

Let's Fall in Love with God
Chapter 1: Relationship Not Religion
(John Henry Alan, edited by Bob Clarkson)

Take it slow and easy!

S T O P ! Please do not read any further *if you have not read the Introduction and Forward. They create a framework for understanding.*

An old Chinese proverb says "The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step." *Tozer writes:*

If that first step is not taken, nothing else really matters. If you are not on the journey, talking about it does not matter. Many Christians talk about living in intimate relationship with God, but nothing in their lives indicates they have even begun the journey. There's much joy that they have been saved, but no anticipation of continuing on the journey towards spiritual perfection. They are so happy that they are not what they used to be, that they cannot see what God wants them to be. Christianity has a glorious and victorious side, that few Christians experience.

My recommendation to the church of Christ and all others in the world is "*Live abandoned to intimacy with God.*" Our tragic loss is that very few are going on to know Christ in enriched intimacy and familiarity. Worse yet, we're not even talking about it. We rarely hear about it. And it

does not find its way into our literature or media ministries. And it is not found in our churches. What I'm talking about is this yearning, this longing to know God in increasing measure. This yearning should push us forward to spiritual perfection (intimacy with God).

What Questions Are Important?

What questions matter in the grand scheme of things? We all have more of them than we can count. It is also certain that most of them will not be answered to our satisfaction. Yet, objectively, we could, if we so chose, eliminate most of them. Most of our questions are irrelevant. Either they have already been answered and we are not satisfied with the answer, or they are irrelevant because any answer will suffice since their answer does not provide any added value to our experience of life.

So whether you have questions about religion, faith, spirituality and so forth, it would be advisable to eliminate any of the questions that produce nothing of value. This would apply to non spiritual questions as well. Why waste time pondering essentially useless curiosities? To that end, let us try to boil down spiritual questions to the most commonly effective and useful ones.

The Same Ending

Asking which religion is the best one, provides very little more than the realization that nearly all of them have the same ways and means to the same common end.

For example, all religions of the world, including Christianity, promote teachings that aspire to a final connection and end in the presence of their particular *god*. The common teachings of all are somewhat moralistic and hold cultural morality as the highest order of importance. Again, even Christianity holds high this same banner. Furthermore, all religions, except one, worship icons of their faith who are dead and buried but with a great spiritual legacy left behind. Even, Jesus Christ, is held by nearly every religion to be the greatest teacher or prophet of all time. So what question could have any *value-add* associated with it?

Only Two Questions

As I see it, there is only one question, maybe two, that are worth pondering for any length of time which have both temporal and eternal consequences at stake. For the moment, let's consider two. The first is, "Who is Jesus Christ, whose followers claim to be alive and well over 2 millennia after His crucifixion?" The second is, "How does my opinion of Jesus Christ affect my life?" The reason I believe these two questions ought to be answered, is because the answers will determine the eternal destiny of every human life.

Many Ways to God

"Now that's preposterous," you say. "There are as many ways to God as there are religions in the world," you insist. Well, I must admit, your argument seems logical at first glance. However, there are myriad stories of

men and women who would have been vastly rich, had they known that their land possessed a gold mine beneath its surface. Yet, just because they did not ask the question, “Is there anything of value under my yard that might make me rich?” they remained poor. Since they did not ask the first question, they had no reason to ask the second one. If they had asked the first question and the answer to it was yes, then the second question, “What do I need to do to harvest it?”

Again you raise your hand and with permission to speak, you say, “That’s foolish! The chances are so slim that there would be a gold mine under anyone’s property, the world would go mad if everyone began digging in their yard!” This seems logical as well. However, there is a distinct difference between the questions about highly improbable wealth in the yard and the questions about Jesus Christ. The difference is that there is a treasure map that has been published more widely than any other in the history of man. The treasure map is about this very Jesus Christ aforementioned. Further the author of the map has clearly stated that if you will follow the map, He will insure that you will find the treasure.

There Is A Map, Use It

So, whether you like it or not, there is a treasure and a map. So, whether you believe it or not, there is a treasure and a map, the Bible. My knowledge or lack thereof does not change the facts. My ignorance is assured unless I choose to pursue knowledge. We are all

innocently ignorant until we have been informed. However, once informed, we are just plain stupid if we continue to shout in contradiction to irrefutable evidence, “I still don’t believe it!” And, to be sure, to ignore the evidence or not even seek such evidence is your option, always. However, with not only life but also eternity at stake, to simply ignore the evidence would border on insanity. Just pretending that something does not matter does not affect its significance.

No Answer is a ‘No’ Answer

The answer to the first question, “Who is Jesus Christ?” has already been answered with prolific evidence and a plethora of personal experiential testimonies. But if you will not ponder the evidence, the second question is already rendered irrelevant. However, if you consider all of the evidence revealing the facts about Jesus Christ, it is nothing short of arrogance or insolence to refuse to answer the second one. But, be advised, the second question is always answered and it is answered by every human being. No answer, is a “No!” answer. Just as in the example of the gold mine. The absence of an answer is an answer of, “*No*” which is the default for all of us.

No Action Required

Another significant difference between Christianity and all other world religions is this: the gods out there, that is all of the gods except the God of Abraham, require actions and attitudes consistent with

recognition of the extreme superiority of the *god-being*. Only the God of Abraham offers human beings the opportunity to be in a genuinely affectionate relationship with Himself! Herein is the rub. Herein is the truth as well. Every relationship is a *two person* choice. Both parties must accept the other's invitation to be together and to care for each other.

God Can't Be Trusted

So, it befuddles me to notice the extremely high measure of resistance to God's offer to every person an up-close-and-personal relationship with Himself. I see nothing to lose and everything to gain. Who, in their right mind, would not want God to be at least a BFF (best friend forever)? But then this gives rise to the question that is foundational to every affectionate relationship. "Can my significant other be trusted?" And this seems to be the primary reason most humans do not engage God in a personal relationship. They have been convinced, wrongly I might add, that God wants perfect behaviors and attitudes. They have mostly believed that the treasure map will lead them to destruction in the hands of an angry *pirate*, God.

Better to Be Safe Than Sorry

Unfortunately this is a very widely accepted view of God. Fortunately, there is an enormous amount of evidence to prove just the opposite. But, unless you are first willing to ask the two most important questions in

human experience, you will be saying *no* to a proposition you never evaluated. That, my friend, is an irretrievable mistake. I would suggest that “It is better to be safe than sorry.” One religious teacher said frequently, “If my faith in Jesus Christ proves to have been unnecessary on an eternal landscape, I have lost nothing. However, if what I believe about Jesus Christ is true, and you refuse to believe it yourself, you will suffer separation from God, forever!”

Jesus’ Teaching {22 }

The vast majority of teaching is based on the *informational philosophy*. Jesus’ teaching was based on the *transformational philosophy*. Even the methods of delivery of the messages of Jesus were intended to promote *life change*, not information accumulation. Jesus’ entire focus was on relationship. And for very good reason. Humans were created for relationships. Relationship can only be established between humans. Relationships are at the core of our engineering *in the image of God*. Everything external to relationship, the human expression of personality, simply provides an environment in which relationship can be expressed.

Pursuit of Power

It is no mystery that the informational philosophy is so predominant. We have all heard the saying, *knowledge is power*. Since one of the three basic desires of humans is to obtain *power*, we are driven to become

powerful. Yet, most of the carnage in human history is evidence of this axiom, *power corrupts*. The *power* pursuit of man binds people in relationship to one another. At the same time, this same pursuit can be the greatest hindrance or destroyer of relationship. In other words, relationship's greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. Another expression of *power* is *worship*. *Power* seeking people are in effect garnering the *worship* of others.

Manipulation

I have spent incredible amounts of time and energy trying to convince, coerce or manipulate others to *worship* me. And so have you. This actually drives many away from us. But, when I truly fall in love with another, my *worship* of them is evidence that I love them. I *worship* that which I value. Therefore the *worship* of my most significant other is natural. So is the *worship* of my heroes, even if they might be villains to others. (Hitler was a hero for many but a villain to others.)

I Wannabe Rich

External things, such as the accumulation of resources (*prosperity*) may provide ways and means to express our feelings toward one another. For example, giving a lover flowers expresses affection for them. At the same time, an obsession with the accumulation of *prosperity* can be the very thing that destroys relationship. This obsession can distract us from meeting the emotional

needs of the ones we love.

I Wannabe Popular

Another significant pursuit of all people is *popularity*. This can be a hurdle over which two people must leap in order to be in relationship with each other. Since we all want to be applauded or recognized for the good things we do, our pursuit of such shifts our attention from the one we love to ourselves. The extreme of this is narcissism.

Self Inflicted Loneliness

So, the very things that are the greatest impetus for our every expression (word or deed), can also be the demise of any particular relationship. Those who are the loneliest are those whose focus is most introverted and selfish. Obsession with self and a desperate need to be prosperous, popular or worshipped leads to depression, despair and possibly even personal termination (suicide) when they are not attained. Therefore, healthy relationships which supply these needs, are the solution to addictive behaviors of all kinds. The world would be a much better place if all of us were more other-caring and less self-indulgent.

Transformational

Jesus' teachings are not only *relational* but also *transformational*. His message ran contrary to all religious teaching in His day. He and His message were rejected summarily by any and all who were more

interested in themselves (their own prosperity, popularity and power) than in wholesome mutually other-caring relationships. All religions, including the Christian religion, place more value in the selfish pursuits of the *worshippers*, attempting to appease their gods, than developing genuine, affectionate relationships with others. Christianity, when actually practiced, is relationship and not religion. Most relationships then and now were (and are) mutual accommodation of self-need. That explains the phenomena of falling **in** love and then falling **out** of love.

Not About Morality

Jesus did not teach morality. Jesus did not teach justice and equity. Jesus did not teach responsible living. Jesus did not teach behavior management. Jesus did not teach social activism. All expressions of any of these are at best futile attempts to be *self-righteous*, or *a good person*. Even the Old Testament was grossly misunderstood as a behavioral approach to *rightness*. A more accurate understanding is that all of the rules and regulations of the Commandments of God were simply the revelation of the symptoms of the disease of selfishness (the antithesis of love). Anyone can see the natural consequences, relational carnage, that violation of the rules would produce. Actions do speak louder than words!

Recognizing What I Want

Believe it or not, worship is not a religious activity.

Worship is the natural activity of the human soul. It is the basis for all relationships. It is the impetus for individuality, partnership and relational bonding. Every person on earth today is a great worshipper. We all worship many things or people. Unfortunately, worship of objects which cannot return worship in kind, are all too common in every generation.

It is equally unfortunate that most objects of worship which have the capacity to return our worship, do not do so. I have worshipped many people who never even knew my name. However, the highest object of worship, and the only one who is guaranteed to return my worship is the Creator, who gave me life and breath in the first place.

The Best Worshipers

The bottom line for all of us is not to become better worshippers. We are all exceptionally good at it. The best option is to improve the objects of our worship. In this case, I suggest that God would be the ultimate object of worship. And who better to be in marital union with than God, Himself. Like it or not, we are all in the same boat. And we must all face the fact that the only assured love of our life is the one who created us in the first place. You might liken it to Father and Mother love. Good parents have children in order to have loving relationships with them. And God is the ultimate, good parent!

Can't Feel It

Now to be sure, we must first feel God's love for us in order to respond to it. If we have misperceptions as to the measure of God's love for us or misgivings about it, we cannot respond to a love we do not feel. It is usually the case, that when we do not believe that God actually does love us, just the way we are, we have been misinformed by well-meaning but misguided informants. These informants are parents, pastors, peers, politicians, professors, and professionals of all kinds. However, the good news of the Gospel is this. The Holy Spirit of God Himself will come to us and convince us that God desires to be in relationship with us.

You Will Know When

But, if we do not say "yes" to His overtures of love, we remain apart from Him. The good news is that God will express His affectionate intentions toward every man and woman some time in his or her life. He wants every one to be up close and personal with Him. But that could not be possible if ever God forced anyone in that regard. This is the very essence of faith in God. **Faith is essentially my affectionate response to God's love for me.** It is in the moment when my heart is pierced by His love, that I have the opportunity to establish a personal relationship with Him. It cannot and will not happen at any other time. And He may only ask you one time. I strongly suggest that you just say, "*Yes!*"

Who I Am in Christ

Once having been overwhelmed by God's love and responding to His invitation of a deeply personal relationship with Him, my expressions about Him will reflect my affection for Him. My identity is not defined by my abilities, talents, intelligence, vocation or my personal successes. My identity is a matter of relationship. I am defined by my heritage, my relationship and my personality. Identity is a matter of being not doing. Unfortunately the predominant answer to the question, "Who are you?" is a recitation of my accomplishments and abilities. Relationship, which is the ultimate in human experience is based rather on pure emotional and spiritual connection with another being. My identity then, is in my identification with another in relationship. Birth and marriage are two primary examples of this.

Christ-In by Marriage

In Christ, that is in having responded to God's invitation to be joined to Him in a deeply personal way, my identity takes on a much higher value than with any other relationship. As a Christ-In, I am identified with God as a member of His family, by marriage, with all of its inherent benefits and pleasures. Thus the term "Christian" in its purest meaning is in this marital union with God in all three of His manifestations, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Living in relational unity and harmony with God, enables me to demonstrate the selfless, other-caring Spirit of God to all those around me. And in that Spirit, I will

have genuine affection for all others around me.

From this place of identity:

everything I do will be motivated by who I am.

The Good News and the Bad News

The good news is that God offers His love and relationship to everyone. The bad news is that most refuse to accept His offer of relationship and remain alone in the world and estranged from God. So when God comes courting, just say yes. You can rest assured that He will be the most faithful of anyone with whom you will ever share relationship! His love for you will be deeper and stronger than anyone else in the universe. He is and will always be the *perfect* Father, Mother, Sister, Brother, Friend and Mate for you.

Do I hear a, “Yes?”