

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

Connecting with God for a Strong Finish

CHAPTER 14a

Worship and Love

*And this I pray, **that your love may abound** still more and more
in real knowledge and all discernment*

Philippians 1:9 NAS

Knowing the truth about God activates more than a response of worship; it sparks love. Our Heavenly Father did not send Jesus here to recruit worshipers. He came to connect us permanently with His passionate love. The first and greatest commandment involves loving God not worshiping Him.

Our Heavenly Father seeks informed worshipers because they make the best lovers. Love commands paramount importance in our response to God. He created us for an extravagant exchange of intimate affection. The more clearly we see the truth about God the more passionately we will love Him. As important as love may be, the Bible does not emphasize love as a prerequisite for worship.

Love ≠ Worship

In its purest form, love comes without conditions; it does not depend on merit or worth. True love requires neither stipulation nor provision. Paul put it this way: *“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all*

*things, endures all things. Love never ends.*¹ One phrase sums up the entire law, *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”*² Loving our neighbor extends across a broad continuum—from loving God to loving mortal enemies to loving ourselves.³

Worship on the other hand, depends entirely on conditions; it is by definition, contingent on worth. God deserves this response based on merit. His divine attributes, supernatural accomplishments, and eternal promises warrant worship.

Properly understood, God’s love sparks a reciprocal response. *“We love Him because He first loved us.”*⁴ His supernatural love arouses fond feelings and intimate affection. It kindles moments of close communion sustained by mutual respect and shared fascination. Love flows both ways—from God to us and from us to God.

Worship is different. It conveys a unilateral response. We worship God but He never worships us or anyone else in return. Unlike love, reverence extends one way—toward the one who deserves it. Along with angels and demons, we worship God without ever receiving worship from God.

Without a doubt, strong feelings accompanied worshipers in the Bible. Intense grief marked the worship experience of Job and David with the loss of their beloved children. Other worshipers experienced joy, fear, awe, gratitude, anticipation, and surprise. Love however, does not appear in the Bible as a trigger for worship—at least not directly. Regardless of any emotional cues, worshipers venerate God based on His worth. Though possible and highly desirable, affectionate feelings are not necessary for expressing reverence.

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:7-8 ESV

² Galatians 5:14 ESV

³ Matthew 5:44

⁴ 1 John 4:19 NKJ

God is Love

*The one who does not love
does not **know God**, for God is love.*

1 John 4:8 NAS and 1 John 4:16 NAS

While the Bible does not emphasize an association between love and worship, it also does not drive a wedge between the two. God deserves worship if for no other reason than that He loves us so passionately. According to Jesus, *“we worship what we know”*.⁵ Knowing the truth about God includes a keen appreciation for His love.

God’s infinite love and unquenchable passion merit a response of facedown worship. Nothing can separate us from God’s love.⁶ It dominates top priority in our relationship while elevating the value of God’s worth to inconceivable heights. Jesus said:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. (Matthew 22:37-38 NIV)

Inseparable Love

A barrier does not separate worship from the priority of love. Despite clear distinctions, love enhances worship. It supplements reverence with important sentiments of affection. As we grow in love, worship becomes more meaningful and significant. Each revelation in God’s presence promotes a richer bond of affection and a more sincere response of veneration.

Connecting with the knowledge of the truth incorporates God’s love into every aspect of our understanding. The more we know about Him, the more ardent our response becomes in both love and worship.

As the Holy Spirit reveals the truth about God, an inseparable bond of love materializes. The love of God informs worshipers of His worth

⁵ John 4:22 NAS

⁶ Romans 8:35

because love is a vital attribute distributed throughout His divine nature. As the knowledge of this truth unfolds, expressions of love supplement gestures of worship. The more accurate our knowledge, the more comprehensive our love; the deeper our respect, the greater our admiration becomes.

Gratitude may kindle much Love it but Falls Short of Worship

At a dinner party hosted by Simon the Pharisee, a woman washed Jesus' feet with her tears, dried them with her hair, then kissed and anointed them with perfume from an alabaster jar.⁷ Thankful to receive forgiveness, her passion extended far beyond cultural courtesy. While expressing gratitude, her love diffused throughout the room. This woman of ill repute knew the truth about herself—that she was a forgiven sinner. With gestures of extravagant appreciation, she communicated reverence without words. This woman loved Jesus very much because He forgave her of so many sins.⁸ Had she realized that Jesus was actually God her response may have been different.

The wording used in this narrative avoids mentioning any response of worship. It fails to distinguish whether this woman acknowledged Jesus' divine nature or merely honored Him as a special rabbi with authority to forgive sins. While Jesus forgave her sins and validated her dignity, this text does not indicate whether she acknowledged Him as God or revered Him as such. Worshiping Jesus as God would have earned a harsh penalty under Jewish blasphemy laws.

At this time in Jesus' ministry, few people if any recognized the truth about Him—that He was God arrayed in human flesh. Judging by how long the apostles and others took to gain this understanding, she most likely paid homage to Him as a great prophet or benevolent Rabbi.

⁷ Luke 7:36-50

⁸ Luke 7:47

In a moment of frank awareness, this woman exhibited self-deprecating humility. Peter did the same when he fell before Jesus and announced, *“I am a sinful man”*.⁹

During another occasion in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, Mary broke an alabaster flask filled with pure nard. She anointed Jesus’ feet shortly before the Passover then wiped them with her hair.¹⁰ According to Mark, she also poured the expensive ointment over His head.¹¹ Again, this incident mentions neither love nor worship. Jesus interpreted her *“good deed”* as an anointing for His burial.¹²

Being the sister of Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead, this Mary recognized the resurrection power of Christ. Most likely, she agreed with her sister Martha who told Jesus, *“I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”*¹³ Notwithstanding, the Bible does not indicate a response of worship as it does when Jesus greeted Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James after His resurrection.¹⁴ After Jesus rose from the dead, the text clearly states that, *“they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.”*¹⁵

While love may and ultimately should accompany gestures of reverence, such sentiments are not directly associated with worship in the Bible.

God Intends to adjust more than our Terminology

When Jesus shows up worship is far from being academic. Though words and concepts exert an important influence, they have limita-

⁹ Luke 5:8 ESV

¹⁰ John 12:1-3

¹¹ Mark 14:3

¹² Mark 14:6, 8 NAS

¹³ John 11:27 ESV

¹⁴ Mark 16:1

¹⁵ Matthew 28:9 NAS

tions. Because meanings shift and words change, responding to the truth about God does not require a consensus of dictionary definitions.

Worship surpasses semantics. It transcends pedantic creeds with their meticulous phraseology. While God reigns as the prevailing expert in linguistics, He is more concerned with restoring worshipers than revising their vocabulary. When our Heavenly Father finds worshipers, He does not judge them based on language skills. God weighs heart attitudes focused on the truth and synchronized with reality.

When worshipers recognize the truth about God, facedown reverence makes perfect sense. Connecting with Him evokes a whole body response. With or without accurate definitions, words are inadequate. Ordinary syllables fall short when responding to an extraordinary God. Clarifying our revelation of the truth is more important than adjusting nuances in our vernacular.

Worshipers that encounter Jesus offer an informed response, which extends beyond thinking or talking about Him. They bow low because their connection exceeds intellectual ideas supported by academic data. Worshipers relate to God on a personal level. They know Him personally; they know who He is, recognize what He has accomplished, and appreciate the eternal assurance that He guarantees.

Worshipers Make the Best Lovers

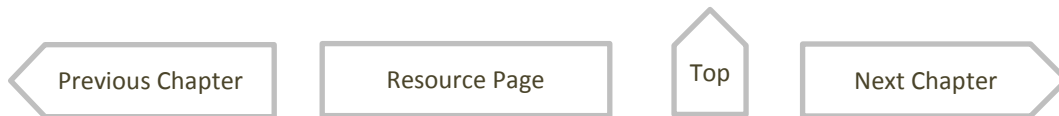
Connecting with Jesus should arouse feelings of love without even a hint of idolization. Sealed by an eternal commitment, love transcends fickle sentiments based on earned merit. It generates bonds of affection without the encumbrance of a dotting infatuation.

God's love compels us to embrace Jesus as the consummate Bridegroom. His passion pulses with affection for us despite our past performance. A divine romance activates volleys of giving and receiving based on desire rather than obligation. Despite our many faults and

failings, nothing can separate us from God's love.¹⁶ His love dominates every circumstance in life and endures every scenario in death.

True worshipers love Jesus because they know Him for what He is worth. They trust His intentions and they respect His decisions, though unfavorable circumstances or undesirable outcomes may cloud their view. Despite seemingly unanswered prayers, worshipers recognize the thoughtfulness behind His authority. Because they understand the basis for their connection, their love never fails; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and it endures all things.¹⁷

When worshipers know the truth about God they fall for Him by assimilating love into worship. Knowing the truth about Jesus transforms redeemed worshipers into emancipated lovers. He sweeps them off their feet because the significance of His love is more than they can stand.



¹⁶ Romans 8:35, 38

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:7-8 NAS