

The Essential Elements of Christian Worship

3 - Spirit-led Worship

To tell you the Truth...

When we speak of 'spirit-led' worship, it can mean many things. To one group, it means 'spontaneous' or impromptu. To another group, it might refer the use of 'charisma' gifts such as speaking (or singing) in another tongue. But these views of 'spirit-led' worship do not reflect the full ministry of the Holy Spirit in our act(s) of worship of Christ.

Why is it important that the Spirit leads us in our worship? Well, according to John 4:24, God desires those who worship Him 'in spirit and in truth'. But what does that really mean? Does that mean we just need to be sincere? Well, sincerity is part of it, as Jesus quoted Isaiah in Matt. 15:8, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." But beyond just our subjective feelings, there must be a correct 'object' of our worship - Jesus! Think about it... just because I'm really sincere about worshipping a block of wood would not make it any less a case of idolatry. **The Holy Spirit leads us into the 'truth' about Jesus.**

Jesus told the Disciples that the Holy Spirit's ministry is to glorify Christ (John 16:14). That is why Paul is able to write, "*no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*" (1 Cor. 12:3) **Therefore, the essence of Christian worship is recognizing Jesus' deity - a work of the Holy Spirit!**

But when he,
the Spirit of
truth, comes,
he will guide
you into all
the truth.

John 16:13a

Supernatural activity...

In fact, James Torrance refers to Trinitarian worship as a 'God-Humanward' activity, which allows us to enact 'Human-Godward' activity - i.e. worship! It is a supernatural act of grace that even brings us to be able to recognize Jesus as Lord, since Paul also reminds us, "*The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*" (2Cor. 4:4).

Three... and One... the who and the what



The Trinity is sometimes a difficult doctrine to understand. Yet it is also a very crucial doctrine for the Christian worshipper. Why is that?

First of all, it is about having a correct picture of 'who He is' - an eternal community that is capable of relationship, which is why He chose to create us - **FOR THAT COMMUNITY WITH HIMSELF!**

Secondly, we can see the Trinity in 'what He has done' to bring us in our sinful state **BACK INTO THAT COMMUNITY**. **The Father** sends **The Son** to be our sacrifice. **The Spirit** is sent to unveil Christ and make all who receive The Son **ONE IN THAT ETERNAL COMMUNITY!** The Triune God accomplishes our salvation for us!! **THAT** should cause us to worship!

Trinitarian worship...

If we recognize the different 'roles' that each member of the Trinity has in our worship, it helps us see God for who He is. C.S. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity*, explains that, "God is the thing to which he is praying... God is also the thing inside him which is pushing him on... God is also the road or bridge along which he is being pushed to that goal"¹

We see the active role of the Godhead involved in our worship:

- God **initiates** the worship from within us (Spirit)
- God **conveys** our worship through Christ our mediator (through his sacrifice)
- God **receives** our worship

As John Witvliet puts it, "The picture here is not of God as a passive being up in heaven, waiting for us to sing a little louder and pray a little harder before conferring a blessing. That description better fits Baal! (1 Kings 18). No, God is active in prompting our worship, in receiving it, and in perfecting it."²



Worship as Relationship...

Even in Christian churches today, Torrance maintains that most worship is largely Unitarian - it's about us trying to approach God with our offering of worship - about what **we** do. Instead, our study of Trinitarian worship shows us that worship is truly about **relationship... about God actively bringing us into communion with Himself**, both as an individual and as a people.



"Congregating is an act of Spirit-forged coming together around the person of Christ for the purpose of addressing God."³

John Witvliet

The Holy Spirit is in ALL our acts of worship... from gathering to sending. **Leaders** prepare under the direction of the Spirit. **Congregants** should expect to come and be led by the Spirit. He is in our **singing**, our **praying**, our **confessing**, our **greeting**, our **giving**, our **preaching**, our **response**, and in our **sending out again!**

If that is truly the case, then we can and should expect God to change us as we worship.

"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."" (Rom. 8:14-15, NIV)

¹C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, Macmillan, 1960), p.14.

²John Witvliet. "The Beginning of Worship: Trinity" in *A More Profound Alleluia*, Leanne Van Dyk, ed., (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2005), p. 3.

³Ibid, p.10.

Discussion questions:

1. How aware are you of the work that the Holy Spirit is doing in our gathered worship? List some ways that He is involved.

2. In what ways does (or maybe should) understanding the Trinity as a model 'community' impact your relationships?

3. Why is having an accurate understanding of God's character important to our Christian worship?

4. How does the work of God in Salvation illustrate the Trinity?