

What Is Worship?

God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. —**John 4:24**

I believe that every Christian has one fundamental calling and one primary duty—we are called, by the way we live and in all we do, to worship God. This is a full-time activity, not only here on earth, but in heaven, too.

But what exactly is worship? True worship is in the Spirit or by the Spirit of God.

Two Greek words in the New Testament are translated by our word “worship.” One is *proskuneo*, which is used sixty times and means “to adore” or “to give reverence to.” This refers to the condition of the heart. It is the word used by Jesus in John 4:24.

The other word is *latreuontes*, which appears as a noun or a verb twenty-six times and may be translated as “service.” This is the word used to refer to public worship and comes in Philippians 3:3 (KJV): “... who worship [serve] God in the spirit.” Both words are used in the context of Spirit-led and Spirit-controlled worship.

Here, then, is my own definition of worship: it is the response to, and/or preparation for, the preached Word. In worship, the Spirit prepares our minds and hearts to receive God’s Word, and, as we see at Pentecost, it is the Spirit who brings about a change of heart and enables us to continue in the apostles’ doctrine.

But if the first thing is the Spirit, what is the role of the truth? Truth—Christian doctrine as revealed in the Word of God—is the proof and guarantee that one is in the Spirit; it also serves as a yardstick for testing actions that are allegedly in the Spirit but that in fact are not. The truth

keeps worship from detours. The Bible was not given to replace the Holy Spirit. The Bible is there to correct abuse and to help us make sure that our worship and our Christian walk are genuinely in the Spirit.

Excerpted from *Worshipping God* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2004).