

Swept off your Feet

Beyond Worship-as-Usual

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CHAPTER 18

Requirements for Worship

Two Questions—One Response

An accurate self-appraisal puts God in perspective. It creates a baseline for appraising His worth. Divine attributes and supernatural accomplishments set God apart. There's a big difference between Him and everyone else. Worshipers recognize this difference. They notice the vast distinction between their humanity and His deity. Before offering an appropriate response, worshipers compare the truth about them self with the truth about God; they answer two questions.

- Who am I
- Who is God

The Truth about Us

After addressing a shorefront multitude from Simon's boat, Jesus instigated a miraculous catch of fish. This net-bursting occasion prompted Simon to partially admit the truth about himself. Falling on his knees before Jesus he exclaimed, "*Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man*".¹ Simon acknowledged Jesus as "*Lord*", recorded by Luke using the Greek word *Kurios*. This word refers to a master as owner, possessor, and disposer of a person or thing; it's a title of honor and respect used by servants greeting their master.²

Realizing the inequity in status, Simon's response betrays an incomplete assessment. He did not walk away discreetly as a humble admirer. Instead, Simon the sinful servant, issued an imperative command telling Jesus to go away. The impetuous servant uttered an imperious statement directing the immortal master to depart. Simon's insecure self-awareness failed to account for the consequences

¹ Luke 5:8 NAS

² <http://bible.crosswalk.com> (5-5-08)

of separation. The implications associated with Jesus leaving did not register. Jesus was the only hope for sinful Simon in need of forgiveness and salvation. Separation held dire consequences in this life and the most critical consequence in the next. Simon's only hope was to connect with Jesus as divine lover and savior of the world.

Simon presumed that his sinful nature disqualified him from embracing a meaningful relationship with Jesus. He miscalculated the immense value and extraordinary potential that God had invested in him. A new connection with spiritual reality was seeking to emerge; it offered astonishing benefits. Simon failed to realize that God the Father had activated a season change. He misjudged Jesus' power and nature.

Simon's answer to the question, "who am I", implies a classic but unnecessary resolve to remain disconnected from God. While divine separation applied to all sinners since Adam and Eve, it does 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, Simon underestimated Jesus' ability to save, heal, deliver, and restore. Over time, Simon learned there was more to himself and more to Jesus 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.

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

The Truth in Names

Andrew introduced his older brother Simon to Jesus as "*the Messiah*"; Jesus promptly changed Simon's name to *Cephas*.³ Simon refers to the English version of the Hebrew name Shimon, derived from *Sh'ma*, which means to hear or listen, and obey—a contradiction to Simon's character. *Cephas* refers to an Aramaic name also transliterated *Kefa*, and the Hebrew name *Evan*, which mean stone. Peter refers to an English rendition of the Greek name *Petros*.

³ Mark 3:16; Luke 6:14; John 1:42

Throughout the four Gospels Jesus consistently referred to Peter (Cephas) as Simon—except on two occasions. Jesus had asked His disciples, *"But who do you say that I am?"* After months of following Jesus, Simon upgraded his previous assessment from Lord to, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*⁴ Jesus responded by saying,

*"Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are **Peter** [Petros, a smaller rock], and upon this rock [petra, a larger rock] I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Mat 16:17-18 (NAS)*

The bible records Jesus referring to Simon as Peter (Cephas) one other time. After Simon assured Jesus that he was ready to face imprisonment and death, Jesus responded, *"I say to you, **Peter** [spoken by Jesus as Cephas but translated into Greek as Petros], the rooster will not crow today until you have denied three times that **you know Me.**"*⁵ God put Peter (Cephas) on the spot to help him consider under pressure this two-part question regarding the knowledge of the truth.

The Truth about God

The contrast between Simon and Jesus was unmistakable. Though Simon knew part of the answer to the question, *"who am I"*, he remained tentative about Jesus. Was Jesus an extraordinary rabbi, a gifted prophet, a political deliverer, or the long-awaited Messiah? The Jews expected the anointed one, their Messiah, but ascribing deity to Him was considered a blasphemous offence punishable by death. No one expected God Himself to arrive as a person; that was an incomprehensible notion—except for demoniacs.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke describe unclean spirits falling down with their human host at the sight of Jesus. While Simon fell on his knees and blurted the truth about his sinfulness, unclean spirits proclaimed the truth about Jesus. Simon said, *"I am a sinful man"* but demoniacs shouted, *"You are the Son of God!"*⁶

Calming a life-threatening storm at sea, Jesus jolted His disciples wide awake so they could ask a vital question. Though *"terrified"*, they exclaimed, *"Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!"*⁷ The urgency of their question reflects the uncertainty in their previous answer. The Son of God deliberately

⁴ Matthew 16:15-16 NAS

⁵ Luke 22:34 (NAS)

⁶ Mark 3:11; Luke 4:41

⁷ Mark 4:41 NIV

stretched every parameter of human reasoning beyond its breaking point. Apparently, the disciples were struggling to determine whether Jesus was anything more than Israel's anointed Messiah.

Each worshiper reckons with this question. They assess information and process their experience to determine Jesus' worth. Does He 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 each authentic worshiper. God will not be fooled.

After this storm, an unlikely source provided the answer to the disciples' 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..."⁸

Belated Response of Worship

After a second storm at sea, several months later, the disciples finally acknowledged Jesus beyond His humanity. Simon had returned from an awkward stroll on the Sea of Galilee when the disciples voiced their answer. Equipped with fresh insight from this harrowing experience, "*those who were in the boat*" connected the dots and "*worshiped [proskuneo] Him, saying, 'You are certainly God's Son!'*"⁹ They echoed what the unclean spirits had been saying all along about their Messiah Jesus. This account stands out as the only biblical reference before the resurrection, where the disciples expressed worship to Jesus. One time in a small boat at sea highlights their entire testimony as worshipers—until Jesus rose from the dead.

Before this moment, the disciples had grown accustomed to listening to Jesus as an extraordinary teacher and inspired prophet. They had watched Him perform unprecedented miracles and exceptional healings. They had witnessed deliverance from evil spirits. Nonetheless, these amazing sights and sounds were not enough to trigger 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 many months following Jesus in the flesh, they finally

⁸ Mark 5:6-7 NAS and Luke 8:28 NAS

⁹ Matthew 14:33 NAS

got it. They showed their Heavenly Father what He was looking for by worshiping Jesus as the Son of God. Authentic worship cannot be rushed, contrived, simulated, or fabricated. God knows how much time we need to discover the correct answers and respond with sincere awe and honest homage.

This 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—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.

As God's stature and status become more apparent, acknowledging His eminence becomes more compelling. Worshipers esteem God's authority as they relinquish prideful delusions of independence and self-reliance. When they abandon self-righteous opinions and forsake personal agendas, they are free to express extreme homage.

Our response of worship ranges from tokens of reverence based on limited knowledge to facedown veneration based on experiential revelation. Since divine worth has infinite value, worshipers will forever enhance their understanding of His progressive revelation. Endless encounters with God's presence will inform higher levels of appreciation and evoke deeper levels of reverence. We will spend eternity learning details about God's awesome worth and responding in worship.

We are the Bride of Christ—Not His Clone

Born-again Spirit-filled believers are not God and will never be God. Though fully redeemed and participating in His divine nature, we are forever human. Only Jesus possesses the fullness of God in bodily form.¹⁰ He alone exists as both God and human simultaneously.

Worshipers 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 Jesus the Messiah, whom the disciples referred to as Yeshua ha Mashiach. Our Heavenly Father deliberately made men and women to embrace this exclusive honor. He created them specifically for bridal compatibility with His beloved bridegroom Son.

¹⁰ Colossians 2:9 NAS

As God transforms redeemed sinners into ideal humans, they become suitable complements for Christ. Betrothed to Jesus, they await a fully restored mind and imperishable body.¹¹ 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, undermines our potential and thwarts our destiny. When Eve ate forbidden fruit to become more like God than she already was, she became less human than God had created her to be. Despite our notorious history of pride, lust, and rebellion, humans retain lasting value worth redeeming with the most expensive commodity in the universe—the blood of Jesus. 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).¹²

Made in God’s image, we possess attributes associated with His divine nature; we share similarities with His likeness. Nonetheless, finite boundaries limit human faculties and features. Only God is God. He will always be God—and we will always be human. God alone is all-knowing, all-powerful, 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 of being or species of life.

Our humanity testifies to the fact that we are best suited to give worship rather than receive it. In N. T. Wright’s words, connecting with the truth about God activates “a new way of being human, a way of worship and love”.¹³ 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.¹⁴

From the beginning, God designed men and women, boys and girls, everyone to be worshipers. From primitive tribes to progressive societies, history records a consistent pattern. Either individuals worship God or they suppress the truth and

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 NAS

¹² Psalm 16:3 NAS

¹³ N. T. Wright, *For all God’s Worth*, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K., 1997, p. 15.

¹⁴ James 4:10

worship substitutes for Him. Sometimes they exchange the truth about God for a lie and resort to worshipping creatures like animals, angels, or themselves.¹⁵

No one but God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit deserves worship. Humans, angels, demons, and all God-impersonators including Satan will never come close to divine eminence. Only God lives up to divine perfection. His infallible competence leaves no room for equals let alone impostors.

Unlike God who never worships anyone, humans worship. They offer a response of veneration that reflects intrinsic beliefs stamped on their heart. The psalmist solicits praise (not worship) from the sun, moon, stars, sky, sea creatures, ocean depths, lightning, hail, snow, clouds, stormy winds, mountains, hills, trees, animals, and birds.¹⁶ Jesus announced that if His disciples kept quiet, *“the stones will cry out”* in praise.¹⁷ Other created entities may praise the Lord, but only humans, angels, and the four living creatures in heaven worship Him.

Worship is a unique response consistent with our eternal destiny. In route to becoming a fully restored person, 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 reverent gestures of exclusive distinction. We are becoming all that He intended for us to be as we worship precisely as He deserves to be worshiped.

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¹⁵ Romans 1:23,25

¹⁶ Psalm 148:2-10

¹⁷ Luke 19:37-40 NIV