

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Soli Deo Gloria Among the Reformation Solas

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“It is not sufficient for anyone, and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross.”

—Martin Luther

“We never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory.... The elect are justified by the Lord, in order that they may glory in him, and in none else.”

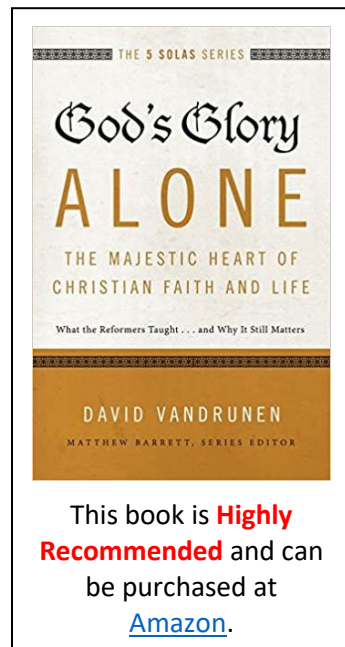
—John Calvin

Soli Deo Gloria—Glory to God alone. Most Protestant Christians do not read Latin these days, but many of them need no help translating these three words. What simple slogan stirs the godly heart more warmly and encapsulates more biblical truth than *soli Deo gloria*? “Glory to God” was the theme of the angelic host that announced Jesus’ birth to the shepherds in the

field and of the heavenly throng whose songs John recorded in Revelation. What a privilege almost beyond imagination that the all-majestic God calls sinners like us to contemplate his glory and to echo the angels’ chorus in our own worship. And what a blessing that he enables us to write and read books on such a grand topic.

The occasion for this book, and the series of which it’s a part, is to commemorate and celebrate the Protestant Reformation, whose unofficial 500th birthday draws near as I write. Protestants commonly speak of the “five *solas* of the Reformation,” but we often forget that the Reformers themselves never sat down and adopted these five slogans—*sola scriptura*, *sola fide*, *sola gratia*, *solus Christus*, and *soli Deo gloria*—as the official mottos of the Reformation movement. At first, this sounds a little disappointing. We like to think we’re adopting the very same set of phrases that Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and their colleagues bequeathed to their spiritual posterity.

It really shouldn’t disappoint us at all. People may have begun speaking of the “five *solas* of the Reformation” only long after the Reformation itself, but each of these five themes does in fact probe the heart of Reformation faith and life in its own way. The Reformers



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may not have spoken explicitly of “the five *solas*,” but the magnification of Christ, grace, faith, Scripture, and God’s glory—and these alone—suffused their theology and ethics, their worship and piety. Christ alone, and no other redeemer, is the mediator of our salvation. Grace alone, and not any human contribution, saves us. Faith alone, and no other human action, is the instrument by which we’re saved. Scripture, and no merely human word, is our ultimate standard of authority. God’s glory alone, and that of no creature, is the supreme end of all things. Our study of the five *solas* involves no rote repetition of slogans but the wonderful embrace of the holy religion taught in the Bible and revitalized in the Reformation.

Soli Deo Gloria: The Glue That Holds the Solas Together

Even so, there may seem to be something about *soli Deo gloria* that works less well than the other four as a motto summarizing Reformation theology. Teachers of Reformation theology, trying to be fair and accurate, often have to remind their students that medieval Christianity and sixteenth century Roman Catholicism did not deny the importance of Scripture, faith, grace, and Christ. Theologians spoke of them often and would have eagerly affirmed that there is no salvation without them. But if we could press the matter further and ask these theologians about the little word *alone*, we would soon find genuine disagreement. While the Reformers claimed that Scripture alone is the authority for Christian faith and life, Roman Catholics professed reverence for Scripture but insisted that the church’s tradition and the Pope in Rome stood alongside Scripture to interpret it infallibly and to augment its teaching. When the Reformers asserted that justification comes by faith alone, Roman Catholics responded that justification does indeed come by faith, but also by works alongside faith. They had similar exchanges about grace and Christ.

Claims about Scripture alone, faith alone, grace alone, and Christ alone concerned the two chief points of debate between Rome and the Reformation: religious authority and the doctrine of salvation. *Soli Deo gloria* thus appears to be a bit of an outlier. When the Reformers proclaimed that glory belongs to God alone, did Roman Catholics really respond that glory in fact belongs equally to God and something or someone else? Does the principle of *soli Deo gloria*, magnificent as it is, really have much to do with the Reformation itself?

Indeed it does, even if Rome never directly denounced the idea of glory to God *alone* as it denounced the ideas of Scripture *alone* and faith *alone*. *Soli Deo gloria* can be understood as the glue that holds the other *solas* in place, or the center that draws the other *solas* into a grand, unified whole. Recent writers suggest the same idea when they speak of *soli Deo*

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gloria as “the logical implication of the other four points” or as the motto that “subsumes all the others.”¹

What justifies such strong claims? Simply put, the fact that salvation is by faith alone, grace alone, and Christ alone, without any meritorious contribution on our part, ensures that all glory is God’s and not our own. Likewise, the fact that Scripture alone is our final authority, without any ecclesiastical tradition, magisterium, or Pope supplementing or overruling it, protects the glory of God against every human conceit. Rome, of course, would never admit to usurping God’s glory. Even meritorious human works, it says, are accomplished by divine grace infused through the sacraments. The church’s traditions grow organically from the practice of the apostles, Rome adds, and the Pope is the servant of servants. But the Reformers came to understand how such claims, though perennially attractive, ultimately reveal the deceit of the human heart. How we like to think that there’s something for us to add to the satisfaction and obedience of Christ or to the inspired word of the prophets and apostles, and even that God is wonderfully honored by our contribution. But the Reformers perceived that the perfect word and work of Christ—precisely because they are perfect—need nothing to supplement them. Anything that tries to supplement them, in fact, challenges their perfection and thus dishonors God’s word and work in Christ. If the Roman Catholic doctrine of authority and doctrine of salvation are true, all glory thus does not belong to God alone. And God, Scripture tells us, will share his glory with no other (Isa 42:8).

We might think of it in another way. By holding forth *solī Deo gloria* as the lifeblood of the *solas*, we remind ourselves that the biblical religion recaptured by the Reformation is not ultimately about ourselves, but about God. Our focus so easily becomes self-centered, even when we ask the same important questions that occupied the Reformers: Where can I find God’s authoritative revelation? How can I escape the wrath of God? What must I do to be saved? The other four *solas* provide necessary and life-changing answers to such questions, but *solī Deo gloria* puts them in proper perspective: the highest purpose of God’s plan of salvation in Christ, made known in Scripture, is not our own beatitude, wonderful as that is. The highest purpose is God’s own glory. God glorifies himself through the abundant blessings he bestows upon us.

A Theology of Glory Vs. a Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther

As we embark on this study, some puzzling questions may arise for readers familiar with Reformation theology. Didn’t Martin Luther speak *against* a “theology of glory”? Can an

¹ See respectively John D. Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), 9; R. C. Sproul Jr., “*Solī Deo Gloria*,” in *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology: Essays in Honor of R. C. Sproul*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003), 191.

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emphasis upon the glory of God actually detract from a biblical “theology of the cross” rather than illumine it? These are good questions. Luther did, in fact, call for a theology of the cross to replace the theology of glory he thought so prevalent in his own day, but his purpose was not to divert our attention from the glory of God. Rather, it was to explain *how* God manifests his glory to us and calls us to glorious fellowship with him. This is a great example of Luther’s delight in paradox. Anyone who wishes to know the great God of glory must see him through the humility of the cross. Luther’s reasoning is worth contemplating, because it exposes an important theme in subsequent chapters of this book: according to Scripture, glory comes through suffering. God is most highly glorified through the suffering of his Son; Christians know God and are glorified with Christ only by taking up their cross and following him.

Luther objected to the so-called theology of glory because he was concerned that Christians were seeking to know God in the wrong way. Many theologians thought they could understand the one true God by the speculative power of their own reason. They figured they could get to God directly and perceive him as he is in himself. Luther countered that we have no hope of knowing God unless he takes the initiative and reveals himself to us, and this strips us of our illusions of control. The theology of glory, therefore, is an exercise of human pretension. Sinful human beings, cloaking their hubris in a seemingly pious religiosity, try to climb to heaven to get a peek at God in his majesty. If we want to know God, Luther came to recognize, we must know him through revelation, and his clearest revelation is in Scripture. And when we open Scripture and learn that we are lost sinners, and that a God of wrath and judgment stands against us, the theology of glory becomes but a dream extinguished by Scripture’s dawn.

In Scripture, however, Luther also discovered the theology of the cross. As long as sinful people strive to come to God by their own resources, the Almighty will keep himself veiled. But when they seek him through the humanly unimaginable way of the cross, God redeems them from sin and provides genuine knowledge of himself. To behold the God of glory, we must behold God beaten, mocked, and crucified. To gain everlasting beatitude, we must utterly humble ourselves and find refuge only in a cursed cross.

It may be helpful to hear this in a few of Luther’s own words. Some of his most famous statements about the theology of glory and theology of the cross come from the *Heidelberg Disputation*, composed in 1518, during his early efforts at reformation. Luther identifies two kinds of theologians. One is the “theologian of the cross”: he “who comprehends the visible and manifest things of God seen through suffering and the cross” is the one who deserves to be called a theologian. “It is not sufficient for anyone,” writes Luther, “and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty, unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross.” On the other hand, Luther describes the “theologian

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of glory” in this way: he “who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore he prefers works to suffering, glory to the cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil.” The “theologian of the cross,” in contrast, has been “deflated and destroyed by suffering and evil until he knows that he is worthless and that his works are not his but God’s.”²

As it turns out, Luther’s critique of the theology of glory was hardly opposed to the perspective summarized at the opening of this chapter. I noted that the two overriding concerns of the Reformation had to do with religious authority and the doctrine of salvation. Luther championed the theology of the cross as a result of the same concerns. The theology of the cross was built upon biblical revelation that rejected all speculative human attempts to know God in our own way.³ The theology of the cross was also a theology of salvation, rejecting all vain endeavors to reconcile ourselves to the creator.⁴ It therefore points only to the grace of God in Christ, and summons us to confess our own poverty, to look outside of ourselves, and to cling only to Christ by faith. It hardly turns us away from God’s glory altogether. God glorifies himself, and we can live for his glory, but only along a path that unaided human reason could never have discovered and would never have dared imagine. The way to God’s glory winds through the lowliness and desolation of Calvary.

Divine Glory and Human Glory: John Calvin

The suspected tension between Luther’s critique of the theology of glory and the Reformation theme of *solī Deo gloria* turns out to be no problem at all. A different sort of problem is perhaps more serious, since it threatens to challenge the whole thrust of Reformation theology we’ve considered thus far. The alleged problem is this: the emphasis on God’s glory and God’s glory *alone* seems to demean human beings. If God’s glory implies humanity’s debasement, is such a God really worthy of our praise? Furthermore, the problem continues, this depiction of human debasement is hardly consistent with Scripture. Scripture describes human beings as the pinnacle of God’s creation, as divine image-bearers with dominion over the world. Even after the fall, God

² *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer: I*, ed. Harold J. Grimm, gen. ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 52–53.

³ As Alister McGrath has put it, “We may summarize the leading features of the *theologia crucis* [theology of the cross] as follows: (1) The theology of the cross is a theology of revelation, which stands in sharp contrast to speculation.” See *Luther’s Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther’s Theological Breakthrough* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 149.

⁴ Bernhard Lohse comments that “use of the concepts *theologia gloriae* and *theologia crucis* ... helps to make the question of salvation the theme of his theology.” See *Martin Luther’s Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development*, trans. Roy A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 38. For similar comments, see also McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross*, 151, 174.

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redeems his people so that someday they might be glorified. Surely if glorification awaits us, then glory does not belong to God *alone*!

This, too, is not really a problem, but it does present a challenge. I asked at the outset whether any simple slogan encapsulates as much truth as *solī Deo gloria*. I think the answer is probably no, yet by their very nature slogans simplify matters and fail to express nuance and complexity. If the *solī Deo gloria* theme is as profound as I've suggested, then we must attend to its nuance and complexity in order to do it justice. This alleged tension between the *solī Deo gloria* theme and the gift of human glorification is a great case in point.

Scripture does indeed speak of human experience and the human calling in many exalted ways. God made us in his image—just a little lower than the angels—and gave us dominion over the works of his hands (Gen 1:26–28; Ps. 8:5–8). Even more marvelous, God destined human beings to rule the world to come (Heb 2:5–9). He has promised that those who believe in his Son, though guilty sinners, will share in Christ's glory and have glory revealed in them (Rom 8:17–18). At first blush, this does seem to contradict the Reformation slogan we so enthusiastically promote.

Yet we need not be embarrassed by the Bible's description of human exaltation. It is good that we feel the tension and wrestle with it, because we cannot fully understand the glory of God without giving due weight to humanity's glorification in creation and especially in redemption. One way to put it is that the all-wise and loving God is pleased to glorify himself precisely through the glorification of his human creation. Our glory, such as it is, redounds back to God's glory. From a different angle we might also say that precisely through acknowledging and seeking God's glory alone, human beings attain their highest destiny and enjoy their proper dignity. Our words are true and edifying when they conform to Scripture alone. Our works become good and holy when they proceed from justification by grace alone through faith alone. We are renewed in the image of God when we rest on Christ alone. So are human beings demeaned by the confession of glory to God alone? Unexpectedly, no. As the opening of both the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms communicates, God simultaneously makes us instruments for glorifying him and causes us to enjoy him as we ascribe to him all glory: the "chief end of man" is "to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." In God's glory is our dignity. In God's glory is our delight. Our glorification lies in ascribing all glory in heaven and earth to him.

The Reformers understood this. John Calvin provides a good example. In his zeal to protect the supreme glory of God, Calvin recognized that God manifests his glory in large part through the beauty of his handiwork. Calvin stood in awe of creation as a "beautiful

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theatre,” indeed, a “theatre of the divine glory.”⁵ “In every part of the world,” he writes, “some lineaments of divine glory are beheld.”⁶ Appealing to biblical texts that describe God’s revelation of his greatness through nature, Calvin observes: “Because the glory of his power and wisdom is more refulgent in the firmament, it is frequently designated as his palace. And, first, where you turn your eyes, there is no portion of the world, however minute, that does not exhibit at least some sparks of beauty; while it is impossible to contemplate the vast and beautiful fabric as it extends around, without being overwhelmed by the immense weight of glory.”⁷

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But Calvin also thought that God’s glory shines in a special way in human beings, created in the image of God. Calvin located the image, and hence humanity’s chief dignity, especially in the soul, yet he also comments: “There was no part even of the body in which some rays of glory did not shine,” and thus “the divine glory is [also] displayed in man’s outward appearance.”⁸ Calvin’s zeal for the glory of God, therefore, hardly entailed a demeaning view of creation or of humanity in particular. In fact, it was just the opposite. The beauty and dignity we have, thought Calvin, reflect God’s glory manifest in us.

If God’s glory shines in the original creation, how much more does it radiate in Christ, his work of redemption, and the hope of new creation? “In the person of Christ,” Calvin remarks, “the glory of God is visibly manifested to us.”⁹ The salvation achieved in Christ’s incarnation also promotes the divine glory. When contemplating our justification in Christ, for example, Calvin asserts that “two ends must be kept especially in view — namely, that the glory of God be maintained unimpaired, and that our consciences, in the view of his tribunal, be secured in peaceful rest and calm tranquility.”¹⁰ We ought to remember, he adds, “that in the whole discussion concerning justification the great thing to be attended to is, that God’s glory be maintained entire and unimpaired; since, as the Apostle declares, it was in demonstration of his own righteousness that he shed his favor upon us.”

⁵ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 1.14.20; and Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 22 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 266 (concerning Hebrews 11:3). For helpful discussions of Calvin’s view of the natural order and its revelation of God’s glory, see e.g. Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham: Labyrinth, 1991); and Davis A. Young, *John Calvin and the Natural World* (Lanham, MO: University Press of America, 2007).

⁶ *Institutes*, 1.15.3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.5.1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.5.3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.2.1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.13.1.

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This statement is a wonderful example of how *solī Deo gloria* is so closely connected with the other Reformation *solas*. Salvation by Christ alone, through grace alone, by faith alone means that all glory goes to God alone. And far from demeaning us, this marvelous display of divine glory enables us to fulfill our highest calling. Even now, explains Calvin through his own “theology of the cross,” we have the privilege of declaring God’s glory as we cast aside our own: “We never truly glory in him until we have utterly discarded our own glory ... The elect are justified by the Lord, in order that they may glory in him, and in none else.”¹¹ But even this is nothing compared to the privilege that awaits the saints when Christ returns. Commenting on Titus 2:13, Calvin states: “I interpret the *glory of God* to mean not only that by which he shall be glorious in himself, but also that by which he shall then diffuse himself on all *sides*, so as to make all his elect partakers of it.”¹²

The cynic’s objection that the Reformation theme of *solī Deo gloria* debases humanity need not worry us. In fact, to find humanity debased, we need look no further than the imaginary universe of those who deny God’s glory. If God is not the all-glorious creator and redeemer, then this world is random chaos, life is meaningless, and human destiny is the grave. The biblical and Reformation message of *solī Deo gloria*, on the other hand, directs our eyes to Christ’s second coming, when God will reveal his glory most brilliantly and his people, saved by grace, will themselves be glorified with their Lord.¹³ This, too, must be our theme in the chapters ahead.

The Glory of God in Contemporary Theology

Even the relatively brief survey in the pages above highlights the importance of the *solī Deo gloria* theme for the Reformation, a theme originating not with the Reformers but in Scripture itself. In light of its eminent pedigree, it’s little wonder that many contemporary writers who embrace the Reformation continue to return to the theme of God’s glory to unfold the message of Scripture and to describe the character of the Christian religion. They do so in many different ways, however. Most of their approaches are compatible, and I imagine most of them would appreciate the others’ insights. In part, their different

¹¹ Ibid., 3.13.2.

¹² *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 21: 320 (concerning Titus 2:13). For helpful discussion of God’s glory in Christ and redemption through him, see Billy Kristanto, *Sola Dei Gloria: The Glory of God in the Thought of John Calvin* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), Part 2.

¹³ Although I discuss only Luther and Calvin, other Protestant Reformers were also devoted to the glory of God as central for Christian faith and life. To give but one example, Heinrich Bullinger, a prominent Reformer in Zurich, wrote: “Whosoever is endued with the Spirit of God, whatsoever he shall either do or say will savour of the fear of God; finally, he shall say and do all things unto the glory of God: and all these things truly are freely and fully drawn out of the only fountain of the Holy Ghost.” See Henry Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger, The Fourth Decade*, ed. Thomas Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1851), 320.

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approaches stem from the richness of the *solī Deo gloria* motif in Scripture and the fact that this single jewel can be admired from various angles. While my own treatment of the subject in subsequent chapters comports with some of these approaches better than with others, my point in sampling them is not to critique any in particular but to provide readers with a sense of the contemporary landscape and to help us identify important aspects of the full biblical presentation of *solī Deo gloria*.

One emphasis among some recent writers captures perhaps the most common way of thinking about the *solī Deo gloria* theme in popular imagination: *solī Deo gloria* is a call for believers to gear all of their pursuits for the glory of God. This emphasis seems to follow the spirit of the great musician and orthodox Lutheran Johann Sebastian Bach, who appended “SDG” to scores he composed.¹⁴ Terry Johnson, for example, devotes two chapters to *solī Deo gloria* in a book on the Reformation *solas*, the first of which focuses upon the reform of worship and church government. Then he treats the theme in terms of being obedient to God in all areas of life and the impact it can have on our surrounding cultures. He urges that *solī Deo gloria* calls believers today to “carry the Christian worldview into their realms of endeavor ...”¹⁵

John Hannah raises similar ideas. He explains how “glory” expresses God’s internal qualities or attributes and how Scripture often describes God’s glory as a visible display of his brightness and excellency.¹⁶ But central to Hannah’s work—in accord with its title: *How Do We Glorify God?*—are the moral implications of God’s glory. Our postmodern age, he observes, is one of radical self-centeredness and narcissism, but *solī Deo gloria* is “a call to a radical vision of God-centered living in all of life’s many facets. The glory of God alone implies the right purpose for all of life—a God-centered purpose. All who share this radical view of Christianity make the ultimate purpose of life God’s glory, not their own self-fulfillment or self-realization.”¹⁷ At some length, he later explains how God is glorified as we mirror his holiness and how this should transform our perspective on work, politics, and other endeavors of life.¹⁸

Reflecting on the theme of God’s glory from a somewhat different angle, John Piper invokes the theology of Jonathan Edwards, and especially his treatise, “The End for

¹⁴ See Calvin R. Stapert, *My Only Comfort: Death, Deliverance, and Discipleship in the Music of Bach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 27–28; and Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 140.

¹⁵ Terry L. Johnson, *The Case for Traditional Protestantism: The Solas of the Reformation* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004), 162. The two chapters dealing with *solī Deo gloria* are 6–7.

¹⁶ John Hannah, *How Do We Glorify God? Basics of the Reformed Faith Series* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 6–7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 6–7, 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 19–35, 38–40.

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Which God Created the World,” about which I’ll say a little more in the next chapter. Piper explains, “The *rejoicing* of all peoples in God, and the *magnifying* of God’s glory are one end, not two.... The exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing.” This, he says, is what his own life is all about and what shapes nearly everything he preaches and writes.¹⁹ In this Edwardsian vision, God’s grace enables us to grow into an ever-increasing delight in God, and “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.”²⁰ Thus, God zealously desires our joy just as much as he desires his own glory.²¹ In this sense, Piper embraces C. S. Lewis’s aphorism, “*It is a Christian duty, as you know, for everyone to be as happy as he can.*”²²

Another route by which contemporary writers approach the theme of God’s glory is as an organizing theme of biblical theology. I use the term “biblical theology” here in a technical sense. Biblical theology—in distinction from other methods of doing theology, such as systematic theology and historical theology—explores the progress and organic development of theological themes and of the overall message of Scripture as the biblical canon moves from earlier books to later books. We can also think of this as movement within Scripture from less complete revelation of God to more complete, or as the gradual growth in the manifestation of God’s truth from seed into full blossom. I raise this subject because several writers have recently identified the glory of God as the central theme of biblical theology, that is, the central theme of this unfolding, ever more profound revelation of God in Scripture.

One of them, James Hamilton, organizes his *Biblical Theology* around the motif of God’s glory in his work of salvation and judgment through history. He acknowledges that God’s glory “is like a many-faceted gem, which reflects and refracts light in ever-new, ever-unexpected ways as it is admired.”²³ But Hamilton attempts to bring these various beams of divine glory together by suggesting that “the glory of God is the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation, that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth.”²⁴ Hamilton recognizes a movement in

¹⁹ John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 31–32.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 34–35, 47.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

²² *Ibid.*, 46 (italics his).

²³ James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 59.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

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Scripture from the more limited and local manifestations of God's glory to Old Testament Israel toward the universal and eschatological goal of God's glory filling all the world.²⁵

Thomas Schreiner also makes the glory of God a major strand of his *Biblical Theology*, as he did in earlier works on New Testament biblical theology and Paul.²⁶ Schreiner claims that Scripture uses the word "glory" "broadly to capture the supremacy of God in everything." He believes this has direct implication for our moral lives: "Human beings exist to obey, believe in, and praise God ... God exercises an absolute claim upon the lives of all."²⁷ A third contemporary biblical theologian, G. K. Beale, also calls readers' attention to the centrality of God's glory at the outset of *A New Testament Biblical Theology*: "I contend that the goal of the New Testament storyline is God's glory, and that the main stepping-stone to that goal is Christ's establishment of an eschatological new-creational kingdom and its expansion." Beale's primary focus is upon this stepping-stone, the new creation, but only because many others have already argued effectively that the glory of God is Scripture's ultimate end.²⁸

These contemporary authors testify to the continuing richness and vibrancy of the Reformation theme that glory belongs to God alone. Whether contemplating godly service in the world, Christian spirituality, or the developing revelation of God's salvation in Scripture, these writers find the glory of God a deep reservoir for theological reflection. That will be the case in subsequent chapters of this book as well.

All Glory Belongs to God and Not to Ourselves

In this book, we have set out to contemplate the glory of the Lord and the Reformation theme that all glory belongs to God. The Reformers established a trajectory that will surely not lead us astray. Against the perennial temptation to elevate our own words above God's and to pursue everlasting life by our own deeds, the Reformers called the church back to Scripture alone, to faith alone, to grace alone, and to Christ alone, and by so doing they reminded us that all glory belongs to God and not to ourselves. Approaching this God and knowing him truly requires us to humble ourselves and to seek him in the lowliness of the cross. Yet far from debasing us, humbling ourselves by faith in Christ crucified reconciles us to God and enables us to become the sort of

²⁵ Ibid., 106, 116, 268–69, 343, 483.

²⁶ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

²⁷ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 126.

²⁸ Ibid., 16.

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creatures God made us to be. God grants us the privilege of reflecting his own glory as we grow in holiness and ascribe him glory in our worship, and by one day joining him in the glory of the new creation—which Scripture wonderfully calls our *glorification*. God draws supreme glory to himself, in part, by glorifying us. The Reformation theme of *solī Deo gloria* is indeed a beautiful aspect of the good news of the gospel.

Our chief interest in this book is to explore this theme further in Scripture and to consider how we might build on the Reformers' insights and gain a deeper and fuller picture of the glory of God and its implications for Christian faith and life. The contemporary writers discussed above encourage us to think this is still a noble and profitable task. But before moving directly to Scripture, we would do well to reflect also on how Reformed theologians between the time of the Reformation and the early twenty-first century presented this topic. In Chapter 2, therefore, we continue these initial historical reflections by turning to the age of Reformed Orthodoxy (so-called), where we find not a dry and stifling theology, as the name might suggest, but a rich and careful understanding of the glory of God, its revelation in history, and its wonderful benefits for Christ's saints.²⁹

- Chapter 1 of *God's Glory Alone—The Majestic Heart of Christian Faith and Life: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why it Still Matters*.

²⁹ VanDrunen, D., & Barrett, M. (2015). *God's glory alone—the majestic heart of christian faith and life: what the reformers taught...and why it still matters* (pp. 13–25). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.