God (as C.S. Lewis states, "Joy in God is a Christian duty"). If faith earnestly believes that "God rewards those who seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6) and if obedience flows from faith, then all obedience must be a pursuit of God's reward and of joy in God. This follows the example of Jesus "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Hebrews 12:2; cf. the example of Moses in Hebrews 11:25-26). All people instinctively long to be happy and filled with joy. The Christian is the one who by the grace of God has discovered that God is the only source of satisfying and enduring joy. Thus God is honored as the only one who can fully meet our needs. In the wisdom of God, the glory of God and the eternal joy and well-being of His people always coincide. Therefore, to pursue one is to pursue the other.

PERSEVERANCE OF THE SAINTS

The biblical doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints has two parts: (1) God will so work with His people in His grace that they will inevitably persevere to the end and be saved (I Peter 1:5; Jude 1; John 10:28-30; Philippians 1:6). Thus no true child of God, born of the Holy Spirit, will ever be lost (Romans 8:29-30). True believers are eternally secure because God has ordained that they be eternally secure and so will work as to bring it to pass. (2) It is equally true, however, that no person will be saved without persevering to the end. In order to be saved, believers must persevere to the end in faith and obedience (Mark 13:13; Colossians 1:22-23; Hebrews 3:14; 12:14). Future and final perseverance is the ultimate test of past participation in Christ. Those who make some kind of beginning in the Christian faith but do not continue give evidence that they never really had saving faith (I John 2:19; Hebrews 3:14; 6:4-9). The means God uses to bring about our perseverance are His magnificent promises (II Peter 1:3-4) which will be ours if we persevere, and His terrifying warnings which will come true if we fall away (Hebrews 10:26ff). God causes His people to persevere by giving them a deep longing for His promises and a healthy fear of His threats through His Spirit and through the exhortation, admonition, and encouragement of His people (Hebrews 3:12-13; 10:23-24).

* Thanks to John Reisinger, Tim Keller, and John Piper. Their influence can be found in the document above.