

# The Glory of God

## Examining the Purpose of God for the Ages

By Dr. Jerry A. Collins

### Introduction

Both covenant and dispensational theologians agree with the premise that the ultimate purpose of God's plan for the ages is **the glory of God**. Charles Hodge represents the covenant position, stating, "the final cause of all of God's purposes is His own glory" (Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, p. 535). John F. Walvoord expresses the dispensational view: "according to the written Word of God, one supreme purpose is revealed in all that God has done or will do, from the beginning of creation to the farthest reaches of eternity. This supreme purpose is the manifestation of the glory of God" (Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, 1976, p. 28). On the one hand, there is virtual agreement as to this most basic and significant theological purpose of God. On the other hand, there is critical disagreement as to the expression of this ultimate purpose in history.

The covenant theologian believes that God's glory is summed up in the plan of redemption, often called redemptive history. The dispensationalist understands God's glory as bound up in all God's work throughout the ages, including but not exclusive to redemption. The purpose of this paper is to delineate the arguments for, and the distinctions between, a soteriological (redemptive history) and doxological (God's glory) plan of God for the ages. This paper will discuss the basis of the redemptive construct of covenant theology, namely, the covenant of grace related to salvation history. This will be compared and contrasted with components of a dispensational understanding, which undergirds God's glory as the end of history.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term קָבֵד (*kābōd*) is used most frequently of God's glory. When used in relation to God, כָּבֵד (*kābōd*) refers to the manifestation of His being. This manifestation is God's glory displayed in His visible and active presence (e.g., Exodus 16:7; 1 Kings 8:11; and Psalm 63:2). The most common New Testament term related to God's glory is δόξα (*doxa*). Glory is not merely an attribute of God. It is the sum total of God's essential being. God is a glorious God. All that is associated with God's person (intrinsic glory) and the entirety of His work (extrinsic glory) reveals that glory.

In his commentary on Ephesians, Hoehner states, "basically, δόξα (*doxa*) has the idea of the reflection of the essence of one's being, the summation of all of one's attributes...Therefore, a human being is to glorify (in the sense of magnify or praise) God because of His glory, reflecting His essential being" (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 200). We can summarize the meaning of glory as "intrinsic value" and the glory of God as "the intrinsic value of God." In other words, that which belongs to the very nature of God (intrinsic) is of ultimate worth, excellence, and usefulness (value). It is this quality of God, His glory, that is, His intrinsic value, that formulates the unifying principle of the Bible and the goal of history.

### God's Glory in History

The differences between a covenant philosophy of history and a dispensational one is based in how each system views the unifying principle that underlies that philosophy. Both allege to systematically interpret the succession of historical events toward their ultimate meaning. However, Ryrie articulates how these two systems diverge by examining them in relation to three features of a systematized philosophy of history. Ryrie states that a definition of a philosophy of history centers on three things: "(1) the recognition of 'historical events and successions,' or a proper concept of the progress of

revelation in history; (2) the unifying principle [of the historical successions]; and (3) the ultimate goal of history [of those historical successions]" (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 17).

Using each of these **three features**, we can see how the covenant and dispensational systems differ in their philosophy of history.

- A covenant system, in **recognizing historical events and successions**, is governed by the covenant of grace, through which all historical events are interpreted and by which a revelation of redemption is determined. A dispensational system recognizes various administrations of God in historical events and successions, allowing for the progress of revelation of the glory of God throughout the ages.
- A covenant system's **unifying principle** of a philosophy of history employs the covenant of grace, which is the entirety of God's plan of salvation, making their unifying principle redemptive history. A dispensational system utilizes the glory of God as the unifying premise, manifested in the differing administrations of God's plan in history.
- In the covenant system, the **ultimate goal of history** is the eternal state in the new heavens and earth. Ryrie says the reason for this is the covenant view "sees the course of history continuing the present struggle between good and evil until it is terminated by the beginning of eternity [and] does not have any goal within temporal history." For the dispensationalist, the ultimate goal of history is the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom when Christ rules on earth. A dispensational philosophy of history consummates within history in the administration of the Millennium, making it a more consistent philosophy of history (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 18).

Ultimately, a philosophy of history which contains a unifying principle must be determined by an exegetical study of Scripture. The Bible is not a philosophy of history, *per se*, but it contains one with actual historical events and successions that can be examined. A unifying principle can be determined from those events that reveal the trajectory of that history toward its ultimate and final goal.

**The debate between the covenant and dispensational systems  
Is the identity of the unifying principle of history within those events**

Both attempt to use Scripture to articulate that principle. A dispensational position advocates for God's glory derived by a literal hermeneutic, while the covenant position argues for redemption derived through the prism of a covenant of grace.

## **God's Glory: The Sine Qua Non**

The covenant system engineers a redemptive salvation history focus in Scripture. Ryrie confronts that aim by enumerating the *sine qua non* (the absolutely indispensable part) of dispensationalism to contrast the systems, and distinguish the uniqueness of dispensational thought. The **three-fold list** includes:

1. The literal historical-grammatical hermeneutic (interpretation).
2. Maintenance of the Israel and church distinction.
3. The underlying purpose of God in the world being the glory of God [God's intrinsic value] (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, pp. 39-40).

The literal at-face-value hermeneutic serves as the cornerstone of the dispensational system. The Israel/church distinction, and the glory of God as the unifying principle of Scripture, are derived from a consistently applied literal hermeneutic. This distinction and unifying principle can be discovered with certainty and specificity in the Bible by means of that hermeneutic.

The understanding of the glory of God as the end game in all of history, as well as the unifying axiom of the Bible, contrasts with the covenant unifying principle of salvation history. This contrast becomes evident when the views are measured by a literal at-face-value hermeneutic. Dispensationalism uses a literal interpretation that necessitates an Israel/church distinction, with the glory of God as the central purpose. It is telling that a covenant system, which does not consistently employ a literal at-face-value hermeneutic, does not agree with these conclusions. Dr. Christopher Cone thinks that the Israel/church distinction may be “so significant in its practical implications that there may be no single greater theological difference between the dispensational and Reformed [covenant] systems” (Cone, *Soli Dei Gloria*, p. 1).

The covenant of grace alleges to be an agreement among the Godhead of the entire plan of redemption. This covenant mitigates the distinction between Israel and the church, determining redemption as the means of God’s glory being the central purpose of the ages. In order to eliminate an Israel/church distinction, the covenant system conflates prophecies of a literal future Israel with promises to the church. By spiritualizing passages that apply directly to Israel, they obliterate God’s purpose for that people and nation. Those passages are then subsumed under a redemptive unifying purpose of history.

When a literal hermeneutic governs exegesis of Scripture, **one will by default** develop a dispensational understanding of various administrations of God on earth, that progressively reveal His plan for the ages. A distinction between Israel and the church is organically derived from this hermeneutic. It will not produce a co-mingling of these two distinct entities. A consistent application of a literal hermeneutic **will inherently** uncover God’s plan for the ages as the universal revelation of the glory of God. It will not supply a superintending covenant of grace that says salvation is that purpose.

## **The Case for God’s Glory**

A charge from the covenant camp against dispensationalism is that it destroys the unity of the Bible with its emphasis upon differing administrations of God in history. Those economies each have their own distinctive features which, according to the charge, creates a disunity of the Biblical message. Ryrie counters this charge of disunity, “No dispensationalist minimizes the importance of God’s saving purpose in the world. But whether it is God’s **total purpose**, or even His **principle purpose**, is open to question” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 93).

One might be tempted to think that the differences between a soteriological and doxological purpose are minuscule and insignificant. Whether covenant theology makes the all-encompassing means of manifesting God’s glory the plan of redemption or whether the dispensationalist determines that it is the glory of God governing the outworking of all His plan for the ages, the answer to this query can be done by examining Scripture to determine that ultimate unifying purpose.

Ryrie posits, “How do we know that the glory of God is the purpose of God above and beyond His saving purpose?” (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 94). He answers this question by affirming **three facets** of Scripture that orient toward this dispensational understanding:

- The first is the plain declaration of Scripture that salvation is ***to the praise of God’s glory***, according to Ephesians 1:6, 12, and 14. In other words, redemption is **one of the means** which glorifies God.
- The second is the plan of God for **the angels**. That plan does not involve salvation but God still has a distinct program and purpose for angels that is not soteriological.
- The third is a recognition that God’s purposes in the world **transcend redemption** in His

kingdom program to include His work in creation, judgment, the church and nations (Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, p. 94).

The conflicting concepts between covenant and dispensational views of Biblical history are stark. Covenant theology blurs any distinctions between Israel and the church, positing one people of God without distinctions, and insisting on a hermeneutic that spiritualizes passages to maintain a **redemptive history**. Dispensationalism insists that the **glory of God** is the ultimate purpose and plan for the ages and a literal hermeneutic maintains this understanding in all of Scripture.

## **God's Glory in the Bible**

When we turn to Scripture, we discover that it testifies to the glory of God, and not redemption, as the unifying principle of history. Walvoord addresses the comprehensive nature of the manifestation of the glory of God in the major movements of God in Scripture. “For this one purpose angels were created, the material universe was designed to reflect that glory, and man was created in the image and likeness of God. In the inscrutable wisdom of God, even sin was permitted and redemption was provided with a view toward the realization of this supreme purpose” (Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, p. 28).

The Bible is the source that discloses the purposes of God in history to be His glory. That means the supreme purpose of the Bible is God’s ultimate purpose, too, which is that He may be glorified. Walvoord records seven aspects of God’s glory as the unifying purpose, each derived from Scripture:

1. *Angels and men, the material universe and every creature, are all created for his glory.* That “all things...that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him” (for his glory, Col. 1:16). “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1).
2. *The nation Israel is for the glory of God* (Isa. 43:7, 21, 25; 60:1, 3, 21; 62:3; Jer. 13:11).
3. *Salvation is unto the glory of God* (Rom. 9:23), even as it will be a manifestation of the grace of God (Eph. 2:7), and is now a manifestation of the wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10).
4. *All service should be unto the glory of God* (Matt. 5:16; John 15:8; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:11, 14). The Bible itself is God’s instrument by which He prepares the man of God unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).
5. *The Christian’s new passion is that God may be glorified* (Rom. 5:2).
6. *Even the believer’s death is said to be to this one end* (John 21:19; Phil. 1:20).
7. *The saved one is appointed to share in the glory of Christ* (John 17:22; Col. 3:4).

Taken as a whole, the Bible differs in its subject matter and purpose from any other book in the history of the world. It gives in detail the infinite glories that belong to God Himself (Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, p. 29). A Biblical theology derived from an exegetical study of Scripture clearly indicates that historical events, and their successions, lead to the understanding that it is the glory of God which is the apex of history. Along the way, those specific historical events chronicle God’s intrinsic value as they unfold successively and progressively, until they reach their climax in the Millennial rule of Christ.

## **God's Glory in the Christian Life**

There are **three practical works** of God on behalf of believers which express God’s glory in the outworking of His purpose in our lives.

### **The Glory of God in Salvation**

Ephesians one mentions three times in verses 6, 12, and 14, in the context of explaining God’s

redemptive plan, that it is all ***to the praise of His glory***. Redemption means *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world* (v. 4); *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself* (v. 5); *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses* (v. 7); *in Him also we have obtained an inheritance* (vv. 10-11); and *you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise* (v. 13). The entirety of God's redemptive plan is projected toward ***the praise of His glory*** for such an all-encompassing deliverance from sin and judgment. Hoehner states:

Therefore, it is praise to God's essential being, his glory, for his graciousness as seen in his acts of electing and predestinating. God's essential being is the summation of all his attributes. Its manifestation is God's gracious actions of the election and predestination whereby he adopted sons according to the good pleasure of his will. This is why the believer is to praise his glory or his essential being (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 202).

According to this passage, a salvation which entails every necessary work to absolve sinners, is ***to the praise of God's glory***. It is not praises from believers to God for redemption, but praise to God's glory in His essential glorious being. Hoehner comments that the interjections of praise to God are "not describing a human's glorious praise of God's grace but rather one's praise of God's glory...the praise of God's glory for His grace...or to the praise of God's essential being for His gracious quality" (Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 201-202).

### **The Glory of God in Sanctification**

In 1 Corinthians 6:20, Paul declares *for you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body*. After warning believers to avoid fornication (v. 18), he says we have a moral obligation to God, since we now belong to Him by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit (v. 19). Based on that Biblical rationale, believers purchased by God's plan of redemption must *glorify God in your body*. So how are we to manifest the intrinsic value of God with our bodies? We do that by not participating in sexually immoral acts (vv. 16-18). It is God's glory that governs our sexual sanctification.

Additionally, *whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God* (1 Corinthians 10:31). Contextually, Paul argues that refraining from, or participating in, certain revelries must be governed by *doing all to the glory of God*. God provides a check on our sanctification freedom by obligating us to consider the path we choose, based upon an understanding of the glory of God applied to that situation. Constable asks, "What glorifies God? Consideration for the consciences of other people and promotion of their wellbeing does. This contrasts with the observance of distinctions between foods, the satisfaction of one's personal preferences, and insistence on one's own rights. What glorifies God is what puts **His preferences, plans, and program first** [emphasis added]" (Constable, *1 Corinthians*, Soniclight.com).

### **The Glory of God in Consummation**

In Philippians 2:9-11 is the declaration *God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*. At the end of the age, it is Christ's reputation and honor in His global kingdom reign over the nations of the earth that will be established and flourish.

This exaltation of Jesus Christ will be comprehensive in nature. God the Father has already raised His Son to the height of exaltation through His resurrection, ascension, and glorification in heaven (v. 9). Jesus has been given such a highly exalted position for the purpose of every being in the universe bowing in submission to His authority (v. 10). A universal verbal confession of the lordship of Jesus will

then accompany the symbolic physical submission (v. 11). God's intrinsic value is bound up within the consummation of Christ's comprehensive reign and the universal submission accompanying it.

## Conclusion

This paper has established the core principle that God's purpose in history is His glory. A dispensational system upholds this comprehensive purpose as the unifying goal of history. God's glory steadily progresses throughout Scripture, as history unfolds until the ultimate fulfillment in the Millennium, when Christ reigns. Walvoord indicates that God's purpose to glorify Himself will also be eternal, "the consummation of it all is found in the new heavens, the new earth, and the new Jerusalem as history recedes and eternity begins" (Walvoord, *Major Bible Themes*, p. 28). It seems, too, that the glory of God is intimately associated with the New Jerusalem. The Apostle John testified, *and he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God* (Revelation 21:10-11).

The covenant system has been shown to be an inadequate version of that unifying historical purpose, based on its tenacity to legitimatize a redemptive historical theological construct. That construct, not derived from a literal at-face-value hermeneutic, circumvents the Biblically stated purpose of God's glory and replaces it with a redemptive salvation purpose. Engaging in an exegetical study of Scripture naturally leads to the conclusion of both a distinct Israel and the church, and the glory of God as the purpose of the ages.

In the meantime, believers must make God's glory of paramount importance in their sanctification. While awaiting the ultimate display of God's glory in His plan for the ages, believers should determine to apply the intrinsic value of God within their daily-life situations. One day, all of creation will acknowledge the supremacy of Jesus Christ, *to the glory of God the Father*. Believers can do this now, as they faithfully glorify God in all that they do, everywhere they do it, and with whomever it is done, *for you have been bought with a price: therefore, glorify God in your body*.