

SPIRIT-FILLED WORSHIP

Through its Spirit-filled worship, the Pentecostal Movement has radically transformed Christianity in the last 100 years. Historian Walter Hollenweger has stated that Pentecostalism's most important contribution to the larger Christian tradition has been in the practice of worship.¹ Explaining the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism, Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori write, "The engine of Pentecostalism is its worship,"² and at the center of Pentecostal worship is the Holy Spirit. The Church of God emphasizes the value and importance of worship.³ This brief study points out a number of biblical emphases regarding Spirit-filled worship. Although it does not answer every question about worship, it is a starting point for further study.

I. WHAT IS WORSHIP?

Before going any further, it may be helpful to sharpen our study by defining the word "worship." Some people think that worship consists only in singing, as in the phrase "praise and worship." While it is true that singing can be an expression of worship, worship is much more than just singing. Alfred P. Gibbs (*Worship: The Christian's Highest Occupation*) offers a definition that emphasizes the spiritual attitude of the worshiper. He writes, "Worship is the occupation of the heart, not with its needs, or even with its blessings, but with God Himself." Gibbs' definition emphasizes two important characteristics of worship: (1) Worship must come from the heart. (2) Worship must be focused upon God, not upon ourselves. While this is helpful, our source of ultimate authority is the Scripture. Therefore, at this point we will examine the biblical terminology used to define worship.

¹ Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals: The Charismatic Movement in the Churches* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Pub. House, 1st U.S. edn, 1972), p. 466. Cf. Harvey G. Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 139-57.

² Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 23.

³ See Church of God, *Minutes of the International General Assembly* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2016), p. 36.

The Bible uses three primary terms that are translated “worship.” The first term is “to serve,” which signifies a lifestyle of commitment and allegiance. The second term is “to fear,” which refers to the attitude of reverence. The third term is “to worship,” which fundamentally means the act of bowing down to pay homage.

A. Serve: A Lifestyle of Worship

The Bible speaks of worship as “serving” God. When the LORD calls Israel to meet with Him on Mount Sinai, He says to them, “you shall **serve** God on this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). To serve God means to devote oneself fully to God. Serving God is a commitment to total allegiance, a lifestyle of dedication to God and to God alone. The most important New Testament text regarding worship as a lifestyle is probably Paul’s admonition to the Romans. He writes, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable **service**” (Romans 12:1). The apostle Paul declares that our worship to God must include our whole selves, which includes our bodies. To serve God means to give honor and glory to God through a daily lifestyle of obedience and behavior that reflects a committed relationship.

B. Fear: An Attitude of Worship

The word “fear” is another term that can mean “worship.” Although it can mean “to be terrified or scared,” fear can also mean “to reverence and honor.” It is this idea of honor and reverence that makes the fear of the LORD suitable as an attitude of worship. After the Israelites had dedicated themselves to serve the LORD, Joshua added the following instructions: “Now therefore, **fear** the LORD, serve Him in sincerity and in truth” (Joshua 24:14). To fear God is to have reverence and awe for His power and authority as God. The fear of God is an inner disposition or attitude of deep respect for God. Therefore, it represents the emotional foundation of worship.

C. Bowing Down: Actions of Worship

The third biblical term that we will consider is “to worship,” which fundamentally means the act of bowing down to pay homage. In biblical times, the Greek and Hebrew words meaning “to bow or kneel down” are expanded to include any act of worship or any ritual action that pays homage to God and that expresses veneration to God. These actions include feasts, sacrifices, prayers, songs, art, music, or dance. They can be formal liturgical acts, ceremonies in private, worship acts within the family, or any expression of worship in the Church. The word “worship” is used for the first time in the story of Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. The LORD tests Abraham

and commands him to sacrifice Isaac his only son. When Abraham's party reaches the mountain where the sacrifice is to take place, we read the following : "And Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and **worship**, and we will come back to you'" (Genesis 22:5).

Whether it be the giving of Abraham's son, the giving of a lamb, the giving of money, or the giving of our time, worship involves giving to God something that is valuable to us.

D. A Biblical Definition of Worship

Our study of biblical terminology leads to the conclusion that worship is expressed in three interrelated concepts: (1) Worship is a way of life, a commitment to God; (2) Worship is an inner disposition of love, fear, and reverence; and (3) Worship is expressed through specific acts that show our gratitude to God and our esteem for Him. All three of these elements make up the total worship of the Christian. Spirit-filled worship must involve a worshipful lifestyle, a worshipful heart, and worshipful actions. Therefore, I would define true worship in the following way:

True worship is giving God the honor and esteem that is due to him as God. Worship is expressed through the believer's commitment, disposition, and actions.

II. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF SPIRIT-FILLED WORSHIP

A. Worship in Spirit and Truth

The most important lesson regarding worship is that **true worship is empowered by the Holy Spirit**. Without the Holy Spirit, true worship is impossible to attain. True worship is initiated by the Holy Spirit, guided by the Holy Spirit, and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The key New Testament text for understanding the value of the Holy Spirit in worship is John 4:18-26, where we read about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well. Jesus was traveling north from Judea to Galilee, and he paused at Jacob's Well, where he met a Samaritan woman who had come to draw water.

The woman was quite surprised when Jesus asked her for a drink of water, because the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans. Perceiving that Jesus was a prophet, the woman said to Him,

"Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is,

when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must **worship in spirit and truth**” (John 4:18-25).

The conversation about worship teaches us several valuable lessons. First, regarding the place of worship, Jesus points out that the day is coming when worshipers will gather anywhere and everywhere to worship God. The New Covenant and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will make worship a universal experience. Location will no longer be important, because God will dwell in the hearts of His people and in the midst of the Church, wherever it is located.

Second, regarding the object of worship, Jesus declares that the Samaritans did not know who they worshiped. The Samaritans had only a partial faith, because they accepted only the Old Testament books of Genesis through Deuteronomy as Scripture. By excluding most of the Old Testament, they had failed to adopt much of the biblical faith. The Samaritans represent anyone who believes only part of the Bible, but they do not accept the whole Bible. That kind of faith is incomplete and imperfect.

According to Jesus, the object of true worship is “the Father.” Christians worship Jehovah, the God of the Bible. There is no other God (Isaiah 45:21). We worship Jehovah because he is creator of all things, He is our only Savior, and He is our covenant God. To worship “in truth” means that we do not worship other gods; we do not worship created things; we do not worship angels; we do not worship demons; and we do not worship other humans. When we say that we worship only Jehovah, we are including the entire Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The first chapter of John’s Gospel reveals that Jesus is God (John 1:1). All things were created by the Father through Jesus (John 1:3). To worship “in truth” means that we worship Jesus as our Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and soon coming King.

It is important for pastors and worship leaders to remember that worship not only inspires, but it also teaches. Most Christians learn their theology in the Sunday worship services. Our beliefs about God should be expressed in our worship. We learn about God through the songs, the prayers, the testimonies, and the sermons. Our worship embodies our theology, celebrates our theology, and communicates our theology. Therefore, we must conduct our worship services so that they teach sound doctrine. When evaluating our worship, we should ask what kind of theology our worship conveys.

Third, regarding the nature of worship, Jesus taught that “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” In John’s Gospel, Jesus is the truth. He is “full of grace and truth” (John

1:15, 17). Jesus speaks the truth and testifies to the truth (John 8:40, 45, 46; 18:37). In fact, Jesus Christ **is the truth**. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Therefore, those who worship in truth are worshipping the Father in the Spirit and in the Truth (Jesus). Jesus’ statement hints at the fact that true worship involves the entire Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To worship God in spirit and truth is necessary because God is spirit. Earlier in the Gospel of John, we learned that to become children of God we must be “born of the Spirit” (John 3:5-6). Now we discover that the Spirit is necessary not only for the new birth but also for true worship. We are born by the Spirit, and we also worship in the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the power of worship that enables us to connect with God. The apostle Paul recognizes the importance of the Spirit in worship. He writes, “For we are the circumcision, who **worship God in the Spirit**, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). Without the Holy Spirit, we do not have the ability to worship God acceptably or freely. The human flesh is weak and incapable of worship. Only “in the Spirit” can we truly worship God.

According to Paul, being filled with the Spirit leads naturally to joyful worship. Worship in the Spirit includes “singing” and “giving thanks.” Paul writes,

And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the **Spirit**, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the LORD, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our LORD Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:18-20).

We tend to separate the two terms—“spirit” and “truth”—but Jesus makes the point that genuine worship requires a merging of both. We know that Jesus is the truth, but the Spirit is also the truth. The Spirit and the truth are intimately connected. Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus will teach his disciples that the Holy Spirit is the “Spirit of truth.” Jesus says, “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive” (John 14:16-17; 15:26). Furthermore, as the Spirit of truth, the Spirit will guide us into the truth and teach us all things: “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things” (John 14:26).

B. Rejoicing in the Spirit and Praying in the Spirit

To worship God in the Spirit includes several related elements. In the New Testament, Spirit inspired worship is characterized by rejoicing in the Spirit and praying in the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit produces joy. The apostle Paul tells us that joy is a fruit of the Spirit. He states, “But the fruit of the **Spirit** is love, **joy**, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23). In fact, joy is so important that it is a characteristic of the Kingdom: “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and **joy in the Holy Spirit**” (Romans 14:17).

Prayer is an act of worship, and every worship service includes prayer. When we pray, we must have the Spirit’s help in order to make our prayers honest and effective. Paul explains: “Likewise the **Spirit** also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should **pray** for as we ought, but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Romans 8:26). We may not know what we really need or how to ask in the proper manner, but the Holy Spirit directs, empowers, and energizes our prayers. Both Paul and Jude emphasize the necessity of praying in the Spirit. Paul encourages the Church to be “praying always with all prayer and supplication **in the Spirit**” (Ephesians 6:18). Jude adds that when believers pray “in the Spirit” they are building their faith: “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, **praying in the Holy Spirit**” (Jude 1:20). Worship in the Spirit includes praying in the Spirit.

C. The Gifts of the Spirit

Worship in the Spirit includes the gifts of the Spirit. If it is necessary that we worship “in spirit and in truth,” then all aspects of the Spirit’s work must be considered. One way that the Spirit manifests Himself in our worship is through the gifts of the Spirit. In most cases, the term “spiritual gifts” is a translation of the Greek word *charismata*, which is derived from the root word *charis*, meaning **grace**. Therefore, the spiritual gifts might more accurately be called **grace gifts**. Spiritual gifts are part of salvation—they are God’s grace flowing through us. As gifts of God’s grace, the spiritual gifts are not hidden talents; they are supernatural endowments from God. The gifts are part of our participation in the work of God, the ministry of God’s grace, the church, and salvation. The spiritual gifts are ministry through which we give to one another (see 1 Peter 4:10-11; Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:7-13; and 1 Corinthians 12-14).

D. Freedom in the Spirit

The Spirit gives freedom in worship. Worship in the Spirit allows for the freedom and the movement of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul states, “Now the LORD is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the LORD is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17). Worship in the Spirit is motivated

and moved by the Holy Spirit, and it is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Worship in the Spirit gives liberty in praise, liberty in prayer, and liberty to rejoice. In the Spirit, we have liberty to “shout for joy and be glad” (Psalm 35:27).

Worship in the Spirit produces liberty for every kind of spiritual manifestation. However, liberty always has a purpose and a goal. The Spirit gives liberty so that the Church may minister to one another and reach out to unbelievers. Therefore, the liberty of the Spirit has certain boundaries. Freedom does not stand in opposition to order and decorum. Churches have their own preferences and habits regarding the order of service, but they do practice a certain order, and that order ensures that liberty does not degenerate into chaos. The members of the body must submit to the Head, which is Christ; and Christ has put into place the pastors and leaders who oversee the worship.

CONCLUSION

Worship is at the heart of Pentecostal identity. If Pentecostalism is to continue as a vibrant movement of the Holy Spirit, it must transmit the heart of the movement to the next generation. The heart of the movement is more than statements of doctrine; because Pentecostalism is more than just a list of certain beliefs. Our beliefs and practices combine to form a distinct spirituality. For example, the theological heart of Pentecostalism is the Fivefold Gospel—Jesus is Savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and soon-coming king. However, the Fivefold Gospel is more than a list of beliefs; it is a way of being in the world; it is a spirituality. Spirituality, however, is not a static attainment. It must be nurtured, developed, instilled, and made steadfast by means of spiritual practices. For Pentecostalism, these spiritual practices include uninhibited worship, tarrying in prayer, seasons of fasting, caring for one another, bearing witness to the world, self-sacrifice, preaching the whole Gospel, healing the sick, water baptism, the Lord’s Supper, footwashing, immersion in God’s Word, and seeking for the Spirit’s gifts. All of these are done with a sense of urgency and longing in light of the soon return of Jesus. Worship is at the center of our spirituality and our experience of God, and the manner in which we worship affects our way of life, our desires, our goals, and our future.

BOOKS FOR FURTHER STUDY

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