

A PECULIAR GLORY: HOW THE CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES REVEAL THEIR COMPLETE TRUTHFULNESS

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***Abstract:** The glory of God, seen in Scripture, is both the goal of the soul's satisfaction, and the ground of the soul's certainty. The glory of God in Scripture proves itself not only to be incomparably rewarding to the heart, but also inescapably real to the mind. The quest for truth and the quest for joy turn out to be the same quest. The path to unshakable conviction and the path to unending contentment are the same path. Knowing for sure, and rejoicing forever, happen by the same discovery of the glory of God in the Bible. The way you know for sure what is true, and the way you find everlasting happiness are the same: by seeing the peculiar glory of God in the word of God, with Jesus Christ and his saving work as the clearest expression of it.*

***Key words:** John Piper, peculiar glory, Scripture, self-attestation, self-authenticating, Jonathan Edwards, glory of God, Westminster Shorter Catechism*

I thought I might begin this message by affirming that the devil could be a member of the Evangelical Theological Society. The reason I thought this might be true is that to be a member one need only affirm the truth of two statements: “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory.”

I have often said, and still believe, that the devil is doctrinally more orthodox than most evangelicals. The difference is that he hates most of what he knows is true in Scripture. So, I thought he could be a member of ETS because he could at least affirm the truth of those two statements.

But on second thought, I don't think that is true. I don't doubt that the devil affirms the existence of the Trinity, as much as he hates the beauty of it. But I do doubt that the devil affirms the inerrancy of Scripture. And the reason is that Scripture affirms not just the *truth* of things but the *value* of things.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God! (Ps 36:7)

The devil does not agree with that. And I ask myself: Which of the following inerrant statements would he agree with?

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;

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the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
 the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
 the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
 the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether.
 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
 sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. (Ps 19:7–10)

I don't think the devil would agree with any of those statements. The word of God restores true life, makes wise, gives the best joy, enlightens the eyes, surpasses the value of gold, is sweeter to the soul than honey to the tongue.

I. IMPLICATIONS FOR ETS

All of this has an important implication for membership in the ETS: What keeps the devil out, and keeps you in, is the connection between the *truth* of the Word and the beauty and *preciousness* of what it reveals. What keeps him out, and you in, is the connection between *affirming the truth* of the Word and the Trinity and *treasuring the value* of the Word and the Trinity. The devil wants to break that connection. You don't.

Or to say it another way: What keeps the devil out, and keeps you in, is that you *treasure* the glory of the Trinitarian God as revealed in Scripture, and Satan does not. For you the glory of the Trinitarian God revealed in Scripture is a source of great joy. You don't just *declare* that the Trinity is glorious; you *delight* in the glory. The glory of God is the ground of your joy. This is the most important difference between you and the devil.

1. *Link between soul satisfaction and soul certainty.* Now here's the connection with where we are going in this address. I have devoted most of my life to trying to understand and proclaim and live the relationship between God's glory and human happiness. And I have argued on countless occasions that not only were we made to be supremely satisfied in the glory of God, but that this satisfaction itself is the way God is most glorified in us. The greatness of the glory of God is what makes us supremely glad, and that supreme gladness in the glory of God is what makes its greatness shine in the world.

What I have not spent much time doing is giving an account of why I am warranted to spend a lifetime basing so many claims about ultimate reality on a book, the Bible, though I have often said: "If you can't see what I say in the Bible, it has no claim on you."

But for the last three years or so, that's what I've been thinking and writing about—namely, that the glory of God, seen in Scripture, is both the goal of the soul's *satisfaction* and the ground of the soul's *certainty*. The glory of God in Scripture proves itself not only to be incomparably *rewarding* to the heart, but also inescapably *real* to the mind. The quest for *truth* and the quest for *joy* turn out to be the same quest. The path to unshakable *conviction* and the path to unending *contentment* are the same path. *Knowing* for sure, and *rejoicing* forever, happen by the same discovery of the glory of God in the Bible. The way you *know* for sure what is *true*, and the way you find everlasting *happiness* are the same: by seeing the peculiar glory of God in

the word of God, with Jesus Christ and his saving work as the clearest expression of it.

2. *Inviting you to see why I say it this way.* Forty years ago, when I was thirty years old, Jonathan Edwards sowed the seed that finally grew into a published plant called *A Peculiar Glory: How the Christian Scriptures Reveal Their Complete Truthfulness* (Crossway, 2016). So, what I would like to do is invite you into the process of my thinking that led me to this particular way of articulating the ground of my confidence in Scripture.

Notice that I did not say that I invite you into the process of my thinking that led me to confidence in Scripture, but rather the process that led me to this particular way of articulating the ground of my confidence in Scripture. I've been confident in Scripture since I was a child. And it is owing to the very nature of the ground of that confidence that makes it possible to be confident—with a genuinely warranted, well-grounded confidence—when you are seven, and yet not render a full-orbed articulation of that ground until you are seventy. It would be like knowing at seven that I can see, and only writing a theory of light and a physiology of the eye when I am seventy.

Off and on, then, for the past four decades I have pondered, prodded by Jonathan Edwards: How can ordinary, uneducated, even primitive, people know that the Bible's message about Christ and his saving work is true? I am not driven mainly by how to answer modern academic skeptics. For me, the driving question has been: How do children come to a well-grounded confidence in the Bible? How can the Muslim villager in South Sudan, or a pre-literate people group in a remote mountain village in Papua New Guinea, know that the Bible is true? How can they know the truth of the Bible with such certainty that they are willing to die for their new faith after a few weeks of following Jesus, and yet not be fools?

The answer I have tried to unfold is that there is a divine glory—a peculiar glory, a spiritual glory, not a physical one, a distinguishing spiritual beauty—that shines in and through the meaning of Scripture and shows it to be the word of God. This divine glory can be seen for what it really is by the eyes of the heart which Paul refers to in Eph 1:18.

So, to shed light on how this works, let me mention two historical pointers, Jonathan Edwards and the Westminster Catechism, and then three analogies from Scripture that led me to this understanding.

II. JONATHAN EDWARDS

From 1751 to 1758, Edwards was pastor of the church in the frontier town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and a missionary to the Indians. His concern for Indian evangelization extends back into his pastorate at Northampton. You can see this in these comments from *Religious Affections* which were written about ten years earlier.

Miserable is the condition of the Houssatunnuck Indians and others, who have lately manifested a desire to be instructed in Christianity, if they can come at no

evidence of the truth of Christianity, sufficient to induce them to sell all for Christ, in any other way but this [path of historical reasoning].¹

What, then, is the alternative? Here is his answer:

Thus a soul may have a kind of intuitive knowledge of the divinity of the things exhibited in the gospel; not that he judges the doctrines of the gospel to be from God, without any argument or deduction at all; but it is without any long chain of arguments; the argument is but one, and the evidence direct; the mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory.²

Unless men may come to a reasonable solid persuasion and conviction of the truth of the gospel, by the internal evidences of it ... viz. by a sight of its ry; 'tis impossible that those who are illiterate, and unacquainted with history, should have any thorough and effectual conviction of it at all. ³

So, Edwards is arguing that the path to a well-grounded conviction of the truth of the gospel, and the Scriptures that tell that story, is a path that the seven-year-old John Piper, and the Sudanese villager, and the Papuan tribesman can follow. It's a path that anyone can follow who has eyes to see: the path of seeing the glory of God in Scripture.

III. THE WESTMINSTER CATECHISM

After Edwards, the Westminster Catechism offered me something very suggestive in the same direction that Edwards pointed.

Question 4: How does it appear that the Scriptures are the Word of God?

Answer: The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, *and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God ...* ⁴

What does that mean? I take the phrase “scope of the whole” to mean that “all that the Bible takes into view in the totality of its writings.” In other words, the whole Bible, properly understood, has this divine purpose—to communicate or display or reveal the glory of God.

So Edwards says, “The mind ascends to the truth of the gospel [and the Scriptures] but by one step, and that is its divine glory.” And the Catechism, a hundred years earlier, says that the Scriptures show themselves to be the Word of God, by the fact that the revelation of the glory of God is the aim of all the Scriptures.

I don't doubt that most of you in this room have experienced what Edwards is describing even if you may have never thought of it in precisely these terms. It's almost always the case that God opens the eyes of our hearts and convinces us of

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2: *Religious Affections* (ed. John E. Smith and Harry S. Stout; rev. ed.; New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 304.

² *Ibid.*, 298–99.

³ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁴ Italics added.

his truth, and gives us faith, and saves us, and only later do we see in the Bible how he did that, and what language the Bible uses to describe our experience. If that's true, your question may not be whether the experience is valid, but whether the Bible actually encourages us to think in these categories—that is, being persuaded of its truth by a sight of its glory.

So, let me try, with three biblical analogies, to argue that Edwards's way of warranting the Scriptures is what the Bible itself shows: that a well-founded conviction about the truth of Scripture arises from a sight of its divine glory.

IV. THE GLORY OF GOD AND CREATION

The first analogy, then, is this: The Bible shows that God intends for us to have a well-grounded conviction that he is the powerful, wise, merciful Creator and Sustainer of the world by means of a sight of his glory in and through creation.

Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens are telling the glory of God.” Notice that the heavens—the sun and moon and stars and galaxies—are not themselves the glory of God. We are not pantheists. The heavens are not God. And their glory is not the glory of God. They are telling—pointing to—the glory of God. Which means you must have eyes to see *through* the glory of nature to the glory of *God*.

Many non-Christian scientists see glory in the universe. Charles Misner said that Einstein had seen much more majesty than the preachers had ever imagined, and it seemed to him that they were just not talking about the real thing.⁵ But seeing the glory of the universe is not the same as seeing the glory of God. So, Ps 19:1 shows us that the sight of divine glory can give us well-grounded confidence that this universe is of God.

Then, even more clearly and more importantly, Paul makes a similar point in Rom 1:19–21:

What can be known about God is *plain to them*, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been *clearly perceived*, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although *they knew God*, they did not **glorify** him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

My guess is that very few of you have had trouble with the claim that God's invisible power and divine nature are revealed in and through the creation, and that we are accountable to see his glory and, because of that sight, know—that is, have a well-grounded conviction—that he made the world, and that he is powerful and wise and beneficent. But you do not see this with your physical eyes. Your physical eyes see the wonders of the universe. They become the lens through which your spiritual eyes—what Paul calls the eyes of the heart (Eph 1:18)—see (or do not see) the very glory of God. And seeing the glory of God, *know* that this is God's world. He made it.

⁵ Quoted in *First Things* (December 1991): 63.

And my argument is that the same thing happens when you read the Scriptures. The Scriptures reveal themselves to be the *Word* of God the way nature reveals itself to be the *world* of God—God’s glory shines in and through the meaning of these words, and authenticates their divine origin the way God’s glory shines in and through the creation and authenticates its divine origin.

V. THE GLORY OF GOD AND JESUS CHRIST

Here is a second analogy of how God’s glory authenticates his divine reality—the glory of God in Jesus Christ, the God-man. God expected people in Jesus’s day to see the glory of God in him and know that he was the Son of God, even though he was really human, and looked like other ordinary people.

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’” (John 14:8–9)

Many people looked at God incarnate and did not see God. And many people today hear God’s word and do not hear *God*. But the Son of God was really *there* for those who had eyes to see the glory, and the word of God is really *here*, for those who have ears to hear. The glory of God in Christ was missed by many. And the glory of God in Scripture is missed by many. But neither is deficient. The problem was not that the glory of Jesus was inadequate to manifest his deity, or that the glory of the Word is inadequate to manifest its divine origin; the problem, as Jesus said, was that “seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear” (Matt 13:13).

VI. THE GLORY OF GOD AND THE GOSPEL

Here is one final analogy—the most important one—of how God’s glory authenticates the word of God—namely, the way the glory of God authenticates *the gospel*. Paul says in 2 Cor 4:4, “The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing *the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*, who is the image of God.” The gospel—the story of how God came to save sinners—emits a supernatural light to the eyes of the heart—the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.” Christ’s self-authenticating glory shines through the gospel. And God shatters the blindness in verse 6: “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

So the light is called in verse 4, “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” And the light is called in verse 6, “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Paul is saying that the way we come to know that the Christian gospel, as recorded in Scripture, is God’s truth is by a sight of its glory. The glory of God in the face of Christ. The glory of Christ, the image of God.

I call this a “peculiar glory.” It’s a glory that shines through all of the Scripture, but most brightly in the gospel of the Son of God crucified for the sake of sinners. Part of what makes the glory of God in Scripture peculiar is *the way God’s majesty is expressed through his meekness*. God reveals himself in Lion-like majesty together with his Lamb-like meekness.

Isaiah cries out that this glory is utterly unique in the universe: “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who works for those who wait for him” (Isa 64:4). God magnifies his greatness in condescending to help us, save us. He magnifies his greatness by making himself the supreme treasure of our hearts, even at great cost to himself (Rom 8:32), and in that way satisfying us—serving us—in the very act of exalting his glory. This is the peculiar brightness that shines through the whole Bible, and comes to its most beautiful radiance in the person and work of Jesus Christ, dying and rising for his enemies.

VII. THE SCRIPTURES SHINE WITH GOD’S GLORY

My conclusion is that just as God confirms that the world is his by revealing his glory through it, and that Jesus is the Son of God by revealing his glory through him, and that the gospel is the gospel of God by revealing his glory through it, in the same way the whole Bible authenticates itself by shining with the peculiar glory of the one who inspired it. Which means that we know that the Scriptures are the Word of God because in their true meaning we see the self-authenticating glory of God. Or to use the words of Jonathan Edwards, “The mind ascends to the truth of the gospel but by one step, and that is its divine glory.”

Of course, the problem is that by nature we are blind to the glory of God. We suppress it. We love the darkness, Jesus says (John 3:19). Paul says in 1 Cor 2:14, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” We have eyes but we do not see; ears, but do not hear.

The only hope for us to see the glory of God in Scripture, and to have a well-grounded confidence that it is the Word of God, is for God to perform a miracle and take away our spiritual blindness with which we are all born. And Paul says God does, in fact, do this. God comes to us, and he speaks a word of new creation just like he did in the old creation and says, “Let there be light.” And we are given life and new spiritual eyes: “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

You know Christ is real, you know the gospel is real, and you know the Scriptures are true, because God says, “Let there be light.” You see the peculiar glory, and you know this is not the mere work of man. This is of God.

VIII. CLARIFICATION AND EXHORTATION

But this is not God telling us that the Scriptures are glorious; this is God enabling us to see what is really there. Divine glory is really shining in and through the

galaxies. Divine glory is really shining in and through Jesus Christ. Divine glory is really shining in and through the gospel of the glory of Christ. And divine glory is really shining in and through the God-intended meaning of the God-inspired Scriptures.

Which means for the Evangelical Theological Society that we will bend every effort to find that meaning and see that glory. We will not presume to see the glory in Scripture where we have not seen the meaning of Scripture. And we will not be satisfied that we have seen the meaning of Scripture as we ought until we have seen the glory of God through it. If we go about our work this way, our confidence in the Scriptures will be well grounded, and our joy in the glory of God will be great. And the devil will be out.