

What the Heck, Mr. Beck?

America has recently been abuzz about Glenn Beck and his rather large contingent of followers. Ever since somewhere between 90,000 and a billion people showed up at his Restoring Honor rally to hear the Fox News host and radio-talker prophesy from on high, fans and foes have heaped adulation, disgust, cheer, hatred, exuberance, and all sorts of emotions on the man himself. The response depends on whom you ask and what sort of political worldview they hold. Those on the political right tend to like him and see where he is coming from; however, those on the opposite side of the political divide generally show antipathy toward Beck and his event.

Adding to the Left's (and some others') angst was the fact that he conducted his rally at the stoop of the civil rights movement—the Lincoln Memorial—on the very spot where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the same day 47 years ago, delivered one of America's defining speeches. Would Mr. Beck live up to that august standard? Would he dare use this sacred place and auspicious moment as an occasion to butcher the Obama administration and, in his view, their evil conspiracy to bring America to the hard left?

In fact, no. He did something out of character. Departing from his usual message, diverging from the political path—he instead spoke of God. He opined about honor. He sounded more like a religious, pulpit-pounder than the partisan, chalkboard artist that he usually is. He declared that “something beyond imagination is happening. America today begins to turn back to God.”[\[1\]](#) Wow! How awesome is that? Someone in our nation standing up for God. Or is he?

Who is God?

When we dig deeper, having already donned our distinctively Christian worldview lenses, Beck's message may not be what it

seems. Is he really trying to turn America back to God? The God that we as evangelical Christians believe in—the one in the Old Testament as well as in the New? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The Triune God—you know, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? In fact, as you listen to Mr. Beck's rhetoric, you might notice that he never defines which God he is actually referring to. How can you say that America is turning back to God and never define the God that you are talking about—unless you are taking one for granted? Is this the god of civic religion we hear invoked so often within the halls of power? Maybe America is seeking a god who is not really there—because it doesn't exist. Or maybe America wants to fashion, shape, and mold a god of its own—a god who is not true yet makes people feel a little better.

This god that is being fashioned here by Mr. Beck's verbiage seems to be a god called the Enlightenment, a deity of Reason. Now, please do not get me wrong, I believe that Mr. Beck has the best of intentions. I believe that he sincerely thinks that God is the answer for America. I also believe that Mr. Beck is not alone—there are many Americans, and yes, plenty of Christians, who believe that God is the answer for America and then proceed to form that god into whatever pleases them most. This is the reason why Mr. Beck's rally was a hit for some many people, and many among them, sadly, are church leaders. Yet, Scripture will not allow us to remake God into our own image—this is what He is supposed to be doing to us.

But, I digress. Back to Mr. Beck and the god called the Enlightenment. I believe he is basically trying to foster a moral, ethical movement that stands for things like honesty, integrity, truth, and nobility—you know, good, ol' fashioned morals—hoping that this will save America from its de-evolution. Essentially, he seems to promote morality without the bothersome requirement of bowing down to the One True God of the Bible.

This kind of a cart-before-the-horse thinking was rampant

during the era of the Enlightenment. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of God was altered. Instead of looking to the classical Biblical definition of God, these Enlightened thinkers deemed the task of defining who God is, practically unnecessary.

One of the products of the Enlightenment, which seems to be carried over and promoted by Mr. Beck, is stripping morality from the worship of God. Immanuel Kant, one the chief proponents of such Enlightened thinking in the 18th century, reverses the traditional order that morality only flows from a true concept of God. He, instead, believed that you could acquire morality without God, because morality is rooted in reason. "It is reason, by means of its moral principles, that can first produce the concept of God." {2} Did you get it? Kant is claiming that morality establishes the concept of God. Additionally, Kant here is not referring to the One True God of the Bible; rather, it is a god that he has fashioned in his own mind. Basically, God is morality; and you can get morality by being sensible, rationale, reasonable, by looking within yourself.

Mr. Beck's gathering was a pep-rally encouraging people to look within themselves. Don't look to someone else, he proclaimed, we must "look inside ourselves." {3} He eloquently spoke of the "power of the individual" and the difference that you can make when "you look inside yourself." {4} Morality is attainable—not by worship of and communion with a holy, righteous God—but by examining your reasonable self. I believe that Mr. Beck's libertarian political philosophy is not merely the way he sees politics—it is the way he sees all of life.

But we see Scripture providing an altogether different viewpoint—or might I say, worldview. It tells us that men's hearts are deceitful, in fact, so much so that not even the individual himself or herself can know it. It tells us that the belief and worship of God is directly tied to how we live. Wrong beliefs lead to wrong living, overall. The Bible tells

us not to look within ourselves for the solution, but to look to the cross: to look to the true God and his guilt–sacrifice on our behalf. And then it tells us to look toward the community–the church of God–in order to live a holy, moral, ethical life; not so that we can become good patriots, but so that we can become good children of God, and thus more fully human. The end result will be virtuous people living together in harmony.

The bottom line is that faith counts. Looking to God for morality is both Biblical and essential. But many within the Christian community seem to ignore this important fact when they are presented with a celebrity that seems to give voice to their political and moral values. Two leading evangelicals, when commenting about Mr. Beck’s gathering to Christianity Today, ignore the ultimacy of faith. “Glenn Beck’s Mormon faith is irrelevant,”[{5}](#) cried one; while the other proclaimed that Mr. Beck will be seen by evangelicals “as a moral voice, not necessarily a spiritual voice.”[{6}](#) But I ask once again: can morality and spirituality be divorced from one another? Is faith really irrelevant? No, and no.

What is Honor?

But another question regarding Mr. Beck’s gospel is, What does it mean to be honorable? His rally was called “Restoring Honor” and he obviously lauds the idea of honor, but he never defines it. He joked at the rally that America’s shape was much like his weight and then added, “That ain’t good.”[{7}](#) So, if America is in such bad condition morally, and if America needs to be restored, what does it need to be restored to? These are all questions he leaves unanswered, yet I believe they are crucial questions from a Christian perspective.

But we may have more answers than we think. The one thing we do know is that Mr. Beck is a political animal. He has made a very nice living in talk radio as well as on television opining his political views. He is an unabashedly libertarian

thinker, believing that small government is the best government, and that citizens deserve the highest amounts of freedom which they lose if government is too large. Thus, weak government equals strong individual freedom.

This, of course, is a legitimate political philosophy—one which many Americans believe in. Yet, Mr. Beck promotes his ideology with the fiercest possible rhetoric. He once queried about murdering Michael Moore: “I’m wondering if I could kill him myself, or if I would need to hire somebody to do it...I’ve lost all sense of right and wrong now. I used to be able to say, ‘Yeah, I’d kill Michael Moore,’ and then I’d see the little [arm]band: What Would Jesus Do? And then I’d realize, ‘Oh, you wouldn’t kill Michael Moore. Or at least you wouldn’t choke him to death.’ And you know, well, I’m not sure.”[\[8\]](#) His résumé also contains insults of the 9/11 victims’ families wanting them to just “shut up,”[\[9\]](#) calling Katrina victims “scumbags,”[\[10\]](#) and probably most infamously, claiming that President Obama had “a deep-seated hatred for white people.”[\[11\]](#)

So, what is honor? Is honor standing up for what you believe using the most hateful kinds of attacks to do it? Would Mr. Beck be able to call President Obama honorable? Or liberal filmmaker Michael Moore? Or oppositional political pundit Keith Olbermann? Does honor only reside on the political right? It seems that honor for Mr. Beck is not something that transcends politics, but something that is very political, quite partisan. I may be wrong; Mr. Beck’s message about honor may be apolitical. But if that is the case, the messenger was flawed. The self-styled prophet who showed up that day at the Lincoln Memorial is a man whose public persona is so filled with partisan, vitriolic attacks upon people who disagree with him politically that it seems clear: “restoring honor” means ascribing to certain political views—his personal views. Yet honor is not about a political view; it transcends politics and should never be abused by being politicized.

Unfortunately, Mr. Beck's message did just that.

Contrast that with the other folks who have been discussing, and yes, preaching about honor for thousands of years. Their message is pure; it is not hogtied to a political context, not confined to the simple, temporal issues of politics—rather, this message is concerned with the eternal. They are the countless preachers, teachers, pastors, church leaders who for centuries have been passing down a true message about honor. It is the Christian concept of honor. Yes, there is honor outside the Christian domain, but never does honor shine more than when it is a part of a Christian worldview. Our faith defines honor and it defines to whom honor is due.

Paul does just that in his letter to Galatia when he writes: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”[{12}](#) The very next verse ties what honor is to whom honor is due: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passion and desires” [emphasis mine].[{13}](#) This is honor in its brightest colors. Living a life of worship to the true God—a life that is characterized by love and its eight subsequent characteristics: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I believe that all of this can be summed up nicely by Paul's words in the same letter when he writes, “if we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit.”[{14}](#) Whether it is morality or honor, we must realize that this kind of walking can only be done when we are living by the Spirit. The moral, ethical system that Mr. Beck is looking for is located in the pages of Holy Scripture. It is not found by looking inside oneself; it is about looking at God's rich Word. If you choose the first option, you will remain confused in sin; if you practice the second, you will accurately know what morality and honor is. You will indeed have the moral and spiritual power to live it out. That is the only hope for our country, as it is the only

hope for any person or country. Maybe I am wrong about Mr. Beck—but until the Beckian revolution can tell us what honor is and what God we are supposed to turn toward—we should, from afar, keep shouting: “What the heck, Mr. Beck?”

Notes

1. Glenn Beck at the “Restoring Honor” Rally in Washington D.C., August 28, 2010. Video accessed at GlennBeck.com.
2. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*.
3. Glenn Beck at the “Restoring Honor” Rally in Washington D.C., August 28, 2010. Video accessed at GlennBeck.com.
4. Ibid.
5. Jerry Falwell, Jr., President of Liberty University. *Christianity Today*, September 2010.
6. Lou Engle, Founder of “The Call.” *Christianity Today*, September 2010.
7. Ibid.
8. The Glenn Beck Program, May 17, 2005.
9. The Glenn Beck Program, September 9, 2005.
10. Ibid.
11. Fox and Friends, Fox News Television, July 28, 2009.
12. Galatians 5:22–23.
13. Galatians 5:24.
14. Galatians 5:25.