

The Person and Work of the Holy Spirit in Worship

There are two common misunderstandings about worship. The first is that this term generally refers to a time during a church service when people sing and praise God. The second is a criticism that usually comes from those outside the church who claim that God's need for worship must be a sign of his insecurity. Evidence for this second misunderstanding can be seen in a sarcastic Monty Python skit in which this responsive prayer is recited during a chapel service at an Anglican Boys' School:

“Chaplain: Let us praise God. O Lord... Congregation: O Lord...

Chaplain: ...Ooh, you are so big... Congregation: ...Ooh, you are so big...

Chaplain: ...So absolutely huge... Congregation: ... So absolutely huge...

Chaplain: Gosh, we're all really impressed down here, I can tell You...”

To deal with these misunderstandings we must answer two fundamental questions about worship: 1. What is worship¹? 2. Why do we worship God? Defining worship is the more straightforward of the two answers. Although there are numerous Biblical words connected to worship, most of them boil down to acts of service and praise done in response to *who God is* and *what God has done*. Obviously this excludes the Monty Python prayer from being an act of true worship. But perhaps this mock-prayer should challenge some of our own half-hearted, semi-conscious rote religious recitals.

In order to explore the question of why we worship, consider the questions and Bible passages below.

1. Read Ephesians 1:15 – 17. In this Spirit-inspired prayer, Paul asks God to give the Ephesians the Spirit² of wisdom and revelation. Why are the spiritual gifts of revelation and understanding necessary for true worship?
2. One of the fundamental ways that God makes himself known to us is through his written word (the Bible). Read 2 Timothy 3:16³ and 2 Peter 1:19 – 21. What do these verses teach us about the essential connection between God's word the work of the Holy Spirit in us?
3. Read Romans 8:13 – 17. Explain how the work of the Holy Spirit enables us to call God 'Our Father'?
4. Read Romans 8:26 – 27. Explain how the Holy Spirit assists us in prayer.
5. Read and reflect on Ephesians 1:18 – 23. How will a greater understanding of these blessings and revelations make worship a more natural and spontaneous response to who God is and what he has done?

¹ The word 'worship' comes from the old English word 'worthship' (i.e. being worthy of honour).

² Because the definite article 'the' doesn't appear before the word, 'Spirit' it might also be translated 'spirit'. But the wider context indicates that this 'spirit' is connected to the Holy Spirit mentioned in the surrounding verses and elsewhere in Ephesians (E.g. 1:13 - 14 & 3:4 – 5).

³ Remember that the Biblical term for 'the breath of God' and 'the Spirit' is the same.