

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

THEOLOGY PROPER

The Doctrine of God

UNIT 10: CONCLUSION — BEHOLDING THE GOD OF GLORY

Lesson 30

The Beatific Vision — Knowing God Now and Forever

The Ultimate Aim of Theology: To See God and Be Satisfied

Key Texts: 1 John 3:2; John 17:3, 24; Exodus 33:18–23; Philippians 3:8–10; Romans 11:36

I Pray You, Show Me Your Glory

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Series Verse
<i>“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?”</i>
Romans 11:33–34, NASB 1995

Introduction

We have arrived. After twenty-nine lessons traversing the most majestic, most demanding, and most inexhaustible subject that any creature made in the image of God can undertake, the study of God Himself, as He has condescended to reveal Himself in the inspired and inerrant pages of Holy Scripture, we stand at the summit. And as is fitting for the summit of any great ascent, the view from here does not primarily direct our eyes back down the mountain we have climbed, surveying all the terrain we have covered. It directs our eyes upward, and forward, toward the glory that lies beyond the horizon of the present age, the glory that all our theological labor has been, from the beginning, pointing toward.

This final lesson does not introduce a new doctrine; it gathers up everything we have studied and places it in its proper ultimate context. Every attribute of God we have examined, His aseity and self-sufficiency, His immutability and eternity, His omniscience and wisdom, His holiness and righteousness, His love and grace and wrath, the mystery of His Trinitarian being, the wonder of His eternal decrees, the glory of His creative work, the comprehensiveness of His providential governance, all of it has been, in the end, a preparation for a single culminating reality: the beatific vision. The face-to-face knowledge of the living God that is the ultimate destiny of every person who has been redeemed by the blood of the eternal Son.

The beatific vision is not merely the reward at the end of the theological journey. It is the goal that gives the journey its meaning, the light that has been illuminating every step of the way. The Westminster Shorter Catechism's first answer, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever", is not a description of the afterlife alone; it is the definition of what human beings are for, and therefore of what theology is for. Theology pursued without the aim of enjoying God is not theology in the fullest sense; it is merely information management. The study we have undertaken in this series has had one ultimate destination from its very first lesson: the face of God.

I. The Beatific Vision: Its Meaning and Its Biblical Foundation

A. The Meaning of the Term

The phrase "beatific vision" comes from the Latin *visio beatifica*, the blessed or beatifying sight of God. It is the classical theological term for the ultimate knowledge of God that the redeemed will enjoy in the new creation: not the mediated, partial, faith-based knowledge of God that the believer possesses in this present age, but the direct, immediate, unveiled, face-to-face knowledge of God as He is. The beatific vision is not a metaphor for a vague sense of divine presence; it is the specific theological affirmation that the redeemed will know God in the most immediate, most intimate, and most transforming way that creaturely knowledge of an infinite God makes possible.

The doctrine of the beatific vision has a long and rich history in the Christian theological tradition. It is affirmed by the early Fathers, developed with great sophistication in the

medieval scholastic tradition (especially by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*), and received by the Reformed tradition not as a speculative elaboration but as the faithful articulation of what Scripture clearly teaches. Whatever the differences in metaphysical elaboration across the tradition, the essential claim is simple and biblical: the ultimate destiny of the redeemed is to see God, and in seeing God, to be blessed beyond all comparison.

B. The Biblical Foundation: 1 John 3:2

The clearest and most direct statement of the beatific vision in all of Scripture is 1 John 3:2: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (NASB 1995). John’s statement is at once simple and breathtaking. The ultimate destiny of the redeemed is to “see Him just as He is”, a direct, unveiled, unmediated vision of God in the fullness of His being. Not a reflection, not a symbol, not a partial and condescending accommodation to creaturely limitations, but the actual sight of God as He actually is.

John immediately connects this vision to transformation: “we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” The beatific vision is not merely an act of perception; it is an act of participation and transformation. The creature who sees God as He is will be conformed to the likeness of what it sees. The image of God in the redeemed, which sin has defaced and which the sanctifying work of the Spirit is restoring in the present age, will be perfectly and permanently restored in the glory of the beatific vision. To see God perfectly is to be made perfectly godlike, not in the sense of becoming divine (the Creator-creature distinction remains eternal), but in the sense of bearing the divine image with the completeness and purity that was intended in the original creation and that sin has made impossible in the present age.

C. The Biblical Foundation: John 17:24

Our Lord’s own high-priestly prayer in John 17 provides the second great pillar of the beatific vision in the New Testament. In verses 3 and 24, Jesus prays for two things that illuminate the nature and the goal of the vision: “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3, NASB 1995); and “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24, NASB 1995).

John 17:3 defines eternal life not as a duration of existence but as a quality of relationship: the personal, intimate, transforming knowledge of the Father and the Son. Eternal life begins now, in the present experience of faith and fellowship with God through the Spirit; it will be consummated in eternity in the unveiled vision of the triune God whom the redeemed have been coming to know throughout the whole of the Christian life. And John 17:24 reveals the specific content of the eternal vision: the glory of Christ, the eternal glory that the Father gave the Son before the foundation of the world and that was briefly unveiled on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8). The ultimate destiny of the redeemed is to behold the unclouded glory of the eternal Son, the glory that no human

eye can presently sustain, and to do so not as terrified observers but as beloved friends of the one who has prayed them into this vision.

"We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is." | "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God." | "I desire... that they may see My glory."

1 John 3:2; John 17:3, 24, NASB 1995

II. Theology as Pilgrimage: Every Doctrine a Step Toward the Face of God

The twenty-nine lessons that have preceded this one have not been, in the end, a collection of discrete doctrines arranged in systematic order. They have been a pilgrimage, a journey of the mind and heart into the knowledge of the most glorious Being in existence, conducted under the guidance of the only infallible guide available to the creature: the inspired and inerrant Word of God. And like every great pilgrimage, each step has been oriented toward a single destination: not the satisfaction of intellectual curiosity, not the accumulation of theological credentials, not even the formation of a well-ordered doctrinal system, but the face of God.

Consider what we have seen along the way. We began in Lesson 1 with the foundational conviction that the study of God is the highest and most urgent of all intellectual pursuits, that the question "Who is God?" silences all other questions with its weight and wonder. We learned in Lessons 2 and 3 that this God, while genuinely knowable, is inexhaustibly incomprehensible, that the knowledge we have of Him is true and reliable but not exhaustive, and that every theological statement we make about Him is an analogy calibrated to our creaturely capacity, not a direct equivalence with the divine reality itself.

We pressed into the arguments for God's existence in Lessons 4 through 6, and found in them not merely philosophical proofs but testimonies to a God who has left the imprint of His presence on every dimension of the reality He created. We explored the names of God in Lessons 7 and 8, and found in each name a window into the inexhaustible character of the One who bears it, from the self-existence announced in the divine name I AM to the grace and truth made known in the name of Jesus. We traversed the incommunicable and communicable attributes in Lessons 9 through 18, and found in each one not merely a description of God but an invitation to worship: the God who is self-sufficient, immutable, eternal, omnipresent, omniscient, holy, just, good, sovereign, and wrathful is the God who deserves and demands the total devotion of every creature He has made.

We ascended to the heights of Trinitarian theology in Lessons 19 through 22, and found there the most glorious mystery in all of reality, that the God who is one is eternally three, that the three who are distinct are inseparably one, and that the eternal love of the Father, Son, and Spirit is the ultimate ground of all the love that has ever been expressed in the creation, in the redemption, and in the life of every person who has been reborn into the family of the triune God. We examined the eternal decrees in Lessons 23 and 24, and found in them not the cold machinery of divine determinism but the warm, sovereign, gracious purpose of a God who chose His people before the foundation of the world and

who will accomplish what He has begun. We explored the doctrine of creation in Lessons 25 through 27, and found in the created world the theater of the divine glory, overflowing with the power and wisdom and beauty of the God who spoke it into being for His own glory and the creature's highest good. And we closed the series with the doctrine of providence in Lessons 28 and 29, finding in the sovereign governance of all things, including the hardest things, the caring, purposeful hand of a Father who works all things together for the good of those who love Him.

Every one of these doctrines has been, in its own way, a step on the pilgrimage toward the face of God. The beatific vision is not something we arrive at independently of everything that has preceded it; it is the destination toward which every doctrine has been pointing, the glory toward which every truth has been guiding us. The knowledge of God that we have been accumulating throughout this series is the beginning of the knowledge of God that will be consummated in eternity. We know now in part; we shall know then in full (1 Corinthians 13:12). But the partial knowledge of now and the full knowledge of then are not different in kind; they are different in degree. We are on the same pilgrimage now that we will have completed then.

III. Moses: I Pray You, Show Me Your Glory

No single passage in all of Scripture better captures the heart of the theologian, the heart of every person who has ever pursued the knowledge of God with genuine desire, than the extraordinary exchange between Moses and the Lord in Exodus 33:18–23. Moses, the man of God, the one who had spoken to God face to face as a man speaks with his friend (Exodus 33:11), the mediator of the old covenant, the prophet through whom God gave His law to Israel, this man, who had experienced the divine presence more intimately than almost any other creature in the history of Israel, makes a request that betrays the holy restlessness of every true theologian: “I pray You, show me Your glory!” (Exodus 33:18, NASB 1995).

The request is staggering in its audacity and illuminating in its theology. Moses has seen God speak from the burning bush. He has seen the plagues. He has crossed the Red Sea. He has received the Ten Commandments from the very finger of God. He has spoken with God face to face. And after all of this, after everything he has experienced, he asks for more. “Show me Your glory.” He is not satisfied with what he has seen, because what he has seen, as glorious as it is, has only served to deepen his desire for more. This is the nature of the genuine knowledge of God: it does not satisfy in the sense of ending desire; it satisfies in the sense of nourishing and deepening it. The more we know of God, the more we want to know. The closer we come to the inexhaustible light, the more aware we become of how much light remains beyond our present sight.

God's answer to Moses is itself a revelation: “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion to whom I will show compassion. But He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!’” (Exodus 33:19–20, NASB 1995). God gives Moses the proclamation of His name, the great declaration of Exodus 34:6–7, the most comprehensive self-disclosure of the divine character in the entire Old Testament, but He does not give Moses the direct vision of His face. Moses is

placed in the cleft of the rock, covered by God's hand, and allowed to see only the divine afterglow, the back, not the face.

The incompleteness of Moses' vision in Exodus 33 is a paradigm of the incomplete vision that is all any creature possesses in the present age. We see the back; we see the afterglow; we see the reflection of the divine glory in the mirror of creation, in the testimony of Scripture, in the face of Christ as He is made known to us through the Word and the Spirit. But we do not yet see the face. That is reserved for the age to come. And the cry of Moses, "Show me Your glory!", is the cry of every soul who has been genuinely captured by the knowledge of God: the cry that will not be finally and fully satisfied until the veil is lifted, the glass is set aside, and the face of God is seen in the full, unveiled, beatifying glory of the eternal day.

"I pray You, show me Your glory!" | "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live."

Exodus 33:18–20, NASB 1995

IV. Paul: That I May Know Him

A. The Apostle's Supreme Desire

The apostle Paul, writing from a Roman prison in the final years of his extraordinary life and ministry, expresses in Philippians 3:8–10 a desire that stands as the most compressed and the most intensely personal statement of the theological quest in all of his letters: "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death" (NASB 1995).

The phrase "that I may know Him" is placed at the end of a long sentence as its climactic purpose, the aim toward which everything else in the passage is oriented. Paul has already established that he counts all his previous credentials (his Pharisaic pedigree, his legal righteousness, his zeal, his irreproachable standing under the law) as rubbish in comparison to knowing Christ. And the knowing that he speaks of is not merely propositional knowledge about Christ; it is personal, experiential, progressively deepening communion with Christ, the knowing of 1 John 3:2 that will be fully consummated in the beatific vision.

B. Already / Not Yet: The Structure of Present Knowledge

Paul's prayer "that I may know Him" is remarkable for this reason: Paul already knows Christ. He has met the risen Lord on the road to Damascus. He has been caught up to the third heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). He has received the most extraordinary direct revelations of the divine purpose of any person in the New Testament era. And yet he speaks of knowing Christ as a goal still being pursued, still being desired, still beckoning him forward.

This is the “already/not yet” structure of the Christian’s knowledge of God, and it is one of the most important theological categories for understanding our present condition. We already know God, truly, reliably, personally, savingly. The believer who has been born again by the Spirit, who has trusted Christ for salvation, who reads the Word of God and prays and worships and serves, this believer genuinely knows God. The knowledge is real, the relationship is real, and the fellowship is genuine. But the knowledge is not yet complete. It is partial, mediated, faith-based, and limited by the creaturely finitude that characterizes our present state. The veil has been partially lifted; it has not been entirely removed. We see, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, “in a mirror dimly” (NASB 1995), the reflection is real, but it is not the same as the face-to-face vision that awaits the age to come.

1 Corinthians 13:12 is Paul’s most direct statement of the already/not yet of divine knowledge: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (NASB 1995). The contrast is precise: now/then; mirror/face to face; in part/fully. The knowledge of the present age, however genuine and however extensive it may become through the faithful use of the means of grace, is always and irreducibly partial, a reflected image, not a direct vision. The knowledge of the age to come will be full, direct, and face-to-face. But it is the same God we are coming to know now and whom we shall know fully then.

C. The Means of Present Knowledge

The “already” dimension of the beatific vision, the genuine, partial, mediated knowledge of God that is available to the redeemed in the present age, comes to us through the means God has appointed. These are the means of grace: the Word of God, which is the primary vehicle of divine self-disclosure; prayer, which is the primary avenue of personal fellowship with God; the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, which are the signs and seals of the covenant in which God has united Himself to His people; and the community of the church, in which the Spirit of God moves among His people to illuminate, comfort, strengthen, and conform them to the image of Christ.

The study of Theology Proper itself is one of the most important means of the present partial knowledge of God. Every lesson of this series has been, in its own way, an exercise in the use of the primary means of grace, the Word of God, to extend and deepen our knowledge of the God whom the Word reveals. Theology done rightly is not an academic exercise; it is an act of worship and a foretaste of the beatific vision. When the mind is engaged with the truth of God’s being and character, when the heart is moved by what the mind has grasped, when the will is shaped by the knowledge of who God is, this is the creature already beginning to participate, in a dim and partial way, in the full knowledge of God that awaits the age to come.

V. The Doxological Conclusion: Theology Must Terminate in Worship

The most important single thing to be said about the twenty-nine lessons that have preceded this one, and about the thirty that together constitute this Theology Proper series, is this: all of it has been in the service of worship. Every argument, every exegetical observation, every historical survey, every doctrinal definition, every pastoral application,

all of it has been oriented, from the very beginning, toward a single destination: the adoring, humble, grateful, joyful worship of the God who has revealed Himself in His Word and in His Son.

This is not a pious afterthought appended to an otherwise academic enterprise. It is the nature of genuine theology. The Puritans used to say that theology is the science of living blessedly forever, and they meant by this that the knowledge of God and the enjoyment of God are not two different things but one. To know God truly is to enjoy God; to enjoy God is to worship God; to worship God is to arrive, in however dim and partial a way, at the destination for which every creature made in the image of God was created. The Psalm that perhaps best expresses this is Psalm 73:25–26: “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (NASB 1995). This is the voice of someone who has arrived, not yet at the beatific vision, but at the theological conviction that makes the beatific vision the only destination worth having.

The great Paul understood this. When he arrived, in Romans 11, at the summit of his most rigorous theological exposition, the doctrine of God’s sovereign governance of all of redemptive history, including the mystery of Israel’s hardening and eventual restoration, he did not offer a concluding thesis statement or a systematic summary. He erupted into the doxology that has served as the series verse of this entire course, and that is fitting for the conclusion of every genuine theological study:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

This is the proper terminus of Theology Proper. Not a well-organized filing cabinet of doctrinal propositions, however accurate. Not a sophisticated theological system, however rigorously constructed. But a doxology, a lyrical, adoring, uncontainable eruption of praise before a God whose wisdom is unsearchable, whose ways are unfathomable, and from whom and through whom and to whom are all things. This is where all genuine theology leads, and this is where it is meant to lead. The study of God that does not terminate in worship has not yet arrived at its proper destination.

VI. The Eternal Occupation of the Redeemed

A. Beholding the Glory of the Triune God

What will the redeemed do forever? This is not an idle question, and the biblical answer is not the cartoonish image of disembodied souls floating on clouds playing harps. The eternal occupation of the redeemed is as specific and as magnificent as the God who has ordained it: they will behold, enjoy, and glorify the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the direct, unmediated, face-to-face vision of the divine glory that is the beatific vision, world without end.

Revelation 22:4 states it with three-word simplicity: “they will see His face” (NASB 1995). After everything, after creation and fall and redemption and judgment, after the groaning of the creation and the tears of the suffering and the long pilgrimage of the people of God through history, the final and permanent state of the redeemed is expressed in three words: they will see His face. The face of God, which Moses was told no creature could see and live, will be seen by the redeemed in the power of the resurrection, in bodies glorified and perfected for this very purpose. The vision that was beyond Moses in the flesh will be the permanent, unceasing, eternally inexhaustible occupation of the redeemed in glory.

B. The Inexhaustibility of the Vision

The beatific vision is not an experience that the redeemed will exhaust. The God who is infinite cannot be fully comprehended by any finite mind, even a glorified finite mind, even in the age to come, even in the fullness of the resurrection glory. The redeemed will see God as He is; they will not see God as exhaustively as God sees Himself. The distinction between archetypal knowledge (God’s complete self-knowledge) and ectypal knowledge (the creature’s finite, derived knowledge) does not disappear in the new creation; it is fulfilled in the new creation. The redeemed will know God truly and fully, more fully than any creature has ever known Him before, but the inexhaustible depths of the divine being will always lie infinitely beyond the furthest reach of creaturely comprehension.

This is not a limitation of the beatific vision; it is its perpetual glory. The redeemed will never exhaust the sight of God. The vision will be forever new, forever deepening, forever expanding, forever surprising, forever more beautiful and more glorious than it was in the moment before. The exploration of the inexhaustible riches of the knowledge of God is not a project that the redeemed will complete; it is the eternal project, the occupation of a joy that never runs dry because its object is infinite. The Westminster Shorter Catechism got it exactly right: the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

C. The Community of the Vision

The beatific vision is not a solitary experience. The redeemed will see God together, as the vast, diverse, indescribable community gathered from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue (Revelation 7:9), united in Christ, indwelt by the Spirit, and gathered before the throne of the Father in the eternal city of God. The vision will be shared; the joy will be communal; the worship will be corporate. The hymn of the redeemed in Revelation 5:9–14 gives us the shape of the eternal doxology: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing” (Revelation 5:12, NASB 1995), sung by ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, until the whole of creation joins the chorus in a praise that has no ending.

The communion of saints in the new creation will not be a distraction from the beatific vision; it will be one of its most glorious dimensions. The redeemed will know each other as they are fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12), in a community of love and truth and joy that has been perfected by the removal of every sin, every misunderstanding, every failure of love that has marred human community in the present age. They will love God together and enjoy God together and glorify God together, in a fellowship of worship that

makes the finest moments of corporate worship in the present age seem, by comparison, like the faintest whisper before a symphony.

VII. A Closing Meditation: For from Him and Through Him and to Him Are All Things

We have come, in this final section, to the place where we must lay down the pen, not because there is nothing more to say about the God we have been studying, but because what remains to be said cannot be said in prose. What remains is doxology. What remains is the worship that all genuine theology, when it has done its work honestly and well, inevitably and naturally produces.

Paul's great doxology in Romans 11:36 is not merely the conclusion of a lengthy theological argument; it is the revelation of what all theological argument is ultimately for. "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." Every word of this sentence has been unpacked, in one way or another, across the twenty-nine lessons that have preceded this one. "From Him", creation ex nihilo, the decree of election, the eternal Trinitarian life from which all else proceeds. "Through Him", the Trinitarian governance of creation, the mediation of the eternal Son, the application of the Spirit, the providential governance of all things. "To Him", the ultimate purpose of creation and redemption, the doxological end toward which all of history and all of theology is moving. And then the response that these three prepositions demand: "To Him be the glory forever. Amen."

The Amen is not a closing formality. It is a confession. It is the creature's acknowledgment that what God has said about Himself is true, that what He has done is good, that what He has promised will come to pass. The Amen is the theologian's most honest and most faithful word, the word that expresses both intellectual conviction ("I believe this") and personal commitment ("I surrender to this"). The Amen of Romans 11:36 is the Amen of every believer who has sat with the doctrine of God long enough to be undone by it, and then rebuilt by it, and then set on fire by it with a worship that no longer needs to be encouraged or manufactured or explained, because it arises naturally, inevitably, and joyfully from the encounter with the God who is greater than all our thoughts and more glorious than all our words.

And so we close. Not with a summary. Not with a review. But with the prayer of Moses, offered on behalf of every student of Theology Proper who has labored through these pages and who has arrived, breathless and humbled and glorious, at this final lesson with something more than they had when they began: *"I pray You, show me Your glory!"* May that be the prayer of every soul who has opened these pages. May the God who is too great to be fully comprehended but too gracious to remain hidden answer that prayer, now, through His Word and His Spirit; and then, in the unveiled, beatifying, eternal vision of His own glorious face. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Key Texts: 1 John 3:2; John 17:3, 24; Exodus 33:18–23; Philippians 3:8–10; Romans 11:36; Revelation 22:4

Theological Terms and Definitions

Term	Definition
Beatific Vision	From the Latin visio beatifica, the blessed or beatifying sight. The classical theological term for the direct, immediate, unveiled, face-to-face knowledge of God that the redeemed will enjoy in the new creation. Distinguished from the partial, mediated, faith-based knowledge of God available in the present age. Grounded in 1 John 3:2 (“we will see Him just as He is”), John 17:24 (“they may see My glory”), Revelation 22:4 (“they will see His face”), and 1 Corinthians 13:12 (“face to face”).
Visio Beatifica	Latin: “blessed sight” or “beatifying vision.” The Latin equivalent of the beatific vision, the classical theological terminology for the direct sight of God that constitutes the ultimate blessedness of the redeemed. The term carries the double connotation of blessedness received (the one who sees God is beatified, made supremely blessed) and glory given (the vision is of the supremely glorious God who is Himself the source of all blessedness).
Already / Not Yet	The theological structure of the Christian’s experience in the present age, in which the blessings of the age to come have already broken into the present through the resurrection of Christ and the gift of the Spirit, but have not yet been fully consummated. Applied to the knowledge of God: the believer already knows God truly and savingly through Word, Spirit, and faith; but the full, direct, unveiled knowledge of the beatific vision has not yet arrived. Grounded in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (now dim mirror / then face to face; now in part / then fully).
Incomprehensibility of God	The doctrine that God, in the fullness of His infinite being, cannot be exhaustively known by any finite mind, even in the age to come. The beatific vision gives the redeemed a far fuller and more direct knowledge of God than is available in the present age, but God’s infinite being will always exceed the furthest reach of creaturely comprehension. The inexhaustibility of God is not a limitation of the beatific vision but its eternal glory: the redeemed will explore the infinite riches of the divine being forever, always finding more and never exhausting the source.
Pilgrimage	The metaphor for the Christian life and theological study as a journey toward a destination: the direct, face-to-face knowledge and enjoyment of God that is the beatific vision. Every genuine act of theological study, every faithful use of the means of grace, every experience of divine fellowship in the present age is a step on the pilgrimage toward the face of God. The destination gives meaning to every step; each step is oriented toward and finds its significance in the destination.

Doxology	From the Greek doxa (glory) and logos (word or speaking). An expression of praise and glory to God. In theological usage, doxology is the proper terminus of all genuine theological reflection: the study of God, rightly pursued, invariably and inevitably terminates in the worship and glorification of God. The great doxologies of Scripture (Romans 11:33–36; Revelation 5:9–14; 19:1–6) and of the Christian tradition (the Gloria Patri, the Gloria in Excelsis, the Te Deum) model the doxological response that the knowledge of God is meant to produce.
Chief End of Man	The Westminster Shorter Catechism’s answer to its first question: “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.” This formulation captures the inseparable connection between the glorification of God and the enjoyment of God: to glorify God and to enjoy God are not two different ends but one. The creature’s highest good is identical with God’s ultimate aim in creation. The beatific vision is the eternal consummation of this chief end: in seeing God as He is, the redeemed glorify Him and enjoy Him in the most perfect and permanent way possible for a finite creature.
Eternal Life	In its New Testament usage (especially in the Gospel of John), not merely the duration of existence after death but the quality of relational knowledge of God. “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (John 17:3, NASB 1995). Eternal life begins now in the genuine, saving, personal knowledge of God through faith in Christ; it will be consummated in eternity in the direct, face-to-face knowledge of the beatific vision. The beatific vision is not something different from eternal life; it is its ultimate and permanent expression.
Glorification	The final stage of the order of salvation (the golden chain of Romans 8:29–30): the completion of the process by which the redeemed are conformed to the image of Christ, accomplished at the resurrection of the body and the entrance into the new creation. Glorification is the enabling of the redeemed for the beatific vision: the bodies and souls of the redeemed are transformed and perfected so as to be capable of beholding the direct, unveiled glory of God without destruction. 1 John 3:2 connects the sight of God with the transformation into His likeness: “we will see Him just as He is” and “we will be like Him.”
Theology as Doxology	The conviction that genuine theological study, rightly pursued, inevitably and naturally terminates in worship. Theology that produces only intellectual satisfaction without doxological fire has not completed its proper work. The study of God is itself a form of worship; the proper response to every truth learned about God is adoration, gratitude, and submission. The great Reformed and Puritan theologians understood that theology is not a cold science but a living encounter with the most glorious Being in existence,

	and that the proper response to such an encounter is the eruption of praise that Paul models in Romans 11:33–36.
Communion of Saints	The fellowship of all the redeemed, past, present, and future, united in Christ by the Spirit, sharing in the blessings of salvation and in the worship of the triune God. In the new creation, the communion of saints will be fully realized: the vast, diverse community gathered from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue will behold the face of God together, worship the triune God together, and enjoy one another in the perfection of love and truth and joy that sin has made impossible in the present age. The beatific vision is a corporate experience as well as a personal one.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the knowledge of God to which this series has been dedicated is not merely theoretical but eschatological, that it is the beginning of the knowledge that will be consummated in the beatific vision. Every truth we have learned about the being and attributes and works of God is not merely information to be stored; it is the beginning of the vision that will one day be complete. The Christian who understands this will not relate to theology as an academic discipline but as a foretaste of eternity, as the most important thing she does in the present age, because it is the beginning of what she will do forever.

We must also believe that the God we have been studying is not only the most glorious subject of any possible inquiry, but the only truly satisfying object of the human heart. Augustine's great confession is the conclusion of every soul who has genuinely pursued the knowledge of God: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." The restlessness is real; the satisfaction is real; and the ultimate satisfaction, the beatific vision, is the destination toward which every believer is moving.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

Let the cry of Moses become the cry of your heart: "I pray You, show me Your glory!" Not once, at the beginning of a theological study, but continuously, daily, as the governing desire of your life. The person whose deepest desire is to see the face of God is the person for whom theology is not a burden but a delight, not an obligation but a feast, not a subject to be studied but a love to be pursued. Let this series have done whatever it could to fan that desire into a living flame that will not be extinguished until it is finally and forever satisfied in the face of God.

Desire also the fullness of the corporate vision, the company of the redeemed gathered from every nation and tongue, worshipping together before the throne of the Lamb. The beatific vision is not for you alone; it is for the whole people of God. Let that corporate dimension of the hope shape the way you relate to the body of Christ in the present: every believer you encounter, however different from you in temperament or background or culture, is a co-pilgrim on the same journey, destined for the same face of God.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Continue the pilgrimage. This series on Theology Proper is one step, a significant one, on a lifelong journey toward the face of God. The study of God does not end with the last page of this course; it deepens and widens and intensifies as long as we live. Read the theologians who have walked this path before you: Augustine's Confessions, Calvin's Institutes, Owen's Communion with God, Edwards's Religious Affections, Charnock's Existence and Attributes of God. Let the great cloud of witnesses guide you deeper into the knowledge of the God they pursued.
- Let theology produce doxology. Every truth you have learned in this series about the being and attributes and works of God is meant to produce worship. After each session of study, after each reading, after each encounter with a truth about God that has pressed upon you with its full weight, stop. Pray. Adore. Let the

knowledge of God descend from the mind to the heart and from the heart to the knees. Theology that stays in the head has not yet done its full work.

- Teach what you have learned. The knowledge of God is not meant to be hoarded. Every believer is a steward of the glorious truths of Theology Proper, and those truths are most fully internalized when they are shared. Teach your children. Disciple your friends. Open the Word with your neighbors. The pilgrimage is most richly walked in community.
- Live as a citizen of the new creation. The doctrine of the beatific vision should shape the way you live in the present age: as a pilgrim, not a settler; as one whose ultimate citizenship is in the new creation, not in this present world; as one for whom death is not a defeat but the doorway to the face of God. Live with the long view that the beatific vision provides. Let the weight of the coming glory press down on the present suffering and put it in its proper, eternal perspective.
- Pray Moses's prayer. Every day. In every circumstance. In the dark valley and on the mountain top. In the classroom and the boardroom and the hospital room and the cemetery. "I pray You, show me Your glory." This is the prayer of the true theologian, the true disciple, and the true pilgrim. It is the prayer that will not go unanswered. It is the prayer that God, in His great grace, has purposed to answer, fully, finally, and forever, in the age to come.

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

1. As you come to the final lesson of this series, what has been the single most significant truth about God that you have encountered? Which lesson or doctrine has most moved you, challenged you, humbled you, or deepened your worship? Share honestly with the group.

Observation Questions (What Does the Text Say?)

2. Read 1 John 3:1–3. What is the connection John draws between being children of God (v. 1), seeing God as He is (v. 2), and being transformed to be like Him (v. 2)? What practical implication does John draw from the hope of the beatific vision in verse 3?

3. Read John 17:1–6, 20–26. Identify what Jesus prays for in verses 3 and 24. What is the relationship between these two petitions? How does the high-priestly prayer of John 17 frame the purpose of both eternal life and the beatific vision?

4. Read Exodus 33:12–23. What is the progression of Moses' requests in this passage? What does God grant and what does He withhold? What does His answer reveal about the nature of the knowledge of God available to creatures in the present age?

5. Read Philippians 3:4–14. What does Paul count as “loss” and “rubbish” in verses 7–8? What does he set against these things as the surpassing worth? How does the phrase “that I may know Him” (v. 10) function as the ultimate aim of Paul's life and theology?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

6. Explain the already/not yet structure of the believer's knowledge of God, using 1 Corinthians 13:12 and Philippians 3:10 as your primary texts. In what sense do believers already know God? In what sense do they not yet know Him fully? How does this structure shape the way we should pursue the knowledge of God in the present age?

7. The lesson argues that Moses' cry “Show me Your glory!” is the cry of every true theologian. What is it about this prayer that makes it the paradigmatic expression of the theological quest? How does God's answer to Moses, both what He grants and what He withholds, illuminate the structure of present-age theological knowledge?

8. The lesson argues that all genuine theology must terminate in doxology, and that theology which does not produce worship has not completed its proper work. Do you agree? What is the relationship between the intellectual rigor of theological study and the doxological fire it is meant to produce? Can these be in tension, and if so, how should that tension be resolved?

9. The beatific vision is described as both the consummation of the believer's personal knowledge of God and a corporate experience of the entire community of the redeemed. Why does the corporate dimension of the vision matter? How should the prospect of sharing the beatific vision with the entire community of the redeemed, from every nation, tribe, and tongue, shape our attitudes toward the diversity of the body of Christ in the present age?

10. The lesson closes with the three prepositions of Romans 11:36: "from Him and through Him and to Him are all things." How do these three prepositions summarize the theological journey of this entire series? What does each preposition capture about the God we have been studying, and about the relationship between God and all that He has made?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

11. The Westminster Shorter Catechism says man's chief end is "to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." After thirty lessons on Theology Proper, how has your understanding of both the glorification and the enjoyment of God deepened? In what specific way is the God you are glorifying and enjoying more glorious and more enjoyable to you now than at the beginning of this series?

12. The lesson describes the beatific vision as the eternal project of exploring the inexhaustible riches of the knowledge of God, always new, always deepening, always more glorious than it was in the moment before. How does this picture of eternal life change the way you think about the Christian's enjoyment of God in the present age? Does your current experience of studying and knowing God have the quality of inexhaustible discovery, or has it become routine?

13. The closing meditation invites the reader to pray Moses's prayer: "I pray You, show me Your glory!" Have you made this prayer your own? If so, how has God been answering it through this series? If not, what would it look like to begin praying it, and meaning it, as the governing desire of your theological and devotional life?

14. This is the final question of the final lesson of this series. Looking back over everything you have studied, and looking forward to the beatific vision that the series has been pointing toward: What do you most want to say to God right now? Not a theological statement, not a summary, not a conclusion, but a word from the creature to the Creator, from the pilgrim to the one whose face he is seeking. Take a moment in silence. And then, if you are willing, speak it.

Prayer Focus

Close this series, this entire Theology Proper course, with a time of worship rather than instruction. Begin with the reading of Psalm 84, the Psalm of the pilgrim who longs for the presence of God: “How lovely are Your dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God” (Psalm 84:1–2, NASB 1995). Let the Psalmist’s longing for the presence of God be your longing. And let the Psalmist’s affirmation, “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside” (Psalm 84:10, NASB 1995), be the theological verdict of every person who has walked through these thirty lessons.

Spend time in adoration of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for every truth about Himself that He has condescended to reveal in His Word. Adore the Father for His sovereign, eternal, incomprehensible love. Adore the Son for the glory of the incarnation, the atoning death, the triumphant resurrection, and the unceasing intercession at the Father’s right hand. Adore the Spirit for the regenerating, sanctifying, illuminating, comforting presence that has made the study of the Word a living encounter with the living God.

Pray Moses’s prayer together as a group, slowly and deliberately: “I pray You, show me Your glory.” And then receive God’s answer, the same answer He gave Moses, and the same answer He gives to every pilgrim who asks with a sincere heart: I will cause all My goodness to pass before you. I will proclaim My name to you. And one day, one day that is as certain as the resurrection of My Son, you will see not My back but My face. You will see Me as I am. And in seeing Me, you will be like Me. And in being like Me, you will be home.

Close with the doxology of Romans 11:33–36, spoken together as the final word of this series, not as a formula but as a confession, not as a conclusion but as a beginning:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”, Romans 11:33–36, NASB 1995

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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