

God's Flaming Glory – Post 6 – God's Irradiating Glory

According to Calvin, God's glory is not something He keeps to Himself. His glory is always His, for He said "My glory I will not give to another" (Isaiah 48:11). Yet He also said, "The glory that you have given me I have given to them" (John 17:22). God's glory is Himself, and He shares "the true image of His glory"¹ that believers might have fellowship with God, and have a participation in His glory in Jesus Christ.

Calvin uses a specific word for this participation in God's glory. Humanity, he said, was made for "irradiation" in God's glory. Just as when Christians first believed through being "irradiated by the brightness of Christ,"² so believers are destined for a full irradiation in Christ.

Jesus shares His "glory, power, and righteousness, with the elect" and gave "Himself to be enjoyed by them."³ Humanity, therefore, is meant for far more than to be disconnected spectators of His glory. The entire Christian life is to be one of communion with God, and the enjoyment of His fullness. As one author observed of Calvin's thought, "Nothing less than a relationship of sharing and mutual indwelling will satisfy Calvin, who makes both the *goal* and *means* of the Christian life to be participatory communion."⁴

This relationship with God is what the Holy Spirit brought believers into by revealing Christ to them and bringing about faith in their hearts. This participation, as well as present and

¹ John Calvin (1845). *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 336.

² John Calvin (1845). *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 336.

³ John Calvin (1845). *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 618.

⁴ Julie Canlis (2010). *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 4. *Slightly paraphrased*.

future irradiation, is obtained by union with Christ. For through Christ believers are “admitted to full and sure communion with God... insofar as Christ unites us.”⁵ For the only way that people

...are included in that love which He mentions [in John 17:26] is that Christ dwells in us; for, as the Father cannot look upon His Son without having likewise before His eyes the whole body of Christ, so, if we wish to be beheld in Him, we must be actually His members.⁶

It was this communion which Calvin saw to be the most comforting hope in life and in death.⁷ In the face of the death of a young boy, Calvin wrote these words in a private letter:

“There can be no doubt but that Christ will bind together both them and us in the same inseparable society, in that incomparable participation of His own glory.”⁸ Far from being abstract for Calvin, God’s glory and participation in it were central in his view of the Christian life.⁹

⁵ John Calvin (1845). *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 313.

⁶ John Calvin (n.d.). *Commentary on John, Volume Two*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 112.

⁷ For more on this, see my Post “*The Kindness of God in the Face of Death*,” <https://standingbeforegodblog.wordpress.com/2022/08/14/the-kindness-of-god-in-the-face-of-death/>

⁸ John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 4, Letters 1528-1545*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. p. 244.

⁹ Calvin makes similar statements throughout his Letters: “...it is well that the Son of God be glorified by our sufferings, and we be participators in His glory” [John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 4, Letters 1528-1545*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. 449]. “...that finally we may be also partakers of His glory which He has promised us” [John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 5, Letters 1545-1553*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. p. 24]. “...on that celestial glory and immortality to which we are invited...” [John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 5, Letters 1545-1553*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. p. 413]. “...participators of His glory...” [John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 6, Letters 1554-1558*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. p. 302]. “...be partakers of His glory” [John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 6, Letters 1554-1558*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. p. 443]. “...that [the Son of God may finally receive you into the fellowship of His everlasting glory” [John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 7, Letters 1559-1564*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. p. 436]

God is not some ruler to appease (very much unlike Allah, see Post 2),¹⁰ nor an abstract substance to pursue. The triune God of Scripture is glorious in His goodness, and is glorified through others partaking in His glory. A God whose glory is brightest when it is shared, and darkest when He is not trusted in.¹¹ This precious reality Calvin described in the word *irradiation*.

Calvin explains this in his comments on 2 Thessalonians 1:10¹² more fully than he did anywhere else. When Christ returned, Calvin wrote, He would

irradiate His saints with His glory, and that they may be partakers of it. “Christ will not have this glory for himself individually; but it will be common to all the saints.” This is the crowning and choice consolation of the pious, that when the Son of God will be manifested in the glory of His kingdom, He will gather them into the same fellowship with Himself ... *then* they will be precious, and full of dignity, when Christ will pour forth His glory upon them.¹³

It was in the context of this participation in glory, this union in Christ, this inclusion into the body of Christ, this communion with God, that Calvin understood the glory of God to be the purpose of all things and the chief purpose of the Christian life:

The Apostle Paul calls us back to the chief end of our whole life – that we may promote the Lord’s glory. ...that those who have advanced the glory of Christ will also in their

¹⁰ “*God’s Flaming Glory – Allah’s Glory, According to the Quran – Post 2*,” <https://standingbeforegodblog.wordpress.com/2023/11/14/gods-flaming-glory-allahs-glory-according-to-the-quran-post-2/>

¹¹ “...for [the Father’s] chief glory lies in that we should call upon Him alone in the name of Jesus Christ” [John Calvin (1998). *Selected Works of John Calvin, Volume 4, Letters 1528-1545*. The AGES Digital Library. Albany, OR. p. 360].

¹² “When He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (1 Thessalonians 1:10 ESV).

¹³ John Calvin (n.d.). *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 289.

turn be glorified in Him. For in this, first of all, the wonderful goodness of God shines forth – that He will have His glory be conspicuous in us who are covered over with ignominy. ...that He afterwards irradiates us with His glory, as though He would do the same to us in return. On this account he adds, *according to the grace of God and Christ...* for it is solely by the guidance of the Holy Spirit that our life is made to contribute to the glory of God.¹⁴

¹⁴ John Calvin (n.d.). *Commentary on Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 291.