

...for we are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.

Philippians 3:3



Spirit and Truth

ACCORDING TO THE MODERN PARADIGM, and true in far too many churches, contemporary worship often tries too hard to force the Spirit. It tries too hard to be casual and cozy at a time when it should, instead, be reverent and humble. It tries too hard to leverage the Spirit into still-slumbering hearts and brains. It tries too hard to force everyone to worship according to the same acceptable template.

In this self-centered society in which we now live it is possible for this method to lead to an immodest—even man-centered—form of worship. It can inadvertently express an attitude of barging into God’s throne room based on *our* merit, rather than His: “I am here to worship You! Aren’t You *glad?*” Too often the joy expressed in this moment is an inauthentic, physical joy forced by the worship leaders from the platform.

It is insincere. It is plastic. It is immodest.



By contrast, when we begin our worship focusing on God rather than on our contribution to His praise, we are driven, appropriately, to our knees in humble, reverent awe. When we begin by acknowledging our position in Him—worthy, but only because of the sacrificial blood of Christ—we can approach the throne only with empty hands and a full heart. And the joy expressed in *this* moment is sincere, Spirit-generated, and a true “sacrifice of praise.” It is a joy expressed from the inside out, rather than in mimic of an outside influence.

Any more energetic praise that follows will then be the authentic outward expression of the gratitude and adoration we have experienced on our knees before the throne. It will be God-centered, rather than man-centered.

The modern paradigm for worship can badly manhandle the Holy Spirit. It is presumptuous, even arrogant. It says, “We *will* be in the Spirit.” It preempts supernatural prerogative: Rather than care-

fully preparing fertile soil from which He might reveal Himself by *His* timing and manner, worship leaders today often haul out the Spirit by the scruff of the neck. And if He chooses not to sanction the moment, they simply behave as if He actually has.

Instead of graciously inviting the Spirit in, then waiting expectantly to see what He will do, today's worship often erects a plastic stand-in for His presence, something safe, dependable, and utilitarian, but uninspired.



The modern form of worship (based, for the most part, on attracting those unaccustomed to worship of any kind, and especially of a holy God) makes much of the Holy Spirit. He is talked about, artistically imagined in banners, and, on occasion, invoked. He is addressed with the familiarity of a close, personal friend. Yet rarely is He patiently “waited upon.”

Jesus' counsel to the woman at the well was both succinct and profound:

“But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

John 4:23-24

The “truth” to which Jesus refers is the *one* truth. It is not subjective, malleable, negotiable or fleeting. It is God's eternal revelation: the Bible. The believer's worship—for it to be authentic, and accepted by its intended Audience—must be based on the truth found in God's holy word.

Then our truth-grounded worship must be informed by, energized by, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. It cannot be just a quick reference to His name; not just an acknowledgement that He exists; not just

a recitation of His familiar wisdom, but it must include His singular *presence*. It must be a worship *infused* by the Spirit. Not a pale, insipid substitute, but the real thing.

Only then will our worship, praise, and thanksgiving be a fragrant and pleasing aroma to our God.