

Introduction

In recent years, with the growth of the Pentecostal movement across the world, there has been an increased awareness concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in corporate gatherings. It is helpful for all of God's people to further investigate the purpose of the Holy Spirit as He is involved with our worship. But in order for this discussion to be productive, we must delve into the Scriptures and see how the Spirit and His work are described. We must be faithful to how the Spirit is presented in the Scriptures if we desire our worship to take the shape God intends for His people.

The Spirit as the Object of Worship

In the early stages of worship services that are observable in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is "referred to as the agent of divine power in and among believers, and as the mode of divine enablement and presence specifically in worship."¹ Although it is clear that the Spirit is the means by which worship is offered; the Spirit as the recipient of worship is less clear. Early Christian worship seemed to take on a binitarian shape, with the experiences involving all three members of the Trinity, but the objects of worship were only God and Christ.² Dan Block has noted that in all of the doxologies of the New Testament, the Spirit is never listed as the object of praise and worship.³

As the early church fathers began to understand and develop Biblical doctrine, careful statements were drawn in order to articulate scriptural truth and in many cases they arose to combat heresies that were being developed. These statements caused no small amount of discord. In 325, by way of dealing with discord over the nature of Christ

¹ Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 63.

² Ibid.

³ Daniel I. Block, "The Object of Worship" (classroom lecture notes, *27700 Biblical Theology of Worship*, Spring 2000, photocopy), 30-31.

in relation to God, the Nicene Creed was ratified. In this original statement, the only reference to the Holy Spirit was to say, “We believe in the Holy Spirit.”⁴ Although the primary concern of this document was to confront the Arian heresy of that time, they did not anticipate the division that would follow.

Many Arians came to admit the Son was equal with the Father, but the Spirit was to be considered the greatest of all the creatures and was less in substance than the members of the Godhead. In 362 at Alexandria, a synod convened to say, “The third Person is of the same substance and divinity as the other Two. The synod also required that ‘those who say that the Holy Spirit is a Creature and separate from the Essence of Christ’ must be anathematized.”⁵ Later, in Constantinople in 381, an addition to this section of the creed stated that the Holy Spirit “proceedeth from the Father and who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified.”⁶

In our own day, we see this Trinitarian pattern followed. In the Doxology that is found on page 253 in our own Baptist Hymnal, we are to sing praise to the “Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” Even more specific, in certain songs, the Spirit is given distinct praise during such songs as hymn number 249 in the Baptist Hymnal, “Glorify Thy Name”, where each member of the Trinity is separated and praised accordingly.

J. I. Packer indicates that in many New Testament passages, the Father, Son and the Spirit are seen working in a way that is clearly deliberate to produce a single work of grace.⁷ An example of this is found in Ephesians 1:3-13. The Father is mentioned as the

⁴ Stanley M. Burgess, *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1984), 94.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ J. I. Packer, *The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, vol. 1, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*, (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 1998), 222.

One who chose us before the foundation of the world; the Son purchased our redemption through His blood; and the Spirit works to seal us with the promise of eternal life after we believed. The purpose of redemption is accomplished through the unity of purposes found in each part of the Trinity.

In the Great Commission, we read in Matthew 28:19 that Christ tells His disciples to go and baptize converts into the name of the “Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” The use of the singular name they are baptized into suggests the unity of the persons of the Godhead.

John 14 teaches that Christ informs His disciples that when He leaves, the Father will send a helper in the person of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit was given to guide the disciples as they minister in Christ’s stead. The communion with the Spirit will be in and with these disciples forever as well for all those who trust in Christ. It is evident that the Spirit who is given is Divine in nature and on equal standing with the Father and Christ through this exchange. There are many more examples to indicate the Tri-personal nature of the Godhead, but these verses will suffice for the present discussion.

Acknowledging that the Spirit is part of the Trinity and on equal footing with God and Christ, we must ask the following question: Does the work of the Holy Spirit bring attention to Himself in our worship and how should we view the Holy Spirit in our times of Christian gatherings? Should we seek for the name of the Spirit to be glorified as the aforementioned song indicates? These questions must be answered by observing the role of the Spirit as presented in the Scriptures.

The Spirit’s Role in Worship

It has been noted that “the works and words of Jesus Christ and the apostles are enacted through and permeated with the Spirit... The Holy spirit is the hidden cohesive,

the very life-breath of the New Testament witness and church.”⁸ One cannot study the Scriptures for any length of time without noticing the importance given to the Spirit for God’s people. His role is central to understanding proper manifestations of Christian life and worship for today’s believer.

The first thing we must understand is that the Spirit has a primary role in making His people worshippers. John 6:63 plainly states that it is the Spirit who gives life. A.C. Barnard says it well, “The Spirit...opens blind eyes so that they see Christ and deaf ears to heed God’s own call; it softens hardened hearts so that they turn to faith in Christ; bends the recalcitrant will to surrender to Christ; renews all of life so that Christ can enter and live in it. He makes believers his own, incorporates them in him until the church becomes the body of Christ.”⁹

With relation to the Church, it is further noted, “the work of the Spirit is the effectual union of the believer with Christ which in Him creates the fellowship of believers, Christ’s Body, the Church.”¹⁰ The Spirit’s task is to build a body of believers bound together through His common bond. The existence of the church, both local and universal is attributed to the work of the Spirit.

Not only is the Spirit active in making worshippers, “the Holy Spirit shapes the Church and her life. He is the link between the Risen Christ and those who believe, drawing them together, empowering them for obedience and service.”¹¹ When we affirm this, we “stand within the tradition of the Christian faith. The Spirit insures that Christ is

⁸ A. C. Barnard, “The Holy Spirit and Liturgy/Public Worship,” in *The Spirit in Biblical Perspective*, ed. W. S. Vorster (Muckleneuk, South Africa: University of South Africa, 1980), 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 54

¹⁰ Louis H. Gunnemann, “The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of Worship,” *Theology and Life* 6 (Winter 1963), 336.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 333.

not a mere memory, but a living person whose love and power draw the response of love and obedience from those who hear and heed the Gospel.”¹²

These events are not all. Through the Spirit we are: baptized into Jesus (I Cor. 12:13), recognize Jesus as Lord (I Cor. 12:3), and are enabled through baptism and communion to participate in His death and resurrection (John 6:22-65). The Spirit’s work is constantly referred to as we begin life in the faith and grow in understanding of Christian truth.

It is also important that this Spirit gives gifts for the body, as they are agents of Christ in the world. I Corinthians 12:7 underscores the fact that the gifts given by the Spirit are for the common good of the church and not for personal exaltation. The outpouring of these gifts for the church underscores the importance of body life as it pertains to the role of the Spirit in our midst. His work is most complete when Christ’s Body lives in such a way to maximize the use of what the Spirit has given.

We must further understand the role of the Spirit as He focuses on the Word of God. The New Testament shows us that the Spirit is the author of Scripture and that in worship, the “Spirit does not guide or direct us apart from or away from Scripture, but always refers us to Scripture which he reveals to believers.”¹³ We must understand that the “experience of the Holy Spirit is always linked to Word...The witness of the Christian community of faith to the Christ, given in the Scriptures, is the occasion of the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ 1 Peter 1:21 gives a clear indication that the men who wrote the sacred scriptures did so as the Holy Spirit moved them.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Barnard, “The Holy Spirit and Liturgy/Public Worship,” 51.

¹⁴ Gunnemann, “The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of Worship,” 334.

The Word that is proclaimed is nothing more than imparting information on others when the work of the Spirit is absent. “The proclaimed Word as the occasion of the Holy Spirit results in the personal response of man to the personal presence of Christ.”¹⁵ The presence and power of the Spirit is vital to an understanding of the power of the Word.

Concerning communion with God through prayer, “the Spirit performs a task of enabling prayer to happen with His people. He kindles the desire to pray in the hearts of the faithful and of the church; he brings this desire to utterance and removes the fear of it; he puts thoughts in the mind and words on the lips; above all, he makes these feeble and deficient prayers acceptable to God.”¹⁶ Webster has aptly stated, “The theology of prayer indicated in such passages as Romans 8:15f., 26f. and Ephesians 2:18 suggests that in the prayer which the Spirit enables God ‘hears his own voice’. In prayer, ‘the Spirit’s voice turns out to be...the voice of God addressing himself from within man’.”¹⁷

Grudem indicates, “The Holy Spirit empowers prayer and makes it effective.”¹⁸ This voice of the Spirit intercedes in ways too deep for us to understand. Romans 8:26 indicates that the Spirit utters words and groanings of intercession that cannot even be described with words.

Lest we think the Spirit’s influence for today’s church is inconsequential, we can say “without the help of the Spirit, the corporate expression of worship, the proclamation of the Gospel, and the...fellowship of the Holy Communion, would be reduced to empty

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Barnard, “The Holy Spirit and Liturgy/Public Worship,” 55.

¹⁷ John Webster, “The Identity of the Holy Spirit: A Problem in Trinitarian Theology,” *Themelios* 9 (September 1983): 7.

¹⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 639.

repetitious acts of remembrance.”¹⁹ Without the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, our worship symbols will not have any distinct meaning apart from the faith He brings. Gunnemann states “Although celebration of the Lord’s Supper is surely always an act of remembrance done in obedience to the lord Himself, it is the faith of the Church that the ‘memory’ is filled with the Lord’s presence, this being the Spirit’s work.”²⁰

If our desire is to worship God authentically, we must understand our need for the Holy Spirit. It is through His promptings that we see the beauty of Christ. Peterson says, “Complete dependence on God and all that he offers to us in Christ must be expressed corporately if the true character of the Christian congregation is to be maintained. We do not simply meet to have fellowship with one another but to relate together to Christ as our Saviour and our Lord.”²¹ This cannot happen alone nor by our own power and does not focus on individuals only. In order for a true picture of corporate worship to take place, “When Christians met together to minister to one another there would be a corporate, spiritual, engagement with God, in the Holy Spirit, through his words.”²²

Seeking to underscore the futuristic aspect of the role of the Holy Spirit in worship, J.J. von Allmen says, “Reading and preaching the Word of God are degraded and distorted if we cease to understand them as eschatological events, through which the Holy Spirit is working.”²³ By this we need to understand the immediate importance of the Word and Spirit as it relates to the tension that we have already been given the Spirit, but

¹⁹ Gunnemann, “The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of Worship,” 333-334.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 335.

²¹ David Peterson, “Further Reflections on Worship in the New Testament,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 44 (May-August 1985): 39.

²² *Ibid.*, 37.

²³ J. J. Von Allmen, “Worship and the Holy Spirit,” *Studia Liturgia* 2 (June 1963): 128.

we do not yet fully realize the final consummation of Spirit worship that we will experience in the glories of heaven.

Conclusion

Concerning the question of whether we should seek to glorify the Spirit, A.C. Barnard echoes my sentiment and says that the Holy Spirit “does not utter himself but utters the Word. He does not incarnate himself but incarnates the Son. He does not show his own face, but show us the Father in the face of the Son...Christ is not known and believed in the ground of human testimony but only on the ground of testimony that comes from God himself. He is not only the Spirit who comes forth from God and returns to God, but the Spirit sent to us by Christ and who directs us back to Christ, the Spirit of Testimony and the Spirit of Truth.”²⁴

We must clearly note that the work of the Spirit does not spotlight Himself, but instead focuses on Jesus. The New Testament shows that in public worship the work of the Spirit does not consist in something other than what Christ has done. We should have our emphasis wholly on Jesus as the only name whereby we can be saved. Staying true to Scripture, we must see that the Spirit does not build his own kingdom, but seeks God’s kingdom through Christ, and will bring it to consummation in the end of time. We understand the Spirit’s work when we see that His role is to continue the work which God began in Christ, and that His validity and effectiveness comes from Christ’s once-for-all accomplishment through His death and resurrection.

When the role of the Spirit is taken seriously, there will be an increased focus of the following aspects of worship. First, the Spirit always points to the Word and we must remember that Jesus Christ is God’s Word made flesh. Therefore, Spirit-led worship will

²⁴ Barnard, “The Holy Spirit and Liturgy/Public Worship,” 54.

point to Christ. Second, the Spirit's work underscores the primacy of the Scriptures in Christian worship. Lastly, the Spirit's presence necessitates the priority of the role of Biblical preaching in the Church.

It will transform our worship when we view preaching, when centered in the Word, is the opportunity for the Spirit's work of making Christ's presence real.²⁵ Worship that is driven in the power of the Spirit will be rooted in Jesus Christ and known through the Scriptures, of which the Spirit is the author.²⁶

Should we seek to glorify the Spirit? It must be understood that this is not what He would desire from us and is not His goal. The Work of the Spirit always points to Christ and His Word. John 16:14 makes it clear that the Spirit has been given and exists to glorify Christ. Although the Spirit is part of the Trinity and shares Divinity with the Father, His role is such that He does not demand attention or seek to be the object of worship.

How then, does this affect our prayer life? According to scriptural patterns, we would be careful not to pray to the Spirit, but rather ask God to send His Spirit to help us focus on Christ. We ask for God's presence to be in our midst through the Spirit, but should be cautious not to step out of bounds of the Spirit's clearly defined role and purpose.

Although His divinity elevates the Spirit to a place that would demand worship from God's people, the manner of His work necessitates that worship not be focused on Himself. According to Scripture, He is the agent and not the object. We must conclude,

²⁵ Gunnemann, "The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of Worship," 338.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 339.

that His function within the Deity suggests that when He has done His job, all attention will be given to Christ and His work.

Bibliography

- Allmen, J. J. von. "Worship and the Holy Spirit." *Studia Liturgia* 2 (June 1963): 124-135.
- Barnard, A. C. "The Holy Spirit and Liturgy/Public Worship," in *The Spirit in Biblical Perspective*. Muckleneuk, South Africa: University of South Africa, 1980. 48-63.
- Block, Daniel I. "The Object of Worship" classroom lecture notes. *27700 Biblical Theology of Worship*, Spring 2000, photocopy. 23-34.
- Burgess, Stanley M. *The Holy Spirit: Ancient Christian Traditions*. Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1984.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Gunnemann, Louis H. "The Holy Spirit and the Renewal of Worship," *Theology and Life* 6 (Winter 1963): 331-341.
- Hurtado, Larry W. *At the Origins of Christian Worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Packer, J. I. *The Collected Shorter Writings of J. I. Packer*, vol. 1, *Celebrating the Saving Work of God*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Publishing, 1998.
- Peterson, David. "Further Reflections on Worship in the New Testament." *The Reformed Theological Review* 44 (May-August 1985): 34-41.
- Webster, John. "The Identity of the Holy Spirit: A Problem in Trinitarian Theology." *Themelios* 9 (September 1983): 4-7.