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CHAPTER 18

Prerequisites for Worship

Two Questions—One Response

True worshipers answer two questions correctly before they offer a response. First, they discern the truth about themselves. Next, they discern the truth about God.

An accurate self-appraisal puts God in perspective. Divine perfection sets Him apart because there is a big difference between God and everyone else. Worshipers notice this difference. They perceive the infinite contrast between human weakness and divine competence.

Recognizing our mortality confirms how much God deserves worship. It prompts us to concede notions of independence and self-reliance. The facts about God's attributes, achievements, and promises are compelling. Reality prompts each of us to ditch self-righteous attitudes and pious facades. True worshipers abandon unfounded pride and they surrender unentitled rights. Because worshipers know their flaws and limitations, they relinquish opinionated claims and they forsake personal agendas.

Worshiping God means unconditional surrender to His sovereign authority. With steadfast love and unmerited favor, God compels everyone to respond with humble deference. His mercy and kindness leave no room for self-exaltation.

Distinguished to be the Bride of Christ—Not His Clone

Though born again and Spirit filled, we are not God and will never be God. Fully redeemed and participating in His divine nature, we are forever human. Only

Jesus contains the fullness of God in bodily form.¹ He alone exists as God and human simultaneously.

Worshippers understand the benefits associated with their mortal makeup. Aware of their limitations, they appreciate the immense significance invested in their design. Humans qualify for a passionate union with their Lord, Jesus Christ. Our Heavenly Father deliberately made men and women to embrace this exclusive honor. He created them specifically for bridal compatibility with His beloved Son.

As God transforms redeemed sinners into ideal human beings, they become suitable complements for Christ. Betrothed to Jesus, they wait for a fully restored mind and an imperishable body.² This new mind and body, however strong and glorious, will not transmorph them into angels or gods. Even after their resurrection, humans will not be equivalent to God.

God made men and women in His image as humans—not as angels and not as gods. Aspiring to be more like God than our Spirit-filled humanity warrants, thwarts our destiny and undermines our potential. Despite our history of pride, lust, and rebellion, human beings retain lasting value worth redeeming. Unlike Satan’s prospects, our Heavenly Father delights in our humanity. Imperfect as we are, He considers us *“majestic ones”* (NAS), *“excellent ones”* (NKJ), and *“glorious ones”* (NIV).³

Made in God’s image, humans demonstrate important similarities with His likeness. When spiritually born again, they share attributes associated with His divine nature. Nonetheless, boundaries limit human faculties. Only God is all-powerful, all-knowing and ever-present. Being entirely independent from the material universe, He alone transcends time and space. Always perfect in every respect, God remains eternal and completely holy. He does not fit in any other category or species of life. God alone is God. He will always be God—and we will always be human.

Our humanity testifies to the fact that we are best suited to give worship rather than receive it. Connecting with the truth about God provides us with, in N.

¹ Colossians 2:9 NAS

² 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 NAS

³ Psalm 16:3 NAS

T. Wright's words, "a new way of being human, a way of worship and love".⁴ This new way actually reflects the original way that God intended for us to behave. As we humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, He lifts us up to live according to our divine design.⁵

From the beginning, God designed men and women, and boys and girls to be worshipers. From primitive tribes to progressive societies, history records a consistent pattern. Either individuals worship God or they suppress the truth and worship substitutes for Him. Sometimes they exchange the truth about God for a lie and resort to worshipping creatures like animals, angels, or themselves.

Unlike God who never worships anyone, human beings worship. They offer a universal response of veneration, which reflects their intrinsic beliefs. The psalmist solicits praise from the sun, moon, stars, sky, sea creatures, ocean depths, lightning, hail, snow, clouds, stormy winds, mountains, hills, trees, animals, and birds.⁶ Jesus announced that if His disciples kept quiet, "the stones will cry out" in praise.⁷ While other entities may praise the Lord, only humans, angels, and the four living creatures in heaven worship Him.

Worship is a unique response consistent with our eternal destiny. En-route to becoming fully restored, worship features the right way to act in God's presence. We validate our humanity by worshipping our Heavenly Father in spirit and truth. With neither self-diminishing nor self-exalting agendas, we venerate our Creator with this distinction.

No one but the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit deserves worship. Humans, angels, demons, and all God-impersonators (including Satan) will never come close to divine eminence.

Worship signifies a confession of weakness. Only God lives up to divine perfection. His infallible competence leaves no room for equals let alone impostors. Worshipers know how inadequate they are. Relative to God's eternal power, they recognize their frailty. Compared to God's infinite wisdom, they acknowledge their ignorance.

⁴ N. T. Wright, *For all God's Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 15.

⁵ James 4:10

⁶ Psalm 148:2-10

⁷ Luke 19:37-40 NIV

Question One: Who am I? The Truth about Myself

When Simon Peter saw himself in light of Jesus, he fell to his knees saying, “Go away from me Lord, for **I am a sinful man**”.⁸ The word *fell* in this account comes from the Greek word *prospipto*. Mark’s Gospel also used this word to describe unclean spirits when they fell down with their human host before Jesus. While Peter blurted out the truth about his own sinfulness, unclean spirits spoke the truth about Jesus. Peter said, “I am a sinful man” but demoniacs shouted, “You are the Son of God!”

While Peter and other disciples called Jesus Lord, they had not yet recognized or acknowledged Him as the Son of God. Peter addressed Jesus as Lord using the Greek word *kurios*. This word traditionally refers to a master as owner, possessor, and disposer of a person or thing. It is a title of honor used by servants greeting their master with respect and reverence.⁹ In other contexts, this title later applied to Jesus the Messiah.

The contrast between Peter and Jesus was unmistakable. Nevertheless, while Peter knew the answer to the first question, “*who am I?*” he was still unsure about Jesus being the Messiah. Sensing an enormous gulf of inequity, Peter did not simply remove himself from Jesus. He could have walked away discreetly as a humble admirer. Instead, Peter the sinner issued a brash directive instructing Jesus to depart. An impetuous servant uttered an imperious command to tell the immortal Master to leave.

Peter’s self-awareness failed to account for the cost of such a statement. The implications associated with Jesus leaving did not register. Jesus was the only hope for a sinner like Peter in need of forgiveness and salvation. Separation from God held dire consequences in this life and the direst of consequences in the next. Peter’s only hope was to connect with the Savior of the world.

Peter presumed that his sinful nature disqualified him from a meaningful relationship with Jesus. He was slow to realize how much the Father had changed the times and seasons. A new connection opportunity was at hand and it offered extraordinary benefits.

Peter’s answer to the question, “*who am I?*”, implies a classic but unnecessary resolve to remain disconnected from God. While separation previously applied to

⁸ Luke 5:8 NAS

⁹ <http://bible.crosswalk.com> (5-5-08)

all sinners since Adam and Eve, it did not apply when connecting with the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world.

As an avowed sinner entrenched in flawed thinking, Peter underestimated Jesus' ability to save, heal, deliver, and restore. Over time, Peter learned that there was more to this Man than meets the eye. Jesus did not come to enforce the separation penalty instituted in the Garden of Eden. He became a human imperative sent to restore the fullness of God's love to lost sinners.

The Son of God dispelled myths about God and fallacies about us. He shattered one preconceived notion after another by breaking biased religious models. Responding with unconventional grace, Jesus brought the truth about God back into focus for misinformed sinners. He transforms sinners into worshipers by restoring their depraved mind.

Question Two: Who is Jesus? The Truth about God

Calming a life-threatening storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus jolted His disciples awake so they could ask another important question. Though *"terrified"* and in shock, they exclaimed, *"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!"*¹⁰ The urgency of their question reflects the importance of their evaluation. The Son of God stretched every parameter of human reasoning beyond its breaking point. Apparently, the disciples were struggling to determine whether Jesus was anything more than an extraordinary man or prophet.

Each worshiper reckons with this question. They process data to determine worth. Does Jesus qualify as God incarnate? Does He satisfy the gold standard for divinity? Before falling facedown, each worshiper becomes an analyst to determine this fact. Who is the Son of Man? Is He the Son of God? Is He God? Honest answers are critical for every worshiper.

After the storm, an unlikely source provided the answer to this question. Immediately after docking their boat in the Gerasene region, a demon-possessed man ran up to Jesus and *"bowed down"* (translated from *proskuneo*, the most common Greek word in the New Testament for worshiping God). Shouting the answer in a loud voice, he proclaimed Jesus *"Son of the Most High God"*.¹¹

¹⁰ Mark 4:41 NIV

¹¹ Mark 5:6-7 NAS and Luke 8:28 NAS

Responding in Worship

Not until some months later during another storm at sea, did the disciples recognize Jesus for who He is. When Peter returned from his awkward stroll with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee, the disciples finally voiced their answer. Equipped with fresh insight from this harrowing experience, *“those who were in the boat”* finally connected the dots and *“worshiped [proskuneo] Him, saying, “You are certainly God’s Son!”*¹² The disciples echoed what the unclean spirits had been saying all along about Jesus. This account stands out as the only biblical record, before the resurrection, where the disciples expressed worship to Jesus. One time in a small boat at sea highlights their entire testimony as worshipers—before Christ rose from the dead.

Until this moment, the disciples had grown accustomed to listening to Jesus as an extraordinary speaker. They had watched Him perform unprecedented miracles and exceptional healings. They had witnessed deliverance from numerous evil spirits. Yet, these amazing sights and sounds were not enough to inspire a gesture of worship captured in the biblical record. It took a life-threatening storm punctuated by ghostly fear to evoke worship from these seasoned disciples. After so many months living with Jesus in the flesh, they finally got it. They showed their Heavenly Father what He was looking for by worshiping Jesus as the Son of God.

This one solitary reference to worship occurred after the disciples thought Jesus was a spirit walking on the water. A supposed apparition forced them to stop looking at reality according to the flesh. After viewing Jesus as a spirit, they worshiped Him as God. This experience triggered a notable response of worship in spirit and truth. Our Heavenly Father seeks people like this. They know who they are, they know who God is, and they respond accordingly.

Worship occurs naturally when people recognize who they are, ask the right questions, and then discover the truth about God. As God’s status and stature become more apparent, acknowledging His eminence becomes more compelling.

Our response of worship may range from tokens of reverence based on limited knowledge to facedown veneration based on progressive revelation. Since divine worth has infinite value, worshipers will forever grow in their understanding as they receive successive revelations. Endless encounters with God’s presence will inform higher levels of appreciation and evoke

¹² Matthew 14:33 NAS

deeper levels of reverence. We will spend eternity learning details about God's incomprehensible worth and responding in worship.

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