

God's Flaming Glory – Post 12 – God's Glory in Creation, According to Jonathan Edwards

God's Glory in Creation

In all things, God is pursuing the shining out and spreading forth His supreme end in creation: His glory. That one glory consists of His fullness as the Triune God, and the communication of Himself.

This “fulness of God,” said Edwards, “consists in the holiness and happiness of the deity” which subsists in the Holy Spirit.¹ This is why he wrote that

it was God's last end,² that there might be a glorious and abundant emanation of His infinite fullness of good *ad extra*, or [outside of] Himself; and that the disposition to communicate Himself, or diffuse His own fullness, was what moved Him to create the world.³

God, because He is Triune, has a “general inclination to diffuse himself.”⁴ Both God's communication of Himself and Him Being can be spoken of as His last end. For “God acting for Himself, or making Himself His last end, and His acting for [His peoples'] sake, are not to be set in opposition; they are rather to be considered as coinciding one with the other, and implied one

¹ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *A Treatise on Grace*. Christian Classic Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 30, 34.

² Edwards meant by “last end” that end for which all other purposes are worked. He wrote that the use of a thing can be seen from its use. In this way he compared creation to a watch, “that the last end of the *hand* is the last end of the *whole* machine” [Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 816].

³ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 796.

⁴ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 799.

in the other.”⁵ It is not as though God is doing all things for His glory and we are left in the dust. God doing all things for His glory means God acting for His people’s good.

Lavishness is essential to God’s glory. “It is the necessary consequence of His delighting in the glory of His nature, that He delights in the emanation and effulgence of it.”⁶ And that emanation or “disposition to cause His own infinite fullness to flow forth, is not the less properly called His goodness, because the good He communicates is what He delights in, as He delights in His own glory.”⁷ Therefore, God’s fullness (which is the same as His glory) consists in His Triune goodness; that fullness of the goodness of the fellowship of the Trinity which preceded the foundations of the world – that *is* His glory.

Edwards’ view of creation was that God, in seeking the communication (or emanation) of His glory to His people, gave them the uttermost of His blessings such that everything was for their good.⁸ All of creation came from the infinitely glorious Triune God, that He might communicate His love and glory to His special creation: human beings. Indeed, His goodness is woven into the warp and woof of creation:

All God’s works, both of creation and providence⁹, are represented as works of goodness or mercy to his people; as in the 136th Psalm. His wonderful works in general. Ver. 4. “To Him who alone doth great wonders; for His mercy endures forever.” The works of

⁵ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 799.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 803.

⁷ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 811.

⁸ God’s heart to His elect did not change between creation and redemption, but was always to give His children “all things” in His Son (Romans 8:32).

⁹ In passing, Edwards’ definition of providence: “God’s *providence* is His *use* of the *world* He has made” [Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 816].

creation in all its parts. Ver. 5-9. “To Him that by wisdom made the heavens; for His mercy endures forever. To Him that stretched out the earth above the waters; for His mercy endures forever. To Him that made great lights; for His mercy endures forever. The sun to rule by day; for His mercy endures forever. The moon and stars to rule by night; for His mercy endures forever.” And God’s works of providence, in the following part of the Psalm.¹⁰

The whole of the created order was no mere theatrical display, but the very communication of God’s good and gracious fullness.

In this way, like Calvin before him, Edwards seems incredibly human centered (anthropocentric) in holding to his belief that all things exist for the glory of God alone. And, just like Calvin, *he was*. Not in that he held that mankind was for whom all things exist *to glorify*, but that all things exist for mankind’s good as *an overflow of God’s own glory*.

God’s goodness to them who are to be the eternal subjects of His goodness, is the end of the creation; since the whole creation, in all its parts, is spoken of as theirs. 1 Corinthians 3 22, 23. “All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours.” The terms are very universal; and both works of creation and providence are mentioned; and it is manifestly the design of the apostle to be understood of every work of God whatsoever. Now, how can we understand this any otherwise, than that all things are for their benefit; and that God made and uses all for their good?¹¹

¹⁰ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 842.

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 842.

“God made and uses all for their good.” That is His purpose for creation. Everything that God created was to be used by Christ for the benefit of His elect people. In creation, God’s glory is the effulgence of Himself to “the eternal subjects of His goodness.”

All of creation is the preparation for something better. In God’s grand design, even for all the beauty and goodness in the natural world, it is not permanent. Out of the Fall of humanity into death and sin, God is bringing something about which He “decreed before the ages for our glory,” unimaginable things which the Spirit is now revealing to His saints (1 Corinthians 2:6-10). In Edwards’ words,

the whole old creation, both heaven and earth, as to all its natural glory and creature fullness, was to be pulled down. And thus way was to be made for the creation of the new heavens and new earth, or the setting forth of the whole elect universe in its consummate, everlasting, immutable glory in the fullness of God, in a great, most conspicuous, immediate, and universal dependence on His power and sovereign grace, and also on the glorious and infinitely excellent nature and essence of God, as the infinite fountain of glory and love: the beholding and enjoying of which, and union with which, being the elect creature’s all in all, all its strength, all its beauty, all its life, its fruit, its honor, its blessedness.¹²

The creation of all things is the preparation for the work of redemption and consummation thereof – God saving His elect Bride by Christ, for Him, and to Him.

¹² Jonathan Edwards (n.d.). *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume Two*. Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Grand Rapids, MI. p. 1694-1695.