Section: Doctrine of God

**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q8. What is the glory of God?**

The glory of God is His holiness, infinite beauty, and the greatness of His limitless perfection shining out to all of creation.

## Greetings

Good evening, I pray that you’ve been enjoying our study through the catechism. It’s been a blessing to hear feedback from many of you. Tonight, I have the task of speaking on the glory of God. As we work through many of these doctrinal points, please do not hesitate to reach out to the elders or the teaching team if you have questions. I know that I would love to sit and speak to you in person about these things, and I’m sure the rest of the team would as well.

## Introduction

When it comes to the glory of God, we should look to the holy scriptures to give us a helpful description. For example, consider some words used in the Bible for glory. One Old Testament word for glory refers to the person who is weighty, significant, important. Also, in use is a word which denotes the splendid appearance of one whose name is known far and wide, while another word in the text describes the splendor and beauty of that appearance. The Greek equivalent used in the Septuagint and the New Testament is a word that lifts up the recognition a person receives or is entitled to receive, the fame or honor that person enjoys.

And even then, the Word is describing something about God that is much bigger than what human language can fully communicate. Scripture points to the *reality* of the glory of God, but while knowable, the *fullness* of the glory of God is rightly unfathomable to created beings *because* it is an emanation of God’s character. Only God himself can fully grasp the fullness of His glory. Thus, we are reliant upon the Word to instruct us on this topic. In Scripture, we find awesome declarations of God’s glory and we find it also pointing us to God’s creation for displays of God’s glory. That means that we see glimpses of His glory manifested through creation. Because of that, I think it will be helpful to start off tonight with an illustration.

When I first wrote this three years ago, I used this illustration which involved my then 8-month-old daughter, who will be four next month. I considered removing it and using a different illustration, but after thinking it through, I want to use it tonight because it is still helpful.

The glory of God is ***like*** this picture of my infant daughter:

To be clear, nothing I put on this screen can fully depict God’s glory. But, as one theologian has put it, “*Like all God’s perfections, so also that of God’s glory is reflected in his creatures. It is communicable. In the created world there is a faint reflection of the inexpressible glory and majesty that God possesses. Just as the contemplation of God’s creatures directs our attention upward and prompts us to speak of God’s eternity and omnipresence, his righteousness and grace, so it also gives us a glimpse of God’s glory. What we have here, however, is analogy, not identity*.”

When Emma was an infant, she would delight in Blanca’s presence when my wife would enter the room. She would look at Blanca and become overjoyed. In that moment, Emma was delighting in her mom.

Simply put, Blanca was transmitting a type of radiance or giving off something that Emma was (and still is) uniquely gifted to receive or appreciate.

These examples should require us to dig a little deeper and ask, “What was happening here?”

Why did Emma experience joy when Blanca came into the room?

Let’s look at Blanca. Who is she? She is a great mother; she provides Emma with care, love, compassion, empathy, instruction, discipline, nourishment, etc. These attributes are part of Blanca’s character, and in this situation, Emma is uniquely gifted to perceive them.

In our example, Emma responded with joy when Blanca entered the room *because* of Blanca’s character. Likewise, when we perceive God’s glory as it is manifested to us in various ways, we often respond with awe, reverence, fear, and joy.

One’s glory is directly tied to one’s nature. Let’s think about God’s nature: God is holy. God is spirit. God is sovereign. God is immutable. God is wrath. God is love. These aspects of His nature are reflected outward into creation.

As Psalm 19:1 states, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.’ The creation is reflecting God’s glory.

We cannot directly see light. It has no mass, it is immaterial. Yet, we see its reflection on nearly everything. The glory of God is like this. We cannot really see the glory of God, as though it is something that we can measure and dissect, however all humans see and experience God’s goodness manifested in creation. We see His glory everywhere! And all **Christians** perceive the glory of God in His grace to us--through our adoption as sons and heirs.

Our catechism answer tonight says, *The glory of God is His holiness, infinite beauty, and the greatness of His limitless perfection shining out to all of creation.*

19th century Christian Theologian Herman Bavinck is renowned for his work teaching about God’s attributes. I’ll quote him some tonight, and we’ll look now at a quote that parallels what I’ve said so far and our catechism answer. Bavinck says, “*The “glory of the Lord” is the splendor and brilliance that is inseparably associated with all of God’s attributes and his self-revelation in nature and grace, the glorious form in which he everywhere appears to his creatures.*

*This glory and majesty in which God is clothed and which characterizes all his activities, though manifest throughout his creation, is nevertheless especially visible in the realm of grace.*”

Back to our catechism answer we see it specify a few things, so let’s consider them, let’s first look at his Holiness.

## Holiness

Perhaps one of the most amazing displays of God’s glory is found in Isaiah 6:3. In the sixth chapter of Isaiah, we see Isaiah’s vision of the Holy God.

“And one called to another and said: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

The first section of this chapter is characterized as ‘the prophet’s vision’, in which Isaiah describes the revelation of the Lord of hosts exalted in the temple and praised by the seraphim (6:1-4).

God’s holiness is difficult for us to rightly understand because it is not an attribute that we inherit from Adam. God’s holiness is His unique set-apart-ness, it is the sum of His perfections and the sum of what makes God wholly unique—wholly above us, better than us, other than us. Mankind is also called to holiness and it should jolt us into the humble realization that only the holy will see God when they die. Holiness is an absolute necessity to be in relationship with God.

For instance, Hebrews 12:14 says, Strive for peace with everyone, and *for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord*.

In the book of Isaiah, we witness the bitter reminder of God’s glory departing from the temple due to Israel’s sin. God will not and cannot dwell with and tolerate sin. His holiness forbids it. This reality helps us understand Isaiah’s reaction in our passage.

Isa 6:4-5 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 And I (Isaiah) said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

*Woe is me. I am lost. My lips are unclean*. Isaiah rightly understood the majesty of God’s holiness and it scared Him because to be in the presence of the Holy God with indwelling sin is to be destroyed by His righteous purity! Our destitute sin cannot exist in communion with a holy God.

But read further, it just gets better and better!

Isa 6:6-7 Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

This verse is a pre-incarnate Old Testament look into how God deals with our sin through the atonement. In Isaiah’s vision, God graciously provided him with the righteousness required that He himself demanded! God imputed Jesus’ righteousness to Isaiah through the promise of Christ’s atoning work on the cross.

How majestic is our God that requires that we be holy *in order to* teach of us His unique character! Isaiah’s salvation did not lessen his appreciation for God’s holy character. No, it would only drop him to his feet in humble adoration. God’s salvation through Christ is the means by which we progressively appreciate His holy character and the means by which we grow in holiness unto final glorification.

Again, Isaiah 6:3 says, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!”

John Gill taught of this verse that the earth was full of God’s glory especially when Christ dwelt bodily on it, when he performed miracles and manifested His glory. But Christ’s ascension did not remove God’s glory from the earth! Through the faithful teaching of the Apostles and the Church, we continue to herald His gospel unto all the nations. We do so until ‘the whole earth is full of God’s glory’ and Jesus returns in power.

The whole earth is being filled with God’s glory precisely because of the manifestation of Christ!

## God’s Beauty

Let’s again look at the catechism answer, which says: *the glory of God is His holiness, infinite beauty, and the greatness of His limitless perfection shining out to all of creation.*

I want to next speak about beauty. But, what exactly is beauty? It may be helpful to define beauty. MERRIAM-WEBSTER DICTIONARY says it is the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit.

Beauty, human beauty, is always subjective. It is fluid and it changes from person to person. I’m not interested in human beauty tonight, however it points us to God, which is where our focus is tonight. Bavinck again says, *“The pinnacle of beauty, the beauty toward which all creatures point, is God.”*

So, I want to ask the question, “What is divine beauty?” We cannot say that divine beauty is subjective. God is the standard by which we understand what true beauty is. So then, divine beauty is the full display of God’s character and attributes from all eternity. God is beautiful. He is beautiful because of who He is. To these points, Bavinck again, *“[God] is supreme being, supreme truth, supreme goodness,* ***and also the apex of unchanging beauty****. ‘Who is it that made these changeable things beautiful if not the unchangeably beautiful One?’ God is the highest beauty, because in his being is absolute oneness, measure, and order. He is lacking in nothing, nor is there anything superfluous in him.”*

Therefore, God’s characteristics and attributes are all beautiful because they are essential to His nature—His unchanging essence.

We saw in Scripture that His beauty is uniquely made manifest to us through creation!

Again, Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”

John Piper says of this verse, “[God] shouts with clouds. He shouts with blue expanse. He shouts with gold on the horizons. He shouts with galaxies and stars. He is shouting. I am glorious. Open your eyes. It is like this only better if you know me. And, the Bible says, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty. The whole earth is full of his glory. If you had eyes to see in this room, you would see the glory of God everywhere. We need eyes. We need eyes more than we need anything. The God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the knowledge of the glory of Christ in the gospel.”

The point is this, creation is magnificent, it reflects God’s beauty! Often when we think of the beauty of God, perhaps we think only of the mountains, seas and rivers. But, God also reveals His beauty to us through His Holy Word.

William Keach says of this, “there are greater and more evident impressions of divine excellencies left on (IN) the written word, from the infinite wisdom of the Author of it, than any that are communicated unto the works of God in the creation of the world.”

The scriptures are in an entirely different league as compared to the creation as they are the very word of our omniscient, fully wise and beautiful God. We can study the Holy Scriptures for millennia and not exhaust their meaning! David says later in Psalm 19:10, speaking of God’s law, that it was ‘more to be desired ~~are they~~ than gold, even much fine gold; (that God’s law was) sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.’

But all of God’s beauty in creation and through special revelation are tools by which God has decreed we would see and savor Him, not merely as invisible spirit, but as the God-man. The man who radiates the full glory of God, Jesus Christ.

So, let us echo Piper and Keach, we are desperate to see His unveiled beauty!

## Limitless Perfection

Let’s again look at the catechism answer, which says: the glory of God is His holiness, infinite beauty, and **the greatness of His limitless perfection** shining out to all of creation.

What is perfection? The word perfect essentially means finished or complete and without flaw. And we know this about God, He is self-existent, full and without imperfections. He isn’t like created false-gods, He just simply exists. That means that whatever God is, He is perfection because all definitions of perfection are contrasted against Him. He is the standard by which we even know what perfection looks like! If God says a thing is good, that thing is good because God has said so. He is fundamental to our understanding of good/bad and right/wrong!

Benjamin Keach says, “God is a perfect pattern to all his children; those perfections and excellencies of the Divine Being that are communicable are set before us for our imitation, and though we should do our best to be as like him as we can, yet when we have done all, and gone as high as we are capable to go by the assistance of grace, we shall, notwithstanding, infinitely fall short of that perfect copy [Christ]”

It stands that His perfections are limitless, that is, God is not limited as we are limited. God is omnipotent and fully free to do as He pleases. Thus, His limitless perfections are automatically great, just as we could simply say that His holiness or infinite beauty testify of His greatness. Bavinck says, “*Manifest in God’s glory is his sublime greatness…*” He *is* the epitome of greatness. He is God. Amen.

## Shining Out

And finally, Habakkuk 2:14 says “For the earth will be **filled** with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”

The Habakkuk verse continues in the same vein as the Psalm verse I read earlier. The glory of God **radiates** from His Holiness **throughout** the entire world, these things **testify** of God.

God’s glory radiates outward, it fills the world and it shines outward. The bible employs metaphoric language to help us understand, in human terms and concepts, how the glory of God is manifested in the world.

Fundamentally, it is helpful for us to see that in Christ, we see the fullness of God’s glory dwelling in man. When the bible speaks of how the earth declares the glory of God or how the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, it is pointing to the prophetic reality of how Jesus will save the elect of God through His substitutionary atonement, how Jesus will return to earth in power at His second coming to vanquish all evil and how the church will shine His glory out into a broken world in order to bring God’s people to Him.

## Who values His glory?

Bavinck says “*It is called “greatness” … insofar as it elicits in creatures their worshipful admiration and adoration. It is called “glorious” insofar as it elicits gratitude, praise, and honor. It is called “majesty” insofar as it is bound up with his absolute dignity and demands submission from all creatures.*”

But who responds properly like this? Now that we have a better understanding of what the glory of God is, let’s talk about who can value it and who cannot value it.

First, God is gracious to all of mankind in that He displays His glory throughout all of creation. But because of sin, mankind as a whole turns away from God’s glory in order to seek self-glory or glory in created things.

Turn with me to Romans 1:18-25.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”

Did you see that? “God has shown it to them” but “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for” creation. Sin makes mankind hate God, and turn to other things. But God will not tolerate this, as we read in: *Isaiah 42:8 “ I am the LORD; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.”*

God’s glory is made known through creation and He shows, what is sometimes called common grace to those who do not love him.

We see this in Matthew 5:45, “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

But because of their hardened spiritually dead hearts unbelievers do not see God’s glory as something valuable. Mankind has turned from God and sought their own way, which we have all done. However, God has preordained the solution. Through Christ, He will show undeserved favor, as decreed before the foundation of world, on some. This is saving grace.

Turn with me to Exodus 33. We’re going to start in verse 18.

18 Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” 19 And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” 21 And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

The special partial revealing of the glory of God for Moses in this context is not revealed to someone who is unregenerate, or *not saved*. What we see is God showing favor to Moses in verse 17. In the verse directly prior to the section we just read, God says, “you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” Let’s look closely at this favor, at this grace:

In verse 19 God refers to his glory as his goodness. What is interesting is that God says in the very next verse “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy”. We should understand that God’s sovereignty and will in all things is a good thing. God’s choosing of saving grace and mercy on some and not others is God’s good, perfect, and glorious will.

In verse 20 we see that the fullness of God’s glory will cause even the most righteous living men to die. The text says, “man shall not see me and live.” Why? God’s glory, if fully revealed to men in their fallen state, will cause men to die. We are unrighteous before a Holy God. Our sinfulness cannot stand with a righteous God. Until a human is made sinless, he cannot see or survive the glory of God, more fully revealed.

Moses found favor in God’s sight not by anything Moses had done. He was justified by Christ, just as we are. And like Moses, in order for us to be able to see God in glory, we need to stand on the true Rock, who is Christ. Without Christ we cannot rightly see or savingly know who God is. Our minds are veiled to His glory. We have no concept of the beauty of His attributes. It is only through Christ’s perfect atoning sacrifice for His elect that we can know God.

For those of us who are believers, we have been given a new heart. Ezekiel 36:26 says, And I [God] will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. God has caused us to be born again. And because of our salvation, we are able to enjoy the glory of God and anticipate the unveiled experience of it that Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 13:12 “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.”

Paul’s words testify of the coming reality, when it truly will be better for us. When our salvation is complete, when God gives us a made-new body, a immutably sinless nature, and more fully reveals his presence, we “shall know fully” and we will experience His glory in ways we can't even imagine! This process is called “final glorification” and we will study that in more detail later in the catechism.

But what about those who reject God? If we go back to my original illustration. You may have noticed that I said that Emma was uniquely gifted to receive Blanca’s glory. Likewise, if Christ has saved you, then you *will* acknowledge and enjoy God’s glory as an amazing and wonderful thing. But, to those people who aren’t saved, they will not understand God’s glory, rather, it will confound them and confuse them. It will produce no fruit.

To those who do not submit to the King of the Universe, Jesus is just a historical figure who is no different than any other man who has lived. And to those people, God’s glory is like that, it makes no sense. To those who have rejected God, would be all of us apart from Christ’s work on our behalf, they have clearly perceived the glory of God in the stars, in the universe, in the mountains and in the oceans. But, although the creation may spark awe and reverence, in their worldview it is nothing but natural processes and accidents in a mindless universe that is simply matter in motion. It is madness.

God’s glory is His perfection that shines out into all creation, but only those who have become new creations in Christ will value it. It is supremely valuable for us who are being conformed into the image of Christ and will eventually be glorified in heaven.

## Putting glory on display as Christians

As we’ve seen, God’s glory is the summation of His holiness, infinite beauty and the greatness of His limitless perfection shining out to all creation. We as believers are to understand that we show the world God’s glory by honoring God through submission to His commands. By God’s sanctifying grace working through us, our good and righteous works put on display God’s glory. But, this glory is a vertical glory that points others to God, it is not a selfish glory which points others to us.

Let’s look at Matthew 5:14-16 “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Christ is saying: If you have been made alive, given a new heart, saved by grace, you are to be a light to the watching world. You are to be a set apart people. You are to shine before others as something different from them. And, if God’s grace is real in you, you *will* have faith empowered works which put on display His holiness. Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory. As we’ve been adopted by God the Father because of the atoning work of Jesus, we are now able to reflect the radiance of Christ outward to all men.

B. B. Warfield, in his book The Lord of Glory says, “Jesus was the glory of God, the shekinah. According to the Old Testament, the shekinah was the visible manifestation of the invisible God. The shekinah was a radiant cloud or brilliant light within a cloud that signaled the immediate presence of God. For Jesus to be identified with the shekinah was to be equated with the presence of God Himself. In Jesus we see the full manifestation of the majesty of God.”

It should be a remarkable reality to every Christian that God took on flesh through the incarnation of Christ, and that He had the full glory of God dwelling in Him. Our Lord Jesus is God’s glory manifest in human form!

We are saved not by the deeds of some prophet who was merely a man. No, we are saved by the work of The God-man, the one who is God in the flesh. Let this drive our witness, let this empower our gospel proclamation. We preach not as beggars who need the world to hear our message, no we preach as emissaries of the One True God who will work through us to draw His people to Himself. We carry with us the power of God, dwelling in us.

## Application & Conclusion

I want to finish by talking about the effects of God’s glory in our lives. The scriptures are written so that God’s people would have saving knowledge, that we would know that we are highly exalted by God. But, in numerous places in the New Testament it is reiterated that our walk will be marked by persecution and suffering.

We see this clearly stated in Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

We will suffer with Christ. How did He suffer? He was persecuted by the world, by those who hated God. But my friends, is there not hope in these verses? Our suffering is not the hallmark of our lives. It is what God is doing through our suffering that should be the hallmark of our lives. We suffer with Jesus in order that we may also be glorified with Him. Will this life be a challenge? Absolutely. But the New Testament narrative is quick to remind us that we are going somewhere. We are running a race, we are being transformed from one degree of glory to the next, our minds are being renewed, etc.

So be encouraged to know that as God’s chosen people, you will be glorified in heaven! We will share in God’s glory. What does that mean exactly? It’s difficult to know particularly, but just as we studied earlier, we will be made perfectly Holy ourselves and thus emanate a type of glory given to us by the Father. This glorification we will experience isn’t about us (for our fame, pride, etc), rather it’s for our good BUT about God’s name and glory. We have much to look forward to. We will, because of Jesus, be glorified and live forever with God.

As we encounter persecution, sinful temptation and fleshly desires, I believe God’s glory to be central in our perseverance. So often we become burdened by the waves of suffering that crash over us. So often we fall to our own moral failures. So often these things take hold in our lives. What breaks us out of this rut? My friends, it is the beholding of God’s glory.

We can be like the man in Psalm 1:2, but his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

I would like to close by reading Psalm 23, verse 4.

*4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, 3 I will fear no evil,*

*For you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*

Even though we will suffer and experience intense trial, we shall fear no evil. Why? Because the sovereign Lord, who is over the smallest details in the universe, He loves you. Indeed, He has chosen you prior to the foundation of the world through the covenant of redemption! He has dispatched Christ as the unblemished lamb for your sin. Why? He wasn’t forced to do that. It is merely by His free grace.

He is with us in those dark times. The sovereign God who effortlessly birthed all of the universe by His word. It would take you 25,000 years to get to the closest galaxy. Think how insignificant that makes us in the eyes of God. But, what do we know? We know that we’re not insignificant. Because of His goodness, His glory, He has made a way for sinners. Oh, how I pray that we would let the sovereign nature of God fill our hearts as we walk through trial.

And finally, we see in this psalm that God’s rod and staff comforts us. The rod and staff are the corrective tools that conform us to the image of Jesus. How great is our God that He would adopt us and purify us to be *like* the radiance of His glory, Jesus Christ!

Do you see God’s glory? It is not some minimal concept that has no bearing on your life. It’s anything but that. For those whom God has sovereignly elected, it is the fuel to get us through life.

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.

Let’s pray.