

How do we worship God the Holy Spirit?

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
The Lord, and giver of life,
Who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified,
He has spoken through the Prophets,*

The Creed says we worship the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son.

But it doesn't seem that we do, does it – or at least, not in the same way we publicly worship the Father and the Son.

When did you last hear a prayer addressed to the Spirit, or a hymn sung praising the Spirit, or when have you been blessed in the Spirit's name alone?

And even if you have heard such things it is quite uncommon.

And in this

In having our public prayers and hymns addressed to the Father and the Son but not to the Spirit, we are just following the practice and example of the New Testament

When we read the New Testament it is apparent that believers seem to relate to the Spirit differently to the way they relate to the Father and the Son

There is no prayer to the Spirit in the New Testament.

Prayer is typically made to the Father or to God, meaning the Father, as you would expect where the Lord Jesus taught His followers to pray "Our Father"

So in Acts 4, for example, the apostles pray to the Sovereign Lord, meaning the Father

Acts 4:²⁴ And when they heard it, they lifted their voices together to God and said, "Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and everything in them, ²⁵ who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,

*"Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples plot in vain?*

*²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—*

²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,

Or Paul in Ephesians 3 writes he bows his knee in prayer to the Father

Ephesians 3:¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father,

There are some prayers addressed to the Lord Jesus – such as Stephen's as he is dying, or Paul seeking relief from his thorn in the flesh

Acts 7:⁵⁹ And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

2 Cor. 12:⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.⁹ But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

[cf. 2 Thess. 2:16-17]

But no prayers to the Spirit

In the greetings at the beginning of the New Testament letters – the Father and Son are often joined

1 Cor. 1:³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the Spirit is not

Thanks is given to God the Father and the Lord Jesus can be associated with that, but the Spirit is not in those thanksgivings.

Col. 1:³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

1 Thess. 1:² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

In the blessings at the end of the letters only once is the Spirit included 2 Cor. 13:14, but typically that final blessing speaks of the grace of Christ only [1 Cor. 16:23, Eph. 6:18, Gal. 6:18, Phil. 4:23]

Or speaks of God [Heb. 13:20],

Jude²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Or of the Father and the Son

Eph. 6:⁷ To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[cf. Romans 16:27]

And In Revelation hymns are sung to God and to the Lamb, but not to the Spirit

[Rev. 5:9, 12 – to the Lamb, to God 4:11, 11:17, 15:3, 19:1-8, to God and the Lamb 5:13]

It would seem in the New Testament that the Spirit is not worshipped in the same way as the Father and the Son

Does that mean we need to develop our worship beyond that of the New Testament if we are to be true to the confession?

Or does this difference mean the Spirit is not really God, or not God in the same sense as the Father and the Son – for only God is to be worshipped and the absence of worship suggests the Spirit is less than God, perhaps an exalted creature?

That can be an impression that is only increased when we see how often the activity of the Spirit is spoken of using physical metaphors - the Spirit is poured out [Acts 2:17], the Spirit fills [Acts 2:4, 4:8, 31; Eph. 5:18], we can be baptised in or with the Spirit [Mark 1:8]

Those sound impersonal, as if the Spirit is thing, a kind of spiritual substance

So before we answer the question how we worship the Holy Spirit lets first confirm that the Spirit is to be worshipped by looking at the evidence that the Holy Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity.

Then we will think about how the Spirit is to be worshipped, both in public prayer and praise, but also, and more importantly, in the worship of the whole of our lives

So that we are confident we are honouring God the Spirit when we conform our practice to that of the New Testament,

And are being directed by the Spirit in our response to the One God, Father, Son and Spirit, saving us through the Son who gives the Spirit to His people

That is, that we are truly living as those in whom the Spirit of the Son dwells

The Spirit deserves to be worshipped with the Father and the Son, because He is God, the third person of the Trinity

The Spirit is God

The very names – Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit – suggest that the Spirit is God

God's Spirit will not be less than God; while distinct, not all the God there is, the Spirit of God must always on the Creator side of the creator creature divide

And this is clear in a number of places in the New Testament

Paul says in

1 Corinthians 2:¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God who has intimate knowledge of God– cannot be less than God 1 Cor. 2:10-11. NO creature can have such knowledge

The Spirit can be blasphemed –

Mark 3:²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin”–

– This was the danger the Pharisees were in, for they were attributing the work of God, the powerful work of the Spirit in driving our demons , to the evil one.

Acts 5:3-4 – to lie to the Spirit is to lie to God

Acts 5:³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”

And we see in Matthew 28:19 – the One name of God, the saving revelation of God, is Father, Son and Spirit

Matthew 28:¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

The Spirit is God

And the Spirit is the third person of the Trinity

Let's remember what we mean by person in speaking of the three persons of the Trinity.

It is not the same as personality, which in us can change over time.

And it is not the modern sense of a person as a separate individual, separate individual consciousness.

Person has more of a legal sense, one who has agency and relationship [Bray, p. 126], and so is responsible and known in action and relating.

And that is what we see – The Spirit is active in relationship with believers, and the Spirit is active in relationship within God, with the Father and the Son, while never being separate from them.

Let us look at both in turn

In relation to us we see the Spirit is a willing, speaking, acting agent,

In Acts it is the Spirit who directs the spread of the gospel

The Spirit speaks

Acts 8:²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."

The spirit said to Philip, and the Spirit speaks to Peter

10:¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Behold, three men are looking for you."

The Spirit directs the work of spreading the gospel, initiating Paul's missionary journeys

Acts 13:² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."³ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

And the Spirit continues to guide the apostle's movements, forbidding Paul to speak the word in Asia in preparation for his call to Europe, to Macedonia

Acts 16:⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia.⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them.

And the Spirit can be grieved, Eph. 4:30, that is, wronged in relationship

Ephesians 4:³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

And our Lord talks of the Spirit as the other comforter or helper, who will continue to do in the lives of the disciples what He has done while on earth

John 14:¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

As the other helper— John 14:26

John 14:²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

The Spirit teaches, as Jesus taught [John 6:59, 7:14]

John 15: 26 "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

John 15:26 The Spirit bears witness, as Jesus bore witness to what He has seen and heard [John 3:11, 32-33]

The Spirit will glorify Jesus, as Jesus glorifies the Father [John 16:12-15; John 17:1; not speak of Himself 17:8]

John 16: 13 "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. 14 He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. 15 All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

And will protect and guide Jesus' disciples as the Lord Jesus did on earth

Jesus' work with the disciples was a personal work, and the Spirit's, the other helpers is in turn a personal work in the lives of the disciples

A thing or force cannot take the place of a person, and fulfill that role

The Spirit is God, and is a person

Some people raise objections to speaking of the Holy Spirit as a person

Some say the Greek word Pneuma is neuter, not male or female, and so the Spirit must be a force, some impersonal power. But the Hebrew word for Spirit ruach feminine, and they are confusing grammatical gender with reality [tekna – children are not things because the word in Greek for children is neuter, nor are ships persons because in English they are regularly referred to as she]; Besides, breaking rules of grammatical concord the Spirit is referred to by the Masculine pronoun in John 16:13, 14 - ekeinos

Others look at the way the activity of the Spirit is often spoken about with physical metaphors

, but those metaphors say nothing about whether the Spirit is a person, just as describing God as a rock does not suggest He is impersonal. Those metaphors are a way of talking to convey something of the experience and effect of the Spirit's coming

like water - Spirit is life giving, or like the waters of baptism, cleansing and purifying

Like a flood, or a mighty wind, The Spirit can be powerful and overwhelming, And also, like the wind filling the sails of a sailing boat, empowering

And at the same time, Uncontrolled by us

And the Spirit is an eternal person, in relationship with the Father and the Son eternally within God

The Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son, not a form of the Father or the Son, but sent by the Father 14:26, and the Son 15:26 to be the other counsellor

And the Spirit is in an other-person centred relationship of love with the Father and the Son

He glorifies the Son 16:14, as the Father also glorifies the Son in love

And He does the Father's will in coming and speaking the Father's word through the prophets, glorifying the Father just as the Son glorifies the Father in willing obedience

And is Himself, in being sent by the Father and the Son the bond of mutual love of the Father and Son for each other

And glorified in the glory of their love

The way the creed speaks of those relationships, taking its lead from the revelation of the Spirit in the work of the Son in His dealings with us, is in terms of the Spirit Proceeding from the Father and the Son.

John 15:²⁶ "But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me.

But whereas that sending of the Spirit to us has a beginning in time when the Lord Jesus ascends to the Father

This is a continuous proceeding, an eternal proceeding within the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit, which distinguishes the Spirit from the Father and Son in the one God.

And affirms what Scripture affirms, that the Spirit of God is always the Spirit of the Son [Romans 8:9, Galatians 4:6, Romans 8:14-15]– and so the relationship He establishes and includes us in with the Father and the Son is an always relationship

The Spirit is eternally a person, and eternally God

[As an historical aside, that talk of the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son has been a cause of continuing difficulty and division between the Eastern and Western churches

The original Creed spoke of the Spirit proceeding from the Father

The phrase and the Son was introduced in a council of bishops in Toledo in Spain in 589

There goal was to prevent the Arians from suggesting the Son was somehow a lesser god than the Father, to affirm that the Son shared fully with the Father in the nature of God

But they did it without any consultation with the churches of the East, who had a different emphasis in the way the spoke of the relationships within the one God

[If you want to read about it – Gerald Bray, God Has Spoken. A History of Christian Theology. Chapter 16, pp. 637-719]

But that is why, even if some things in the Creed like 'for us men', or 'catholic' as a description of the church, may irritate us, we don't make unilateral changes to a creed that is the possession of all believers.]

And as the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son the Spirit is one with the Father and the Son in the work of our salvation, whose coming gives both the content of that salvation – adoption as God's sons and daughters as we are spiritually united with Christ by faith, and guarantees the fulness of that salvation

The Scriptures repeatedly unite Father, Son and Spirit in our salvation. For example, Peter speaks of believers chosen

1 Peter 1:² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

In closing 2 Corinthians Paul writes

2 Cor. 13:¹⁴ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Grace, love and fellowship are all aspects of the believer's relationship with the One God who saves them

1 Corinthians 12:⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord;⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone.

Spirit, the Lord Jesus, and God the Father, are all at work in sustaining and providing for God's church

[cf. Eph. 1:3-14, Acts 2:33, 38-39, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14]

The Spirit deserves to be worshipped with the Father and the Son, because He is God, the third person of the Trinity, the One God who saves us

And, receiving the Spirit, our experience in believing the gospel is trinitarian from the beginning – saved by God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, and that experience is then reflected in our worship of God the Spirit

How?

As the Creed confesses and Scripture confirms the Spirit is God, the third person of the Trinity, how do we worship the Spirit?

And is following the pattern of the New Testament, with public prayer and praise directed to God, to the Father, to the Son, somehow inadequate?

How do we worship the Spirit?

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In John 4 Jesus says John 4:22-24

John 4: ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

We cannot worship without the Spirit, just as we cannot worship without the truth – and Jesus brings both

Only with the new heart the Spirit brings, the Spirit who is given by the Son to His people, can we love the Father and do His will, and only by embracing the revelation of the truth of God revealed by the Son who speaks the Father's words and does the Father's work can we honour the Father

God is only worshipped as He wills to be worshipped where Father, Son and Spirit are known and believed. You cannot worship one without the others.

As Basil said in the fourth century "The Holy Spirit cannot be divided from the Father and the Son in worship. If you remain outside the Spirit, you cannot worship at all, and if you are in Him you cannot separate Him from God." Basil

The Holy Spirit cannot be separated from our worship of God, as if when we are worshipping the Father and the Son we are not worshipping the Spirit also. He is, and He must be, present for any worship, present as the Spirit of God who is God, sharing in the worship of God

And this is the answer to how the Spirit is worshipped

The Spirit is worshipped with the Father and the Son – and this is what the Creed affirms when it says

With the Father and the Son he [the Holy Spirit] is worshipped and glorified,

Together with, not alongside or in addition to, nor apart from

You cannot worship God without worshipping the Spirit – can't worship Father or Son without worshipping the Spirit of God, and to worship One is to worship all three

That such worship is expressed in terms of the worship of God, or of the Father or the Son – as we see in the New Testament

Reflects the nature of the relationship of the Spirit to the Son and the Son to the Father, the reality of their love

The Spirit our Lord said in John 16:14 'will glorify me, because He will take from what is mine and declare it to you.'

John 16: ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

This work of the Spirit J I Packer has called his floodlight ministry. He describes seeing a church building he was about to speak in floodlit to bring out all its architectural details and splendour, and he says “When flood-lighting is well done, the floodlights are so placed that you do not see them; you are not in fact supposed to see where the light is coming from; what you are meant to see is just the building on which the floodlights are trained. The intended effect is to make it visible when otherwise it would not be seen for the darkness, and to maximise its dignity by throwing all its details into relief so that you see it properly.” This, he says, perfectly illustrates the Spirit’s role, to be the hidden floodlight shining on the Saviour.

And so he says the Spirit’s message is never “look at me; listen to me; come to me, get to know me,” but always “look at Him, and see His glory; listen to Him, and hear His word; go to him, and have life; get to know Him, and taste his gift of joy and life.”

The Spirit in worship continues to direct us to the Saviour, and Scripture says it is through the Saviour that in turn we offer our sacrifice of praise to God [Heb. 13:15]

So just as in our experience we are saved by God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, and we come to the Father through the Son in the Spirit, and the Christian life is sharing through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s relationship with the Father

So in worship, our praise and prayer is directed to the Father through the Son in the Spirit, the kind of praise and prayer you see in the New Testament, the praise and prayer that honours our saving God, Father, Son and Spirit by reflecting the order revealed in the salvation the one God has achieved.

That worship doesn’t express a deficiency in our understanding of the Spirit, but a grasp of the Spirit’s purpose in being given by the Father to the Son to be poured out by the Son on all who believe in Him

But in a sense there is a better question for the believer to ask in relation to the presence of the Spirit in our lives – and that is, how do we honour the presence of the Spirit, live as those who know that they have been given the Spirit by Christ, that the Spirit of God dwells in them [1 Cor. 6:19].

How is worship of the Spirit caught up in the worship of our whole lives as daughters and sons of God, worship that the Spirit makes it possible for us to offer to God in offering ourselves to Him as living sacrifices [Romans 12:1-2]?

The better question – How do we honour the Spirit in our lives

We have spoken a little of this already, when we spoke of the Spirit’s work of giving us new hearts that delight to do God’s will, and the New Testament’s call to give ourselves to the life of the Spirit within us, to march to the beat of the Spirit’s drum as the Spirit transforms our characters into the likeness of the Son’s [Galatians 5:16-25, Romans 8:1-17, Romans 7:6], to set our minds on the things of the Spirit

And we will speak next week of honouring the Spirit by receiving the Spirit inspired word as the Word of God and rejecting other spirits [1 John 4:1-6]

What I want to focus on now is honouring the Spirit by glorifying Christ in our lives, for this is the chief work of the Spirit in and through the Spirit given gospel

The Spirit will glorify me, said our Lord, by His coming and His equipping the apostles in their witness

And so we honour the Spirit in us by conforming our lives to the Spirit’s purpose of glorifying Christ

And I want to highlight three aspects of glorifying Christ

Firstly and above all by confessing the truth of the Spirit given gospel –

That is more than saying that Christ died for our sin and rose again

The Spirit in His coming convicts of sin, and righteousness and judgement

John 16: ⁸And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: ⁹concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; ¹¹concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.

To confess the truth of the gospel is first to Accept the gospel's verdict on our lives

That we v. 9 are sinners, rebels, people who have ignored our Creator, failed to trust Him and given Him thanks, rejected Him in disobeying Him

And then v. 10 we Accept the verdict of God on the life of Jesus given in the gospel. God has raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him over all, so we believe all He has said, trust Him as the one with all authority, the one who can forgive us

And we are confident v. 11 of His victory, and live confident of it

The One who has triumphed, has judged and condemned the devil, the great rebel against God's rule – once and for all – in His death on the cross, exposed him as a liar, and powerless in the face of the life, love and truth of God

And having confessed the truth of the Spirit borne gospel, we then, seeking Christ's glory are diligent in our own lives and communities to maintain the truth of the gospel through which the Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus

And we seek to share the gospel that glorifies Christ, share with confidence in the Spirit whose goal is the glory of Christ– Matthew 10:19-20

Matthew 10: ¹⁹When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour. ²⁰For it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Sometimes we can be hesitant to speak of Jesus because we are afraid we will be overwhelmed by criticism or caught out lacking answers to people's questions

The Spirit wants Jesus known and honoured as the Saviour of the world, so we shouldn't be anxious that it is all up to us, that we will be left exposed and defenceless as we are faithful to Jesus

We are promised help

While it is love to want to deal with difficulties – to prepare yourself by reading books that defend the gospel, don't think you can't speak about what you know, about the Lord Jesus and His saving you, until you have mastered all the answers

Be confident in the Spirit who wants to glorify Christ, and speak of what you know and have experienced.

Can always say – good point, I hadn't thought about that, let me come back to you

Is that so – my understanding is a little different, let me go away and get back to you

Hopefully the stability of our faith doesn't rest in the confidence we have in our intellectual arguments, but in a Spirit given conviction of the truth of the gospel

We honour the Spirit who glorifies Christ by confessing the truth of the gospel, maintaining the truth of the gospel, and sharing the gospel

And secondly we honour the Spirit who comes to glorify Christ By praying as the Spirit prompts us to pray for the glory of Christ.

You had an example of that in Acts 4 where the disciples, threatened with punishment, pray

Acts 4:23-31 – for the glory of Christ and boldness in making Him known

We too should be praying for boldness in making the gospel known, and for God to powerfully confirm its truth

And the Spirit whose purpose is to glorify Christ prompts us to pray for His return.

Revelation 22: ¹⁷ Both the Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" Let anyone who hears, say, "Come!"

The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come' Rev. 22:17

Seeking Christ's glory we should long for the day when Jesus is no longer ignored or despised

And thirdly, we seek Christ's glory

By building up Christ's body, His church, by serving in love with our Spirit given gifts, given for that purpose

Spirit distributes the gifts 1 Cor 12:4, 11

1 Corinthians 12: ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵ and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ¹¹ All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

WE honour the Spirit, we give our God, Father Son and Spirit the worship He deserves in our whole lives, by giving ourselves to the Spirit's mission of glorifying Christ in our lives and in our community and sharing the Spirit's goal that Christ be glorified, seen for who He is, the eternal Son, entrusted with all that is the Father's

And in our gatherings we Worship the Spirit together with the Father and the Son – by giving prayer and praise to the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit, and receiving the Spirit breathed word read and taught in our midst as the Word of God

But more of that next week, when we think about *He has spoken through the Prophets*, the relation of the Spirit to the Word the Spirit speaks, in the final sermon in this part of series on the Creed before we think about eldership for a week and then recommence Matthew's gospel