

the pursuit of
Glory

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Finding Satisfaction in Christ Alone

Jeffrey D. Johnson



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The Pursuit of Glory

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orders@heritagebooks.org

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Dedicated to my loving wife,

Letha

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Foreword

This book gives an expanded exposition of the Augustinian summary of human purpose, “You have made us for yourself, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You.” Jeff Johnson, the author, wants the reader to experience satisfaction in this universal quest and moves us toward the goal in three ways. The book title draws us to one set of important ideas. The list of chapter titles draws us to a second set. The style of argument makes us consider another important aspect of engaging this ultimately important subject.

The title may be considered as a twofold concern. First, we may view the pursuit of glory from a heavenly, or transcendent, perspective; second, it may be considered from an earthly, or immanent, perspective. From the transcendent side, a person’s pursuit of glory (if it is a real pursuit of glory) will lead him or her to desire the forever-satisfying experience of seeing and living in the presence of God in all His glorious perfection. Those who truly desire this “transport of delight” finally will see Him as He is. Anne Cousins, a nineteenth-century writer, composed a song about what prompts the desire to be in heaven. Here are two of the verses:

O Christ, He is the fountain,
 The deep, sweet well of love!
 The streams on earth I've tasted
 More deep I'll drink above:
 There to an ocean fullness
 His mercy doth expand,
 And glory, glory dwelleth
 In Immanuel's land.

The King there in His beauty,
 Without a veil is seen:
 It were a well-spent journey,
 Though seven deaths lay between:
 The Lamb with His fair army,
 Doth on Mount Zion stand,
 And glory—glory dwelleth
 In Immanuel's land.

From the immanent side, the pursuit of glory will lead the seeker to find his or her sense of permanent well-being in having the character of God imprinted in his or her affections and actions. This is a book about those two ways of seeing glory and how God, in His grace, does indeed bring sinners into His “house of wine” again, as Anne Cousins expressed it:

O I am my Beloved's
 And my Beloved's mine!
 He brings a poor vile sinner
 Into His house of wine.
 I stand upon His merit—
 I know no other stand,
 Not e'en where glory dwelleth
 In Immanuel's land.

The author gives a second major prompting to find rest for our restlessness in the hopes that form the titles of each chapter. Jeff gives a clear description of how each of these hopes resides within everyone. Every one of these is deeply embedded in the soul because the form (now really only a form, an empty shell) of these deeply and richly satisfying states of being is inextricably set as fundamental to human nature. These are the shapes of the divine image in humanity. They have been emptied of their content, but the shape is there, and that is the reason “our hearts are restless until they find their rest” in our Creator.

Glory, happiness, purpose, freedom, companionship, truth, peace, holiness, life—every person strives to find these in something that is a substitute for the real thing. The author, reflecting on Scripture as his authority and looking at examples in the lives of friends and persons he has counseled, sets the table in a compelling style. In a manner similar to the biblical book of Ecclesiastes, he demonstrates that all our attempts to substitute the values and things of this present age for that which is genuine without exception fail. The truth in each of these quests of soul resides in God alone. Attempts to find them in the creation instead of the Creator are sheer vanity—endlessly frustrating, severely disappointing, and horribly aggravating vanity.

The author’s intention is not to condemn the quest for glory and all the fulfilling things that compose its reality. No, the pursuit is good and right. It is what we were made for. His intention, bolstered by his personal quest and his commitment to the revealed truth of Scripture, is to show how all these elements of the divine image are restored through the

redemptive, reconciling work of Christ. He expands this by the way he weaves his argument.

The third inviting feature of this book has to do with its style of argument. It is composed of both propositions of truth and acute observations about the author's personal journey. Like Augustine in his spiritual testimony *Confessions*, Jeff Johnson has shared some deep conflicts of his own life in which he came up short of finding the thing he looked for. In one event, he was driven to the brink of suicide. By God's powerful, life-changing intervention in his life, however, that which he had despaired of finding in this life became his through the grace of Christ. His honest, transparent, plain-spoken, earnest accounts of how true glory, happiness, purpose, and the other elements of this pursuit flooded his own life are interwoven with the biblical truth supporting each element of his quest. This comes as an invitation to each of us to find it in the same way.

He is not proposing some secret, mystical incantation or detachment from reality but points to the plainly revealed, clearly proposed gospel of the birth, life, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. He is the one in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form. Jesus is indeed the image of the invisible God, the express image of His character; He is the brightness of the Father's glory. If we seek glory and all its accompanying values, we will find them only in Christ. That is the driving purpose and clear message of this book. "Take and read."

Tom J. Nettles
Louisville, Kentucky

the pursuit of *Glory*

You and I are looking for something. Though we may not know exactly what it is, we continue to search for it. No matter how hard we try, we cannot stop our pursuit of it. As if we are looking for a lost wallet, we cannot rest until we find what is missing. We look here and then there without finding, and yet we continue to search.

We pursue it with all our heart for it consumes us. We are restless! Our drive to find it determines every decision we make. Even my desire to write and your desire to read this book were motivated by our common pursuit. We want it badly, but so does everyone. Whether or not we love God, the pursuit is in us all. It is part of the human condition. We were made by God to pursue it, and pursue it we will.

What is it, you may be wondering? What is it, you ask, that we cannot stop pursuing? It is glory. We are all looking for glory—*unadulterated glory!*

Not Earthly Glory

I do not mean fame, if that is what you are thinking. It is true that we are often deceived into looking for glory in becoming famous. Notoriety, however, has never brought any lasting

satisfaction. Famous people are miserable too. They, along with each of us, have holes in their hearts that cannot be filled by mass numbers of Twitter followers.

This hole inside our hearts, that empty spot that longs to be filled, seeks for something far greater than being a celebrity. Deep down, we long for true glory. We long for the highest glory—the glory of glories—a glory that cannot be surpassed by earthly accolades—an unadulterated glory.

Being made in the image of God, we can never be satisfied with a counterfeit glory that is manufactured from the things of this world. Even the atheist Bertrand Russell understood that people can never be satisfied with the glory of this world: “Man differs from other animals in one very important respect, and that is that he has some desires which are, so to speak, infinite, which can never be fully gratified, and which would keep him restless even in Paradise.”¹

The only glory that can satisfy our deepest longings is not obtained at our favorite department store or at the Audi dealership. This glory is not found in throwing the game-winning pass in the Super Bowl or being elected president of the United States. Health, wealth, and power are all alluring, but deep down we all know that our hearts aspire for something that transcends these things. The glory we seek does not fade away. It is not empty or vain. Rather, true glory consists of something eternal—something weightier than things that perish.

Consider that the Hebrew word for glory, *kabowd*, means heaviness. Though this may seem like a strange way of

1. Bertrand Russell, as quoted in *Nobel Writers on Writing*, ed. Ottar G. Draugsvold (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 61.

defining glory, we must remember that the value of ancient coins was determined by their weight—their heaviness. Today, a nickel is heavier than a dime, yet this was not the case when coins were made from precious metals. When you are trading with coins forged from bronze, silver, and gold, then the larger and heavier the coin is, the better. The greater the weight, the greater the value. Thus, the glory and value of something is in its weight, or substance.

The biblical contrast to glory is vanity. In Hebrew, *vanity* speaks of something having little to no substance. It speaks of that which is light, empty, or worthless. We may grasp the wind, but even if we were able to lay hold of it, what do we have? Nothing. There is no value in having a fistful of air.

Not Temporary Glory

To understand the difference between glory and vanity, we must discern the distinction between temporal and eternal realities. Because the praise of people and the glory of this world are passing away, they are superficial. They are vanity. Though on the surface they feel and look impressive, underneath the shine lies a hidden and expanding layer of corrosion.

For the person who has mere seconds to live, what does it really matter if he or she has a handful of weeds or a handful of rubies? Nothing really matters if all we have are things we cannot keep. As the psalmist observes, our “plans perish” with us at death (Ps. 146:4). Even if we could gain the whole world before dying, what value would it be to us if we lost our souls afterward (Mark 8:36)?

The glory of this world is like a dissipating vapor. And we all, deep down in our consciences, know it. We know that earthly beauty and praise is short-lived. At best, the most attractive things in this world are like beautiful flowers that have already begun to wilt. The diminishing glory of this world is like the grimy canals and the years of decay that have settled on Venice, Italy. It is just a matter of time before its splendor will disappear altogether.

Searching after the glory of this world is like grasping after the wind. The instant you think you have it, it slips away from you like the smell of a new car that begins to fade the moment the car is driven off the lot. Earthly triumphs are soon forgotten. Trophies that once stood proudly on the mantle are now boxed away in the attic. Even the memories of your “glory days”—when you were the star basketball player or you graduated magna cum laude—are starting to grow dim. It will not be long before almost everything, if not everything, about your life will be forgotten.

Death overtakes us all. The stench of it has penetrated the fabric of life. The brevity of life is ever present in our minds; it taints our most joyful experiences. No matter what enjoyment you and I find in the here and now, we subconsciously know that the grim reaper is lurking for us in the shadows.

The world and all its desires are passing away (1 John 2:17). All earthly glory is fleeting—“riches are not forever” (Prov. 27:24). Therefore, as the Preacher says, the glory of this world is vanity. The best this world has to offer is empty and meaningless. “All *is* vanity” (Eccl. 1:2, emphasis added).

Not Superficial Glory

Nothing in this life is permanent. Thus, we pursue an eternal glory. I do not mean that we long to live forever in our current state. Mere existence is hell if it is all we have to look forward to. We do not long merely to stay alive; rather, we long to obtain something that is more important than what this world offers. Again, we are searching for an unadulterated glory.

Whatever this glory is, it is something that is far weightier, far more valuable, far more precious, and far more lasting than that which can be mined out of this world. The glory that we need is an eternal glory. It is an infinite, unchanging, and immeasurable glory. This is the only thing that will fully and eternally satisfy us.

This glory is found only in God. Because there is no enduring value in perishable things, we cannot help but desire an “eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). This is why we all, whether we acknowledge it or not, are in pursuit of the glory of God. It is the only thing that truly matters in life because God alone is eternal, infinite, and immutable. Only God is of infinite value. Everything else is vain, empty, and worthless in comparison. God’s glory is the sum of all that God is. It is the radiance, majesty, beauty, and splendor that shine forth from His unchangeable and eternal essence.

Because glory is the value of the intrinsic worth of the essence of God, God’s glory requires an observer. This does not mean that God’s glory requires us to appreciate Him. His glory would not be eternal if it depended on anything outside Him. God’s glory is eternal because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have always appreciated and ascribed glory to one another. Because the Father knows the

true value of the Son and the Spirit, He glorifies the Son and the Spirit. And the Son and the Spirit likewise know the true value of the Father, and they glorify the Father accordingly. This is the glory that they ascribed to each other from the beginning (John 17:5). They are completely and forever satisfied in the infinite glory they share with each other.

This is perfect glory. Because each person of the Trinity interpenetrates the other two, they know each other perfectly. Because of this perfect knowledge of each other, they have perfect, full appreciation of and love for each other. The Father is satisfied in the love of the Son and the Spirit, as the Son is satisfied in the love of the Father and the Spirit, and as the Spirit is satisfied in the love of the Father and the Son. Nothing lacking, nothing missing, nothing wanting. Full and complete satisfaction. This is the glory of God. And this is the only glory that can satisfy us. We are miserable not because we aspire after glory but because we aspire after glory in all the wrong things. That is, we don't aim high enough.

Again, all of us, whether we like it or not, are pursuing glory with all our hearts. It is not a matter of whether we look for glory; it is a matter of whether we look for glory in the only place glory can truly be found—in God. Therefore, the ultimate question is this: Do you long to enjoy the glory of God, or are you chasing the vainglory of this fallen world? In other words, what is your glory?

How you answer this question will determine everything. As this book seeks to explain, we long for happiness, purpose, freedom, companionship, truth, peace, holiness, and life. These longings are innate within us because we are made in the image of God. And, as we shall see, it is only when we find God that we find the glory we so desperately seek and need.

God has placed this longing—and what a longing it is—in our hearts (Acts 17:26–28). Being made in the likeness of God, we cannot be satisfied with anything less than the glory of God. As Augustine said so many years ago: “For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in Thee.”²

§ QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What are the key differences between earthly and heavenly glory?
2. Why is the concept of weightiness used to describe the word *glory*?
3. Why does the Bible contrast the word *glory* with the word *vanity*?
4. How should contemplating death influence the way we view this world?
5. Where should we look to find glory?

2. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. F. J. Sheed, ed. Michael P. Foley (London: Hackett, 2006), 3.