

The Glory of God in 2 Corinthians

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I cannot expect to understand the mysteries of God ... If I understood God, He could not be the true God. A doctrine which I cannot fully grasp is a Truth of God which is intended to grasp me. When I cannot climb, I kneel. Where I cannot build an observatory, I set up an altar. A great stone which I cannot lift serves me for a pillar, upon which I pour the oil of gratitude and adore the Lord my God. How idle it is to dream of our ever running parallel in understanding with the infinite God! His knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is so high—we cannot attain to it.²

We can study nothing as monumental or overwhelming as our glorious God. Yet through creation, humanity, his Word, and Jesus himself, God has graciously revealed himself—and his glory—to us. Although God has not spoken

exhaustively, he has spoken truly and sufficiently to us as his image-bearers. So while the depths of God and his glory will remain out of our reach, by God's grace and through his revelation we can and do know in part.

One particularly helpful glimpse into God's glory is 2 Corinthians, which contains twenty-one references to the term (counting both nominal and verbal forms; see 2 Cor 1:20; 3:7 (x2), 8, 9 (x2), 10 (x3), 11 (x2), 18 (x3); 4:4, 6, 15, 17; 6:8; 8:19, 23). Glory is a vital theme in 2 Corinthians,³ pulling together the letter in particular ways. First, 2 Corinthians 3:1–4:6 stands as a key to the book, and “glory” is central to that passage. Second, glory relates to one of the main threads throughout the book—the contrast between Paul's boasts and commendations on the basis of the gospel, on the one hand, and the super-apostles' claims based on their own personality, on the other. Paul boasts, commends, and is commended—he gives and receives glory—on the basis of the gospel, not on the basis of his own roles, gifts, or accomplishments.⁴ Third, the uses of glory in 1:20; 4:15, 17; and 8:19, 23 culminate Paul's statements about the purpose of ministry—to glorify God in Christ. Because much of the book centers on the legitimacy and purpose of Paul's ministry, and since God's glory stands as his ministry's ultimate purpose, glory plays an important role in the letter's argument.

This essay traces Paul's teachings about glory in 2 Corinthians: first, on the basis of explicit uses of the term, and second, on thematic elements related to it. The explicit uses are treated under three broad categories: the glory of God (glory not ascribed, or without any reference to a creature giving it to him), the glory of God's people, and glory to God (glory ascribed, or with reference to creaturely worship). Along the way we will see the meaning(s) of glory in 2 Corinthians and that glory serves as an important thematic and theological thread tying the book together.

PAUL'S USE OF THE TERM “GLORY”

The Glory of God

Explicit reference to the glory of God, without a reference to a creature giving it to him, is found clustered in the middle of 2 Corinthians—3:7–18—and its corollary arguments in 4:1–18. This portion of the letter is one of the main hinges of Paul's argument, weaving together the two overarching concerns of the epistle, namely, the veracity of the gospel and the validity of his

apostleship.⁵ While the issues surrounding this passage are complex,⁶ we can say with relative certainty that Paul wants to show the glory of the new covenant superseding that of the old covenant, meaning that his ministry is valid while his opponents' are not.⁷ In making that contrast, Paul compares the (lesser) glory of the old covenant and the ministry of Moses with the (greater) glory of the new covenant and the ministry of the Spirit (vv. 7–11). The vast majority of the references to “glory” in this section occur here, and each mentions God’s glory being given to him by a creature.

The references to God’s glory apart from any mention of a creature giving it to him come later, first in the climax of the covenantal contrast in 3:18, and then in the subsequent argument of 4:1–6. In concluding the first part of his argument, Paul says that members of the new covenant are, by the Spirit’s power in Christ, able to behold “the glory of the Lord,” and thereby are changed “into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (v. 18). We will deal with the latter phrase in the section below, but for now it is enough to say that the phrases “glory of the Lord” (*doxan kuriou*) and “the same image” (*tēn autēn eikona*) are synonymous.⁸ The glory of God in the ministry of the new covenant, and the glory that believers are being changed into, is the glory of Jesus Christ.

The other two references to God’s glory apart from any mention of him receiving it occur in the next section of this passage, 4:1–6. Here Paul refers to the good news as “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (v. 4). Two verses later he again discusses conversion, describing it as coming to the “knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6). Both of these references connect the gospel and the incarnation of the Son to the glory of God. For Paul, God’s glory is seen in Christ, specifically in his work of salvation in his life, death, and resurrection for both Jew and Gentile—the content of the gospel and apostolic proclamation.⁹ Paul here reveals a revelatory dimension to God’s glory: it is ultimately seen through the incarnate Christ and his saving work. Indeed, seeing the Father’s glory in the face of Jesus Christ is the content of the good news. Or, as Richard Gaffin puts it, “2 Corinthians 4:4–6 affirms that divine glory has found its focused manifestation and ... its full and final manifestation in Jesus Christ as Lord. Further, the glory-manifestation that Christ is specifies the content of Paul’s gospel.”¹⁰

The Glory of God's People

Explicit reference to creaturely glory without corresponding reference to a giver of that glory is again clustered in 3:7–4:18. There is also a clear mention in 8:23. First, as we have already noted, Paul shows that the glory of the new covenant is such that it exceedingly surpasses the glory of the old covenant (v. 10).¹¹ In chapter 4, Paul uses the term “glory” in 4:4, 6, 15, 17, and 18. Here we are concerned primarily with the latter two references, but first note Paul’s discussion of “treasure in jars of clay” beginning in 4:7. While there is no mention in these verses of the term “glory,” the treasure is likely “the gospel of the glory of Christ” or the “glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”¹² Paul is conveying a point he will repeat in 2 Corinthians: God’s power is seen through human weakness.

Paul then lays out this theology of weakness, making it explicit in 4:17, where he says that he, the apostles, and those who preach the gospel experience momentary affliction in preparation for “an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”¹³ The renewal of the inner self in v. 16 and the eternal, unseen things in v. 18 refer to the glorification of believers at Christ’s return (e.g., 5:1–11; Rom 8:18–30; 1 John 3:2).¹⁴ Such future glory fosters present hope, especially for those suffering for the gospel. Notice again that glory, in this case the future glorified state of believers, is still connected both to the preaching of the gospel and to Christ.

The other mention of someone’s glory besides God’s occurs in 8:23, where Paul says that “our brothers are messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ.” Murray Harris argues rightly that the last phrase is a reference to Titus and the other two unnamed messengers¹⁵ commended to the Corinthian church in 8:16–24.¹⁶ This means the phrase’s referent is to the messengers’ work of gospel ministry; it is this ministry of the new covenant that is the glory of Christ.

One other sense in which we see Paul, the apostles, and the churches having glory or being glorified is through the book’s refrain of boasting in (1:14; 5:12; 7:14–16; 10:7–12:21) or being commended by (3:16; 5:12; 6:3–13; 8:18) the Lord and his gospel rather than in or by human hands. While there is little mention of glory in these contexts,¹⁷ it is not hard to see the relationship between the concepts.¹⁸ George Guthrie is among those who tie them explicitly together, using the corresponding contrast of honor/shame, noting that the Corinthian culture and the larger Greco-Roman world were

inordinately occupied with social status, social acknowledgement, and their position.¹⁹ For Paul, defending his apostleship to the Corinthians would have fallen into this realm of concern, but Paul does so with a twist—by boasting in his weaknesses and commending himself on the basis of his afflictions.²⁰ The contexts of such statements, and in particular those of 4:7–18 and 10:7–12:21, reveal why: Paul’s boasting is in God’s power and not his own. In both of these passages, Paul links his afflictions to God’s power in the midst of his weakness.

Further, if we take Martin’s point that the verb for “rest” in 12:10—*episkēnōsēi*—is likely a reference to the “Hebrew concept concerning the presence of God as it was found in the Jewish Tabernacle and first Temple,” i.e., the *shekinah* glory,²¹ then we have a direct link between the boasting of Paul and God’s glory. That link is further strengthened by Jason Hood’s argument that the “third heaven” language in 12:2ff. is reminiscent of the “common triadic sanctuary arrangements on earth (the Garden-Eden-outermost uninhabited land trio ... reflected in Sinai, the tabernacle, and the Jerusalem temple).”²² In other words, Paul in 12:1–6 recounts an experience of being taken to a place reminiscent of, or perhaps synonymous with, the Garden and the Holy of Holies, and in 12:7–10 he refers to the tabernacle-ing presence of God resting on him in his weakness. All of 12:1–10 is thus seen through a tabernacle lens, so to speak, and therefore is flush with the presence of God’s glory, both literarily and conceptually. In seeing Paul’s weakness, then, we see God’s power, and thus his glory.²³ Because he acknowledges his own weakness, fragility, and frailty, this “makes Paul most translucent so that one can see the source of the real power and light.”²⁴ In other words, God’s glory shines through Paul when he acknowledges, boasts about, and commends himself because of his own weakness (see likewise the “treasure in jars of clay” of 4:7). Further, Paul’s weakness is patterned after and participates in Christ’s “strength through weakness,” and so is a display of Christ *and* of his glorious power.²⁵

The glory of God in 2 Corinthians, then, is “not just referring to a radiance or a shining appearance but to the very manifestation on earth of the presence of God,”²⁶ especially in Jesus, and therefore is the demonstration of who he is and what he has done, to the praise of his name; likewise Paul, the apostles, and the churches can boast and be commended because of who they are and what they do. The key difference, though, is that God is who he is because

he is I AM; Paul, the apostles, and the church, on the other hand, are who they are because of the grace of God through the gospel of the Lord Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.²⁷ And this is exactly Paul's point; he and his brothers and sisters in Christ can boast, but only in Christ and his saving work. Once again we see that same threefold thread—glory, Christ, and the gospel—running through important themes, boasting and commendation.

Glory to God

Finally, some passages speak of Paul, the apostles, the church, and/or events giving glory to God. These include 1:20; 4:15; 8:19; 9:13–14; and possibly 2:14–17. In each case what brings God glory is the ministry of the gospel. In 1:20 and 4:15, believing and expressing thanks for²⁸ the gospel message brings God glory. In 8:19 and 9:13–14, the ministry of the gospel in both proclamation and service brings God glory. Second Corinthians 9:13–14 is particularly instructive in this regard, since *epi tē hupotagei* can and should probably be taken as a subjective genitive to *tēs homologias humōn*.²⁹ The ESV translates it well: “because of your submission which comes from your confession.” In other words, their confession—“Jesus is Lord”—results in their submission, to the ministry of service expressed in their gospel-motivated giving. The gospel that redeems them also motivates them for service, to the glory of God. Finally, in the “fragrance” metaphor of 2:14–17, whatever we conclude about the background issues,³⁰ those being led by Christ are at the same time proclaiming him and his work. Similar to 4:15, as the gospel is proclaimed, who God is in Christ is made known; in other words, God is glorified.³¹

What we see again, then, is that glory, gospel, and Christ are tied together. The gospel is tied explicitly to the testimony about Jesus Christ so that we can once again say that the threefold cord of God's glory seen in the face of Jesus Christ and particularly in his salvific work—the gospel—is at play in this third set of passages.

Synthesis: The Meaning(s) of Glory in 2 Corinthians

The previous survey not only shows the centrality of glory to the argument of 2 Corinthians, but also reveals glory used in various ways and with multiple shades of meaning:³²

- The glory of God as the ultimate purpose or result of God being exalted, worshiped, thanked, or praised (1:20; 4:15; 8:19; 9:12–15).

- The glory of God as the splendid display of God's presence (3:7–18).
- The glory of God as Christ's transformative power to change believers increasingly into conformity to him (3:17–18).
- Glory as the image of God (cf., Christ, the image of God, in 4:4) into which believers are gradually transformed (3:17–18).
- The glory of Christ as the content/focal point of the gospel itself (4:4).
- The glory of God as the covenantal, saving presence of God revealed in the person of Jesus (4:6).
- Glory as the prepared, eternal, and weighty blessings of the age to come, experienced partially now, experienced fully and bodily at the consummation, and whose value is so significant that extreme suffering seems light and momentary by comparison (4:17–5:10).
- Glory as honor, in contrast to shame (6:8).
- The glory of Christ as applied to the messengers of the churches, the meaning of which is ambiguous. The sense may be that those who come bearing the presence of Christ honor Christ, or more likely, faithfully proclaim the gospel of the glory of Christ (8:23).

THEMES RELATED TO PAUL'S USE OF "GLORY"

Having surveyed and defined Paul's use of the term "glory" in 2 Corinthians, what are its thematic and theological implications? Here we argue that in 2 Corinthians Paul relates the glory of God to several key themes, many of which are intricately interrelated: Trinity, revelation, Christ, gospel, new covenant, salvation, Spirit, eschatology, boasting, suffering, and ministry. Each relationship sheds light on Paul's understanding of glory and his overall message to the Corinthians.

Glory and the Trinity

First, Paul shows that glory is thoroughly Trinitarian, both ontologically and economically. Ontologically, all three persons of the Trinity share in the same divine essence and in the glory that shines from that essence. Without hesitation, Paul shifts from speaking of the "glory of God" (e.g., 1:20) to the "glory of Christ" (8:23), and from the glory of "the ministry of the Spirit" (3:8) to "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6). All three persons, as the one God, are intrinsically and extrinsically glorious

(how glory particularly relates to Christ and the Spirit will be developed below as separate themes).

Economically, Paul shows how the Son fulfills all the covenant promises of God, who establishes, anoints, and seals believers with the Spirit, the down payment of the future inheritance to come (1:18-22). The Spirit also points to the Son in the ministry of the new covenant (3:7-18) and when God is seen “in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6).

Glory and Revelation

Second, Paul directly links the revelation of God to glory. The revelation of God’s glory in 2 Corinthians is predominantly Christological. All the promises of God find their “Yes” in Christ (1:18-22). God revealed his presence in splendor and brilliance to Moses, and now God has revealed his presence even more fully and marvelously in Jesus (3:7-18). Further, Paul speaks of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,” Christ as “the image of God” (4:4), and salvation/new creation as “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). In each case, Paul crystallizes the content of revelation—God’s glory (3:1-4:18). And in each case, it is the Son who shows us the Father.

Paul also teaches that revelation is progressive; revelation is genuine in the old covenant but even fuller in the new (also note 1:20: “All the promises of God find their ‘Yes’” in Christ). Mikko Sivonen perceptively recognizes both how Paul links revelation to glory and how the progressive revelation ultimately culminates in Christ:

God’s revelation both in letter and stone, in the manifestation of the Law, and in the ministry of Spirit is described as δόξα for Paul. Indeed the common denominator to both is δόξα ... [T]he revelation of God at the face of Moses as δόξα is inferior to the ministry of the Spirit and temporary compared to the permanency of the ministry of Spirit of δόξα. Both glories are revelations, and both revelations are glories. Therefore, they are not as much antithetical as they are progressive and advancing.³³

Throughout 2 Corinthians Paul thus highlights that divine revelation of glory is decidedly and permanently Christological, as John Owen detects:

All communications from the divine being and infinite fullness in heaven to glorified saints are in and through Christ Jesus. He shall forever be the medium of communication between God and the church, even in glory. All things being gathered into one head in him, even things in heaven, and things in earth—that head being in immediate dependence on God—this order shall never be dissolved (Eph. 1:10,11; 1 Cor. 3:23). And on these communications from God through Christ depends entirely our continuance in a state of blessedness and glory. We shall no more be self-subsistent in glory than we are in nature or grace.³⁴

Glory and Christ

Third, Paul relates the glory of God to Christ. In 2 Corinthians Paul portrays Christ in lofty terms. He is the preexistent and incarnate redeemer who is the basis for and the example of generosity: “You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (8:9). Jesus is the sinless substitute who “knew no sin” and yet became sin so that everyone in Christ might become the righteousness of God (5:21). Jesus is meek and gentle, the example for genuine ministry (10:1). Jesus is the unique Son of God (1:3–5; 11:31), and as such is the fulfillment of all God’s promises (1:18–22). Jesus is Lord (3:16–18; 4:5) and thus assumes “the role of ‘the Lord’ in the Old Testament narrative.”³⁵

Jesus, the preexistent, sinless, unique Son of God and Lord, is also directly identified with the glory of the Lord. Indeed, believers behold the glory of Christ and are being “transformed into the glory that is Christ’s” (3:18).³⁶ Paul also identifies glory with Christ when he refers to “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4), Christ as “the image of God” (4:4), and “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (4:6). From these passages, Owen concludes, “In his incarnation he becomes the representative image of God to the church (2 Cor. 4:6); without whom our understanding can make no such approach unto the divine excellencies but that God continues to be to us what he is in himself—the “invisible God.” In the face of Jesus Christ we see his glory.”³⁷ As Son and Lord, Jesus inherently possesses divine glory and is “the true expression of God the Father’s glory and the true bearer of the divine image.”³⁸

Glory and the Gospel

Fourth, and as we have noted throughout, Paul relates the glory of God to the gospel. With respect to apostleship, those commissioned by Christ through the power of the gospel, not through their own self-effort or praise, are “messengers of the churches, the glory of Christ” (8:23). With respect to the message of the gospel, over and over again Paul proclaims the power of God, not man, in the face of weakness (e.g., 12:9–10).³⁹ Those who recognize their own weakness and Christ’s sovereignty are actually the strong, the ones on whom God’s power truly rests. With respect to gospel ministry, Paul underlines that ministry grounded on self-praise, presumptuous boasting, or self-glorification is not authentic ministry.

In 2 Corinthians true ministers of the glorious new covenant serve because of the gospel they genuinely believe. True ministers help those who are weak just as they are; find God’s strength through weakness; discover God’s grace is sufficient for life and ministry. And they do it all for the glory of God and the good of the church. In each of these—apostleship, message, ministry—we see a connection between what God gives to us in the gospel, what he does in us through the gospel, what he does through us as ambassadors of the gospel, and how he is glorified by us in that gospel service. In other words, God is glorified through redeeming us, commissioning us, and using us to serve others—all through the gospel.

Glory and the New Covenant

Fifth, and integrally related to the gospel, the new covenant is also directly linked with the glory of God. Since the exegetical section previously addressed this and since George Guthrie’s solid essay, “*Καταργέω* and the People of the Shining Face (2 Corinthians 3:7-18),” addresses the subject in this *SBJT* volume, suffice it to say here that the new covenant builds upon the old covenant, surpasses the old covenant, testifies to God’s faithfulness, culminates in Christ, is effected by the Spirit, fosters boldness, is permanent, is characterized by life, features God’s glory, removes the veil, brings freedom, and enables believers to behold the glory of the Lord and be transformed into Christ’s glory-image (1:20–23; 3:7–18).

Glory and Salvation

Sixth, Paul relates glory to salvation. Much of how glory relates to salvation is already clear from the previous treatments of glory and Christ, the gospel,

and the new covenant. It is important to point out, however, how Paul's view of Christ and his glory drives his view of salvation in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 Paul directly links the two, as Fee clarifies: "This transitory glory has been replaced in the new covenant by a much greater glory, effected by Christ and made effective through the Spirit, so that believers, as they behold Christ by the Spirit, are themselves transformed into the glory that is Christ's."⁴⁰ Thus, salvation is grounded on the person and work of Christ (see also 5:14–21). Salvation is applied through the work of the Spirit. And salvation is pictured as a transformation, particularly a transformation into Christ's unfading glory.⁴¹ This transformation is already and not yet, present and future. In Christ and through the Spirit, believers have already partially been changed into Christ's glory. Believers are also presently characterized by faith, and apparently they are ever-increasingly being changed into his glory (3:18; 4:16; Rom 12:2). And one day believers will be completely transformed by his glory and into his glory, be "in his presence," and receive a glorious heavenly body (3:18; 4:14; 5:1–11; cf. Rom 8:18–30; 1 Cor 15:35–49; Phil 3:20–21).⁴²

Further, according to 2 Corinthians 4:4–6, the bearer of the divine glory is himself the image of God. Paul here links the glory of God with the image of God in the person of Christ. Astonishingly, Paul likewise links the glory of God with the image of God for everyone in Christ. Upon that basis, Paul likens salvation to restoration, even a new creation, in which the God who creates and summons light to emerge also shines in the hearts of believers "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (4:6; cf. 5:14–21). In Christ believers are therefore "being re-created into the image of God as they by the Spirit behold the One who is himself the perfect bearer of the divine image, whose glory is seen in Christ's face."⁴³ While Paul does not detail the nature of this glory, it is related to the image of God, as John Calvin notes in his comments on 2 Corinthians 3:18:

Observe, that the design of the gospel is this—that the image of God, which had been effaced by sin, may be stamped anew upon us, and that the advancement of this restoration may be continually going forward in us during our whole life, because God makes his glory shine forth in us by little and little.⁴⁴

Thus salvation is likened to transformation by Christ's glory into glory

from one degree of glory to another. Salvation is also being conformed to Christ, the image of God, and is therefore a restoration, leading believers to increasingly become what they were always created to be (see also Gen 1:26–28; Rom 1:18–21; 3:23; 8:28–30; Col 3:9–10).⁴⁵

Glory and the Spirit

Seventh, and intricately related to glory and salvation, is Paul's link between glory and the Spirit. After explaining that Christ is the fulfillment of all God's covenant promises and that this redounds to God's glory, Paul stresses that God establishes, anoints,⁴⁶ and seals believers in Christ, giving his Spirit to them as a guarantee (1:18–22). Similarly, Paul later shows how God will provide a glorified, heavenly body for all believers, and again highlights the Spirit as a guarantee (5:5). In both cases, the Spirit's work is eschatological and tied to glory. The Spirit is God's eschatological down payment to believers, as the real and first portion of what is to come (full glorification at the consummation) and the guarantee of that certain future (see also 1 Cor 15:42–49 for more on how our bodies are "spiritual," existing in a mode characterized by the eschatological Spirit).⁴⁷ In other words, the future, which is characterized by glory, is here and certain by the Spirit's presence. Therefore, believers experience glory already in part now and in fullness later at the consummation—all through the Spirit, as Michael Horton observes:

Through the Spirit, all that is done by Christ for us, outside of us and in the past, is received and made fruitful within us in the present. In this way, the power that is constitutive of the consummation (the age to come) is already at work now in the world. Through the Spirit's agency, not only is Christ's past work applied to us but his present status of glory in glory penetrates our own existence in a semi-realized manner. The Spirit's work is what connects us here and now to Christ's past, present, and future. . . . [T]he Spirit shapes creaturely reality according to the archetypal image of the Son.⁴⁸

Paul also links glory and the Spirit in 3:1–18. As Paul contrasts the ministries of the old and new covenants, he contrasts that "of the letter" with that "of the Spirit": "The letter kills, the Spirit gives life" (3:6). He also ties the new covenant to the Spirit in verse 8: "Will not the ministry of the Spirit have even

more glory?” Paul then points to the Spirit as the source of a new covenant believer’s freedom, from the removal of the veil and for boldness to enter God’s presence, behold his glory face to face, and be transformed into the glory-image of Christ (3:15–18).⁴⁹ Sinclair Ferguson explains:

In Scripture, image and glory are interrelated ideas. As the image of God, man was created to reflect, express and participate in the glory of God, in miniature, creaturely form. Restoration to this is effected through the Spirit’s work of sanctification, in which he takes those who have distorted God’s image in the shame of sin, and transforms them into those who bear that image in glory.

The mark we were created to reach, but have missed, was glory. We have sinned and failed to attain that destiny. Against this background, the task of the Spirit may be stated simply: to bring us to glory, to create glory within us, and to glorify us together with Christ. The startling significance of this might be plainer if we expressed it thus: the Spirit is given to glorify us; not just to “add” glory as a crown to what we are, but actually to transform the very constitution of our being so that we become glorious. In the New Testament, this glorification is seen to begin already in the present order, in believers. Through the Spirit they are already being changed from glory to glory, as they gaze on/reflect the face of the Lord (2 Cor. 3:17–18). But the consummation of this glorification awaits the eschaton and the Spirit’s ministry in the resurrection. Here, too, the pattern of his working is: as in Christ, so in believers and, by implication, in the universe.

The image and image-bearers are one in Spirit to the end, so that when Christ appears in glory image-bearers are one with him in that glory (Col. 3:4). We are raised in Christ, with Christ, by Christ, to be like Christ.⁵⁰

The Spirit’s work of sharing God’s glory with us does not elevate us beyond our humanity or our creaturely nature, but actually enables us to live in full humanness as image-bearers of God.

Glory and Eschatology

Eighth, and as should be evident in the preceding themes, Paul links glory and eschatology. The themes of revelation, Christ, gospel, and the new covenant are each eschatological, as Christ comes as the fulfillment of all the

promises of God, bears the new covenant, and brings the new age with his arrival and saving work (1:18–22; 3:1–4:6). Salvation is eschatological as believers are presently experiencing the glory-transformation of the end of the age and will receive the glorious, heavenly body at the consummation (3:15–5:10). The Spirit is also eschatological, as he is God’s down payment to believers, the firstfruits and the guarantee of their transformation to the glory-image of Christ (1:20–23; 3:15–5:10).

Glory and Boasting

Ninth, Paul relates the glory of God to boasting as he contrasts appropriate boasting (and commending of himself, the apostles, and the churches) with that of his opponents, the so-called super-apostles. For Paul and godly ministers, boasting and commending are based only on the gospel; for Paul’s opponents, boasting and commending are also based on their own perceived merit. D. A. Carson captures it well:

Paul is prepared to boast what God has done for him (Gal. 6:14) in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and what God has done through him (Rom. 15:18–19; cf. Acts 14:27) by the Spirit in his apostolic ministry; but he is not prepared to boast about talent, wealth, power, wisdom, eloquence, and the like. After all, what do we have but what we have received (1 Cor. 4:7)?⁵¹

That is why Paul stresses the gospel of the glory of Christ is communicated through weak messengers (as we will see below). The treasure of the gospel is carried by jars of clay “to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (4:7–12). As such, all boasting must be “in the Lord,” the only one worthy of glory (10:17–18).

Glory and Suffering

Tenth, Paul links glory and suffering as he contrasts the suffering, weakness, and humiliation of this life with the glory that awaits when Christ returns and changes his people through his Spirit (3:18; 4:16–18). What is good, true, beautiful, and eternal is the gospel of the glory of Christ. And what promotes the gospel of the glory of Christ is not human strength, vigor, or talent. To the contrary, death had to be at work in Paul before he could manifest the life of Christ in a way that served others (4:7–12). Suffering

for the sake of Christ and the churches was counted as light and momentary when Paul viewed it in light of the incomparable and eternal weight of glory he would receive (4:16–18). Note the contrasts: suffering is momentary; glory is eternal. Suffering is light; glory is weighty.⁵² No wonder the apostle could exclaim: “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (12:9–10).

Glory and Ministry

Finally, Paul relates his motives of ministry: the glory of God as the ultimate purpose of all things and his ministry for the good of the church. God’s glory as Paul’s ultimate purpose of ministry is clear throughout. The covenant promises are in Christ, and believers “Amen” them for God’s glory (1:20). Paul ministers so that God’s grace extends to more and more people, which increases thanksgiving for God’s glory (4:15). Paul’s central aim is “to please him” (5:9). Paul is committed to the collection of the offering for God’s glory (8:19). And Paul expects those receiving the offering ultimately to offer thanksgiving and glory to God (9:12–15).⁵³

Yet in these very passages, and in others, Paul speaks of another central purpose: his ministry is for the sake of the church. Indeed, for Paul the two purposes, God’s glory and the church’s good, are united. After all, the church is the new temple, the very dwelling place of the living and holy God (6:14–7:1). Paul proclaims “Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake” (4:5). For Paul, serving the church is for the sake of, and thus the glory of, Jesus. Revealing his pastoral burden, Paul declares, “Death is at work in us, but life in you” (4:12). He continues: the suffering “is all for your sake,” so that God’s grace keeps extending to more and more people, all “to the glory of God” (4:15). Paul invests himself in the collection for the poor because it supplies the needs of the saints, overflowing into thanksgiving to God and leading them to glorify God for the church’s generosity (9:12–15). In each case, Paul’s motives for ministry are dual, though uneven: to give of himself for the good of the church, ultimately for the glory of God.

Further, Paul often highlights the God-centered and God-glorifying process of ministry. Paul teaches that the God of all comfort “comforts us” (Paul and the other ministers) in “all our affliction” (Paul and the other

ministers), that “we may be able to comfort” others “with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (1:3–7). So the God of comfort comforts Paul, and the God of comfort comforts others through Paul’s comfort. Paul also clarifies that God gives light and life through the gospel of the glory of Christ, Paul and the others are given over to death for Jesus’s sake, and God is giving life to others through death’s being at work in them (4:1–18). Paul likewise urges that in Christ, God produces the new creation and reconciles believers to himself, entrusts them with the message of reconciliation, sends them as his ambassadors, and through it all makes his appeal through them to others: be reconciled to God (5:16–21). Paul also shows that the God of comfort gives comfort through his people. He recalls how we received comfort through Titus, who likewise received comfort through the Corinthian church (7:6–7). Paul similarly celebrates God’s grace given among the churches of Macedonia, who despite their extreme poverty overflowed with generosity, giving to the Lord, to Paul and his leaders, and through them to others, all to the thanksgiving and glory of God (ch 8–9).⁵⁴ Paul then marvels that the God of grace and power chooses to show his grace as sufficient in Paul’s weakness, leading him to boast in his weakness and become strong in God’s power resting upon him (12:9–10).

In each example—comfort, suffering, reconciliation, giving, and weakness—God is the beginning, middle, and end of all authentic ministry. God gives; we receive. God initiates and gives to us; we receive from God and serve others through what we have received. God initiates and gives to others; they receive from God and serve us through what they have received. Throughout it all, we are blessed, others are blessed, and the inherently glorious God displays his glory and is glorified.

¹ Matt wrote the bulk of the exegetical section, and Chris wrote most of the theological section.

² Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “The Hairs of Your Head Numbered,” sermon on Matthew 10:30 (*Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 34; London: Passmore and Alabaster, 1888): sermon number 2005.

³ We will not address the issue of 2 Corinthians’ structure and unity. We see the book as a coherent whole written by the same author, Paul, and that as a coherent whole we may examine a particular theme of the book in a unified manner. For a detailed examination of the book’s structure and unity, see George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians* (BECNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 23–51.

⁴ On the rhetorical style of the letter and its use in defending Paul’s apostleship, see Linda L. Belleville, “A Letter of Apologetic Self-Commendation: 2 Cor. 1:8–7:16,” *NovT* 31.2 (1989): 142–63.

- ⁵ Or as Hafemann puts it, “Within [2:14–7:16] it has long been recognized that 2:14–3:18 is the theological heart of the epistle, providing the framework for understanding the rest of Paul’s discussion in chapters 4–9, and perhaps also chapters 10–13.” Scott Hafemann, “Paul’s Use of the Old Testament in 2 Corinthians,” *Int* 52.3 (1998): 246. See also idem, “The Comfort and Power of the Gospel: The Argument of 2 Corinthians 1–3,” *RevExp* 86 (1989): 325–44.
- ⁶ See Murray J. Harris, *2 Corinthians* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 275–320, for a summary of the issues at hand. See also Hafemann, “The Glory and Veil of Moses in 2 Cor 3:7–14: An Example of Paul’s Contextual Exegesis of the OT; A Proposal,” *HBT* 14 (1992): 31–49; and idem, *Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel: The Letter/Spirit Contrast and the Argument from Scripture in 2 Corinthians 3* (WUNT 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 1995. See also Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 203–32.
- ⁷ See Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC; Waco: Word Books, 1986), 59; Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 206; Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 275–76, 278. Guthrie helpfully emphasizes that the primary contrast in this passage is between the apostolic ministry and the ministry of the Mosaic covenant, not simply between the two covenants themselves. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 206. See also David A. Garland, “The Sufficiency of Paul, Minister of the New Covenant,” *CTR* 4.1 (1989): 21–22.
- ⁸ This is apparent due to Paul’s use of the personal pronoun (translated “the same”) to point back to “the glory of God,” but also because of Paul’s use of the terms *kuriou* and *eikona*. The former is used regularly by Paul to refer to Christ, and the context supports that use here, while the latter is used by Paul elsewhere in his letters to refer to Jesus as the “image of God” (e.g., Col 1:15). In other words, both terms are used by Paul to refer to Christ, and here they are linked definitively by the pronoun that comes syntactically between them. See Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 330–31.
- ⁹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 72.
- ¹⁰ Richard Gaffin Jr., “The Glory of God in Paul’s Epistles,” in *The Glory of God* (ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson; Theology in Community; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 131.
- ¹¹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 64–65.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 80.
- ¹³ “Weight of glory” is likely a paronomasia, since the Hebrew term *chabod* likely stands behind Paul’s use of *doxa*. At its root, *chabod* conveys the idea of heaviness, used in the OT to speak of God’s glory. So Paul is likely bringing out both of those interrelated senses with this phrase. See Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 92. For more on the Jewish background of Paul’s use of “glory,” see Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul’s Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Corinthians 3:1–18* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991); and C. C. Newman, *Paul’s Glory-Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992).
- ¹⁴ See Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 249–55.
- ¹⁵ Walker believes them to be Apollos and Timothy. William O. Walker, “Apollos and Timothy as the Unnamed ‘Brothers’ in 2 Corinthians 8:18–24,” *CBQ* 73 (2011): 318–38.
- ¹⁶ Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 610–12. On the Jewish background to this passage, and particularly the Isaianic servant songs (esp. Isa 42:8), as well as its background in the Greco-Roman benefactor tradition, see James R. Harrison, “The Brothers as the ‘Glory of Christ’ (2 Cor 8:23): Paul’s *Doxa* Terminology in Its Ancient Benefaction Context,” *NovT* 52 (2010): 156–88.
- ¹⁷ Although see 6:8, which contrasts honor and dishonor in Paul’s combination of a “virtue list” and “affliction list.” Paul contrasts *doxa* (translated here as “honor”) with *atimia* (“dishonor”). While we have not included this use of *doxa* in our analysis because of its obvious association with honor by virtue of being contrasted with dishonor, its use here also shows that glory in 2 Corinthians is closely bound up with boasting and commendation (e.g., honor). Guthrie makes this connection between honor and glory as well, noting that they are closely associated concepts in the Greco-Roman world (e.g., Plutarch, *Rom. Q.* 1.13; *Mulier. virt.* 16; *Cor.* 4:3). See Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 15n14; see also 207–9.
- ¹⁸ On the relationship between boasting and God’s glory in Paul, including in Rom 3:27, the Corinthian correspondence, and other Pauline texts, see Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “‘Where Then Is Boasting?’: Romans 3:27 and Its Contexts,” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes Biblical Society* 5 (1985): 57–66.
- ¹⁹ Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 15–17.
- ²⁰ This type of argument by Paul is not limited to 2 Corinthians. For its use in Galatians, see James A. Kelhoffer, “Suffering as Defense of Paul’s Authority in Galatians and 2 Corinthians 11,” *SEA* 74 (2009): 127–43. On the background of these “tribulation lists,” see Robert Hodgson, “Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists,” *ZNW* 74 (1983): 59–80.
- ²¹ Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 421; following A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915; repr., 1978), 355.

- ²² Jason B. Hood, "The Temple and the Thorn: 2 Corinthians 12 and Paul's Heavenly Ecclesiology," *BBR* 21.3 (2011): 357–70, esp. 361–65.
- ²³ Alexandra R. Brown, "The Gospel Takes Place: Paul's Theology of Power-in-Weakness in 2 Corinthians," *Int* 52.3 (1998): 280–82.
- ²⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 463.
- ²⁵ See Dane C. Ortlund, "'Power is Made Perfect in Weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9): A Biblical Theology of Strength through Weakness," *Presbyterian* 36.2 (2010): 86–108, esp. 106. See also Schreiner, *Paul*, 94–99.
- ²⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 386.
- ²⁷ As Gaffin notes, glory is uniquely attributed to God but only derivatively so to others. "The Glory of God in Paul's Epistles," 130.
- ²⁸ And perhaps doing so in a liturgical context. So Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 27.
- ²⁹ David A. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC 29; Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 414.
- ³⁰ For a detailed examination of the linguistic possibilities and historical background of this passage, see Harris, *2 Corinthians*, 241–56. See also George Guthrie, "Paul's Triumphal Procession Imagery (2 Cor. 2:14–16a): Neglected Points of Background," *NTS* 61 (2015): 79–91; as well as the seminal work of Scott J. Hafemann, *Suffering and the Spirit: An Exegetical Study of II Cor. 2:14–3:3 within the Context of the Corinthian Correspondence* (WUNT 2/19; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986). Finally, for the connection between the "olfactory tradition" in early Christian writing, Jewish Wisdom tradition, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, see Dominika A. Kurek-Chomyz, "The Sweet Scent of the Gospel in the *Didache* and in Second Corinthians: Some Comments on Two Recent Interpretations of the *Stinoufi* Prayer in the Coptic *Did.* 10.8," *VC* 63 (2009): 323–44. This particular nexus only bolsters the present claim about 2:14–17, namely that the fragrance metaphor is about demonstrating to the world the gospel of Jesus Christ, which, as we have already shown, is tantamount to displaying God's glory.
- ³¹ On 4:15, if we take Paul's short citation of Psalm 115 LXX in 4:13 as in some way identifying his own sufferings and (eventual) overcoming with the suffering and resurrection of Christ, this only bolsters the connection between giving God glory and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Not only do those who receive grace give thanks and thus glory to God (4:15), but those who are sent out to proclaim that message are imitating Christ and thus spreading his fame—his glory—throughout the earth. On 4:13 and its use of Ps. 115 LXX, see, e.g., Douglas Campbell, "2 Corinthians 4:13: Evidence in Paul That Christ Believes," *JBL* 128.2 (2009): 340–48.
- ³² For a more thorough treatment of the meaning(s) of glory in Scripture, as well as in biblical and systematic theology, see Christopher W. Morgan, "Toward a Theology of the Glory of God," in *The Glory of God*, 156–60.
- ³³ Mikko Sivonen, "Eschatological Vindication of δόξα of God in Creation and Humanity through δόξα of Christ, Who Represents God and Humanity," unpublished paper.
- ³⁴ John Owen, *The Glory of Christ: His Office and Grace* (1684; reprint, Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Heritage/Christian Focus Publications, 2004), 221.
- ³⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 176. Fee masterfully treats each passage's Christological teachings mentioned above.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 54.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 174–85. Also helpful is Sivonen's unpublished "Eschatological Vindication of δόξα": "The eschatological prophecies previewed in the Old Testament of seeing God's glory seem be pinned and come into fruition in the Christ-event. Paul seems to equate 1) the gospel with the glory of Christ and 2) the knowledge of the glory of God with the face of Christ, and 3) the glory of the Lord with the image of God found in Christ. Thus, Christ becomes a character that shares both the Adamic glory (the image and the glory of Christ) and the glory of God. He is the image that the Corinthians' gaze upon, the Adamic figure, and the revealed God himself. Christ as God's glory is the very gospel that Paul is preaching. Not only so, but the same Christ, who is referred to the glory of the Lord, is the representation that the believers are called to image."
- ³⁹ On the applicability of 12:9–10 and its broader context to all believers and not just to Paul, see Dustin W. Ellington, "Not Applicable to Believers? The Aims and Basis of Paul's 'I' in 2 Corinthians 10–13," *JBL* 131.2 (2012): 325–40.
- ⁴⁰ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 176.
- ⁴¹ For more on transformation, see Mark A. Seifrid, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 178–87.
- ⁴² See Gaffin, "The Glory of God in Paul's Epistles," 127–52, for an outstanding treatment of this.

⁴³ Fee, *Pauline Christology*, 184.

⁴⁴ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 187.

⁴⁵ For more on glory and salvation, see Morgan, “Toward a Theology of the Glory of God,” 179–87, especially 186–87: “In sum, from our vantage point, the story of our salvation as it relates to glory is this: as humans we all refused to acknowledge God’s glory and instead sought our own glory. Through this we forfeited the glory God intended for us as his image-bearers. By his grace and through union with Christ, the perfect image, God restores us as full image-bearers to participate in and reflect the glory we longed for the whole time. Thus, we are recipients of glory, are undergoing transformation through glory, and will be sharers of glory. Our salvation is not merely from sin but it is also unto glory. What grace we have received: we who exchanged the glory of God for idols, we who rebelled against God’s glory, have been, are being, and will be completely transformed by the very glory we despised and rejected. Even more, through union with Christ, together we are the church, the new humanity (Eph. 2:11–22; 4:11–16; 4:20–24), the firstfruits of the new creation, bearing God’s image, displaying how life ought to be, and making known the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10–11).”

“From an even broader vantage point, salvation history is the story of the intrinsically glorious God graciously and joyfully communicating his fullness, chiefly through his creation, image-bearers, providence, and redemptive acts. As his people we respond by glorifying him, and in this God receives glory. Further, through uniting us to the glorious Christ, the perfect image of God, God shares his glory with us. And all of this redounds to his glory, as God in his manifold perfections is exhibited, known, rejoiced in, and prized. In this sense, the entire biblical plot—creation, fall, redemption, and consummation—is the drama of God’s glory. Jonathan Edwards captured it well: ‘the whole is of God, and in God, and to God; and he is the beginning, middle, and end.’” The citation is Jonathan Edwards, “The End for Which God Created the World,” in *God’s Passion for His Glory* (ed. John Piper; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 247.

⁴⁶ Note the play on words: believers are anointed in the Anointed One, Christ.

⁴⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 292–94.

⁴⁸ Michael S. Horton, *People and Place: A Covenant Ecclesiology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 21.

⁴⁹ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 313–14.

⁵⁰ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Contours of Christian Theology; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 139–40, 249, 251; for insights related to cosmic glorification, see 252–55.

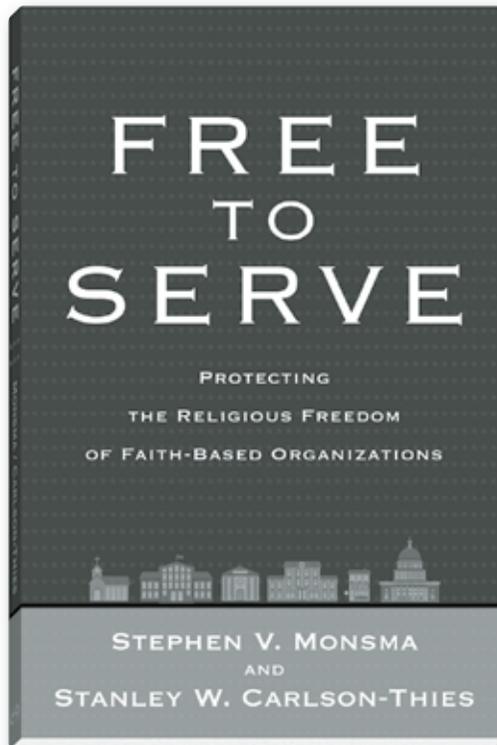
⁵¹ D. A. Carson, *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10–13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988), 88.

⁵² As mentioned previously, “weight of glory” is a paronomasia, since the Hebrew term *chabod* stands behinds Paul’s use of *doxa*. At its root *chabod* conveys the idea of heaviness and is used in the OT to speak of God’s glory.

⁵³ Note how Paul relates thanksgiving and glory. See 2 Cor 4:15; 9:11–15; also Rom 1:23.

⁵⁴ See the perceptive sermon by John Piper, “He Who Sows Bountifully Will Reap Bountifully,” sermon on 2 Corinthians 9:6–15. Accessed at <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/he-who-sows-bountifully-will-reap-bountifully>.

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