

THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL

or

The Gospel of the Glory of God

PREFACE

The enclosed two studies were originally printed separately in April and May 1983. Though printed separately, they were consciously prepared with the aim of bringing them together as a connected whole in the present form:

- ◆ Rejoicing in Hope of the Glory of God
- ◆ Changed from Glory into Glory

In the interests of greater clarity, they have been revised slightly from the form in which they were first printed.

The theme they cover is closely bound up with that of “the mystery of godliness”. (A collection of further articles on the latter theme is found in the fourth and last of this series of booklets.)

The title chosen for the present booklet is the literal rendering of the AV expression “the glorious gospel” (2 Corinthians 4:4). It was chosen deliberately to emphasise a fundamental facet of the Gospel, i.e. that it is the Gospel of the restored glory. The true significance of the phrase “the glorious Gospel” is not so much to draw attention to the *nature* of the Gospel as to its *content*. It does not so much mean that the Gospel is glorious, but rather that it is a Gospel of glory. In other words, the Gospel is about nothing less than the restoration to man of his original glory, the very glory of God Himself.

This is not just good theological theory. It is attainable reality.

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March 2014

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REJOICING IN HOPE of THE GLORY OF GOD

ONE of the most familiar evangelistic references is Romans 3:23: “All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”

Although often quoting this verse, for a long time I felt there was far more in the latter part of the verse than I could then understand. The more I delved into this subject, the more I felt like an explorer walking in wide-eyed astonishment from room to room after stumbling upon the fabulous treasures of Tutankhamen’s tomb, or an Inca palace.

If this article serves to impart only a small fraction of the wealth I have found here, it will be rewarding indeed.

Ichabod: the Glory is departed

One of the special privileges of Israel was “*the glory*” (Romans 9:4). Basically this was a manifestation of the awesome presence of God, such as the cloudy pillar and the pillar of fire that accompanied Israel on their departure from Egypt. To have the divine glory meant to enjoy God’s presence and fulness in a peculiar way.

After the tabernacle was built, the glory was especially associated with the Most Holy place, and, in particular, the cherubim of glory and the ark.

One of the most tragic events in all the history of Israel was the capture of the ark by the Philistines. It precipitated Eli’s death and caused his daughter-in-law to name her newly born son “*Ichabod*” for, said she, “*The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken*” (1 Samuel 4:22).

Ezekiel beheld a similar scene when carried to Jerusalem in vision by the Spirit. There he witnessed the progressive withdrawal of the glory from the city (Ezekiel 8:3-4; 9:3a; 10:18-19; 11:22-23). Only those who appreciate the significance to Israel of the glory will grasp the heart-rending effect of such a sight.

But a tragedy greater by far occurred in the Garden of Eden, far worse than the departure of the glory from Moses’ tabernacle or from the temple of Solomon. It had repercussions not only for Israel but also for all mankind. It was the departure of the glory of God from the tabernacle and temple of the human body, of which the former were only pale shadows.

Adam was once “*the image and glory of God*” (1 Corinthians 11:7). But he lost his original glory at the fall.

In one sense, even after the fall, men are still *“made after the similitude of God”* (James 3:9b). There is another sense, however, in which it is only the *new man* that is *“renewed after the image of Him that created Him”* (Colossians 3:10).

Every part of the creation has a particular glory of its own: *“there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars...”* (1 Corinthians 15:40b-41). But the glory of man was altogether special. It was not just a glory peculiar to him. It was nothing less than the very glory of God Himself. I cannot adequately stress this. The self-same glory that hovered over the tabernacle in the wilderness once swathed man.

But through Adam’s sin, mankind has lost its original splendour and *“come short of the glory of God.”* The first glory of man then became no better than that of the grass of the field: *“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass”* (1 Peter 1:24).

Furthermore, as well as losing his own original peculiar glory, man also lost with it the right to enter into *“the presence of His glory.”*

Christ, the Glory of God

But all was not lost. The Lord’s initial intention of a creation bearing *“the image and glory of God”* was not to be frustrated. He would first find a man upon and within whom the Glory could abide. Then He would reproduce him.

That Man was Christ.

The implications of the expression *“the temple of his body”* (John 2:21) are rich. Christ’s body was the inner sanctuary and dwelling-place of God. Not the Holy place, but the Holiest of all. His flesh was the veil (Hebrews 10:19-20). Behind the veil of His flesh dwelt the cloud of Glory.

This is why Philippians 3:21 speaks of *“the body of His glory”* (RV). It is why Christ is described as *“the Lord of glory”* (1 Corinthians 2:8). This truth is strikingly brought out by two renderings of James 2:1: *“our Lord Jesus Christ who is the glory”* (Weymouth); *“our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious presence of God on earth”* (Williams).

So greatly did Christ reveal the Shekinah presence of God, that Paul wrote of *“the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4:6). This fact is crucial to a full assessment of the Gospel.

The AV misses the point in 2 Corinthians 4:4 when it refers to *“the glorious gospel of Christ.”* The literal rendering is *“the gospel of the glory of Christ.”* Paul’s intention is not to describe the gospel as glorious, but to throw light on the content and essence of the gospel. Christ came not only to save from the wrath to come. He came to restore to man His lost glory. And Christ was not only the means of achieving salvation but also Himself a revelation of the nature of that salvation. This is the significance of the term *“the gospel of the glory of Christ.”*

The gospel proclaims Christ as Himself containing and revealing the glory of God. He was *“the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person”* (Hebrews 1:3). But since God has predestined believers *“to be conformed to the image of His Son”* (Romans 8:28), they shall themselves also bear *“the image and glory of God.”*

To comprehend the fact and implications of the Glory tabernacled behind the veil of Christ’s flesh is thus crucial to an adequate proclamation of the gospel.

Called unto glory

A highly significant New Testament prayer is for enlightenment as to *“what is the hope of His calling”* (Ephesians 1:18).

What is this hope to which the Father of glory has called us? The answer is not difficult to find:

- ◆ *“God... hath called you unto His kingdom and glory”* (I Thessalonians 2:12);
- ◆ *“the God of all grace who hath called us unto His eternal glory”* (I Peter 5:10);
- ◆ *“Him that hath called us to glory”* (2 Peter 1:3; Cp Romans 9:23; Hebrews 2:10).

Furthermore, our calling is not simply unto glory. It is unto the very glory which was in Christ: *“He called you...to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (2 Thessalonians 2:14). So, *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27) does not simply mean a promise of a future glory. It is a promise of His glory, for He *is* the future glory.

This explains the unusual wording of 2 Thessalonians 1:10a: *“when He shall come to be glorified in His saints.”* The sense is not that at His coming Christ shall be glorified by His saints. At His coming His glory shall be reflected *in* them.

Likewise, Jesus’ words in John 17:10b, *“I am glorified in them,”* mean far more than His being glorified through His disciples’ lives. It hints at what Jesus said explicitly later in His prayer: *“the glory which thou gavest me I have given them”* (v.22).

Having the glory of God

It is imperative to proclaim a fuller gospel than simply justification by faith. Although an essential foundation, this doctrine is but the doorway to full salvation, Justification leads on to glorification: *“whom He called, them He also justified, and whom He justified, them he also glorified,”* (Romans 8:30). Therefore, having clearly established our legal standing before God in Romans 1-4. Paul then looks further ahead: *“being justified by faith, we... rejoice in hope of the glory of God”* (Romans 5:1-2).

We anticipate nothing less than a full sharing of the glory so often manifested to Israel and which was man’s original inheritance. This gives a much wider and more concrete perspective to Christ’s intention for His church: *“that he might present it to himself a glorious church”* (Ephesians 5:27).

The English word “glorious” can often be very vague. In the overall context of its Biblical usage, however, it becomes very clear what Christ’s ultimate goal is. It is

identical to John's grand vision of the consummation of our redemption when he beheld the holy Jerusalem, the bride, "*having the glory of God*" (Revelation 21:11).

Oh, the blessedness! To be swathed in, and indwelt by, the glory. Not only shall we partake to the full of "*the glory that shall be revealed*" (I Peter 5:1). We shall be enabled to stand "*faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*" (Jude 24). Here is the grand climax of salvation: not only man indwelt by the glory, but also man indwelling the glory. Not only shall we enter into glory; we shall enter without fear into *the* glory, that pure blazing Light which is God.

This is the final answer to the deep longing of godly men throughout the ages, echoed by the psalmist: "*my soul thirsteth for thee...to see thy glory*" (Psalm 63:1-2). Even Moses, who spoke to God face to face and regularly entered the glory, revealed that there was yet more to know when he said: "*I beseech thee, shew me thy glory*" (Exodus 33:18).

Conclusion

In concluding, it must not be thought that the experience of this glory is only a future hope.

Even now we may taste "*the spirit of glory*" (I Peter 4:14), and "*rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*" (I Peter 1:8), because already we are being "*changed...from glory to glory*" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

But this is a separate study in its own right.

2

CHANGED FROM GLORY INTO GLORY

THE transfiguration scene provides a major insight into God's purposes in salvation.

I considered this no more than any other miracle until one day its present relevance dawned upon me as never before. My conception of full salvation has never been the same since.

Let us look more closely at this inspiring scene (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36).

Eyewitnesses of His Majesty

Jesus had ascended a high mountain to pray. Apparently He continued into the night, for the three accompanying disciples were "*heavy with sleep.*" When they were fully awake, however, what a sight met their wondering eyes! A resplendent light dispelled the night darkness. A "*shining cloud* (i.e. a cloud composed of light) *overshadowed them*" (Matthew 17:5, Amp.). Peter later described this cloud as "*the excellent glory*" (2 Peter 1:17), i.e. the very glory which accompanied Israel in the wilderness. How beautiful!

As if that were not enough, the disciples also had a fuller revelation of who Christ was than anything hitherto. They were "*eyewitnesses of his majesty*" (2 Peter 1:16b).

The word "*eyewitnesses*" is significant. It was applied to those few in the ancient pagan "mystery religions" who progressed to the final stage of initiation. Only these were granted a complete revelation of their god. In other words, the apostles were here admitted to the spectacle of who Jesus really was: "*the Lord of Glory,*" and "*the brightness of his (God's) glory.*"

The pillar of fire which once tabernacled behind a badger-skin veil was now veiled behind the flesh of the man Christ Jesus. As John said: "*we beheld his glory*" (John 1:14). Although fulfilled in some measure in our Lord's miracles (e.g. John 2:11), this expression finds particular fulfilment in His transfiguration.

On the mount Christ's glory was such that even His very garments were transfigured into pure light: "*His raiment was white as the light*" (Matthew 17:2). Or, as the Amplified so graphically puts it, "*His raiment became dazzling white - flashing with the brilliance of lightning*" (Luke 9:29).

How different from Moses! Then a mere piece of cloth put over his shining face could conceal "*the glory of his countenance*" (2 Corinthians 3:7, 13, Amp).

In addition, despite the surrounding darkness, *“his face did shine as the sun”*. This was a significant foreview of things to come: *“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon...for the glory of the Lamb did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof”* (Revelation 21:23).

In fact, the whole scene previewed Christ’s coming in the glory of His Kingdom. This is why Jesus said, just before the event, *“There be some standing here which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom”* (Matthew 16:27-28).

The apostles have long since died and our Lord has not yet come. Clearly, therefore, they must have witnessed something when still alive which was equivalent to the coming in power and glory of Christ’s future Messianic Kingdom.

That something was His transfiguration. On the Holy Mount the disciples beheld Christ as He would be after His glorification at His coming.

The manifestation of the sons of God

Not only is this remarkable scene a preview of Jesus *“crowned with glory”* (Hebrews 2:9), however. It is also a fore-glimpse of *“the manifestation of the sons of God”* in glory. For not only did the disciples see the Lord of glory, they also beheld a glorified Man, a demonstration of God’s ultimate intention for us.

To highlight this is the principal objective of this study. The remaining space will be dedicated to developing it.

Much is heard of *“that blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ”* (Titus 2:13, RV). But our hope is not simply the fact of Jesus’ appearing in glory. It is what takes place at His appearing.

1 John 3:2 says, *“when he shall appear we shall be like him”*. And this likeness is nothing less than His glory, for, *“when Christ shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory”* (Colossians 3:4).

A harbinger of this was the sight of Moses and Elijah who appeared with Christ on the mount. How were they harbingers? Because there they too *“appeared in glory”* (Luke 9:31a). As with them, so our hope also is to be *“glorified with him”* (Romans 8:17b, RV), with an inner glory (Romans 8:18b) which radiates the pure light within. Just as Jesus, so also *“shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father”* (Matthew 13:43; Cp Daniel 12:3).

Such shall be the unspeakable splendour of *“the manifestation of the sons of God”* (Romans 8:19b) that all creation shall feel the effects of *“the liberty of the glory of the children of God”* (Romans 8:21b, RV).

Oh, blessed hope, the hope of restored glory!

The Spirit of Glory

As if all this were not enough, Christ’s transfiguration is not only an earnest of *future* glorification. It also has promise for the *present*.

Undoubtedly the fulness of our inheritance is yet future: *“We ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”* (Romans 8:23b).

Nonetheless, the Scriptures also clearly teach that we already enjoy now *“the firstfruits of the Spirit”* (v.23a). In other words, the Spirit is not only given as a promise of a future inheritance. He is Himself also a present foretaste of that inheritance. This is why the Holy Ghost is termed *“the Spirit of adoption”* (Romans 8:15). He is Himself the present firstfruits of the future adoption.

Now, since the adoption includes the unveiling of *“the glory of the children of God,”* to the degree that we now taste the Spirit of adoption we also taste that coming glory. This explains why the Spirit is also designated *“the Spirit of glory”* (1 Peter 4:14).

So, just as Christ was transfigured, even now by the Spirit we also may be progressively transfigured: *“we all... beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 3:18). As we repeatedly expose ourselves to the revelation of *“the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”* (2 Corinthians 4:6), we too progressively come to bear that same glory.

(The word *“changed”* means literally *“are being transfigured.”* This further emphasises that the scene on the holy mount was a harbinger both of our own future glorification and of our present continuous transformation from one degree of glory to another.)

In one translation of Proverbs 4:18, we read that the path of godly men *“like a ray of dawn, shines on and on to the full light of day”*. Yet it is not only the *path* of the righteous, but the righteous man himself that shines with ever-increasing light.

And we may actually experience even now the reality of a progressive transfiguration and glorification.

This unutterable blessing is effected by the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18b). He brings into the present the coming future *“liberty of the glory of the children of God”*, for in writing of the transfiguring ministry of the Spirit, Paul states: *“where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty”*(v.17b). Biblical liberty is the fruit of conscious inner glorification.

The key role of the Spirit is further highlighted in a well-known passage: *“be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Romans 12.2). The opening phrase means literally *“be transfigured”*. This transfiguring is brought about by being *“renewed in the spirit of your mind”* (Ephesians 4:23). The agent of this renewing is the Spirit, for Paul speaks of *“the renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Titus 3:5).

But what is the connection between being renewed and being transfigured? The answer lies in the definition of renewal found in Colossians 3:10: *“renewed... after the image of Him that created him”*. Glorification is defined as being transfigured into the image of Him whose face reflects the glory of God (2 Corinthians 4:6; 3:18). Renewal also means to be changed into His image, therefore, renewal is identical to glorification.

Bearing in mind this definition, additional light is shed on another passage which is frequently not clearly understood: *“though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day* (2 Corinthians 4:16). Paul refers here to much more than merely being refreshed and revitalised within despite many external pressures. In fact, the Spirit’s ministry of renewal is a continuous, progressive glorification. Hence, if our inward man is being renewed, this means it is being glorified. This should help explain Paul’s subsequent remark: *“our light affliction... worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Corinthians 4:17). Present affliction, therefore, does not simply result in a future weight of glory (Blessed weight!). It is progressively working that glory into us even now.

Full of Glory

It is written of Stephen’s last moments that *“the council saw his face as it had been the face of an angel”* (Acts 6:15). This transfigured countenance is not surprising since he, *“being full of the Holy Ghost, looked stedfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God”* (Acts 7:55). To be full of the Holy Ghost, who is the Spirit of glory, means to be *‘full of glory.’*

The experience of this glory is not, however, limited to our last moments.

Peter’s letters reveal the deep impression left by the vision of Christ’s transfiguration in his repeated use of the word *“glory.”* One in particular is a priceless gem: *“joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (1 Peter 1:8). The last phrase means literally *“glorified.”* Peter thus spoke of a joy that is more than glorious, it is glorified. It so transfigures the countenance as to actually radiate the heavenly glory, just as on the holy mount.

For Peter, then, the transfiguration was far more than simply a preview of the Lord of glory returning in the power and glory of His Kingdom. It threw light on:

- ◆ both our own *future* hope of glory,
- ◆ and also our *present* experience of the glorifying ministry of the Spirit.

We look forward to something more unspeakably precious than even Moses’ remarkable experiences of the glory of God:

- ◆ The glory of Moses’ countenance progressively faded. But that which we experience increases from one degree of glory to another.
- ◆ Beautiful though it was Moses that could regularly enter into the glory, we have a far more beautiful hope, of the glory entering into us: *“Christ in you, the hope of glory”* (Colossians 1:27).

How rich is our hope! Little wonder that the Psalmist exclaimed *“Let the saints be joyful in glory”* (Psalm 149:5).

May *“the Father of glory...give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints”* (Ephesians 1:17-18).