

What Was God Thinking?
Chapter 5: Worship in Relationship
(by John Henry Alan; edited by Bob Clarkson)

Natural for People; Natural for God

Many people consider God to be aloof from us. He is high and mighty. We are tiny and insignificant. We may believe that we come into a relationship with God when we believe in Jesus as God in the flesh. Yet we all too often assume, and wrongly I might add, that since we cannot touch Him physically that we cannot have an intimate relationship with Him. He even declares, "God is a Spirit and those who worship Him must do so in spirit and truth." Yet the truth eludes us, mostly because we cannot comprehend such a being.

Now when we approach any one with the expectation that they will not accept us, there is a strong chance that they will not. This is because our body language or other cues reveal to them that we are skeptical about their acceptance. So, since we think that God is beyond human comprehension, we abandon the courtship with God before it even begins. However, there is a tragic flaw in this wrong thinking. And it complicates our efforts to sidle up to God in a cozy way. This flaw is none other than this. "We can know God intimately because relationship is something we all crave and experience fully. That is why God cloned

Himself in the person of Jesus so that He could communicate with us in our terms of endearment.

So, it is no wonder that the church, which is the body of Christ on earth, misrepresents God in myriad ways. Much of this misperception of God can be rectified quite simply. And the starting point is to stop misbelieving! As long as you believe that you cannot become lovers with God, you actually cannot. You must be convinced that even though God is a Spirit and cannot be touched physically, affections for Him can be as deep and passionately loving as humans can have for their most significant others.

Relationship IS Spiritual

Consider this brief story. I was on an airplane flying to Seattle, Washington to visit with my cousins whom I had not been with for over 10 years. As I engaged a fellow traveler in conversation about relationships in general, it struck me. Relationship is NOT as much a physical experience as it is a spiritual one. I said to Jenna, "After this flight is over, we will likely never see each other again. I have enjoyed our time together so much I will have fond memories of this day whenever you come to mind." She replied emphatically, "I believe that I will too!" Once having said this, I continued to say that whenever I think of any of my loved ones, this same deep affection rises within me, which is as great as when I will step off of the curb at the airport and hug my cousins! I

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concluded that there is no distance between two hearts that love each other.

In this same manner, we can have a deeply passionate, intimate relationship with God. Okay. We can't touch Him. I get that. But our mutual affections for each other still enable us to be lovers. Even atheists, who hate God and deny His very existence, express strong emotions toward a supposedly non-existent spirit. This leads me to write about how this love stuff works. And it is wrapped in a single word, worship! The word is grossly misapplied to religiosity by and large. And the word is commonly wrongly defined by most people.

Relationship IS Emotional

Worship is an integral and vital part of human nature. It is also in God's nature. So, we have at least this one major characteristic in common with the Creator. It is fair to say that worship is what all people do. Worship actually creates the desire to do anything and everything we do. Worship stems from our emotional sink (the soul). It is our emotions that are the primary catalyst for relational interaction. Our emotions stimulate us to 'go to work' for 'fear' of getting fired if we don't. Emotions stimulate us to 'do kind deeds' for 'desire' of being appreciated, respected, admired, applauded and even emulated. Emotions stimulate us to 'control other people' in order to 'satisfy' our desire to be consequential, influential and significant.

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Worship IS Emotional

Worship is something that we do all day, every day of our lives. It may be worship of self, others or God. But every activity can be traced back to one of these three objects of worship. Let's begin with these brash statements, "Worship is the activity of the human soul." It is not what Christians, Muslims, Mormons, Hindus and other religious do. It's what people do. Everyone on planet earth is a worshipper today. "What we worship or who we worship is not so much defined by what we say as by what we do." How we live our lives in community illuminates the objects of our worship. So, if you want to know what I worship, just watch me spin, listen to my talk, feel the emotional wake of my passage.

Now, in terms of worshipping in a religious sense, most people of faith would declare that they want to worship God, they want to serve God or they want to please God in whatever ways possible. We even gather in places of worship to sing or testify about the majesty and worthiness of God to receive our worship. But the truth be told, we don't say or sing our worship to God, we live to and for Him or we don't. Just as "actions speak louder than words" in relationship to motives, so do "actions tell the whole truth" regarding motives. What determines 'goodness' is the **motivation** behind the action, not the action itself. We can wear a smiley face giving to

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the poor while pitying their miserable station in life and actually despising them.

Worship Springs from Genuine Affection

When what we say to God matches how we live to God then our expressions of worship are genuine and true. We were all created to worship. We even have children in order to be loved (worshipped) by them. However, let's pause to establish a workable definition of 'worship.' "I am a worshipper. That's not what I do. It's who I am. And that's why it's what I do."^{5lg} We may differ significantly in where we worship or how we express it. But it is not about these things. It is simply that we all do worship incessantly! However, true worship is expressed in expletive ways. For example, you may say that when you go to church, you worship in a very quiet and still pose or manner. But when you are in the stadium and your team scores in the final moments to win the game, congruent expression of worship of your team occurs. That is, your expression of excitement is at a pitch and volume matching the measure of your pleasure.

Not Stained Glass or Religion

Most people when they hear the word 'worship' in conversation, they immediately think about church, religion, stained glass windows and religious practices. But worship is so much larger than that. Actually less genuine worship happens inside religious buildings or

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spaces than at the holiday dinner table, Hollywood, sports arenas or sports bars. Worship is not properly defined as going to church or Christian gatherings. “Worship is whenever you, or whenever I, determine that something is ‘worth’ something to me.” ^{5lg} It is when we say and act in a way that communicates that, “I value that. I worth that. I worship that.” The playing field is amazingly level in that everyone you know spends all day every day expressing worship of somebody or something. You might as well be carrying a large sign saying, “This is what I value most. My whole person is aimed toward that This is what I worship.”

You will find objects of worship all around. You can find objects of worship in the ruins of any ancient civilization. You will see objects of worship in every current civilization. There will never be a shortage of worshippers or objects of worship. No one needs training in worship. We are all great worshippers. Few if any need any improvement in how to worship. But the issue for me and you is not that the ‘quality’ of our worship improve, it’s that the objects of our worship improve. Even the Apostle Paul rolled into the town center of Athens and praised the philosophers for the quality of their worship. Then he directed their attention to the ‘unknown God.” He proceeded to inform them of the most worthy object of worship, the true and living God.

It is never wise to criticize others for what they believe. Even Jesus did not talk junk about others' religions. Jesus, simply declared the truth of the Only True God. Jesus, was not a leader, nor did He try to develop leadership skills in His disciples. Jesus was the most excellent follower and invited His disciples to "Come, Follow Me!" Actually none of the disciples of Jesus possessed what would be defined as excellent leadership qualities. But their end game as "followers" gave them a legacy which was far greater on the landscape of eternity than the most charismatic of all human leaders! People could tell that these men had been with Jesus since they were far more profound than formally educated people.

Evidence of Relationship

What's on your wall? By this I mean what's on display on your smart phone, Face book, photo albums, posters or in your art gallery. Who or what do you brag about? If you were asked to talk about someone you love by a stranger waiting beside you in a transit station, who would it be and what kinds of things would you say about them? And have you ever noticed how much you speak proudly of your significant others (mate, family, influential friends, sports stars, movie stars and the like? Have you ever heard yourself or others talk that proudly, prolifically and frequently about God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit doing amazing things currently and consistently?

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Worship is the spontaneous expression of incredible affection and pleasure in another person or thing.

Consider the measure of delight with which you express yourself about your favorite family member, friend or super star. How does that compare to the expressions of your heart toward God? “Love gushes forth in robust expressions of worship.” Even God’s love toward us was expressed in extreme terms in the manifestation of God in Jesus and the innocent God/man sacrificing Himself to pay the penalty for the crimes of all human beings. And if you think you are devoid of criminality and good enough to enter into God’s throne room without His permission, you will find yourself trembling in fear and awe when you are standing in his presence after your death.

We are often moved far more to shout about (worship) our earthly ‘idols’ than we are to worship the Almighty God of the universe! And we seldom criticize anyone else regarding how they express their worship to their human ‘stars.’ Yet we are quick to criticize how other people worship their ‘god.’ Worship is in us, every one of us. Worship is so focused on the object of worship that the worshipper pays no attention to anyone else in the room. But, to be sure, anyone can tell when another person is worshipping. It is extremely obvious. Worship happens in office buildings, malls, arenas, stadiums and every other place on earth all day and every day.

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Worship is about worth. Worship is about value. It's about declaring, "This is what is important to me!" This is what I worship.

Lifestyle Says It All

Worship is not as much about what we say. It's about how we live. It is not about our words. It's about our lifestyle. It's not so much about our actions as it is about our motives for action. In short, worship is completely and utterly about the affections of the soul. Even Jesus told His disciples just before the Crucifixion that they would be known as His disciples because of their unconditional love for each other, not by their 'white-washed' actions. The best evidence of love for God is a genuine love for others, even those who do not like us or maybe even hate us.

There is a trail that others can follow to decipher who or what we worship. There is a trail of our time, resources, affection, emotion, investments, allegiance, devotions, and of our possessions. And if you follow that trail, not our words you will know what we worship. And at the end of everybody's trail there is a throne. You don't follow the theory or the fantasy expressed in words. You follow the evidence. The evidence is in the energy, the passion, the time, the thinking and the action. When you get to the end of the trail, something or someone is on the throne (the place of greatest value). It could be you, your job, your lover, your reputation. There's a great chance

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that you worship yourself most of the time. There's also a good chance that God is seldom found on the throne at the end of your trail of valued breadcrumbs.

So when you are tempted to say, "I worship God more than anything or anyone else," consider the reasons why you go to church, teach Bible studies, play in the worship band, serve on committees and boards, give to God or charity, and so forth. Because it is your motives (reasons) that ultimately betray your words about who you worship. You might also consider how what you do in church on Sunday morning might be as evil as the things you did on Saturday night. Even doing the "Christian" things can be unholy if they are done to promote your reputation, influence, or affluence! "Love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength..." "Love your neighbor as you love yourself..."

Jesus fulfilled that summary of God's commands for us. However, Jesus gave us a more impossible command to live out. "Love one another in the same manner, depth and intensity as I have loved you! By this, and only this, will other people know that you are Christians, that you have unconditional love for each other." And remember this. Love is NOT action. However, genuine love does produce loving action. Loving expression is not necessarily providing goods, services or money to others. The only true currency of love is the investment of your time to be

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with another who needs company. Love is expressed in terms of acceptance and embrace, terms of endearment. People don't want to know how much you know. They want to know how much you care! Jesus demonstrated the ultimate in caring! Being born again by the Spirit of God, we too can love like Christ!

You need to recognize what or who you value the most and admit it. Telling me what you worship means nothing. Watching you worship tells me everything! If you are not walking in great affection for God and His kids (all people), then you are worshipping yourself. Look in the mirror! You can readily see if you are motivated by your prosperity, popularity or power. You can tell if you promote your own pleasure, applause and influence. If your mirror is fogged up or distorted, you may need to ask another to reflect what they see as they observe you. Could it be that much of what you do that is appreciated by others has a selfish motive attached to it? 'Walking the walk' is not so much about moral whiteness as it is genuine affection for others. The receptivity to your words is directly proportional to how much love the listener feels that you have for them. ^{4jha}

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