

God's Glory Alone: The Majestic Heart of the Christian Faith

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A Brief Book Summary from Books At a Glance

About the Author

David VanDrunen is Robert B. Strimple Professor of Systematic Theology and Christian Ethics at Westminster Seminary California. He is the author of *Living in God's Two Kingdoms: A Biblical Vision for Christianity and Culture and Natural Law and the Two Kingdoms: A Study in the Development of Reformed Social Thought*.

Introduction

This book is part of *The Five Solas Series* that investigates the *solas* of the Reformation. VanDrunen explores the majestic theme of *solus Deo gloria*. He demonstrates how this theme is pervasive in the teaching of the Reformers and critical in Scripture. The glory of God is a rich theological topic with a host of practical implications. This book shows how *solus Deo gloria* refers to far, far more than just our responsibility to glorify God in all that we do. Glory is an eternal attribute of God and he brings glory to himself through what he does. In grace, God redeems sinners to share in his glory. Our glorification and a fuller revelation of the glory of God awaits in the future age, but we are to live for God and the glory of his name now.

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Chapter 1

Solus Deo Gloria* Among the Reformation *Solas

The Reformers never used the exact phrases of the “five *solas* of the Reformation” but these phrases do represent their theological concerns. *Solus Deo gloria* is the glue that holds the other four together. Since salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, it follows that it is to the glory of God alone. Scripture alone is our final authority, and this protects the glory of God. Christianity—and even our own salvation—is not ultimately about us, but about God. Luther argued that the theology of glory comes through suffering, through the theology of the cross. Some want to use reason to ascend to heaven and see God's glory, but the only way to behold it is through his revelation at the cross. We cannot come to know God through speculation. The knowledge of God and salvation are only found at the cross of Christ.

Even though redeemed human beings experience glorification, that state redounds to the glory of the God who so richly blesses them. John Calvin marvellously declared that all of creation exists to display the glory of God. God's glory shines in the original creation and in God's image bearers. It will be even more greatly revealed in the new heavens and new earth. Christ specially reveals the glory of God. *Soli Deo gloria* is often used today to refer to our need to do everything to the glory of God. Each facet of our lives should reflect the moral character and glory of the Lord. The theme of God's glory is very important for biblical theology.

Chapter 2

The Glorious God, Glorified Through Us: *Soli Deo Gloria* in Reformed Theology

It is true that we are to do everything to the glory of God, but *soli Deo gloria* refers to more than this. In Scripture God's glory describes God himself and it is revealed through what he does in creation and redemptive history. Theologians during the period of Reformed orthodoxy noted that the biblical data shows that glory is first and foremost about God, and it is God's glory that glorifies believers and allows them to live for his glory. They saw that God's glory is one of his attributes and it reveals the perfections of all of his attributes. He is intrinsically perfect in glory but also created an external world that redounds to his glory. In this world he sometimes manifests his glory in special ways (e.g., in the pillar of cloud in Exodus). In the future he will bring glorified human beings into a fuller display of his glory.

Although he was not the only one to do so, Jonathan Edwards spoke about the glory of God and God's delight in his own glory. Human beings are created to be supremely happy when they glorify God—deep human delight is tied to the glory of God. The Westminster Catechism begins by orienting all of life to the glory of God. The Westminster Standards (Confession and Catechisms) are pervaded by the theme of the glory of the Lord. Glory is an internal attribute of the eternal God. The Lord brings glory to himself through all of his works. God receives glory in creation, providence, judgment, election, salvation, revelation—there is nothing that falls outside of his glory. Nevertheless, in his gracious plan of salvation, God takes ruined sinners and brings them into glory, which is a special display of his glorious character and power. Believers are to especially glorify God in worship. Amazingly, God brings glory to himself by enabling his people to act for his glory

Chapter 3

In the Cloud: God's Glory Made Visible

Today when we reduce *soli Deo gloria* to the idea that we are to glorify God in all that we do, we lose the more profound truth that God's glory is about God—it is about his intrinsic glory and how he brings glory to himself. To be faithful to *sola Scriptura*, we need to see if *soli Deo gloria* is truly biblical. In both the Old and New Testaments, "glory" is at times used as God's name. He acts for the glory of his name. Psalm 19 says that creation reveals the glory of God. The Bible is clear that God's glory is revealed through his deeds of judgment and salvation. The Reformers were correct to connect God's glory with salvation by grace alone in Christ alone—it is all by his sovereign power.

Genesis never refers to God as glorious, but Exodus brings God's glory to the forefront. God's internal glory is made manifest in the pillar of cloud. The revelation of God's glory in the cloud is tied to the redemption of his people and the defeat of his enemies. The cloud appeared to be of smoke and fire. It was a type of God's heavenly throne room. Later Scripture teaches that as the cloud led the people they were led by the Spirit. The cloud led Israel, but the people were not able to come too close to it. It rested on Sinai in an awesome and terrifying manifestation, signaling God's presence but also his distance. When the glory cloud fills the tabernacle it is a time of incredible rejoicing, but the deaths of Nadab and Abihu clearly show that God's holy presence must not be trifled with. The Holy of Holies where God's glory was manifested was a place that nobody could enter on penalty of death (except the high priest once a year, through the death of a substitute).

The Scriptures proclaim that God's glorious presence with Israel was a great blessing. Yet, because of the sin of the people, often the cloud is mentioned in contexts of judgment. The Israelites who were brought out of Egypt saw God's glory but treated it with contempt and died in the wilderness. Throughout Israel's history they traded the glory of the Lord for idols and worthless things. Moses entered the cloud at Sinai, but even after this experience he asked to see God's glory—Moses knew the cloud did not exhaust the glory of God. There is a greater display of the glory of God yet awaiting. When Israel arrived at the Promised Land the cloud stopped leading them, but the tabernacle was still the locus of God's glorious presence. The cloud makes a return when the temple is built, and it fills the temple as it had filled the tabernacle. Unlike in the moving tabernacle, God's glory was finally at rest. Isaiah and Ezekiel had visions of the glory of God in smoke and cloud, and they realized that what they saw went beyond the visible manifestation of the cloud pillar. The same problem of sin in Israel continues throughout the history of the OT, until God's glory moves from its rest and departs from the temple. The sinful nation goes into exile and the temple is destroyed, but the prophets proclaim that there will be restoration and the glory will return.

Chapter 4

The Brightness of His Father's Glory: The Glory of God Incarnate

The departure of God's glory was not the final word. The prophets looked forward to a greater display of glory than had ever been experienced before. God's glory would cover the whole land and there would be a new temple where he revealed his glory like never before. All the nations would be attracted to it. Details in the prophecies show that this glorious reality far transcended the post-exilic temple—it is found in the temple's fulfillment and the new heavens and new earth. The fulfillment of the temple is found in the incarnate son of God. God's glory in a restored Jerusalem was tied to the Messiah. Jesus is the Messiah, and the NT often speaks of his glory. His glory renders the physical temple obsolete. In fact, the glory cloud in the tabernacle and temple was pointing forward to the glory of God in his incarnate son. Just as the cloud of glory was connected to the Spirit, so Christ's glory is connected to the Spirit, too.

It should strike us that God's revelation of his glory takes place climactically in and through a human being. Beyond this, it is incredible that God's glory is revealed in and through this human being's suffering and death on the cross. God reveals his glory in humility. From the very beginning of his earthly life, Jesus lives in glory-in-humility, and this continues throughout his

life on earth. The Father glorifies the Son and the Son glorifies the Father. John's Gospel explicitly claims that the Triune God is glorified not only after the cross but through the cross. But after his death Jesus was resurrected, and the veil over his glory was pulled back. Jesus' glorification comes through his atoning death and the vindication of the resurrection. Jesus was taken up in glory and into glory. But this is not the end of the story—the consummation awaits our Lord's second coming in power and glory. At that time he will get glory through the judgment and final defeat of his enemies, but he will also get glory through his saints.

Chapter 5

The Glory of Christ in the Glorification of His People

Being created in the image of God entails that we were created to reflect his glory. God crowned us with honor and glory and put us over the rest of creation, but the glory still belongs to him. Human beings rebel by trying to glorify themselves. Jesus redeems us and brings us into his own glory. This state of glorification is certain in Christ, but we will experience it as a future blessing. Our path to glory follows Christ's: we are led by the Spirit, through the cross, and on to the new creation in his image. Jesus was conceived by the Spirit and led by the Spirit to fulfill his mission on earth. As a result of his triumph, Jesus was given the Spirit as a gift to be poured out on all of his followers. To have the Spirit is to participate in Christ's glory. Before we experience future glorification, however, we are called to experience humility and suffering, just as Christ did. In fact, believers can be persecuted by the world precisely because they are sharing in the glory of the Lord. The world crucified the Lord of glory and does not look with favor on his children. God has elected his children to share in his glory. Our glorification is certain, and this is what gives us hope and encouragement in the midst of trials. We will be transformed in glory when Christ returns.

The glory of God is about God himself—we are called to bring him glory, but glorifying God is not first and foremost about what we do but about what he does! Nevertheless, we are called to live our lives for the glory of God. One of the ways we give glory to God is by having faith in his promises. In Scripture, our worshiping the Lord is more connected to his glory than anything else we do. Worship is a distinct activity. We are able to enter into the praise of the heavenly court in the presence of God. The OT prophets foresaw a day when all nations would worship the Lord, and this day comes through the Messiah. The consummation has not yet taken place, but even now Christians worship the Lord in eager expectation of the future glory in which we will praise him. The NT contains many doxologies that ascribe praise to God (a *doxology* is literally “a word of glory”). Flowing from our attitudes of adoration and worship, everything we do in our lives is to be done for the glory of God. God brings glory to himself, and one of the ways that he does this is by empowering us to live lives that honor him.

Chapter 6

Prayer and Worship in an Age of Distraction

Prayer is an essential component of the Reformation tradition. We worship and honor God by calling on him. Prayer reminds us of our complete dependency on God. The Bible shows us that worship in heaven, in the old covenant, and in the church is a corporate activity, but not exclusively so. We are to worship corporately, but we are also called to privately meditate on

Scripture and pray. Prayer must be from our hearts and minds—we must concentrate and engage deeply with God. It is dishonoring to God for us to have wandering and inattentive thoughts.

One of the great challenges in our contemporary society is that we are surrounded with technology that makes concentrating more and more difficult. Worshiping God requires attention and contemplation, but the internet and a host of electronic devices are eroding our ability to focus. Many are cultivating a habit of being distracted. The internet encourages skim reading and moving quickly from one thing to the next. Our electronic technologies are even affecting how our brains process and store information. Every generation has found concentration in prayer and worship difficult, but it is more difficult now than ever before. To counter these problems we need to cultivate the virtues of self-control, patience, perseverance, and intimacy in relationships (as opposed to superficiality). God is our sanctifier so we need to ask him to form these virtues in us, but we need to recognize that he will do so as we strive and fight and practice doing what we ought to do. Observing the Sabbath day (not just one hour at a worship service) can give us a break from our multitasking and provide us with time for worship and prayer. The Lord's Prayer provides a framework for our prayers. It begins with addressing God as our Father, and its focus is on bringing God glory.

Chapter 7

The Fear of the Lord in an Age of Narcissism

Even many secular writers recognize that we live in an age of narcissism. People are far too preoccupied with themselves and their own images. Narcissistic traits are commonplace. In Christian theology our narcissistic tendencies have often been referred to as *vainglory*. Instead of worrying about ourselves, the Bible calls us to a high and reverent fear of the Lord. Christians have confidence and do not operate with a slavish fear, but they need to be characterized by a filial fear that takes the holiness of God seriously and that longs to please him. Knowing God allows us to see his awesome power and righteousness—it allows us to stand in awe of him. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, it keeps us from sin, it brings God glory, and it also abases our pride and engenders humility.

The fear of the Lord and narcissism are not compatible. Vanity has always been recognized by Christians as a great sin. A vainglorious person seeks glory for themselves rather than for God. Pride may fuel us to excel others, but vainglory seeks recognition and applause. On the other side of the coin, vainglory cannot handle flaws and shortcomings, so it engages in hypocrisy and cover-ups. Narcissism clings to things that fade like beauty and power, it consumes without satisfaction, and it tries to foster envy rather than respect. Studies show that narcissistic traits are pervasive in our society. With the advent of social media, more and more people are being wired to obsess about their images. Financially, many people live on credit to give the impression that they have wealth rather than actually building wealth. People feel the need for more and more praise for less and less work. The antidote to pride and narcissism is the fear of the Lord. We must learn the truth about ourselves and the truth about God. Such knowledge makes us humble. The gospel itself teaches us how righteous God is, how sinful we are, and how amazing Christ's substitutionary death is. Narcissism and pride cannot flourish at the base of the cross.

Chapter 8

Glorifying God in an Age That is Passing

This present age is not one of glory. In fact, this age is characterized by evil. An important element in Paul's thought is that there are two ages—this present evil age and the age to come. Jesus is currently reigning over all things, but in this age Satan blinds unbelievers to the glory of Christ. Through common grace God continues to bless in this age, and in special grace his kingdom is present but not yet consummated. God's heavenly kingdom is the true home of the Christian, so this world is not our home—we are sojourners on a pilgrimage. More than just on the move, we are also exiles, expelled from our true home and longing to return. Just as the Jews were to work in Babylon during their exile, Christians are to work for the good of society during their lifetimes. We are dual citizens, but our most important citizenship is in heaven.

One of the ways that we can glorify God in the present age is by joining the church's corporate worship, because worshiping God connects us with the corporate worship of the angels and saints in heaven (which is characteristic of the age to come). We are also to use the gifts God has given us to joyfully serve others in love. Since this is not a world of glory we must practice self-denial and patient endurance. We must also wait upon the Lord without being moved. Self-denial is not loss but rather gain in light of rewards in the age to come. Proper self-denial is motivated by a desire to please God in this world. Denying our old natures for the sake of God and future glory leads to patient endurance. This may sound grim now, but the Christian life is really one of hope, joy, and courage. It is in this context that we wait for the Lord to bring the final deliverance and usher us into glory.

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