

A Biblical and Theological Examination of the Glory of God

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Ryrie's *Sine Qua Non*

“What marks off a man as a dispensationalist? What is the *sine qua non* of the system?”² In 1965, Charles Ryrie answered these questions in what is arguably his greatest contribution to the development of dispensationalism. In his book *Dispensationalism Today*, Ryrie listed for the first time his evaluation of the essentials (the *sine qua non*)³ of dispensationalism. These essentials were (1) A distinction between Israel and the church, (2) the use of a consistent literal hermeneutic, and (3) a doxological purpose of history.⁴ Ryrie's *sine qua non* gained almost immediate acceptance throughout dispensational circles⁵ and rapidly became the standard

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² Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, with a forward by Frank E. Gaebelain (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 43.

³ *Sine qua non* is a Latin phrase that strictly translated means “without which none” and is used to refer to the essential element or elements of something. Thus, according to Ryrie, the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism are those elements without which dispensationalism could not exist as a coherent theological system.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 43–47.

⁵ The immediate acceptance of Ryrie's *sine qua non* was due, at least in part, to the fact that these three propositions could be found individually in many previous dispensational writings. Walvoord's interaction with Ladd provides just one example: “The reviewer believes a more tenable position is that the larger purpose of God is the manifestation of His own glory. To this end each dispensation, each successive revelation of God's plan for the ages, His dealing with the nonelect as with the elect, and the glories of nature combine to manifest divine glory.... These issues have frequently been discussed from the dispensational point of view in

definition for dispensationalism as a system for the next twenty years.⁶ Blaising correctly observes, “The importance of this work for the self-understanding of late twentieth-century dispensationalism cannot be overstated.”⁷

Still, a weakness of Ryrie’s third point is in the area of definition.⁸ Even though Ryrie discusses at great length the importance of a doxological purpose of history,⁹ he uses only

Bibliotheca Sacra during the last ten years” (John F. Walvoord, “A Review of ‘Crucial Questions about the Kingdom of God,’” *BibSac* 110 [1953]: 3–4.

⁶ These twenty years mark off the time from the original publication of the *sine qua non* to the advent of progressive dispensationalism in 1985. Forty-two years after Ryrie’s original publication, his belief in the importance of a doxological purpose of history had not changed: “The unifying principal of normative dispensationalism is doxological, or the glory of God, for the dispensations reveal the glory of God as He manifests His character in the differing stewardships given to man” (Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 107.

⁷ Craig A. Blaising, “Dispensationalism: The Search for Definition,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 23.

⁸ Interestingly, Ryrie does not broach the subject at all in his *Basic Theology* (*Basic Theology: A Popular Systemic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* [Chicago: Moody, 1999]), an oversight he readily admits. See Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Transformed by His Glory* (Wheaton, IL.: Victor, 1990), 9.

⁹ It appears that Ryrie included the doxological purpose of history in his *sine qua non* primarily to draw a distinction between dispensationalism and other theological systems: “The covenant theologian, in practice, believes this purpose to be salvation (although covenant theologians strongly emphasize the glory of God in their theology), and the dispensationalist says the purpose is broader than that; namely *the glory of God*. Progressives have a Christological center, apparently to undergird their emphasis on the Davidic covenant and on Christ as the already reigning Davidic ruler in heaven” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 48). But in drawing this distinction with covenant theology, it is possible that Ryrie overstates his case. Packer, for example, argues, “All serious Christian thinkers acknowledge that glorifying God is at once man’s divine calling and his highest joy, both here and here-after. Reformed theology goes

one sentence to define it. Although Ryrie expands upon this definition in *Transformed by His Glory*, nowhere does he provide a detailed exegetical basis for it.

An Historical Dispensational Understanding¹⁰

Ryrie understands the glory of God as follows: “The glory of God is manifesting God for who He is.”¹¹ “Glory concerns what people think about something or someone, and thus refers to the reputation the person or object has. The glory of God is what He seems to be, which in His case is what He really is. It is God seen in some or all of His characteristics.”¹²

Walvoord’s definition is similar. He defines the glory of God as “the manifestation of God’s infinite perfections.”¹³ This

beyond other views, however, in emphasizing [that] ... God’s goal in all that he does is his glory....” (“The Glory of God,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright [Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 1988], 272). Likewise, Jonathan Edwards argues that the glory of God is “God’s end in his works” and the end “which God had ultimately in view in the creation of the world....” (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. [Peabody, MA.: Hendrickson, 2000], 1:116). Similarly, Piper argues that “God’s ultimate goal in all that he does it is to preserve and display his glory,” and reduces redemptive history to evidence for that claim (*Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* [Sisters, OR.: Multnomah, 1996], 255). Piper also writes, “Redemption, salvation, and restoration are not God’s ultimate goal. These he performs for the sake of something greater: namely, the enjoyment he has in glorifying himself” (*Ibid.*, 33).

¹⁰ I fully understand that a sample size of three is hardly determinative. This being said, in my search throughout dispensational writings, I discovered that although nearly everyone speaks of the glory of God, almost no one defines it.

¹¹ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 106.

¹² Ryrie, *Transformed by His Glory*, 18-19. In this definition, Ryrie echoes, at least in part, what seems to be a popular understanding concerning the glory of God. Packer, for example, defines God’s glory as excellence and praiseworthiness on display as well as honor and adoration expressed in response to this display (Packer, “The Glory of God,” 271).

¹³ John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 476.

definition is given in a discussion of the glorious resurrection bodies awaiting the believer. These bodies are glorious in that they “reflect God’s perfections.”¹⁴ So, like Ryrie, Walvoord limits the glory of God to the manifestation of who he is.

Upon reflection, however, limiting the glory of God to “the manifestation of God’s infinite perfections” may be too restrictive. For under this definition, it appears that God must be able to manifest himself to someone external to himself in order to be glorious. Put another way, this definition appears to depend upon a created order so that God might manifest his perfections. Thus, one would be forced to conclude that, prior to the creation of the existing order when only the Godhead existed, God’s infinite perfections existed, but his glory did not.

Chafer’s definition seems more complete. He regards the glory of God as “both essential or intrinsic and declarative.”¹⁵ Chafer argues that God’s glory is essential because it is “concentrated in Himself. It is because of what He is that glory belongs to Him and only Him.”¹⁶ “Regardless of any

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary P, 1947-48; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993), 7:172. It should be noted that this understanding of the glory of God is not limited to dispensational writers. Allen Ross, as just one example, argues that the word *glory*, when applied to the LORD, “is basically saying that *he is the most important or preeminent person* in this or any other universe. And when the Bible refers to the ‘glory of the LORD,’ it is usually referring to all the evidence of God’s preeminence” (*Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006], 47). Drawing a distinction between holiness and glory, Ross continues, “To speak of God’s ‘holiness’ is to say that there is no one like him, that he has absolute power and perfection; to speak of God’s ‘glory’ is to say that he is preeminent in existence and that the whole universe is filled with evidence of his importance and sublimity” (Ibid., 48). Similarly, Herman Bavinck defines “the glory of the LORD” as “the splendor and brilliance that is inseparably associated with all of God’s attributes and his self-revelation in nature and grace, the glorious form in which he everywhere appears to his creatures” (*Reformed Dogmatics*, trans., John Vriend, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004], 2:252).

¹⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:173.

recognition of it on the part of creatures, God is Himself a glorious being.”¹⁷

In contrast to the essential glory of God, the declarative glory of God “is that which His creatures may accord to Him.”¹⁸ In one respect, all of the created order declares “a certain degree of that glory,”¹⁹ although not all of creation does so willingly.²⁰ Still, it should be noted that the essential glory of God demands the declarative glory of God from his creation. To fail to declare the essential glory of God is “rebellion within God’s universe which the Son of God will judge in time to come.”²¹

Biblical Evidence

The only legitimate way to develop a definition of the glory of God is to investigate the biblical evidence. This section will examine the evidence from the OT and NT separately.

OT Evidence

The OT uses כְּבוֹד to express the idea of glory. This word has at its root the idea of heaviness²² and therefore, by extension, abundance, honor²³ and glory.²⁴ The word כְּבוֹד has a

¹⁷ Ibid., 7:172.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 7:173.

²⁰ “Only fallen angels and members of this fallen race withhold glory from God” (Ibid., 7:172-73).

²¹ Ibid., 7:173.

²² The idea of glory as heaviness may be seen in the wordplay of Isaiah 17:4, where a loss of glory and a loss of weight are compared: “Now in that day the glory of Jacob will fade, and the fatness of his flesh will become lean” (Leslie C. Allen, “Glory,” in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2016). Unless stated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible.

²³ It has been suggested that the Latin *gravis* (heavy, grievous, serious) is semantically analogous to כְּבוֹד (C. John Collins, “כְּבוֹד,” in *NIDOTTE* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], 2:577).

²⁴ F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: 1907), s.v. כְּבוֹד.

wide semantic range and may be used in a variety of ways. It is used, for example, to refer to wealth (Gen 31:1), the honor given to men (Gen 45:15), and the splendor of nations (Hos 10:5). It is used to describe things such as chariots (Isa 22:18) or forests (Isa 10:18), as well as places, such as Lebanon (Isa 35:2) or the temple (Hag 2:3, 9). This being said, כְּבוֹד has two specialized uses. It is used as a technical term for the manifest presence of the glory of the LORD and as a self-referential term when God describes his own glory.²⁵

God's Manifest Presence

The phrase “manifest presence” is intended to be a general term describing those ways in which God makes his glory particularly evident.²⁶ It is true, of course, that God makes his glory known to all people at all times through what he has made (Ps 19:1-4; cf. Rom 1:18-21).²⁷ The seraphim cry out to one another, “the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa 6:3). This being said, even though God is continuously present and continuously revealing his glory, it remains true that “God will also be especially present at certain times; God is believed to be everywhere present, yet God will also be especially present in certain places.”²⁸

²⁵ Collins, *NIDOTTE*, 2:579.

²⁶ In contrast to this general understanding, Terence Fretheim presents a “continuum to describe the more specific modes of divine presence. God’s accompanying presence could be placed on one end, God’s theophanic presence (appearance) on the other, with God’s tabernacling presence (and perhaps others) at intermediate points. One might speak of a greater intensification of presence as one moves across the continuum toward that which is more and more specific, articulate, tangible, and formful” (*The Suffering of God* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984], 61).

²⁷ Fretheim describes this as God’s “structural presence” and argues that this truth is foundational to understanding the more “specific and concrete ways” in which God reveals himself. “Without this as the given, or being neglectful of this as the given, the idea of a God who is present can be perceived only as an interruption of the natural order, or as radically discontinuous from life in creation generally” (Ibid.).

²⁸ Ibid., 61-62.

Not only is God “especially present in certain places,” but God also manifests his glory in various ways. One way is through what might be called a physical force, or perhaps (more crudely) a pressure. It is difficult to know how to adequately label this phenomenon, but its reality cannot be denied. In Exodus 40:35, after the erection of the tabernacle, we are told that “Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because... the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.” This same situation occurred at the dedication of Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 8:11; 2 Chron 5:14; 7:2). To be clear, we are not told what *exactly* barred entrance in these cases. The secondary cause in 2 Chronicles 5:14 is the cloud, but it is clear that the glory of the LORD was the primary cause. Still, whether it was the inability to see or disorientation caused by the cloud, there was something about the glory of the LORD that kept people at a distance.

Another aspect of the glory of the LORD is visual. For example, the phrase “the glory of the LORD” (כְּבוֹד הַיְהוָה)²⁹ is first used in Exodus 16:7, where Israel is promised that they would “see the glory of the LORD.” The next morning, “they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud” (Exod 16:10). Although it would be incorrect to equate the cloud with the glory of the LORD,³⁰ one may still conclude that the glory of the LORD contains a visual component, in that Israel would “see” and the LORD “appeared.” What should be noticed, however, is that this visual component is more often than not left undefined,³¹ even though the accompanying cloud seems to be constant. Put another way,

²⁹ This phrase often includes suffixes and is occasionally written with כְּבוֹדֵי as the genitive (Collins, *NIDOTTE*, 2:581).

³⁰ Exodus 14:19 records the angel of God withdrawing from the front of Israel’s army and moving to the position of rearguard. The pillar of cloud also moves to the same position, but is listed as a separate entity from the angel of God. Also, a careful reading of Exodus 16:10 shows that the glory of the LORD appeared “in” the cloud, not “as” a cloud.

³¹ See, for example, Exodus 16:7, 10; 40:34, 35; Lev 9:6, 23; Numbers 14:10, 21; 16:19, 42; 20:6; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chronicles 5:14; 7:1-3; Isaiah 35:2; 40:5.

we are told that the people see the glory of the LORD in the midst of the cloud, but we are not told what they see.³²

Interestingly, this pattern is broken by the prophet Ezekiel, who attempts to tell his readers exactly what the glory of the LORD looks like. In Ezekiel 1:4, once again we see the cloud enveloping the glory of the LORD. This cloud has fire within it and a bright light around it. Ezekiel 1:26-28 describes one sitting upon “something resembling a throne” who had “the appearance of a man.” From the waist up he had the appearance of glowing metal with fire all around it, and from the waist downward “something like fire” and “a radiance around him.” This radiance had the appearance of a rainbow on a rainy day. Finally, we are told, “Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” (Ezek 1:28). As we work our way through the other nine references to the glory of the LORD in Ezekiel, this seems to be the default definition.

Delitzsch provides an interesting rationale as to why the glory of the LORD should have “the appearance of a man.” Commenting on Isaiah 3:8, Delitzsch argues that the glory of God “is invariably the fiery, bright *doxa* which reveals Him as the Holy One.”³³ But what is meant by “the eyes of his glory?”³⁴ He answers, “The glory (*chabod*) of God is that eternal and glorious *morphe*³⁵ which His holy nature assumes, and which

³² This is not always the case, however. In Exodus 24:17, the people of Israel perceive the glory of the LORD as a consuming fire. Still, whether one understands the cloud in verse 16 to cover the glory of the LORD only (see George Bush, *Commentary on Exodus* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993], 367) or to cover both the glory and the mountain (C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. J. Martin et al., 25 vols [Edinburgh: 1857-1878; repr. 10 vols., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 1:161), once again it is evident that the glory of the LORD and the cloud are not the same.

³³ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary*, 7:135.

³⁴ *Ibid.* “For Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen, Because their speech and their actions are against the LORD, To rebel against His glorious presence” (literally, “the eyes of his glory” עֵינֵי כְבוֹדוֹ).

³⁵ Delitzsch’s point that the glory of God is expressed in a particular form (μορφή) should not be taken to mean that כְבוֹד and μορφή are synonymous. Daniel Fabricatore makes a compelling argument that μορφή

men must picture to themselves anthropomorphically, because they cannot imagine anything superior to the human form.”³⁶ Assuming this to be true, it appears that God fashions the visible component of his manifest presence so that it best communicates his infinite perfections to finite man.

Still, this does not explain the necessity of the cloud so often associated with the glory of the LORD. In Exodus 33:18, Moses requests that God would show him his glory. In response, God allows Moses to see his goodness and to hear his name proclaimed. “‘But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live’” (Exod 33:20). This is an interesting statement for at least two reasons. First, God associates his glory with his face, which is a euphemism for his person. Second, God indicates the mortal danger involved with seeing his person on full display. This danger is so absolute that God places Moses in a cleft of the rock and then places his hand over Moses as he passes by. Therefore, it appears that the manifestation of God’s presence must include some safety mechanism for the preservation of those to whom God is revealing himself. While one cannot be certain, it appears that this may be the function of the cloud. By veiling the glory of the LORD, those witnessing God’s self-revelation are preserved.³⁷

is a broad term that may include the concept of glory, but should not be limited to it: “Μορφή isn’t exactly equal to any of the other Greek terms mentioned, yet it has a sufficiently large semantic range to encompass them all. In other words, if Paul wanted to say that Christ was the very glory (δόξα) of God, and if he wanted to say that Christ was the very nature (φύσις) and essence (οὐσία) of God, or the very image (εἰκών) of God then what word could he use to imply or encompass all of this? He could use the word μορφή. Now Paul does not mean all these things by his use of μορφή; it is rather that μορφή has the potential to express, in any given context, either φύσις, οὐσία, εἰκών, ὁμοίωμα, or δόξα” (*Form of God, Form of a Servant: An Examination of the Greek Noun μορφή in Philippians 2:6-7* [Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2010], 153).

³⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary*, 7:136.

³⁷ Likewise, it seems probable that it is the cloud that keeps people out of the tabernacle and the temple when the glory of the LORD is revealed. This understanding would be in keeping with 2 Chronicles 5:14: “... the

Glorify as a Means of Self-Reference

The standard Hebrew lexicon lists the suffixed form “my honour” (“my glory,” קְבוֹדִי) as “poet. of the seat of honor in the inner man, the noblest part of man.”³⁸ Thus, when God states that he will consecrate the tabernacle with “my glory” (Exod 29:43), he is using a self-referential term to refer to the glory inherent in his being. In other words, he will be there, which means his glory will be there. It should be noted, however, that this inherent glory is not so transcendent as to be non-observable. We see, for example, a connection between “my glory” and “my signs which I performed in Egypt” in Numbers 14:22. Similarly, God’s “salvation in Zion” is called “my glory for Israel” in Isaiah 46:13. Again, when God proclaims he will show his glory in “my servant, Israel” (Isa 49:3), he is stating that he will do works through his servant that will cause his name to be praised.

One should also observe that this self-referential term may also be used of the praise given to God by his creation as in Isaiah 42:8 where “my glory” and “my praise” are parallel to one another. Likewise, in Isaiah 43:7, God speaks of those he has created “for my glory.” This seems to be an obvious reference to his perfections being displayed in those he has redeemed. Finally, Isaiah 66:18-19 speaks of God gathering the nations, even those that have not heard of his glory, so that he may declare his glory among them.

Conclusion for OT Evidence

When one takes this information as a whole, it appears that the glory of the LORD is a visible representation of his presence made manifest with a special intensity. This visual representation is designed to best communicate who God is to finite human beings. God’s glory is something that he possesses

priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of God.” Again, although the glory of the LORD is the primary reason they cannot enter, it appears that the cloud is the actual mechanism that restrains them.

³⁸ BDB, s.v. קְבוֹד.

in himself, but also something recognized by his creation so that the entirety of his creation declares it in one way or another.

NT Evidence

In the NT, δόξα is the word used to describe the glory of God.³⁹ The standard Greek lexicon defines δόξα as (1) “the condition of begin bright or shining, *brightness, splendor, radiance* (a distinctive aspect of Hb. כְּבוֹד),” (2) “a state of being magnificent, *greatness, splendor,*” or (3) “honor as an enhancement or recognition of status or performance, *fame, recognition, renown, honor, prestige.*”⁴⁰ Aalen argues that this word “suggests something which radiates from the one who has it, leaving an impression behind.”⁴¹

Interestingly, when δόξα came in contact with the Bible, its basic meaning changed. In secular Greek, δόξα meant opinion or conjecture. But neither of these meanings is found in the either the LXX or the NT.⁴² Instead, the LXX transfers the concept of כְּבוֹד to δόξα, which usage the NT adopts.⁴³ It should be no surprise, therefore, that there is considerable overlap between the OT’s use of כְּבוֹד and the NT’s use of δόξα.

For example, just as with כְּבוֹד, δόξα may be used to describe honor to men (1 Thess 2:6) or the splendor of nations (Matt 4:8). Similarly, as כְּבוֹד is used in the OT to describe the

³⁹ S. Aalen, “Glory,” in *NIDONTT*, ed. Colin Brown, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975-1985), 2:44. In contrast, man’s honor is usually represented by the Greek τιμή (Ibid., 2:49).

⁴⁰ Walter Bauer, F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek – English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), s.v. δόξα.

⁴¹ Aalen, *NIDONTT*, 2:44.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 2:45. Aalen argues that when כְּבוֹד is used of God, “it does not mean God in his essential nature, but the luminous manifestation of his person, his glorious revelation of himself.” Ibid. As has been pointed out, this statement seems too limited.

manifest presence of God, so δόξα is used in the NT to describe the manifest presence of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

This link is clearly established in John 12:41. In this passage, John quotes from Isaiah 6 to describe the unbelief of the Jewish populace of Jesus' day. John justifies his application of this quotation by saying, "These things Isaiah said because he saw His [i.e., Jesus'] glory, and he spoke of Him [i.e., Jesus]." In the context of Isaiah 6, what Isaiah saw was the Lord seated on a throne, lofty and exalted, surrounded by seraphim who called to one another, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory." Taking these passages together, we find compelling evidence that the $\kappa\upsilon\omicron\varsigma\omicron\varsigma$ of the LORD and the δόξα of Jesus are the same.⁴⁴

One should also not miss other NT evidence that bolsters this conclusion. For the NT strongly implies that the Father and the Son exhibit the same glory. The author of Hebrews states that Jesus is "the radiance of His [i.e. God's] glory and the exact representation of His [i.e. God's] nature" (Heb 1:3). In an apparent allusion to Psalm 24:8-10,⁴⁵ Paul calls Jesus "the Lord of Glory" (1 Cor 2:8).⁴⁶

Additionally, at his second coming Jesus will "come in the glory of His Father" (Matt 16:27), yet will also come "in His

⁴⁴ This relationship is also hinted at in John 17:5: "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." Grammatically it could be argued at the glory of Christ and the glory of the Father could be separate and distinct. The same argument could be made with regard to John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." Taken within the context of the Gospel of John, however, this clearly is not the case.

⁴⁵ "Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, The Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O gates, And lift them up, O ancient doors, That the King of glory may come in! Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory."

⁴⁶ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, ed. John S. Feinberg, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 461-62.

glory” (Matt 25:31).⁴⁷ Jesus testified that he did not glorify himself but that “My Father ... glorifies Me” (John 8:54). Lazarus’s sickness was “for the glory of God, so that the Son of God maybe glorified by it” (John 11:4). Jesus prayed, “Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was” (John 17:5). When Stephen gazed into heaven he saw “the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).

Now at this point readers must be careful to grasp what this does, and does not, mean. Just because *קְבוֹד* and *δόξα* are synonymous does not mean that the representation of God’s glory in the OT is exactly the same as the representation of God’s glory in Jesus Christ. Clearly there are significant differences. What this does mean, however, is that it is legitimate to take general principles concerning God’s glory derived from either testament and synthesize these principles into a unified definition.

The Glory of God as Visible Phenomena

Just as in the OT, the manifest presence of God’s glory in the NT is primarily something that is seen. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter and his companions “saw His [Jesus] glory” (Luke 9:32). In a scene reminiscent of the OT, “a cloud formed and *began* to overshadow them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him’” (Luke 9:34-35). During this incident, Peter, James, and John hear the voice of God the Father from the center of a cloud. Although not explicitly stated in the text, it seems certain that some visual component of the glory of the Lord was present, for prior to hearing the voice they were afraid as they entered the cloud. In

⁴⁷ There is some evidence that the holy angels also share this glory. The Son of Man will come “in His glory, and [the glory] of the Father and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26). While it is beyond the scope of this study to fully discuss what is meant by the inclusion of “the holy angels” in this verse, one suspects that the glory of the holy angels is similar to that of the glorified believer, in that it is a glory bestowed upon them by the graciousness of God.

Matthew's account, he does not describe the glory of the Lord, but does indicate that the cloud was "bright" (Matt 17:5). There is also a visual component to Jesus' revealed glory, as it is something that the disciples "saw." What they saw was Jesus' bodily appearance lit up with a dazzling brightness: "His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light" (Matt 17:2). Aside from this singular event, there is no other recorded instance of Jesus' glory being revealed in a similar manner. This being said, one should not conclude that Jesus' glory is never again revealed visually, but only that it is never again revealed visually *in the same way*.

Acts 7:55 reports that immediately prior to Stephen's martyrdom, Stephen "gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God." Once again, although there is no description of what Stephen saw, the glory of God in this instance was clearly visible.

The Glory of God as Light

There is good evidence that the brightness seen on the Mount of Transfiguration is one aspect of the glory of God. As mentioned above, BDAG's first definition for δόξα is "the condition of begin bright or shining, *brightness, splendor, radiance* (a distinctive aspect of Hb. דָּבָר)." ⁴⁸ This linking of brightness and glory is easily demonstrated by a quick examination of those instances where δόξα is used in parallel with other words signifying light.

For example, Revelation 21:11 describes the glory of God as the brilliance (φωστήρ) of a precious stone. In Philippians 2:15,⁴⁹ φωστήρ is used to describe the light of a star. Revelation 21:23 reveals that the eternal city "has no need of

⁴⁸ BDAG, s.v. δόξα.

⁴⁹ "So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear (mg. *shine*) as lights (mg. *luminaries, stars*) in the world," See *ibid.*, s.v. φωστήρ.

the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined (ἐφώτισεν) it, and its lamp (λύχνος) is the Lamb.”⁵⁰

Based on this evidence, it seems reasonable to conclude that, although visible light is not the glory of God, the glory of God may be manifested as a visible, bright light. This being said, we must be careful not to go too far. For this is not the only way that the glory of God may be made manifest.

The Glory of God and Power

One way that the glory of God may be revealed is through the possession of his perfections. In the NT, this may be seen in the linkage between God’s glory and power. For example, in Colossians 1:11, Paul prays that believers would be “strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might....” The eternal punishment that awaits those who do not obey the gospel includes being “away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:7).⁵¹

A careful reading of these texts indicates that it is not the use of God’s power, but the possession of it, that is described as glorious. Understanding that God’s omnipotence is only one aspect of his perfections, it seems unlikely that this attribute alone is glorious while the others are not. Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that one may extend the expression of God’s glory to all of his perfections, both individually and corporately.

This being said, we must also recognize that the use of these perfections also brings God glory. In Revelation 4:11, the twenty-four elders fall down before the throne to state that God is worthy to receive glory and honor and power because he created all things and because of his will they exist. This reference, however, is slightly different than the ones

⁵⁰ This same concept of “glory” as “light” may be seen in Revelation 18:1, where the earth is illumined (ἐφωτίσθη) with the glory of an angel.

⁵¹ In Revelation 19:1, glory and power are once again linked. During the great tribulation, after the fall of Babylon, a great multitude in heaven shouts, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.” In this instance, however, it appears that glory and power are separate attributes that receive praise.

mentioned above. In this instance, God is due glory by the created order because of what he has done. It is not referring to the intrinsic glory he already possesses. Still, one may legitimately argue that the mandate to give God glory stems from the fact that he already possesses that glory. In other words, the created order's obligation to ascribe glory to God is just the extension of the obligation to tell the truth. The truth about God is that he is glorious; therefore his creatures have an obligation to say that.

God's Manifest Presence in Jesus Christ

Even though Jesus' glory was revealed on the Mount of Transfiguration as light, in nearly every other instance Jesus' glory is revealed through his works. For example, when Jesus turned the water into wine at the wedding in Cana, John testifies that Jesus "manifested His glory" (John 2:11). Witnesses to Jesus' raising of Lazarus saw the glory of God (John 11:4). In Jesus' high priestly prayer, Jesus prays, "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4).

Of course, the greatest work of Jesus during his first advent was his death and resurrection. When the time came for his passion, Jesus prayed, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You" (John 17:1) and "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). Jesus was raised from the dead "through the glory of the Father" (Rom 6:4). His resurrected body is a "glorious body" (Phil 3:21). Paul calls the good news of Jesus Christ "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4) and "the glorious gospel" (1 Tim 1:11).

Still, one must realize that the glory of Christ is not ultimately or finally exhibited in his death and resurrection. His ascension, present ministry in heaven, as well as his future return and coming kingdom all display his glory. According to the Scripture it was "necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory" (Luke 24:26). At his ascension, Jesus was "taken up in glory" (1 Tim 3:16). At his second coming "the Son of Man will come with power and

great glory” (Matt 24:30). During the millennial kingdom, Jesus will sit on a glorious throne (Matt 19:28).

Conclusion for NT Evidence

The NT’s teaching on the glory of God harmonizes with the data collected from the OT. This is not surprising when one considers (1) that the LXX and NT usage of δόξα is derived from the OT use of כְּבוֹד and (2) that the כְּבוֹד of the LORD and the δόξα of Jesus are the same.

Just as in the OT, the manifest presence of God’s glory in the NT is primarily something that is seen. This is true in Stephen’s vision of heaven as well as in the person of Jesus Christ. Although sometimes this glory is revealed as a light, more commonly it is expressed in the works of the Lord Jesus.

Additionally, through the study of God’s glory expressed through his omnipotence, it was concluded that the mere possession of that attribute is considered glorious. Therefore, it seems fair to conclude that one may extend the expression of God’s glory to all of his perfections, both individually and corporately.

Aalen observes that, “Just as in the OT, [in the NT] glory is partly linked with God’s action (Rom 6:4) and is partly an attribute of his being.”⁵² Put another way, the NT teaches that the glory of God is both intrinsic and declarative. It is intrinsic in that God possesses it apart from any recognition by his creation and declarative in that it is displayed for his creation to see through his works.

Theological Considerations

Virtually all theologians would agree, at least at some level, that the glory of God includes the manifestation of his person. Thus, Ryrie’s definition of the glory of God— “The glory of God is manifesting God for who He is”⁵³—would not generally be disputed, at least as far as it goes. The question is whether it

⁵² Aalen, *NIDONTT*, 2:47.

⁵³ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 106.

goes far enough. For the unstated assumption in this definition is that a created order must be present for this manifestation to take place.⁵⁴

G. T. Shedd provides a case in point. He would agree with Ryrie at one level: “The glory of God means such a manifestation of the Divine perfections as leads creatures to worship and adore.”⁵⁵ This being said, Shedd provides the following caveat: “The essential glory of God, that is, his glory as it exists per se, is not intended in this definition. This is the same, whether there be a creation or not; whether there be worship or not.”⁵⁶

The Non-Necessity of the Created Order

According to Shedd, the necessity of the created order for God’s glory to exist cannot logically be true, for it moves the final end of God’s actions from the Creator to what he has created.⁵⁷ This would mean that “the superior would be subordinated to the inferior.... It would be a maladaptation of means to ends.... The infinite would exist for the finite.... The creature in *any* aspect cannot be regarded as the last end, any more than the first cause of all things.”⁵⁸

Berkhof argues in a similar manner. If the eternal purpose of God is to glorify himself, then by necessity this cannot be dependent upon the created order. “The glory of God is the only end that is consistent with His independence and sovereignty. Everyone is dependent on whomsoever or whatsoever he makes his ultimate end. If God chooses anything in the creature as His

⁵⁴ This assumption may be seen in Ryrie’s expanded definition: “Glory concerns what people think about something or someone, and thus refers to the reputation the person or object has. The glory of God is what He seems to be, which in His case is what He really is. It is God seen in some or all of His characteristics” (Ryrie, *Transformed by His Glory*, 18-19).

⁵⁵ William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 1:357.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1:357-58.

final end, this would make Him dependent on the creature to that extent.”⁵⁹

A Trinitarian Solution

If the created order is not necessary for God to be glorious, does this mean that the understanding of God’s glory as revelation must be abandoned? Not necessarily. Berkhof argues for a Trinitarian solution: “Though God undoubtedly reveals His goodness in creation, it is not correct to say that His goodness or love could not express itself, if there were no world. The personal relations within the triune God supplied all that was necessary for a full and eternal life of love.”⁶⁰ This love relationship within the Trinity, which is independent of the created order, is easily seen in Scripture.

Three times in John 17:20-26 Jesus speaks of the Father’s love for him (17:23, 24, 26). Of particular import is verse 24, which states that the Father loved the Son “before the foundation of the world.” This indicates that a love relationship between the Father and the Son existed prior to the created order. If the Father loved the Son from eternity past, it is inconceivable that this love relationship did not exist between all three members of the Godhead.

⁵⁹ Lewis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th rev. and enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 136. “It would seem to be perfectly self-evident that God does not exist for the sake of man, but man for the sake of God. God only is Creator and the supreme Good, while man is but a creature, who for that very reason cannot be the end of creation. The temporal finds its end in the eternal, the human in the divine, and not *vice versa*” (Ibid.). Strong makes the same case: “His own glory is the only end which consists with God’s independence and sovereignty. Every being is dependent upon whomsoever or whatsoever he makes his ultimate end. If anything in the creature is the last end of God, God is dependent upon the creature. But since God is dependent only on himself, he must find in himself his end” (Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* [Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907], 399).

⁶⁰ Berkhof, *Theology*, 136.

Because of God's basic simplicity, God's perfections and his person are functionally synonymous. As Bavinck explains,

On the whole their [Christian theologians'] teaching has been that God is simple, exalted above all composition, and that there is no real distinction between his being and his attributes. Every attribute is identical with God's being. He *is* what he *has*.... Whatever God is he is completely and simultaneously. By means of this doctrine of God's simplicity Christian theology was kept from falling into the error of regarding God's attributes as separate from and more or less independent of his essence."⁶¹

What this means in practical terms is that if one attribute was eternally enjoyed within the Godhead, then all the attributes are eternally enjoyed within the Godhead. Put another way, the revelation of all of God's perfections has been a perpetual revelation within the Godhead. He has constantly revealed and enjoyed his own perfections throughout all eternity.

A Proposed Definition

If one understands the glory of God as fundamentally "the revelation of God's perfections," then the glory of God is an eternal glory, independent of his creation, for this revelation has eternally existed within the Godhead. As a result, God's eternal purpose is dependent upon nothing outside of himself. At the same time, God reveals himself to all of his creation through his deeds in a way that may be best understood. This being said, although the simple definition of "the revelation of God's perfections" is technically accurate, this definition is likely to be misunderstood without further clarification.

Therefore, the following definition is proposed: *The glory of God is his revelation of his own perfections, both eternally within the Godhead and temporally in all creation.* This definition concisely summarizes the biblical evidence reviewed

⁶¹ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 121.

above, avoids the theological pitfall of making God dependent upon his creation, and stands firmly within the dispensational tradition, combining the insights of both Ryrie and Chafer.

This author understands that this article is not the final word on the subject. But it is hoped that this definition may be a starting place for a larger discussion within dispensationalism on a topic that has been largely ignored. *Soli Deo Gloria!*