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HONORING GOD

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Introduction: This article is a special edition of CIC. It is a slightly edited version of the paper that I wrote as a graduation requirement for the masters program I just completed. The assignment was to cover all the major topics of systematic theology from the perspective of a personal, integrating motif. The beginning section defines and justifies the motif. The rest of the article is an overview of the great doctrines of Christianity. There are bracketed Biblical references in each section. I hope that this CIC article honors God and helps equip its readers for the work of the ministry.

HONORING GOD AS A BIBLICAL MOTIF

Definition: Believing and acting in such way so as to render to God, as He has revealed Himself in Scripture, the respect and service due His holy name.

God's purpose for Christians is that we might bring honor to His holy name as we enjoy our relationship with Him for all eternity. Since the nature of fallen humanity is such that our primary motivation is to honor ourselves and not God, a work of God's grace is required to change motives, beliefs, and actions. Honoring God means humbling ourselves and taking to heart God's person and purposes. Thus God will weigh heavily upon our thoughts and lives. Our teaching about God and His purposes and our treatment of the people to whom He sends us will either honor or dis-honor God.

BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATION

In the book of Malachi, the temple services were back in operation and there had been significant reforms under Ezra and Nehemiah. Yet in this context God warned: "If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name," says the Lord of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not taking it to heart" (Malachi 2:2). Interestingly, the priests did not believe that they were failing to honor God even

though God had accused them of despising His name (Malachi 1:6). The type of idolatry that caused Ezekiel to lament about God's name being "profaned" among the Gentiles (Ezekiel 36:21) was no longer being practiced, yet the priests were failing to honor God. How can this be?

The answer is in the commands to "listen" and "take it to heart." Rote religious activity is not honoring to God. "Listen," calls to mind a most famous tradition in Israel, the "shema" (Deut. 6:4-9). The point is to honor God by loving Him with one's whole being, and taking to heart His words, teaching them to the people for generations to come.

Honoring God's name is His purpose not only for Old Testament priests, but for all His people. God's name in this context is more than a personal identifier; it denotes His nature, character, and the self-revelation of His person in holiness and truth. The Bible recognizes two types of people: those who honor the Father and His Son (John 5:23) and those who refuse to honor God (Rom. 1:21). The former are ultimately glorified (Rom. 8:29,30) and the later judged (Rom. 1:18-20; 22ff). The redeemed in heaven are often found exclaiming God's honor (Rev. 4:11; 5:12,13; 7:12).

God is often portrayed as acting to bring honor to His name or to rectify a situation where His name has been profaned. Moses pleaded before God to spare Israel lest He be dis-honored

before the nations (Exo. 32:12; Num 14:15,16; Deut. 9:28). God told Israel that He was going to act, not for their sake, but for the sake of His holy name that had been profaned (Ezekiel 36:22,23). However, if God's people would call upon Him in their time of trouble, He would rescue them and by being thus rescued they would honor God (Psa.50:15). The Lord's prayer begins with a call for God's name to be honored through His intervention in history to vindicate His righteous ones who long for His coming (Mat. 6:9,10,13). The desire that God's name be honored resonates in the sentiments of the apostle Paul: "[God] alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen" (1Tim. 6:16 and see 1Tim. 1:17).

HONORING THE GOD OF THE BIBLE

In order for fallen, finite humans to know and understand the infinite, transcendent God, communication from God to humans is necessary. God has provided such communication specifically through the 66 books of the Bible. The Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2Tim. 3:16, 2Pet. 1:21). When God's servants teach and preach the Bible as the very words of God, they honor God and greatly benefit their hearers (2Tim. 3:17). God is honored when His word is preached even if it is rejected (2Cor. 2:14-17).

The Scriptures contain propositional revelation. This means that clear assertions and truth claims are made. What is taught in the Bible is neither mystical, purposely vague, nor subject to multiple, valid interpretations (1Pet. 1:20). The false claim that the Bible has as many meanings as it has readers dishonors the God who inspired it. Jesus quoted the Scriptures often and indicted

those who misinterpreted or otherwise misused them (Mark 7:6-9; Mat. 22:29).

The Bible is inerrant and authoritative in all that it asserts. Jesus claimed that the Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35). God cannot lie and God inspired the Scriptures. The New Testament quotes the Old Testament as authoritative, using the phrase "the Holy Spirit says" (Heb. 3:7) when citing Scripture. The phrase "in order that it may be fulfilled" is frequently used in the gospels to show that what God promised would come to pass did so in the life of Messiah (Mat. 8:17; 12:17; 21:4; et. al.). Jesus said that all things written about Him "must be fulfilled" (Luke 24:44). This shows the certainty and infallibility of Scripture. Thus, for the Christian who would honor God, he or she will consider a matter settled once the Scriptural teaching on the matter is clearly demonstrated.

HONORING THE GOD WHO IS

In order to please God, one "must believe that He is" (Heb. 11:6). The existence of the eternal God is asserted throughout the Bible, beginning with Genesis 1:1. Those who refuse to honor God even in the face of the clear evidence for His existence abide under the wrath of God (Rom. 1:18,19).

God's attributes can be divided into those that uniquely belong to God and cannot be "communicated" to His creatures and those that can be found in some form in humans. These categories are communicable and incommunicable attributes. To fully honor God, we must be careful to know, acknowledge, and teach the attributes of God that are revealed in Scripture.

INCOMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

God is self-existent. This means that He is eternal and depends on nothing outside of Himself for His own existence. God speaks through Isaiah, "Even from eternity I am He; And there is none who can deliver out of My hand; I act and who can reverse it?" (Isa. 43:13). This is true of no other being.

God is immutable. This means that He does not change (Malachi 3:6).

God's purposes, plans, and nature are not contingent on anything outside of Himself (Psa. 33:11; Pro. 19:21; Isa. 46:9-11). The modern tendency to consider God as in "process" or "open" so as to change His plans based on unforeseen actions of His creatures dishonors God. As others have said, "God knows all contingencies, but He knows nothing contingently." Making God and His purposes contingent on things outside of Himself is a denial of this important attribute.

God is omnipresent. This means that there are no bounds to God's presence. As vast as the universe is, it is still finite. God is not. God transcends all spacial limits yet is simultaneously present (in all of His being) in all points of the universe (Isa. 66:1,2; Acts 7:48,49). By saying that God is present in His fullness at all points of the universe, we also imply His unity. God is not an aggregate being, one made up of composite parts. God is one, in essence and in His uniqueness as the only one (Deut. 6:4). The doctrine of the Trinity is no denial of this.

GOD'S COMMUNICABLE ATTRIBUTES

We honor God when we acknowledge Him as the source of all goodness, including that which He communicates to His creatures. God is personal and is the ultimate source of the personal attributes of humans. God has personal attributes but no human limitations.

God is Spirit (John 4:24). In His essence, God is invisible and not a physical being with all attendant limitations. Biblical language which speaks of God's eyes, arms, feet, etc. is anthropomorphic. Those who would fashion idols or assert that God looks just like us, dishonor God in a most reprehensible way. The rhetorical questions of Isa. 40:18 imply that God cannot be compared to any likeness formed by humans. To truly honor God, we must, with Paul, confess the glory of the God we worship: "who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen" (1Tim. 6:16).

God's omniscience refers to His knowledge. It has no limits. God not only knows everything about the universe He created, but all contingencies and eventualities. Nothing, past present or future, comes to pass outside of God's knowledge (Psa. 147:5; Isa. 40:28). Though denied by some historically and in our day, the knowledge of God also extends to secondary causes, contingencies, and the free choices of free moral agents (Isa. 42:9 and His predictions of Cyrus' actions — Isa. 45:1). The fulfillment of specific prophecies such as the events in the life of Messiah depends on this, since the acts of moral agents are involved. We must honor God by clearly teaching the truth about Him based on His own self-revelation.

God's wisdom means that all His decisions and decrees are such as to lead to the ends that will glorify Him and demonstrate His perfect righteousness. God's wisdom is His perfect knowledge being manifested in His use of the means to His decreed ends. Since God is perfectly wise, we must not dishonor Him by questioning His means of dealing with us (Rom. 9:20-24).

God is true. This means that He is the true God in contrast to false claimants and that His self-revelation is completely reliable. Jesus claimed to be the "Truth" (John 14:6). The Hebrew "emeth" is a key word in numerous Old Testament passages where God reveals His nature (a principal one is Exo. 34:6 where God reveals Himself to Moses). That God is full of "lovingkindness and truth" is an often repeated refrain from the lips of the saints of the Old Testament. This terminology is reflected in the description of Christ as full of "grace and truth" (John 1:14). When we proclaim God to be full of grace and truth we join with the saints of the Old and New Testament in honoring the God of the Bible in accordance with His own self-revelation. Truth is so much a part of God's nature, that the Bible asserts "God cannot lie" (Tit. 1:2).

God is good. This is true in His eternal nature. To claim that "God is" is to also acknowledge that God is good. Jesus said that God alone is good (Mark 10:18). He is the source of all that is

good (Jam. 1:17). The goodness of God is also ethical. His actions and relationships with His creatures are good.

God is Love (1John 4:8). God's love is expressed toward us in many ways, the greatest of them being in the sending of the Son (John 3:16). God even loves His enemies and serves as our example in that (Luke 6:35). The laid down life of Christ is how we know God's love (1John 3:16). Any who reject the love of God as displayed in the cross dishonor God and face eternal punishment. Those who love God because He first loved them honor God.

God is holy. This means that He is separate from all defilement and uniquely the exalted one. God is distinct from all His creatures. God's holiness is proclaimed throughout the Bible as a key aspect of His nature. God's holiness is not distinct from His other attributes but co-extensive with them. God is holy in love, mercy, justice, truth, righteousness and even in His wrath against sin. The Bible describes God as being clothed with "splendor and majesty" (Psa. 104:1; Psa. 145:5). In His holiness God cannot tolerate sin (Hab. 1:13). God declares Himself to be Holy (1Pet. 1:16). These facts ought to cause all to honor God in worship and adoration like the angels in heaven (Rev. 7:12).

God is just and righteous. This means that in all His decrees, dealings, and in His essential nature, God is right. God cannot be wrong or do wrong (Gen. 18:25, Rev. 16:5). God's dealings with His creatures are never unjust or unrighteous. All temptations to dishonor God by questioning the justice of His decrees and judgements must be resisted. Humans with incomplete knowledge often notice human injustice and question whether a just God could allow this. Yet we are assured that the Lord will not tarry long over those who "cry out to Him day and night for justice" (Luke 18:7). However, God's coming to bring justice is not necessarily comforting for sinners (Luke 18:8). Those who dishonor God through complaining about His supposed lack of justice do not realize that it is His mercy that allows them to live on in their own unrighteousness, all the while calling to them to repent. To

acknowledge God's justice and righteousness and to confess our own unrighteousness is to honor God. God will show mercy to repentant sinners and still remain just (Luke 18:9-14; Rom. 3:4-6,26).

HONORING THE TRIUNE GOD

God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Though three in person, the Trinity is one in divine essence. The divine essence is not divided between the three persons, but exists in all the fulness of the divine attributes in each of the persons of the Trinity.

Though the term is not found in the Bible, the doctrine of the Trinity is derived from the teachings of the Bible. The Bible asserts the deity of the Father (John 20:17; Rom. 1:7) of the Son (Heb. 1:8; John 1:10) and of the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3,4; 1Cor. 3:16; and 2Tim. 3:16 compared with 2Pet. 1:21). The three persons of the Trinity are mentioned in the apostolic benediction of 2Cor. 13:14. Though there is a certain amount of mystery attached to this doctrine, we honor God by humbly accepting what is put forth in scripture about it. John 14 (where Jesus discusses His relationship to the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit) makes clear that the honor that is due God is due the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus and the Father are one (in divine essence though clearly two persons John 14:9,10) and the Father will send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16,17). The Son sends the Spirit who proceeds from the Father (John 15:26). The unity of the Trinity in its plurality of persons is clear from these passages.

HONORING CHRIST

The Gospels portray Christ as the promised Jewish Messiah (John 1:41). The term "Christ" means "anointed," and the Christ is "the anointed One" who was predicted in the Old Testament (Dan. 9:25,26). Though also called the "Son of Man" (Dan. 7:13; Mat. 12:8) and "Son of God" (John 20:31), these terms also reference the Jewish Messiah as the New Testament apostles so eloquently argued (Rom. 1:4). Though the

nationalistic Jewish Messianic hopes were not realized during the first advent, the many promises of a suffering "Servant of the Lord" (in Isa. 42, 49, 53) were fulfilled in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus was born of the virgin Mary (Isa. 7:14; Mat. 1:23; Luke 1:27-34), conceived of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35), and born in Bethlehem as predicted by the prophet Micah (Mic. 5:2; Mat. 2:1). The birth of Messiah was announced by angels and honored by Jewish shepherds and pagan Magi (Luke 2; Mat. 2). The incarnation means that He who pre-existed as God from all eternity was "made flesh" and dwelt (lit. tabernacled) among us (John 1:1-14). The very glory of God dwelt in Jesus as the "only begotten of God" (meaning unique one, only one of His kind John 1:14). To confess and worship Him as the Holy One of God honors God by honoring the One whom the Father has sent: "In order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him" (John 5:23).

In His incarnation, Jesus not only took on the form of human flesh, but became truly a man (1Tim. 2:5). Jesus had a real human body, before and after His resurrection (1John 1:1; Luke 24:39). Jesus' genealogy is traced to David (Luke 3:23-31) and He is proclaimed the son of David who fulfills the Messianic promises made to David (Mat. 1:1; Mat. 21:9). Though fully human, Jesus was sinless (Heb. 2:17; Heb. 4:15). Thus we can honor God by coming to Jesus in our time of trial and temptation, knowing that He can relate to us in that He was tempted and can deliver us in that He was sinless and always did the things that please the Father (John 8:29).

Though fully human, Jesus is also God. The deity of Christ is asserted in John 1:1. Jesus was rightfully worshiped as God (John 20:28). Jesus claimed eternal existence as the great "I AM" (John 8:24,58). Jesus is both God and savior (Tit. 2:13; 2Pet. 1:1). The Jewish authorities recognized that Jesus claimed to be God (John 10:33). All

doctrines that compromise this truth, (including those who claim deity was conferred upon Jesus at His baptism, obtained at some other point in history, or taken from Him at his crucifixion as some current false teachers assert) dishonor the One who came to save us. Peter prophesied that Christ would be dishonored by teachers from within the church (2Pet. 2:1). Deity that is contingent, given, removed, attained, or compromised is no deity at all. Deity is eternal and non-contingent by definition. Christ is fully God.

Christ came to atone for our sins (1Pet. 3:18). His death on the cross paid the penalty for sins, once for all, for all who fully trust in Him (Gal. 3:13; Eph. 2:16-18; Col. 1:21,22). Those who make themselves enemies of the cross of Christ by mocking the Christian message or trusting themselves rather than God, dishonor God and will perish eternally if they do not repent (Phil. 3:18,19). Though Christ died on a Roman cross at the instigation of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, He was bodily raised from the dead on the third day, just as He had predicted (Acts 2:22-24; 1Cor. 15:4; Luke 9:22).

Christ's death on the cross was a substitutionary atonement. That means that the rightful penalty for our sins, death, was inflicted upon the sinless One, that we might be delivered from this penalty (2Cor. 5:15; Rom. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:23-25). Jesus made the full payment for our sins when He died on the cross. To call upon the name of the Lord for forgiveness based on the finished work of Christ, honors God: "And call upon Me in the day of trouble; I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me" (Psalm 50:15). It honors God when we confess our helplessness and cry out to Him. The doctrine of the substitutionary atonement honors God because it places the work of salvation in God's hands and makes no place for humans to solve their own problems through their own efforts. No works of righteousness will avail, except the one work of righteousness performed on our behalf by Jesus Christ.

Thus Jesus is called the "last Adam" (1Cor. 15:45). The first Adam plunged

the whole human race into sin, misery, and death. The last Adam died to deliver us from that condition. Just as all who are "in Adam" die (1Cor. 15:22) all who are "in Christ" are made alive. Paul richly develops this analogy in Rom. 5:12ff.

HONORING THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is not a force, but a person. Personal pronouns are used of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:16,26). The Holy Spirit teaches (John 14:26), acts as a Counselor (John 14:16), regenerates (Tit. 3:5), and empowers (Acts 1:8) the Christian. These are the functions of a personal God. The deity of the Holy Spirit is shown by the fact that divine attributes are ascribed to Him and that He is called God (Acts 5:3,4; see discussion of the Trinity). The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is precious and essential. He causes the love of God to be poured out in our hearts (Rom. 5:5). He causes other fruits of our relationship to God to develop in our lives (Gal. 5:22-24). He empowers us for preaching, Christian witness, and a walk of holiness. All of these things are to be evident in the lives of those who have been born of the Spirit (John 3:3-6). We are to honor God by asking for the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13) and depending on God daily by walking by the Spirit's power (Gal. 5:16).

The gifts of the Spirit (1Cor. 12) are given to individual members of the body of Christ as the Spirit wills (1Cor. 12:11). The purpose of the gifts is for the edification of the body of Christ (1Cor. 12:12-25). Contrary to the teaching of some, the New Testament does not teach that the gifts would cease to exist in the church before the return of Christ. The presence of gifts, however, does not prove a superior spirituality or Christian maturity. The experience of the Corinthian church proves that. The gifts of the Spirit are given that we may honor God by humbly serving His people, being careful to show the most respect for the members who may seem less important (1Cor. 12:22).

HONORING GOD THE CREATOR

God created the universe out of nothing

(Gen. 1:1). All things, animate or inanimate, physical or spiritual, came into existence because of the act of God in creating. This means that the creation, unlike the Creator, is contingent, finite, and dependent on something outside itself for its own existence. The creation exists because of the will of God and the eternal decree of God. Gen. 1 portrays creation as happening as God "spoke." This implies an intelligent and deliberate process, governed by the infinite wisdom of a personal God, not the blind and chaotic forces of time and chance. Those who assert such absurdities dishonor God.

The capstone of creation was the creation of humans in God's image (Gen. 1:26,27). Gen. 1:27 says that "male and female" are created in the image of God, showing the ontological equality of men and women, both equally bearing God's image. Of the various theories about what is meant by "God's image" in these passages, the comprehensive view is preferable. God's image involves dominion over the non-human animate and inanimate creation (Gen. 1:28,29). It also involves things unique to humans such as rationality, conscience, and reflective self-awareness. It consists of the capability of making moral choices and being held responsible for them (Gen. 2 & 3). One false view of "image" that dishonors God is the teaching that it involves physical likeness. This is not the case because God is spirit (John 4:24).

God created humans with a most awesome responsibility: to love and honor God. We are to honor Him by ascribing to Him all that His name deserves. The creation "calls out" to all who observe it, that God is glorious and worthy to be praised (Psalm 19:1). Therefore, those who see God's eternal attributes displayed in His creation and refuse to honor Him, are judged severely (Rom. 1:18-20). That our purpose is to honor God can be seen in what is said about those who refuse to: "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened" (Rom. 1:21). This condition needs to be

rectified through repentance and crying out to God for forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Having been redeemed by Christ, we can find the eternal purpose of God at work in our lives, enabling us to love and honor our Creator, and enjoy Him for all eternity.

The special work of God in creation is sustained through God's continuing work called "providence." God holds all things together (Col 1:16,17). The Bible teaches that He works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11). The redeemed are the beneficiaries of God's providential working (Rom. 8:28). God draws out the boundaries of the nations (Acts 17:26), sets up the rulers (Rom. 13:1), and rules in majesty and power with infinite wisdom and knowledge (Isa. 40:12-15). Even those who have wicked intentions unwittingly carry out God's saving purposes (Acts 2:23,24; Acts 4:27,28). Some people would effectively deny providence by claiming that the knowledge and plan of God does not extend to all things such as the choices of moral agents. This dishonors God. Such is surely not the way God is portrayed in the Bible (see Isa. 46:9-11). The God who initiated the universe in creation sustains it in all things through His loving, providential oversight.

HONORING GOD IN THE FACE OF EVIL

The discussion of God's providence brings us to the major objection to it, the existence of Evil. If God is good and creates and sustains all things, how could He allow evil to exist? God did not directly create evil (Jam. 1:13,14). That God allows evil is obvious. God created all things good. God created beings with moral agency that were capable of being corrupted. The first being to rebel against God was Satan (perhaps Isaiah 14:12-15 describes this though it may only refer to the king of Babylon). A third of the angels joined him in rebellion and were cast out of heaven. Satan, through the serpent, tempted Adam and Eve and they rebelled against God (Gen. 3:1-6). They lost access to the tree of life and all of their descendants are born in the likeness of Adam and Eve after the

Fall (Gen. 5:3).

The question of God's relationship to evil still remains. Many claim that God took a "risk" and created beings with free-will so they could freely love him. They say that the possibility of sin and rebellion was a necessary concomitant of moral freedom. As attractive and popular as this notion is, it fails to fully honor God. Some who hold this view at least admit that God knew what would happen, but that He created because it was worth it to Him to have creatures who might freely love Him. The reason this tends to not fully honor God is that it implies that God created out of some lack in Him. The truth is, the Triune God of the Bible needed or needs nothing outside of Himself to be perfect, holy, and complete. God created out of His infinite wisdom and love, not out of a need for there to be other beings.

The other problem with the so-called "free-will" defense is that it assumes that freedom requires the possibility (some would insist that evil is a necessary result of freedom of the will) of evil to be truly free. However, this does not account for the fact that two thirds of the angels who never fell into sin freely worship God and that the redeemed in heaven shall be free from all sin and the possibility of sinning again and yet will freely worship God. Therefore, God can create free beings that do not sin. So, it is more honoring to God to assert that He does all things well, after the counsel of His will, and that all things will ultimately be for His honor and glory. God did not decree sin, but willingly created beings He knew would sin (Rev. 13:8 any way that it is taken shows the plan of salvation from sin existing from before the foundation of the world).

God will be honored in overcoming sin and rebellion, even in judgment. For example, in the midst of God's purposes of salvation for some and wrath upon the rest in the book of Revelation, this is proclaimed: "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 7:12). The best way to understand God's relationship with evil is as follows: God allows

evil, God uses evil, God overcomes evil, for a greater good than had evil never been. This is the essence of the "soul-building" defense. It is seen most clearly in the crucifixion of Christ as described in Acts (Acts 2:22-24). It was both by the pre-determined plan of God and at the hands of evil people. Yet it had a glorious purpose and outcome.

Not only have spiritual beings and humans been affected by evil, but the whole creation. Paul discusses this in Rom. 8:19-21. We look for a new creation, one that is fully characterized by "righteousness" (2Pet. 3:13). God will be honored, even in allowing evil and overcoming it according to His righteous purposes.

HONORING GOD OUR SAVIOR

From all eternity God decreed to save some from the fallen race of Adam by showing them mercy. This can be shown from the fact that the Bible sees the elect as being chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:3-5). Christ's work of redemption is also said to be planned from before creation (1Pet. 1:20; Eph. 3:11). God's purpose and grace that the elect experience during the church age was "granted us in Christ from all eternity" (2Tim. 1:9).

Though decreed from all eternity, the salvation of the elect is worked out in history by God's ordained means. Salvation is by faith (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 3:22; Rom. 4:5) and not works. The key passage, Eph. 2:8, says that it is by grace, through faith, not of ourselves, but it is a gift of God. Salvation in its entirety is a gift, including the grace and faith that are the means of salvation. Humans neither merit salvation nor earn it. They receive it as a gift.

The means God uses to bring the gift of salvation to sinners includes the preaching of the gospel, the hearing of faith, and calling on God's name (Rom. 10:11-17). We honor God's loving purposes when we obediently preach the gospel to all people as God enables us. Even though the salvation of the elect is assured from eternity, it is actualized in time through God's ordained means, including the preaching of the cross of Christ, with a call for all people every-

where to repent (Acts 17:30).

Salvation is only in Christ. Jesus said that no one can come to the Father except through Him (John 14:6 and see Acts 4:12). Those who assert a supposed right to come to God on their own terms dishonor God and exclude themselves from salvation. God has revealed His loving purpose in sending His Son (John 3:16) and one cannot honor God without believing (meaning put one's full trust in) in Jesus the Son of God.

Logically the first thing that happens in salvation is regeneration (Tit. 3:5). The reason for this is that the natural person, in his or her fallen condition, is alienated from God and does not accept the things of God (1Cor. 2:14). The person in the flesh (meaning all that he or she is as alienated from God in sin) cannot please God (Rom. 8:7,8). This condition does not change until a person receives the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). Thus the sinner must first be regenerated by the Holy Spirit to be willing to trust God, love God, and come to God on God's terms. Regeneration is the same as being born again (John 3:3-7).

As previously mentioned, salvation is a gift. Faith which is necessary for salvation is not a meritorious work, but is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8; 1Cor. 12:9; Rom. 12:3; Jam. 1:17). Repentance, which is also a key aspect of salvation, means turning from self to God. Repentance is granted by God, that is as a gift (Acts 11:18; 2Tim. 2:25).

Justification (being legally declared right or just before God) is said to be a gift from God (Rom. 5:16). Therefore, everything about salvation is from God. There are many theories that are very popular in evangelicalism that deny many of these truths. It is supposed that salvation is "synergistic" (a cooperative effort between God and man). These theories do not honor God in the same way as the doctrines of grace described above. Theories that suppose that God's purposes are stymied and thwarted by His own creatures do not fully honor God. Such is the case with those theories that suppose that God intended to save all, but has failed in most cases. The truths of election from all eternity, effectual calling through the grace that

comes to the elect through the gospel, and regeneration as an unmerited act of God honor Him.

Sanctification is a concomitant of salvation, not an option for certain elite Christians. We are sanctified positionally as ones who are in Christ (Heb. 10:10,14) and practically in a progressive manner throughout our Christian lives (1Thess. 5:23; Heb. 12:14, 1Thess. 4:3). Sanctification is no more by works of the Law than is salvation (Gal. 3:3).

Those whom God has effectively called to salvation shall by His grace persevere therein (John 6:39-40). The doctrine of perseverance means that God's people persevere in holiness (Heb. 12:10, Eph. 4:24). Any perversion of the doctrine that suggests that those who live unrepentant, ungodly lives are still saved (based on a claimed salvation experience) dishonors the God who has called us. God is honored by the holy lives of His "saints" (holy ones). Those who truly hope in Christ and desire to be like Him, are motivated to seek purity (1John 3:2,3). That having been said, those God has called and justified, He shall also glorify (Rom. 8:29,30).

GOD BRINGS HONOR TO HIS NAME THROUGH HIS CHURCH

The church militant consists of all the persons who God has added to it through regeneration who are presently alive on the face of the earth. The church universal consists of all the elect from all ages, including those who have gone on to heaven (Heb. 12:23). The local church is a gathering of believers for the purpose of prayer, teaching, worship, and the practice of church ordinances. The ultimate purpose of the church is to honor the Lord who bought her, bringing glory to His name.

The New Testament word commonly translated "church" means "called out ones." Its importance is seen in the fact that it is found one hundred and eleven times in the New Testament. The called together assemblies of believers exist because of the merciful act of God in calling sinners to repentance, out of the world and into fellowship with God and one another. In an important sense, God

brings honor to His own name by gathering together a redeemed people, whose lives show forth His mighty work of grace. Jesus took joy in His followers (John 15:11) and the apostle Paul called one of the churches His joy (1Thess. 2:19). The apostle John invites His readers to join the "fellowship" that he and the others have with the Father and the Son (1John 1:3). The term translated fellowship denotes, "sharing a common life together." We honor God by fellowshiping with Him and those He has called out of the pagan world into a blessed relationship with Him.

The concept of the church is so rich and many faceted that the Bible uses several metaphors to describe it. One is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:12). The idea is that Christ is the head and each member is important in relationship to Him and the other members (1Cor. 12:12-20). We are to honor God by honoring all the members of the body, particularly those who seem weak or insignificant (1Cor. 12:22,23). It is crucial for the well being of the church that members never become status conscious or look down on any whom the Lord has chosen. James warns about the danger of bringing "dishonor" to the poor man (Jam. 2:6). The implication is that in so doing Christ is dishonored (Mat. 25:40). Showing love and concern for each member of the body is one of the greatest opportunities the Lord gives us to honor Him!

The church ultimately is to be the "bride" of Christ. Thus Paul promises that Christ loves the church, gave Himself up for her, that He might present the church to himself as a spotless, holy bride (Eph. 5:26,27). The church's ultimate union with Christ is filled with glorious analogies from a Jewish wedding supper (Rev. 19:7-9). How honored we shall be in being able to honor God with our adoration and worship as we are gathered to this great feast.

The church's mission is most fully described in Mat. 28:18-20. We are commanded to make disciples, which includes preaching the gospel, baptizing converts, and teaching them to observe the teachings of Christ. The scope of this mission is world wide: to all the

nations (lit. "tribes" or people groups). This mission shall go on until Christ returns for us (Mat. 24:14). By fulfilling our mission, we honor the God who bought us. God has chosen to use the preaching of the cross, through the church, to save those who will believe (1Cor. 1:21). Though the hostile world mocks this message, we honor God by proclaiming it!

The founding authority of the Church is Christ Himself (Mat. 16:18). He authorized His apostles to transmit His teachings to the church (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit has preserved their teachings in written form, the New Testament. The apostles had no successors, and the New Testament (with the Old) remains our authoritative teaching. There are local servants whom Christ has given to the churches. These are pastors, elders and deacons (1Tim. 3:1-13; see Acts 20:17-28 where elders, overseers, and the verb to pastor are used of the same people). The most important role of elders is to teach (1Tim. 5:17, 1Tim. 3:2). Thus teachers are important local servants of the church.

There are also servants of the church whose role is to honor God beyond the local congregation. There are no apostles and prophets of the authoritative type who gave us the Scriptures. However, the terms in the Greek can also denote the functions of "sent ones" and those who "speak forth God's word." We have missionaries and evangelists who fulfill these roles. They are sent to preach to the lost, plant new congregations, and help build up small or new works that lack mature, local leadership.

The ordinances of the church are baptism and the Lord's supper. Baptism is a public testimony of having died to sin and come alive to God. Thus Paul uses the analogy of burial and resurrection, having been crucified with Him and raised to new life (Rom. 6:4-7). The New Testament commands us to be baptized, but does not make baptism a necessary work for salvation. The Lord's supper is a proclamation of His saving death on the cross and a reminder of our hope of being reunited at the great marriage supper of the Lamb (1Cor. 11:26;

Mat. 26:29). It is also a time for the body of Christ to be joined together in fellowship, as in the Jewish concept of table fellowship. We honor God by faithfully observing these ordinances as we long for Christ's return.

HONORING GOD THROUGHOUT ETERNITY

When a believer dies, he or she goes immediately to be with the Lord (2Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23). We are assured that those who die before the return of Christ will come back with Him and receive resurrection bodies (1Thess. 4:14-16). The rest will be caught up to meet Him in the air (1Thess. 4:17). To be with the Lord is our greatest hope and joy. We shall be like Him (1John 3:2) and be able to honor Him with praise, worship and great joy.

Those who are not believers go to hades when they die, awaiting the final judgement (Luke 16:23; Rev. 20:13). Their doom is sealed, there is no chance to repent after death (Heb. 9:27).

At the end of the church age, there shall arise a literal Antichrist (1John 2:8; also called the man of lawlessness in 2Thess. 2:3) who shall deceive the nations. There shall be a seven year period called the great tribulation (Mat. 24:21; Rev. 7:14) which is described in the Book of Revelation. It will be a time of great distress, sorrow and misery for the inhabitants of the earth. I have always believed in a pre-tribulation rapture (catching up 1Thess. 4:17) of the church because this doctrine is most compatible with the New Testament teaching of the imminent return of Christ (Mat. 24:44; Mat. 25:1-13; Mark 13:33-37; Rev. 16:15). Recently some have made a good case for the rapture of the church to be just before the wrath of God is poured out on wicked humanity during the last half of the tribulation. The post-tribulation rapture idea has the least to commend it. In any case, no one knows the day or the hour (Math. 24:36).

At the end of the great tribulation, Christ will return to judge the nations, save Israel (Rom. 11:26), and reward the saints. This is the time of the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-6). Those who partic-

ipate in the first resurrection shall reign with Christ for a thousand years, during which time Satan will be bound (Rev. 20:2). This is the millennial reign of Christ.

At the end of the millennium, Satan will be released to arouse the nations again, and God will intervene and destroy those who have rebelled (Rev. 20:7-9). At the end of the thousand years the rest of the dead (the unrighteous) will be resurrected to face judgement (Rev. 20:5,1-14; John 5:28,29). Those whose names are not in the book of life shall be consigned to the lake of fire, which is the second death (Rev. 20:15). There they shall suffer eternal punishment away from the presence of the Lord (2Thess. 1:9).

The final state of the saints will be most glorious. Since our purpose is to bring honor to God's name, how glorious it will be to dwell in the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-7). In the final state of glory, the key theme will be one repeated from the Old Testament covenant formula: "And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away'" (Rev. 21:3,4). Those who have lived their lives to bring honor and glory to God, shall be rewarded by the honor of His eternal presence in blessed covenant relationship. He shall be our God and we shall be His people.

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