

WORSHIP IN THE NEW COVENANT: TRINITY AND INCARNATION

1. The Trinity and incarnation are the basis of creation and our relation to God as his image bearers

- **God lives in communion**

- Ultimate reality is the Triune God and thus fully personal and relational. The One who is Being and thus the source of all other life and existence is a super-personal God who exists in three distinct relationships.
- God's chief end is to glorify and enjoy God, and this God-centeredness is expressed and embodied in the other-centered loving relationships of the Trinity in which each person enjoys and glorifies the others (see e.g., the way that the mutual relations of Father, Son, and Spirit are described in John 14–17).

- **Human beings are made to reflect and participate in the communion of the Trinity**

Human nature is defined by our likeness to God, and thus we are personal and relational beings. We are designed for worship, i.e., to find our highest joy and fulfillment in sharing the communion of the Trinity.

- **Communion with God:** We are built for worship, i.e., to participate in the communion of God's own life. Worship is the highest purpose/goal of human beings.
- **Communion within human relationships:** Our right relationship to God is only fully known and expressed in communion with others. The triune God is only fully imaged in the world within a community of persons who reflect the love of Father, Son, and Spirit in their relationships with one another.

2. The Trinity and incarnation are the basis of redemption (and worship) accomplished and applied

(1) Jesus

- **The true God to be worshipped**

Jesus is the fullest revelation of God (John 1:1–18; Heb 1:1–4), the divine Son who is the true temple of God's presence in the world, and thus the One to whom all true worship is directed.

- **The true Man who worships**

In Jesus, God and man are united in the deepest possible way. For the first time in history, the life of God is manifest in the life of a perfect human worshipper, and his worship is now the paradigm/model and source of all other human worship.

- **The work that expresses/embodies his worship and makes our worship possible**

- **Life:** Jesus lived a perfect human life of unwavering loving communion with Father in the power of the Spirit and therefore perfect obedience to God's will/purpose.
- **Death:** Jesus' ultimate act of worship is his sacrificial self-offering to God on the cross. In this act, his perfect worship (his perfect faith, love, and obedience to God) are both manifest and matured or made perfect by his suffering (Heb 5:7–9).
- **Resurrection:** Jesus is raised to life by the Father and the Spirit, and his life of perfect communion with the Father and the Spirit is restored, vindicated, and glorified in the resurrection. In this way, his person and work become the source and foundation of our worship. The resurrection is Jesus' public justification and ours (1 Tim 3:16; Rom 4:25); his sanctification and ours, i.e., freedom from the power and effects of sin that he assumed on our behalf (Rom 6:4–10); the declaration of his Sonship and ours (Rom 1:4; 8:11, 15–17); his glorification and ours, i.e., transformation into full maturity and immortality (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:42–49; Col 3:4; Phil 3:21).

- **Ascension** to eternal kingship and priesthood: In his ascension, Jesus is enthroned at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33–36) and begins his universal rule as the Davidic Messiah and the priest-king of the order of Melchizedek (Ps 110; Heb 7). Jesus not only occupies the throne of God’s tabernacle/temple in heaven as king to be worshipped with the Father (Rev 4–5; 7:9–17; 22:1) but he also ministers there perpetually as a human high priest, a minister in the true tabernacle (Heb 8:2) interceding for us (Heb 7:25), leading God’s people in songs of praise (Heb 2:12), and appearing in God’s presence on our behalf to offer himself as our permanent, perfect sacrifice (Heb 7:3, 16; 24–25; 9:11–14, 24).

(2) Holy Spirit and the Church

- **Creation, incarnation, resurrection:** The Holy Spirit is the agent of Father and Son in the original creation (Gen 1:2) and also in the second creation beginning with Jesus’ incarnation (Luke 1:35) and ministry and in Jesus’ resurrection (Rom 1:4; 8:11; 1 Pet 3:18).¹ As a consequence, he is the Spirit of Christ (Acts 16:7; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6).
- **Pentecost and temple:** Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit upon the church (Acts 2) in order to fulfill his promise to be with the church forever (Matt 18:20; John 14) and to make the church a temple where his presence and power are found (1 Cor 3:16–17).
- **Union with Christ:** The Spirit baptizes us into Christ via his body (1 Cor 6:11; 12:13) and dwells within God’s people (and within individual Christians: 1 Cor 6:19). Thus, he unites us to Christ himself (Rom 8:1–17) so that we have access to the Father through Christ in the Spirit (Eph 2:18). Thus, by the Spirit we become partakers of Christ and all the saving effects of his person and work on our behalf.
- **Worship in the Spirit:** Christian worship is in the Spirit (Acts 10:45–46; John 4:23–24; Phil 3:3)
 - **Desire:** The Spirit grants new life and faith (John 3; Tit 3:5) and a new mind and desire for Christ (Rom 8:5; Gal 5:17).
 - **Revelation:** The Spirit creates worship by revealing the wisdom and revelation of Christ and granting illumination of the word of God (John 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13; 1 Cor 2:6–16; Eph 1:17). The sword of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17).
 - **Confession of faith:** True professions of faith are the Spirit’s work (1 Cor 12:3).
 - **Prayer:** When we pray, the Spirit prays in and with us, even when we do not know what to pray (Rom 8:26–27; Eph 6:18; Acts 4:31). Thus, Jesus is the one who not only prays for us, but he also prays in and through us by his Spirit. Because we are in Christ, our prayers are joined to his prayers and cleansed and effected by him.
 - **Lord’s Supper:** The Supper is a participation (*koinonia*) in Christ’s body and blood (1 Cor 10:16) that constitutes the church as one body of Christ (1 Cor 10:17). The NT elsewhere attributes our membership and unity in the body of Christ to the fact that we are baptized in/with the Spirit and “drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:12–13; note the sacramental imagery of the Supper in the last phrase).

Worship is “the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son’s communion with the Father. It means participating in union with Christ, in what he has done for us once and for all, in his self-offering to the Father, in his life and death on the cross. It also means participating in what he is continuing to do for us in the presence of the Father and in his mission from the Father to the world.” Thus, **“the prime purpose of the incarnation, in the love of God, is to lift us up into a life of communion, of participation in the very triune life of God.”** (James Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace*)

¹ This is what Paul means when he refers to Jesus’ resurrected body as a “Spiritual body” and the resurrected Christ as “life-giving Spirit” (1 Cor 15:44–45). Jesus’ resurrected body is raised and empowered by the life of the Spirit of God.