

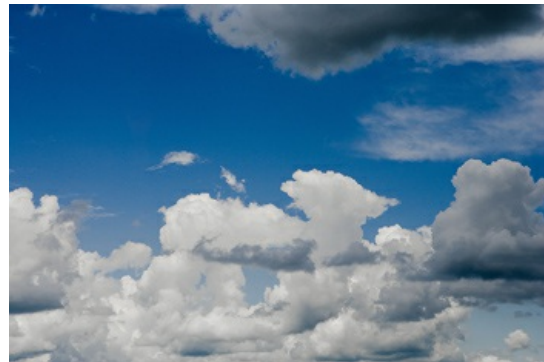
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The Divine Egotist — Is God Arrogant, Selfish, or Megalomaniacal?

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Is the God of the Bible the supreme egotist? That question arises when human beings contemplate the meaning of the truth that God does everything for the sake of his own glory. Is God then a megalomaniac?

Human beings are trapped in a human frame of reference. When we think of motivation, we inevitably start with our own self-conscious knowledge of our own motivations. For a human to seek his or her own glory is narcissism in purest form. Human egotism is constantly on display. And, if we are honest, we know that we seek our own glory as a reflex.



In reality, this is the essence of sin. Our desire for glory is inherently idolatrous and selfish. Paul describes this perfectly in Romans 1:22-23: “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.” This exchange that robs God of his glory is the very heart of sin. We want the glory that is God’s alone.

When we think of God, our reflex is to think in human terms. We are trapped in the knowledge that our efforts to glorify ourselves are perverse. Yet, if we are to think rightly of God, we must think in infinitely different terms, and the only way we can do this is by the gift of revelation. God must give us even the frame of reference with which we can think of him, and he does so in his Word.

The Bible tells us that God does all things for the sake of his own glory. As God spoke to his people through the prophet Ezekiel: “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes” [Ezekiel 36:22-23].

God’s saving acts are for the sake of his own glory, even as his people are redeemed. He acts to vindicate his own name and to display his own power and holiness. Creation itself displays his glory, extending to every atom and molecule. “The heavens declare the glory of God,” sings the Psalmist, and God created the world for the purpose of putting his glory on display [Psalm 19:1].

Ultimately, creation serves as the theater of the glory of God’s redeeming love. The drama of God’s redemption accomplished in Christ is the great story on display. In the consummation of history, the revelation of a new heaven and a new earth will become the platform for the manifestation of the glory of the triune God throughout eternity.

Does this make God a megalomaniac?

Our starting point for answering this question is the perfection of God. As the only perfect being, all that God does is perfect. He perfectly seeks to display his perfection. He is even jealous of his own glory. As John Calvin reminds us, “God is called jealous, because he permits no rivalry which may detract from his glory.” In a human this attitude would be ugly and contemptible. In God it is perfect and holy.

As Herman Bavinck expressed this truth, “God can rest in nothing other than himself and cannot be satisfied with anything less than himself. He has no alternative but to seek his own honor.” Similarly, though from a very different theological perspective, Karl Barth defined God’s glory as “his dignity and right, not only to maintain, but to prove and declare, to denote and almost as it were to make himself conspicuous and everywhere apparent as the One he is.”

This is merely the logic of what it means for God to be the one perfect being. As such, he cannot look beyond himself for anything or anyone greater. In an often-overlooked passage in Hebrews, we are told that “when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself” [Hebrews 6:13]. When humans take an oath, we naturally invoke God’s name. When God makes a promise, he can invoke no greater name than his own. This is not evidence of selfishness or narcissism — only an irrefutable logic.

Even so, some who are troubled by this question may remain puzzled. Even when God is understood to be the one perfect being, this still appears to be a cold logic.

The most important corrective to this misunderstanding is to realize that God’s glory is a generous and self-giving glory. His glory is his own joy, and the display of his glory brings his creatures true joy.

When a human glorifies himself, he robs others of joy. Self-aggrandizement and human megalomania cause hurt and harm to others, not blessing and joy.

But when God displays and exhibits his glory, he shares joy with his creatures and wholeness with all creation. Put most directly, without the knowledge of God’s glory, we would be robbed of true joy. God would be less than perfect — even selfish — if he did not display his glory and allow us to share in the divine joy and fulfillment.

Is God a megalomaniac . . . the transcendent Egotist? Of course not. In the truest sense, this is an arrogant and irresponsible question. How can God be other than he is in his perfection? But in another sense, the question is helpful, for it directs our thinking to the essence of God’s glory and resets our theological framework. God shows his love for us in the display of his glory and in his jealous concern for his own name and reputation. Our greatest joy is found in beholding his glory and in glorifying the triune God for all eternity.

Fallen creatures, blinded by sin, cannot see that to rob God of his glory is to rob ourselves of true joy. It takes the grace of God to make that known to us, and, incredibly enough, God glorifies himself in making himself known to sinners and in saving them through Christ’s perfect atonement for sin.

For now, we see the glory of God most perfectly displayed in the cross of Christ. That fact alone answers the question far more convincingly than any argument.

Soli Deo Gloria.

We will be talking about this question in a special edition of *The Albert Mohler Program* today, broadcast before a live audience of college students. Join us by broadcast or online.

REFERENCES:

Calvin, *Four Last Books of Moses*, I:423.

Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, II:434.

Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II, 1:641. Barth, though neo-orthodox and deficient in many aspects of theology, nonetheless defined the essence of God’s glory in definitive terms.

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