



Dear Phil

GOD'S GLORY

What is God's glory?—Dave

Dear Dave,

My best understanding is that God's glory, in its essence, is the unique excellence of His character and person. However, it is important to know that the Bible uses the term *glory* in relation to God in several ways.

First, *glory* refers to the fire or light that emanates from the place where God chooses to manifest His presence. Exodus 24:17 says that "the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire" on top of Mt. Sinai. When God's glory left the temple, Ezekiel says that "the temple was filled with the cloud and the court was filled with the brightness of the glory of the LORD." God has chosen fire or light as the physical manifestations of His glorious presence. Perhaps the most striking fact about the visible manifestation of God's unique excellence is how people respond to it.

We all enjoy times when God sensibly manifests His presence among us. Some describe scenes where people are shouting and giving loud praise to God as "the glory"

falling. Interestingly, there are no examples of this in Scripture. In every instance where God visibly manifested His *glory* among His people there was only one response: *people fell prostrate before the Lord in awe and fear* (cf. Lev. 9:23-24; Num. 20:6; 1 Kings 8:11; 2 Chron. 7:3; Ezek. 1:28, 3:23; Luke 2:9). Even in Heaven's temple, when it is filled with the smoke from the glory and power of God, no one can enter it (Rev. 15:8). By the way, several passages of Scripture talk about a cloud associated with God's glory. I think the flannelgraph pictures I saw of the cloud of God's glory were white, fleecy clouds. Solomon appears to describe the cloud of God's glory as a cloud of "deep darkness" in 2 Chron. 5:14-6:1. This suggests that the cloud was a dark cloud, intended to cloak the brightness of God's glory.

Second, the Bible uses the word *glory* to refer to God's reputation. Psalm 102:15 indicates that God's name (reputation) and God's glory are similar concepts: "So the nations will fear the name of the LORD and all the kings of the earth Your glory." In this sense, the glory of God is His reputation for the unique excellence of His person and character. God is exceedingly jealous for His reputation. In fact, I believe that a careful examination of Scripture reveals that the ultimate goal of everything God does is His glory. In other words, God's ultimate purpose for everything He does is that the unique excellence of His character and person will be clearly evident to all creation. (For more on this, see the link "Toward a Biblical Theology of the Glory of God" on my website, <http://pages.prodigy.net/apbrown2>.)

When all creation clearly sees the unique excellence of God's character and person, the result is the third sense of the word *glory*: *praise or honor*. When we "give glory to God," as in Psalm 50:15,

23, we are honoring or praising the unique excellence of His character, person, and/or works. Isaiah 48:11 illustrates this sense: "For My own sake, for My own sake, I will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another." God's passion for his reputation ("name") is so great that He will not give the credit that is due to His name to anyone else. This explains, for example, why God smote Herod for receiving the honor that should have been given to God alone (Acts 12:23). Admittedly (and thankfully), God does not immediately strike people dead when they do not honor Him as they should. But, obviously, God is very serious about His glory. That should motivate us to recognize and freely confess that God deserves all the credit and praise for any good thing we accomplish (cf. 1 Pet. 4:11).

When Paul enjoins us to "do all to the glory of God," this means that all our activities should reflect the unique excellence of God's character in such a way that God's reputation will be enhanced in the eyes of those looking on, and they will be moved to praise Him for His unique excellence. So, for example, I glorify God in eating by reflecting His orderliness (by eating mannerly), His self-control (by eating moderately), His love (by my considerate interactions with those eating with me), and so on. There is no area of life where we cannot bring honor to God and magnify His reputation for unique excellence in the eyes of others.

May we all appropriate God's grace to do so!

Sincerely,
Philip Brown ■

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