

# The Glory of God and Dispensationalism: Revisiting the *Sine Qua Non* of Dispensationalism

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In 1965 Charles Ryrie published *Dispensationalism Today*. In this influential volume, Ryrie attempted to explain, systematize, and defend the dispensational approach to the Scriptures. His most notable contribution was arguably the three *sine qua non* of dispensationalism. First, a dispensationalist consistently keeps Israel and the church distinct. Second, a dispensationalist consistently employs a literal system of hermeneutics (i.e., what Ryrie calls “normal” or “plain” interpretation). Third, a dispensationalist believes that the underlying purpose of the world is the glory of God.<sup>2</sup>

The acceptance of Ryrie’s *sine qua non* of dispensationalism has varied within dispensational circles. In general, traditional dispensationalists have accepted the *sine qua non* and used them as a starting point to explain the essence of dispensationalism.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, progressive dispensationalists have largely rejected Ryrie’s proposal and have explored new ways to explain the essential tenants of

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<sup>2</sup> C. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 43-47.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, R. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, 12th ed. (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 2010), 52, 53; R. McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 1 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 112-15; C. Cone, ed., *Dispensationalism Tomorrow and Beyond: A Theological Collection in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie* (Fort Worth: Tyndale Seminary P, 2008), *passim*.

dispensationalism.<sup>4</sup> Despite criticisms leveled by progressive dispensationalists, Ryrie reaffirmed the *sine qua non* when he revised and expanded his book in 2007.<sup>5</sup> It is remarkable that for over fifty years dispensational advocates continue to affirm, debate, and dispute Ryrie's *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.

This study is primarily concerned with Ryrie's third essential aspect, the glory of God. On balance, dispensational scholarship has focused more on the other two distinctives, the distinction between Israel and the church and a consistent literal hermeneutic. E. E. Johnson correctly observes, "In this author's view dispensationalists have not always given adequate attention to the glory of God in their teaching on dispensationalism. Yet the Bible repeatedly focuses on this aspect of God's program."<sup>6</sup> I have divided this study into three parts. First, I will explain the controversy surrounding the glory of God as a distinguishing mark of dispensational thought. Second, I will attempt to develop an outline for a biblical theology for God's glory based on Scripture. Third, I will draw some conclusions about the validity of using the glory of God as a unifying principle for dispensationalism.

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<sup>4</sup> C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Up-to-Date Handbook of Contemporary Dispensational Thought* (Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint, 1993), 9-56; see especially endnote 8, pp. 304-305; R. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 19-29; J. S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. J. S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 67-85; M. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles: Theological Studies P, 2008), 13-31.

<sup>5</sup> C. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, rev. and exp. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 45-48.

<sup>6</sup> E. E. Johnson, "A Biblical Theology of God's Glory," *BibSac* 169 (2012): 403. Stanley Toussaint remarks, "Of these three [*sine qua non*], undoubtedly the most important is the distinction between Israel and the church" "Israel and the Church of a Traditional Dispensationalist," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. H. W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 227.

## *The Controversy Concerning God's Glory within Dispensationalism*

A short historical overview is in order to help understand the controversy related to the glory of God and dispensationalism.<sup>7</sup> Classical dispensationalists such as C. I. Scofield and L. S. Chafer taught that God had two separate redemptive purposes for Israel and the church. Israel was seen as the earthly people of God through whom God would fulfill an earthly redemption. The church was seen as the heavenly people of God through whom God would fulfill a heavenly redemption. These two divine purposes were eternally separate and helped to explain why God instituted different dispensations. Critics from covenantal theology, such as O. T. Allis, charged dispensationalists with undermining the unity of the Bible and Reformed theology, especially the covenant of grace and Westminster Confession.<sup>8</sup> For Allis and other covenant theologians, the unifying theme of redemptive history is soteriological, grounded in the covenant of grace.

In response to these criticisms, dispensational scholars searched for a unifying theme within the dispensational theology. John Walvoord, who formerly was Presbyterian, responded to these charges by affirming that there is one overarching purpose of Scripture—the glory of God:

All the events of the created world are designed to manifest the glory of God. The error of covenant theologians is that they combine all the many facets of divine purpose in the one objective of the fulfillment of the covenant of grace. From a logical standpoint, this is the reductive error—the use of one aspect of the whole as the determining element.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See the helpful summaries by C. A. Blaising, “Contemporary Dispensationalism,” in *SWJT* 36 (1994): 5-10; and “Development of Dispensationalism by Contemporary Dispensationalists, Part 2,” *BibSac* 145 (1988): 266-69.

<sup>8</sup> O. T. Allis, “Modern Dispensationalism and the Unity of Scripture,” *EvQ* (1936): 22-35.

<sup>9</sup> J. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1959), 92.

Ryrie followed Walvoord's lead and incorporated the glory of God into his *sine qua non* of dispensationalism.

Decades later, controversy continues to swirl around the proposal that the glory of God is a distinguishing mark of dispensationalism. Herb Bateman IV summarizes the criticisms under two questions. He asks, "First, do all dispensationalists agree that the self-glorification of God is the unifying theme of Scripture?"<sup>10</sup> Bateman notes that prior to Walvoord and Ryrie there was a lack of consensus among classical dispensationalists such as Chafer, who evidently proposed no overarching principle. In addition, contemporaries of Ryrie argued for other unifying principles. For example, Alva McClain and Dwight Pentecost made the arguments that the unifying theme of Scripture is the mediatorial kingdom and theocratic kingdom of God respectively.<sup>11</sup> To this list, one should add progressive dispensationalists. Blaising states, "[F]or progressive dispensationalism, the kingdom of God is the unifying theme of the history of divine revelation, and Jesus Christ is the apex of that kingdom, the agent and mediator through whom it is brought to fulfillment, and the focal point of divine revelation."<sup>12</sup>

The second question Bateman raises is "whether the doxological principle is a unique or distinguishing feature of dispensationalism."<sup>13</sup> To this inquiry, he responds negatively as well. In other words, are dispensationalists the only theologians who see God's glory as the ultimate purpose for creation? Covenant theologians enjoy a rich heritage of celebrating the glory of God. One could look to the Westminster Shorter

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<sup>10</sup> H. W. Bateman IV, "Introduction: Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. H. W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 36.

<sup>11</sup> A. J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1992), 4-5; J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 433.

<sup>12</sup> C. Blaising, "Contemporary Dispensationalism," 12. So Robert Saucy, *Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, 27-29.

<sup>13</sup> Bateman, "Dispensationalism Yesterday," 36.

Catechism<sup>14</sup> or Jonathan Edwards's treatise *The End for Which God Created the World*. Ryrie (and Walvoord) knew, however, this as well and even acknowledged that covenant theologians recognize the ultimate end of God's glory.<sup>15</sup>

The doxological principle in dispensationalism, however, is part of a much larger discussion than merely recognizing God's glory. It relates to one's philosophy of history. Ryrie articulates three elements needed to establish a philosophy of history: (1) "a proper concept of the progress of revelation in history; (2) the unifying principle; and (3) the ultimate goal of history."<sup>16</sup> Ryrie does a commendable job explaining the differences between not only covenant theology and dispensationalism, but also between progressive dispensationalism and traditional dispensationalism as they relate to their philosophies of history.<sup>17</sup> Their views of progressive revelation are different, their unifying principles are different, and their ultimate goals are different as well.

Before attempting to outline the biblical theology of God's glory, one more topic needs to be discussed, namely, the problem of finding a unifying center. Both systematic and biblical theologians have long recognized the difficulty of finding one center that provides an adequate foundation for all other truth.<sup>18</sup> James Hamilton describes a biblical theological center as follows:

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<sup>14</sup> Question 1: "What is the chief end of man?" Answer: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

<sup>15</sup> For example, see Ryrie's comments about Charles Hodge and William G. T. Shedd (*Dispensationalism*, 108).

<sup>16</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 21.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-23, 103-9. See also Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, 49-52.

<sup>18</sup> James Hamilton, "The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment: The Centre of Biblical Theology?" *TynBul* 57 (2006): 59-62; G. F. Hasel, "The Problem of the Center in the OT Theology Debate," *ZAW* 86 (1974): 65-82; R. McCune, *A Systematic Theology*, 1:135; C. Blomberg, "Unity and Diversity of Scripture," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 66-69.

This centre of the Bible's theology acts as the centre of gravity for all of its other themes, it undergirds biblical wisdom, and it presents itself as the apex of the purposes of the God who speaks and acts from creation and redemption to judgement and consummation. . . . Moreover the centre of biblical theology is the theme which all of the Bible's other themes serve to exposit.<sup>19</sup>

### *The Case for a Dispensational Understanding of God's Glory*

Attempting to develop a biblical theology of God's glory is an immense undertaking. Such an endeavor is complicated by the fact that we are finite and God is infinite, so there is always more about God to know and to learn. Even for all of eternity the redeemed will grow in their understanding of the glory of God. Pentecost comments, "A finite mind could no more comprehend His glory that one can compress the ocean into a bucket. All eternity will be spent learning more and more about how great, how good, and how glorious God is."<sup>20</sup> So the following is just a start of a biblical theology of God's glory, especially as it relates to dispensationalism. The outline progresses through seven premises that build upon one another.

#### **1. Premise: God is a glorious God.**

What exactly is the glory of God? Christians speak frequently about God's glory and glorifying God, but few have considered what it is. Unfortunately, many systematic theologies do not directly discuss the issue.

Perhaps the best place to start is with the terms most frequently used for glory in the Old and New Testaments. In the OT, the Hebrew term *kābôd* (used 376 times along with its derivatives) is used most frequently of God's glory.<sup>21</sup> When it is used in a context not directly related to God, *kābôd* can refer to (1) a weight or burden (1 Sam 4:18; Isa 2:24); (2) possessions

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<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, "Glory of God in Salvation," 59, 61.

<sup>20</sup> J. D. Pentecost, *The Glory of God* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1978), 97.

<sup>21</sup> J. N. Oswalt, "943 קָבֹד," *TWOT*, 427.

(Gen 31:1) or impressive appearance (Gen 45:3); (3) splendor, magnificence (Hag 2:3); and (4) distinction, respect, or a mark of honor (1 Kgs 3:13; Prov 26:8).<sup>22</sup> When used in relation to God, *kābôd* refers to the manifestation of his being. J. N. Owalt comments,

Over against the transience of human and earthly glory stands the unchanging beauty of the manifest God (Ps 145:5). In this sense the noun *kābôd* takes on its most unusual and distinctive meaning. Forty-five times this form of the root relates to a visible manifestation of God and whenever ‘the glory of God’ is mentioned this usage must be taken account of.<sup>23</sup>

R. B. Gaffin Jr states that “the phrase ‘glory of the LORD’ (*k<sup>e</sup>bôd yhwh*) occurs frequently in the OT; it is virtually a technical term (e.g., Exod. 16:7; 1 Kgs. 8:11; Ps. 63:2). God’s glory is His visible and active presence.”<sup>24</sup>

The most common NT term related to God’s glory is *doxa* (used 166 times in the NT). In secular Greek *doxa* is most frequently used to refer to one’s “opinion” or “view”; surprisingly this usage is absent from biblical Greek (both the LXX and NT).<sup>25</sup> The Septuagint translators shaped the biblical use of *doxa* when they used it to translate *kābôd*. In the NT, *doxa* has four basic meanings: (1) the condition of being bright or shining, *brightness, splendor, radiance* (Acts 7:55); (2) a state of being magnificent, *greatness, splendor* (Mark 6:29); (3) honor as enhancement or recognition of status or performance, *fame, recognition, renown, honor, prestige* (2 Pet 1:17); and (4) a transcendent being deserving of honor, majestic being (2 Pet 2:10).<sup>26</sup> The two key ways NT writers use *doxa* in relation to God is either to display his visible radiance or to uphold and

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<sup>22</sup> William Lee Holladay and Ludwig Köhler, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 151.

<sup>23</sup> J. N. Oswalt, “943 כָּבוֹד,” *TWOT*, 1:427.

<sup>24</sup> R. B. Gaffin, Jr., “Glory,” in *NBDT*, 507.

<sup>25</sup> *EDNT*, 1:345; LSJ, 444.

<sup>26</sup> BDAG, 256-58.

spread his reputation and honor.<sup>27</sup> At times, it is hard to distinguish which meaning a particular author is using in any given context.

The glory of God goes beyond lexical studies. How do we understand the glory God theologically? Several theologians make a helpful distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic glory of God.<sup>28</sup> The intrinsic glory of God relates to the very essence or being of God. Glory is not merely an attribute of God; rather it is the sum total of all his attributes. John Walvoord defines God's glory as "the manifestation of God's infinite perfections."<sup>29</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost concurs, "The glory of God is the sum total of all His perfections as revealed to men."<sup>30</sup> Scripture presents many of God's attributes and works as glorious because they reflect the intrinsic glory of God. God is a glorious God. The extrinsic glory of God relates to the manifestation or revelation of God's intrinsic glory. Wayne Grudem defines God's glory as "the created brightness that surrounds God's revelation of himself." He further comments, "It is very appropriate that God's revelation of himself should be accompanied by such splendor and brightness, for this glory of God is the visible manifestation of the excellence of God's

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<sup>27</sup> See the very helpful summary in R. Bauckham, *The Gospel of Glory: Major Themes in Johannine Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), Kindle Edition.

<sup>28</sup> See the survey in C. W. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God" in *The Glory of God*, ed. C. W. Morgan and R. A. Petterson, *Theology in Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 165-67. So also J. MacArthur Jr., *God: How to Know and Glorify Him* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1982), 56-62; J. D. Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God?* Basics of the Faith Series (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 10-11. L. S. Chafer distinguishes between the essential (i.e., intrinsic) and declarative aspects to "the boundless glory of God" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 7 [Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948], 172-73).

<sup>29</sup> J. F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990), 476.

<sup>30</sup> J. D. Pentecost, *Glory of God*, 123.

character.”<sup>31</sup> Many scholars link the display of God’s glory to his presence, both in the world and among his people (John 1:14).<sup>32</sup> In many respects, the Bible’s story line is the progressive revelation of God’s extrinsic glory.

## **2. Premise: The ultimate goal of all creation is the glory of God.**

Romans 11:36 states, “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.” This doxology (along with many other doxologies in the Bible) captures the key purpose of why God created the world—for his own glory. The three prepositional phrases in this verse describe the comprehensive scope of God’s purpose. “From Him” (*ek autou*) explains that God is the creator. God made the universe and everything in it. “Through Him” (*di autou*) explains that God is the sustainer. By His eternal power and wisdom, God sustains the universe and directs its course. “To Him” (*eis auton*) explains that God himself is the goal of creation. This telic use of the preposition *eis* reveals that the universe is inherently God-centered. He is the first and last cause of “all things” (*ta panta*).<sup>33</sup> This theological reality cannot be overemphasized. A God-centered approach to theology radically affects how one understands and applies Scripture. The doxological conclusion of Romans 11:36, “To Him be the glory forever,” summarizes the proper response all creation should have towards the one true God. Ephesians 1:3-14 confirms that every facet of God’s eternal plan (1:11) is ultimately accomplished “to the praise of God’s glory” (1:6, 12, 14). J. D. Hannah states it this way: “What is the chief end or purpose of God? Why did God create the world and mankind? I answer: God’s chief end is to be known in all his glory.”<sup>34</sup> H. C. Thiessen and V. D. Doerksen concur:

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<sup>31</sup> W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 220, 221.

<sup>32</sup> R. B. Gaffin Jr., “Glory,” in *NBDT*, 507-09.

<sup>33</sup> See similar ideas in Colossians 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 8:6.

<sup>34</sup> J. D. Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God?*, 11.

Though God sincerely seeks to promote the happiness of his creatures and to perfect the saints in holiness, neither of these is the highest possible end. The end is his own glory. All his works in creation (Ps. 19:1–6; Prov. 3:19), preservation (Neh. 9:6; Rev. 4:11), providence (Ps. 33:10f.; Dan. 4:35; Eph. 1:11), and redemption (1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 3:10f.) have this end in view.<sup>35</sup>

A God-centered view of reality is what John Piper calls a “continental divide in theology. If you really believe this, all rivers of your thinking run toward God. If you do not, all rivers run toward man. The theological and practical implications are innumerable.”<sup>36</sup>

This view of reality raises a theological paradox that is interesting to unwind. Is God selfish or sinful for seeking his own glory?<sup>37</sup> The answer to this question rests ultimately in the perfections of God’s essence and character. If the God of the Bible is the one true God, then for him to seek some other end outside himself would be absurd. God is the highest entity in the universe and has infinite value. There is nothing greater to seek. For God to create the world for himself demonstrates the reality that he is indeed God. If God called creation to seek something other than his own glory, he would be calling people to idolatry. In contrast, calling people to recognize and understand his glory is an act of love and is in no way selfish or sinful.

### **3. Premise: God wants every creature to glorify him.**

If God is a glorious God, and he has created the world for his own glory, the next logical question is, how does one glorify

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<sup>35</sup> H. C. Thiessen and V. D. Doerksen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 82. See also pp. 100, 103, 111, 118, and 126.

<sup>36</sup> J. Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 141 n. 21.

<sup>37</sup> See Jonathan Edwards, “The End for Which God Created the World” in *God’s Passion for His Glory*, 168-76; J. D. Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God?*, 15, 16.

God? Christians speak of glorifying God on a regular basis. Yet the true meaning of this familiar phrase seems lost to the contemporary church.

Let us first consider what glorifying God cannot mean. First, glorifying God does not mean that God is deficient of glory. Second, glorifying God does not mean that God is part of creation. Third, glorifying God does not mean that God is dependent upon creation. To the contrary, God is eternally perfect, and his glory is neither deficient nor incomplete. Chafer states, “As for that glory which is called intrinsic or essential, it may be observed that, regardless of any recognition of it on the part of creatures, God is himself a glorious being.”<sup>38</sup> In addition, God is completely separate from and transcendent above creation. God is not dependent upon creation for anything—he is self-existent. Psalm 115:3 states, “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.” Therefore, no creature can add to or diminish God’s intrinsic glory. This raises another paradox related to God’s glory. On one hand, God’s glory is perfect and complete; on the other hand, God still receives glory and praise from creatures. Both concepts are true. The genuine reception of praise and honor does not diminish God’s full and complete intrinsic glory.<sup>39</sup>

Now let us consider positively what glorifying God does mean. The Greek verb *doxazō* (used sixty-one times in the NT) has two basic meanings: (1) to influence one’s opinion about another so as to enhance the latter’s reputation, *praise, honor, extol*; and (2) to cause to have splendid greatness, *clothe in splendor, glorify*.<sup>40</sup> In the NT, the second meaning of “glorify” is an activity reserved exclusively for God (Acts 3:13, Rom 8:30). Only God can cause one to have splendid greatness. The first definition, however, captures the main thrust of how creatures can glorify God—to influence people’s opinion about God so as to enhance his reputation throughout the world. Scripture articulates this concept in passages such as Matthew

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<sup>38</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:172.

<sup>39</sup> See C. W. Morgan, “Towards a Theology of the Glory of God,” 167-69.

<sup>40</sup> BDAG, 258.

5:16, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” First Peter 2:12 echoes the same theme: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.”

Three principal activities comprise the biblical idea of glorifying God. First, glorifying God involves primarily the *revelation* of the one true God. When God reveals himself, he is glorified. When people come to know God, God is glorified.

Second, glorifying God involves the spread of the *reputation* of the one true God. When the true reputation of God spreads and people begin to honor and respect him, God is glorified. One way the spread of God’s reputation occurs in Scripture is through the spread of God’s name. When God called Moses, Moses’ task was to remind the nation of God’s name: “God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: “The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.’” In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus’ first request is that God’s name would be hallowed throughout the world (Matt 6:9).

Third, glorifying God relates to the *pleasure* of the one true God. Hannah asserts,

To state it succinctly, God is only pleased with that which is in perfect agreement with his perfections. God is only glorified in himself either in beholding his innate triune perfections with his own being or observing himself through his creation. Truly pleasing God from the creature’s perspective means being like God in moral and spiritual qualities.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, whatever pleases God is also what glorifies him. Here are just a few things that please God: the spread of the gospel; the salvation of the lost; the sanctification of believers;

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<sup>41</sup> Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God?*, 26.

the bearing of spiritual fruit; and the genuine offer of praise, thanks, and worship.

#### **4. Premise: Glorifying God is bound to God's self-disclosure.**

Foundational to glorifying God is the self-disclosure of God.<sup>42</sup> As Paul Enns explains, "Revelation is thus God's disclosure to man, in which He reveals truth about Himself that man would not otherwise know."<sup>43</sup> God has chosen to reveal himself through various means. First, God has revealed his glory through *general revelation* to all humanity. God has revealed his glory in creation (Ps 19:1-6). Psalm 19:1 states, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." In Romans 1, Paul explains that creation reveals the invisible attributes of God, including his eternal power and divine nature, so that all of humanity is without excuse (Rom 1:19-21). Those who reject God foolishly "exchange the glory of God" for idolatry (Rom 1:23). God also reveals himself generally through the conscience (Rom 2:14, 15) and through divine providence (Acts 14:15-17; Matt 5:45).

Second, God has revealed his glory in *special revelation*. The scope of special revelation is narrower than general revelation since not all people may receive the message. It is special because it reveals more information about God and his will for humanity through a variety of means (Heb 1:1). Salvation is possible only through special revelation (Rom 10:17). We will focus on just two avenues of special revelation: the word of God and the Son of God. Scripture was inspired by God and is capable of equipping believers for every good work (2 Tim 3:16). It is through the pages of Scripture that we learn of God, his glory, and his eternal plan. John Piper states, "The whole Bible, properly understood, has this divine purpose to communicate or display the glory of God. And this pervasive

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<sup>42</sup> See esp. J. Hamilton, "The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment," 57-84 and Pentecost, *The Glory of God, passim*.

<sup>43</sup> Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1989), 186.

aim of the Scriptures to glorify God, in what they teach and how they teach it, reveals the handiwork of God in the writing of the Bible.”<sup>44</sup> Jesus Christ is the climax of God’s revelation (John 1:1, 18; Heb 1:1-4). God manifested his glory in Jesus’ First Advent (John 1:14) and will manifest it again in the Second Advent (Matt 24:30).

### **5. Premise: God has chosen to reveal his glory progressively and systematically through redemptive history (i.e., through every dispensation).**

Under the previous premise, I asserted that God reveals his own glory. Under this premise, I am asserting that God reveals his glory progressively and systematically throughout redemptive history. Dispensationalists recognize that God has chosen to reveal himself progressively in each dispensation. A proper view of progressive revelation is foundational to the proper understanding of Scripture. Ryrie summarizes the issue well:

Progressive revelation views the Bible not as a textbook on theology but as the continually unfolding revelation of God given by various means throughout the successive ages. In this unfolding there are distinguishable stages of revelation when God introduces new things for which man becomes responsible. These stages are the economies, stewardships, or dispensations in the unfolding of His purpose. Dispensationalism, therefore, recognizes both the unity of His purpose and the diversity in the unfolding of it.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the dispensations, God specifically reveals more about his glory. The following are just a few highlights of the progressive revelation of God’s glory. This survey takes special note of God’s display of brightness and light as well as

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<sup>44</sup> J. Piper, *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 195.

<sup>45</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 39.

explicit statements about his own glory.<sup>46</sup> As already noted, creation declares the glory of God and his invisible attributes (Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:19-23). God created humanity in his own image and crowned them in glory (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:3-5; Heb 2:5-9). The LORD revealed his own glory and name to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3). On Mount Sinai when God gave the law, God revealed his glory to his servant Moses (Exod 33-34). Both the apostles John and Paul allude to this famous event in the life of Moses when they compare the glory under the law to the glory of the new covenant (John 1:14-18; 2 Cor 3:13-18). Throughout the exodus and wilderness wanderings God's presence was with the Israelites through the Shekinah glory—a cloud by day, a pillar of fire at night, and a cloud of glory within the tabernacle (Exod 40:34-38; Lev 16:2). The glory of the LORD filled the first temple until the days of Ezekiel (1 Kgs 8:10-14; Ezek 9-11). God displayed his glory repeatedly in his judgment of the nations and of Israel (Exod 14:4, 17). At least three OT prophets had the privilege of seeing prophetic visions of the glory inside the very throne room of God—Isaiah (Isa 6), Ezekiel (Ezek 1), and Daniel (Dan 7).

In the NT God revealed his glory in the life and ministry of Jesus. The incarnation of Jesus showed the glory of God (John 1:14). Jesus is the light of the world (John 1:4; 8:12; 9:5). The brightness of God's glory lit up the night sky when the angels announced Jesus's birth to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14). The miracles of Jesus displayed the glory of God (John 2:11; 9:1-4; 11:4, 40). The transfiguration of Jesus gave Peter, James, and John an eyewitness account of the glory of Jesus, which was veiled during his first advent (Matt 17:1-13; 2 Pet 1:16-18). The passion and death of Jesus revealed God's glory as Jesus was lifted up (John 13:31, 32). After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God restored the glory of Jesus (John 17:5; Acts 2:32, 33; 13:13-15; Heb 2:5-9). The church displays the glory of God in many different capacities (Eph 1:22, 23; 3:20, 21; 1

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<sup>46</sup> See similar surveys in Gaffin, "Glory," 507-11; C. W. Morgan and R. A. Petterson, eds., *The Glory of God*, Theology in Community (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), *passim*; J. Edwards, "The End for Which God Created the World," 183-251; Pentecost, *Glory of God*, *passim*.

Cor 10:31). The church's gospel ministry is characterized by a greater glory than that under the Law (2 Cor 3). Both Paul and John saw visions of the glorious throne room in heaven (2 Cor 12:1-4; Rev 4-5). Paul identifies the rapture of the church as the "appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). The second coming of Christ will display the glory of God before the entire world (Matt 24:30). All will acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus and witness his exaltation (Phil 2:9, 10). Jesus will manifest the glory of God throughout the millennial kingdom (Isa 24:23).

## **6. Premise: The climax of God's glorification in human history will occur at the second coming and during the millennium.**

The climax of God's glorification in human history is the second coming of Christ and the reign of Christ during the millennium. The millennium is the final dispensation; it represents the culmination of progressive revelation and goal of eschatology. Ryrie calls the millennium the eschatological goal of dispensationalism. The unifying theological principle is doxological; but the goal of history is Christ's rule on earth in the kingdom. Ryrie states, "Concerning the goal of history, dispensationalists find it in the establishment of the millennial kingdom on earth . . . [T]hey insist that the display of the glory of the God who is sovereign in human history must be seen in the present heavens and earth."<sup>47</sup>

Scripture anticipates and predicts this future display of God's glory in many places. Here are just a few examples. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus articulates the future coming kingdom when he prays, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9-10). The only time and place God's name will be hallowed is when God's kingdom is established on earth. Disciples of Jesus are to pray for the coming of Christ and the future millennium. In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus explains that the Son of Man's return will be glorious: "For as

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<sup>47</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 21.

the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Matt 24:27). He continues, “Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30).<sup>48</sup> The manner of Christ’s second coming is radically different from that of the first coming. Jesus’ first advent was marked by humility, coming as a babe in the manger. Jesus’ second advent is marked by a glorious and powerful display of might, descending from heaven with the hosts of the redeemed (Rev 19:11-16). After the second coming, Christ will rule on earth for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1-7). His dominion will be the entire earth; all humanity will submit to Christ’s glorious rule (Ps 2:6-9; Ps 110; Dan 7:14). Addressing the conditions of the millennial kingdom, Walvoord states, “The kingdom will be a glorious kingdom, in which the glory of God will find full manifestation.”<sup>49</sup>

## **7. Premise: The ultimate completion of God’s glorification before all creation will occur only as he fulfills the national promises to Israel in the millennium.**

Recognizing Christ’s earthly rule as the climax of God’s revelation of his glory is essentially a premillennial position. It is not distinctively dispensational, since historic premillennialists would agree to the same premise. So what makes a dispensational understanding of God’s glory different? What is distinctive about dispensationalism? The main difference is that dispensationalists see the millennium as the restoration of the theocratic kingdom to the nation of Israel. At

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<sup>48</sup> See Matthew 16:27; Matthew 24:64; 2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 1:7.

<sup>49</sup> J. D. Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1964), 488. Showers notes, “The Scriptures repeatedly associate the glory of God with His sovereign rule” (*There Really is a Difference*, 50).

this point, a dispensational explanation of the kingdom of God might be helpful.

God's kingdom program is one of the most important themes in Scripture. Dispensationalists have consistently seen different aspects to God's rule.<sup>50</sup> First, God rules sovereignly over all creation at all times. This aspect of God's kingdom is the *universal kingdom* of God. The Scriptures reflect God's universal rule in verses such as Psalm 103:19, "The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all" and Psalm 145:13, "Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations." God's omnipotent rule over creation is unshakeable despite the enemies of God.

Second, God will rule beyond time as we know it into eternity. This aspect of God's kingdom is the *eternal kingdom*. In eternity, God will vanquish all the enemies, both on the earth and in the angelic realm. God will completely reverse the curse of sin on creation as he creates a new heaven and new earth (Rev 22).

Third, God at various times has manifested his rule on the earth through a mediator or representative. This aspect of God's kingdom is the *theocratic* or *mediatorial kingdom*. The theocratic rule of God started in Eden with Adam as God's image bearer (Gen 1:26-28). Adam's sin and subsequent fall ruined humanity's mediatorial rule over creation and allowed Satan to implement his kingdom (Gen 3). God instituted his theocratic rule again with the nation of Israel at Sinai (Exod 19). Though limited in scope and imperfect in its implementation, Israel's theocracy lasted from Sinai until the

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, A. J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1992); J. D. Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990); A. G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 1994), 604-611; Showers, *There Really is a Difference*, 155-67. Dispensationalists continue to debate the relationship of the church to the kingdom. Although this issue is worthy of consideration, it is not essential to the argument in this paper. For a basic introduction to the issues, see the essays by S. D. Toussaint and J. L. Burns in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*.

departure of the presence of God's glory at the time of the exile (Ezek 10). The reinstatement of God's theocratic rule on earth will take place at Christ's second coming and the establishment of the millennium (Matt 25:31). As the God-man, Jesus Christ will restore humanity's rightful place to rule over creation (Ps 8; Heb 2:5-9). As the Messiah, Jesus will rule over God's theocratic kingdom over all nations of the earth from David's throne in Jerusalem (2 Sam 7:14; Isa 11:1-5). The millennium will restore the nation of Israel's kingdom for 1,000 years (Rev 20).

The establishment of Israel's theocratic kingdom will fulfill the covenants God has made with Israel: the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3), the Palestinian covenant (Deut 30:1-10), the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:16), and the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34). All of the promises and prophecies God made with Israel will come to fulfillment during the millennium. Only through the completion of God's program with the nation of Israel will God's full measure of glory be manifest. Isaiah 24:23 states, "Then the moon will be confounded and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and his glory will be before his elders." Christ will rule in Jerusalem, and he will radiate forth glory so bright that the moon and sun will fade by comparison (see also Isa 30:26). Isaiah 65 is an exemplary passage in which God promises to restore the nation of Israel with abundant blessing. This was Paul's hope and expectation for Israel in Romans 9-11. He succinctly states that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26). Showers summarizes this expectation well:

The dispensations progressively move history toward the fulfillment of its God-intended climax. In the final "dispensation of the fullness of times" (Eph. 1:9-10), God will fully glorify Himself by crushing Satan and his kingdom (Rom. 16:20; Rev. 20:1-3), restoring His own Kingdom rule to earth through Jesus Christ (Rev. 11:15; 20:4-6), and reversing the tragic consequences of man's rebellion (Mt. 19:28; Acts 3:19-21).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, 51.

Both the OT and NT are full of similar promises and prophecies about Israel. All of these expectations reflect the wisdom and sovereignty of God to the praise of his glory. Any other theological or hermeneutical system that fails to acknowledge the fulfillment of God's covenants, promises, and prophecies to Israel diminishes God's glory. Only a dispensational understanding of the millennium captures the full expression of God's glory within human history.

### ***Conclusion: The Case for a Dispensational Understanding of God's Glory***

The glory of God is a great theme throughout Scripture and a watershed issue among theological systems. All genuine Christians, regardless of their theological system, should recognize the doxological purpose of God and its implications for scholarship and the church. The glory of God affects hermeneutics, biblical, systematic, and practical theology, and, of course, Christian living. I would like to draw a few conclusions based upon this study.

First, the Scriptures clearly teach that the glory of God is the overarching purpose of God. God is a God of glory. His glory is intrinsic to his essence, and it is the first and last cause of why God created the world. God has progressively revealed and expressed his glory throughout each dispensation. The ultimate end of all humanity is to glorify God by recognizing and reflecting his glory.

Second, the doxological purpose of creation is a shared belief among theological systems. Dispensationalists need to do a better job recognizing that other theologians with other theological systems (such as covenant theology and progressive covenantalism<sup>52</sup>) do uphold God's glory as creation's chief end. The doxological purpose of creation is not unique to dispensationalists. This point has been a source of much confusion both within and outside dispensational circles. This is

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<sup>52</sup> S. J. Wellum and B. E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

why virtually all progressive dispensationalist and even some traditional dispensationalists have abandoned the glory of God as a defining mark of dispensationalism. Since the glory of God is not unique to dispensationalism, it is assumed that it cannot be a *sine qua non* of the system. But is this abandonment necessary? I would argue, “No.” Dispensationalism should retain the glory of God as its unifying principle.

Third, the dispensational view of God’s glory is unique. What distinguishes a dispensational view of God’s glory from other theological systems is the complete manifestation of God’s glory in the millennium—that is, the theocratic kingdom restored to national Israel. Any theological system that undermines the completion of God’s program with Israel diminishes God’s glory. This argument has the advantage of uniting dispensationalists, especially those who see kingdom as the unifying principle of Scripture. God’s glory and the kingdom are thematically united in God’s purposes. This is a mediating position. My hope is that it could help dispensationalists present God and his glory to future generations and help unite the movement.