

# Is God for Us or for Himself?

by John Piper

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*God's ultimate goal in history is to receive praise and glory from men, motivated by His desire to complete our joy and bring us full and complete satisfaction.*

**Duration:** 26:34

**Scripture:** Isaiah 48:11, Jeremiah 13:11, Ephesians 1:5-6, Ephesians 1:12, Ephesians 1:14, Revelation 5:11-13

**Topics:** "Praise And Worship", "Gods Glory"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of praise and delight in our lives. He uses examples such as praising a baby's features, cheering for a sports team, and admiring the beauty of nature to illustrate the natural inclination to praise what brings us joy. The speaker then turns to the book of Psalms and quotes C.S. Lewis' Reflection on the Psalms to highlight the connection between joy and praise. Finally, the speaker references the book of Ephesians, specifically chapter 1, to show that Paul believed the goal of God in saving us is for the praise of His glory.

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## Transcript

Let's pray together. Let him who speaks, speak as one who speaks the words of God. Peter taught us.

Lord, I call upon you now to perform that miracle of speaking as I speak because it's your word and yours alone that has power to transform the affections of our hearts and return them to you. So be it. Amen.

I have to preface what I have planned to say with a thank you and an admonition. The thank you is to several people who this week have made my week very bright by calling me on the phone or coming to my office and just telling me good news about things that are happening in their lives. I won't mention any names because then somebody might feel bad if I forget somebody, but people are being won to Christ.

I know of two in the past week and there was excitement about that. And people are eager to serve. They just come and say, what can I do? And I wish I knew more about the church so that I could say, here's where there's a need and here's where there's a need.

And I thank you for that. And I urge that you bring me criticisms and you bring me good news about what's happening in our church family because both of them are important for any pastor. Years ago, I attended a Billy Graham crusade in Anaheim, California.

I don't remember the date. I think it was when I was in seminary out there. And I sat out in the left field bleachers.

There were 50,000 people there that night and I could see from where I was as the 50,000 people wrapped around the infield. And when Cliff Barrows, who's a good friend of mine because I grew up in the same town he did and like him tremendously, when he led How Great Thou Art, as he always does, I got about two bars out and couldn't sing anymore because I had never heard 50,000 people sing praises to God. And my heart was so stunned with that event that I've never forgotten it and what it did to me.

Nothing had ever before or since seemed so right and so beautiful and so joyful as 50,000 creatures singing praise to their creator. It was an experience unforgettable. And I really believe that that night I got a little teeny glimpse into heaven because according to the revelation of John, which Jesus gave to him in chapter 5 verses 11 to 13, which you don't need to look up, it's not my text, heaven is going to look like this.

And I beheld and I heard a voice of many angels around the throne and the beasts and the elders and the number of them was 10,000 times 10,000 and thousands of thousands saying with a loud voice worthy is the lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and glory and honor and blessing. Of course, you all hear the tune, don't you? From the Messiah. And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea and all that are in them, I heard saying blessing and honor and glory and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne and unto the lamb forever and ever.

The goal of God is to create a people and bring them to himself and receive unbounded praise from their hearts with all their might. And those of us who've tasted the worthiness of the lamb, we wouldn't miss it for the world. The lamb is worthy.

The father is worthy. They ought to be praised and they will be praised. We will praise them in this church and in the age to come.

But for two weeks now, we've seen from scripture on Sunday morning that God has not merely been acting so that praise is resulting from men. God has been acting and taking the initiative to get praise from men. Everything God does from the earliest act of predestination in eternity down to the end is motivated by his desire to get praise.

Isaiah 48, 11 is like a banner over every divine act. For my own sake, for my own sake I do it. My glory I will not give to another.

Or as Jeremiah states it in 13, 11 of his prophecy. For as the waste cloth clings to the loins of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, says the Lord, that they might be for me a people and a name and a praise and a glory. God's goal in all that he does is to receive praise and glory from men.

And now, lest we think that this is just an Old Testament emphasis, because that's where we've been emphasizing, you will perhaps want to look at the text of the morning with me in Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians is an amazing book with sentences that extend to 11 verses and extend as well into the halls of heaven. It's an exalted book. Paul was not anywhere else any higher.

In this first chapter, which Pastor Carlson read, there is a phrase that's repeated three times. And the repetition of this phrase shows us what Paul believes is the goal of God in saving us for himself. I'll point

them out.

Verses 5 and 6. He predestined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will to the praise of the glory of his grace. Verse 12. We who first hoped in Christ have been predestined and appointed to live for 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. There's no doubt, is there, what Paul's concern in those 11 verses is.

Paul wants us to know that from eternity, in the decrees of predestination, to the end of our enjoyment of his inheritance in the age to come, everything along the way has been aimed at the purpose of getting praise for God's glory. So God is praiseworthy. In that he is praiseworthy.

In that we ought to praise him. In that we will praise him. Nobody who is in the church doubts.

And we affirm that truth gladly. But, less often do we hear the emphasis that it was not just the result of God's activity, but the goal of God's activity, that people are to praise him. He governs the world precisely to the end that he might be admired and marveled at and exalted and praised.

Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 10, that Jesus Christ is going to return at the end of the age, notice the purpose, to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at by all who believe. Jesus is coming in order to be marveled at. Now, it's been my experience, however, over the past years that this truth, this emphasis, is received with somewhat less gusto than the statement that we ought to praise Jesus.

It's alright for God to be praised. It's not quite right for God to seek praise for himself. Didn't Jesus say, whoever exalts himself will be abased and whoever humbles himself will be exalted? Yet, God's clear purpose from Scripture is to exalt himself in the eyes of men.

Now, my aim in this message this morning is to try to show as best I can that this aim of God is wholly good and with no fault whatsoever and radically different from human self-exaltation primarily because it is a supreme act of love. And therefore, I want us to be able to walk out of here affirming gladly with all our hearts that God, in fact, has made it his ultimate goal in history to be praised and to join him in that ultimate goal. Now, there are two reasons that stand in the way of our affirming with full hearts and zealous minds that God is, in fact, seeking his own praise in history.

The two reasons, I think, are these. We don't like humans who do that. And the second reason is from the Bible more explicitly.

The Bible teaches, as we've already seen, that it's wrong to exalt yourself. Jesus said it was wrong. So people take offense at this teaching that we've been stressing for the last two weeks because it contradicts their experience and it contradicts some of the teachings they have in the Bible as far as they can see.

We just don't like people who are all enamored by their own skill or their own power or their own gifts or their own savvy and talk about it. We don't like scholars who go out of their way to make sure we know that they know more than we know. We don't like them when they recite for us all their recent publications and lectureships.

We don't like businessmen who are always chattering about their terrific investments, how they've stayed on top of the market and managed to get in low and out high and they're just sitting pretty all the time and talk it up because there's power in investments. We don't like children who hour after hour play one-upmanship with each other. I know that we don't like that.

And unless we're one of them, we don't like women and men who instead of dressing simply, modestly, inoffensively, make it their aim always to be in the most current style so that people will think they're in or punky or laid back or whatever the world says you're supposed to look like this week. Why don't we like that? You know why? It's because we don't like inauthentic people. People that are after praise are inauthentic people.

I and Rand, who wrote Atlas Shrugged, who's an atheist, hit the nail on the head when she called them second-handers. They live not first-hand by the joy that comes from achieving what you value. They live second-hand by the praise and the compliment that come in after you've done a little bit.

That's what gives their life significance. And we don't like second-handers. We don't want to be second-handers deep down.

We admire people who are composed and secure enough so that they don't always have to be shoring up their weaknesses or compensating for their deficiencies by trying to win as many compliments as they possibly can. Therefore, it stands to reason that any teaching that would tend to put God in the category of a second-hander is going to be rejected. And that's what, in fact, this teaching that he is after his own praise, wanting to be admired, seeking his own glory, seems to make him a second-hander.

But should it? Must it? One thing we can say for sure. God is not weak. And we can say, secondly, He has no deficiencies.

Paul says, all things are from Him and through Him and to Him. He always was. He always will be.

He is not becoming. He is changelessly perfect. Whatever is that is not God has its existence from Him and cannot make any contribution to God's perfection except what God has already contributed to Him.

That's simply what it means to be God and not a creature. Therefore, God's zeal to seek praise from men and going after glory and the honor of His own name cannot be motivated by weakness, a desire to shore it up, or a desire to compensate for some deficiency that He has. He may seem at a superficial glance to be in the category of a second-hander, but He cannot be.

Something must be wrong, or there must be a motive different than the motive of the second-hander to account for God seeking His own praise. Now, there's another reason from experience, just briefly, why we don't like second-handers or why we don't like people who are always seeking their own glory. It's not merely that they are inauthentic people who deep down have weaknesses they're trying to hide.

It's because they're unloving. They are so caught up with their own affairs, they've got no time to care for anybody else and they will just step on people on the way to their glory. They are unloving, and we don't like unloving people.

But now that leads into what I said was a biblical argument for why we don't like this sort of person. 1 Corinthians 13:5 puts a tremendous boulder in the way of God's self-exaltation. It says, Love seeks not its own.

Now, that creates a crisis, doesn't it? For God. If we've understood God's goal. Because He is seeking His own glory.

According to Isaiah 48.11. But, how can He then be loving if love seeks not its own? For three weeks we've argued that God is for Himself. And now we hear that in order to be loving, He must be for us. Is then God for Himself? Or is He for us? Now, the answer I want to try to persuade you is the true answer.

It could be summed up like this. Because God is unique, as the most glorious of all beings, and is totally self-sufficient, He must be for Himself in order to be for us. If He were to abandon His goal of self-exaltation, we would be the losers.

Not merely God. His aim to bring praise to Himself and His aim to bring pleasure to His people are one aim. And they stand and they fall together.

That's what I want us to see. Now, in view of God's infinitely admirable beauty, this is the question we have to ask, which I think will lead us to the solution that brings the two together, His love and His self-exaltation. What is it that God must give us in order to be perfectly loving to us? How will the perfect love of the infinitely beautiful God be manifested? What gift can He give us? And there is only one answer.

He must give us Himself and nothing else. That's what God aims to give. His perfection for our contemplation and fellowship.

And that's precisely what God was aiming to do in sending Jesus into the world, wasn't He? Ephesians 2.18, it says, Christ came that we might have access in one Spirit to the Father. 1 Peter 3.18, Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring us to God. The whole aim of God in His redemptive activity is to bring people to Himself so that they might see Him and enjoy Him and fellowship with Him.

Now, usually we don't stop to think what that implies. That is very vain of God. Isn't it? Only vain is a bad word.

It has bad connotations. God must have a very high regard for Himself to think that the death of His Son is worth it to bring people into His presence. If I were to do that, you would think I was very, very arrogant.

But that's the gift God wants to give us precisely because the psalmist says, in your presence there is fullness of joy, at your right hand there are pleasures forevermore. So God's goal for His people is not prestige, it's not wealth, it's not even health, it's the contemplation of and the fellowship with Himself. And now we're on the brink of what for me was a tremendous discovery which I made about... well, I made half of it about 1968 and the other half 1974.

And let me take you into this discovery with me. To be supremely loving, God must give us what is best for us, what is going to bring us most delight. Namely, He must give us Himself.

But what do we do when we get what is best, when we get something that brings us terrific delight? We praise it. When a little baby comes into the world, especially if it comes in easy and doesn't get all bent out of shape like a banana, you'll look at it and you'll say, Oh, look at that head, it's so round. And his little nose is so out there.

No, not like this. And his little hands are so big. And look at all that hair.

And you just try to think of ways to praise this little baby because we love to praise what we delight in. We praise our lovers when they've been gone a long time and we think of all kinds of creative ways to say, Your eyes are like the sky and your hair is like silk and you are beautiful to me. And if we couldn't say it, we'd be really frustrated.

And for those of you who are sportsmen, you just tell me what you do when your team is down by three runs in the bottom of the ninth and somebody hits a grand slam. You're off your seat and we call that cheering, but another word for it when you're in church is praise. Or to use one other example, I think there's another group here that might take more to this.

How many have taken a boat ride down the St. Croix in the autumn and praised the colors of the trees and groped for words to give expression to the delight that flows through the eye into the heart because of that scenery. But my great discovery was this. Not so much that we praise what we enjoy.

That was discovery enough. But that the joy is not complete until the praise is part of it. Praise is not merely tacked on like a duty or a compliment.

It is the joy in consummation. You would be frustrated if you were not allowed to speak of the joy you have in whatever it is that you delight in. Now I'm going to read a section from the book of Psalms that C.S. Lewis wrote called Reflection on the Psalms because this embodies the solution as I found it to my dilemma.

Listen to what he says and see if it doesn't help you as much. He says, The most obvious fact about praise, whether of God or anything, strangely escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval or the giving honor.

I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise unless something like shyness or the fear of boring others is deliberately brought in to check it. The world rings with praise. Lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite games, praise of weather, wines, dishes, actors, horses, colleges, countries, historical personages, children, flowers, mountains, rare stamps, rare beetles, even sometimes politicians and scholars.

My whole more general difficulty about the praise of God depended on my absurdly denying to us as regards the supremely valuable what we delight to do, what we indeed cannot help doing about everything else we value. I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not only merely expresses, but completes the enjoyment. It is its appointed consummation.

It's not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are. The delight is incomplete until it is expressed. And that's the key.

We praise what we enjoy because the delight in God is incomplete until it is expressed in praise or in witness. If we were not allowed to speak of what we value or celebrate what we delight in, we would not have full joy. Therefore, if God truly loves us and aims to bring us full and complete joy in the age to come and a foretaste in this age, He must make it His aim not only to do us good, but to bring Himself praise.

Not because He needs to shore up any weakness or compensate for some deficiency, but because He loves us and He wants to complete our joy. And that can only happen in praising Him, the most beautiful of all beings. So, in conclusion, God is the one being in all the universe for whom seeking His own praise is

the most loving act.

No man can say that. If you make it your aim to seek your praise, you will wind up being unloving. But God, precisely in making His goal the seeking of His own praise, is loving.

For Him, self-exaltation is the highest virtue. When He does all things, as Ephesians 1 says, for the praise of His glory, He is preserving for us and offering to us the one thing which will provide ultimate satisfaction for our deepest longings. Praise the Lord.

Let everyone who has breath praise the Lord.

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