

“The Glorified Word”

The Glorified Word

1. We began this fourth part of our major outline (The Word of Salvation) by mentioning Isaiah’s visionary encounter with the LORD. He was **terrified** – which is the universal reaction of coming **face to face** with God. When the prophets or leaders encountered the LORD or the Angel of the LORD they were terrified, fell on their faces, and were undone. However, one who walked with God for a long time dared to ask to see God’s glory (Exod. 33:18).
2. We are informed that no one can see God (e.g. Exod. 33:20; Deut. 4:12, 15; Job 35:14; Jn. 1:18; 5:37; 6:46; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 Jn. 4:12). Even the trail (or wake) of His glory is too much for anyone to handle. Read Exod. 33:18-23.
3. “Jeffrey S. Niehaus correctly observes that in the biblical presentation theophany involves both a veiling and an unveiling.³⁵ It is as though outside Eden human ontology cannot bear the sight of the divine glory in its plenitude. A variety of commentators underline the point. For example, Jewish scholar Jeffrey H. Tigay comments, ‘Although the Bible assumes that God has a physical (usually humanlike) form, many passages suggest that seeing him would be too awesome for humans to survive.’³⁶ Evangelical Walter Kaiser, Jr., helpfully suggests, ‘That this is a figure of speech [Exod. 33:23] is clear from the double effect of God passing by while simultaneously protecting Moses with the divine “hand.” Only after his glory, or presence, had passed by would God remove his gracious, protecting “hand.” Then Moses would view what God had permitted.’³⁷ He then asks, ‘But what was left for Moses to see? The translators say God’s “back.” But since God is spirit (Is 31:3; Jn 4:24) and formless, what would this refer to?’³⁸ Kaiser, Jr., answers his own questions: ‘The word *back* can as easily be rendered the “after effects” of the glory that had passed by. This would fit the context as well as the range of meanings for the Hebrew word used. Moses did not see the glory of God directly, but once it had gone past, God did allow him to view the results, the afterglow, that his presence had produced.’³⁹ ¹
4. Moses did see the after effect of God’s glory only because God shrouded such and merely gave Moses a tiny taste of such after hiding Moses in the cleft, covering his face, and passing by first!
5. However, we are given a glorious contingent beatitude in Jesus’ great Sermon on the Mount (Mat. 5:8). This is not some novelty but the most glorious, fulfilling, profound, majestic, euphoric, jubilant, experience one could dare dream to attain. This is what the Word made possible for us by becoming flesh. The Word is not only the Creator, or the Revealer, or the Sustainer, or the Redeemer; He is the Destination. And the destination is more glorious than the map.
6. God is the Alpha and Omega and will not share His glory with another; and Jesus both claims eternal status and radiates the glory of God! See Col. 1:15-20; Heb. 1:5.
7. The impossible feat of seeing God is only accomplished by the Son of God. “The wonderful news of the Gospel is that God did not send a mere revelatory spirit nor a mere prophetic surrogate but the Son himself (Mark 12:1–12). No other could reveal the Father as the Son could. No other could redeem alienated humanity as the Son could. No other could both represent and substitute for us as

³⁵ Niehaus 1997.

³⁶ Tigay 2003: 111. The evidence he adduces for this claim includes Exod. 33:20–23 as well as Gen. 32:31; Exod. 19:21; Judg. 13:22; Isa. 6:5. I would qualify Tigay’s comment as follows: ‘Although the Bible takes for granted that God can assume a physical (usually humanlike) form . . .’.

³⁷ Kaiser, Jr., et al. 2001, in reference to Exod. 33:23.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

¹ Cole, G. A. (2013). [*The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 60). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

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the Son could. No other could defeat the evil one as the Son could. No other could model all that Adam and Israel should have been as the sinless, ever obedient, ever trusting Son could. And he did!”²

8. Jesus taking on flesh (incarnation) was necessary for we needed a federal representative who could both identify with man as our perfect representation yet could offer a sacrifice (Himself) which would have eternal implications and efficacy. “At a theological level kenosis appears to move in the wrong direction. Its basic equation is: incarnation = God minus. The biblical equation is rather: incarnation = God plus.”⁷ The plus is the new way the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate through the assumed humanity of the Son. Rather we are speaking of the Trinity and plus. The change is relational and permanent.”^{8 3}
9. His objective is to make us like Himself Ro. 8:29-30. “This is a staggering claim. No surrogate came. Concerning God the Son, Irenaeus the second-century church father writes of ‘the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself’.³ If this is not a reason for doxology, what can be?”⁴
10. The doctrine of deification has been part of orthodoxy including Roman Catholicism, Eastern or Greek Orthodox, Anglican, Puritans, Reformers, and Protestantism abroad. Protestants have virtually not promoted, adhered to, or taken the time to understand it since not long after the 16th Century Reformation spurred by Martin Luther.
11. I am simply stating facts and their implications and I want to see if I can illuminate understanding with regard to this concept which has been held by the ancient Church fathers all the way through the Great Reformation till now.
12. Martin Luther – whom no Protestant nor informed Catholic would call a heretic – wrote: “Just as the word of God became flesh, so it is certainly also necessary that the flesh become word. For the word becomes flesh precisely so that the flesh may become word. In other words: God became man so that man may become God.” Furthermore John Calvin, beloved by Baptists and other Protestants, affirmed what is called deification. Moreover, Athanasius (regarded as the greatest theologian of his time) said God “was made man that we might be made God.” Maximus the Confessor stated that “the time preceding Christ is that of preparation for the incarnation, the time subsequent to Christ is that of the divinization of human kind.” Finally, the renowned St. Augustine articulated God’s end game: “God wishes not only to vivify, but also deify us.” What on earth are these church fathers claiming? There are of course distinctions which should be made. Ro. 8:29 states that man’s end is

² Cole, G. A. (2013). [*The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 139). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

⁷ Milne 2009: 200.

⁸ Contra Marcellus of Ancyra (c. AD 280–374) who thought that in salvation history we see an extrapolation from the Godhead in the coming of the Son and further extrapolation from the Godhead in the coming of the Holy Spirit. However, at the denouement of all things these extrapolations were returned to the Godhead and thus God returns to oneness. This is how he understood 1 Cor. 15:28: ‘When he [Jesus] has done this [put down all opposition to the divine rule], then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.’ See Pelikan 1971: 207–209. The Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed of AD 381 includes the phrase ‘and his kingdom will have no end’ to exclude Marcellianism.

³ Cole, G. A. (2013). [*The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 146). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

³ Irenaeus 2007: V, preface.

⁴ Cole, G. A. (2013). [*The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 167). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

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to be made into Jesus’ image and Jesus is the image of God. 2 Pet. 1:4 ensures that saints will “become partakers of the divine nature.” What does this mean? Ha ha, likely end part 1.

13. I believe in Scripture – the living Word of God, and it does not clearly or concisely say that we will become God. I want to focus on what it does say clearly so we can both better understand what the great giants of faith were articulating (or misarticulating) and that of the spectacular promises of us becoming one with God (cf. Jn. 17:20-24 which we’ll review subsequently)!
14. There is no doubt in my mind that there are semantics (using different terms to describe the same thing) going on with regard to the ancient and reliable Church fathers through the Great Reformation of the 16th Century and our contemporary theology. One of the realities that is mysterious and essential to our faith is the concept of union with Christ. “In Christ” is the most used adjective to describe believers in the NT. Perhaps Col. 3:1-3 is the most helpful articulation of this reality.
15. The early Church fathers and contemporary Catholics and Orthodox believers make the distinctions of God’s *energies* and *essence* and, like Maximus the Confessor, claim “the whole of the human being is interpenetrated by the whole of God and becomes all that God is, excluding identity of essence.” The distinction is helpful in that it acknowledges (like the others mentioned above) that there is only one eternal, almighty, infinite, and triune God and Savior. We will never ‘enter’ the godhead⁵ and become God for such is impossible. The finite cannot become infinite although the infinite One partook of finitude via the incarnation. There are no “openings” in the Trinity. We can never attain the essence of the Eternal Word! However, we can partake of the energies of the Word (1 Pet. 1:4). Maximus articulated the distinction of God’s essence and energies: “God is communicable in that He imparts to us; but He is not communicable in the incommunicability of his essence.” I understand that as we partake of the energies of the divine nature but can never become the divine essence.
16. Jesus promised that the “righteous will shine like the sun” (Mat. 13:43 cf. Dan. 12:3).
17. Paul put it this way: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).
18. In his glorious chapter on the resurrection, Paul explains the necessity of our glorification in order to be in the unveiled presence of God (1 Cor. 15:35-57). Deity is glorified and humanity will have the restored and *glorified* image of the one eternal God.
19. Later Paul articulated that glory we will inherit (2 Cor. 5:1-5). Here, Paul articulates that we are incomplete without our new clothing. Taken together with the kenosis of Phil. 2:7 “emptied,” theologians acknowledge that Jesus left glory and clothed himself in flesh so that we can shed our sin and be clothed in His glory! In fact, Rev. 21:24 states that “the kings of the earth will bring their glory” into the New City.
20. 1 Jn. 3:1-3 claims the beatific vision promised by Jesus in Matt. 5:8. It is said that like recognizes like. Or, only God recognizes God (Mat. 24:24; 1 Jn. 2:18-20). When talking with friends, one asked if we could be deceived by false prophets masquerading as Messiah or forerunners of Him and I said that there will be no mistake when Jesus returns! And my friend agreed and said that “God recognizes God.” I knew exactly what he meant by that. He meant that the Spirit of God who resides with us cannot be fooled; for the Spirit of God is God and thus will recognize God. This is not to say that only believers will recognize the return of the Son because there will be no questioning such. However, the beatitude of ‘seeing’ God is another matter. Graham Cole noted: “For John the end-time prospect is the transformation of the children of God. The *visio Dei* in this text [1 Jn. 3:1-3] is actually the *visio Christi*. There is an ancient epistemic principle that only like

⁵ The godhead refers to the triune essence of God. It is godhood so to speak. It is the essence of the eternal, righteous, omnipotent, personal deity.

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can know like. In the end, to see Christ there needs to be ontological transformation. Paul in his letters calls it ‘glorification’ (e.g. Rom. 8:30).⁶

21. It is true that man is totally depraved and sick with the incurable disease of sin. However, it is equally true that the dignity of man is affirmed in nothing less than by God becoming one!
22. We will never be YHWY! We will never be infinite or eternal. We cannot become nor partake of the LORD’s essence. However, we will, as Peter claimed, “partake of the divine nature” when we are glorified and see God as He is! To some extent we partake of Him now (Jn. 6:53-56 cf. 15:4; Ro. 8:9).⁷ Such truth is too wonderful for you and me to comprehend.
23. That the Son of God became a man means that His creation is so brilliant, profound, and beloved that He entered into it and took on human nature forevermore. If it were possible for God to outdo God, it would be the Gospel. But we know that such a notion is merely a figure of speech because perfection cannot be improved. But the perfect God made the perfect plan for mankind to be redeemed and glorified so that even God’s creation reaches – or rather receives – the partaking of divinity. The infinite, eternal, immutable, almighty, personal, righteous One is working all things together for our glorious transformation into the image of Christ (Ro. 8:28-29)! Only the God of Creation, Revelation, Incarnation, and Salvation could even plan such a profundity. Now, He is in the midst of performing it (Jn. 14:1-6) cf. 2 Cor. 4:16-18 → ***preparing us for glory not glory for us!*** We are becoming one with each other and with Jesus and the Father by His Spirit! Such was unthinkable in the OT and it even sounds blasphemous now! Jesus, in his High Priestly Prayer, prayed: Jn. 17:20-24!

What is the promise of the beatific vision? What does it mean that we will see God? What is theosis or deification? Who believes in it? Will we partake of divinity? Mormons teach that as God is now, man will be and as man is now, God once was. John taught that the Word (Son of God) is eternal and the Creator of all things. He later wrote that the redeemed will “be like Him, because we will see Him as He is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Peter wrote that saints will “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). These questions, beliefs, and passages presented above must be considered. If God has an objective in all He is doing in history and Christ is at the center, we must explore the Word for what God is doing through Christ. Scripture spells it out e.g. Ro. 8:28-29. However, it is our privilege to search (Prov. 25:2) the scriptures to find out why. In the Bible, Messiah is promised, presented, preached, explained, and experienced to the extent that we become one with Him (Jn. 14:20; Col. 3:3-4). Something mysterious, awesome, and utterly transforming must happen for such to occur. Therefore, the Word is not only the revelation and the redemption but also the glory and goal.

As much as I love the Word and as much as I believe that the resurrection and glory await me, I realize how short I fall of fully appreciating such. But meditating on these discussed realities helps us to prepare for glory. Meditating on the Word informs us to sanctification (Ro. 12:2). And when we arrive at glory we will find ourselves face to face with a person – the Word! Then, we will all be full to capacity of His Life, Logic, Love, Law, and Light forever to “shine like the sun” (Mat. 13:43 cf. Dan. 12:3).

⁶ Cole, G. A. (2013). [*The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (Vol. 30, p. 164). England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press.

⁷ Many see this current partaking of Christ in transubstantiation.