

A.W. Tozer: How God Defines Your Life

Many of us claim that God is first in our lives. But do we live out this reality in our everyday existence—or have we made something else preeminent?

Order, both in nature and in human life, depends upon right relationships; to achieve harmony each thing must be in its proper position relative to each other thing. That's why it is so essential for God to have His proper place in our lives. When He does not, everything is out of order.

We are right when, and only when, we stand in a right position relative to God, and we are wrong so far and so long as we stand in any other position.

So let us begin with God. Back of all, above all, before all is God; first in sequential order, above in rank and station, exalted in dignity and honor. As the self-existent One He gave being to all things, and all things exist out of Him and for Him. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created" (Rev. 4:11, KJV).

Every soul belongs to God and exists by His pleasure. God being who and what He is, and we being who and what we are, the only thinkable relation between us is one of full lordship on His part and complete submission on ours. We owe Him every honor that is in our power to give Him. Our everlasting grief lies in giving Him anything less.

The pursuit of God will embrace the labor of bringing our total personality into conformity to His. I do not here refer to the act of justification by faith in Christ. I speak of a voluntary exalting of God to His proper station over us and a willing surrender of our whole being to the place of

worshipful submission that the Creator creature circumstance makes proper.

The moment we make up our minds that we are going on with this determination to exalt God over all, we step out of the world's parade. We shall find ourselves out of adjustment to the ways of the world and increasingly so as we make progress in the holy way. We shall acquire a new viewpoint; a new psychology will be formed within us; a new power will begin to surprise us by its upsurgings and its outgoings.

Our break with the world will be the direct outcome of our changed relation to God. For the world of fallen men does not honor God. Millions call themselves by His name, it is true, and pay some token respect to Him, but a simple test will show how little He is really honored among them.

Let the average man be put to the proof on the question of who or what is above, and his true position will be exposed. Let him be forced into making a choice between God and money, between God and man, between God and personal ambition, God and self, God and human love, and God will take second place every time. Those other things will be exalted above. However the man may protest, the proof is in the choices he makes day after day throughout his life.

"Be exalted, O Lord" (Ps. 21:13, NKJV) is the language of victorious spiritual experience. It is a little key to unlock the door to great treasures of grace. It is central in the life of God in the soul.

Let the seeking man reach a place where life and lips join to say continually "Be exalted, O Lord," and a thousand minor problems will be solved at once. His Christian life ceases to be the complicated thing it had been before and becomes the very essence of simplicity. By the exercise of his will he has set his course, and on that course he will stay as if guided by an automatic pilot.

Let no one imagine that he will lose anything of human dignity by this voluntary sell-out of his all to God. His deep disgrace lay in his unnatural usurpation of the place of God. His honor will be proved by restoring again that stolen throne. In exalting God over all he finds his own highest honor upheld.

Anyone who might feel reluctant to surrender his will to the will of another should remember Jesus' words, "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34). We must of necessity be servant to someone, either to God or to sin.

The sinner prides himself on his independence, completely overlooking the fact that he is the weak slave of the sins that rule his members. The man who surrenders to Christ exchanges a cruel slave driver for a kind and gentle Master whose yoke is easy and whose burden is light.

I hope it is clear that there is a logic behind God's claim to preeminence. That place is His by every right in earth or heaven. While we take to ourselves the place that is His, the whole course of our lives is out of joint. Nothing will or can restore order till our hearts make the great decision: God shall be exalted above.

"Those who honor Me I will honor" (1 Sam. 2:30), God said once to a priest of Israel, and that ancient law of the kingdom stands today unchanged by the passing of time or the changes of dispensation. The whole Bible and every page of history proclaim the perpetuation of that law.

"If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor," (John 12:26), Jesus said, tying in the old with the new and revealing the essential unity of His ways with men.

Sometimes the best way to see a thing is to look at its opposite. Eli and his sons are placed in the priesthood with the stipulation that they honor God in their lives and

ministrations. They fail to do this, and God sends Samuel to announce the consequences.

Unknown to Eli, this law of reciprocal honor has been all the while secretly working, and now the time has come for judgment to fall. Hophni and Phineas, the degenerate priests, fall in battle; the wife of Hophni dies in childbirth; Israel flees before her enemies; the ark of God is captured by the Philistines; and the old man Eli falls backward and dies of a broken neck. Thus stark, utter tragedy followed upon Eli's failure to honor God.

Now over against this set almost any Bible character who honestly tried to glorify God in his earthly walk. See how God winked at weakness and overlooked failures as He poured upon His servants grace and blessing untold. Let it be Abraham, Jacob, David, Daniel, Elijah or whom you will; honor followed honor as harvest the seed.

The man of God set his heart to exalt God above all; God accepted his intention as fact and acted accordingly. Not perfection, but holy intention made the difference.

In our Lord Jesus Christ this law was seen in simple perfection. In His lowly manhood He humbled Himself and gladly gave all glory to His Father in heaven. He sought not His own honor but the honor of God who sent Him.

"If I honor Myself," He said on one occasion, "My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me" (John 8:54). So far had the Pharisees departed from this law that they could not understand one who honored God at his own expense. "I honor My Father," Jesus said to them, "and you dishonor Me" (v. 49).

Another saying of Jesus, and a most disturbing one, was put in the form of a question. "How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God?" (John 5:44). If I understand this correctly, Christ taught here the alarming doctrine that the

desire for honor among men made belief impossible.

Is this sin at the root of religious unbelief? I believe it may be. The whole course of life is upset by failure to put God where He belongs. We exalt ourselves instead of God, and the curse follows.

In our desire after God let us keep always in mind that God also has desire, and His desire is toward the sons of men, and more particularly toward those sons of men who will make the once-for-all decision to exalt Him over all. Such as these are precious to God above all treasures of earth or sea.

In them God finds a theater where He can display His exceeding kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. With them God can walk unhindered; toward them He can act like the God He is.

In speaking thus I have one fear: that I may convince the mind before God can win the heart. For this God-above-all position is one not easy to take. The mind may approve it while not having the consent of the will to put it into effect.

Though the imagination races ahead to honor God, the will may lag behind, and the man must make the decision before the heart can know any real satisfaction. God wants the whole person, and He will not rest till He gets us in entirety.

Let us pray over this in detail, throwing ourselves at God's feet and meaning everything we say. Let's ask God today to be exalted over our possessions, our friendships, our comforts, our reputations. Let's ask Him to take His proper place of honor above our ambitions, our likes and dislikes, our family, our health and even life itself.

No one who prays thus in sincerity need wait long for tokens of divine acceptance. God will unveil His glory before His servant's eyes, and He will place all His treasures at the disposal of such a one, for He knows that His honor is safe in consecrated hands.

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