

Dear Friend,

I've been asked the question I aim to address in this article twice in the past month and scores of times in the past 30 years. Actually there are two questions that are very closely related. First, if God knew that humans would betray him and believe Satan's lie rather than his word and thus bring such rebellion and misery into the universe then why did God create such a world? The second question that relates to this is: if God doesn't need anyone or anything (Acts 17:24-25) then why did he create anything for the glory of his own name? Doesn't this mean he "needs" creation to be admired?

The answer to both of these questions lies in understanding the meaning of this statement: "God does all that he does for the glory of his own name." This is what the Bible tells us is the ultimate reason for why God does all that he does. Jonathon Edwards wrote a treatise entitled, "The End for which God Made the World" in which he lists hundreds of verses that show that God's ultimate purpose in all that he does is the glory of his own name. Romans 11:36 summarizes this purpose by stating, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever." This comes at the end of Paul's describing the great salvation that God has accomplished in and through Christ. Psalm 19 tells us that the entire creation "declares his glory." Creation exists for the glory of God. So God creates and God saves for the glory of his own name.

The first thing to recognize is that what it means for God to act for the glory of his own name does not mean the same thing as saying that a human does something for the glory of his own name. When a human being acts for the glory of his or her own name it is always evil. This is pride, a desire to assert or prove my superiority so that I receive the honor that is due to God alone. Also, when humans act for the glory of their own name they are being motivated by a need for the approval of others. A person who does something with his eye on how others view him or her is demonstrating his or her dependence upon or need for the approval of others.

The first thing to say then about God's acting for the glory of his own name is that he is not acting in order to gain our approval. God does not need our approval in order to be happy. When God acts "for his own sake" (Isaiah 48:11, Ezekiel 36:22-23, etc.) or for the glory of his own name he is acting according to his own nature. God, because he is God takes pleasure in certain kinds of actions. He loves being God and loves to act as God.

Humans, as made in God's image demonstrate this fact of God's existence in innumerable ways. Why does an artist, when acting as an artist and not as a person who needs to make money, paint a picture? Artists paint pictures because they delight to do so. They find joy in creating beauty. They do not need the picture but rather they find joy in creating it. Why do parents provide for their children? They do so out of delight in their children. They love their children and delight in doing them good. Good parents don't "need" their children but find their joy in being kind to their children. It's the same in marriage. It is in the nature of love to give out of the sheer joy of giving, not so that you will receive payment in return for your gift.

God delights to love and he delights to create and he delights to be just and he delights to shower favor on undeserving sinners, etc. because it is his nature as God to do so. God's glory is his exuberant delight in being and acting like he is and so he is always doing all that he does as an expression of his joy in being God, or doing all that he does for the sake of his own name. He doesn't create because he needs creation but because he finds pleasure in creating. He doesn't love because the object of his love is lovable or he needs to be loved in return but because he delights to love. He doesn't punish unbelieving sinners because he "needs" them to suffer but because he delights in being just.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 helps us understand what this fact ought to mean to us. "This is what the Lord says, 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth for I delight in these things,' declares the Lord." In other words, because God delights in being God, that is, in exercising his kindness, justice and righteousness; then we are to make it our goal to know him, to delight in him as well. We glorify God by joining in his joy in being God. We are taken up with him, not with his gifts. We want to savor him and we want others to savor him because he is the most delicious being in the universe.

So God created this kind of universe as an expression of his joy in being God. It is only this kind of universe that adequately expresses God's glory, his exuberant delight in being God in all of his vast and infinite and complex being. God made a world in which sin exists (Note: he did not make sin.) so he can exercise his kindness, justice and righteousness. There is much here which we do not fully comprehend. God and his ways will forever remain beyond our complete understanding. However, what God has revealed to us is more than adequate to fill our hearts with joy and praise and delight in him. The goal is not to comprehend everything about God but to enjoy who he is through the work he has done in creation and salvation.

Enjoying God with you,