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## CHAPTER 27

# We Worship What We Know

## What do you Know?

Focused on His lifesaving mission, Jesus spoke an imperative command. He said, “*tell no one*” after healing a leper, raising Jairus’ daughter from the dead, revealing His radiance on the mount, and being affirmed by Peter as “*the Christ, the son of the living God*”.<sup>1</sup> Jesus synchronized the timing and telling of His mission and message with calculated precision. He reinforced the knowledge of the truth with actions that speak louder than words.

For less honorable reasons my Sicilian relatives spoke a similar phrase. With unified conviction, they said, “tell nutton-ta-no-one”. Ironically my grandfather greeted with me with an open-ended question—Hey Michele, wha-da-ya know? Little did I know that secrecy and intel secured his survival. I grew up believing he bought and sold equipment for commercial kitchens. In a revealing documentary, “Captive City—Chicago in Chains”, Ovid Demaris cites my grandfather as a contract assassin for the Chicago Syndicate. He appears in a list of 23 “top-rated exterminators who work[ed] strictly on contracts for the Board of Directors.”<sup>2</sup> For my grandfather, knowledge meant power on the street. Jesus emphasized the responsibility associated with the knowledge we possess. He said,

*“... From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.”*  
(Luke 12:48 NIV)

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 8:4, Luke 8:56, Matthew 17:9 and 16:20

<sup>2</sup> Ovid Demaris, *Captive City—Chicago in Chains*, NY Lyle Stuart, 1969, p. 64-65.

Jesus challenged an inquisitive Samaritan woman with an enlightening fact. He said, “*You worship what you do not know [oída]; **we worship what we know** [oída]...*”.<sup>3</sup> Accurate knowledge informs true worshipers who worship God in spirit and truth.

Acquiring knowledge involves three essential components, in no particular order. Two are bottom-up since they rely on observed evidence or mindful reasoning. The third is top-down since it relies on direct revelation from God to us.

### **Knowledge = (Awareness + Understanding + Revelation)**

- 1. Awareness** based on sensory perception
- 2. Understanding** based on a rational assessment
- 3. Revelation** based on God’s word illuminated by the Holy Spirit

### **Awareness**

In the New Testament, the Greek word *oída* (or *eido*) means, “to have seen or perceived”.<sup>4</sup> *Oída* is a perfect tense verb with an active meaning. This type of knowledge relies on empirical data, which involves observation, investigation, and personal experience. True worshipers, by definition, possess true knowledge about God. They worship Him based on what they perceive to be true.

Paul offers an example of how someone can know God by observing what He created. The elaborate detail and elegant precision found in creation offers tangible insight into God’s character and competence. Besides knowing what the Bible has to say about God, we derive knowledge from other sources such as visual observation and sensory perception of what He made.

Writing to the Romans, Paul said:

*For what can be **known about God** is plain to them, because **God has shown** it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been **clearly perceived**, ever since the creation of the world, **in the things that have been made**. So they are without excuse.*

(Romans 1:19-20 ESV)

Jesus confronted a complex religious system purporting to worship His Father. Teaching in the temple court, He said:

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<sup>3</sup> John 4:22 NAS

<sup>4</sup> Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine, Riverside Book and Bible House, Iowa Falls, IA, p. 628.

*“Yes, you know me, [this word know does not appear in the original Greek; translators added it for readability] and you **know** [oída] where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not **know** [oída] him, but I **know** [oída] him because I am from him and he sent me”.*

(John 7:28-29 NIV)

Religious leaders in Jerusalem underestimated Jesus because they did not really know the One who sent Him. Instead of falling facedown, awestruck by His glorious majesty, they promoted obligatory religious duties in an attempt to regulate beliefs and control behavior. Their worship reflects incomplete knowledge based on inaccurate information. It did not emanate from a vital relationship based on life-changing encounters.

## Understanding

Being “more or less synonymous with *oída*,” the Greek word *ginōskō* “emphasizes understanding rather than sensory perception.”<sup>5</sup> Paul considered knowing the truth about Jesus a vital priority. He wrote, *“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of **knowing** [gnosis] Christ Jesus my Lord...”*<sup>6</sup> Paul cried out for both knowledge and power, declaring the longing in his heart, *“that I may **know** [ginōskō] Him and the power of His resurrection”*.<sup>7</sup> According to W. E. Vine, *ginōskō* denotes progressive knowledge rather than the fullness of knowledge; it involves a process of continual learning through an interactive relationship.<sup>8</sup>

While other religions worship impostors posing as gods, Jesus stands out with living proof that He is God personified—One with His Father. To His most intimate disciples Jesus said, *“If you really **knew** [ginōskō] me, you would **know** [ginōskō] my Father as well. From now on, you do **know** [ginōskō] him and have **seen** [horao] him.”*<sup>9</sup> According to Kittel and others, *horao* means to see with the eyes, to perceive with the mind, or to become acquainted with by experience.<sup>10</sup> Jesus

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<sup>5</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged Edition; Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1985, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> Phil 3:8 NIV

<sup>7</sup> Philippians 3:10 NIV

<sup>8</sup> Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, W. E. Vine, Riverside Book and Bible House, Iowa Falls, IA, p. 628.

<sup>9</sup> John 14: 7 NIV

<sup>10</sup> Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged Edition; Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, 1985, p. 706.

communicated in both word and deed, revealing the most reliable knowledge available. He said, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”*<sup>11</sup>

Our Heavenly Father *“desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge [epignosis] of the truth”*.<sup>12</sup> The Greek word *epignosis* means precise knowledge based on accurate information. It stands in contrast to subjective knowledge based on relative opinions. As God grants repentance, He leads us *“to the knowledge of the truth”* that we might come to our *“senses and escape from the snare of the devil.”*<sup>13</sup> God empowers us to focus on this knowledge by *“Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith”*.<sup>14</sup>

Adam and Eve compromised the future of the human race when they settled for *“the knowledge of good and evil”* rather than embracing *“the knowledge of the truth”*.<sup>15</sup> Following Satan’s advice, they became disillusioned with self, alienated from each other, and fatally separated from God. Those who retain a form of godliness while denying its supernatural power, reduce themselves to an outside observer. Though always learning, they are never able to come to precise knowledge based on correct information.<sup>16</sup>

Knowing God experientially provides a compelling reason to worship Him in spirit and truth. While not understanding everything, worshipers know enough to take Him seriously—as seriously as He deserves. Instead of postulating opinions based on subjective feelings, worshipers evaluate the evidence until the knowledge of the truth becomes apparent. They validate their personal experience with biblical support and theological certitude.

Sight unseen, worshipers recognize by faith the quality of God’s character. Voice unheard, they appreciate the impact of His accomplishments. With hope yet unfulfilled, they comprehend the importance and magnitude of His promises.

## **Revelation**

The Bible remains a fundamental source for knowing the truth about God, each other, ourselves, and this world. Together with the spirit of wisdom and rev-

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<sup>11</sup> John 14:6 NAS

<sup>12</sup> 1 Timothy 2:4 NAS

<sup>13</sup> 2 Timothy 2:24-26 NAS

<sup>14</sup> Hebrews 12:2 NAS

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 2:17 NAS with 2 Timothy 2:25

<sup>16</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5 NAS with 2 Timothy 3:7 NAS

elation, the Bible help us understand the facts so we can know God better. Paul prayed for us, “*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know [epignosis] him better.*”<sup>17</sup>

God imparts wisdom and revelation so that we might know Him better. Estimating God’s worth involves more than a cursory glance at second-hand intelligence or eye-witness testimony. The Bible offers reliable knowledge based on credible evidence. Being the gold standard for truth, it describes God’s attributes, documents His achievements, and explains His promises.

We need more than information to worship God in spirit and truth. We need authentic revelation from the Spirit of truth. Jesus said:

*But when he, the **Spirit of truth**, comes, he **will guide you into all truth**.  
... **the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.**  
(John 16:13-15 NIV)*

The Spirit of God teams up with the Word of God to reveal the truth of God. Together they provide spiritual insight, which helps us understand and relate to the One we worship. With supernatural attention, the spirit and the word inform what we experience, and they confirm what we know.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He said, “*it is to your **advantage** [sumphero] that I go away*”.<sup>18</sup> By sending His Spirit to live within us, our Heavenly Father provides a supernatural advantage. The Greek verb *sumphero* means to bear or bring together, to collect, contribute or carry with others. Translated as two words in the NAS, “*common good*”, *sumphero* implies shared benefit.<sup>19</sup> Jesus said:

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Counselor** [from the Greek word *parakletos*, which means advocate, intercessor, or counsel] to be with you forever—**the Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows [ginosko] him. But **you know** [ginosko] **him, for he lives with you and will be in you.** (John 14:16-17 NIV)*

The Spirit of truth unravels mysteries about God’s character, adds meaning to His exploits, and clarifies His intentions. Connecting with the Spirit of truth reveals the truth about God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus said:

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<sup>17</sup> Ephesians 1:17 NIV

<sup>18</sup> John 16:7 NAS

<sup>19</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7 NAS

*“When **the Helper** [parakletos] comes, whom I [Jesus] will send to you from the **Father**, that is the **Spirit of truth** who proceeds from the Father, He **will testify about Me**, (John 15:26 NAS)*

Paul highlights the importance of a sound spiritual foundation as we attempt to appraise the truth about God. Spiritual thoughts and spiritual words depend on an authentic relationship with the Spirit and truth.

*Now **we have received**, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit** who is from God, so **that we may know** [oída] the **things** freely given to us by God, **which things we also speak**, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those **taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words**. (1 Corinthians 2:12-13 NAS)*

Paul draws a contrast between natural and spiritual appraisals. He said:

*But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because **they are spiritually appraised**. But **he who is spiritual appraises all things....** (1 Corinthians 2:14-15 NAS)*

Spiritual thoughts and words from the Holy Spirit compel worshipers on earth to join the consensus of praise in heaven. Natural wisdom can only approximate the value of God’s worth. It underestimates His value. As the Holy Spirit teaches us to appraise God’s attributes and activity with greater discernment, worshipers on earth will unite with multitudes in heaven to offer a response of unanimous veneration.

## **A Sacred Reflex**

When it comes to expressions of worship,  
what we do on the outside is a key reflection  
of what’s taking place on the inside.<sup>20</sup>

Matt Redman

Ultimately, our style of worship indicates who we are and what we know. It reveals whether we are in touch with spiritual reality or not. Worship puts angels and demons, men and women, boys and girls, everyone in their place. It brands them with distinction. Worship is more than a figure of speech or a function completed. Genuine worship confirms our union with God’s inseparable love. It indi-

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<sup>20</sup> Matt Redman, Facedown, Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 2004, p 14.

cates whether our bond with Jesus is deliberate and sincere or obligatory and platonic. Platonic means, perfect in form or concept but not found in reality.<sup>21</sup>

How we worship indicates our perception, comprehension, and exposure to spiritual reality. It reflects how well our spiritual vision has been restored. With informed conviction, worshipers assert that they get it, or at least an important part of it. Knowledge informs our response of worship—it validates our connecting point with God. Awareness, understanding, and revelation activate a unified response expressed with emancipated passion. Truth liberates the spirit, soul, and body to worship God with comprehensive freedom. Demonstrative worship signifies that *“the knowledge of the glory of the Lord”* has flooded our being. Someday this knowledge will overflow beyond the confines of mind and matter—it will fill the earth.

*For the earth will be **filled with the knowledge** of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* (Habakkuk 2:14 NAS)

The more clearly God manifests His presence the more sincere and demonstrative our response. The closer He gets, the clearer He becomes, the greater His weight of glory, and the harder it becomes to stand, speak, see, or even think. If we have not yet bowed facedown in worship, we are probably too far away in our perception, understanding, and discernment.

God is more than a theological postulate. He is alive and active, pursuing us with extravagant determination. The mercy He extends deflates our pride and dissolves our vanity. If we rarely bow down before our Heavenly Father, our connection is probably limited to thinking about theology or pondering religious doctrine rather than encountering His presence. When we perceive God’s presence to be close (and we rarely do), bowing facedown comes naturally.

Facts about Jesus are extremely important, but information alone is not enough to evoke a response of worship in spirit and truth. Reading the Bible, singing songs, saying prayers, participating in ceremonies, and performing rituals may provide practical connecting points but they are not a substitute for encountering God Himself. Only God is God. Worshipers realize that nothing can take His place, no-one and no-thing comes close to filling in for Him.

After examining the evidence, we eventually conclude that God inhabits a class of His own. Divine distinctions extend beyond the farthest reach of human imagination. No one can quantify the infinite scope of God’s greatness. No scale is big

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<sup>21</sup> Encarta Online Dictionary: English, North America, (Accessed 1-29-2011)

enough to rate the merit of His worth or quality of His love. After rigorous consideration and patient contemplation, worshipers notice firsthand that our Heavenly Father, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are extraordinary beyond measure.

The significance of God’s attributes and accomplishments extend beyond mortal perception and comprehension. Only a sin-compromised mind would attempt to scale God down to accommodate their preferred religion. Ultimately, God remains incomprehensible. According to N. T. Wright,

You can’t measure God... as the most important being in a sequence of beings. You need a different sort of scale altogether, a different set of dimensions.<sup>22</sup>

We do not command enough knowledge or skill to wrap God in a tidy theological package for wholesale consumption. Wright stresses that no one can domesticate God—He is untamable.

### **Authentic Revelation Inspires Authentic Worship**

Deep down, everyone wants to know if their God is God. We want to settle this question once-and-for-all. Relying on faith, we seek assurance and evidence to confirm the God we do not yet see.<sup>23</sup> Each observation, contemplation, and encounter escorts us closer to the proof that we seek. When we notice God’s presence in the vicinity of our perception, flawed assumptions become irrelevant. When God’s in attendance, we do not rely on hunches or conjecture to determine His worth.

Knowing God through personal experience evokes a response that goes beyond singing scripted songs or reciting printed prayers. Saying and doing religion seems inadequate when God connects with us. The closer He gets to our consciousness, the stronger the urge to stop what we are doing and bow in fascinated veneration. Reflection alone misses the point. Worshipers are compelled to do more than think about God as they respond to Him. When God draws near, rituals detonate at His feet in pools of contrition, gratitude, and resplendent awe.

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<sup>22</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, Cambridge, UK, 1997, p. 33-34.

<sup>23</sup> Hebrews 11:1 NAS