

## Should We Worship the Holy Spirit?

**Matt Miller**

*IT consultant, Cairns*

[mmiller@acom.edu.au](mailto:mmiller@acom.edu.au)

### Introduction

Often when we discuss the Holy Spirit it is in relation to worship. The continued growth of the charismatic worship movement has brought with it new questions about the role of the Holy Spirit in worship. Recently the topic of Trinitarian worship has also attracted renewed interest. The time is right to take another look at our understanding of the Holy Spirit and to consider whether or not he should be worshipped equally with Father and Son. This also calls us to address the wider topic of the Spirit's ministry in the area of worship.

### The Holy Spirit in the Trinity

How does the Holy Spirit fit into our understanding of worship? Is he merely present through worship to bless us with divine gifts, or should he in fact be the focus of our worship? To answer these questions, we need to revisit our understanding of the Spirit in relation to the Trinity. Let's look at a section from the Nicene Creed:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father,  
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.

"Who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified." From a straight reading of the Creed, the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly worthy of worship. This is not surprising, given that the Holy Spirit shares in the divinity of God as a person within the Trinity.

We also find the same pattern of Trinitarian worship in the Church's history, where the Spirit is worshipped with equal devotion as the Father and Son. Consider, for example, this hymn written by Thomas Ken (1637-1711) in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century:

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow  
Praise Him all creatures here below  
Praise Him all of ye heavenly host  
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Yet we must be careful to read these sources with a fuller view of the Trinity in mind. To properly apply these texts, we need to look more deeply at the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. Most of us have a basic understanding of what the Trinity represents, that is, the three persons of God—Father, Son and Spirit—unified in one Godhead. But what distinct role does the Holy Spirit play in this Godhead?

The role of the Holy Spirit is to testify to the person and power of Jesus. Studying John's Gospel tells us that the Holy Spirit is sent in the name of Jesus and will teach us and remind us of everything he taught the disciples (John 14:26). The Spirit will testify about Jesus (15:26). He will make the things of Jesus known to us (16:14). Jesus even says that he will send the Spirit and that when that time comes the Spirit will testify about him (15:26). Hence in Acts 2, to explain to the crowd the miraculous signs of the Spirit's power that they are witnessing, Peter gives an extended testimony of the life and power of Jesus. The Holy Spirit's unique role in the Trinity is to bring to light the wonder and work of Jesus Christ!

When it comes to the question of whether or not we should worship the Holy Spirit then, we must bear in mind that the Spirit's primary purpose is to testify concerning Jesus. The Holy Spirit exists to give glory to the Father through the redeeming power of Jesus. Although he is an equal member of the Trinity and a powerful divinity in his own right, the Holy Spirit does not seek to draw attention to himself, but rather seeks to draw them to the Father through Jesus. Hence instead of being the subject of our worship, it follows that the Holy Spirit would want to draw our worship towards Jesus and the Father.

We can easily agree with all of this on a cerebral level, but we need to ground it somehow in our practice of worship. In this sense, it may be helpful to view the Holy Spirit as the *facilitator* of our worship. A helpful metaphor in more common language is that the Holy Spirit is the ultimate worship leader! The Holy Spirit prompts us to worship through his ministry within us and help bring our worship before God. Each time we honour Jesus and the Father, the Holy Spirit is glorified having served his purpose in bringing "worth-ship" to the other members of the Trinity.

Robin Parry describes beautifully how this kind of worship might look in practice:

In an ideal model, our worship will ceaselessly and effortlessly move back and forth between the threeness of God and the unity of God. It will shift focus from Father, to Son, to Spirit and back again in a restless celebration of divine love and mystery. It will also highlight the deep relations within the Godhead by not allowing the worshippers to lose sight of any of the Persons. At times the worship will draw the Father into focus; however the Son and Spirit will be there, out of focus, but still in our field of awareness. Other times the Son will attract our attention, but not in such a way that we do not see Father and Spirit. When the Spirit attracts our worshipping attention it will always be as the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore the Spirit is not ignored in our worship, as if he should carry out his role in such a way that we're oblivious to his presence. Rather we should acknowledge what the Spirit is doing and invite his ministry to take place in us and through us as we seek to worship God. It may even be

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Parry, 'Making Our Worship More Trinitarian' in Matt Redman (ed.), *Inside Out Worship*, (Ventura: Regal, 2005), 66.

helpful to begin our gathered times of worship with this recognition, intentionally asking the Spirit to help us bring our worship as a pleasing sacrifice to Jesus and the Father.

This leads us now to take a closer look at the ministry of the Spirit in worship.

### **The worship ministry of the Holy Spirit**

What, then, is the role of the Holy Spirit in worship? If he is not the direct subject of our worship but rather our leader in bringing glory to the Father and Son, how does the Spirit lead us in worship?

#### *The Holy Spirit empowers us to worship in spirit*

We, as human beings, are “of the flesh”, meaning that we exist in the created realm of planet Earth and in our own frail state are unable to transcend this realm. Yet we are called to “worship in spirit” (John 4:24). Worship by its very nature, being directed towards God, requires us to operate in the spiritual realm. But no matter how hard we try in our own strength, we cannot enter into this place of spiritual worship. John 3:6 tells us that “flesh gives birth to flesh, but Spirit gives birth to spirit”. We can have the best songs, the best leaders and the best intentions, but without the Spirit our worship can only be of the flesh. The Holy Spirit’s ministry is what allows us to worship in spirit as we are called by God to do.

#### *The Holy Spirit reveals the mysteries of God*

Truth is revealed to us by the Spirit. Paul writes to the Corinthians:

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Corinthians 2:10-12)

Many things in the spiritual realm, including the things of God, are beyond our capacity to fully understand. God infinitely transcends our brain’s limited ability to interpret and comprehend – despite the complexity and power of the brain he has given us! The Spirit dwelling within us is the Spirit of God, who has the deepest knowledge of God. The Holy Spirit is able to minister this understanding to our spirit and give us insight as God reveals himself to us in a myriad of ways. Without this ministry of the Spirit, Paul says that the things of the Spirit would be as foolishness to us because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). We are able to worship God out of a greater understanding of truth because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. As these truths are revealed to us, we are enabled and compelled to respond as physical beings to the spiritual realities we encountered by the power of the revelation of the Spirit.

#### *The Holy Spirit enables us to respond*

To respond to the revealed mysteries of God requires so much more than we can give from our human abilities. Jesus reminds us that the greatest commandment is to love God with an all-encompassing love. “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with

all your mind and with all your strength.” (Mark 12:30). We need the Spirit’s help to respond with this fullness.

As we become captivated by God’s revelation and respond to him in worship, it is to be expected that praise should overflow from our inner being. If it is reasonable that passion at a football match should result in emotion and movement, then how much more should the King of Kings evoke a response! We can *experience* the presence of the Holy Spirit and the jubilation that comes with fulfilling our created purpose – to relate with and worship God! Yet in the blessings of this experience we must not forget our commissioning to “go and make disciples”.

### *The Holy Spirit compels us to serve God’s mission*

If we are truly worshipping God, then our worship cannot stop at personal fulfilment. Indeed it is true that we become like what we worship, and if we are worshipping in spirit and in truth then we will grow into Christ-likeness. At the heart of Christ is the unfolding redemptive mission of God in the world. The Holy Spirit compels us to participate in this mission. It is the Holy Spirit who is at work in those who do not yet follow God. He is preparing them for the redeeming work of Christ and he equips us to be agents for God’s amazing grace. The Holy Spirit who is the leader of worship is also the leader of mission, for in both of these causes glory is brought to God. Our response must be to allow the Spirit to build us and take us wherever there is need.

### **To the glory of God**

We see now that the full circle of divine-human relationship is taking place as we worship. The Holy Spirit is a full and equal member of the Godhead, yet he chooses to submit himself to the purpose of bringing glory to the Father by testifying to the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Therefore we serve this purpose best by allowing the Holy Spirit to help us worship, that we may worship God in his fullness. Our worship is not directly *to* the Spirit but is most definitely *through* the Spirit. In this the Holy Spirit receives glory in the fulfilment of his purpose and as a co-equal participant within the Godhead.

When we allow the Spirit to lead us in worship, he bridges the gap between our flesh and spirit, taking our worship beyond our capabilities and into the spiritual realm. The Spirit gives us insight into the mysteries of God—truths which were once foreign to us—and allows us to respond with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. Through the Spirit bringing us to Christ-likeness, we are compelled to join in the mission of God and to serve him so that others may come to glorify God as Spirit-filled worshippers.

As he seeks to bring glory to the other members of the Trinity, it seems the Holy Spirit would not desire to be the subject of our worship, though he is without doubt worthy. We must always remember, however, that our worship of Jesus and the Father would fall meaningless if we did not have the Spirit as our one true worship leader.