



LET *the*
NATIONS
Be GLAD!

THE SUPREMACY OF GOD
IN MISSIONS

30TH
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION

JOHN
PIPER



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Preface

In this fourth edition of *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, revised and updated, the hope and prayer remains the same: that people, churches, mission agencies, and social ministries become God-centered, Christ-exalting, Spirit-powered, soul-satisfied, Bible-saturated, missions-mobilizing, soul-winning, and church-strengthening. The book is a partial fulfillment of my life mission: to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples through Jesus Christ.

John Stott sounded the note I love to hear and echo:

The highest of missionary motives is neither obedience to the Great Commission (important as that is), nor love for sinners who are alienated and perishing (strong as that incentive is, especially when we contemplate the wrath of God . . .), but rather zeal—burning and passionate zeal—for the glory of Jesus Christ. . . . Only one imperialism is Christian . . . and that is concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ, and for the glory of his empire.¹

Oh for the day when all pastors and laypeople and scholars and missionaries will be aflame with “concern for His Imperial Majesty Jesus Christ”!

Where do such God-centered, Christ-exalting, missions-driven people come from? They come from God-besotted, Christ-addicted, Bible-breathing homes and churches and schools and ministries. These are what this book aims to nurture.

1. John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 53.

There is a God-enthralled, Christ-treasuring, all-enduring love that pursues the fullness of God in the soul and in the service of Jesus. It is not absorbed in anthropology or methodology or even theology—it is absorbed in God. It cries out with the psalmist, “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for joy” (Ps. 67:3–4); “Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth” (Ps. 47:6–7).

This is a distinct God-magnifying, Christ-exalting mindset. It is relentless in bringing God forward again and again. It is spring-loaded to make much of the triune God in anthropology and methodology and theology. It cannot make peace with God-ignoring, God-neglecting planning or preaching or puttering around. Instead it says,

All the earth-shaking awesome forces unleashed on the world are released by the Lord Jesus Christ. He reigns today. He is in the control room of the universe. He is the only Ultimate Cause; all the sins of man and machinations of Satan ultimately have to enhance the glory and kingdom of our Saviour. This is true of our world today—in wars, famines, earthquakes, or the evil that apparently has the ascendancy. All God’s actions are just and loving. We have become too enemy-conscious, and can over-do the spiritual warfare aspect of intercession. We need to be more God-conscious, so that we can laugh the laugh of faith knowing that we have power over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19). He has already lost control because of Calvary where the Lamb was slain. What confidence and rest of heart this gives us as we face a world in turmoil and such spiritual need.²

There it is. Where are the teachers and preachers and mission executives and seminary presidents who talk like that? Their number is increasing. Even as I run my final lap, I want to be one. I want to breathe any little spark of Godward zeal I can into the reader’s soul. Your soul. Feel free to ransack this book for wherever you feel that breath. It doesn’t have to be read straight through.

This book is not just for missionaries. It is for pastors who want to connect their fragile, momentary, local labors to God’s invincible, eternal, global purposes. It is for laypeople who want a deeper motivation for

2. Patrick Johnstone, *Operation World* (Kent, UK: STL, 1987), 21. A regularly updated online version of that book is maintained at <http://www.operationworld.org>.

being world Christians than they get from statistics. It is for college and seminary professors teaching the theology of missions who really want their classes to be *theological* as well as anthropological, methodological, and technological. And it is for leaders who need the flickering wick of their vocation fanned into flame again with a focus on the supremacy of God in all things.

My prayer is that God will be merciful to make my labors fruitful for Christ's "Imperial Majesty." May he raise up generations of world Christians who are willing to lay down their lives to make the nations glad in the glory of God through Jesus Christ.



PART 1

MAKING GOD
SUPREME *in*
MISSIONS

The Purpose, the Power, and the Price

The Supremacy of God in Missions through Worship

Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.¹

Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal of missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God. "The LORD reigns, let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad!*" (Ps. 97:1). "Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy*" (Ps. 67:3–4).

But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. Missionaries will never call out, "Let the nations *be glad!*"

1. When I speak of *worship*, I do not mean "worship services." I mean the inner essence of treasuring God and its authentic expressions in what we say and sing and pray and do. See chap. 7, "The Inner Simplicity and Outer Freedom of Worldwide Worship." The thesis is that the New Testament is stunningly silent about the outward forms of worship and radically focused on the inner experience of treasuring God, because the New Testament is a book of vision for missions in all cultures, not a worship manual for how to "do worship" in one culture.

if they cannot say from the heart, “*I rejoice in the LORD*”; “*I will be glad and exult in you*; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High” (Pss. 104:34; 9:2). Missions begins and ends in worship.

If the pursuit of God’s glory is not ordered above the pursuit of man’s good in the affections of the heart and the priorities of the church, man will not be well served, and God will not be duly honored. I am not pleading for a diminishing of missions but for a magnifying of God. When the flame of worship burns with the heat of God’s true worth, the light of missions will shine to the peoples on earth in the greatest darkness. And I long for that day to come!

Where passion for God is weak, zeal for missions will be weak. Churches that are not centered on the exaltation of the majesty and beauty of God will scarcely kindle a fervent desire to “declare *his glory* among the nations” (Ps. 96:3). Even outsiders feel the disparity between the boldness of our claim upon the nations and the blandness of our engagement with God.

| Albert Einstein’s Indictment

For example, Charles Misner, a scientific specialist in general relativity theory, expressed Albert Einstein’s skepticism about the church with words that should awaken us to the shallowness of our experience with God in worship:

The design of the universe . . . is very magnificent and shouldn’t be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. *He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming. He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing.* My guess is that he simply felt that religions he’d run across did not have proper respect . . . for the author of the universe.²

The charge of blasphemy is loaded. The point is to pack a wallop behind the charge that in our worship services God simply doesn’t come through

2. Charles Misner, quoted in Richard John Neuhaus, “The Feminist Revelation,” *First Things* 18 (December 1991): 63 (emphasis added).

for who he is. He is unwittingly belittled. For those who are stunned by the indescribable magnitude of what God has made, not to mention the infinite greatness of the One who made it, the steady diet on Sunday morning of practical how-tos and psychological soothing and relational therapy and tactical planning seems dramatically out of touch with Reality—the God of overwhelming greatness.

It is possible to be distracted from God in trying to serve God. Martha-like, we neglect the one thing needful and soon begin to present God as if he is as busy and fretful as we are. A. W. Tozer warned us about this:

We commonly represent God as a busy, eager, somewhat frustrated Father hurrying about seeking help to carry out His benevolent plan to bring peace and salvation to the world. . . . Too many missionary appeals are based upon this fancied frustration of Almighty God.³

Scientists know that light travels at the speed of 5.87 trillion miles a year. They also know that the galaxy of which our solar system is a part is about 100,000 light-years in diameter—about 587 quadrillion miles. It is one of billions of galaxies in our universe—some say 200 billion, some say two trillion.⁴ It has been estimated that in our galaxy there are more than 200 billion stars. The sun is one of them, a modest star burning at about 6,000 degrees centigrade on the surface and traveling in an orbit at 135 miles per second, which means it will take about 250 million years to complete a revolution around the galaxy.

Scientists know these things and are awed by them. And they say, “If there is a personal God, as the Christians say, who spoke this universe into being, then there is a certain respect and reverence and wonder and dread that would have to come through when we talk about him and when we worship him.”

We who believe the Bible know this even better than the scientists who don’t share our belief, because we have heard something even more amazing:

3. A. W. Tozer, quoted in Tom Wells, *A Vision for Missions* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 35.

4. Henry Fountain, “Take a Number: Two Trillion Galaxies, at the Very Least,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/18/science/two-trillion-galaxies-at-the-very-least.html>.

To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these [stars]? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.

Isaiah 40:25–26

Every one of the billions of stars in the universe is there by God’s specific appointment. He knows their number. And most astonishing of all, he knows them by name. They do his bidding as his personal agents.

When we feel the weight of this grandeur in the heavens, we have only touched the hem of his garment. “Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him!” (Job 26:14). That is why we cry, “Be exalted, O God, above the heavens!” (Ps. 57:5). God is the absolute reality that everyone in the universe must come to terms with. Everything depends utterly on his will. All other realities compare to him like a raindrop compares to the ocean or like an anthill compares to Mount Everest. To ignore him or belittle him is unintelligible and suicidal folly. How shall one who has not trembled before this great God with joyful wonder ever be his emissary?

| The Second Greatest Activity in the World

The most crucial issue in missions is the centrality of God in the life of the church. How can people who are not stunned by the greatness of God be sent with the ringing message, “*Great* is the LORD, and *greatly* to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods” (Ps. 96:4)? Missions is not first and ultimate; God is. And these are not just words. This truth is the lifeblood of missionary inspiration and endurance. William Carey, the father of modern missions, who set sail for India from England in 1793, expressed the connection:

When I left England, my hope of India’s conversion was very strong; but amongst so many obstacles, it would die, unless upheld by God. Well, I have God, and His Word is true. Though the superstitions of the heathen were a thousand times stronger than they are, and the example of the Europeans a thousand times worse; though I were deserted by all and persecuted by

all, yet my faith, fixed on the sure Word, would rise above all obstructions and overcome every trial. God's cause will triumph.⁵

Carey and thousands like him have been moved and carried by the vision of a great and triumphant God. That vision must come first. Savoring it in worship precedes spreading it in missions. All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white-hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the earth. Missions is not that goal. It is the means. And for that reason it is the second greatest human activity in the world.

| God's Passion for God Is the Foundation for Ours

One of the things God uses to make this truth take hold of a person and a church is the stunning realization that it is also true for God himself. Missions is not *God's* ultimate goal, worship is. And when this sinks into a person's heart, everything changes. The world is often turned on its head, and everything looks different—including the missionary enterprise.

The ultimate foundation for our passion to see God glorified is his own passion to be glorified. God is central and supreme in his own affections. There are no rivals for the supremacy of God's glory in his own heart. God is not an idolater. He does not disobey the first and greatest commandment. With all his heart and soul and strength and mind he delights in the glory of his manifold perfections.⁶ The most passionate heart for God in all the universe is God's heart.

This truth, more than any other I know, seals the conviction that worship is the fuel and goal of missions. The deepest reason why *our* passion for God should fuel missions is that *God's* passion for God fuels missions. Missions is the overflow of our delight in God because missions is the overflow of God's delight in being God. And the deepest reason why worship is the *goal* in missions is that worship is God's goal. We are confirmed in this goal by the biblical record of God's relentless pursuit of praise among

5. William Carey, quoted in Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 140. For an introduction to Carey's life, see Timothy George, *Faithful Witness: The Life and Mission of William Carey* (Birmingham, AL: New Hope, 1991).

6. I have tried to unfold this wonderful truth of the Father's delight in himself in *The Pleasures of God: Meditations on God's Delight in Being God*, rev. and exp. ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2012), chap. 1, "The Pleasure of God in His Son" (11–32).

the nations. “Praise the LORD, all nations! Extol him, all peoples!” (Ps. 117:1). If it is God’s goal, it must be our goal.

| **The Chief End of God Is to Glorify God and Enjoy Himself Forever**

All my years of preaching and teaching on the supremacy of God in the heart of God have proved that this truth hits most people like a truck laden with unknown fruit. If they survive the impact, they discover that this is the most luscious fruit on the planet. I have unpacked this truth with lengthy arguments in other places.⁷ So here I will give just a brief overview of the biblical basis. What I am claiming is that the answer to the first question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is the same when asked concerning God as it is when asked concerning man. Question: “What is the chief end of man?” Answer: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Question: “What is the chief end of God?” Answer: “God’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy himself forever.”

Another way to say it is simply that God is righteous. The opposite of righteousness is to value and enjoy what is not truly valuable or rewarding. This is why people are called unrighteous in Romans 1:18. They suppress the truth of God’s value and exchange God for created things. So they belittle God and discredit his worth. Righteousness is the opposite. It means recognizing true value for what it is and esteeming it and enjoying it in proportion to its true worth. The unrighteous in 2 Thessalonians 2:10 perish because they refuse to *love* the truth. The righteous, then, are those who *welcome* a love for the truth. Righteousness is recognizing and welcoming and loving and upholding what is truly valuable.

God is righteous. This means that he recognizes, welcomes, loves, and upholds with infinite jealousy and energy what is infinitely valuable: namely, the worth of God. God’s righteous passion and delight is to display and uphold his infinitely valuable glory. This is not a vague theological conjecture. It flows inevitably from dozens of biblical texts that show God in the relentless pursuit of praise and honor from creation to consummation.

7. See especially appendix 2, “The Goal of God in Redemptive History,” in John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2011), 313–26; and the entirety of Piper, *Pleasures of God*.

Probably no text in the Bible reveals the passion of God for his own glory more clearly and bluntly than Isaiah 48:9–11, where God says,

For my name's sake I defer my anger; for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you, that I may not cut you off. Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.

I have found that for many people these words come like six hammerblows to a man-centered way of looking at the world:

For *my* name's sake!
 For the sake of *my* praise!
 For *my* own sake!
 For *my* own sake!
 How should *my* name be profaned!
 My glory I will not give to another!

What this text hammers home to us is the centrality of God in his own affections. The most passionate heart for the glorification of God is God's heart. God's ultimate goal is to uphold and display the glory of his name.

| **Biblical Texts to Show God's Zeal for His Own Glory**

God chose his people for his glory:

He chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we might be holy and blameless before him in love, having predestined us for sonship through Jesus Christ for himself according to the good pleasure of his will *unto the praise of the glory of his grace.*

Ephesians 1:4–6, author's translation; cf. verses 12, 14

God created us for his glory:

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, every-one who is called by my name, *whom I created for my glory.*

Isaiah 43:6–7

God called Israel for his glory:

You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.

Isaiah 49:3

I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, *that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory.*

Jeremiah 13:11

God rescued Israel from Egypt for his glory:

Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works . . . but rebelled by the sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them *for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power.*

Psalms 106:7–8

God raised Pharaoh up to show his power and glorify his name:

The Scripture says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

Romans 9:17

God defeated Pharaoh at the Red Sea to show his glory:

I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and *I will get glory over Pharaoh* and all his host, and the Egyptians *shall know that I am the LORD. . . . And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten glory over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen.*

Exodus 14:4, 18; cf. verse 17

God spared Israel in the wilderness for the glory of his name:

I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I had brought them out.

Ezekiel 20:14

God gave Israel victory in Canaan for the glory of his name:

Who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, *making himself a name* and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods?

2 Samuel 7:23

For the glory of his name, God did not cast away his people:

Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD. . . . For the LORD will not forsake his people, *for his great name's sake*.

1 Samuel 12:20, 22

God saved Jerusalem from attack for the glory of his name:

I will defend this city to save it, *for my own sake* and for the sake of my servant David.

2 Kings 19:34; cf. 20:6

God restored Israel from exile for the glory of his name:

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*. . . . *And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name*. . . . And the nations will know that I am the LORD.

Ezekiel 36:22–23; cf. verse 32

Jesus sought the glory of his Father in all he did:

The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but *the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him* is true, and in him there is no falsehood.

John 7:18

Jesus told us to do good works so that God gets glory:

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and *give glory to your Father who is in heaven*.

Matthew 5:16; cf. 1 Peter 2:12

Jesus warned that not seeking God's glory makes faith impossible:

How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?

John 5:44

Jesus said that he answers prayer so that God will be glorified:

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, *that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*

John 14:13

Jesus endured his final hours of suffering for God's glory:

"Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? *But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.*" Then a voice came from heaven: "*I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.*"

John 12:27–28

Father, the hour has come; *glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.*

John 17:1; cf. 13:31–32

God gave his Son to vindicate the glory of his righteousness:

God put [Christ] forward as a propitiation by his blood . . . *to show God's righteousness. . . .* It was to show his righteousness at the present time.

Romans 3:25–26

God forgives our sins for his own sake:

I, I am he who blots out your transgressions *for my own sake*, and I will not remember your sins.

Isaiah 43:25

For *your name's sake*, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Psalm 25:11

Jesus receives us into his fellowship for the glory of God:

Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, *for the glory of God.*

Romans 15:7

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to glorify the Son of God:

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

John 16:14

God instructs us to do everything for his glory:

Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, *do all to the glory of God.*

1 Corinthians 10:31; cf. 6:20

God tells us to serve in a way that will glorify him:

Whoever serves, [let him do it] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that *in everything God may be glorified* through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:11

Jesus will fill us with fruits of righteousness for God's glory:

It is my prayer that . . . [you be] filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, *to the glory and praise of God.*

Philippians 1:9, 11

All are under judgment for dishonoring God's glory:

They became fools, and *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images.*

Romans 1:22–23

All have sinned and *fall short of the glory of God.*

Romans 3:23

Herod was struck dead because he did not give glory to God:

Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because *he did not give God the glory.*

Acts 12:23

Jesus is coming again for the glory of God:

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day *to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed.*

2 Thessalonians 1:9–10

Jesus's ultimate aim for us is that we see and enjoy his glory:

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory* that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

John 17:24

Even in wrath, God's aim is to make known the wealth of his glory:

Desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, [God] has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, *in order to make known the riches of his glory* for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory.

Romans 9:22–23

God's plan is to fill the earth with the knowledge of his glory:

The earth will be filled with *the knowledge of the glory of the LORD* as the waters cover the sea.

Habakkuk 2:14

Everything that happens will redound to God's glory:

From him and through him and to him are all things. *To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Romans 11:36

In the New Jerusalem, the glory of God replaces the sun:

The city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for *the glory of God gives it light*, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Revelation 21:23

God’s passion for God is unmistakable. God struck me with this most powerfully when I first read Jonathan Edwards’s book titled *The End for Which God Created the World*.⁸ There Edwards piles reason upon reason and Scripture upon Scripture to show this truth:

The great end of God’s works, which is so variously expressed in Scripture, is indeed but ONE; and this one end is most properly and comprehensively called, THE GLORY OF GOD.⁹

In other words, the chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy himself forever.

| The Belittling of God’s Glory and the Horrors of Hell

The condition of the human heart throws God’s God-centeredness into stark relief. Man by nature does not have a heart to glorify God. “All have sinned and *fall short of the glory of God*” (Rom. 3:23). In our wickedness, we suppress the truth that God is our Sovereign and worthy of all our allegiance and affection. By nature we exchange the glory of the immortal God for dim images of it in creation (Rom. 1:18, 23). We forsake the fountain of living waters and hew out for ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water (Jer. 2:13).

The nations “are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18). By nature we were all once dead in trespasses and sins, following the slave master Satan, and therefore children of wrath (Eph. 2:1–3). Our end was “eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46), exclusion

8. For an introduction to the life of Edwards, the implications of his theology for evangelism, and the complete text of Edwards’s *The End for Which God Created the World*, see John Piper, *God’s Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998).

9. Edwards, *End for Which God Created the World*, 246.

“from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9), and endless torments in “the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8; cf. 14:11; 20:10).¹⁰

The infinite horrors of hell are intended by God to be a vivid demonstration of the infinite value of the glory of God. The biblical assumption of the justice of hell is a clear testimony to the infiniteness of the sin of failing to glorify God. All of us have failed. All the nations have failed. Therefore, the weight of infinite guilt rests on every human head because of our failure to cherish the glory of God. The biblical vision of God, then, is that he is supremely committed, with infinite passion, to uphold and display the glory of his name. And the biblical vision of man without grace is that he suppresses this truth and by nature finds more joy in his own glory than he does in God’s. God exists to be worshiped, and man worships the work of his own hands. This twofold reality creates the critical need for missions. And the very God-centeredness of God, which creates the crisis, also creates the solution.

| How Can Self-Exaltation Be Love?

For over thirty years I have tried to present to Christians in various places this central biblical truth of God’s passion for the glory of God. The major objection has been that it seems to make God unloving. The merciful, kind, loving heart of God seems to disappear in the passions of an overweening ego. Doesn’t the Bible say, “Love . . . does not seek its own” (1 Cor. 13:4–5 NASB)? How then can God be loving and seek his own glory? It’s a good question. And in answering it we will see how the supremacy of God in the heart of God is the spring of mercy and kindness and love—which means the spring of missions.

There are two ways to see harmony between God’s passion for his own glory and Paul’s statement that “love . . . does not seek its own.” One is to say that Paul doesn’t mean that every way of seeking your own is wrong. Some ways are, and some ways aren’t. The other is to say that God is unique and that Paul’s statement does not apply to him the way it does to us. I think both of these are true.

10. For a defense of the reality of eternal conscious torment in hell for those who reject the truth of God, see chap. 4.

| Love Seeks Its Own Joy in the Joy of Others

First, “love . . . does not seek its own” was not meant by Paul to condemn every possible way of “seeking your own.” He did not mean that seeking your own happiness in loving others is loveless. We know this because in Acts 20:35 Paul told the elders of the church of Ephesus to “remember” the word of the Lord Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” If it were unloving to be motivated by the blessedness of loving, then Paul would not have told the elders to “remember” this word—that is, to keep it in their minds where it could function as a conscious motive. If seeking your own blessing in giving to others ruined the act, Paul would not have told us to keep this blessing in mind.

Those who have thought most deeply about motivation realize this and have interpreted Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:5 with great wisdom. For example, Jonathan Edwards pointed out that what Paul is opposing in the words “love . . . does not seek its own” is not

the degree in which [a person] loves his own happiness, but in his placing his happiness where he ought not, and in limiting and confining his love. Some, although they love their own happiness, do not place that happiness in their own confined good, or in that good which is limited to themselves, but more in the common good—in that which is the good of others, or in the good to be enjoyed in and by others. . . . And when it is said that *Charity seeketh not her own*, we are to understand it of her own private good—good limited to herself.¹¹

In other words, Paul did not mean to condemn every possible way of seeking your own. He had in mind the selfish attitude that finds its happiness not in helping others but in using others or ignoring others for personal gain. He did not have in mind the attitude that *seeks its own* joy precisely in doing good to others. In fact, he appeals to that motive two verses earlier when he says, “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I *gain nothing*” (1 Cor. 13:3). He is saying, “Surely you do not want to ‘gain nothing,’ do you? Well, then be sure that you love. Then you will gain much.” So he actually appeals to the very motive that some say he is denouncing. But he is not appealing to low, selfish,

11. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (1852; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 164.

materialistic motives. He is calling for the radical transformation of heart that finds its joy in the act of love and all the goodness that comes from it.

So the way is opened perhaps for God to “seek his own” and still be loving. But I said there are two ways to see harmony between God’s passion for his own glory and Paul’s statement “love . . . does not seek its own.” We’ve seen one: namely, that Paul is not opposing “seeking one’s own” if “one’s own” is really the good of others.

| The Sin of Imitating God

The other way to see this harmony is to say that God is unique and that Paul’s statement does not apply to him the way it does to us. This is true. Things are forbidden to us that are not forbidden to God precisely because we are not God and he is. The reason we are not to exalt our own glory but God’s is because he is God and we are not. For God to be faithful to this same principle means that he too would exalt not our glory but his. The unifying principle is not, Don’t exalt your own glory. The unifying principle is, Exalt the glory of what is infinitely glorious. For us that means exalt God. And for God that means exalt God. For us it means don’t seek your own glory. For God it means *do* seek your own glory.

This can be very slippery. Satan saw this and used it in the Garden of Eden. He came with the temptation to Adam and Eve: If you eat from the forbidden tree, “you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). Now, what Adam and Eve should have said was, “We are already like God. We have been created *in his image*” (see Gen. 1:27). But instead of putting this truth against Satan’s temptation, they allowed the truth to make error look plausible: “If we are in the image of God, then it can’t be wrong to want to be like God. So the suggestion of the serpent that we will be like God can’t be bad.” So they ate.

But the problem is that it is *not* right for humans to try to be like God in every way. God’s God-ness makes some things right for him to do that are not right for us to do. In Adam and Eve’s case, it is God’s right to decide for them what is good and what is evil, what is helpful and what is harmful. They are finite and do not have the wisdom to know all the factors to take into account in living a happy life. Only God knows all that needs to be known. Therefore, humans have no right to be independent of God. Independent judgment about what is helpful and harmful

is folly and rebellion. That was the temptation. And that was the essence of their disobedience.

The point is simply that even though we are created in the image of God, and even though in some ways we are to “be imitators of God” (Eph. 5:1), we are mistaken to think that God does not have some rights that we do not have. A father wants his child to imitate his manners and courtesies and integrity, but he does not want the child to imitate the father’s authority, neither toward the parents nor toward the child’s brothers and sisters.

Thus, it is right for God to do some things that we are forbidden to do. And one of those things is to exalt his own glory. He would be unrighteous if he did not do so, because he would not be prizing what is infinitely valuable. He would in fact be an idolater if he esteemed as his infinite treasure something less precious than his own glory.

| **God Is Most Glorified in Us When We Are Most Satisfied in Him**

But is it *loving* for God to exalt his own glory? Yes, it is. And there are several ways to see this truth clearly. One is to ponder this sentence: *God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him*. This is perhaps the most important sentence in my theology.¹² If it is true, then it becomes plain why God is loving when he seeks to exalt his glory in my life, for that means that he seeks to maximize my satisfaction in him, since he is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in him. Therefore, God’s pursuit of his own glory is not at odds with my joy, and that means it is not unkind or unmerciful or unloving of him to seek his glory. In fact, it means that the more passionate God is for his own glory, the more passionate he is for my satisfaction in that glory. And therefore, God’s God-centeredness and God’s love soar together.

To illustrate the truth that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him, consider what I might say on a pastoral visit when entering the hospital room of one of my people. They look up from their bed with a smile and say, “Oh, Pastor John, how good of you to come. What

12. For an extended elaboration of this thesis, see Piper, *Desiring God*, and its abbreviated version, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2001). For a collection of messages developing this truth, see <https://www.desiringgod.org/topics/christian-hedonism/messages>. For a six-part video series on this topic, see <https://www.desiringgod.org/series/jesus-and-the-journey-to-joy>.

an encouragement.” And suppose I lift my hand, as it were to deflect the words, and say matter-of-factly, “Don’t mention it. It’s my duty as a pastor.” Now, what is wrong here? Why do we cringe at such a thoughtless pastoral statement? “It is my duty.” Duty is a good thing. So why does that statement do so much damage?

It damages because it does not honor the sick person. Why? Because delight confers more honor than duty does. Doing hospital visitation out of mere duty honors my dutiful self-sacrifice. Doing it out of delight honors the patients. And they feel that. The right pastoral response to the patient’s greeting would have been, “It’s a pleasure to be here. Encouraging you to hope in Christ gives me joy.” Do you see the paradox here? Those two sentences would show that I am “seeking my own.” “It’s *my* pleasure to be here. Encouraging you gives *me* joy.” And yet the reason these statements are not selfish is that they confer honor on the patient, not on the pastor. When someone delights in you and finds joy in doing you good, you feel honored. When someone finds happiness in being around you, you feel treasured, appreciated, “glorified.” Visiting the sick because you are glad to be there is a loving thing to do.

This then is the answer to why God is not unloving to magnify his glory. God is glorified precisely when we are satisfied in him—when we delight in his presence, when we like to be around him, when we treasure his fellowship. This is an utterly life-changing discovery. It frees us to pursue our joy in God, and God to pursue his glory in us, because they are not two different pursuits. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.

| **God’s Self-Exaltation: Signpost to Human Satisfaction**

Therefore, when we read hundreds of texts in the Bible that show God passionately exalting his own glory, we no longer hear them as the passions of an overweening, uncaring ego. We hear them as the rightful exaltation of One who is infinitely exalted, and we hear them as God’s pursuit of our deepest satisfaction in him. God is utterly unique. He is the only being in the universe worthy of worship. Therefore, when he exalts himself he directs people to true and lasting joy. “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11). But when we exalt ourselves, we are distracting people from what will

bring true and lasting joy. So for us to be loving we must exalt God, and for God to be loving he must exalt God. Love is helping people toward the greatest beauty, the highest value, the deepest satisfaction, the most lasting joy, the biggest reward, the most wonderful friendship, and the most overwhelming worship—love is helping people toward God. We do this by pointing to the greatness of God. And God does it by pointing to the greatness of God.

| God Exalts Himself in Mercy

There is another way to see how God’s passion for his own glory is loving, and here the connection between the supremacy of God and the cause of missions becomes explicit. The connection between missions and the supremacy of God is found in this sentence: *The glory God seeks to magnify is supremely the glory of his mercy.* The key text is Romans 15:8–9:

I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised [Jewish people] to show God’s truthfulness, *in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.*

Notice three interlocking truths in these great missionary verses.

1. *Zeal for the glory of God motivates world missions.* Paul gives three reasons why Christ humbled himself as a servant and came into the world on that first great missionary journey from heaven to earth. First, “Christ became a servant . . . to show God’s truthfulness.” Second, he came “in order to confirm [God’s] promises.” Third, he came “in order that the [nations] might glorify God for his mercy.”

In other words, Christ was on a mission to magnify God. He came to show that God is truthful. He came to show that God is a promise-keeper. And he came to show that God is glorious. Jesus came into the world for God’s sake—to certify God’s integrity, to vindicate God’s Word, to magnify God’s glory. Since God sent his Son to do all this, it is plain that the primary motive of the first great mission to unreached peoples—the mission of Jesus from heaven—was God’s zeal for the glory of God. That’s the first truth from Romans 15:8–9: Zeal for the glory of God motivates world missions.

2. *A servant spirit and a heart of mercy motivate world missions.* “Christ became a *servant* . . . in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his *mercy*.” Christ became a servant . . . and Christ brought mercy. He was a servant not only in that he humbled himself to do what the Father wanted him to do at great cost to himself. He was also a servant in that he lived his life for the sake of extending mercy to the nations. During his lifetime, he showed the connection between compassion and missions. We see this, for example, in Matthew 9:36–38:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Jesus’s compassion came to expression in the call to pray for more missionaries. From first to last, mercy was moving missions in the life of Jesus. And not only in his life but also in his death. “You were slain, and by your *blood* you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev. 5:9). Mercy was the very heart of Jesus’s mission. No one deserved his mission. It was all mercy and all servanthood. That’s the second truth from Romans 15:8–9: A servant spirit and a heart of mercy motivate world missions.

3. *The first and second truths are one truth.* Zeal for the glory of God and a servant heart of mercy for the nations are one. This is plain from the wording of verse 9: Christ came “in order that the Gentiles might glorify God.” Yes! That was the passion of Christ, and it should be our passion—that the nations might love the glory of God and praise the glory of God. But the verse goes on: Christ came “that the Gentiles might glorify God *for his mercy*.” The motive of mercy and the motive of God’s glory are not two different motives, because the glory we want to see exalted among the nations is supremely the glory of God’s mercy.

Mercy is the apex of God’s glory the way the overflow of a fountain is the apex of the fountain’s fullness. God is free to be merciful because he is full in himself and utterly self-sufficient. He has no deficiencies or needs or defects. He relies totally on himself for all that he is. He never had a beginning or underwent any process of improvement through some influence outside himself. The glory of his all-sufficiency overflows in the

freedom of his mercy to the nations. Therefore, extending God's mercy and exalting God's glory are one.¹³

A heart for the glory of God and a heart of mercy for the nations make a Christlike missionary.¹⁴ These must be kept together. If we have no zeal for the glory of God, our mercy becomes superficial, man-centered human improvement with no eternal significance. And if our zeal for the glory of God is not a reveling in his mercy, then our so-called zeal, in spite of all its protests, is out of touch with God and hypocritical (see Matt. 9:13).¹⁵

| He Does Everything for the Praise of the Glory of His Grace

This wonderful agreement between God's passion to be glorified and his passion to be gracious is also strikingly evident in the first chapter of Ephesians. Three times Paul says that God is doing all his saving work "to the praise of His glory" (NASB). And verse 6 makes clear that this glory is "the glory of His grace." Election, predestination, adoption, redemption, sealing by the Spirit, working all things according to the counsel of his will—God does all this to elicit praise for the glory of his grace. Verses 5–6: ". . . having predestined us for sonship through Jesus Christ . . . *to the praise of the glory of his grace*" (author's translation). Verses 11–12: God "works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be *to the praise of his glory*." Verse 14: The Holy Spirit "is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, *to the praise of his glory*."

This is just what we saw in Romans 15:9. There the nations glorify God for his mercy. Here they praise God for his grace. In both cases, God gets the glory and humans get the joy. So the more passionate God is for his glory, the more passionate he is for meeting our need as sinners. Grace is our only hope and the only hope of the nations. Therefore, the more zealous God is for his grace to be glorified, the more hope there is that missions will succeed.

13. For a more extended contemplation of how God's God-centeredness is the ground for his mercy, see Piper, *Pleasures of God*, 104–9.

14. For further reflection on the interconnectedness of mercy and magnifying God in missions, see chap. 6 of this book, "A Passion for God's Supremacy and Compassion for Man's Soul."

15. See chap. 6 for a fuller explanation of how these two motives in missions fit together.

| The Power of Missions Is Worship

What we have been showing is that God's supremacy in his own heart is not unloving. It is, in fact, the fountain of love. God's full delight in his own perfection overflows in his merciful will to share that delight with the nations. We may reaffirm, then, the earlier truth that worship is the fuel and the goal that drive us in missions because it is the fuel and the goal that drive God in missions. Missions flows from the fullness of God's passion for God, and it aims at the participation of the nations in the very passion that he has for himself (see Matt. 25:21, 23; John 15:11; 17:13, 26). The power of the missionary enterprise is to be caught up into God's fuel and God's goal. And that means being caught up in worship.

| Only One God Works for People Who Wait for Him

This remarkable vision of God as one who "exalts himself to show mercy" (Isa. 30:18) impels world missions in more ways than one. One way we have not pondered is the sheer uniqueness of this God among all the gods of the nations. Isaiah realizes this and says, "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him" (Isa. 64:4). In other words, Isaiah is stunned that the greatness of God has the paradoxical effect that he does not need people to work for him but rather magnifies himself by working for them, if they will renounce self-reliance and "wait for him."

Isaiah anticipated the words of Paul in Acts 17:25: God is not "served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything." The uniqueness at the heart of Christianity is the glory of God manifest in the freedom of grace. God is glorious because he does not need the nations to work for him. He is free to work for them. "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Missions is not a recruitment project for God's labor force. It is a liberation project from the heavy burdens and hard yokes of other gods (Matt. 11:28–30).

Isaiah says that such a God has not been seen or heard anywhere in the world. "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him"

(Isa. 64:4). What Isaiah sees everywhere he looks are gods who have to *be served* rather than serve. For example, take the Babylonian gods Bel and Nebo:

Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and livestock; these things you carry are borne as burdens on weary beasts. They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden, but themselves go into captivity. Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from before your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

Isaiah 46:1–4; cf. Jeremiah 10:5

The difference between the true God and the gods of the nations is that the true God carries and the other gods must be carried. God serves; they must be served. God glorifies his might by showing mercy. They glorify theirs by gathering slaves. So the vision of God as one whose passion for his glory moves him to mercy impels missions because he is utterly unique among all the gods.

| The Most Shareable Message in the World

There is yet another way that such a God motivates the missionary enterprise. The gospel demand that flows from such a God to the nations is an eminently shareable, doable demand: namely, to rejoice and be glad in God. “The LORD reigns; let the earth *rejoice*; let the many coastlands *be glad!*” (Ps. 97:1). “Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy*” (Ps. 67:3–4). “Let the oppressed see it and *be glad*; you who seek God, *let your hearts revive*” (Ps. 69:32 RSV). “May all who seek you *rejoice and be glad in you!* May those who love your salvation say evermore, ‘God is great!’” (Ps. 70:4). What message would missionaries rather take than the message, “Be glad in God! Rejoice in God! Sing for joy in God! For God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him! God loves to exalt himself by showing mercy to sinners.”

The liberating fact is that the message we take to the frontiers is that people everywhere should seek their own best interest. We are summoning

people to God. And those who come say, “In your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Ps. 16:11). God glorifies himself among the nations with the command, “Delight yourself in the LORD” (Ps. 37:4). His first and great requirement of all men everywhere is that they repent from seeking their joy in other things and begin to seek it only in him. A God who cannot be served¹⁶ is a God who can only be enjoyed. The great sin of the world is not that the human race has failed to work for God so as to *increase* his glory but that we have failed to delight in God so as to *reflect* his glory, for God’s glory is most reflected in us when we are most delighted in him.

The most exhilarating thought in the world is that God’s inexorable purpose to display his glory in the mission of the church is virtually the same as his purpose to give his people infinite delight. The glory of a mountain spring is seen in how many people (and how many different peoples!) find satisfaction and life in its overflowing streams. Therefore, God is committed to the holy joy of the redeemed, gathered from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, with the same zeal that moves him to seek his own glory in all that he does. The supremacy of God in the heart of God is the driving force of his mercy and the missionary movement of his church.

| Biblical Expressions of the Supremacy of God in Missions

Against the background we have developed so far, we may now be able to feel the full force of those biblical texts that emphasize the supremacy of God in the missionary impulse of the church. The motives we see will confirm the centrality of God in the missionary vision of the Bible.

We have seen some of the Old Testament texts that make the glory of God the centerpiece of missionary proclamation: “Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!” (Ps. 96:3). “Proclaim that his name is exalted” (Isa. 12:4). There are many others.¹⁷ But we have not yet seen the straightforward statements of Jesus, Paul, and John that say the same thing.

16. I am aware that the Bible is replete with pictures of God’s people serving him. I have dealt in some detail with the way service can be conceived biblically so as not to put God in the category of an employer who depends on wage earners. See *Desiring God*, 166–74.

17. See an extensive list of these texts in chap. 5.

Leaving Family and Possessions for the Sake of the Name

When Jesus turned the rich young ruler away because the young man was not willing to leave his wealth to follow Jesus, the Lord said, “Only with difficulty will a rich person enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:23). The apostles were amazed and said, “Who then can be saved?” (v. 25). Jesus answered, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (v. 26). Then Peter, speaking as a kind of missionary who had left his home and business to follow Jesus, said, “See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?” (v. 27). Jesus answered with a mild rebuke of Peter’s sense of sacrifice: “Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, *for my name’s sake*, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life” (v. 29).

The point of focus for us here is the phrase “for my name’s sake.” The motive that Jesus virtually takes for granted when a missionary leaves home and family and possessions is that it is *for the sake of the name of Jesus*. That means for the sake of Jesus’s reputation. God’s goal is that his Son’s name be exalted and honored among all the peoples of the world, for when the Son is honored, the Father is honored (Mark 9:37). When every knee bows at the name of Jesus, it will be “to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10–11). Therefore, God-centered missions exists for the sake of the name of Jesus.

A Missionary Prayer for God’s Name to Be Hallowed

The first two petitions of the Lord’s Prayer are perhaps the clearest statements in the teachings of Jesus that missions is driven by the passion of God to be glorified among the nations. “Hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come” (Matt. 6:9–10). Here Jesus teaches us to ask God to hallow his own name and to make his kingdom come. This is a missionary prayer. Its aim is to engage the passion of God for his name among those who forget or revile the name of God (Pss. 9:17; 74:18). To hallow God’s name means to put it in a class by itself and to cherish and honor it above every claim to our allegiance or affection. Jesus’s primary concern—the very first petition of the prayer he teaches—is that more and more people, and more and more peoples, come to hallow God’s name. This is the reason the universe exists. Missions exists because this hallowing does not.

How Much He Must Suffer for the Name

When Paul was converted on the Damascus road, Jesus Christ became the supreme treasure and joy of his life. “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8). It was a costly allegiance. What Paul learned in Damascus was not only the joy of sins forgiven and fellowship with the King of the universe but also how much he would have to suffer. Jesus sent Ananias to him with this message: “I will show him how much he must suffer *for the sake of my name*” (Acts 9:16). Paul’s missionary sufferings were “for the sake of the name.” When he came near the end of his life and was warned not to go to Jerusalem, he answered, “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die in Jerusalem *for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Acts 21:13). For Paul, the glory of the name of Jesus and his reputation in the world were more important than life.

“For the Sake of His Name among All the Nations”

Paul makes crystal clear in Romans 1:5 that his mission and calling are for the name of Christ among all the nations: “We have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith *for the sake of his name among all the nations.*”

The apostle John described the motive of early Christian missionaries in the same way. He wrote to tell one of his churches that they should send out Christian brothers “in a manner worthy of God.” And the reason he gave is that “they have gone out *for the sake of the name*, accepting nothing from the Gentiles” (3 John 6–7).

John Stott comments on these two texts (Rom. 1:5; 3 John 7): “They knew that God had superexalted Jesus, enthroning him at his right hand and bestowing upon him the highest rank, in order that every tongue should confess his lordship. They longed that Jesus should receive the honor due to his name.”¹⁸ This longing is not a dream but a certainty. At the bottom of all our hope, when everything else has given way, we stand on this great reality: The everlasting, all-sufficient God is infinitely, unwaveringly, and eternally committed to the glory of his great and holy name. For the sake

18. John R. W. Stott, “The Bible in World Evangelization,” in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, 3rd ed., ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1999), 22.

of his fame among the nations he will act. His name will not be profaned forever. The mission of the church will be victorious. He will vindicate his people and his cause in all the earth.

| **May the Blessed Redeemer See the Travail of His Soul!**

David Brainerd, the missionary to the Indians in New Jersey in the 1740s, was sustained by this confidence to his death at age twenty-nine. Seven days before he died in 1747, he spoke of his longing for the glory of God in the world. These are the last words he had the strength to write with his own hand:

Friday, October 2. My soul was this day, at turns, sweetly set on God: I longed to be “with him” that I might “behold his glory.” . . . Oh, that his kingdom might come in the world; that they might all love and glorify him for what he is in himself; and that the blessed Redeemer might “see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.” Oh, “come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Amen.”¹⁹

The absence of Brainerd’s passion for God is the great cause of missionary weakness in the churches. This was Andrew Murray’s judgment a hundred years ago:

As we seek to find out why, with such millions of Christians, the real army of God that is fighting the hosts of darkness is so small, the only answer is—lack of heart. The enthusiasm of the kingdom is missing. And that is because there is so little enthusiasm for the *King*.²⁰

This is still true today. Peter Beyerhaus also sees it clearly and calls us to put the glory of God at the center of our life and mission.

We are called and sent to glorify the reign of God and to manifest His saving work before the whole world. . . . Today it is extremely important to emphasize the priority of this doxological aim before all other aims of

19. Quoted in Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit, vol. 7 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (1749; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 474. For a more accessible version of Brainerd’s diary, see Philip E. Howard Jr., *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, ed. Jonathan Edwards (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989).

20. Andrew Murray, *Key to the Missionary Problem* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1979), 133.

mission. Our one-sided concern with man and his society threatens to pervert mission and make it a secular or even a quasi-atheistic undertaking. We are living in an age of apostasy where man arrogantly makes himself the measuring rod of all things. Therefore, it is a part of our missionary task courageously to confess before all enemies of the cross that the earth belongs to God and to His anointed. . . . Our task in mission is to uphold the banner of the risen Lord before the whole world, because it is his own.²¹

The zeal of the church for the glory of her King will not rise until pastors and mission leaders and seminary teachers make much more of the King. When the glory of God himself saturates our preaching and teaching and conversation and writings, and when he predominates above our talk of methods and strategies and psychological buzzwords and cultural trends, then the people might begin to feel that he is the central reality of their lives and that the spread of his glory is more important than all their possessions and all their plans.

| The Power of Missions When Love for the Lost Is Weak

Compassion for the lost is a high and beautiful motive for missionary labor. Without it we lose the sweet humility of sharing a treasure we have freely received. But we have seen that compassion for people must not be detached from passion for the glory of God. John Dawson, a leader in Youth with a Mission, gives an additional reason why this is so. He points out that a strong feeling of love for “the lost” or “the world” is a very difficult experience to sustain and is not always recognizable when it comes.

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to have a love for the lost? This is a term we use as part of our Christian jargon. Many believers search their hearts in condemnation, looking for the arrival of some feeling of benevolence that will propel them into bold evangelism. It will never happen. It is impossible to love “the lost.” You can’t feel deeply for an abstraction or a concept. You would find it impossible to love deeply an unfamiliar individual portrayed in a photograph, let alone a nation or a race or something as vague as “all lost people.”

21. Peter Beyerhaus, *Shaken Foundations: Theological Foundations for Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), 41–42.

Don't wait for a feeling of love in order to share Christ with a stranger. You already love your heavenly Father, and you know that this stranger is created by Him, but separated from Him, so take those first steps in evangelism because you love God. It is not primarily out of a compassion for humanity that we share our faith or pray for the lost; it is first of all, love for God. The Bible says in Ephesians 6:7–8: “With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.”

Humanity does not deserve the love of God any more than you or I do. We should never be Christian humanists, taking Jesus to poor sinful people, reducing Jesus to some kind of product that will better their lot. People deserve to be damned, but Jesus, the suffering Lamb of God, deserves the reward of His suffering.²²

| The Miracle of Love

Dawson's words are a wise and encouraging warning not to limit our mission engagement to the level of compassion we feel for people we do not know. However, I don't want to minimize what the Lord is able to do in giving people a supernatural burden of love for distant peoples. For example, Wesley Duewel, who was president of OMS International, tells the story of his mother's remarkable burden for China and India:

My mother for years carried a hunger for the people of China and India. For many years practically every day as she prayed during family prayer for these two nations she would break down and weep before she finished praying. Her love was deep and constant, and she will be rewarded eternally for her years of love-burden for those lands. This is the love of Jesus reaching out and mediated through Christians by the Holy Spirit.²³

I emphasize again that the motive of compassion and the motive of zeal for the glory of God are not separate. The weeping of compassion is the weeping of joy in God impeded in the extension of itself to another.²⁴

22. John Dawson, *Taking Our Cities for God* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1989), 208–9.

23. Wesley Duewel, *Ablaze for God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 115–16.

24. On this theme, see chap. 6 of this book, “A Passion for God's Supremacy and Compassion for Man's Soul.”

| The Call of God

God is calling us above all else to be the kind of people whose theme and passion is the supremacy of God in all of life. No one will be able to rise to the magnificence of the missionary cause who does not feel the magnificence of Christ. There will be no big world vision without a big God. There will be no passion to draw others into our worship where there is no passion for worship.

God is pursuing with omnipotent passion a worldwide purpose of gathering joyful worshipers for himself from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. He has an inexhaustible enthusiasm for the supremacy of his name among the nations. Therefore, let us bring our affections into line with his, and, for the sake of his name, let us renounce the quest for worldly comforts and join his global purpose. If we do this, God's omnipotent commitment to his name will be over us like a banner, and we will not lose, in spite of many tribulations (Acts 9:16; Rom. 8:35–39). Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. The Great Commission is first to "delight yourself in the LORD" (Ps. 37:4) and then to declare, "Let the nations *be glad and sing for joy*" (Ps. 67:4). In this way, God will be glorified from beginning to end, and worship will empower the missionary enterprise until the coming of the Lord.

Great and amazing are your deeds,
 O Lord God the Almighty!
 Just and true are your ways,
 O King of the nations!
 Who will not fear, O Lord,
 and glorify your name?
 For you alone are holy.
 All nations will come
 and worship you,
 for your righteous acts have been revealed.

Revelation 15:3–4