

Delight and Satisfaction in our Sovereign God

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When I share the gospel with students in public universities, I often ask them this question: “Can you describe how humans are to relate to a God who lives outside of time?” They are usually baffled because as truth suppressors, they do not wish to retain a mental category for God’s transcendence. My question is designed to urge them to come to terms with who God is, and what they owe God as His image and likeness. By contrast, believers love to grow in their knowledge of God.

God is tri-personal—He is a holy ‘community’ of divine Persons comprising one God (Deut 6:4). He is absolute personality, and He is transcendent (outside of time, space and mass), and He is self-contained. This has immense relevance to metaphysics (the nature of ultimate reality). Philosophers who deny the Holy Trinity are bound to fall into one of two ‘ditches’—they either absolutize the *one*, or they absolutize the *many* (they press for either the ultimacy of the one, or the ultimacy of the many). But our Triune God is BOTH the One, and the Many (Three in One).

He alone in His own Person gives meaning to the universe He created. And, since He is ultimate (the foundation of reality), or ‘prime’ reality, ***it is solely His character, might, and wisdom which structure and define all reality***—and, that reality exists solely for His purposes. There is not reality greater than God. He is the uncaused first cause—He knows Himself and His purposes perfectly; then He creates the universe. His power permeates the cosmos, defining, upholding, and revealing Himself every moment—without being part of the universe.

Christianity stands alone among religions and philosophies—for the Bible teaches that God is both transcendent AND personal. In His transcendence He does not share our essence, but in Christ He does share our essence (Col 2:2-3). Prime reality is personal—we worship a personal absolute—God Himself. He is both transcendent (separate from the creation—standing outside of time, space, and mass) and immanent (He has condescended to enter creation in the Person of Christ—“God with us,” *Immanuel*—Isaiah 7:14).

He doesn’t need creation to define Himself. He is not relative to the creation. He made the creation to extend His glory (by revealing His glory to two orders of rational creatures: people and angels). Mankind is made to find its highest purpose in Him. Creation becomes a theater, a backdrop, a stage, a worshipping chorus for the drama of redemption.

Only God knows how wonderful He is. He wants to share Himself—He wills to be known. People and angels are the two orders of creatures made to ‘run on God’. Human beings are the only creature made in His image; therefore, mankind can only find the highest possible joy and good in Him. God doesn’t need creation—the creation needs Him. God isn’t defined by His relation to the cosmos, but the cosmos is defined by its relation to Him. As His creatures, we are utterly dependent upon His revelation in order to possess true knowledge and meaning with certainty. Thus, this Creator-creature distinction is foundational to rationality.

Because our first parents chose to reject God’s loving rule over them, the entrance of sin darkened our understanding of who God is (Eph 4:17-19). We lost our ability to know that God is wonderful and glorious, and we sinned away the desire for the glory of His moral majesty (His holiness). In so doing, we forfeited our calling to find our highest good in Him (Rom 3:23). We saw Him as dangerous, selfish, threatening, a spoiler, punitive, and vindictive (Rom 8:15). Prior to salvation, our fear of Him was craven, not reverential and adoring (Rom 8:15).

God is love, and He demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Rom 5:8). But compared to the love shown by mortal sinners to one another, God's love is of another kind, other-worldly, exotic (1 Jn 3:1)—His love for us is not generated by our virtues. God does not need us, our praise, or our worship. He is totally satisfied in the perfect love, respect and glory of the Trinity. But, because of His great love, and because He wants to extend His glory to us, He sent His Son Christ in the flesh, in our nature to satisfy His demand for a perfect righteousness and to satisfy His demand that every sin be punished and judged (1 Jn 3:5-8; 4:1-3).

Our part in His 'glory story' as creatures in our Maker's image is to know God through this work of redemption. God's plan to bring about redemption through Christ was a mystery locked in the bosom of God from all eternity. No man could have conceived that Christ would come in the flesh and fulfill God's requirement for perfect righteousness and satisfy God's demand for absolute justice against our sins.

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading to obedience of faith;* to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, be the glory forever. Amen (Rom 16:25-27).

If we believe the gospel and repent of sin, God sees us in Christ from then on. This encompassing truth of union with Christ must condition all of our thinking; for we tend to define ourselves by our lack of performance, our sin, our moral ups and downs, our victories and defeats. By nature, we are self-focused. But, because God is satisfied in Himself, and because Christ has provided the satisfaction which makes us acceptable to God, He has set us free to enjoy satisfaction in Him.

This is incredible—God has linked His own satisfaction in Himself, and Christ's satisfaction of His just demands against our sins to our own ability to find ultimate pleasure and satisfaction in Him! He has invited us into His glorious redemptive narrative. He bids us to be satisfied in Him. He's going to give us the joy of the Trinity (Jn 17:13).

Seeking satisfaction in God has a powerful sanctifying effect upon us. As we seek satisfaction in God, He changes us to be more and more like Christ. By beholding the glory of the Lord, by seeing who God is through Christ, we become like Christ (2 Cor 3:18).

The gospel gives us a new orientation and trajectory—we become lovers of His glory. ***God's cause (to extend His glory through the redemption and perfection of sinners) becomes our cause***—we glory in what God glories in (God's zeal for His name and His cause expressed in the new covenant in our Savior's blood).

In the riches of the new covenant, He has given us a heart of flesh instead of stone (Ez 36:26). He sent Christ to suffer in our place, to satisfy His justice (Rom 3:23-26), therefore God is now able to freely bestow favor upon us wretches and He is liberated to be utterly committed to blessing us without compromising or profaning His Name—all because of the work of Christ as Substitute.

The glory of the gospel is that God is righteous when He justifies the ungodly. He takes joy in justifying the ungodly. ***He is glorified when He justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5-8). Knowing this gospel truth is essential for us as forgiven sinners to enter into the full enjoyment of God.***

Salvation is union with Christ (Eph 1:1-14)—for Christ is the 'sphere' in which every dimension of our redemption takes place. God unites us to Christ, thus the benefits that He purchased by His perfect

life, death, and resurrection now count for re-born sinners—we are granted an immutable status before God—because we are now *in Christ*.

We have a perfect covering in Christ. God contemplates the believer in Christ (Col 3:1-5). God has provided the following glorious blessings to us through Christ: He is our hiding place, glorification, High Priest, adoption, righteousness, status, standing, acceptance, sealing, inheritance, and glory. God's cause to extend His glory by redemption of sinners has become my cause. Therefore, the best way to glorify God is to keep believing the gospel so that it exerts a constant power to shape and mold your life.

Believers who've been redeemed know God personally (2 Pet 1:1-4). His purpose to glorify Himself has become the very source of your salvation. The cause of God pursuing His own glory is greater than the combined majesty of all of the galaxies. And, the highest revealer of His glory is our redemption in Christ—for in that redemption His manifold wisdom is revealed (Eph 3:10).

In Romans 12:1-2, by reason of the infinite mercies in Christ, God calls us to abandon ourselves to His glory as the most reasonable, rational, realistic response possible. He is extending His glory through redemption—and He wants us to glory what He glories in. This is evident in Christ's 'high priestly prayer' in John chapter seventeen.

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, *are* in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them (Jn 17:20-26).

In view of these unspeakable riches, worldliness is actually the scorning of the infinite wealth of God's promises—promises in which He gives us Himself. The love of the world is the worship of created things due to a sin-engendered blindness which devalues God and His promises. It is rebellious denial that God's intent is to pour out His benevolent care upon us for His Name's sake.

When believers doubt God's benevolence, they go to the world instead the Lord in order to be satisfied. Doubting Christians have a view of God not based upon a satisfied God (satisfied because of Christ's atoning work in propitiation). The satisfaction of God's justice which Christ accomplished on the cross brings us all the way to God (Eph 2:18). ***God has propitiated His own wrath (Rom 3:23-26). On behalf of the redeemed—He has removed all our liabilities in order to love us freely.*** He is glorified and magnified in Christ's satisfaction on our behalf.

God's burning holiness rightly terrifies the impenitent sinner. One line in the hymn "My God how Wonderful Thou art" is as follows: ***"How dread are Thine eternal years."*** That is the issue: every person dies right with God or horribly wrong with God—and that alignment or lack thereof will never end. God made the cosmos and placed us in it for the great purpose of sharing the stunning wonder and glory of His moral majesty (His holiness). And those who oppose that all-encompassing purpose are regarded by God as His adversaries.

My God, how wonderful Thou art (Hymn)

Author: Frederick W. Faber

My God, how wonderful Thou art,
Thy majesty, how bright;
How beautiful Thy mercy seat
In depths of burning light!

How dread are Thy eternal years,
O everlasting Lord,
By prostrate spirits day and night
Incessantly adored!

How wonderful, how beautiful,
The sight of Thee must be;
Thy endless wisdom, boundless power,
And glorious purity!

O how I fear Thee, living God,
With deep and tender fear;
And worship Thee with trembling hope,
And penitential tears!

Yet, I may love Thee, too, O Lord,
Almighty as Thou art;
For Thou hast stooped to ask of me
The love of my poor heart!

No earthly father loves like Thee,
No mother, e'er so mild,
Bears and forbears as Thou hast done,
With me, Thy sinful child.

Only to sit and think of God,
Oh, what a joy it is!
To think the thought, to breathe the Name,
Earth has no higher bliss.

Father of Jesus, love's Reward!
What rapture it will be
Prostrate before Thy throne to lie,
And gaze, and gaze on Thee!

The fear of God does not impede our enjoyment of God. In fact, those who fear God enjoy Him most, for the election of vessels of mercy is designed to display the riches of God's glorious grace. The salvation of the elect astonishes angels (1 Pet 1:12). The saint who truly comprehends these things will be humbled, thrilled, and motivated. The saint who understands something of the scope of God's sovereignty will not look at history as he once did. He will not view current events within a context of

business as usual. Instead he will see each person's part in the "Grand Demonstration" as described in Romans 9:14-29).

This grand demonstration described in Romans chapter nine is about God showcasing His justice and grace in human history, and ultimately at the consummation of the ages. "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (Rom 9:22).

By choosing 'vessels of mercy' and ***by passing over vessels of wrath, leaving them to be hardened, God is making every single human being an eternal 'object lesson' to the watching universe*** (the holy angels). These insights move the saint to a more God-centered way of thinking. God's nature is made known in His response to evil. For from the "same lump" of depraved humanity, God fashions vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. ***God's glory is displayed in the destiny of these vessels.*** In our man-centered culture, even Christians must learn that God always acts in His own interest. God's decree is inseparable from His intent to glorify Himself. Shall God make the universe, and then have it fail to bring glory to Him (Jonathan Edwards, "The End for which God created the World")?

The universe was made for God—to declare His praise. He filled it with an angelic audience. These rational moral beings (the rational universe) make up the heavenly host that is witness to all of God's works. Creation, the Noahic flood, and the Crucifixion are spectacles witnessed by angels. Each of these comprises a stage in the "Grand Demonstration" spoken of in Romans nine. What is man? What is his part in the "Grand Demonstration?" How we need a very humbling view of man's insignificance. What a poignant reminder that man exists for God's glory and pleasure.

When life is viewed within the framework of the "Grand Demonstration," it will imbue gospel preaching with urgency. It will emphasize the present patience of God in delaying the Second Advent of Christ (Rom 2:4). It will display the terrifying prospect of an endless stream of wrath issuing from the throne of God (Dan 7:10). It will exalt the wealth of God's grace that saves men but not angels (Heb 2:16). It will magnify the glorious state where saints are above angels (Heb 2:5ff.). And it will reiterate that all God does in time and eternity is done under the eye of angels. On the last day, the elect are acquitted before angels and the damned are condemned in the presence of angels (Lu 12:8-9) (*The Grand Demonstration*, Jay Adams).

Currently it is in vogue in our culture to question God and His motives. In Romans 9, Paul gives a rebuke to those who do so. In this age of arrogance and *selfism*, men have no thoughts of their own ill-desert; they seldom reflect upon the obedience and worship that they owe God. Consequently they question God's right to ordain events and to judge. Such 'back-talk' by a creature is as absurd as a clay pot arguing with the potter (Rom 9:20ff.).

God's right over the works of His hands is absolute. He determines what is ultimately right or wrong—He is the standard of righteousness. All goodness from Him to the creature is a matter of grace. Sinners are morally deformed—as such they distort the ways of God and call into question His fairness. Such activity reveals the fact that they have no sentiment for God's all-encompassing design to glorify Himself. Nothing changes the self-orientation of the sinner but the new birth.

In His longsuffering and patience, for the time being, God bears with sin for holy and wise purposes. "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?" (Rom 9:22ff.). All things He does are according to the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11). He answers to no one. The unbeliever cries "fatalism!" Such a charge is made out of ignorance. For man's acts are free acts.

Men act out of who and what they are (by nature). God's decree does not compel and coerce them against their desires. Men and women are 'free moral agents'—God's sovereignty does not kill the freeness of their choices but establishes it. What a sobering thought this is that God vests our decisions with eternal significance.

Men are not pawns or robots; they do not do what they do not wish to do. God's predestination establishes human free agency. God affirms the choices men make—in other words, He makes them stick, He honors those choices. In God's moral universe sowing and reaping are ineffably joined (Gal 6:7ff.) Without this principle, love would not emanate from free choices, and without this human liberty, moral responsibility would be fiction. When men sin willfully they violate God's directive will. But human sin is within the decretive will of God—at first blush that appears to be a contradiction.

Confusion issues from a misunderstanding of human freedom. God's decree does not eliminate human freedom, but protects it. For God has determined that history shall move in a precise fashion toward a predetermined end. BUT his divine plan shall realize its terminus or conclusion through the use of means. The means are nothing less than free acts of men.

This truth is vividly illustrated by the acts of Pharaoh (Rom 9:17) and actions of the enemies of Christ (Acts 2:22-24; 4:27-28). Pharaoh did exactly what he wanted to do; namely defy Moses, Yahweh's representative. Pharaoh's obstinance proved to be the means through which God performs all ten plagues through Moses. But, let us remember that while Moses is standing near the burning bush, God reveals a facet of His decretive will to His servant: "So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My miracles which I shall do in the midst of it; and after that he will let you go" (Ex 3:20).

Pharaoh's wickedness becomes the stage or backdrop upon which God broadcasts the glory, power, and knowledge of His Name. "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH" (Rom 9:17).

First and foremost this doctrine of God's sovereignty over evil is doxological—that is, it is intended to inspire worship, awe, and praise. God's "Grand Demonstration" will not be complete until the last elect person is safe in glory and the last reprobate is confined in perdition. Then, the destiny that is deserved shall magnify God's justice and the endless blessedness that is undeserved shall magnify His mercy and grace. The themes associated with God's sovereignty ought to be incorporated into our worship, Scripture meditation, and preaching:

- 1.) God will surely receive the glory for all His works—the sin of men and angels will not thwart this eternal purpose.
- 2.) God's purpose is not only to glorify His grace, but also to exhibit sin as ruinous, shameful, and deserving of eternal wrath.
- 3.) From the same 'lump' of depraved humanity God has formed vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor.
- 4.) The course of history is accomplishing God's "Grand Demonstration." History controlled by God is the differentiating of vessels (i.e. those of honor and those of dishonor) (Jay Adams, *The Grand Demonstration*).

To summarize, our Holy God made us for Himself and it is by redemption that we are enabled to 'come home to God'. Because God is both holiness and love, the only way He could have eternal

fellowship with men born in sin is if that sin is put away decisively (1 Jn 3:5-8). Now because God is holy and we are not, the experience of His love is often out of reach for us because we are so easily controlled by fear and guilt.

When we reason from what we are in ourselves up to God, there is little room for optimism that God wishes to pour out His love and benevolence upon us. But, when by the gospel we reason down from who God is toward us in Christ, everything changes. We see that God Himself, from His side has pierced the sin barrier and brought us into full and free confident access to Himself (Eph 3:12).

Our satisfaction in God depends upon us knowing that ‘God is the gospel’ as Piper says. In other words, the gospel gives us what was lost in the fall—the glory of God. To have the glory of God is to have everything. This is one of the most difficult concepts for us to grasp—that is God’s intent to share Himself with us eternally (for our endless bliss and His glory) (Ps 16).

In sending Christ to earth, God has done everything necessary in order for Him to ‘export’ the wealth of the joy of the Godhead into our experience. Knowing this is pivotal to satisfaction in God. All false religion is man-centered because it never rises above the sinner’s efforts to: *placate God, mollify God, propitiate God, obligate God, protect oneself from God, serve God (as our Client), etc.*

The gospel is about God clearing away sin in order for us to enjoy His love. The ongoing enjoyment of His love is to be the animating principle of the Christian life. Thus knowing that God propitiates His own wrath in order to satisfy His just demands in order that we might have ultimate satisfaction in Him is pivotal in our endeavor to be satisfied in Him (1 Jn 4:7-19). ***This alone—the work of Christ at the cross is at the heart of God-centered piety.*** This is why only the gospel can take us off of ourselves (our debilitating self-focus, self-consciousness, self-adulation, and self-condemnation).

The gospel sets us free to be ‘God-occupied’ and controlled by His love: “So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:17-19).

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Cor 5:14-15).

“In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).

“We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us” (1 Jn 4:16-19).

“See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 Jn 3:1).

Key Points

- The cause of God pursuing His glory is now forever joined to our redemption in Christ.
- Worldliness is actually the scorning of God’s promises and turning to false sources.
- Doubting Christians have a view of God NOT based upon God’s satisfaction in Himself, and the satisfaction He has wrought in Christ.

- The satisfaction that Christ accomplished on the cross brings us ALL the way to God.
- Thus, God has propitiated His own wrath and has cleared away the liabilities that would block our enjoyment of Him and His love—He has removed ALL our liabilities in order to love us freely.
- God is glorified and magnified in Christ's satisfaction, and God takes delight in us as we take refuge in Christ.
- The best way to glorify God is to keep believing the gospel and then to present yourself to Him daily as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2).