

Reflections by the Pond

THE WRITINGS OF DAVID S LAMPEL



LET'S GET ONE THING STRAIGHT RIGHT AT THE START: The Lord our God is and always has been utterly perfect, whole, unimprovable, lacking nothing, and immutable. Nothing mortal man does or thinks can alter Him—either for better or worse—in any way. This does not mean that God exists in sterile isolation, unsensing, unfeeling, uncaring about His Creation, for He has emotions, feelings that run the gamut from tender, gracious compassion to fire-breathing wrath.

He—that is, the Godhead: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit—stands alone in the universe of His own making. No one else is so unchangeable and so holy as He.

Yet the Bible is filled with active verbs used to express something moving from us to Him—or even implying our ability to add something to what He already is.

Giving Vertically

GOD'S WORD is all about human beings, from its first book to its last. Even with that, the Bible is God-centric—or more precisely, *Christ*-centric. The second member of the Godhead is right there in Genesis—in fact, the apostle Paul in Colossians gives the Son credit for Creation itself.

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Colossians 1:13–17

Christ, as the pre-incarnate “angel of Yahweh,” is woven throughout the Old Testament, and as Jesus the Christ is the central figure of the gospels and epistles, climaxing with His glorious return and reign in The Revelation. He is the One responsible for the creation and holding together of this universe, and He is the One who made man’s relationship and eternity with Father God possible. The Bible we claim to so cherish is all about Christ Jesus and the life we have because of Him.

By contrast, life on this earth, the daily ebb and flow of temporal existence, is almost exclusively man-centric. It is man’s proclivity to be drawn toward those of his own kind, so we humans, as a rule, are more comfortable with our horizontal, rather than vertical, relationships. Thus we often make the mistake of interpreting certain words in the Bible from a horizontal, rather than vertical worldview.

When we “give” something to another human being—be it money, material goods, labor or time—it consists of a *transfer* from one to another. If I give an amount of money to a neighbor, I am lowering my bank account and causing his to rise. He benefits by my largess. If I give a tangible gift to another, his or her life will—or, at least, is intended to—improve as a result. If I work for someone without recompense or reward, I improve his life by eliminating his need to do the same work. Even something as simple and effortless as giving a thank-you or praise to another human being, contributes

something to their self-esteem; it encourages them, and adds a measure of joy to their life. Our expression of appreciation places a value on what they have done and encourages them to do it again.

All of that is a picture of giving horizontally. It is also a picture of good and righteous behavior between one human and another. But things change dramatically when it is *vertical* giving.

We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks,
For Your name is near;
Men declare Your wondrous works.

Psalms 75:1

I will give thanks to You, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
And will glorify Your name forever.

Psalms 86:12

Give glory to the LORD your God,
Before He brings darkness
And before your feet stumble
On the dusky mountains,
And while you are hoping for light
He makes it into deep darkness,
And turns it into gloom.

Jeremiah 13:16

God’s word is clear: It is good and righteous to “give” to God. We can give Him praise, give Him our thanks, and even give Him glory—but the vertical is a very different transaction from the horizontal. When we give horizontally, it is the recipient who benefits; when we give vertically, it is the *giver* who benefits.

Take, for example, the act of giving God glory. There are a couple of ways we can think of giving glory to God. The phrase “Give glory to the Lord your God” is an Old Testament idiom for “Confess

your sins.” We see that not just in the verse from Jeremiah, above, but in the book of Joshua, when Achan was caught stealing some of the spoil from Ai.

Then Joshua said to Achan, “My son, I implore you, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and give praise to Him; and tell me now what you have done. Do not hide it from me.” So Achan answered Joshua and said, “Truly, I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel, and this is what I did...”

Joshua 7:19–20

To “give glory to God” can mean to drop your pretenses, throw away your pride, and come clean before the Lord your God. Acknowledge Him as Lord and accept His sovereign judgment on your sin.

A second way to give glory to God is to confess, either publicly or privately, that He alone is due dignity and honor; only *He* is glorious. It is to acknowledge that He is God and we are not. In this we shun the applause of men and direct it upward, where all praise and glory belongs.

Both of these—the confession of sin, and the confession of His Lordship—work to the same end: both reestablish in our life, in our mind, in our aspect, a proper, godly perspective. To “give” God glory is to slough off the layers of self-worth that this culture wants to slather over us, but which in reality only insulate us from our God. Neither of them do one thing for or to God Himself; He is not changed, He is not made any better than He was before.

There are other Christendom verbs that fall into the same category as “give,” such as Magnify, Exalt, Bless.

I will praise the name of God with song
And magnify Him with thanksgiving.

Psalm 69:30

When we “magnify” the Lord our God we do not contribute anything to who He is, but we, instead, enlarge Him *in our aspect*. We permit Him a larger, more dominant role in our life.

Exalt the LORD our God
And worship at His footstool;
Holy is He.

Psalm 99:5

To “exalt” God is to grant Him a higher prominence over our being. To do this is to raise Him higher than anything or anyone else in our life—perhaps one of the hardest things for a human to do.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,
And all that is within me, bless His holy name.

Psalm 103:1

When we “bless” the Lord we are bowing down before Him in adoration. It is loving, it is personal, it is intimate.

None of these “gifts” change God one iota. None of them add anything to Him.

When we offer them to Him sincerely, earnestly, humbly, *we* are the ones who reap all the benefits.

When we give to God, we are the ones who receive.

But for us to receive, we must first give. ♦