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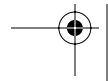
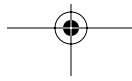
## NOBODY DOES NOT WORSHIP



Worship is at once about who we are, about who or what our god is and about how we choose to live. It is about something that is quite simple but wrapped in a mystery. It is about God himself, who has but one face and whose face has been clearly shown in the person and work of his only begotten Son. It is about a world in which worship takes on a thousand faces. It is also about Satan, dressed as an angel of light, disarmingly attractive yet inherently false, whose faces are cleverly multiplied and whose one desire is to undo what has already been done from the eternities.



The thousand faces of worship contain both deadened and lively countenances. They are the lost and the found, all of whom are continuous worshipers, for as the title of this chapter states, nobody does not worship. We begin with one fundamental fact about worship: at this very moment, and for as long as this world endures, everybody inhabiting it is bowing down and serving something or someone—an artifact, a person, an institution, an idea, a spirit, or God through Christ. Everyone is being shaped thereby and is growing up toward some measure of fullness, whether of righteousness or of evil. No one is exempt and no one can wish to be. We are, every one of us, unceasing worshipers and will remain so forever, for eternity is an infinite extrapolation of one of two conditions: a surrender to the sin-





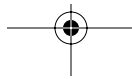
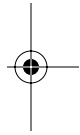
fulness of sin unto infinite loss or the commitment of personal righteousness unto infinite gain. This is the central fact of our existence, and it drives every other fact. Within it lies the story of creation, fall, redemption and new creation or final loss.

I have worked out a definition for worship that I believe covers every possible human condition. It is this: *Worship is the continuous outpouring of all that I am, all that I do and all that I can ever become in light of a chosen or choosing god.* I want to make four preliminary observations about this definition that will feed into the many themes that this book comprises, particularly in the first six chapters.

First, the definition includes the entire human race. It is not just about Christians, but all people everywhere who are going about their worship, their submission to whatever masters them and their witness as to why they live the way they do. This is why I have not yet capitalized the word “god.”

Second, the words about a chosen or choosing god are meant not only to articulate two fundamentally contrasting theological positions taken within the body of Christ but also to depict the confused condition of lostness itself.<sup>1</sup> Among Christians, the debate about choosing God and being chosen by him, as divisive as it can become, is not about two Saviors or two atonements but about two sides of a mystery. The problem lies more with theology than with Scripture, in that theological studies—systematics in particular—seem always to have trouble with mysteries and paradoxes. But with lostness, choosing a god and being “chosen” by one are conducted completely in the dark and result in an infinite standoff. Lostness is a delusion in which “choosing” a god and “being chosen” are mirror images, two opposites within a single delusion. That is, lost individuals in deluded sovereignty “choose,” only to be enslaved by the choice they have made. They can then believe the latter is the same as “being chosen.” The worship of false gods, then, is a negative condition in which sovereignty and enslavement infinitely cancel each other out.

Third, the definition stresses the reality and foundational importance of continuousness. That is, worship does not stop and start, despite our notions to the contrary. Once we place emphasis on specific times, places and methods, we misunderstand worship’s biblical meaning. Worship may ebb and flow, may take on various appearances and may be unconscious or





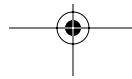
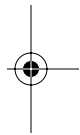
conscious, intense and ecstatic or quiet and commonplace, but it is continuous. When we sin, worship does not stop. It changes directions and reverts back to what it once was, even if only for an instant. Repentance—the turning from and (re)turning to—is the only solution.

Fourth, although I believe every word in the above definition to have particular value, the term *continuous outpouring* particularly stands out. These two words are the only descriptors I can think of that take in both the work of God and the work of humankind as these together eventually inform a biblically complete concept of worship. Permit me to expand a bit more on them.

*Continuous* implies relentlessness. It is the opposite of periodic or sporadic. On the strictly physical and temporal side of things, literal continuity is impossible. I continue to breathe until I die, I continue to eat until I am full, I continue to compose a piece of music until I think I have finished. But on the spiritual side, continuity is of the essence. God is continually and unchangeably the I AM THAT I AM ; his Word abides forever; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. And so, over and above our physicality and temporality, we have been created to enter into God's side of continuousness. Faithfulness to one's spouse is to continue as long as life itself; we are continually to love God with heart, soul and mind; we are to love our neighbor without letup; we are to forgive endlessly; we are to continue our stewardship whether we work or rest; we are to continue in the truth whether we play or preach. At the end of all these we face a continuity of eternal life or eternal death. My choice of the term *continuous* is, therefore, solemn and deliberate.

As for *outpouring*, note that there are many words we can use to talk about the way one person relates to another: *servicing, relating, giving, befriending, revealing, fellowshiping, sojourning, sacrificing, bearing up with* and the like. Any one of these relational words might have been used in place of *outpouring*. But I chose this word not only because of its scriptural force but also because it implies lavishness and generosity: when I pour something, I give it up; I let it go. Dripping is not pouring; there is space between the drops. But in pouring, the flow is organically and consistently itself. In spite of a mixed simile, pouring is seamless.

As to the scriptural importance of pouring, one need only go to a con-



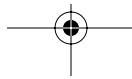
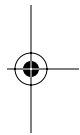


cordance to discover how it pervades, explicitly or implicitly. We see the concept of pouring in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. We see it in the comprehensive sense of giving, of pouring ourselves out toward a neighbor. Most of all, we see it in Christ's own perfect sacrifice—a once-for-all pouring out of his incarnate self on the cross. And there may be no better final descriptor for our personal lives than in Paul's summation of his own: "I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come" (2 Tim 4:6).

Outpouring surpasses measuring out or filling quotas, even to the extent that it does not matter if some of it spills over in gracious waste. I think of Mary's caring carelessness when she anointed Jesus' feet. The room would not have been filled with such abundant fragrance had she merely tithed it out. It was the waste (both a Judas word and holy word) that was so magnificent and intoxicating. The example of this draws me even further, and I think of Jesus, whose entire being was poured out—the world would say wasted—for our salvation, perfume for his Father's feet. This fullness of love is not just enough; it is infinitely enough. And when I am swept into the infinite reach of outpouring, there are no adjectives that can increase the value of the nouns we employ to embody it: *love, grace, favor, mercy, power, presence*. It is the consideration of these grand qualities that makes the word *outpouring* so powerful and so necessary to the definition of worship.

No one's worship can possibly be self-contained, even when it barely dribbles out. Thus, looking ahead to chapter five, *worship* and *witness* are two words for one comprehensive reality. Even self-worship—self-absorbed outpouring, if you will—cannot be contained. In its perversity it infects those who come near its self-worshiping center. Likewise, hiding one's light under a bushel is a substitute outpouring in that something is bound to show in place of what is being hidden, and those coming in contact with it may well imitate it, joining the uncomfortably large world of hidden light.

Finally, continuous outpouring, whatever its kind and quality, is bound to change the outpourer, whether comprehensively or incrementally, whether for good or for evil. Being, becoming and doing, in whatever cause-effect configuration they may occur, are forcibly linked to who or whatever has the mastery. Everyone, even the most fiercely self-justifying





and self-made individual, is mastered by someone or something, despite all blustering protestation to the contrary. Being mastered means obedience, willing or otherwise; obedience means service, willing or otherwise; and serving works its own changes in the servant. Even being lukewarm is still outpouring.

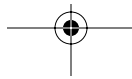
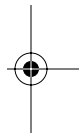
No discussion of worship is possible without the consideration of what worship was like before the Fall. Until recently I was hesitant to speculate about what this must have been like. I worried that I might come up with a fairy-tale version of worship, something so unattached, so conspicuously distant and hypermystical that it would be of no use. However, worry has left me because I have slowly discovered three verifiable realities to guide me both back into Eden and away from it directly to God through Christ: (1) the concept of continuous outpouring as it describes the nature of God; (2) the doctrine of *imago Dei*; (3) the sojourn of Christ on earth.

#### CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING AND THE NATURE OF GOD

We must begin with God, not merely because all other beginnings, continuations and endings must be explained in light of his triune Self but because continuous outpouring must above all be informed by and understood in light of his person and work. God is the uniquely Continuous Outpourer. He cannot but give of himself, reveal himself, pour himself out. Even before he chooses to create, and before he chooses to reveal himself beyond himself, he eternally pours himself out to his triune Self in unending fellowship, ceaseless conversation and immeasurable love unto an infinity of the same. Within limitless intercourse, transcendent speech and splendid work (the Father to the Son, the Son to the Spirit, the Spirit to the Father), the Godhead goes about its glorious work of being the eternal I AM THAT I ACT THAT I AM, with nothing contingent, preceding or following. This is the originating outpouring for which these mere words fail and into which our faith-not-yet-become-sight peers with intense longing.<sup>2</sup>

#### GOD'S OUTPOURING IN CREATION

But even in his satisfying completeness, God decided not to keep himself to himself. He chose to create a vastness out of nothing and to do so with infinite imagination and craft. He did not do this to satisfy an unmet need





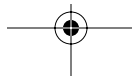
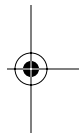
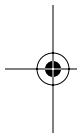
or to bring finish to something. And he did not do it to gain greater praise from the heavenly host, who must certainly have been peering into and rejoicing in the glories of eternal outpouring long before the Spirit breathed upon the waters.

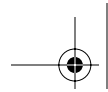
God's creation is outpouring beyond himself and yet not himself. His creation comes of abounding grace and outpouring love. This creating grace—preceding, but inseparable from, sin-healing grace—is a gift of the Trinity to itself even as it is a gift to the stuff that he creates. The creation is an outpoured work, a finished work, a good work. Furthermore, it is not a work left to itself—it is not comfortless. God's outpouring toward the creation is shown in his urgent and continuing love for it, in his declaration that it has a named goodness and that it is comely and useful. His outpouring is shown in his faithful and continual involvement in its workings, for God's nature prohibits him from disengagement. He may appear to leave something alone, but this is only to show that his continuous outpouring encompasses his nearness, his distance and his withinness. Even then, his leaving alone is an action that comes of a sovereign engagement in all things, transcending our versions of sequence, spatial differences and time lapses. Thus right now, and for as long as God himself decides it to be so, creation is being held together by the outpouring Word of his Son, in whom and through whom all things come into being and consist (Col 1:16-17; Heb 1:3).

God creates; God loves. Love is not static; it cannot but pour itself outward. God's creating love and his love for the creation are not lesser loves than, say, his love for his Son, for the Spirit or for the angelic host. It is simply love at work in the doing of a different and material thing. When God creates, his outpouring love extends beyond himself without in any way diminishing the preexisting love he has for his eternal self. Creating is a certain kind of work that he sovereignly chooses to do to show that nothing that he does can possibly fall outside his love. But this is not the end of it.

#### CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING, *IMAGO DEI* AND UNFALLEN WORSHIP

God's grace, inexplicable generosity and immeasurable imagination brought him to create a race of beings in his own image, *imago Dei*. As complex and involved as our thinking can become about this mystery, I believe

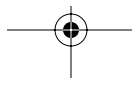
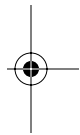


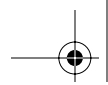


we can boil it down to this foundational idea: because God is the Continuous Outpourer, we bear his image as continuous outpourers. Being made in the image of God means that we were created to act the way God acts, having been given a nature within which such behavior is natural. The difference between God and humankind, merely and mysteriously, is one of singular infinitude and unique and multiplied finitude. Whatever character or attribute God inherently possesses and pours out, we were created finitely to show and to pour out after his manner. Otherwise, the concept of *imago Dei* would have but fractional, even precarious, significance. Being told to be holy even as the Father is holy, for example, is to understand two things at once: (1) When we were originally created, holiness was not a choice among choices; it was the only way we could be. (2) When we fell, instruction became necessary because the only way we could be was ripped from us.

We were created continuously outpouring. Note that I did not say we were created *to be* continuous outpourers. Nor can I dare imply that we were created *to worship*. This would suggest that God is an incomplete person whose need for something outside himself (worship) completes his sense of himself. It might not even be safe to say that we were created *for* worship, because the inference can be drawn that worship is a capacity that can be separated out and eventually relegated to one of several categories of being. I believe it is strategically important, therefore, to say that we were created continuously outpouring—we were created in that condition, at that instant, *imago Dei*. We did not graduate into being in the image of God; we were, by divine fiat, already in the image of God at the instant the Spirit breathed into our dust. Hence we were created continuously outpouring.

God outpours from the eternities, noncontingently; we do so because we were made so, contingently. Creator (singular infinity) and creature (unique finitude) are bound together in mutual love, communion and work. Each gives fully, the one out of endless bounty and the other out of responding stewardship. This is not an apples/oranges affair, the sovereign one always getting and the submissive one always giving. Instead it is one of reciprocity—free, full exchange between Creator and *imago Dei*, love unto continued love, giving unto continued giving, adoration unto contin-





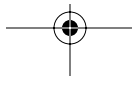
ued adoration. It is one of outpouring willingness—the willingness of all-sufficiency bonded to the willingness of dependency, prevenient love bonded to responding love, transcendent worth in union with created worth. There can be no call to worship in this blessed condition. Continuous outpouring is of the essence, God from the eternities and humankind from the moment dust became *imago Dei*.

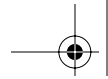
Now we are on safe ground in describing what it originally meant to worship, because God and humankind are knit together—the triune God continuously outpouring within himself and toward *imago Dei*, and *imago Dei* continuously outpouring toward God. Now we are free to understand the eternal and original dimension to worship; now we are free to say that we were created worshipping. Now we can say this without qualification: worship is the unique and finite side of continuous outpouring, just as lordship is the unique and infinite side of continuous outpouring. By nature, God cannot worship, even though he continuously pours out. But everything that worship is on the human side is an outpouring of what it means to be created in the image of God. Worship, in this initial and final sense, is human outpouring to the outpouring of lordship. Thus, if our theology of God and our theology of *imago Dei* are correct, our theology of worship will likewise be correct, and we can link continuous outpouring to continuous worship. But there is more.

#### CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING AND CHRIST ON EARTH

If our Christology is correct, we can view the entire sojourn of the incarnate God on earth as continuous outpouring of a three-in-one kind: continuous outpouring with his triune self as part of the Godhead, continuous outpouring as perfect man to his heavenly Father and continuous outpouring toward the world as the only Savior. His earthly life was thirty-three years of unrelenting worship. He is the perfect worshiper, knowing his Father uninterruptedly, submissively and completely.

In this sense Christ came to show us how Adam and Eve should have continued their worship. He came not only to take away our sin but also to show us that there was no fatal flaw, no hidden weakness in God's original creating act. And we must not forget that Christ's demonstration of the originally perfect work of his Father was set in the severe and disruptive



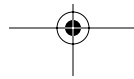
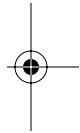


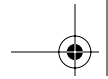
context of a world wandering to and fro under the bidding of alien powers. His temptation in the wilderness was far more stringent and contortive than anything Adam and Eve faced. His daily sojourn was not with a perfect creation but with one set against him. He came to his own but was not received. Every action, every outpouring was sweetly contrasted with the inverted urgencies of sin swirling around him. Christ-on-earth, both God and image of God, both Creator and creature—this dearest of persons is a fully revealed picture of both how our unfallen parents should have continued to worship and how the body of Christ is eventually to worship. Furthermore, Christ's own words about worship, especially in John 4, sufficiently underscore the concept of continuous outpouring for the body of Christ. (This passage will be discussed more fully in chapter two.)

#### CONTINUOUS OUTPOURING AND THE FALL

With the exception of Christ's earthly sojourn, we have been discussing continuous outpouring, worship and unfallenness in the same breath: God as a perfectly whole and holy person; Adam and Eve as created perfectly, *imago Dei*; and Christ, perfect God and perfect Man. Each is a continuous outpourer—God as Lord, the human being as worshiper, Christ as both. We have patterns aplenty, but we are incapable of living them out fully. Here is where we must speak and think differently. We are fallen. We are infected hideously and need a Redeemer, else our hideousness perpetuates ad infinitum. So we turn to this crucial question: What happened to continuous outpouring in light of the Fall?

The Fall did not signal the end of worship or continuous outpouring. Something deeper happened, far down in our being, whereby our entirety was inverted and turned to ruin. We chose to believe a lie, spoken by one with whom truth is impossible but who skillfully dresses falsehood in light. We took to this reversed light and were immediately lost and undone. Our outpouring was falsified. But it continued, with one telling difference: we exchanged gods. We turned from the only One who is not creature and were left, not in a persisting vacuum (this would have been a premature hell), but with a new plethora, the universe of innumerable false gods, false religions and the religionizing of anything that catches our fancy. Heavens were invented. Evil was further falsified by making it ap-





pear to be good. Multiple salvations were enumerated, as were the systems invented to bring them about. In short, we became idolaters, for the worship of anything but God alone is idolatry.

There is no other way to explain the way our outpouring continues than to say that as an intrinsic part of our nature it remains with us and is ceaselessly at work, even as we choose death in pouring ourselves out toward false gods. As mysterious as this fact is, we can well consider it a grace, because it is a ready highway for the coming of the Redeemer. To be sure, the rough places need to be smoothed, the hills and valleys made low. The truth must be known that the Continuous Outpourer has come down among us with an enormous meaning that the prophets could only peer into. And those who see his glory, the children of a lively faith, find that slowly but surely authentic worship is reborn in their enfeebled lives.

We are not left comfortless. Christ has come.

