



*Biblical Studies in*

**worship  
&  
worship  
SERVICES**

Gregg Strawbridge

# Biblical Studies in Worship & Worship Services

by Gregg Strawbridge

©Gregg Strawbridge, 1995, 2003

[gs@wordmp3.com](mailto:gs@wordmp3.com) ❖ POB 585 ❖ 8 Rosewood Dr ❖ Brownstown, PA 17508

All Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988, The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Unless otherwise designated.

## About the Author

Rev. Gregg Strawbridge (Ph.D., University of Southern Mississippi) did his undergraduate work in music (classical guitar), seminary training at Columbia Biblical Seminary, his doctoral work in education and philosophy, and post-graduate theological studies at Reformed Theological Seminary (Orlando) and Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). He has served as a pastor since 1990 and since 2001 he has been the pastor of All Saints' Presbyterian Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He also directs WordMp3.com - an online library of Christian worldview teaching resources. His teaching experience includes college level instruction in guitar, music, philosophy, theology, and education. He and his wife Sharon are the blessed parents of Joy, Jenna, and Julie.

His other publications include several books and booklets, including, *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism*, for which he served as editor. The book features contributions of 15 other scholars including, Joseph Pipa, Bryan Chapel, Richard Pratt, Doug Wilson, R.C. Sproul, Jr., Cornelius Venema, Peter Leithart Lyle Bierma (Presbyterian & Reformed, September, 2003). Other booklets include: *Music in the Bible and Music on the Radio* (forewords by John Frame, Bob Kauflin, & Judy Rogers), and *Classical and Christian Education: Recapturing the Educational Approach of the Past* (Veritas Press 2002 [1997]). He has written many articles for publication and presentation, such as: "How Sweet and Awful is the Place: Zion and Congregational Worship," "Congregational Worship as Covenant Remembrance: An Exegetical Basis from 1 Corinthians 11:25," and most recently, "The Mental Furniture of the Pre-Reformation Mind: The Dialectica of Peter of Spain in the Humanist Reaction to Scholasticism." He has published several book reviews, such as a review of *Van Til's Apologetic: Readings and an Analysis* by Greg L. Bahnsen, a review of *The Worship of the English Puritans* by Horton Davies, a review article on *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* by Greg L. Bahnsen, and critical reviews of *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* by Paul K. Jewett, *A String of Pearls Unstrung* by Fred Malone, and *Abraham's Four Seeds* by John G. Reisinger. These and more are available at [www.WordMp3.com/gs](http://www.WordMp3.com/gs) (*Reformation Resources*).

He has consistently written, recorded and arranged music for personal and church purposes, including several Christmas musicals and children's musicals, "Night Visions: Three Sketches from the First Christmas," "The St. John Passion," "The Messiah of the Psalms," "The Wisdom of God," and "Of the Father's Love Begotten," and "Go to the Ant." He has recorded of over one hundred songs in his home project studios, as well as professional studios, including "Sounds of Sanibel" (an instrumental guitar CD), two songs on the "City of Peace Instrumentals" recording (released by Galilee of the Nations/Provident Distributors), "Make Your Great Name Known," and *Family Worship: Songbook & Tape* (producer/editor, Audubon Press).

## Contents

Introduction .....	<u>-1-</u>
1. <i>How Sweet and Awful is the Place: Congregational Worship</i> .....	<u>-3-</u>
Worship on the Lord's Day .....	<u>-5-</u>
The Biblical Material on the Day of Worship .....	<u>-5-</u>
The Biblical Material on the Sabbath Day .....	<u>-6-</u>
The Historical Precedents .....	<u>-8-</u>
Sanctified Time! .....	<u>-9-</u>
Sanctified by His Presence .....	<u>-10-</u>
The Reformation Concept of Sabbath and Lord's Day .....	<u>-11-</u>
True Zion .....	<u>-13-</u>
How Should We Then Worship? .....	<u>-14-</u>
2. <i>O Worship the King: Foundational Questions</i> .....	<u>-16-</u>
What is Worship? .....	<u>-16-</u>
The Domains of Worship .....	<u>-17-</u>
What is Christ-Centered worship? .....	<u>-19-</u>
What about Old Testament Worship? .....	<u>-21-</u>
What about Covenantal Worship? .....	<u>-23-</u>
What about Liturgy? .....	<u>-24-</u>
What about the Biblical Theological Development of Worship? .....	<u>-24-</u>
Worship as Covenant Remembrance .....	<u>-28-</u>
How Should We Then Worship? .....	<u>-32-</u>
3. <i>How Firm a Foundation: Fundamental Principles</i> .....	<u>-33-</u>
The Edification Principle .....	<u>-33-</u>
The Order Principle .....	<u>-34-</u>
The Regulative Principle .....	<u>-36-</u>
Four Different Approaches to Guide Worship .....	<u>-38-</u>
How Should We Then Worship? .....	<u>-41-</u>
4. <i>Brethren We Have Met to Worship: Categories of Worship Actions</i> .....	<u>-42-</u>
Scripture .....	<u>-43-</u>
The Reading of Scripture .....	<u>-43-</u>
Teaching the Scripture .....	<u>-45-</u>
Teaching: How Should We Then Worship? .....	<u>-46-</u>
The Use of Scriptural Confessions of Faith .....	<u>-46-</u>
Confessions: How Should We Then Worship? .....	<u>-49-</u>
Worship Acts: Pronouncing God's Word .....	<u>-49-</u>
Word-Pronouncements: How Should We Then Worship? .....	<u>-51-</u>
Prayer .....	<u>-52-</u>
Prayer: How Should We Then Worship? .....	<u>-53-</u>
The Sacraments .....	<u>-54-</u>
The Lord's Supper .....	<u>-54-</u>
Baptism .....	<u>-57-</u>

Giving Thanks and Verbal Praise .....	<u>-58-</u>
Giving or Offering .....	<u>-60-</u>
Faith-Promise Giving? .....	<u>-62-</u>
5. <i>Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above: Music in Worship</i> .....	<u>-64-</u>
A Brief Biblical Theology of Music .....	<u>-64-</u>
The Validity of Musical Instruments in Worship .....	<u>-65-</u>
Arguments Against the Use of Musical Instruments .....	<u>-66-</u>
The nature of music .....	<u>-71-</u>
Music and the Aesthetic Problem .....	<u>-73-</u>
The Theological Solution to the Aesthetic Problem .....	<u>-73-</u>
Exclusive Psalm-singing? .....	<u>-75-</u>
Exemplary Psalmody .....	<u>-80-</u>
Contemporary Musical Styles and Worship .....	<u>-83-</u>
Inter-Congregational Music: Soloists, Ensembles, and Choirs .....	<u>-86-</u>
A Biblical Philosophy of Choral Groups .....	<u>-89-</u>
A Biblical Philosophy of Musical Ensembles .....	<u>-92-</u>
Concluding Principles of Church Music .....	<u>-93-</u>
6. <i>Lead On O King Eternal: Ordering Worship</i> .....	<u>-94-</u>
Summary of a Biblical Approach to Worship Services .....	<u>-94-</u>
Principles of liturgy .....	<u>-94-</u>
The Gospel Liturgy .....	<u>-95-</u>
The Covenantal Liturgy .....	<u>-98-</u>
The Lord's Day Liturgy .....	<u>-98-</u>
7. <i>Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus: Bodily Postures</i> .....	<u>-102-</u>
Bodily Postures and Regulative Worship .....	<u>-102-</u>
Relevant Biblical Passages .....	<u>-102-</u>
The Biblical Meaning and Practice of Lifting One's Hands .....	<u>-103-</u>
Dance and Regulative Worship .....	<u>-105-</u>
Dance in the Bible .....	<u>-105-</u>
Attitudes Toward Dance .....	<u>-106-</u>
References for Further Investigation .....	<u>-109-</u>
Appendix A: Objectives for Congregational Worship .....	<u>-111-</u>
Standards for Those Participating in Worship .....	<u>-111-</u>
Appendix B: Examples of Thematic Liturgies .....	<u>-113-</u>
Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah! A Thematic Liturgy of Praise from Psalm 146 .....	<u>-113-</u>
Christ Our Passover: A Thematic Liturgy of Praise .....	<u>-114-</u>
The Blessing: A Thematic Liturgy of Praise from Psalm 67 .....	<u>-115-</u>
Enter His Courts with Praise: A Thematic Liturgy of Praise from Psalm 100 .....	<u>-116-</u>
Appendix C: The printed references to the prescribed elements (NASB) .....	<u>-117-</u>
The Scripture .....	<u>-117-</u>
Prayer .....	<u>-117-</u>
Music .....	<u>-118-</u>
Sacraments .....	<u>-118-</u>

The Lord's Supper .....	<u>-118-</u>
Baptism .....	<u>-119-</u>
Giving Thanks .....	<u>-119-</u>
Giving .....	<u>-120-</u>
Appendix D: Ecumenical Councils and Creeds of the Early Church .....	<u>-122-</u>
Appendix E: A Summary of the Biblical Doctrine of Prayer .....	<u>-124-</u>
Appendix F: Biblical Musical Instruments .....	<u>-125-</u>
Appendix G: Biblical Categories of Praise .....	<u>-126-</u>

## Introduction

### Introduction

“Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed,” said the ancient Greek thinker Heraclitus. The subject of worship commands the attention of many today just because of the endless *changes*. If there were ever days when the Church worshiped with one voice in a unison cadence, those days are gone, for now. After the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, the tapestry of Christian worship disintegrated. The seventeenth century became the fountain head for Protestant thought with such creedal masterpieces as the Westminster Confession and the systematic works of Turretin and Brakel, though no clear unity of worship practice had been reached. Then, riding the waves of revival and revivalism, eighteenth and nineteenth century evangelicals followed many threads of the tapestry of Christian worship. The culmination of this has apexes in a quite sermon-centered, evangelism-centered worship service. Songs and a few necessary items, like offerings are to give way to the pastor’s “message.” Such revivalistic worship is at its apex, a “harvest of souls.” In the twentieth century, the high churches have seen a renewed emphasis on liturgical worship, while the low churches have been empowered by the new phenomenon of praise and worship music. Now we see variations so far removed from each other that the tapestry is like a selection from an *avant guard* artist. We hear a universe of liturgical voices in the fray—or is it a *multiverse*?

In this century, the impact of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement alone accounts for a full facelift of traditional worship. While liturgical patterns drone on, “world without end,” the ecstatic expressions of “praise and worship” have revitalized the worship of virtually every church, in every communion. Technology, too, has changed the face of worship with its overhead, slide, and even video projectors. One cannot overlook the last fifty years of media resources. Just think of it, could the contemporary worship service exist without audio recordings, making a wealth of new music accessible for worship?

There are deeper influences which contribute to an often unhealthy diversity in worship: the emphasis on individualism and the increased role of the psychology of self. We live in a frightfully unique time in the history of the church where the concept of sin is publicly repudiated (even from some pulpits). It is a sin to talk of sin. Salvation is dangerously connected to self-esteem. It seems that all the factors that make up the American mind significantly contribute to the modern kaleidoscope of American worship. With the diversity of church traditions, modern technological influences, and fundamental theological and psychological perspectives intersecting on Sunday morning, there is no end to the array of contemporary approaches to worship.

In spite of so many manifestations of worship (or perhaps because of it), it is still true that many believers are unaware of what the Scripture teaches concerning worship. Many have little motivation to go “*ad fontes*” (*to the sources*) and see what the Word declares. In addressing questions such as music, the role of Scripture, fixed forms (prayers and pronouncements), many are simply “out to lunch” regarding the Biblically relevant material. Either they are droned to sleep in traditionalism or they are doing aerobics with anti-traditionalists or defining worship with TV variety-show techniques.

A clue to the confusion is seen when individuals are asked about worship. We do not hesitate to answer questions about the worship of the Self-revealed Triune God in purely subjective terms of our own feelings. Worship convictions are put in terms of preference, rather than theological commitments. Often, the issues peripheral to the heart of Biblical worship capture center stage in worship talk. Rarely does one actually hear a discussion of worship in *Biblical terms*, where questions are focused on obedience and applications to the Biblical directives or in dialogue with the historical church’s life and practice. To observe our modern worship conversations, it could just as well be concluded that the Bible

## *Worship and Worship Services*

has nothing at all to say about the matter and the church has only recently begun to engage in it (!). (“Don’t they have seminars on that now?”)

This book aims to be more than another voice in the cacophony of calls to worship. It is a challenge to apply Biblical truth to a changing world, to a “post-Christian world.”<sup>1</sup> I will have utterly failed if people read this book and say, “this is his position.” It is my aim for every reader to know *why* much more than know *what*. I want readers to be able to reflectively consider the issues from a thoroughly Biblical point of view.

Of course, I am very conscious of cultural, technological, and ideological influences on my theology of worship. Nevertheless, I seek to know and grow in a Biblical understanding of worship. Worship which honors the God of Scripture, which is historically conscious and which is congregationally meaningful. I truly desire to call the reader to a pursuit of the Scriptures as the basis for anointed leadership in corporate worship, as the blueprint for refining our services of worship, and as the theological backbone of our approach to God.

We must be vigilant for the precepts and relevant applications of Scripture to worship. But might we also engage in this discussion as observers of a historical church? Shall we *tabula rasa*? We cannot be *blank slates* with respect to tradition. If we do this we will probably imitate the least theologically rich tradition, that of the evangelical church over the last few decades. Rather, we must be careful not to hastily “move the ancient boundary which your fathers have set” (Pro 22:28). Must we forever embrace, as C.S. Lewis called it, a chronological snobbery? After all is “new” really better?

A purely Biblical view with a clear appraisal of historical practices, is an aim one should not be too confident in claiming to attain. No present writer has stepped out of a time-capsule, having escaped the myriad of influences in the present. We are not cultural zombies. Neither must we be cultural slaves. We have the sure Word of the living God. While we are prisoners of our culture to some extent, no doubt, we have that which we need to “renew our minds” (Rom 12:2). Granting that one should not be dogmatic on matters which are to be reserved for adaptation, still whatever is unchanging truth, *is unchanging*. The reminder of this book’s thesis is the Word of God must be applied to congregational worship—to the priority, philosophy, structure, current issues, as well as the content of worship. Let us pursue the road map of *Sola Scriptura* (the Scripture alone is the final authority) to the celestial city and let us give our marvelous triune God His praise as we travel. *Soli Deo Gloria* (to God alone be the glory).

---

<sup>1</sup>I believe, more truly though, this is a pre-Christian world, since Christ will put all His enemies under His feet (1Co 15:25).

## 1. The Priority of Congregational Worship

### 1. How Sweet and Awful is the Place: Congregational Worship

#### **“GOD HIMSELF IS WITH US”**

(Text by Gerhard Tersteegen, 1729 Tr. F. W. Foster, J. Miller, 1789 Tune: WUNDERBARER KONIG Joachim Neander, 1680)

GOD HIMSELF IS WITH US: LET US NOW ADORE HIM,  
AND WITH AWE APPEAR BEFORE HIM. GOD IS IN HIS TEMPLE  
ALL WITHIN KEEP SILENCE, PROSTRATE LIE WITH DEEPEST REVERENCE.  
HIM ALONE GOD WE OWN, HIM, OUR GOD AND SAVIOR;  
PRAISE HIS NAME FOREVER.

GOD HIMSELF IS WITH US: HEAR THE HARPS RESOUNDING!  
SEE THE CROWDS THE THRONE SURROUNDING!  
“HOLY, HOLY, HOLY” HEAR THE HYMN ASCENDING,  
ANGELS, SAINTS, THEIR VOICES BLENDING! BOW THINE EAR TO US HERE:  
HEAR, O CHRIST, THE PRAISES THAT THY CHURCH NOW RAISES.

Mark, an excited new Christian, expressed the all too familiar reservations about congregational worship. He said that our personal relationship with Christ, expressed in private devotional worship is more truly *worship* than getting all dressed up and coming to church on Sunday and going through so many rote motions. He appealed to the intimate relationship we have with the Lord as contrary to the formality of a Sunday morning service.

Mark’s thesis leads us to ask, whether real worship to be found more individually, perhaps beside the flowing stream with an open Bible, and ardent personal prayers with emotional fervor—than in the pew?

To answer this, we must pull back the veil of our visible world and look to the invisible. In a more than profound passage, the writer of Hebrews tells his readers,

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant . . . (Heb 11:22-24).

The gathered congregation is like the tip of an iceberg surfacing above the water with the massive invisible spiritual world below the water’s surface. We only see Steve and Jane, Pam and Dale, George, Jerry, and Nathan. We see the *visible church*. We look at the wall paper, the carpet, the pews, and the pulpit and sometimes lose the grand vision of the “church of the first-born.” We are assured that this grand vision of the church is not a *grand illusion* by the very words of God (Heb 11:22ff). Worship is a meeting of the highest heavens with “middle earth.”<sup>2</sup>

The picture is painted no where better than in C.S. Lewis’ *Screwtape Letters*. He writes from the point of view of an elder devil instructing a younger devil,

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as

---

<sup>2</sup>See Doug Wilson’s book

## *Worship and Worship Services*

an army with banners. That, I confess is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with a rather oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours whom he has hitherto avoided. You want to lean pretty heavily on those neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between an expression like “the body of Christ” and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the Enemy’s side. No matter. Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. . . . Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords.<sup>3</sup>

Lewis brilliantly depicts the problem we mortal, redeemed-wretches have in coming to worship. We are encumbered with all the sterility of a public meeting, often forgetting that the very Christ-of-Resurrection promises to be present, as it were in the very next seat. Even the most energetic and vibrant services are still encumbered by the people in the pew. The most inviting atmosphere of transcendental architecture (if such a thing still exists in the American evangelical context) and the brightest and best arrangement of events, complete with professional sound and lighting, inevitably yields to the simple poem: “the church is not the steeple, but the people.” Our eyes are often distracted by “the people” in worship. Yet it is just those people that *are the church* and represent the most profoundly significant realities. Jesus said, “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Mat 16:18). After all the church is Christ’s “body” (Col 1:24).

Recall the full impact of thousands of years of God-revealed redemptive worship from the Older Covenant, when the writer of Hebrews says,

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:28-29)

When we come to meet with the gathered people of God, we come with the recognition of receiving an unshakeable kingdom and know that God is a consuming fire. We come to a much more awful sight than a mountain quaking with the divine fire, we come to newest covenant manifestation of Mount Zion. In the previous verses the writer contrasts the new assembly with the most revered experience of the Israelites at Sinai.

For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them . . . . But you

---

<sup>3</sup>Pp. 12-13 of the Revised Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1961).

## 1. The Priority of Congregational Worship

have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . (Heb 12:18-22)

Earlier in the book, the writer commands the “synagog-ing” together of the church in the most stringent terms, “not forsaking our own assembling together.” The text goes on to say that “if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (10:24-27). In other words, there is no more serious sin than forsaking the assembly of Messiah’s people for His purposes.

Edmond Clowney reminds us that “the very term ‘church’ (*ekklesia*) was a term applied to the Old Testament people of God because of the great assembly at Sinai, when they had stood before God to hear his words. The church is named from the assembly, not at Sinai, nor in the earthly Zion, but in the heavenly Zion, where it is joined with the worshiping host of the saints and the angels (Heb 12:22-24).<sup>4</sup>

What all this means for worship services is that when God’s people gather, it is to be seen in the most profound terms. When we think of what is *real*, we think of our houses, family, jobs, lawns, and cars. But the profound truth which is just as *real* is that presently there are myriads of creatures we cannot fathom giving glory to an incomprehensible, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent Triune God whose presence pervades all of reality. They solemnly declare, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” The church’s gathering for worship which invokes His special presence, is a visible projection of that greater congregation which, though unseen, is quite *real*. It is as though we stand on the shore and look out over the ocean. We cannot see the other side. We do not know that the other shores exist by sight, but we are most certain that the water stops. We cannot see the magnitude of the greater worship service, that of the invisible world. But we are assured by the unshakeable truth of the living God that a great host (for God is the “Lord of hosts”) utters His praise continually.

The simple acts of prayer, praise, preaching, etc. are to be performed acknowledging the reality of the occasion and the reality *behind* the occasion. We must be like the Apostle John who was able to look into heaven and see the worship of heaven (Rev 5). What a powerful change would come over the face the evangelical church today if we were convinced upon entering into worship that our worship was, indeed, the symbol of heaven’s praise.

### **Worship on the Lord’s Day**

If we are to gain a truly Biblical concept of worship and worship services, some consideration must be given to the *time of worship*. Is there something special about Sunday? Did Jesus intend for His church to regularly gather in His special presence on an appointed day? Or was this left to mere circumstance and preference? We must consider not only the Biblical evidence (which is authoritative), but also the way the historical church understood the Biblical evidence (which is significant).

### **The Biblical Material on the Day of Worship**

The New Testament uses the term, “Lord’s day” only once. John writes in the Apocalypse, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet . . .” (1:10). The notable Greek scholar, A.T. Robertson says regarding this term,

---

<sup>4</sup> *Adoration and Action*, in a chapter entitled, *Presbyterian Worship*, in the text edited by D.A. Carson., p. 112.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Deissmann has proven (Bible Studies, p. 217f.; Light, etc., p. 357ff.) from inscriptions and papyri that the word *kuriakos* was in common use for the sense “imperial” as imperial finance and imperial treasury and from papyri and ostraca that *hemera Sebaste* (Augustus Day) was the first day of each month, Emperor’s Day on which money payments were made (cf. 1Co 16:1f.). It was easy, therefore, for the Christians to take this term, already in use, and apply it to the first day of the week in honour of the Lord Jesus Christ’s resurrection on that day (Didache 14, Ignatius Magn. 9).<sup>5</sup>

*Kuriakos* (literally “Lord’s”) is used only twice: once in reference to the Lord’s day (Rev 1:10) and once in reference to the Lord’s Supper (*kuriakos deipnon*, 1Co 11:20). The term means “pertaining to the Lord” or “belonging to the Lord, Lord’s.”<sup>6</sup>

The significance of the day pertaining to the Lord comes into focus when we ponder that the Resurrection of our Lord took place on the first day of the week, Sunday (Mat 28:1, Mar 16:9). It appears that Christ met with his disciples in His post-resurrection, pre-ascension state on the first day of the week (Sunday) on four separate occasions (Mat 28:9, Luk 24:34, 18-33, Joh 20:19-23). “When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week . . . Jesus came and stood in their midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’” (Joh 20:17). One week later we are told, Jesus met with the disciples again on Sunday. “And after eight days (*hemeras okto*) again His disciples were inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, ‘Peace be with you’” (Joh 20:26).

We find in the apostolic record, “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke (*dialegomai*) to them and continued his message until midnight (Acts 20:7). Moreover, Paul instructed the church at Corinth regarding receiving collections, “On the *first day of every week* let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper” (1Co 16:2).

### **The Biblical Material on the Sabbath Day**

The significance of the scattered references to the first day of the week and the Lord’s Day comes into sharper focus when we see that they stand upon the foundation of the Jewish observance of the Sabbath. The six and one, weekly rest and worship pattern is founded upon both the Sabbath creation ordinance (Gen 2:2). Observing the implications of Genesis one, Adam’s first day was a day of rest, since he was created on the sixth day. Adam awoke to a day in which the entire day was spent with His Maker, apart from his labors. The Sabbath was a gift from God from the very the beginning, not a meritorious reward of rest for Adam’s works. Of course, later the Sabbath commandment was codified in the decalogue (the fourth commandment, Exo 20:8). As such, the Jews’ Sabbath observance, including their synagogue convocations carried out divine law and was religiously required for the pious. Thus a weekly worship service and day devoted to worship became culturally non-negotiable. However, there was much more depth of significance to the Old Testament sabbath observance than a mere ritual of ceasing from labor and gathering for religious worship. In the second giving of the Ten Commandments, we see that the Sabbath was a memorial occasion to remember the release from bondage by the power of God:

---

<sup>5</sup>In the BWW, (*in loc.*).

<sup>6</sup>See any standard lexicon; I consult Louw-Nida, Friberg, and Thayers in Bible Works for Windows (5.0).

## *1. The Priority of Congregational Worship*

And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day. (Deu 5:11)

As the above rationale indicates, the nature of Sabbath is woven into the redemption of Israel. Even the land was to be given “sabbaths” — “during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD” (Lev 25:4). The cycle of restitution itself was called a sabbath:

You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself [49 years] . . . . You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. (Lev 25:8-10)

Even the time of the Babylonian exile is measured as a Sabbath:

And those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. (2Ch 36:21)

The very time structure of the coming of Messiah is laid out in Sabbatical pattern.

Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy place. (Dan 9:24)

With the theological depth of the Sabbath, it should not surprise us that the New Testament makes clear the typological nature of the seventh day rest:

For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, ‘AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST,’ although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. . . . 9 There remains therefore a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. (Heb 4:3, 9-10).

Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col 2:16-17).

These theological aspects of the sabbath are interpreted through the lens of Christ’s first advent. Given that the first recipients of the gospel saw the weekly Sabbath pattern of worship as divine law and yet the church emerged from the first century worshipping on the first day of the week — how might this be reasonably explained? The Lord’s Day is the first day of the week, the numerical “eighth day” when one counts from the first creation day. Viewed with the typological aspects in mind, one can see that this “eighth day” of creation was the first day of the new creation. It was the day of resurrection, of new life.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

But is there more specific warrant for this change of worship-day? It does not stand out in red letters, or does it? Jesus taught us that He had authority over the sabbath, the day of remembrance, “For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Mat 12:8). When He instituted His new passover supper, He said, “This is My body which is given for you; *do this in remembrance of Me*” (Luk 22:19). Jesus required His disciples to remember His work of redemption, the antitype of the Exodus. However, His work of redemption was not complete until the first day of the week. Only after His redemptive work was complete, He met with His disciples. And His disciples continued to do this: “on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread . . .” (Act 20:7).

No great leap into the historical and theological unknown is necessary to conclude that the apostolic church had warrant to worship on the day of Resurrection. One should not hesitate in admitting that the explicit Biblical material is meager regarding the question of worship on the first day of the week. But, what the Scriptures suggest in seed, the universal church demonstrates in full bloom. The voice of these verses is joined by the deep chorus of the theological importance of the Resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week and with the specific requirement of the Lord’s Supper: “Do this in remembrance of Me.” This strongly implies that His disciples should remember His redemptive acts on the day that they were demonstrably complete: the Lord’s Day.

### **The Historical Precedents**

The earliest writings of the church are in accord with the priority of the gathered congregation for worship on Sunday. Even the pagan Pliny the Younger reported that Christians meet “on an appointed day.”<sup>7</sup> The Didache commands that, “On the Lord’s Day come together and break bread.”<sup>8</sup> The Epistle of Barnabas likewise says, “Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead.”<sup>9</sup>

Ignatius of Antioch speaks of the early Jewish Christians as “those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s day, on which also our life has sprung up again by him and by his death.”<sup>10</sup> Justin Martyr reproves the Jew Trypho saying that Christians “too would observe the fleshly circumcision, and the sabbaths, and in short all the feasts, if we did not know for what reason they were enjoined you.”<sup>11</sup> Justin is no doubt referring to the apostolic teaching that such were “things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ” (Col 2:17).

Tertullian argues against the one “who contends that the sabbath is still to be observed.”<sup>12</sup> *The Didascalía* very unambiguously, though with a slight thought of speculation, states, “The apostles further

---

<sup>7</sup>Letter 10 [c.a. 112], cited in James F. White’s, *Document of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources* (Wesminster/John Knox Press, 1992) p. 18. Many of the citations I give can be found nicely arranged in White.

<sup>8</sup>Section 14.

<sup>9</sup>Section 15.

<sup>10</sup>Letter to the Magnesians 8 [A.D. 110].

<sup>11</sup>Dialogue with Trypho the Jew 18, 21 [A.D. 155].

<sup>12</sup>An Answer to the Jews 2 [A.D. 203].

## 1. The Priority of Congregational Worship

appointed: On the first day of the week let there be service, and the reading of the Holy Scriptures, and the oblation, because on the first day of the week our Lord rose from the place of the dead, and on the first day of the week he arose upon the world, and on the first day of the week he ascended up to heaven, and on the first day of the week he will appear at last with the angels of heaven.”<sup>13</sup> Victorinus says that “on the Lord’s day we may go forth to our bread with giving of thanks” [after fasting] “lest we should appear to observe any sabbath with the Jews . . . which sabbath he [Christ] in his body abolished.”<sup>14</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea tells us that the “only truly holy day” is “the Lord’s day” with “the days set apart by the Mosaic Law for feasts, new moons, and sabbaths, which the Apostle [Paul] teaches are the shadow of days and not days in reality.”<sup>15</sup> Athanasius reasons, “The sabbath was the end of the first creation, the Lord’s day was the beginning of the second . . . we honor the Lord’s day as being the memorial of the new creation.”<sup>16</sup> The early fourth century Council of Laodicea encourages that “Christians should . . . particularly reverence the Lord’s day and, if possible, not work on it. . . .”<sup>17</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia informs us that “the Council of Elvira (300) decreed: ‘If anyone in the city neglects to come to church for three Sundays, let him be excommunicated for a short time so that he may be corrected’ (xxi).”<sup>18</sup> While more early witnesses to the Lord’s Day meeting could be called, one final word will suffice from *The Apostolic Constitutions*,

And on the day of our Lord’s resurrection, which is the Lord’s day, meet more diligently, sending praise to God that made the universe by Jesus, and sent him to us, and condescended to let him suffer, and raised him from the dead. Otherwise what apology will he make to God who does not assemble on that day . . . in which is performed the reading of the prophets, the preaching of the gospel, the oblation of the sacrifice, the gift of the holy food.<sup>19</sup>

### Sanctified Time!

Did Jesus intend to specify the day on which His church, body, temple, people, congregation, Israel, bride, saints, Zion, New Jerusalem, holy nation, kingdom of priests, etc. was to assemble for worship? Did He not intend for His church to gather in His special presence on “His day,” the day of His resurrection, the day He, Himself met with His disciples after His resurrection, the day that John called the “Lordly Day”—the day on which the church met under apostolic leadership? Biblically, theologically, and historically, it seems clear that He did intend to specify the regular day of worship. On the basis outlined above what can be said to the erring church member who can “take or leave” the Lord’s Day worship? The most direct response is very directly stated in the Word.

---

<sup>13</sup>*Didascalia* 2 [A.D. 225].

<sup>14</sup>*The Creation of the World* [A.D. 300].

<sup>15</sup>*Proof of the Gospel* 4:16:186 [A.D. 319].

<sup>16</sup>*On Sabbath and Circumcision* 3 [A.D. 345].

<sup>17</sup>Canon 29 [A.D. 360].

<sup>18</sup>Published in 1913 by the Encyclopedia Press, Inc.

<sup>19</sup>*Apostolic Constitutions* 2:7:60 [A.D. 400].

## *Worship and Worship Services*

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:24-25)

Do not forsake the assembly! For the Biblically conscientious Christian, congregation worship with the assembly of God's people should be a priority and highly valued. Casual dismissal of what some hymn writers call "Mount Zion's appearing" indicates either blatant Biblical ignorance or significant spiritual declension. And the Christian church has Biblical foundation, theological implication, and historical precedent to call that meeting on the day of Resurrection. Just as the ancient hymn says,

THE DAY OF RESURRECTION! EARTH, TELL IT OUT ABROAD;  
THE PASSOVER OF GLADNESS, THE PASSOVER OF GOD.  
FROM DEATH TO LIFE ETERNAL, FROM THIS WORLD TO THE SKY,  
OUR CHRIST HATH BROUGHT US OVER WITH HYMNS OF VICTORY.

OUR HEARTS BE PURE FROM EVIL, THAT WE MAY SEE ARIGHT  
THE LORD IN RAYS ETERNAL OF RESURRECTION LIGHT;  
AND, LISTENING TO HIS ACCENTS, MAY HEAR, SO CALM AND PLAIN,  
HIS OWN ALL HAIL! AND HEARING, MAY RAISE THE VICTOR STRAIN.

NOW LET THE HEAV'NS BE JOYFUL, LET EARTH HER SONG BEGIN;  
LET THE ROUND WORLD KEEP TRIUMPH, AND ALL THAT IS THEREIN;  
INVISIBLE AND VISIBLE, THEIR NOTES LET ALL THINGS BLEND,  
FOR CHRIST THE LORD HATH RISEN, OUR JOY THAT HATH NO END.

### **Sanctified by His Presence**

Congregational worship is not only sanctified because of its memorial occasion, but it is sanctified because of His special presence. Jesus will never leave or forsake us and we know that His presence in our lives individually is a precious reality. The Word teaches us, however, that there is more to the gathering of the saints than a multiplication of this individual presence of God.

Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst. (Mat 18:18-20)

This well-known passage tells of Christ's presence where "two or three have gathered" (Mat 18:20). This is in the context of Christ's explanation of church discipline. Telling "it to the church" (v 17) is the referent to the "two of you" in verse 19 and "two or three of you" in verse 20. The "keys of the kingdom" are exercised properly when the procedure in verses 15-17 are followed. The judicious and prayerful use of this process fulfills the legal requirement that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (v 16). The final explanation for the authority for binding something on earth is—"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst" (v 20.). The import of this passage for worship is that we can be assured that when the church *gathers together in Jesus name*, He is truly there. I hope you will not ask me to explain the exact nature of this special presence.

A lesser known passage which teaches us of Christ's special presence is found in Hebrew 2:12, "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing thy praise." This

## 1. *The Priority of Congregational Worship*

quotation of Psalm 22:22, applied to Jesus seems to refer both to His earthly ministry in the congregation and to the spiritual presence of Christ with His congregation today. If churches today believed that Christ is present, singing praise in the congregation, how would that change their praise?

### **The Reformation Concept of Sabbath and Lord's Day**

The continental reformers like Calvin and Beza and the writers of the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus and Olevianus, see the Sabbath as a principle which has civil dimensions and primarily requires worship on the Lord's Day. The English Puritans (e.g., Westminster Confession) went further to hold to a rather rigorous understanding of rest which includes *only works of mercy, necessity, and piety*. Chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession teaches that God,

. . . appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day,(3) and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

The chapter continues in saying that “this Sabbath is then kept holy unto the Lord . . . taken up, the whole time, in the public and private exercises of His worship, and in the duties of necessity and mercy” (21:8). Very specifically the Larger Catechism instructs that,

The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy in the publick and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.

However, in the earlier days of the Reformation, Calvin follows his mentor, Augustine who asks, “. . . what there is in these Ten Commandments, *except the observance of the sabbath*, which ought not to be kept by a Christian . . .?”<sup>20</sup> Similarly Calvin interpreted the Fourth Commandment as signifying spiritual rest, congregational worship, and civil rest. Principally, he says that God by the “seventh day has sketched for his people the coming perfection of his Sabbath in the Last Day.”<sup>21</sup>

First, under the repose of the seventh day the heavenly Lawgiver meant to represent to the people of Israel spiritual rest, in which believers ought to lay aside their own works to allow God to work in them. Secondly, he meant that there was to be a stated day for them to assemble to hear the law and perform the rites, or at least to devote it particularly to meditation upon his works, and thus through this remembrance to be trained in piety. Thirdly, he resolved to give a day of

---

<sup>20</sup>*The Spirit and the Letter* 24 [A.D. 412].

<sup>21</sup>Battles trans. (I), p. 396.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

rest to servant and those who are under the authority of others, in order that they should have some respite from toil.<sup>22</sup>

Calvin is very clear that “by the Lord Christ’s coming the ceremonial part of this commandment was abolished” and speaks of “the Sabbath” (referring to Col 2:16-17) as a “a shadow of what is to come; but the body belongs to Christ.” In no uncertain terms he says, “Christians ought therefore to shun completely the superstitious observance of days.”<sup>23</sup> He says in his commentary on Colossians 2:16, “. . . we do not by any means observe days, as though there were any sacredness in holy days, or as though it were not lawful to work on them, but this is done for government and order, not for the days.”<sup>24</sup>

Concerning worship, Calvin makes clear that “although the Sabbath has been abrogated, there is still occasion for us: (1) to assemble on stated days for the hearing of the Word, the breaking of the mystical bread, and for public prayers [cf. Acts 2:42]; (2) to give surcease from labor to servants and workmen . . .” Calvin is very stringent in his denunciation of observing Sunday as the Sabbath. He says,

. . . we are far different from the Jews in this respect. For we are not celebrating it as a ceremony with the most rigid scrupulousness, supposing it as a spiritual mystery to be figured thereby. Rather, we are using it as a remedy needed to keep order in the church. Yet Paul teaches that no one ought to pass judgment on Christians over the observance of this day, for it is only “a shadow of what is to come” [Col 2:17]. . . For, because it was expedient to overthrow superstition, the day sacred to the Jews was set aside; because it was necessary to maintain decorum, order, and peace in the church, another was appointed for that purpose.<sup>25</sup>

Battles, the learned translator of Calvin, surely grasps the matter when he says in a note on the preceding passage: “It is clear from this passage and from sec. 34 that for Calvin the Christian Sunday is not, as in the Westminster Confession 21, a simple continuation of the Jewish Sabbath ‘changed into the first day of the week,’ but a distinctively Christian institution adopted on the abrogation of the former one, as a means of church order and spiritual health.”<sup>26</sup>

Calvin’s words are very strong toward those (amazingly) like the Westminster divines who hold that only the day has been changed: “For those of them who cling to their constitutions surpass the Jews three times over in crass and carnal Sabbatarian superstition.”<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the Genevan catechism, written by Calvin states just as clearly that “the observance of rest is part of the old ceremonies, it was abolished by the advent of Christ” (Q 170); “it is ceremonial” (171); and that what is “beyond ceremony” is that it is “to figure spiritual rest; for the preservation of ecclesiastical polity; and for the relief of slaves” (172-173). This is the very three-fold purpose discussed

---

<sup>22</sup>p. 395.

<sup>23</sup>p. 397.

<sup>24</sup>Eds. Torrance and Torrance (Eerdmans, 1965), p. 337.

<sup>25</sup>p. 399.

<sup>26</sup>p. 399.

<sup>27</sup>p. 400.

## 1. *The Priority of Congregational Worship*

in the *Institutes*. In answer to the question (181), “*What order, then, is to be observed on that day?*” He says merely, “That the people meet to hear the doctrine of Christ, to engage in public prayer, and make profession of their faith.” He maintains strongly, “In regard to the ceremony, I hold that it was abolished, as the reality existed in Christ (Col. 2:17).” Finally he asks (185), “*What of the commandment then remains for us?* Not to neglect the holy ordinances which contribute to the spiritual polity of the Church; especially to frequent sacred assemblies, to hear the word of God, to celebrate the sacraments, and engage in the regular prayers, as enjoined.”

Surely nothing else need be said to explicate Calvin as a non-Sabbatarian! However, the Heidelberg Catechism also indicates that the Reformed churches influenced by Calvin understood this concept of the Sabbath. Question 103 addresses the Fourth Commandment's requirement on believer saying,

First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained; and that I, especially on the sabbath, that is, on the day of rest, diligently frequent the church of God, to hear his word, to use the sacraments, publicly to call upon the Lord, and contribute to the relief of the poor, as becomes a Christian. Secondly, that all the days of my life I cease from my evil works, and yield myself to the Lord, to work by his Holy Spirit in me: and thus begin in this life the eternal sabbath.

### **True Zion**

Having surveyed historical developments, what of a deeper Biblical theology of worship in His presence. There are many other allusions from the Old Testament which help us see the uniqueness and sanctity of congregational worship. If the New Covenant congregation is *in some sense* “Mount Zion,” “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22)—then the Older Testament references to Zion’s worship, inasmuch as there is overlap, can be principally applied to the gathered New Covenant worshipers (as the writer of Hebrews indicated). Surely it is no less true of Christ’s congregation that “God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved” (Psa 46:5) or that in some special sense “His tabernacle is in Salem; His dwelling place also is in Zion” (Psa 76:2). If anything, it is more truly that because our Lord indwells Zion, “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth” (Psa 50:2). Our prayers, no less than our Old Covenant counterparts, are to plead for God to “Remember Thy congregation, which Thou hast purchased of old, which Thou hast redeemed to be the tribe of Thine inheritance; and this Mount Zion, *where Thou hast dwelt*” (Psa 74:2). Blessing comes when we are like those saints of old in whose hearts are the highways to Zion! Upon arriving “every one of them appears before God in Zion” (Psa 84:5-7). True praise flows from the recognition that “The LORD is great in Zion, and He is exalted above all the peoples. Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; holy is He” (Psa 99:2-3). We are to “Sing praises to the LORD, *who dwells in Zion*” (Psa 9:11).

Very directly, we are called to have special affection for the “house of the Lord” which is His temple. It is perfectly clear in the New Testament that the saints, individually and collectively are the temple of God. But we are also told, “we have a great priest over the *house of God*” (Heb 10:21). Therefore, we should say with the psalmist, “Now O LORD, I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwells” (Psa 26:8). At His house we receive more than we can ever give: “They drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; and Thou dost give them to drink of the river of Thy delights. For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we see light (Psa 36:8-9). We should say that “we will be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, Thy holy temple” (Psa 65:4). If we believe these

## *Worship and Worship Services*

things we will say with more vigor than even those who have come before, “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’” (Psa 122:1).

For worship to be both fully Biblical and experientially meaningful, we must recapture the awe of coming to Zion, to His house. Having the fulness of new covenant revelation, we do not look to the *place* for worship, as if the building were *the temple* or *the house of God*. Rather it is “neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem” but “an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers” (Joh 4:21-23). We must know the truly *sanctified place and time*, when and where the assembly of God’s people meet in His special presence and on His special day.

We must, in the words of John Newton, speak glorious things of Zion, the city of our God.<sup>28</sup> With Timothy Dwight we must confess that we “love thy kingdom, Lord, the house of thine abode, the church our blest Redeemer saved with His own precious blood.”<sup>29</sup> And may we know the reality that Isaac Watts (1707) so poetically penned:

HOW SWEET AND AWFUL IS THE PLACE WITH CHRIST WITHIN THE DOORS,  
WHILE EVERLASTING LOVE DISPLAYS THE CHOICEST OF HER STORES.

WHILE ALL OUR HEARTS AND ALL OUR SONGS JOIN TO ADMIRE THE FEAST,  
EACH OF US CRY, WITH THANKFUL TONGUES, LORD, WHY WAS I A GUEST?

WHY WAS I MADE TO HEAR THY VOICE AND ENTER WHILE THERE’S ROOM  
WHEN THOUSANDS MAKE A WRETCHED CHOICE AND RATHER STARVE THAN COME?

‘T WAS THE SAME LOVE THAT SPREAD THE FEAST THAT SWEETLY DREW US IN;  
ELSE WE HAD STILL REFUSED TO TASTE, AND PERISHED IN OUR SIN.

PITY THE NATIONS, O OUR GOD, CONSTRAIN THE EARTH TO COME;  
SEND THY VICTORIOUS WORD ABROAD, AND BRING THE STRANGERS HOME.

WE LONG TO SEE THY CHURCHES FULL, THAT ALL THE CHOSEN RACE  
MAY, WITH ONE VOICE AND HEART AND SOUL, SING THY REDEEMING GRACE.<sup>30</sup>

### **How Should We Then Worship?**

✧ **Lord’s Day Worship.** We must not neglect to gather the Lord’s people on the Lord’s Day in His Presence (Heb 10:24-25, 12:22). Worship on Sunday is not negotiable, it is the Day of Resurrection. We make a profound statement to all the world by setting that day aside. We testify of the creational pattern, of the Scriptural tradition, and most importantly that the Savior of the world was Christ, raised from the dead for our salvation.

From this point arises the question of the permissibility to worship on other days. Only a block or so from my home is a church which identifies itself as a Messianic Jewish church. They worship on Saturday, the Sabbath of the First Testament. How should this question be addressed? Let me state the issue frankly. In this case, these believers are simply mistaken about the fulness of the new covenant, the

---

<sup>28</sup>See the classic hymn based on Psalm 87, “Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken.”

<sup>29</sup>See the hymn written in 1800, “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord.”

<sup>30</sup>This hymn is based on the parable of the great supper in Luke 14:16ff.

## 1. *The Priority of Congregational Worship*

coming of Christ, and the transformation of synagogue and temple to the body of Christ assembling as the Christian *ecclesia* (Church). They perpetuate the idea that there is a Jewish church and a Gentile church (Contra Ephesians 2, Acts 15, and Romans 14-15). Perhaps there is an accommodational principle involved and that they are seeking to reach Jews. We can be thankful for all that are reached through such means. Yet, the New Testament period of transition is over. There is no temple, but the spiritual temple of Christ's church. The Jewish synagogue cannot exist as it did prior to the destruction of the temple in *70 anno Domini*, according to Christ's own word. And of course, synagogues which recognized not our Lord Jesus are, in the words of John, "synagogues of Satan."

There are those in the Muslim world who accommodate the Islamic culture by worship on Friday. When one is in a subversive and covert context, many concessions and accommodations may become necessary. However, worship on the Lord's Day is not a mere preference. Worship on His Day distinctly recognizes His supremacy and redemption as marked by that which Mohammed did not and could not do, come back alive from the grave (Hallelujah!). We are certainly free to worship on Friday or any day for that matter. The advance of the gospel and the fullest application of the truths of the new covenant, however, demand that assemblies of Christ's people honor Him, even in the Day with which they worship. The transformation of the world by the gospel (Isa 11), however, will result in Biblical worship. The most objective dimension of that worship is the uniquely Christian theistic worship of the Triune God on the Day of Resurrection.

✧ **Entrance into Worship.** If congregational worship is qualitatively different than other personal worship forms, then we must consciously enter into His presence as a congregation, invoking His name. Therefore, worship is to begin with some level of recognition of the entrance, congregationally, into His presence. The *votem* and the call to worship function this way. The Psalms repeatedly illustrate the recognition of entering into God's presence (Psa 100).

✧ **The Gravity of Worship.** We must enter His presence with the realization of the *awfulness* (in the older sense of the word, "awe-full") of the occasion (Heb 12:22). "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:28-29). Just this fact alone would remove flippancy, silliness, and a "Jesus is my buddy" approach to worship. We should not think that our recognition of God's presence would quench fellowship, excitement, joy and gladness. Nothing could be further from true. God's people are to "Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name" (Psa 100:4). Moreover, prayers may be offered which speak of personal requests and needs. Greetings may be extended (Rom 16). Our assembling is for "encouraging one another" (Heb 10:25). All of this is with recognition that He is in our midst (Mat 18:20).

✧ **The Dismissal from Worship.** We enter into His presence realizing that Mount Zion has appeared. We have a distinct beginning to such assembly worship. Though worship extends to all of life, there must of necessity be a distinct end to the public, congregational worship of God. It would be unreasonable for it to fizzle out. Rather it is to be, as it were, an explosion of little lights into the world. *The benediction*, a pronouncement of God's blessing on the people, is a common and Biblically-based approach to sending out the congregants. It is the people who gather and are called into the reality of worship. At the conclusion of the service, therefore, the same people are blessed and sent forth to glorify God in all of life. Having been renewed in their covenantal vows as God's people, they are sent forth to perform those vows in all of life.

## **2. O Worship the King: Foundational Questions**

### **What is Worship?**

Worship is far grander than any mere set of activities or narrowly defined experience. After all, it will occupy redeemed people throughout eternity and has been the incomprehensible life of celestial creatures from time immemorial. Let us first view the “forest” of the magnitude of worship so that will be able to see the individual “trees” of manageable worship activities.

Worship is the transition from life to eternity, from ourselves to the recognition of our own limitations and finite place in the universe. Worship provides us with a walkway into another realm so different from this fallen existence. But it is no mere experience limited by the emotional capacities of our frail flesh. It is the normal aspiration of those committed to a God beyond our vision, seen only with the heart’s eye and the mind’s sight.

When we come to the congregation to participate in simple, often unimpressive, activities, we come representative of a life, of a calling, of a set of relationships, of a segment of a personal life in space-time. It is by reciprocally bringing our life into worship and taking worship into our life that we may grasp a fraction of the infinite depth of our relationship with an unlimited, personal, Triune being. God is, as St. Anselm prayed, a being than which no greater can be conceived. Worship plunges our struggling desert existence into the fresh-water ocean of just such a Being. (See the diagram, “Worship Into All of Life.”)

Worship has been a practice of all cultures in all times and on every kind of occasion, though much of it has been *false worship*. The Scripture makes worship an irrevocable responsibility of all living beings and it is to be offered to the true God according to His revealed will. Fallen men, however, are naturally makers of idols. They could do no less, being stamped with the image of an incomprehensible Creator. With eternity placed in their hearts, they are yet darkened by the fallen nature of their original father, Adam. Augustine said so aptly, “Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” The God-shaped vacuum perceived by Pascal must be filled, not just in coming to *know* God, but in continually *knowing* Him through worship.

*Let everything that lives reserve its truest praise for God and God alone.<sup>31</sup>*

Having described it above, what is worship, Biblically speaking? The Bible is filled with words relating to worship in all its activities. The worship words of the Bible give us very concrete images: in the most literal sense worship means “to bow down,” “to kiss toward,” or “to kiss the hand,” from the Greek word *proskyneo* or the Hebrew word *saha*. Other words have come to evoke a kaleidoscope of concepts too, such as “render honor,” “pay homage” (*latrueuo*), “minister” (*leitourgeo*), “praise” (*aineo*), “glory” (*doxa*), “confess” (*exomologeio*), and “sing praise” (*humneo* and *psallo*). Each of these concepts and other Biblical themes come together to form the concept of *worship*, a terms whose English origins involve giving worth to God and attributing greatness to Him.

We might view Biblical worship as a river formed from the merging of several important tributaries. One of these tributaries is the contrast of right worship with idolatry. Worship given to any created being is heinous idolatry (Exo 34:14, Isa 2:8, Rev 22:8,9). Worship is to be according to God’s self-revelation; we must not fabricate what God is like (Deu 12:32, Mat 15:9,10, Exo 20:4,5,6, Col 2:23).

---

<sup>31</sup>From Steve Green’s excellent song “God and God Alone” (Word: Waco, TX).

## 2. Foundational Questions

Throughout the pages of Biblical revelation, we see that worship, as an activity, involves sacrifice, service, and self-awareness.

Worship involves *sacrifice*. In the pre-Mosaic times, from the clothing of Adam and Eve, to the fallen offerings of Cain and Abel, to the Patriarchs, sacrificial worship is present. In the Mosaic mediatorial system it is meticulously specified. What might be more surprising is that in the New Testament we have our worship illustrated and prescribed in sacrificial terms (Rom 12:1, Phi 4:18, Heb 13:15).

Worship involves *service* (Exo 35:21, 1Ch 28:13, Phi 2:17, Heb 12:28, Rev 2:19).<sup>32</sup> We should not think of worship merely in terms of an experience. The writer of Hebrews reasons that “since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe” (Heb 2:28). And Paul teaches that presenting our bodies a living and holy sacrifice “is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom 12:1).

Another worship stream is *self-awareness*. Seeing God as He is we become aware of ourselves, especially in our depravity. Isaiah, upon seeing the Lord Jesus<sup>33</sup> said, “Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5). John was aware of his self when he said, “When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man” (Rev 1:17). When we come into the presence of God in worship we identify our complete insufficiency, sinfulness, and have real self-reflective awareness.

### The Domains of Worship

The trouble with giving a full description and definition of worship is that, in our contemporary vocabulary, worship is broader than any single use of any Biblical term. Of the 182 uses of the word, “worship,” none are really expressive of the fullest sense of our contemporary usage.<sup>34</sup> When we use the term, we mean a conglomeration of many worship terms and concepts in the Bible. We can distinguish three uses of the term, “worship” which have Biblical support:

1. In the broadest sense *worship is all of life*. God demands that we serve Him and glorify Him in all that we do. Therefore, a Christian view of the world must be cultivated such that every activity can be brought under the Lordship of Jesus. The original “cultural mandate” was thus a command to worship and glorify God (Gen 1:26). Man is to have dominion over the world as the vice-regent of His heavenly Father. Thus, the Scriptures call us to live *coram Deo* (before the face of God). “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1Co 10:33; Rom. 12:1-2; Mat. 4:10).

2. In a narrower sense *worship is an organized activity of gathered believers*. Those who profess allegiance to the true God are called to assemble together to glorify Him and build up each other. “When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification” (1Co 14:26; Heb. 10:24-25). While this definition preeminently

---

<sup>32</sup>Stephen Perks has a fine appendix addressing this in an unexpected place, *A Philosophy of Christian Education* (Avant, 1993).

<sup>33</sup>John 12:41 says, “These things Isaiah said, because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.”

<sup>34</sup>In the NASB, for example. Combined with the related terms, like “worshiped,” “worshiping,” etc. total 182 uses.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

applies to congregational, corporate worship, it may be adapted for the family in *family worship*, and the individual in *private (or secret) worship*.<sup>35</sup>

3. In a still narrower sense *worship is an intimate spiritual experience*. There is an existential dimension to true worship. In the most direct sense, worship takes place when Spirit-indwelt believers self-reflectively and consciously bow their hearts in praise and adoration to God. Worship, in this sense, is very experiential. David says, “Bless the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name” (Psa 103:1). And this sense is like the celestial scene of Revelation 5, “And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshiped” (v 14). These creatures were already in the presence of God and were uttering intense praises (v 9-13); but then they “fell down and worshiped” (v 14). This was not a mere matter of posture. Their celestial lives and praises culminated in their most intense expression of worship.

The sense of *worship* which this book will most often address is the worship of the corporate church, the “worship service” (no. 2 above).<sup>36</sup> Though my discussion may go beyond these bounds at times, it is my aim to narrow my applications and suggestions to this arena.

As a resource to our thinking, consider some popular definitions of worship:

Allen and Borrer: “Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare His worth. Worship is not passive, but is participative. Worship is not simply a mood; it is a response. Worship is not just a feeling; it is a declaration.”<sup>37</sup>

Cornwall: “The element of worship—the raw instinct, untutored and undirected—is fundamentally an attitude of veneration, or, more properly, an expression of an inward veneration.”<sup>38</sup>

Hustad: “Christian worship is our affirmative response to the self-revelation of the Triune God.”<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith alludes to this threefold context of worship in 21.6, “God is to be worshiped everywhere in spirit and truth; as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies.”

<sup>36</sup>D. A. Carson observes that there are three reductionistic tendencies in defining worship: (a) to restrict worship to something we “do” in a worship service or worse, part of a service, (b) make worship only “liturgical” (formal) in nature, or (c) (in reaction) to make worship all of life, but not corporate since allegedly, believers gather for edification (“*Worship the Lord Your God*”: *The Perennial Challenge in Worship: Adoration and Action*, Baker: Grand Rapids, 1993) pp. 14-16.

<sup>37</sup>Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship, Rediscovering the Missing Jewel* (Multnomah: Portland, OR, 1982), p. 16.

<sup>38</sup>Judson Cornwall, *Elements of Worship*, (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Pub., 1985), p. 15.

<sup>39</sup>Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate! Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition*, (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Pub., 1981), p. 64.

## 2. Foundational Questions

Peterson: “Worship is a comprehensive category in the New Testament, describing *our engagement with God through faith in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.*”<sup>40</sup>

Rayburn: “Worship is the activity of the new life of a believer in which , recognizing the fullness of the Godhead as it is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and His mighty redemptive acts, he seeks by the power of the Holy Spirit to render to the living God the glory, honor, and submission which are his due.”<sup>41</sup>

Webber: Calls worship “a meeting between God and his people.”<sup>42</sup>

One will notice from these definitions that worship fundamentally is adoration and action. Christian worship articulates these two components and our worship should express them in relation to the past, present and future. We remember the greatness of God and His great acts of redemption for His people. We recognize, in worship, His adorable presence and contemplate His work in our lives. And we extol Him for His future deliverance and pledge to be obedient servants.

The critical question is not what “worship” terms mean (*proskuneo* and the like), rather what is the nature of the *service of worship*.

### What is Christ-Centered worship?

This book would be a drastically different book had it been written before the first century AD. The same principle surely holds—we must worship God according to His Word — however, we now have the Final Word, the Incarnate Word. As Charles Wesley so beautifully penned, we have “the Word of the Father now in flesh appearing.”<sup>43</sup>

Since a Biblical approach to worship and its application to the contemporary church involve the intersect between the Old and New Testaments, this area of investigation is no small matter. Moreover, when we realize that those writing the New Testament worshiped in the shadow of the temple and even participated in old covenant forms of worship — only in those first few decades after Christians were no longer a mere “sect of the Jews” would we see the full flowering of new covenant worship.<sup>44</sup>

From our current vantage point we see that Messiah Jesus came in the fulness of time as the only mediator between God and men. Jesus completes the revelation of God begun in God’s covenant disclosures to Adam, Abraham, and Moses, etc. All the Old Testament progressively unfolds the redemption of the covenant-keeping God, Yahweh. We learn from His Word that He exists in three persons and one divine essence. The self-revealing God of the Scriptures is therefore, a Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>40</sup>David Peterson, *Worship in the New Testament in Worship: Adoration and Action*, (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1993), p. 52.

<sup>41</sup>Robert G. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), pp. 20-21.

<sup>42</sup>Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old & New*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 11.

<sup>43</sup>In “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing.”

<sup>44</sup>For example Paul could take a vow (Acts 18:18) and even make an offering at the temple (Acts 21:26). This would not be possible after the destruction of the temple, according our Lord’s prophetic words of judgment.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

The Old Testament forms and details of worship point to a reality beyond themselves, the Sacrifices, the Passover, the Sabbath, the Jubilee, the Lamb, the Rock, the Temple, the Son, the Servant — these pointed to *the* Christ. The Old Testament acts of worship may seem concrete, with their ritual of blood and fire. Yet to the Biblical mind, the firmness of the substance of the Old Testament ceremonies is as elusive as a shadow cast on the ground by the morning sun. Now, we stand gazing at the brightness of His glory, as it were, into the sun itself. Thus, the Old Testament must be understood in its true intention, as the unfolding of Christ.

One obvious example of this is the use of bloody sacrifices. These were an aspect of the true, right and Biblical directed worship. Now, however, we need only look to the “once for all offering” Christ’s precious blood to know that the blood of bulls and goats was only temporary. This is the heart of the revelation of God. The proper interpretation of the Old Testament worship forms is guided by the Christocentric interpretive principle. Although many Scriptural proofs for this principle abound, one passage will suffice as an explicit example:

And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. . . Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance for forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:24, 44-47)

In my understanding, this principle in no way invalidates the Old Testament as the authoritative Word of God (2Tim 3:16) which reveals God’s character, laws, and salvation. It is the Old Testament to which the apostles continually refer to prove that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. It is the chief characters of the Old Testament which are truly heroes of *our faith* (Heb 11). Paul uses Abraham and David to teach justification by faith alone in Christ (Rom 4-5).

A Christ-centered approach recognizes that Christ is both an Old Testament Messiah, as well as a New Covenant mediator. This whole-Bible approach, grounded in the Christocentricity of the complete Word, must be proclaimed in every facet of the life of the church. This is especially true in worship. The Old Testament shadowy forms are vapors, if they do not lead us to the incarnate Christ. And the New Testament message of a Messiah would have precious little content if the Old Testament concepts were stripped from it. We may only worship aright when we understand that the Lamb of God redeems us from the curse of a Law given in former times (Gal 4:4). Because of Him, the First Testament temple veil was torn in two, from *top to bottom* (Mat 27:51). A Christ-centered Biblical theology, then, sees the culmination of God’s reconciling activity in the work of Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection (1Pe 3:18). Hence, the key to a Biblical understanding of Old Testament worship, then, is that in the progress of redemption there were shadows and types, but now the reality is manifest (Col 2:16-17). What the Old Testament “conceals,” the New Testament “reveals.” This point is very commonly made and hardly controversial. I would only like to emphasize that our worship (in every domain) is illuminated by a whole-Bible. *Christians* cannot be New Testament-only thinkers, since the very concept of a ‘Christ’ only makes sense to one informed by the Older Testament.

Certainly we must recognize that the coming of Christ directly impacted the form and content of worship. Jesus Himself taught this to the woman at the well,

## 2. Foundational Questions

“Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father . . . But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall 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” (Joh 4:21, 23-24).

Consider carefully Jesus’ expression of the purpose of God—*the Father seeks those who worship in spirit and truth* (Joh 4:24). This places worship in the most important place; it is at the very heart of the purpose of God. Thus, we may be assured of the importance of discovering the Biblical nature of worship, especially as it applies to New Testament congregational worship.

### What about Old Testament Worship?

To many the Old Testament is a maze of rules and exactitudes which are to be dismissed out of hand as irrelevant. However, much of the Biblical data concerning worship is found in the Old Testament. Certainly the most fundamental concepts of holiness, majesty, power, revelation, redemption, praise, etc. originate and are concretely illustrated in the Old Testament. At a first glance we see statements which are easily applicable to the new covenant people of God and we see others that are not. We see the Psalms commanding us to “sing praises to the Lord” and we read about regulations for blood sacrifices. We see a call for praise from the nations and a prohibition against uncircumcised men from entering the assembly to worship. How then should we understand and apply the Old Testament commands and prescriptions? I would suggest the following principles as consistent implications from a Biblical theology of worship and as principles most consistent with redemptive revelation and history.

The defense of the principles which follow flow from, I pray, a proper view of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. That relationship, very simply, is an organic relationship. The new covenant is a flowering of that which is foreshadowed in the Old Testament, as discussed above. There are many complex theological matters which surround the continuity/discontinuity issues. These need not be settled here. The following principles lead me to see a sense of continuity with the expressions of praise found in the Old Testament.

1. *All the Scripture is authoritative.* We should seek to understand and apply all of Scripture concerning worship in both testaments since it is all the Word of God (2Ti 3:14-17; 2Pe 3:16) and it all teaches us about Christ (Luk 24:44f.).

2. *All of life is the arena of Biblical worship in the fullest sense.* We should see worship as extending beyond the meeting of the assembly so as to include everything the Bible puts in worship terms, from the intimate cries of the Psalmist, to doing good, to evangelism (e.g., Ps. 61:8; Heb. 13:16; Rom. 15:16).

3. *All Biblical expressions of worship are valid.* We should utilize all of the worship expressions (Old Testament and New Testament), unless there is a Biblical reason for not using it (i.e., Scripture must modify Scripture). For example, while bloody sacrifices are prescribed in the Old Testament, they were certainly superseded by the progressive nature of redemption in Christ according to the New Testament. Moreover, God made that plain to the world in the destruction of the Levitical temple and in raising the (spiritual) “tabernacle of David” — the people of God. The ceremonial aspects of the previous era were to be fulfilled in Christ and no longer required of Christian worshipers (Hebrews; Col 2:16).

4. *All explicit teaching on worship should control the application of other Biblical principles to worship.* We should give primary consideration to the principles of Scripture explicitly revealing the nature and practice of true worship and secondary emphasis to others. A consistent interpretive principle

## *Worship and Worship Services*

such as this guards against misapplications and rationalizations contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture. Thus, areas directed to the subject of worship are to guide our view of worship. For example, we should not apply the “meat sacrificed to idols” principle in order to keep from obeying the teaching of Psalm 150 about praising God with instruments. Psalm 150 directly addresses worship (services) and the “meat sacrificed to idols” principle directly addresses interpersonal relationships in the context of cultural differences.

With these principles—(1) all of the Bible, (2) all of life, (3) all Biblical expressions, and (4) all explicit teaching on worship—we can be assured that we are pursuing worship services according to explicit Biblical teaching pertaining to worship and according to *all the Biblical teaching*. These principles by no means settle all of the controversial issues. Yet, we must use the clear to understand the unclear. These principles will be test in later sections of this study, when address some of the issues that often find their way to the forefront of worship disputes (music style, drama, and dance, etc.).

These principles lead us to assert that worship which is Biblical is warranted by the whole of Scripture, which stands as consistent with the New Covenant, and which is rooted in the whole counsel of God.

## 2. Foundational Questions

### What about Covenantal Worship?

Worship originally was precipitated by the covenant instituted by God. The very need for salvation itself arises from the transgression of the creation covenant.<sup>45</sup> “But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant” (Hos 6:7). Beginning with Abraham the fundamental revelation to him was a covenant promise unfolded throughout the pages of Scripture.

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; 2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; 3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. “ (Genesis 12:1-3)

Abraham was justified by faith, by faith in this covenant word. It was more than a promise of a land, seed, and blessing. It was a promise of righteousness through *the Seed*. “Then he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:16; cf Rom 4:3ff). Nevertheless, it was indeed a promise of a land, seed, and blessing. It involved the authority of God, his Word, His requirements, the commitment of Abraham, and the succession of the covenant in Abraham’s heirs.

The promise of the land takes up the bulk of the narratives of the Hebrew Scriptures and we learn from Hebrews that it foreshadows the inheritance that is everlasting (Heb 11:8, 10, 1Pe 1:4). The inheritance of the saints is a Biblical concept rich in the language of Israel and in the new covenant concepts of the kingdom of God (Eph 5:5). Moreover, Romans 4:13 indicates that the world’s property was actually signified in the promise to Abraham. “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be *heir of the world* was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.” This passage says that Abraham’s descendants will inherit the world. Many texts repeat this refrain: “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9, cf Hab 2:14, Num 14:21, Psa 72:19, Isa 6:3).

The seed of Abraham also takes up the better part of the First Testament. From Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to Egypt and the twelve tribes in the land, all the way to the truest Seed, Christ (Gal 3:16). Moreover, there is that significant thread of the “blessing” that runs through both the Hebrew Scriptures and culminates in the Great Commission.

It is through the Abrahamic covenant that salvation has come, because it is this promise which included a prophecy of the truly unique Seed of Abraham. “Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, ‘And to seeds,’ as referring to many, but rather to one, ‘And to your seed,’ that is, Christ” (Gal 3:16). Mary, the mother of our Lord said that Christ’s coming was in *remembrance*. “He has given help to Israel His servant, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever” (Luke 1:54-55). Christ’s says of the covenantal wine, “for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” (Mat 26:28). Christ’s blood is “the blood of the eternal covenant” (Heb 13:20).

Worship, in the fullest understanding of Biblical revelation, should be conscious of the covenant relationship between God and man, which culminates in Christ. If we are servants of a new covenant, the Bible is the book of that covenant, Christ is the mediator of that covenant, His blood is the blood of that covenant, His cup is the sacrament of that covenant

---

<sup>45</sup>For a more detailed exposition of covenant theology generally and the creational covenant specifically, see O. Palmer Robertson’s, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Grand Rapids: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

We are told by the writer of Hebrews that “even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship” (Heb 9:1). This implies both that the new covenant has regulations of worship and that it is intimately connected with the covenant. Worship should repeat the fundamental terms of the covenant; it should be guided by the book of the covenant; it should focus on the mediator of the covenant; it should be the joy of those who share in the blood of the covenant; it should be covenantal in the fullest sense.

### **What about Liturgy?**

One area of difficulty in bringing the New Testament to bear on the practical matter of worship services is the fact that there is no New Testament liturgy of worship. By the term “liturgy” I mean a *prescribed order of worship events*. A liturgy structures the use of all the elements that form a part of worship. The term *liturgy* is derived from the Greek word, *leitourgia* which is usually translated “ministry” or “service” (e.g., Exo 37:19, Phi 2:17). In the New Testament there are allusions and commands regarding a liturgy, no doubt; but, in fact, the New Testament does not contain anything like a First Century church bulletin complete with an order of worship.

This area is a great concern to contemporary evangelicals since there is a great *liturgical* movement. In this movement, several primary concerns emerge, such as the recovery of action as worship and the renewed emphasis on the Table (Communion). We are reminded by Robert Webber that *worship is a verb*.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, many are on a quest, not for the historical Jesus, but for the historical liturgy, the “old catholic” forms of worship.<sup>47</sup> There is certainly great value in considering these matters, especially in light of the rootlessness of most of Evangelicalism.

With regard to liturgy and attendant elements, what is normative for the church in any century? Liturgy has always involved to a greater or lesser extent some congregational relativity. This does not mean that the Bible has nothing to say about the subject. What the Scripture does say must be carefully understood and applied. We should consider this in the light of the church’s historic practices. We certainly should not come to this task with a *historical tabula rasa*. We would be foolish to cast away every thought and practice of the historical church. Obviously, any historical practices are by that not *normative*. Yet, we should seek a unity in practice as well as doctrine, taking into account Scripture and the voice of the church militant. This was the *modus operandi* in the Reformation.

It follows from the above discussion that we must do three things in order to accomplish the task of obeying the Biblical prescriptions: (a) Interpret the Word of God Christocentrically, (b) obey the stated commands of the Word, and (c) make wise, edifying judgments about the application of Biblical precepts, informed historically, to the situation of the contemporary congregation.

### **What about the Biblical Theological Development of Worship?**

While it is not my purpose to exhaustively discuss the chronological development of a Biblical theology of worship, it may be helpful to give an historical overview of worship. Worship extends from the time of fallen Eden to the formalization of Israel’s worship in the Mosaic covenant to the temple

---

<sup>46</sup>*Worship is a Verb* (Word: Waco, 1985). Also Webber has edited the massive eight volume set of resources, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Star Song, 1994). This set contains discussions on virtually every topic and subtopic of worship from every conceivable denominational perspective. Even so, a strong liturgical bent is admittedly present (cf. *Introduction*, p. xliii).

<sup>47</sup>Popular writers and speakers such as Michael Horton and James B. Jordan are very strong advocates of a historic liturgical approach.

## 2. Foundational Questions

worship testified in the pages of the NT to the sparse accounts of worship in the NT epistles. Essential themes of worship emerge to the seeing eye and the hearing ear. From the beginning we observe that God's creatures do homage to Him. Adam walked with God (daily?) and apparently had a special day of fellowship with Him (Sabbath). There is some indication that Adam experienced the special presence of the Lord at certain special times, and thus worshiped. After sinning they hid from the "presence of the Lord" in the "cool of the day" (Gen 3:8). This implies that Adam had a special time of being in God's presence. Given the later Biblical revelation, it is not too far beyond reason to believe that the weekly Sabbath instituted and exemplified by God was such a special time.

Upon investigation, the entire arrangement of the garden of Eden exemplifies the symbols of worship which are later developed into the tabernacle, tabernacle of David, temple, and the new covenant spiritual realities signified in Ezekiel's temple and the NT teaching.<sup>48</sup> What follows is by no means a dogmatic or exhaustive study of these things. This is merely a suggestive outline which correlates the major themes.

✧ In creation we see the garden of God. Eden has as its covering the heavens. It is set under the blue firmament above (Gen 1:6-8). Similarly, Abraham looked to the starry sky as the symbol of God's covenant to him. Later, the same symbol appears in the tabernacle's sky-like ceiling, the temple's architecture, and the new Jerusalem. Biblical worship looks to the throne room of heaven which is symbolized by the sky. In worship, heaven and earth, as it were are joined. Hence, the New Jerusalem comes down out of the highest heavens (Heb 12:22, Rev 3:12, 21:2).

✧ Eden's was heaven on earth. In heaven, and in the sky-heaven immediately over the primitive creation, the Bible pictures glorious heavenly beings giving worship to the true God. Cherubim guard Eden's east gate (Gen 3:24). God is symbolized in the ark of the covenant as being between them and speaking from there (Num 7:89). Cherubim adorn the symbolic heavens of the tabernacle ceiling (Exo 26:31). Angels of various types (cherubim and seraphim, notably) give praise to God and fill the heavens (Isa 6:2; Rev 5:11). In fact, worship is and has always been in the "innumerable company of angels" (Heb 12:22).

✧ Eden has the lights of the sun, moon, and stars, just as the patriarch's covenant was confirmed by appeal to the number of the stars. There is an interesting correlation between these heavenly lights and heavenly beings. Perhaps our scientific worldview is not so *scientia*-ific after all (Psa 148; Rev 1:20).<sup>49</sup> The tabernacle and temple have the lampstand and the new Jerusalem has its extraordinary light. Biblical worship is illumined by God's revelatory lights and ultimately the Lamb Himself.

✧ Eden's notable entities are its trees, namely, the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Though the nature of these trees are enigmatic at best in the original Garden, we see the development and correlation of this symbol throughout Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. The Patriarch's worship is often correlated with trees: "Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD" (Gen 13:18) — just as the tabernacle, temple, and the heavenly city include tree symbols. Biblical worship recognizes the blessing of God (the benefits and fruits of trees) in respite from the elements (e.g., Patriarch's shade in the Land).

---

<sup>48</sup>I am greatly indebted here to "The Garden of God," a study course by James Jordan (Tyler, TX: Geneva Ministries, 1987) and other of his prolific efforts (Biblical Horizons, Niceville, FL).

<sup>49</sup>An interesting fictional presentation of this point is marvelously present in the *Space Trilogy* by C.S. Lewis. On a more exegetical note, Satan, the great angel, transforms himself (*metaschematizetai*) into an angel of light (2Co 11:14).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

✧ Eden was a high place, apparently on a mountain (Eze 28:13). A river flowed from it (Gen 2:10). Jerusalem, likewise, was the holy mountain (Isa 66:20). It is quite integral to this formative “place” of worship that the Patriarchs, Moses, Elijah (prophets), and Jesus experienced the unique presence of the living God on mountains. Biblical worship is illustrated on a high place (which visually aids one in becoming closer to heaven). In fact, altars are miniature mountains which reach to heaven.<sup>50</sup> Worship was conducted via altars erected by Abraham (Gen 12:7, 13:4, 22:9), Isaac (Gen 26:25), Jacob (Gen 33:20, 35:1,3), and Moses (Exo 17:15). Historically, we might observe the immensity of the mountain-like altars: “In the Mosque of Omar, immediately underneath the great dome, which occupies the site of the old temple, there is a rough projection of the natural rock, of about 60 feet in its extreme length, and 50 in its greatest breadth, and in its highest part about 4 feet above the general pavement. This rock seems to have been left intact when Solomon’s temple was built. It was in all probability the site of the altar of burnt offering.”<sup>51</sup>

✧ From Eden flowed rivers. The water of God is a theme throughout holy Writ. There are springs in the patriarch narratives, the laver in the synagogue, the ocean and basins on chariots in the temple, and finally the rivers of water in the new covenant (Zec 14:8). Following the Fall, these pure waters become waters of purification. Christ said of the Spirit’s reality: “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water’” (Joh 7:38, cf. Isa 58:11, Zec 13:11). Pure water flows from God’s presence. This is surely the image of the new covenant spiritual reality pictured by Ezekiel’s temple (Eze 47:1-3).

Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar (Eze 47:1).

Biblical worship involves both the concept and need of the water of life. This water is symbol of both refreshment and purification.

After sin and death entered the world (Rom 5:25), immediately after the Fall, God initiates the prototypical sacrifices of the animals for a covering of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21). It seems apparent that at this sacrificial inception, the slaying of animals is a *covering* for the transgressions. Sacrificial worship is evident in this first occasion because later we read of the offerings of both Cain and Abel (Gen 4:3-4). Job models the spiritual care of the father over the clan. He offers sacrifices even for his children (1:5-6). Reading through the book of beginnings, Genesis, one sees that sacrifices and offerings in distinct places mark the significant spiritual events in the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Often these worship events are filled with typological significance for later Biblical revelation (e.g., Abraham “worshiping” by offering Isaac, Gen 22:5). These great saints model worship in their walk of faith and the specific acts of homage to the covenant making God.

---

<sup>50</sup>Incidentally, this explains the Tower of Babel and the ancient and pervasive pyramid structure. Eden and post-Edenic worship exemplified reaching God through high places, a theme which pervades Biblical and pagan worship.

<sup>51</sup>*Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (in BWW).

## 2. Foundational Questions

Consider worship in the Mosaic period through the tabernacle and early synagogue convocations<sup>52</sup> and in the temple, preeminently in the reign of King David and King Solomon in national prosperity. The prescriptions for worship are detailed through the Levitical code. In traditional Reformed (regulative principle) circles much has been made of the severe judgment comes when worship is offered such as the “strange fire” of Nadab and Abihu (Num 3:4). It is important to note, though, the developing Biblical theology from the end of the purely Mosaic practice into a kind foretaste of New Covenant worship.

Peter J. Leithart effectively demonstrates this and it is fascinating. He shows the chiastic sequence of the end of pure Mosaic tabernacle worship and its reversal:

- A. Ark taken (house of Eli removed), 1 Samuel 4:1-22.
- B. Ark exiled in Philistia, 1 Samuel 5:1-6:9.
  - C. Ark returned on cart (sin regarding ark), 1 Samuel 6:10-21.
  - D. Ark with Abinadab, 1 Samuel 7:1-2.
  - C' Ark returned on cart (sin regarding ark), 2 Samuel 6:1-9.
  - B' Ark housed with a Philistine, 2 Samuel 6:10-11.
- A' Ark Restored (house of Saul removed), 2 Samuel 6:12-19.

He writes:

Moreover, the blessings upon Obed-edom reveal that the Davidic covenant will be a covenant of blessing to Gentile nations, a promise fulfilled especially in Solomon's reign, when the nations came to learn wisdom from Israel's king (1 Kings 10:24), but also seen earlier as many foreigners come to join David and become mighty men (like Uriah the Hittite). Though one cannot be dogmatic about his identity, an Obed-edom appears in the list of singers assigned to worship before the ark of Yahweh in the tabernacle of David; perhaps this is a Philistine incorporated into semi-priestly service at David's tent, an earnest of the later incorporation of the Gentiles (cf. 1 Chronicles 15:18, 21, 24; 16:37-38). Even if this Obed-edom is not the Gittite who housed the ark, it is still evident that the ark now, in contrast to the earlier exile, is at home among Gentiles. . . In an unprecedented turn of events, at the outset of the Davidic covenant, the ark of God is placed among Gentiles and brings blessing. 2 Samuel 6 thus provides important background for the prophecy of Amos 9:11-12, which James quotes at the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15:16-18 to justify the incorporation of uncircumcised Gentiles into the new Israel.

We see from this the development of worship, including the growth of musical instruments with David. Again, Leithart writes:

In the worship prescribed by David in 1 Chronicles 15-16, song and instrumental music are massively emphasized. Sacrifice is still performed at the Davidic tent, conducted by Zadok and his priestly house (1 Chronicles 16:39-40), but it is almost incidental to the Levitical orchestra and Psalm-singing. This provides a strong line of argument against Reformed liturgists who

---

<sup>52</sup> The weekly functions of synagogue teaching and prayer developed much earlier than Ezra. Leviticus 23:3 says, “For six days work may be done; but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, a *holy convocation* (*miqra*, assembly). You shall not do any work; it is a sabbath to the LORD in all your dwellings.”

## *Worship and Worship Services*

would reject the use of instruments in worship. Instrumental music is not merely "not forbidden"; on the contrary, it should be a central part of Christian worship. According to the very first church council, we do not worship at a silent Mosaic tent; we worship at the restored tent of David, and our praise in Psalms should be accompanied by an orchestra at least as robust as that of the Levites (1 Chronicles 15:16-24).<sup>53</sup>

The expansion of Biblical motifs such as the water of the laver in the tabernacle becoming the great sea of the temple and the basins on the chariots (1Ch 7:23, 38) is no less amazing. The high point of Israelite aesthetics is seen in the temple period of David, incorporating every Biblical expression of praise, including instruments, dance, choirs, architecture, and professional artisans of all sorts. It is important to note that the temple was a place of teaching and of *teaching priests* (2Ch 15:3).

The Synagogue is often associated with the dispersion of believers (the diaspora).<sup>54</sup> There can be no question that the synagogue became prominent within the period of the dispersion of the Jews to many nations (Act 2:5). Inasmuch as can be ascertained, the synagogue patterns of worship are focused on the use of Scripture (reading, teaching, singing, and chanting) and prayer. Little direct liturgical information is given in the Scriptures about this. Christ honored the synagogue model by teaching in them and participating in its service (Mat 4:23; Joh 18:20). Paul and other apostles also "proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues" (Acts 9:20).

Synagogue-like elements, including the use of Scripture in prayer are surely present (Act 4:24) in the early Christian experience. There is also a strong interpersonal connection and the care of believers is primary (see for example the context of Philemon).

It is interesting to observe that in the early years of the New Covenant church believers worshiped in the context of the temple, synagogue and in homes. Acts 2:46 says of the believers following Pentecost, that they were "day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart." Concerning Christians in the Synagogue, Paul says, "in one synagogue after another I used to imprison and beat those who believed in Thee" (Acts 22:19; also 13:14, 43, 14:1, 18:4). All this, however, must be interpreted in light the historical context of the overlap of ages: the old covenant forms/wine skins would soon be crushed. The temple would soon be destroyed and the church would be freed from the tyranny of Judaism.

### **Worship as Covenant Remembrance**

Let us bring the strings of this chapter together with a very specific exegesis of a relevant passage. First Corinthians 11 directly addresses the worship service in the intersect of covenant, communion, gathering and purpose. Consider 1 Corinthians 11:25 as the place to begin unwrapping the whole subject:

---

<sup>53</sup>This is all from an article, "Death and Resurrection of the Tabernacle" (Biblical Horizons, February, 1999) [www.BiblicalHorizons.com](http://www.BiblicalHorizons.com). He also did a fabulous conference message at "The Other Day the Music Died: Christ Church Ministerial Conference 2000" available from [www.wordmp3.com](http://www.wordmp3.com).

<sup>54</sup>Again, I do not think the weekly convocation of God's people began in Exilic period. Synagogue-like services and functions seem to be evident very early (Jdg 17:5).

## 2. Foundational Questions

In the same way, also, (He held) the cup, after eating-supper saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; Do this (!), when you drink (the cup), unto My remembrance.”<sup>55</sup>

Paul addresses the Corinthians in the matter of the Lord’s Supper (11:20) in verses 11:17-34. He refers to the content which he transmits to the Corinthians and which they evidently were familiar with as that which “I received from the Lord”(11:23). Paul has “received” the words of the Supper, just as he “received” the gospel that Christ died and rose according to the Scriptures (15:3). Hence, the Apostle says this content is revelation from Christ.

He addresses the Corinthian abuses of the Supper, namely, “schisms among you” (*scismata*) (11:18). In restating this severe problem he says, “divisiveness [literally ‘heresies’] among you exists”(11:19). This is illustrated in saying, “For each individually in the supper eats ahead (before others), one is hungry and another drunk” (11:21).<sup>56</sup> In rebuking these problems Paul says they are to examine themselves and so eat and drink in a worthy manner (not unworthily, *anaxios*). By continuing in such sin they would be guilty of “sinning against the body and blood of the Lord” (NIV) (*enochos*, worthy of, guilty of, sinning against, caught in, cf. Matt. 26:66) and thus be judged. The stipulations for such judgment are specified: “because of this, among you many are powerless and sickly and a considerable number sleep [are dead]”(11:30).

The “do this” phrase is variously translated: “this do ye, as oft as ye drink it” (KJV); “this do, as often as ye drink it” (ASV); “do this, whenever you drink it” (NIV). In reference to this general temporal clause, the interpreter must inquire about the temporal indication: e.g., when are they to drink of the cup of the Lord or how often are they to eat the Lord’s Supper? Lenski refers to this as a “temporal clause of expectancy.” He says, “Every time the disciples drink the sacramental cup, this cup itself, just like the eating of the sacramental bread, is to constitute their remembrance of the Lord.”<sup>57</sup> Paul is using the language found in the Lukan account of the Last Supper, including the phrase, “Do this in remembrance of Me.” The temporal clause is added by Paul (as oft as you drink).

Exegetes vary in their interpretation as to whether it simply means “when you drink it” or whether Paul is encouraging a frequent observance: e.g., “To his exposition of the supper Paul adds his own emphasis, ‘Do it often.’”<sup>58</sup> Grosheide says, for example, “In its complete form the clause would read; ‘Drink frequently the cup of the Lord and do so always in remembrance of Me.’”<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, another interpreter says, “In the ceremony Jesus does not say how often the communion was to be held but indicates that it is to be periodic—‘whenever you eat...and drink’ . . .”<sup>60</sup> There is no clear warrant

---

<sup>55</sup>My translation. This portion was presented as “Congregational Worship as Covenant Remembrance” at the Evangelical Theological Society’s Eastern Regional meeting in Washington, D.C. in 2002.

<sup>56</sup>Clearly then, the Biblical substance in the cup is fermented wine.

<sup>57</sup>R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 472-473.

<sup>58</sup>Clarence Tucker Craig, [Exegesis] *The Interpreter’s Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1953), 139.

<sup>59</sup>F.W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 272.

<sup>60</sup>W. Harold Mare, *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 259.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

for deciding this question from mere grammatical considerations. Nevertheless, the question may be answered in the way Paul uses the term, *sunerchomai* – “come together” or “assemble.”

This term, *sunerchomai*, is used no less than seven times in the span of chapters 11-14. (The term is used in thirty verses in the entire NT.) Each time in the Corinthian epistle it is perfectly clear that Paul is referring to the gathering of the church, (*ekklesia*) (e.g., 11:18, 22), the assembly of God’s called-out ones. This is especially clear in the combined usage of *ecclesia* and *sunerchomai* in verse 18: “when the church assembles.” What Paul asserts rhetorically is very instructive for our purpose: “When therefore ye assemble (*sunerchomai*) yourselves together, it is not possible to eat the Lord's supper” (ASV) (11:20). Considering his chiding for their abuse and schismatic behavior, Paul means — removing the rhetorical edge— when you assemble, you *should assemble in order* to eat the Lord’s Supper.

This accords with another significant passage on the subject: Acts 20:7, “And upon the first day of the week, when we were *gathered together to break bread*, Paul discoursed with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight” (ASV). Because of the repeated usage of the word “assemble,” in reference to the Supper, it is clear that when the church met they ate the bread and drank the cup.

Paul’s overall purpose in the passage is to rebuke the Corinthians’ sinful divisions and unworthy practice of the Lord’s Supper. Their schisms and factions were exceedingly inconsistent with the meaning of the Table. 1 Corinthians 10:17 says, “For we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” The Supper signifies participation in Christ and unity with our brethren. We have a common loaf. We have, though he does not say it, a common cup. Factions of gross proportion in the celebration of the Table are radically incongruent with the purpose of communion in the body and blood (1Cor. 10:16). Therefore the “as often” clause, given contextual considerations is Paul’s reinforcement of the proper intention of the Lord’s Table – “Do this unto My remembrance.”

Paul does not need to tell the Corinthians to “Drink frequently the cup of the Lord” (Grosheide) or to “Do it often” (Craig), though that is certainly a good word for modern skeptics of weekly communion. Rather, their very purpose in meeting always included partaking of the Lord’s Table. Certainly Paul’s purpose in the larger passage is not limited to encourage or discourage frequency of the Table. It is taken for granted that their meeting will include the Lord’s Table. So much so, that he could say with a cutting pastorally effective, rhetorical punch: “Therefore when you come together in one place, *it is not* to eat the Lord's Supper” (NKJ, 11:20). Paul and the Corinthians know, just as did the church in Troas (Acts 20:7), when they assemble, they partake of the Lord’s Table. That is not in question. Rather, when you eat and drink, each time you do this, you are to do it for a remembrance to Christ. Now we must consider the fuller Biblical ramifications of such a remembrance.

Many in the Reformed tradition have suggested that the structure of the worship service should follow the Gospel: the declaration of God’s authority, the expression of repentance and faith, and the means of salvation, including the Supper. From this structure we would expect worship to begin by declaring the greatness, holiness, mercy, and sovereignty of God. The response to this would follow in the confession of sin and exulting in the grace of God in the work of Christ. From this gospel kernel, the balm of Gilead is applied in the means of grace, namely prayers, the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and finally the benedictory blessing of God to send the people of the Lord into the world for service.

James Jordan, in *Theses on Worship*, argues similarly that there is a definitive five-fold

## 2. Foundational Questions

liturgy of worship: call, confession/pardon, word, table, and commission.<sup>61</sup> He argues on the basis of OT type from the Levitical sacrifice pattern that this is the direct intention of Scripture. What is true in current liturgical writers is supported in the historical practice of the church.

The International Standard Biblical Encyclopedia states that, “The glimpses given us in the earlier Fathers of the Eucharist are in entire accord with the more articulate expression of the church's corporate eucharistic worship, which we find in the liturgical documents and writings of the Nicene era.” We can see that in accepting worship as a covenant remembrance which includes the Lord’s Table we are in full accord with the early church. [The following is from the ISBE.]

(1) Ignatian Epistles: The Ignatian Epistles show us the Eucharist as the focus of the church's life and order, the source of unity and fellowship. The Eucharist consecrated by the prayer of the bishop and church is the Bread of God, the Flesh and Blood of Christ, the communication of love incorruptible and life eternal (compare Ephesians, 5,13,10; Trallians, 7,8; Romans, 7; Philadelphians, 4; Smyrnaeans, 7,8; Magnesians, 7).

(2) Justin Martyr: Justin Martyr tells us that the Eucharist was celebrated on the Lord's Day, the day associated with creation and with Christ's resurrection. To the celebrant were brought bread and wine mixed with water, who then put up to God, over them, solemn thanksgiving for His lovingkindness in the gifts of food and health and for the redemption wrought by Christ. The oblations of bread and wine are presented to God in memorial of Christ's passion, and become Christ's body and blood through prayer. The Eucharist is a spiritual sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving commemorative of Christ's death; and the consecrated elements the communion of Christ's body and blood, by reason of the sacramental character bestowed upon them by the invocation of the Divine blessing (compare 1 Apol., 13,15, 66, 67; Dial. with Trypho, 41,70, 117).

(3) Irenaeus: Irenaeus, also, emphasizes the fact that Christ taught His disciples to offer the new oblation of the New Covenant, to present in thank offering the first-fruits of God's creatures--bread and wine--the pure sacrifice prophesied before by Malachi. The Eucharist consecrated by the church, through the invocation of God's blessing, is the communion of the body and blood of Christ, just as He pronounced the elements to be at the institution (compare Against Heresies, i.13,1; iv.17,5; 18,1-6; 33,1; v.22,3).

(4) Cyprian: Cyprian, too, gives evidence of the same eucharistic belief, and alludes very plainly to the "Lift up your hearts," to the great thanksgiving, and to the prayer of consecration. This last included the rehearsal of what Christ did and said at the institution, the commemoration of His passion, and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (compare Epistle to Caecilius, sections 1, 2, 4, 9, 10, 14, 17; Epistle to Epictetus, sections 2, 4; On the Unity of the Church, I, 17; On the Lord's Prayer, section 31; Firmilian to Cyprian, sections 10, 17).

I believe we must conclude, having surveyed the landscape of Biblical thought, with exegetical detail, general reflection, theological systematization, and the with consideration of the practice of the fathers — they all concur: The Table of the Lord should be practiced in recollection of the redemptive work of Jesus on each Lord’s Day.

---

<sup>61</sup> Available from [www.BiblicalHorizons.com](http://www.BiblicalHorizons.com) (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

The thoughtless objection of many is that a weekly observation of the Lord's Supper would not be "special" – as though reserving the Supper for several times a year remedies that. It is exceedingly inconsistent with all other parts of worship. The preaching of the Word is much more in danger of becoming "old hat." But try and find a command that says there must be sermon in every worship service. This is not to minimize the Word, since the Word permeates each worship action: prayer, praise, the Supper, baptism, etc. Rather, it is to reclaim that which all Old Testament sacrifices, meals, and Biblical imagery allude to – that which the Gospels, Acts, and the Pauline apostolic instruction command for the meeting of believers. The Supper is the repeatable and tangible Gospel: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (NKJ, 11:26). It truly appears very distorted that it would become a ten minute irregular event tacked onto the "normal" service.

To reserve the Table to only a handful of times a year really denies the significance and the fullest and true nature of the sacrament, that it is a *koinonia*, a fellowship in the body and blood and with each other (1 Cor. 10:16). Moreover, it is inconsistent with what we may apprehend about the apostolic and early church. When the priority of congregational worship on the Lord's Day is coupled with the covenantal realities underneath worship, a weekly celebration of the Lord's Table seems quite requisite for a robust Biblical worship theology and practice.

### **How Should We Then Worship?**

We have considered certain crucial questions related to worship, definition, the impact of the New Covenant on worship, Old Testament worship information, liturgy, Biblical-historical development, and the special instruction of covenantal remembrance in worship. In the light of this material we must ask what principles should guide our current practice of New Testament worship.

✧ Worship is about God. It must be God-centered. The presence of Christ is to be acknowledged our actions in worship must there for be refined by this clear recognition. If worship is people in the special presence of the Almighty God doing that which He has commanded, the casual relationships of people are to be minimized within the worship service.

✧ If worship is cognizant of the intersect of the Biblical faith of the new covenant, then worship should be pervaded by a knowledge of Christ, the Messiah. He is the Redeemer, Savior, and Lord. Worship services must therefore represent the gospel (Christ centered). As such it must acknowledge the supremacy of God, the sinfulness of human beings, the redemption we have in Christ, and the means of the application of that redemption.

✧ Since we are the new *covenant* people of God, covenantal recapitulation is the primary action of worship. We are indeed the *renewed* covenant people.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God's OWN POSSESSION, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY. (2Pe 2:9-10).

Because we are His redeemed priesthood. We must rehearse the transcendence of God, the terms of the covenant relationship, including the redemption of Christ and His commands and blessings, and have communion with Him and His people.

## 2. Foundational Questions

### 3. How Firm a Foundation: Fundamental Principles

In light of the previous discussion of the Biblical material on worship services, the road to construct a truly Biblical worship service must proceed down the path of fundamental principles, looking to historic practice and refining it in light of the covenantal unfolding of Scripture. In this chapter we will consider three fundamental principles: the edification principle, the order principle, and the regulative principle. The former are direct statements of Scripture and the later is a principle derived from the breadth of Biblical reflection.

#### The Edification Principle

I Corinthians 14:26 is directed specifically to the assembly or worship service of the Apostolic church.

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. *Let all things be done for edification.*

This is the cornerstone principle of worship directly from the Word of God. Although it is necessary to come to this verse with an understanding of the history of redemption and thus, consider the present applicability of the gifts mentioned, nevertheless, the last sentence of the verse is a *command*. Whatever theological position is taken on the revelatory and sign gifts mentioned here,<sup>62</sup> it must be noted that the list given is not exhaustive. For example, prayer and Scripture reading (clearly commanded for worship) are not mentioned. While the list of actions is illustrative, the last sentence is a command. The listing of the gifts emphasize the diverse use of gifts by different members of the Body. I do not believe the Apostle Paul intended the exclusive *use of those specific actions*.

In considering the entire context of this passage, we find that I Corinthians 12-14 is devoted to (1) the unity of the Body (1Co 12:12-13), (2) the diversity of the Spirit empowered gifts that are operative in those in the Body (1Co 12:11), (3) the priority of congregational edification through the Word (1Co 14:4, 24, 26, et al.), and (4) the order of the assembly (1Co 14:40). There is no other section of Scripture which more directly addresses *what* is to be done in the assembly of believers and *how* the service is to be conducted. Nevertheless, this important passage does not give a liturgy, nor an exhaustive list of the elements of worship, nor limit worship to certain activities. Rather, the Scripture commands that “whatever is done,” be done to edify the congregation. The NIV says, “All of these must be done *for the strengthening of the church*” (14:26).

The crucial question is, what strengthens the church? What is edifying? Edification is a concept communicated by the Greek word *oikodome*. The word literally means “building a house.” It is used metaphorically of building up or strengthening (NIV) the Body of Christ in spiritual maturity (Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1Co 14:3, 5, 12, 26; Eph 2:21) through the use of spiritual gifts. Edification is also emphatically connected to the teaching of the Word and is accomplished in the context of believers loving each other (Eph 2:19-22; 4:11-12; Rom 14:19). Therefore, edification is the crossroads where the Word, love, and the function of spiritual gifts in true fellowship (*koinonia*) intersect.

---

<sup>62</sup>Whether prophecy or tongues is a gift given by God presently, etc. “Cessationism” is the position that the sign and revelatory gifts are not given by God today because their function ceased early in the church’s history.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

An example of this connection is Paul's farewell address in Acts 20:32 in which he leaves the elders at Ephesus saying, "And now I commend you to God and to the *word* of His grace, which is able to *build you up* and to give you the inheritance *among all those* who are sanctified." In summary, the Word is the measurement of edification, love is the context of edification, and spiritual gifts are the means of edification. The setting of edification in the exact sense of First Corinthians 14:26 is the congregational assembly to worship.

### **The Order Principle**

At first glance one might be tempted to press First Corinthians 14 into the service of a fully spontaneous view of corporate worship, where a plan would be "quenching the Spirit." On closer examination, however, we will see that the Apostle Paul did not intend this. According to the passage, all congregational services which aim at edification include *order*: "But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner" (14:40). Edification explicitly includes didactic instruction and structure which guides worship in an appropriate fashion. So, there should be congregational participation, even spontaneity, *but not in a way which sacrifices* order in worship. Consider the full passage in I Corinthians 14:17-26.

For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not *edified*. I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind, that I may *instruct* others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue. Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; yet in evil be babes, but in your thinking be mature. . . But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and worship God, declaring that God is certainly among you. What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. *Let all things be done for edification.*

Clearly Paul's concern is to direct them toward edification in the use of their spiritual gifts. An essential ingredient is an *orderly assembly*. The passage implies both Spirit-powered spontaneity and Spirit-controlled planning. Observe in the following passage, the principles of order, regulation, and spontaneity under control:

If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; *for God is not a God of confusion but of peace*, as in all the churches of the saints. Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. . . *But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.* (14:21-40)

In order to unpack the concept of order in the passage, we should look more carefully at the terms. The word translated "properly" is used in two other New Testament passages and has a strong moral connotation: "Let us behave *properly* . . ." (Rom 13:1); ". . . behave *properly* toward outsiders" (1Th 4:14). The Greek word here is *euschemonos* and is related to the term from which "schematic" is derived.

## 2. Foundational Questions

Especially since it is in conjunction with “orderly,” Paul is calling for intelligible structure, not confusion or unpredictable chaos. The term “orderly” (*taxis*) means “an ordered or arranged sequence,”<sup>63</sup> or “fixed succession”<sup>64</sup> and often involves “an arrangement.”<sup>65</sup> It is used in Luke 1:8, “It happened while he was serving as a priest *in the order* of his division.” By combining these two terms, there can be no question that the Apostle gives warrant for a predictable, controlled, sequence of worship in this injunction.

It is evident from the context of 1 Corinthians 14 that by the structure commanded, participation and freedom is not ruled out. Rather, we should emphasize that worship is something *we do*. In many churches we are left with the distinct impression that the ministers perform and the congregation is the audience. According to First Corinthians 12-14, the congregation *ministers* to God and one another. *God is, in effect, the audience*. The believers in the congregation are to “perform” priestly duties unto God, ministering to Him directly in praise and indirectly by congregational edification and declaring the saving gospel. As the passage indicates, this should include both predictable structure and spontaneity. Functionally, the leadership of the church necessarily interpret the appropriate application of structure and spontaneity for the worship service (1Ti 3:5). According to I Corinthians 14, the structure of the assembly should be *appropriately ordered to the edification of those present*.

In reflecting on the Biblical concerns for edification, structure, and spontaneity in worship, as well as the historical developments of worship in the church, several key factors emerge. In structuring worship, we must address the *format*, the degree of *spontaneity*, the *content*, the all-consuming *purpose*, and the *participants* of worship. These relationships form controlling concepts for worship which help me understand why some church traditions have difference emphases (see the diagram which follows). They emerge as very Biblical concerns in very Biblical terms. The *format*, the degree of *spontaneity*, the *content*, the all-consuming *purpose*, and the *participants* of worship manifest as the Biblical themes of the Word of God, the Spirit of God, the Son of God, the glory of God, and the people of God.

These aspects of worship can be viewed from several perspectives: the perspective of content, the perspective of purpose, and the perspective of experience.<sup>66</sup>

1. The *content of worship* can be focused on the majesty of God, the people of God (and their needs), the Son of God (evangelistically), the Spirit’s present ministry (in practical application, the prophetic ministry<sup>67</sup>), or the Bible’s expository message.

2. From the perspective of the *purpose of worship*, services can aim at the exaltation of God (directly), the practical growth of people of God, the salvation of the lost by the gospel, the expression of the Spirit’s power and ministry, or the teaching of the Bible’s truth.

3. From the perspective of the *experience of worship*, services may control worship by seeking a sense of reverence in the presence of God, the enjoyment of the people of God, the evangelistic

---

<sup>63</sup> *Greek-English Lexicon Based on Semantic Domains, 2nd Edition*, Edited by J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, (United Bible Societies: New York, 1988 ) in the Bible Works for Windows, Hermeneutika Bible Research Software (BWW).

<sup>64</sup> *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament (ANLEX)*, Timothy and Friberg (1994) in the BWW.

<sup>65</sup> *Thayers Greek Lexicon* in BWW.

<sup>66</sup> I am indebted for this kind of distinction to John Frame’s theological insight of “multi-perspectivalism” in *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1987).

<sup>67</sup> This could be seen in the fully charismatic (non-cessationist) sense or the more conservative sense of experiential application or personal insight from the Word, etc.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

experience of seeing the salvation of the lost, the Spirit's spontaneous expressions, or the experience of learning the Word.

These controlling concepts are, I think, best balanced. To some extent the abuses of certain worship traditions can be seen as a fixation on one controlling concept in worship (the Glory of God, Spirit of God, Son of God, Word of God, or People of God). The balance of these concepts probably must be sought in consecutive worship services rather than completely in every service. It would be hard to imagine every worship service being equally controlled by each concept. However, over several months these concepts could all be employed in a balancing relationship.

For example, some services may be more focused on the majesty of God than the people of God. Some may exalt gospel of the Son of God (evangelistically) rather than the Bible's expository message, the Word of God. Only by a comprehensive study and use of the Word in worship will we be more likely to find a consistent balance.

In summary: the *structure* for worship is to be the *Word of God*.<sup>68</sup> The *substance* of worship is to be the *Son of God*. *Spontaneity* in worship is to be evoked by the *Spirit of God*. The "*spirit*" of worship is to be the *glory of God*. And the *subjects* of worship are to be the *people of God*. Every service of worship is an opportunity to expand our conception of the full range of these aspects.

### **The Regulative Principle**

Having pointed out some of the Biblical directives specifically stated for worship, now we shall consider the principle which limits worship to that which is "prescribed" in God's Word. The *regulative principle* is a historical label for "God-ordained worship" and arises from the Protestant, specifically Reformed tradition. It is a general guideline to eliminate false worship. The regulative principle is most notably articulated in the Westminster Confession of Faith (21:1), in the chapter "Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath."<sup>69</sup>

The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might (Rom 1:20; Acts 17:24; Psa 119:68; Jer 10:7; Psa 31:23; Psa 18:3; Rom 10:12; Psa 62:8; Jos 24:14; Mar 12:33). *But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture* (Deu 12:32; Mat 15:9,10; Deu 15:1-20; Exo 20:4,5,6; Col 2:23) (emphasis mine, and perhaps theirs too).

Let us consider the weighty instruction of the Westminster Confession. First, the principle, so stated, limits the "acceptable way of worshipping the true God" to that which is "instituted by Himself." True worship is "limited by His own revealed will." Second, the Biblical texts cited to support worship according to God's "institution" are Deuteronomy 12:32, "What thing soever I command you, observe to

---

<sup>68</sup>I mean by this following the full covenant renewal pattern of approach to God. We may also see value in thematic liturgies which arrange praise, readings, prayers, etc. by Psalms and Biblical-thematic outlines. See Appendix B: Examples of Thematic Liturgies.

<sup>69</sup>Also see the 1689 Baptist Confession (22.1).

## 2. Foundational Questions

do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it” and Matthew 15:9-10, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand.”<sup>70</sup> The point of citing Deuteronomy 15:1-10, which regards the seven-year Sabbath (freeing slaves, forgiving debts, etc.), seems to be both obedience to God’s revealed will and the oft-repeated thought in the Pentateuch, the Lord your God will bless you, “Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day” (v 5).

Third, several limitations are indicated in the Confession: “He may not be worshipped (1) according to the imaginations and devices of men, or (2) the suggestions of Satan, (3) under any visible representation, or (4) any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture. The second commandment is cited to directly support the first three limitations (1-3), “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . .” Exo 20:4,5,6). Likewise the Westminster Larger Catechism also says of this, “The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word . . .” (Q 108) and that what is forbidden is “any religious worship not instituted by God himself” (Q 109).

To support the basic contention that we are not to worship in “any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture,” Colossians 2:23 is also cited. This text says, “Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.” The term “will-worship” is the key term. It is the unusual Greek word, *ethelothreskia*. It is a very important term in the historical defense of the regulative principle. This term is used only once in Scripture, and in no other known Greek source. Paul probably coined the word. It is defined by a recent lexicon as, “a set of religious beliefs and practices resulting from one’s own desires and initiative — ‘self-imposed religion, religion thought up by oneself.’”<sup>71</sup> Following the Authorized Version, the term is translated “will-worship” in the ASV. However, the NKJV renders it “self-imposed religion.” It is “self-made religion” in the NAS, “rigor of devotion” in the RSV, “self-imposed piety” in the NRSV. Interestingly, the Latin Vulgate renders it with “*superstitione*.”

It will be historically valuable, as well as theologically significant to survey the remaining seven sections of this chapter of the Confession. Section two regards the object of worship, “Religious worship is to be given to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; and to Him alone . . .” and mediated by Christ alone. Section three denotes “prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship” — while section four addresses what prayer is to be made for, “things lawful,” “men living,” “but not for the dead,” and “not for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death” (1Jo 5:16 is the last reference). Section five denotes other “parts of religious worship”: the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; “singing of psalms”<sup>72</sup>; and the sacraments. These are “all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God.” Then, there are other aspects listed “besides,” these are “religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions.” This section is similar to the Larger Catechism’s statement, “particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name

---

<sup>70</sup>These texts are cited in the KJV since this is the Authorized Version of the Confession.

<sup>71</sup>Louwa-Nida lexicon, BWW.

<sup>72</sup>See my discussion of exclusive psalm-singing later.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

of God, and vowing unto him” (Q 108).<sup>73</sup> Section six speaks of the insignificance of the “place” of worship, saying that no part of worship is “tied unto, or made more acceptable by, any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed.” The second part of section 6 says “God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and truth” and denotes the three-fold context, “private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies. . .” Section seven teaches that God “appointed one day in seven, for a Sabbath, to be kept holy unto Him” and “from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week,(2) which, in Scripture, is called the Lord’s Day.” Finally, section eight teaches us the right observance of the Sabbath, worship and rest.

It will be clear for this brief study that the most fundamental assertion of the regulative principle is that worship is to be according to God’s own will as we have it in Scripture. “The regulative principle of worship states that true worship includes only that which has Biblical warrant. Explicit or implicit Biblical support must be found for all that forms a part of worship (as contrasted with a circumstance of worship).”<sup>74</sup> Confessional commentator G.I. Williamson says, “The confession . . . limits true worship to that which can be proved from Scripture to be the will of God.”<sup>75</sup> According to the regulative principle, worship should be limited, both in content and means, by the Biblical revelation to those actions and intentions which have *implicit or explicit Biblical support*.

The Reformed, English Puritan framers of the Confession asserted the fundamental principle of worship, *sola Scriptura* (21:1). From this they wished to make clear several chief features of worship: that God alone is the object of worship through the mediatorship of Christ (21:2), that prayer is to be made to God alone and not for the dead (21:3-4), the elements of worship (21:5), the freedom of location in worship and its application in private, family, and congregational settings (21:5), the regular day of worship (the Lord’s Day, 21:7), and how the “Christian Sabbath” is to be properly observed (in worship and rest, 21:8).

### **Four Different Approaches to Guide Worship**

Though the fundamental assertion of the regulative principle is clear, there is some ambiguity in the exact method of limiting worship to what Scripture “prescribes.” This usually shows up in the questions of covenant continuity. Do Old Testament statements about worship apply? Should we only look to the New Testament to discover what should be done in worship? Do we need a command, or can worship practices be founded on Biblical revelation which is in the form of example, principle, etc.? Several “regulating principles” of worship which have emerged both theoretically and practically.

1. *We may worship in any way not prohibited by Scripture.* This was Luther’s position and is generally considered the high Anglican position. It has been traditionally contrasted with the Reformed regulative principle (see below).<sup>76</sup> This principle allows for such things as icons, vestments, and parts of the Roman Mass. This is sometimes called the *normative principle* of worship.

---

<sup>73</sup>It is interesting that this list of “parts” of worship does not include “singing of psalms” and adds “the ministry and maintenance thereof.”

<sup>74</sup>Paul Engle, *Discovering the Fulness of Worship* (Great Commission: Philadelphia, 1978), p. 77.

<sup>75</sup>*The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes*, p. 166.

<sup>76</sup>See for example, G.I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism on the second commandment* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed).

## 2. Foundational Questions

The positions that follow are variations on the “regulative principle” in the Calvinistic sense.

2. *We may worship only in a way (generally) warranted by Scripture (Old and New Testaments).* This is the broadest approach to the (Reformed) regulative principle; by it, both Old Testament and New Testament expressions of worship are valid. (I.e., the Old Testament is valid for worship expressions, unless superseded by the New Testament.)

3. *We may worship only in a way (generally) warranted by the New Testament.* This view is more narrow, but would provide specific justification for such things as offerings, benedictions, confessions of faith; yet, deny the validity of Old Testament expressions such as dance, musical instruments, clapping, etc.

4. *We may worship only in a way explicitly commanded for the New Testament assembly.* This approach is the most restrictive and would, if applied consistently, exclude offerings, baptism (especially infant baptism), benedictions, confessions of faith, musical instruments, etc. (as acts of worship in the service).

I will argue that number two (2) is the best interpretation of regulative principle. It is important to remember the limitations of any historic confession. As Westminster Seminary theologian Vern S. Poythress has argued, historic confessions of faith are to be understood as “one way of formulation, rather than the one permanently exclusive manner of formulation of the substance of Reformed theology.”<sup>77</sup> The nature of Scripture (as unrevisable and without error) and even from what the Confession teaches about itself lead us to the *alone supremacy of Scripture*:

(WCF 1.10) The supreme Judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.

Just as Luther said, contrasting Scripture and traditions,

But everyone, indeed, knows that at times they [the Fathers] have erred as men will; therefore, I am ready to trust them only when they prove their opinions from Scripture, which has never erred.<sup>78</sup>

The Confession even says:

(31.4) All synods or councils, since the Apostles’ times, whether general or particular, may err; and many have erred. Therefore they are not to be made the rule of faith, or practice; but to be used as a help in both.

---

<sup>77</sup> *Biblical Theology, Van Tilian Apologetics and Symphonic Theology: Some Developments at Westminster Theological Seminary.* (Presented at the 1993 Evangelical Theological Society Meeting) p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Cited in R. W. Godfrey’s, “Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition” in *Scripture and Truth*, J. Woodbridge & D. A. Carson, ed. (Zondervan, 1983) p. 227.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Neither the Confession nor the New Testament (as has been previously argued) address worship or liturgy in the manner that leads to a uniformly practiced service. Not only are we not given a prescribed order for the elements in worship (in either the New Testament or the Confession), we are not told that *all* the elements must be present in worship for worship to be Biblically acceptable. Would it be acceptable worship to meet for the baptism alone with a minimal involvement of the other parts of worship? Could a congregation meet for a praise meeting with singing only and proclamation of the Word in preaching or teaching? What about a Lord's Day meeting for prayer only, Scripture reading only? On the other hand, if all the elements must be present for worship, then must the Lord's Supper and baptism be performed at every assembly of the church?

Reflection on these principles brings us back to the first chapter: the importance of worship in the presence of the Lord. These questions must be addressed from one's total picture of worship. There is no explicit text which addresses with the kind of detail some wish for, the new covenant assembly of God's people. It is important to observe that the Protestant confessions generally, and the Westminster Confession specifically, set parameters on worship, but they do not define the structure, style, and sequence of worship. We are also not instructed exactly *how* the elements are to be performed. This is a discussion of the *mode* of the parts of worship. For example, would it be acceptable worship to have the congregation read Scripture rather than the pastor/elders? Or for Scripture reading to be done in some dramatic form? Or is reading to be through successive Bible books, topically, seasonally, or based on the preaching? Or for singing to be harmonized?<sup>79</sup> Or for teaching to use technology such as an overhead projector or a film? Or for the Lord's Supper to be done in the context of a meal? Historically, it was the Westminster Directory for Public Worship,<sup>80</sup> which applied these principles and suggested structure, sequence and the practical application the regulative principle. Unfortunately or fortunately, which ever one's views permit, the Directory was only mandated for a small contingent of the church. Today, the outward forms of worship are rarely dictated by the Book(s) of Church Order of Reformed denominations.<sup>81</sup>

In terms of an historical analysis, Horton Davies' book, *The Worship of the English Puritans* is significant.<sup>82</sup> A survey of the contents show chapters on the nature, theology, and heritage of the Puritans with important consideration given to their relationship with the continental Reformers. An important current running through the book is the development of the Puritanism beyond the first generation Reformers like Calvin, as well as the advances (?) of the Puritans regarding the purity of worship. "Puritanism, as we have seen, was born in Geneva, but it was Christened in England" ( p. 49). Very specifically, the Book of Common Prayer, extemporaneous prayer, praise, preaching, the sacraments, ordinations, and church discipline are examined. The last chapter, surveys and critiques Puritan worship.

---

<sup>79</sup> Many in the early Reformed and Puritan tradition objected to part-singing (harmony) in worship. It is not altogether clear whether this is because of the regulative principle, a reaction to Rome, or a practical concern for attention to be given to the lyrics/meaning.

<sup>80</sup>Included in the Banner of Truth republication of the Confession.

<sup>81</sup>The section of the Book of Church Order in the PCA which addresses matters of worship is a "non-binding" section of the constitution. How one can have a non-binding section of a constitution is somewhat of a concession that worship practice is, unfortunately, not of central importance. The PCA is not alone in worship fragmentation.

<sup>82</sup>(Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1997 [1948]).

## 2. Foundational Questions

Davies points out what one may be surprised to learn: many Puritans' held stark attitudes on a few matters - no ring in marriage, no religious ceremony at a wedding, no religious ceremony at a funeral, public prayer only in a standing posture, and certainly no acknowledgment of holidays other than the Lord's Day (the "Christian Sabbath"), not to mention the more commonly known denials of instrumental music and hymns (of "human composition" or exclusive Psalm-singing) in worship. Pursuing regulative worship has led to some unfortunate cul-de-sacs in Reformed contexts.

The regulative principle, as stated in the Westminster Confession is best understood as a principle requiring Biblical justification for all that we do in worship. An act of worship may not be invented, it must be warranted by God. The formal principle of the Reformation is truly *Sola Scriptura*. The regulative principle reflects this. Yet, as a *principle*, even the regulative principle does not inform us of the operation of Biblical worship. It teaches us to look to the Word for the elements of worship and to justify our practices of worship Biblically.

Recognize the sanctity of Lord's Day worship. Consider the realities of Christ-centered worship. Apply the three fundamental principles of worship: the edification principle; the order principle; the regulative principle.

### **How Should We Then Worship?**

✧ Because worship is for the edification of the congregation (1Co 14:26), is it to be congregationally appropriate. This means that in such areas where the specific characteristics of the congregation come to play, as in those matters which are affected culturally, aesthetically, and socially, concerns for the needs of the present congregation are quite appropriate.

✧ The fact that there is a Biblical command to keep order and structure in the worship service (1Co 14:40) permits a fairly systematic approach to planning the services. Some level of predictable structure is inevitable. The supreme liturgical criterion is the Word.

✧ There is no higher standard than THE Standard. God's Word alone must be the final judge. Yet, when we come to the diversity of Biblical worship expressions, how are we to apply the regulative principle? If we recognize appropriate congregational relativity and the content and structural norms of Scripture, we will do similar "things" in worship, though there will be a healthy diversity.

## **4. Brethren We Have Met to Worship: Categories of Worship Actions**

Having considered the guiding lights of worship in the above three principles, we must now consider the parts or elements which constitute worship. What ingredients go into a truly Biblical service of worship? We know that we must worship in a Christ-centered way, though no exact liturgy is given by Christ. We know that edification, orderliness, and limiting worship to that which is Biblical must guide us. But what do we *do* to worship and *how* should we do it? Even though the whole of worship is more than the sum of its parts, we still have to discover the parts.

Without a prescribed liturgy, a truly Biblical worship service must depend upon two components: the Biblical components of worship and comprehensively applying the fullest Biblical principles to the expression of these components. As indicated earlier there are different approaches to this. Is the criteria to be that which is generally warranted? Or it is to be that which is strictly commanded for the assembly? But in which Testament or both? The position of this writer is that the broader idea of “warrant” for elements of worship seems reasonable. Not only does this position seem to flow from the concept of Sola Scriptura, but it also seems evident in way the Biblical writers merged that which is commanded for the assembly and that which was part of the believer’s overall life. For example is “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord” directed to the assembly, or the family, or the Christian life generally? No sharp dichotomies should be made, given the context of this command. The worship of the true God pervaded the lives of early Christian, from trials to glory. Think of Paul. Surely his afflictions (2Co 11:23-27) and the most transcendent experiences (2Co 12:24) evidence a life of worship commitment, a life of exalting God. This is to say that we must *worship into all of life*.

In the most strict sense, only a few worship actions are actually *commanded for the assembly of believers* in the New Testament. It does not seem as though the apostles made a sharp distinction between warrant and explicit command or between Christian life and worship. We should be reminded of those early church gatherings of believers, even in the midst of persecution. How sweet the fellowship, prayer, praise, proclamation, and breaking of bread must have been to those whose lives depended more upon it than our contemporary hearts can feel. When they gathered, they focused on their common commitment to a Man who died on a cross and who was raised from the dead. Their lives were upset, even forfeited for their commitment to Jesus. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men and Jesus is the wisdom of God.

The following is an outline of references to the New Testament information concerning the *categories of worship action* in the assembly. These texts demonstrate that there is ample support for all of the following components of New Covenant worship (Appendix C includes all the full texts). Several of these elements of worship are discussed in the sections which follow (Scripture, Prayer, the Sacraments, and Sharing). Due to the significance and voluminous amount of material, the next chapter is reserved for the discussion of music.

1. The use of Scripture: Reading: 1Ti 4:13; Teaching/Preaching: 2Ti 4:2, 1Co 14:26; Acts 20:20-21
2. Prayer: Mat 6:9-13; Acts 2:42; 1Co 14:19
3. Music: Mat 26:30; 14:26; Col 3:16
4. Sacraments: Lord’s Supper: Mat 26:17; 1Co 11:20; Baptism: Mat 28:19-20; 1Co 10
5. Testimony/Sharing/Giving Thanks: Heb 10:24-25, 13:15, 1Co 14:16

## 4. Building Blocks

6. Giving/Offering: Acts 2:43-47; 1Co 9:9-11; 1Co 16:1-3

Worship is to be focused on fulfilling the Biblical mandates of Christ-centered worship. This requires applying the principles of edification, order, and limiting that which is done to elements with Scriptural warrant. Let us comprehensively reflect on the above elements of worship. What is their origin, meaning, function, and use?

### Scripture

#### The Reading of Scripture

Reading Scripture is an element commanded for the New Testament assembly (1Ti 4:13; Col 4:16; 1Th 5:27). Paul instructs Timothy to “give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (1Ti 4:13). However, it is by no means a novel act in the gathering of God’s people. Scripture reading has continuity with both synagogue and temple worship (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 13:27, 15:21, 2Ch 34:30). Reading the Word of God has long been an aspect of devotion and service to God for the people (Exo 24:7; Jos 8:35; 2Ki 23:2; Neh 8:2-3) and even the king (Deu 17:19; 2Ki 22:10). Jeffrey Meyers is certainly right this reproof:

The modern church failed to ascertain the centrality of the public reading and hearing of the Word of God. Much too often one can sit through an entire service (even in “Bible-believing” churches) and only hear a verse or two of the Bible read before the sermon. This is inexcusable. . . . Most of the Bible was written in order to be read aloud in the congregation. Private Bible reading and study must certainly be encouraged, but such an individualistic appropriation of the Word is not the Spirit’s *primary* way of illumination and sanctifying the minds of Christians. The Spirit uses the oral reading and preaching combined with the congregations hearing of the Word in church to bring life to his people.<sup>83</sup>

It is a symptom of our Biblically illiterate age that in Protestant churches reading the Word is no longer considered *effective* and has been replaced image-oriented components. This is deadly to Biblical worship.<sup>84</sup> The necessity and significance of Scripture reading, in all its expressions flows from what we might call a theology of *word*. The significance of verbal communication is manifest from Genesis to Revelation, from Adam’s mandate to name the animals (Gen 2:19) to the prohibition against adding the Word of God (Rev 22:18-19). In Biblical thought, one’s words are intimately connected to the life of the person. For example, Isaiah confesses sinfulness by saying “I am a man of unclean *lips*, and I live among a people of unclean *lips*” (6:5). It is his mouth which is then purged (6:7). Jesus says, “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, *speak* what is good? For the *mouth* speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Mat 12:34). “Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the *mouth*,

---

<sup>83</sup>*The Lord’s Service: Worship at Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church* (expanded edition). This important book is being published by Canon Press (Moscow, ID). These quotes are from the manuscript edition (St. Louis: Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1999), p. 60.

<sup>84</sup>The way we worship has huge implications for Whom we worship. This thesis is developed keenly by Edward Gene Veith in *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990) which is based on Neil Postman’s, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

this defiles the man. . . But the things that proceed out of the *mouth come from the heart*, and those defile the man” (Mat 15:11-18).

The concept of the mouth expressing the heart and the words of a person being taken as the essence or heart of a person has abundant Scriptural proof. Though the word of man demonstrates his depravity, the *Word* of God is the instrument of regeneration (1Pe 1:23), the building block of faith (Rom 10:17), and the standard of sanctification (2Ti 3:16). “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God’” (Mat 4:4; also Psa 19, 119). For the righteous, the words of God replace the meditation of the words of man (Psa 1:2, Jos 1:8). Those that die for the Lord are martyred “because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God” (Rev 20:4).

Jesus constantly reproved the religious leaders of His day for their culpable ignorance of the Scripture with the phrase, “Have you not read?” (Mat 12:5, 19:4, 21:16, 21:42, 22:31, etc.). Therefore, it is important that we use the reading of Scripture for increasing the congregation’s understanding of God through the Word. A good example of the emphasis on understanding is found in the following post-exilic passage:

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, explained the law to the people while the people remained in their place. And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating *to give the sense so that they understood the reading*. (Neh 8:8-9)

For the righteous, the goal is — “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer” (Psa 19:14). Whereas it is said of the unrighteous, “The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; He has ceased to be wise and to do good” (Psa 36:3).

In the commands to read Scripture cited above, we have focused on the theological considerations and the purpose of reading the Word. We also need to consider *how* or in what manner the reading is to be done. As we search the Word with this in mind we see that in I Timothy 4:13 the directive seems to be given to the young pastor himself. “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.” Notice the close connection of reading to instruction. In the historical practices of the church, this reading was often done with a New Testament, Old Testament balance. What emerged was an Old Testament lesson, a Gospel lesson, an Epistle lesson which was read. In the Reformation, the practice of the *lectio continuo* was practiced, a sequential reading and preaching through books of the Bible.

In addition to this, we find other applications of reading throughout the Scripture. Upon entrance into the Land of Promise, the Israelites were to recite the covenant blessings and curses in an *antiphonal* response standing on adjacent mountains. This kind of covenant rehearsal is found in Deuteronomy 11 and 27.

And it shall come about, when the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, that you shall place the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal (Deu 11:29). . . When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. And for the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. (Deu 27:12-13)

## 4. Building Blocks

Further, there is indication that reading or recitation can be done in a *responsive* fashion. In Psalm 136, a recurring refrain implies an appropriate responsive reading.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; *For His lovingkindness is everlasting*. Give thanks to the God of gods, *For His lovingkindness is everlasting*. Give thanks to the Lord of lords, *For His lovingkindness is everlasting*. To Him who alone does great wonders, *For His lovingkindness is everlasting*. . . (Psa 136:1-4)

Some practical implications may be drawn from the above discussion.

1. Since the purpose of reading should aim at increasing comprehension, accurate and intelligible translations should be used. This is a more difficult issue than many think. We must respect the Authorized Version (KJV) which was produced by the Church. It unified the English speaking world for more than three hundred years. Unfortunately, it's archaisms have become unintelligible to all but the most ardent AV readers. We need a new Church translation!

2. In order to make the Scriptures meaningful, a sense of the drama of Scripture can be moderately maintained by having different readers take "parts" from the Biblical text. For example, Isaiah 6 can provide parts for an Isaiah reader, Seraphim readers, and Trinity readers (antiphonally and responsively). The Scriptures indicate the value of reading congregationally in unison, antiphonally, and responsively (Deu 11:29, Psa 136).

3. Reading the Scriptures provides an appropriate counterpart to singing. Likewise, the songs can be responses to, repetitions of, or amplifications of the message of the reading.

4. The leadership (pastor/elders) of the church can read the Word in accordance with the exhortation (preaching) and teaching ministry of the church.

5. Because all of the Scriptures are God's Word, care should be taken to include a representative reading of the Old Testament, Gospel, Epistle, etc. Scriptures. This could take the form of an Old Testament, Gospels, Epistles reading — as in many historic liturgies.

### Teaching the Scripture

Teaching and preaching are commanded for the assembly of believers. The responsibility falls chiefly on the elders and pastor(s) (1Ti 3:2, 5:17, 2Ti 4:2; Tit 1:9; Eph 4:11-12). One must not be too rigid about who does the teaching: Others in the Body can teach under the authority of the elders (1Co 14:26; 1Ti 2:12). This is evident because (1) an elder upon recognition to that office must be "apt to teach" (1Ti 3:2)—it would seem that such a competency must be discerned in the process of teaching. Further, (2) teaching gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to women (who cannot be elders and thus teach publically or authoritatively in the congregation) (Acts 18:26; 1Ti 2:12; Tit 3:2), (3) the whole church preached the word, in fact, as a generalization (Acts 8:4), and (4) teaching through music is a product of the spirit-filled, Word-filled life in the whole congregation (for men or women) (Eph 4:19; Col 3:16).

The purpose of teaching is to expound the meaning of the Word of God and make relevant applications of the Word to the congregation. The meaning of Scripture is not always clear to believers (new or old) and often hidden from the unbeliever. We have a good example for the need of teaching in the narrative on the Ethiopian Eunuch.

And he was returning and sitting in his chariot, and was reading the prophet Isaiah. . . And when Philip had run up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what

## *Worship and Worship Services*

you are reading?” And he said, “Well, *how could I, unless someone guides me?*” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:28-31)

The centrality of the Word-centered, preaching/teaching-focused ministry of the apostolic church is clear from the record in Acts. At Pentecost they “were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (2:42). They spoke “the word of God with boldness” (4:31). They did not want to “neglect the word of God” but devoted themselves to “the ministry of the word” (6:2-4). “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly” (6:7). After persecution “those who had been scattered went about preaching the word” (8:4). Samaria “received the word of God” (8:14). The Gentiles “received the word of God” (11:1). Church growth is even described as “the word of the Lord continued to grow” (12:24). They proclaimed “the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” (13:5). And on and on it goes (13:7, 13:26, 13:44, 13:46, 13:48, 13:49, 14:3, 14:25, 15:7, 15:35, 15:36, 16:6, 16:32, 17:11, 17:13, 18:5, 18:11, 19:10, 19:20, 20:32, 20:38). It is safe to conclude that if we wish to emulate the apostles in our ministry focus, we should be Word-centered.

### **Teaching: How Should We Then Worship?**

The teaching ministry of the church is clearly manifested in the pastoral role of “feeding” the sheep with God’s Word. However, I have sought to show that other believers are given teaching gifts for informal edification and even in the assembly of believers. The primary place of the preaching of the Word by the elders or especially those elders called to “who labour in the word and doctrine” (AV, 1Ti 5:17). This is the primary function of the church ministry of the Word, no doubt.

### **The Use of Scriptural Confessions of Faith**

An important component of historic worship is the confession of one’s faith with creeds. The practice of confessing our faith with the use of creeds is a historic part of the universal church, East and West, Protestant and Catholic and has a strong Biblical basis.<sup>85</sup> The modern church exists, no doubt, in an anti-creedal age. The church’s ignorance of doctrinal formulations is a sad testimony to that fact. The problem is at least in part due to the relativism of the intellectual climate in this modern (post-modern) era and the individualism which is its stepchild.

Although some deny the validity of creeds by an alleged reverence of the Bible as their only creed, clearly others have done so because of a denial of propositional (verbally stated) truth altogether. It is interesting to observe here that the bedrock *Sola Scriptura*-mindset of the Reformation produced some of the greatest creeds of the Christian church. The most ardent defenders of the Bible’s alone supremacy did not in any way echo the unreflective stance, “no creed but the Bible.” This statement is not only unBiblical in its sentiment, it is irrational since the very statement is a *credo* (a stated belief). Such a statement is self-refuting and demonstrates the very necessity of creeds. It has been my experience that those who deny “creeds” are most sectarian and least Biblical in the fullest sense.<sup>86</sup> On further analysis it is clear that any time someone teaches, distinguishes truth from error, summarizes or merely states a belief in his own words, a creed, albeit a simple one, has been stated.

---

<sup>85</sup>R. P. Martin’s, *Worship in the Early Church* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992, [1975]). Most evangelical congregations will be greatly helped by a study on the valid uses of creeds.

<sup>86</sup>I am thinking here of the creedless Church of Christ/those following Alexander Campbell or Jehovah’s Witnesses.

#### 4. Building Blocks

The word “creed” is derived from the Latin *credo* which simply means “I believe.” The word “confession” is found throughout the New Testament. The Greek root is *homolegeo* which literally means “to speak the same thing” or sometimes *exomolegeo* which is an intensive form of the word meaning “to confess forth.” Philip Schaff said, “The Bible is the Word of God to man; the Creed is man’s answer to God. The Bible reveals the truth in the popular form of life and fact; the Creed states the truth in the logical form of doctrine.”<sup>87</sup> A creed is the document and confession is the act of professing the truth of statements in the document. Similarly, catechisms teach in the form of question and answer. Catechisms, likewise, have a very long tradition in the church.

Creedal recitations serve a teaching role, a confessional/expressive role, and even an important liturgical function. Catechisms are rather clearly to be considered under (Scripture) teaching, though they may be employed in a somewhat liturgical fashion too. I am inclined to place creeds under the general category of Scripture and the subcategory of teaching since they should function to crystalize, explain, and formalize the teaching the Scripture. However one may wish to categorize confessions, there are clear indications of the Biblical validity of the use of creeds.

An explicit example shows the creedal function of summarizing some aspect of our faith:

And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, Beheld by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory. (1Ti 3:16)

Another use of a kind of confession in Scripture is found in I Timothy 6:12.

“Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” A confession of faith was made by Timothy. This confession may have been at the ordination of Timothy by the laying on of hands (1Ti 4:14, 2Ti 1:6) or at baptism (see also Acts 8:37).

Confession of Christ is necessary for salvation according to Christ himself and the Apostles. “Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven” (Mar 10:42). “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved” (Rom 10:9). Is this to be reduced to a mere one occasion? Or are we to hold fast by our confession?

We are required to maintain our confession as a believer in order to persevere in the true faith. “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession” (Heb 4:14). “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb 10:23). We are to hold unswervingly the hope we profess because of Jesus’ priestly example and ministry to us. “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). In our steadfastness we emulate “Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (Heb 3:1).

Early in the history of church believers were challenged to confess “Caesar is Lord,” rather than “Jesus is Lord.” Such a simple confession is at the heart of the historic use of creeds to distinguish truth from of creeds in the Bible in the Shemah (Deu 4:4), the confessions of Nathanael (Jn 1:50), Peter (Mat

---

<sup>87</sup>*The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. II.* (Baker, [reprinted] 1993), p. 3.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

16:16), Thomas (Jn 20:28), and the Eunuch (Acts 8:37), the Great Commission (Mat 28:19-20); and in various other passages (1Co 8:6, Heb 6:1-2).<sup>88</sup>

Therefore, we see that creeds function in at least three ways Biblically:

1. Creeds function to summarize Biblical truths (I Tim 3:16) and “retain the standard of sound words” (2Ti 1:13). An example of this in church history is the Apostle’s Creed (ca. 340).

2. Creeds are used as a means of confessing the gospel faith at baptism, ordination, and similar times of spiritual significance. For example, we see this in Acts 8:37-38. (Many historians maintain that The Apostle’s Creed is was used in this way.)

And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*” And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

3. Creeds are used to confess the true faith as a conscious act of the persevering believer to follow and hold fast Christ. This function of creeds can be readily incorporated into many elements of worship. In this sense of confession, we hold fast when we believe the Word we are hearing, the Apostle’s Creed we are reading, or the truth we are singing. Is it not a true confession of our faith when we sing,

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness My beauty are, my glorious dress; ‘Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, With joy shall I lift up my head.

Lord, I believe Thy precious blood, which at the mercy seat of God forever doth for sinners plead, for me, e’en for my soul, was shed.<sup>89</sup>

Many aspects of our worship such as hymn singing and teaching are essentially a *credo*. Observe an ironic inconsistency between two opposing church traditions: On the one hand there is the “fundamentalistic” church tradition which cries, “no creed but the Bible,” but sings almost exclusively gospel songs of human (uninspired) composition. In this case, they overlook the fact that singing is an even more dynamic means of confession one’s faith. On the other hand, the Covenanter subscriptionist church legislates “no hymns of human composition.”<sup>90</sup> While strenuously maintaining the necessity of creedal subscription, the exclusive Psalm-singers argue against the “hymn-mongers” who pervert the pure worship of God.

On the contrary, there is no command to invent hymns, there is still less evidence for a command to invent confessions of faith. Both of these positions are deeply incoherent, and in my estimation, do not reflect the atmosphere of the Biblical faith which permits the singing of new songs and requires a good confession. There are two extremes to avoid. On the one hand, the church must avoid an anti-creedal spirit which tends to be irrational, ignorant, and ungrateful for the church’s history of defending the truth from error by the use of creeds. The anti-creedal spirit turns out to be prideful as well since it believes that it can independently ferret all the riches of God’s Word without standing on the shoulders of the past

---

<sup>88</sup>Schaff has an excellent introduction to the concept and function of creeds.

<sup>89</sup>Text by Nicolaus L. von Zinzendorf [of the Moravians]; Translated by John Wesley.

<sup>90</sup>See the discussion which follows on “Exclusive Psalmody.”

## 4. Building Blocks

gifts of God to the church. On the other hand, the church must avoid a creedalistic-minimalistic stance which tends to undermine the alone infallibility and authority of the Bible and seeks to reduce all matters to mere doctrinal subscription.

The balance is found in the Biblical, evangelical use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms to *confess* the faith “once for all delivered” (Jude 3). I suppose the contrast which I am drawing is one of attitude primarily. We must not use creeds in a manner which, in heart, contradicts *Sola Scriptura*. One the other hand, it is imperative that we use them — I have heard preschool children recite a succinct and comprehensive statement about the nature of God, such that most evangelical pastors hardly articulate: “What is God? A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”<sup>91</sup> The use of confessional standards for teaching and examination (e.g., in ordination vows) are an important area of the Christian mind to recover. In worship, the church should use the statements of creeds and confessions as verbal distillations of the Word of God and thus, “trustworthy statements deserving full acceptance” (1Ti 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; 2Ti 2:11; Tit 3:8).

### Confessions: How Should We Then Worship?

Several practical suggestions can be made regarding the function and implementation of creeds and catechisms in worship.

✧ The Apostle’s Creed affirms the basic objective tenets of Christianity. Moreover, it has been incorporated into most of the church’s confessions and catechisms. It is the structure of the *loci communes*, the “common places,” of many theological writings. The regular use of this creed will prove to be a great affirmation of the Biblical faith and a tremendous pedagogical aid.<sup>92</sup>

✧ Creedal and confessional *affirmations* in worship as a teaching function of the content of Scripture are fully warranted (see above) in Scripture. Such affirmations are to be regularly used in worship both for the edification that comes through repetition and the instruction which can build upon that which is known by heart.

✧ With the advent of computers and the ease of word processing, church bulletins can regularly include excerpts from the great creeds and catechisms without much effort. This can be educational and inform believers in doctrinal formulation so as to aid them in their spiritual confession of the faith.

✧ While doctrinal issues divide the major branches of the church (Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic), the doctrinal positions which all branches of the church affirm should be confessed by means of the church’s creeds. To affirm our historic faith we should employ, when possible, the early ecumenical creeds which formulate truth from error in such areas as the doctrines of Christ and the Trinity (see Appendix D). The Nicene creed is especially useful and appropriate for worship.

✧ On the frequency of the use of creeds, certainly no suggestions should be made the rule. I have found an edifying balance using the Apostles’ Creed once a month and the Nicene Creed once a month. This pattern incorporates the creeds regularly enough to learn them and yet is infrequent enough to avoid what would be for us an unhealthy repetition.

### Worship Acts: Pronouncing God’s Word

Beyond the reading and response of Scripture and the doctrinal formulation of Scripture’s teaching in creeds, it would seem that there are actions sanctioned within public worship which require

---

<sup>91</sup>Westminster Shorter Catechism, question 4.

<sup>92</sup>I have a two page defense of the use of the Apostle’s Creed which may form a good appendix.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Scriptural pronouncements. Just as in marriage the act is declared: “By the authority vested in me. . . I now *pronounce* you man and wife.” This is speech performative action. Such acts involve using Scripturally regulated content, but the form of the action is more than merely reading, hearing, and responding. It is an act of declaration or pronouncement. Examples of such pronouncements include: opening sentences which call the congregation to the recognition of public worship, the assurance of pardon, pronouncing the status of an individual under church discipline, administering vows, and benedictions.

Let us first consider the general theological underpinnings of this component. Perhaps on the most rudimentary level, God speaks to us words of blessing and cursing. God’s relation to man involves covenantal blessing and cursing. The plan of redemption involves God’s oath to bless Abraham (Gen 12:2-3). Words of blessing and cursing are formalized with the Sinaitic covenant, where blessings and cursings were antiphonally called between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal (Deu 11:29).

Second, the basis for the validity of these kinds of acts of worship rests upon the principle that God vests his ordained representatives with the authority to make authoritative pronouncements. Aaron and the Levites were instructed to do this in the blessing, the benediction.

Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: 24 The LORD bless you, and keep you; 25 The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; 26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace. ‘ 27 So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them. (Num 6:23-27)

It seems clear that this representative role arises in church discipline. This seems to be behind John 20:23, “If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained” (See also 2Co 5:4-5).

Now we should ask what specific acts of Word pronouncement have warrant in Scripture?

1. *Opening sentences* and calls to worship are declarations to the congregation of the recognition that worship has begun. Indications of this declaration of worship are evident in tabernacle, temple, synagogue and New Testament assembly worship. Though these calls to worship are more like Scripture reading than any other pronouncement. Yet, there is more involved than merely reading Scripture in an informational level of communication. It is a solemn declaration that the worship of the people of God has begun and that the assembly has been formally gathered before God (Heb 12:22-23). Some examples texts used for this may include the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!” (Deu 6:1) and many of the Psalms (e.g., 100, 149, 150).

2. The *assurance of pardon* is a pronouncement which may be unfamiliar to many evangelicals. Yet, it is deeply rooted in the traditional liturgy of the church. Moreover, it flows from the recognition of the keys of the kingdom. “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mat 16:19). This very much connects to pronouncing the status of church discipline, which is an act of declaration. In 2 Corinthians we find Paul teaching, “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, [you are to] deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (5:4-5). This is an act of decision which must be articulated as a pronouncement. Diatribes unduly “puts them out of the church” (3Jo 1:10).

## 4. Building Blocks

3. The pronunciation of *vows* is rooted in the experience of the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the fundamental covenant reality of an oath. The writer of Hebrews says,

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, 14 saying, “I WILL SURELY BLESS YOU, AND I WILL SURELY MULTIPLY YOU.” 15 And thus, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise. 16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. 17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, interposed with an oath, 18 in order that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we may have strong encouragement, we who have fled for refuge in laying hold of the hope set before us. (Heb 6:13-16)

Vows are voluntary oaths made in a variety of circumstances and are evident throughout both (Gen 28:18-22, Lev 7:16, Num 30:2-13, Deu 23:18, Jud 11:30, 39, 1Sa 1:11, Jon 1:16 Act 18:18, 21:23). Even Paul took vows, apparently on two separate occasions. The last occasion was related to his desire to reach the Jews (Acts 18:18, 21:23). Ecclesiastes instructs, “When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay” (5:4-5). The common vows utilized in churches today are for receiving members and for the ordination of officers.<sup>93</sup>

4. *Benedictions* are another act involving the pronunciation of God’s Word to His people collectively. The term “benediction” means literally “good saying” and rooted in the Hebrew term, *barak* and the Greek counterpart, *eulogeo*. Such blessings are first recorded as an act from God (Gen 1:22, 1:28, 2:23). We imitate God’s blessing to us by blessing Him when recognize His mercies (Psa 103:1-2, 145:1-2). More to the liturgical point, Levitical priests were authorized to pronounce the benediction and bless the people (Deu 10:8, Num 6:22-27). We have many examples of apostolic benedictions on the people of God in the New Testament (2Co 13:14, Eph 6:23-24, 2Th 3:16-18, Heb 13:20-21, 1Pe 5:10-11). These blessings come at the close of written epistles. But can it be doubted that similar blessings would come from the lips of the apostles in their personal declaration of the gospel? The apostles follow the millennia old pattern of the priestly declaration of blessing. Hence, God pronounces His blessings on His people via His ordained representatives.

### **Word-Pronouncements: How Should We Then Worship?**

✧ If acts of predication of entrance into worship, exit from worship, blessings, cursings, vows, etc. are Scripturally warranted, then worship should be punctuated with such pronouncements. The opening of worship should include such a predication. The close of worship should likewise include such an act, the benediction of blessing and commission.

✧ Vows should be normal and normative within worship. Many hymns actually include less formal vows. Only the Anabaptists deny the validity of vows (based on an exegetical misunderstanding of Mat 5:34, contra all of Scripture). As the Second Helvetic Confession might say, We detest this error of the Anabaptists. We are to be an oath-making, more, an oath-keeping people. We are to make vows and keep such vows. Public worship is the celebrated occasion for such commitments.

---

<sup>93</sup>For example see the PCA’s *Book of Church Order*.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

✧ Pronouncements of the status of those “cursed” from exclusion to the Table of Blessing are fitting (those censured from the Lord’s Supper). This fits well in the admission of the Lord’s table section of worship.

### **Prayer**

Prayer may be defined simply as speech addressed to God. Prayer is prescribed for individual believers and for the congregation (Mat 6:9-13; Acts 2:42; 4:24; 12:5; 1Co 14:19). Prayer preeminently involves adoration (1Ch 29:1), thanksgiving (Psa 136:1), confession (Psa 51:4), submission (Psa 31:5), promises of future obedience (Psa 80:18), and petition (Dan 9:19). Prayer presupposes a theology. In order for prayer to be meaningful, there must be a God who does the following: (1) Hears prayer (Psa 65:2). (2) Is in control of all the events of history (Isa 44:24-45:8). (3) Does not act arbitrarily, but in accordance with His own nature (Gen. 18:25). (4) Acts in fulfillment of His own promises (Ps 105:8-11). (5) Promises to respond to the prayers of his people (2Ch 7:14-15).

For prayer to be effective, therefore, God must be omniscient, omnipotent, and sovereign. (1) Omniscient: God hears “from the end of the earth” (Psa 61:2); “in secret” (Mat 6:6, Psa 139, Heb 4:13). (2) Omnipotent: God is king (Psa 146) and “is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). Indeed, “with God nothing will be impossible” (Luk 1:37). (3) Sovereign: “Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O Lord, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all” (1Ch 29:11-13). Therefore He “does according to his will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and who can ward off His hand and say what have You done” (Dan. 4:35).

Believers are responsible, as in all of worship, for a heart of reverence (Mat 6:9), sincerity (Jam 5:17), submission (1Jo 5:14), faith (Mat 21:21; Jam 1:6-7) and obedience (1Jo 3:22). In the New Covenant, we must pray Christocentrically and thus, in Jesus’ name (Joh 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-26). To pray in the name of Christ is to ask on the foundation of the revelation which Jesus has given us of Himself and of His work. The sphere in which our requests must be placed is the revelation of the person and work of Christ.

The content of our prayers (what we pray for) is limited by our faith (Mar 11:24), the will of God (1Jo 5:14-15), the name of Jesus (Joh 14:13), and should be in accordance with the Word of God either explicitly (e.g., forgiveness, 1Jo 1:9), or in harmony with Biblical teaching (e.g., needs generally are similar to our “daily bread,” Mat 6:11).

Further, the Scripture allows for varied posture while praying. For example, we may pray with hands uplifted (1Ti 2:8; 1Ki 8:22, 54), kneeling (1Ki 8:54; Dan 6:10; Act 21:5), falling to the ground (Mar 14:35), standing (Neh 9:5), bowing (Exo 34:8), with raised eyes (Joh 11:41), and in secret (Mat 6:6). Interestingly, I can find no reference to the Biblical saints praying with their eyes closed or an explicit case of praying while seated(!).<sup>94</sup>

We find teaching in the Scripture which indicates that we may pray in several different ways: Always, therefore silently (1Th 5:17), led by an individual (Mat 18:19), in a group together (Acts 4:24), and even through music (Psa 72). There seems to be three different forms for prayer. (1) Fully spontaneous prayer seems to be evident in many places (e.g., the choosing Matthias in Acts 1:24). (2) A great many of the long prayers in Scripture seem to have been “studied” or planned. The content was planned, but the exact wording is more spontaneous (e.g., when Solomon prayed at the Temple dedication in 1Ki 8:23ff; and the Lord’s Prayer). (3) Some prayers are fixed forms or pre-written. At the

---

<sup>94</sup>I am indebted W. Spear’s *Biblical Theology of Prayer* (Baker) for most of the material in this section.

## 4. Building Blocks

end of Psalm 72, verse 20 says, “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” This indicates that some of the Psalms were fixed prayers, chanted and prayed in worship. Moreover, the Lord’s Prayer (Mat 6:9ff) is a fixed form, though it is also surely meant as a model for “studied prayer.”

The whole subject of “fixed forms” in worship is an interesting one to consider. The common Evangelical reaction to a pre-written part of worship, whether a prayer or a response, or even a creed in some circles, is to disdain it as rote, mindless, and dull. It is certainly possible for fixed forms, even God’s own words to be used as such. But if the goal is fervent, conscious participation in worship, one might ask whether *knowing the words helps or hinders* this. Songs can be rote, mindless, and dull, too; but hardly anyone objects to knowing the words in advance. It is an extreme irony too that the anti-fixed form constituency in the Evangelical churches insist on no fixed forms—all the time learning only the words of “Gospel Song” hymns which have predictable refrains and choruses. So in effect these groups have “fixed forms,” too. While overlooking the theologically significant riches of the historic Church, they latch on to the newest jingle as their only “fixed form.”

### **Prayer: How Should We Then Worship?**

Practically, prayer functions in several ways in the worship service. (For a Summary of the Biblical Doctrine of Prayer see the Appendix E.)

1. *Liturgically*: Prayer flows in the sequence or liturgy of any church service to make transitions between elements of worship and to enhance elements of worship. For the sake of unity in prayer, there clearly some value in using planned and written prayers. The Lord’s Prayer or written prayers using Biblical prayers may be an effective way to avoid the triteness of spontaneous, though repetitious “free” prayers. The Scripture seems to indicate that following prayer in the assembly, there was a predictable response to such prayers: “Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?” (1Co 14:16). There is certainly warrant for “studied prayer” within the context of public worship—that is prayer which is less than fixed, but has predictable movements.<sup>95</sup>

2. *Pastorally*: Prayer is to be modeled by the pastor and elders and to beseech God for Biblically warranted requests. Paul instructs Timothy for “entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, [to] be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity” (1Ti 2:1-2). It is especially helpful for pastoral prayers to utilize “studied prayer” and this requires being studied in prayer. The “pastoral prayer” voices the range of matters Scripture dictates: (1) missions, *Operation World* being an important resource<sup>96</sup>, (2) our nation and its leadership, (3) our area of the country and its needs, (4) other congregations, (5) our own congregation.

3. *Spontaneously*: Prayer should function in the assembly to thank God for His activity in the church and petition Him for the needs of the church. Such action is not known in advance, thus spontaneous prayer is vitally necessary.

---

<sup>95</sup>Hughes Oliphant Old’s, *Leading in Prayer* is an invaluable resource. Moreover, within the Reformed tradition, Matthew Henry’s book on prayer is very useful.

<sup>96</sup>*Operation World: A Daily Prayer Guide for Missions*, by Patrick Johnstone (Operation Mobilization, 1993) is an absolute “must” for this. Each day includes a country, vital statistical, and prayer information related to the evangelization of the country. This keeps the needs of the world beyond our own congregation before us continually and to whole body assembled on the Lord’s Day.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

### **The Sacraments**

#### **The Lord's Supper**

The Lord's Supper is a blessed sacrament of the New Testament instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of His redemptive work. By eating the bread and drinking wine<sup>97</sup> in a worthy manner believers spiritually feed upon Christ, renew their union and fellowship with Him, meditate upon His redemptive work, and renew their thankfulness for His saving work, as well as spiritually commune with other believers (Luke 22:20; Mat. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Cor. 10:14-21).

The Lord's Supper is explicitly commanded as a perpetual practice of the church until Christ returns (1Co 11:20, 23-24; 10:16-17). Of course the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ Himself in the night before He was betrayed and subsequently fulfilled His role as the Lamb of God (Mat 26:17; Mar 14:12; Luk 22:7). The Lord's Supper is another example of the continuity that exists between the worship of God under the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Passover (Exo 12ff.) was the occasion for the institution of the Lord's Supper. The structure of the first Lord's Supper followed that of Passover, and most importantly, "Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1Co 5:7).

Clearly, the first passover of Messiah is markedly different than those that follow. Christ had not yet died and had not yet been raised. The disciples had not yet received the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal fullness.

It seems that the early practice of the church was to include the Lord's Table at the conclusion of a meal known as a "love feast" (Acts 2:42f.; 1Co 11). Later the meal seemed to become less important and sometimes provided an opportunity for excesses.

"Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God, and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you" (1Co 11:20-22). So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together for judgment. And the remaining matters I shall arrange when I come. (1Co 11:33-34)

Some church traditions see the Lord's Supper as integral to worship, so much so that worship must always include it. However, most evangelical churches practice the Lord's Supper as a ceremonial aspect of certain worship services. The frequency of the Lord's Supper is, I believe, related to the interpretation of its meaning.

There have been four major views of the Lord's Supper throughout the history of the church and the frequency of observation of the Supper can be correlated with its interpretation.

1. **Transubstantiation:** The bread and wine *are* the physical body and blood of Christ. This predominantly Roman Catholic view (although Eastern Orthodox and high Anglicans may also hold this view) holds that the substance of the bread and wine is actually transformed into the substance of the

---

<sup>97</sup>The Bible is very clear that the substance was fermented since 1 Corinthians 11:21 says, "one is hungry and another is drunk" about the abuse of the Lord's Supper. There is no question that it was indeed *wine*.

#### 4. Building Blocks

body and blood of Jesus.<sup>98</sup> Grace is communicated through this sacrament as long as it is not actively resisted.<sup>99</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the Mass takes place as frequently as possible.

2. **Consubstantiation:** The bread and wine *contain* the physical body and blood of Christ. This view is distinctly Lutheran. Luther wanted to maintain a literal belief in the words of Christ “This is my body,” yet deny that Christ was re-sacrificed in the Mass and that grace comes in the sacrament without active faith. Luther suggested that since Christ was divine, his human body could be omnipresent, and thus, everywhere present in Communion. As Zwingli pointed out, however, this is a co-mingling of the human and divine attributes. Holding to “consubstantiation,” a frequent (weekly) observation of the Communion becomes a practical need.

3. **Real Presence:** The bread and wine *contain spiritually* the body and blood of Christ. This view was articulated by Calvin. The Lord’s Supper is still a means of grace to nourish the believer through faith. Christ is spiritually in the elements.<sup>100</sup> This view principally tends toward a more frequent observance.<sup>101</sup>

4. **Mere Memorial:** The bread and wine *represent* the body and blood of Christ. This view was championed by Zwingli. It teaches that the Lord’s Supper is nothing more than a memorial to Christ’s death. Zwingli argued that it should be observed annually like Passover. However, most who hold this position opt for a quarterly observation.

One’s view of the meaning of the Lord’s Supper in part determine’s many peripheral issues, such as frequency, position within the worship service, and relation to other elements of worship.

I believe that a position which asserts more than a pure Memorial position and obviously less than the Transubstantiation view is required by Scripture. The Lord certainly taught that the Supper was to be a memorial opportunity, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luk 22:19). However, Paul teaches that it is more than a mere memorial, “Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?” (1Co 10:16). The Lord’s Supper is a “sharing” (*koinonia*) in the blood and body of Christ. Some weight, as Luther stressed, must be assigned to the most often repeated words by all the New Testament writers in this matter “This is My body” (Mat 26:26; Mar 14:22; Luk 22:19; 1Co 11:24, similarly, “This is my blood.”). However, since Christ’s glorified human body is seated at the right hand of God and He has sent the Spirit, the glorified human body and blood of Christ cannot be in the elements (Acts 2:22-34). Therefore, the sense in which

---

<sup>98</sup>This presupposes the Aristotelian distinction of “substance” (essential nature of the object without which it would not be itself) and “accidents” (package or non-essential form that the substance comes in). For example, a ball may be red or yellow in its accidents but be of the same substance. In the case of the Lord’s Supper the bread blessed by the priest looks, feels, smells, and indeed, tastes like bread, but these are the accidents. The Roman position maintains the bread takes the *substance* of the body of Christ.

<sup>99</sup>*Ex opere operato* (“from the work done”), meaning that the sacrament effects grace *apart from the faith* of the recipient (M.J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Baker, 1987) p. 1009. I am also indebted to Erickson for the leading sentences on the four views, p. 1113.

<sup>100</sup>Calvin says of how this can be, “I will not be ashamed to confess that it is too high a mystery either for my mind to comprehend or my words to express; and to speak more plainly, I rather feel than understand it” (Trans. H. Beveridge, *Institutes, Vol II*, James Clarke Co., 1953) p. 587.

<sup>101</sup>However, most who claim the name “Calvinist” do not take his suggestion to celebrate the Supper weekly. Ironically, the Genevan city council ruled in favor of a quarterly observation.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

the bread is the body and the blood is the wine must be spiritual. This is basically Calvin's view. The Heidelberg Catechism is a good creedal formulation of Calvin's position,

*"What is it to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ? It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and the death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the forgiveness of sins and life eternal, but, further, also to become more and more united to His sacred body, by the Holy Spirit, who dwells both in Christ and in us, so that, though Christ is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless flesh of His flesh and bone of His bones, and live and are governed by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul. (Q. 76)*

The Genevan Catechism which Calvin wrote is instructive in questions 343-344,

*But why is the body of our Lord figured by bread, and his blood by wine?" We are hence taught that such virtue as bread has in nourishing our bodies to sustain the present life, the same has the body of our Lord spiritually to nourish our souls. As by wine the hearts of men are gladdened, their strength recruited, and the whole man strengthened, so by the blood of our Lord the same benefits are received by our souls.*

*Do we therefore eat the body and blood of the Lord? I understand so. For as our whole reliance for salvation depends on him, in order that the obedience which he yielded to the Father may be imputed to us just as if it were ours, it is necessary that he be possessed by us; for the only way in which he communicates his blessings to us is by making himself ours.*

In question 346 of the Genevan catechism, Calvin teaches that "the manner of receiving" the elements consists "in faith."

The Real Spiritual Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper is a view which warrants a more frequent observation. Calvin argued for a weekly reception of the sacrament, as did most other Reformers. Unfortunately, hardly no Reformed church practices it in accord with their patriarchs. The New Testament gives no explicit command regarding frequency of celebration although the precedents are interesting. As argued before, from 1 Corinthians 11 and Acts 20:7, the normative practice was a weekly observance, "And *on the first day of the week*, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them. . . " (Acts 20:7).

From this material what should the practice of the church be? Ought we not to simply and plainly do what Jesus commanded in the eating of *bread*, not crackers or wafers; and the drinking of wine (1 Co 11:21), not unfermented juice? On frequency, if Jesus's spiritual presence is to communicate through the sacrament why not do it each Lord's Day? There is a severe disharmony between the church that doctrinally professes the "Real Presence" of Christ in the Supper and yet reserves this "Real Presence" for four or five times a year. The thoughtless objection of many is that a weekly observation of the Lord's Supper ritualizes (a ritual) is not even deserving of a response. The preaching of the Word is much more in danger of becoming "old hat." But try and find a command that says there must be sermon in every worship service. As a matter of fact, the revivalistic tendency to subjugate all of worship to the supremacy of the sermon (and subsequent alter call) is an indictment that a false theology has been king of worship for many generations. This is not to minimize the Word, since the Word permeates each worship action: prayer, praise, the Supper, baptism, etc. Rather, it is to reclaim that which each all Old Testament sacrifices, meals, and Biblical imagery allude to, that which the Gospel, Acts, and the Pauline

#### 4. Building Blocks

apostolic instruction command for the meeting of believers. Since the Supper is the repeatable and tangible Gospel, it truly appears very distorted that it would become a ten minute irregular event tacked onto the normal service.

To reserve its celebration to only a handful of times a year really denies the significance and the fullest and true nature of the sacrament, that it is a *koinonia*, a fellowship. Perhaps it is true that no frequency rule is stated in just so many words in Scripture. Perhaps there is liberty within congregations about this to some extent. Still when the priority of congregational worship on the Lord's Day is coupled with the covenantal realities underneath worship, a weekly covenant meal seems quite requisite for a robust Biblical worship theology and practice.

#### **Baptism**

Baptism is a blessed sacrament of the New Testament instituted by our Lord as a sign and seal of salvation. Baptism in water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit admits a person into the visible church, testifies of identification with the Triune God of Scripture, union with Christ, regeneration, forgiveness of sin, consecration to walk in newness of life, and fellowship in the Body of Christ (Mat 28:19, 1Co 12:13, Col 2:11,12, Gal 3:27, Rom 6:3-5, Tit 3:5, Mar 1:4; Mat 28:19,20).

Much could be said about the meaning, mode, and recipients of baptism.<sup>102</sup> In keeping with the focus of this book, however, I wish to address the aspects of baptism which relate to its inclusion in the worship of the church. While there is no command that baptism be performed in worship, still there is abundant recognition of it as an act of worship. In fact, baptism is really one's first act of worship. We are admitted in this formal way into worship by baptism. As such it is quite appropriately administered in the context of the gathered people of God, though in all kinds of places (i.e., not necessarily Sunday morning at 11:00 am) (Mat 28:19-20; Mar 16:15-16; 1Co 1:14-17; Acts 8:12, 8:36-38; 10:46-48, 16:15, 25, 33, 18:8; 22:12-16). Baptism may be performed while there are literally "two or three" believers (Acts 8:36). Yet, it seems, given its function as an entrance rite, baptism is best performed in the assembly of believers, for the edification of the congregation (Mat 28:19-20, 1Co 14:26). Further, baptism is correlated with discipleship through instruction, teaching and preaching (Mat 28:19-20; throughout Acts, e.g., 8:12) which normally takes place in the assembly of believers.

In the New Testament no specific liturgical order or pattern is given for the administration of baptism. According to Christ, baptism is to be performed "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Mat 28:19). This statement has the strength of a verbal formula as is the case of "this is my body." Such a formula is certainly to be theologically instructive about the nature of baptism (*eis* "into" the Trinity). Throughout Acts the phrase "in the name of Jesus" is applied to baptism (2:38, 8:12, 10:48, 19:5, 22:16). Frequently, those who insist on baptism "in the name of Jesus" rather than "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" do so because they deny the doctrine of the Trinity (e.g.,

---

<sup>102</sup>For my material on this see, *Infant Baptism: Does the Bible Teach It?* Or the forthcoming: *The Case for Covenantal Infant Baptism* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003). I also have written a study which provides resources: *A Handbook on Baptism: Essays and Resources* (originally an Audubon Press publication).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

United Pentecostal Church). The formula is not nearly so important as the theology.<sup>103</sup> The *Didache* informs us how very early in the history of the church the Trinitarian formula was used.<sup>104</sup>

In the liturgical aspects of the administration of baptism, very little is directly stated from the Biblical material. A few observations must suffice.

1. Baptism is an appropriate time for covenantal vows.
2. Baptism involves instruction as an explanation of its meaning and relationship to the recipient of baptism.
3. Baptism is a time for celebration and thus, praise is appropriate.
4. Baptism is a visual demonstration of the believer's union with Christ and is thus an opportunity for the entire congregation to affirm their faith and love in Christ.

### **Giving Thanks and Verbal Praise**

This aspect of worship may need some justification since in many churches in which the regulative principle is known, "giving thanks" (as I will call it) is not practiced.<sup>105</sup> What I am referring to in this element of worship is an opportunity for believers in the congregation to express thanksgiving and praise to God, ask for prayer, and verbally edify other believers in the assembly. Although many passages explicitly or implicitly refer to *encouraging*, the command for its practice in the assembly can be deduced from Hebrews 10:24-25.

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

This statement requires that a regular part of gathering as a congregation is to stimulate love and good works as well as encourage one another. Holding fast to Christ (v. 23) "requires the encouragement of others and that is given and received chiefly in the life of the congregation."<sup>106</sup> To carry out this blessed obligation "Christians must be alert to the needs of their fellows. . . loving one another will not just happen. It needs to be worked at, even provoked, in the same way as good works."<sup>107</sup> The kind of love

---

<sup>103</sup>See the Athanasian Creed (Appendix D) which says "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity. . . "

<sup>104</sup>*The Didache (The Teaching of the Apostles)* 7 (dated between 70-100 A.D.) it also specifies a preference for baptism by immersion in running water.

<sup>105</sup>The Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession recognizes "prayer, with thanksgiving" (21. 3; 221. 3) and "thanksgivings upon special occasions" (21. 5; 221 5.) as a part of worship. Psalm 107 and 95 are cited as Scriptural proofs. However, Waldron calls "testimony times" "extra-Biblical" (p. 269) and both he and Williamson are silent on what "thanksgiving" means and its application in worship.

<sup>106</sup>R. S. Rayburn, *Hebrews in the Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Baker, 1989) p. 1144.

<sup>107</sup>D. Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Tyndale, 1983) p. 215.

#### 4. Building Blocks

required is “a product of community activity, for it is a virtue that requires others for its exercise.”<sup>108</sup> “And it will be found that not only does love promote fellowship but also that fellowship stimulates love, because it is by meeting together as a true community that Christians have the opportunity for encouraging one another by mutual support, comfort, and exhortation.”<sup>109</sup>

*Giving thanks* is an element of worship which brings together many Biblical commands. It is an opportunity for what the Psalms often call “giving thanks.” “Praise the Lord! *I will give thanks* to the Lord with all my heart, *In the company of the upright* and in the assembly (Psa 111:1). As I have previously argued, we should not simply read or sing these commands, we should obey them! The idea that worship is a monologue from the preacher does not do justice to the Biblical commands or examples.<sup>110</sup> Scripture, throughout, makes clear that congregational worship involves a strong element of observable congregational participation.

The Biblical commands to give thanks invoke the congregation to tell each other about God. This can be seen from the meaning of the word (for “give thanks”) and its use.<sup>111</sup> The Hebrew word (*yada*) for “give thanks” is closely related to “praise.” However, the emphasis is on “‘recognition’ and ‘declaration’ of a fact” and used to “express one’s public proclamation or declaration (confession) of God’s attributes and his works.”<sup>112</sup>

Many passages command believers to do this, such as Psalm 35:18, “I will give Thee thanks in the great congregation; I will praise Thee among a mighty throng.” Psalm 75:1, “We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks, For Thy name is near; Men declare Thy wondrous works” (others include 7:17, 9:1, 18:49, 30:4, 30:12, 33:2, 44:8, 45:17, 52:9, 54:6, 57:9, 79:13, 86:12, 92:1, 97:12, 100:4, 105:1). I believe this same element of worship is carried into the New Testament worship service (Heb 10:24-25, 13:15, 1Co 14:16) and is reflected in the fellowship (*koinonia*) commands to encourage, exhort, comfort, counsel, share, love, etc.

It is possible to fulfill such New Testament commands without a separate focus in worship for their the *verbal expression in the service*; but, there is no Biblical reason or motivation (that I am aware of) which prohibits the multitudinous Old Testament commands and the many implications of the New Testament commands from expressing themselves in an opportunity for *giving thanks*. *Giving thanks* in corporate worship facilitates the expression of both the Old and New Testament admonitions for the

---

<sup>108</sup>*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981) p. 105.

<sup>109</sup>P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977) p. 415.

<sup>110</sup>I think a valid distinction can be made between worship that is “Word-centered” as opposed to “pulpit-centered.” In the former, preaching is a powerful means of applying the truth of God along with every other Biblically warranted means, in the latter, preaching is virtually the *only* means.

<sup>111</sup>The Hebrew term “yadah” (“give thanks”) has 17 translations into English, most involving the idea of Biblical giving thanks: Confess (translated 10 times), Confessed (3), Confesses (1), Confessing (2), Gave praise (2), Give thanks (64), Giving praise (1), Giving thanks (3), Glorify (1), Hymns of thanksgiving (1), Making confession (1), Placed (1), Praise (16), Shoot (1), Thank (5), Thanksgiving(1), and Throw down (1).

<sup>112</sup>R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer & B. K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Moody, 1980) p. 364.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

congregation. Further, if the Old Testament is authoritative in this matter, there is compelling reason to see this element of worship as crucial to the glory of God and the good of His people<sup>113</sup>.

Longman says, “The ‘sharing times’ that occur in modern church services and fellowship groups are too often an excuse to praise ourselves. The psalmist is a model for ‘sharing’ as he directs the attention of the congregation away from himself and toward God.”<sup>114</sup> Our struggle is how to vitally apply what is clear in Scripture, while avoiding the all too common, but obvious extremes of *subjectivism* and *emotionalism*?<sup>115</sup> This can be accomplished in short open times for prayer, in which men lead with some directives. Moreover, informal opportunities at fellowship events should include this, as well as other men’s forums or small group studies.

### **Giving or Offering**

Although the New Testament does not explicitly command the event of an “offering” in the assembly as is normally practiced in contemporary churches, the New Testament teaches the validity of this practice as an element of worship.

From the beginning of the New Testament church believers were led of God to care for the needs of others (Acts 2:44-45; Joh 13:29) and this continued to be a major purpose for giving (Rom 15:26; 1Co 16:1-3; 11Co 8:4, 9:5-15; Gal 6:10; Phi 4:15-19). In fact, Jesus characterized believers as those who feed the hungry and thirsty, house the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and those in prison (Mat 25:34ff.). The maintenance of the ministry is also a proper purpose for giving, and especially the support of those who labor in the Word (Joh 13:29; 1Co 9:1ff.; Phi 4:15-16; 1Ti 5:17-18). Moreover, the missionary task of the church is to be supported by giving (Rom 15:20-24).

Discretion is to be used in the process of giving and the management of church’s ministry (1Co 8:21; 1Ti 3:5). Jesus taught, “When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing that your alms may be in secret” (Mat 6:3). Righteous giving will be rewarded, “And your Father who sees in secret will repay you” (Mat 6:4). Blessing is promised to those who give out of a right heart and motivation (Mal. 3:10; Phi 4:19; 2Co 9:6). Jesus also taught the virtue of sacrificial giving (Mar 12:41-44)

One important reason for seeing giving as an act of worship is because it is put in worship terms.

And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs. Not that I seek the gift itself, but I seek for the profit which increases to your account. But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from

---

<sup>113</sup>Someone may object to this being a regular part of worship on the grounds that it is not feasible for a large congregation. In response I would note that the larger the congregation, the more planning, organization, and facilitation may be needed but I have been in many meetings of over 1000 people in which giving thanks was Biblical, dynamic, and God-glorifying.

<sup>114</sup>*How to Read the Psalms*, 146.

<sup>115</sup>Many reformed believers react strongly to that which is subjective or emotional. However, the Word is filled with believers subjectively expressing things in an emotional way (cf. virtually all the Psalms).

#### 4. Building Blocks

Epaphroditus what you have sent, *a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God*. And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

The imagery is of an offering being brought to the altar, possibly a voluntary offering, such as a thank offering (Lev. 7:12-13, 15; 22:29; 11Ch 33:16; 30:11). This is illustrated in the revival in the days of Hezekiah.

Then Hezekiah gave the order to offer the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song to the Lord also began with the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David, king of Israel. While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. Now at the completion of the burnt offerings, the king and all who were present with him bowed down and worshiped. Moreover, King Hezekiah and the officials ordered the Levites to sing praises to the Lord with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with joy, and bowed down and worshiped. Then Hezekiah answered and said, "Now that you have consecrated yourselves to the Lord, come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the house of the Lord." And the assembly brought sacrifices and thank offerings, and all those who were willing brought burnt offerings. (11Ch 29:27-31)

The passage that most clearly develops a theology of New Testament giving is 2Corinthians 9:6-15.

Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully. Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed; as it is written, "He scattered abroad, he gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever." Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness; you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God. For the ministry of this service is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

This passage is commonly cited as speaking to the heart of the Christian in the act of giving, "for God loves a cheerful giver." This is an important aspect of giving as an act of worship. However, another aspect of giving results in an "overflowing through many thanksgivings to God. Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ" (9:12-13). In the support of the ministry and caring for the needs of saints, God is glorified by others who see the reality of Christ in our lives. One implication from this passage for the contemporary local church is that the faithful support of the ministry can be an opportunity for people to worship God in gladness. This may take place in the during the "offering" and especially in the offertory prayer.

There are different ways of applying the Scripture's teaching on giving. The Bible certainly does not mandate an "offering." In this modern age it would not be unthinkable that believers could give by

## *Worship and Worship Services*

making electronic transactions with their personal computers or as is the practice of some churches, by informally depositing their gifts in a box at the back of the church building. However, a time of giving to reflect on the above principles and to liturgically recognize *giving* has Biblical support.

### **Faith-Promise Giving?**

Paul praised the Macedonians for sacrificial giving, “For I testify that according to their ability, and *beyond their ability they gave* of their own accord” (2Co 8:4). This text (2Co 8:4) is considered the key principle behind “faith-promise” giving which is such a common missions mechanism. One is to trust God to provide more than one is able and this surplus is promised to support ministries (such as missions). Some have objected to this practice on the basis that it is a vow which one does not know if it can be fulfilled.<sup>116</sup> This may be a valid critique. Although, one might see a “faith-promise” vow as merely a promise to give what God provides. If God does not provide (“over and above”), then the believer is not vowing to give it. If this were clear in the vow, then would it be a violation of Ecc. 5:4-5? (“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed -- Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.”) Perhaps not. However, we must ask whether making such a conditional vow, outside of one’s own power, is justified.

According to the Westminster Confession, it would be illegitimate precisely because it would not be in one’s power to perform and because one does not have a promise of ability from God.

WCF 22.7 No man may vow to do anything forbidden in the Word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or *which is not in his own power, and for the performance whereof he hath no promise of ability from God...*

Can I know that I have the power or the promise of ability from God to give \$10,000 more than my regular salary/income provides for? Having served in church which used this mechanism for a several hundred thousand dollar missions program, in fact what takes place is that people give a small amount that they know very well they could pay from the normal resources. The very affluent that were by no means giving “beyond their ability” provided for the bulk. Upon investigation of this mechanism in this context, no one that I could find had a “faith-promise” philosophy of giving what God provided over and above. Such is the state of evangelicalism today. Churches programs are filled with unexamined catchwords. Had the church merely tithed with the majority going to the church, I am persuaded that budget could have been doubled or tripled, or likely more.<sup>117</sup>

The way an offering is carried out involves a number of congregational and liturgical factors. Yet, a few suggestions may be helpful in considering its application in worship.

1. Practically, we should remind people of the Biblical directives for giving during the offering, in citing Scripture as a call to give, in prayer, and in the teaching ministries of the church.

---

<sup>116</sup>See for example in the meeting of the PCA group, The Concerned Presbyterians, Carl Bogue’s message on “The Regulative Principle,” available from Mt Olive Tape Library.

<sup>117</sup>I do not mean to have an uncharitable attitude toward my brethren there; I love them. But should we not get back to a more Biblical standard, tithing.

#### *4. Building Blocks*

2. The offering is an appropriate time for a “selah,” a musical interlude which functions to lift up one’s thoughts to Christ in worship (regarding giving) and in preparation for what is about to take place (e.g., the sermon).

3. Although instrumental music has become quite traditional during the offering, it is also a good time for choral or soloists to edify the congregation in song, or even congregational singing.

4. Prayer is appropriate before receiving an offering to turn peoples hearts to God in accord with the Biblical principles of giving.

## **5. Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above: Music in Worship**

### **A Brief Biblical Theology of Music**

Many passages support the use of music as a fundamental category in the worship of the new covenant church (Mat 26:30; 1Co 14:19, 14:26; Eph 5:18-20; Col 3:16; Heb 2:12). Aside from singing in a unison congregational form which is virtually universal in its acceptance, the Scripture teaches other uses of music in worship. There is a covenantal basis for the continuity of Old Testament expressions of praise with the New Testament's elements of worship (i.e., instrumental music). Music is warranted as an acceptable category of worship, though it is not an end in itself. The primary church music texts in the New Testament (Col 3:16 & Eph 4:19) are commands, not primarily to sing or make music, but to "teach" and "speak" with "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." We are assuredly commanded to praise God with instruments or praise with music in the Psalms (Psa 33, 149, 150). Why should the Psalms be disregarded in this? Let us consider further this matter.

The Scripture recognizes music as a means for praise (Acts 16:25; Rom 15:9 [originally sung]), a means of expressing joy (Jam 5:13), thanksgiving (Psa 92:1-3), sorrow for sin (Is. 16:10), a means of prayer (1Co 14:15; Psa 72:20), and a means of teaching and spiritual communication (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19). In Scripture the music makers are both professional (1Ch 15:22; 25:7; Isa 5:11-12; Eze 33:32) as well as nonprofessional (Psa 100; 1Ki 1:39-40; 1Co 14:26; Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). There are those who direct music (Psa 4:1, 5:1, 6:1, etc.; Neh 12:8)<sup>118</sup> and teach music (1Ch 15:22). The people of the Bible overflow with music in every circumstance including cultural uses placed in positive and negative terms. Music sounded in every aspect of life—work, play, celebration, and war (Isa 16:10; Jer 48:33; Mat 11:17; Luk 15:25; Gen 31:27; Exo 32:17-18; Ecc 2:8; Jdg 11:34-35; 2Sa 19:35).

Giving attention to the Psalms as they apply to music, the key word is "praise." Musical praise, especially in the Psalms, is spoken of as congregational, individual and for every situation. Music is used to praise God joyfully, loudly, melodically, and with a variety of instruments. Such praise is associated with dancing and skillful playing. The Psalmists command praise for the congregation and to call the nations and even the entire creation to praise Jehovah (see Appendix G: Biblical Categories of Praise for references).

On the basis of what Scripture teaches about the words of man and the words of God, it is not surprising that there are no strict separations between praise and prayer which is spoken, sung, or shouted. All verbal activity manifests the heart and the Word of God changes the heart, as well as the fruit of the lips is the result.<sup>119</sup> Therefore, the redeemed of the Lord "say so" in a continuum of verbal expression from simply speaking, to speaking loudly, to singing, to shouting. In fact, in some cases it is difficult to tell exactly what act the words are referring to (singing, chanting, speaking loudly, etc.). Consider the Biblical parallels.

Psalms 33:3 *Sing* to Him a new song; *Play* skillfully with a shout of joy.

---

<sup>118</sup>From the instructions for Psalms and the examples we see that there were individuals given charge of the ministry of music (directors).

<sup>119</sup>I am indebted to J. Frame's lecture "Music and Salvation" (Mount Olive Tape Library) for this idea. See also V. Poythress, "Ezra 3, Union with Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XXXVII (1974-75, pp. 74-94-218-235).

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

Psalm 65:13 The meadows are clothed with flocks, And the valleys are covered with grain; They *shout* for joy, yes, they *sing*.

Psalm 95:2 Let us come before His presence with *thanksgiving*; Let us *shout* joyfully to Him with psalms.

Psalm 71:23 My lips will *shout* for joy when I *sing* praises to Thee; And my soul, which Thou hast redeemed.

Psalm 75:9 But as for me, I will *declare* it forever; I will *sing* praises to the God of Jacob.

Psalm 81:1 (For the choir director; on the Gittith) *Sing* for joy to God our strength; *Shout* joyfully to the God of Jacob.

Psalm 95:1 O come, let us *sing* for joy to the Lord ; Let us *shout* joyfully to the rock of our salvation.

Psalm 96:2 *Sing* to the Lord, bless His name; *Proclaim* good tidings of His salvation from day to day.

Psalm 98:4 *Shout* joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; *Break forth* and *sing* for joy and sing praises.

Psalm 105:2 *Sing* to Him, sing praises to Him; *Speak* of all His wonders.

The rigid distinction between singing and other verbal activity in our contemporary use of language was not so distinct to the people of the Bible. In the content of verbal activity there seems also to be another continuum from prose to poetry. This range of literary expression can be identified by the structure and sounds of Biblical text.<sup>120</sup> For a song, the use of the voice is intensified in pitch and for shouting it is intensified in volume. At times it seems that there is an intensity of both pitch and volume.

Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre; With the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn Shout joyfully before the King, the Lord. (Psa 98:4-6)

There are a great many aspects and expressions of musical and verbal worship which can be found in the Bible. However, it does not follow that every expression of praise is essential for the New Testament believer and for every assembly of believers. The regulative elements of the New Testament have a more substantial role in worship by virtue of the fact that they are the direct commands of the Apostles to the churches.

### **The Validity of Musical Instruments in Worship**

When we consider the category of music, a number of important questions for worship services arise. Let us consider first the validity of the use of musical instruments. Biblical commands regarding the use of instruments permeate the Psalms. The use of musical instruments to accompany singing is evident in both the commands and the examples (1Ch 15-16). In the Psalms we find the clear intention of instrumental accompaniment of vocal music.

Give thanks to the Lord with the lyre; Sing praises to Him with a harp of ten strings. (33:2)

I will also praise Thee with a harp, Even Thy truth, O my God; To Thee I will sing praises with the lyre, O Thou Holy One of Israel. (71:22; also, 144:9; 147:7)

---

<sup>120</sup>For a bibliography see P.T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word, 1982) pp. 32ff.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Sometimes, however, it is not clear whether there is a place for instrumental music (without singing). “Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre” (Psa 150:3). Is the “*with*” to be taken as meaning “accompanying” or “by means of”? Aside from the testimony of Near Eastern musicologists who tell us that instrumental music abounded in the ancient Near East (including Israel),<sup>121</sup> some direct Biblical evidence can be brought to bear on this question.

Saul’s servants then said to him, “Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. “Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play the harp with his hand, and you will be well.” So Saul said to his servants, “Provide for me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me.” Then one of the young men answered and said, “Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician”. . . So it came about whenever the evil spirit from God came to Saul, David would take the harp and play it with his hand; and Saul would be refreshed and be well, and the evil spirit would depart from him. (1Sa 16:15-23)

This text, though not in the context of worship, lucidly indicates that the Hebrews played instrumental music. David “shall play the harp with his hand.” Observe that no mention of vocal music is mentioned. Since this is so, there is no reason to take the following commands in any way that would invalidate the use instrumental music.

Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre; With the lyre and the sound of melody. (Psa 98:5)

Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy. (Psa 33:3)

Moreover, the term “selah,” found 74 times in the Old Testament (71 in the Psalms and 3 in Habakkuk) is thought to mean “the lifting up of instrumental music in an interlude or postlude.”<sup>122</sup>

The Lord shall count when He registers the peoples, “This one was born there.” Selah. Then those who sing as well as those who play the flutes shall say, “All my springs of joy are in you.” (Psa 87:6-7)

### **Arguments Against the Use of Musical Instruments**

We could stop our discussion here with most contemporary evangelicals. However, certain church traditions have opposed the use of musical instruments in worship. Several kinds of arguments are employed to support this position, depending on one’s larger theological commitments. Argument (1): The New Testament alone provides the basis for the “New Testament Church” and Christian worship; there is lack of a New Testament command or example for the use of musical instruments in worship. Therefore, the use of musical instruments in worship is invalid. This argument is a “New Testament” only appeal. The basic issue here is whether the Old Testament is fully authoritative (2Ti 3:16, Mat 5:17)

---

<sup>121</sup>See the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* on Music; also A. Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, p. 17.

<sup>122</sup>*Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, p. 324.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

and thus whether there is any covenantal continuity. Given the explicit teaching of the New Testament about the authority of the Old Testament, a bare appeal to a “New Testament” only presupposition has no force.

A more weighty argument, though not very popular, is the argument (2): Musical instruments were inextricably connected with the sacrificial system; the sacrificial system was abolished with the fulfillment of Christ; hence, the use of them today is invalid. For example, Kevin Reed argues,

. . . it is indisputable that these musicians [of 1Ch 23ff.] were part of the Levitical priesthood. . . . The priestly services of the Levites have been replaced in the New Testament. Therefore, the burden of proof rests with the proponents of instrumental music; they must prove a divine warrant for such service apart from tabernacle or temple ordinances, if they wish to introduce instrumental music into new covenant worship. Without such a warrant, it is improper to reintroduce such ceremonial observances back into public worship.<sup>123</sup>

Reed cites 19<sup>th</sup> century Presbyterian, John L. Girardeau,

The instrumental music of temple-worship was typical of the joy and triumph of God’s believing people to result from the plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost in New Testament times....[I]t pleased God to typify the spiritual joy to spring from a richer possession of the Holy Spirit through the sensuous rapture engendered by the passionate melody of stringed instruments and the clash of cymbals, by the blare of trumpets and the ringing of harps. It was the instruction of his children in a lower school, preparing them for a higher.<sup>124</sup>

Calvin (I hate to say) is the Reformed patriarch of this view. He says, “The Levites, under the law, were justified in making use of instrumental music in the worship of God; it having been his will to train his people, while they were yet tender and like children, by such rudiments, until the coming of Christ” and it was “a part of the education; that is to say, the puerile instruction of the law...”<sup>125</sup>

In both of these arguments (1 & 2), fully developed, a great deal would also be made of the importance of verbal praise, appealing to texts like Hebrews 13:15, “the fruit of lips that give thanks.” Before considering an answer to these, it is important to make a distinction: (1) the use of instruments is *necessary* for worship, versus (2) the use of instruments as acceptable in worship, given other Biblical requirements. The use of musical instruments is not in the essence of new covenant worship, that is granted; neither, was it essential to Old Testament worship — remember the lack of such instruments in the patriarchs or even specified in the tabernacle. Musical instruments flourished as a result of David’s tabernacle of praise.

Speaking more strictly in terms of regulative principle worship— James B. Jordan’s comments:

There is no example of *a cappella* singing (singing without instruments) in the Bible. We are told on occasion that people sang, and instruments are not mentioned, but never are we told that

---

<sup>123</sup> *Biblical Worship* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1995), pp. 62, 65.

<sup>124</sup> pp. 67-68.

<sup>125</sup> Cited in Reed, pp. 66-67.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

people sang without instruments. Thus, any strict construction of worship based on the simplistic notion that anything not commanded is forbidden, will have to assert that it is wrong to sing without instruments. Clearly that would be going too far, of course. Singing without instruments is not forbidden, but for the full expression of worship, instruments are necessary.<sup>126</sup>

Speaking of strict constructions of the Regulative Principle — Is the use of musical instruments in worship a mere “circumstance” of worship? Some have tried to avoid the difficulty by appealing to this concept. The Westminster Confession (1:6) says, “there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.” The idea that the use of musical instruments is only a circumstance of worship is appealed to by many including Robert Fisher, Edmond Clowney, and Samuel Waldron.<sup>127</sup> For example, Waldron (referencing Fisher) says whether “singing is accompanied by guitar or a piano or a pitchpipe or a flute” are “illustrations of such circumstances.”<sup>128</sup>

I doubt these brothers would be happy with a local charismatic church saying, “O our rock band is just a circumstance of worship.” This is an inadequate justification for anything like a full-orbed utilization of piano, organ, or orchestral music, much less praise bands and rhythm sections. Especially in the face of the above argument (2), if instruments were part and parcel of the sacrificial system, then the “circumstance justification” falls short — just as other aspects of the sacrificial system would if brought into the age of the once for all sacrifice. George Gillespie is right in arguing that a circumstance must be (a) without liturgical significance, (b) something which could not have been imposed by the Bible, and (c) if carried out will not wound the conscience.<sup>129</sup> It should be clear from an elementary knowledge of Scripture that (a) the use of instruments *can* fill a place in the events of worship, such as “praise Him with the harp” (as in the Temple). (b) Such usage was, in fact, commanded by God, especially in the Psalms. (c) Apparently their use offends many who hold the narrowest interpretation of the regulative principle.

What then can be said in answer to this? The following list of arguments which support the use of musical instruments in new covenant worship is compelling to me.

1. Since all of the Bible is authoritative (Mat 5:17-19; 2Ti 3:16; 2Pe 3:2), the burden of proof is clearly placed on those who deny the validity of the Old Testament precedents and commands for the acceptability of instrumental praise in worship. On what *specific* New Testament grounds can the use of instruments be abrogated? The covenantal hermeneutic of the Reformed faith looks for continuity. As far

---

<sup>126</sup>From [www.BiblicalHorizons.com](http://www.BiblicalHorizons.com) (1999) “Additional Notes on Musical Instruments” which is appended to the article above by Leithart (“Death and Resurrection of the Tabernacle”).

<sup>127</sup>Fisher argues that the Confession is clear in what it means by “circumstance” since it says that they are things with which other human organizations have in common. The time of meeting is an obvious example of a “circumstance” of worship. However, Fisher gives as another example, accompaniment of singing by piano, guitar, or pitch pipe. Likewise, Clowney alludes to this justification in *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D.A. Carson.

<sup>128</sup>*The Regulative Principle of the Church* (P.O. box 1233, Quezon City: Philippines, 1995), p. 20.

<sup>129</sup>Cited in *Worship in the Presence of God*, eds. Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), p. 18.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

as claims that instruments were typological in some way (like the sacrifices), where is the New Testament evidence to support this? Certainly, the Old Testament does not represent the use of instruments as exclusively connected to blood sacrificial actions. Further, on what exegetical grounds may it be claimed that the hundreds of commands and narratives regarding the use of musical instruments all merely *typify* a New Covenant reality of spiritual joy? Did Miriam and David and Aseph lack “spiritual joy”? As far as relegating musical instruments to the concepts of tutorship (the immature period of formation) (as in Calvin), this begs the question. One needs to show *the basis* for consigning instruments to only the formative period, not a mere assertion that they were. Along with this kind of thought comes the claim that non-instrumental music is more “spiritual.” But I find it hard to be convinced that David playing the harp and singing is somehow less spiritual than say, the Scottish Covenanters singing what David composed with his harp. All of this “more spiritual” talk is more of Plato and less of Paul.<sup>130</sup>

2. Specifically, the New Testament commands the use of Psalms both singing and reading (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19; I Tim 4:13). We are required to keep the commandments and exhortations of God’s Word (2Ti 3:16; 1Co 7:19). Then, why should we not obey the Psalms’ commands to praise God with musical instruments (33:2-3, 43:4, 71:22, 149:3, 150:3-5)?<sup>131</sup> There is a striking inconsistency in reading and singing, “Play skillfully with a shout of joy” (Psa 33:3) or “Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre” (Psa 150:3), if we are actually forbidden from doing so. Are we merely to *sing* the Psalms and not *do* them?

3. While it is admitted that there is no direct command or example of instruments in worship in the New Testament assembly, there is Biblical evidence that New Covenant believers will, nevertheless, praise God with instruments. Psalm 98 extols the eschatological salvation of God for Israel and the nations who are to praise God with instruments. “Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; Break forth and sing for joy and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre; With the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn Shout joyfully before the King, the Lord” (98:4-6). This is even stronger when we see that the Apostolic interpretation of the salvation of the nations is Christocentric and placed within the New Testament era (Rom 15:9-11; 1Pe 2:9).

4. The history of redemption is thrown out of sync by the insistence that instruments are illegitimate in the New Testament age. Throughout the Old Testament we see their employment, from Job (30:31), to Miriam and the women of Israel at the Red Sea (Exo 15:20), to the pre-Temple prophets (1Sa 10:5), to David (1Sa 16:3), and especially in Temple worship. And even in the depiction of glory we see the use of instruments in the praise of God, too (Rev 5:8, 15:2). Morton Smith is certainly right in saying, “If both the past and the future periods of the church’s worship include instruments, may we not by good and necessary consequence deduce that they may be used in this period as well?”<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup>Consideration of this whole line of thought displays the bent toward a platonizing tendency to reject the concrete, earthly, stuff of worship; here it is in Calvin on instruments, just as in Augustine before, and the congregational Puritans afterward. Worship quickly becomes a mere mental activity in a meeting room— and we wonder how such a culture could be turned to Unitarian rationalism!

<sup>131</sup>It is odd to see Reformed theologians become dispensationalists at this point. Morton Smith (Dean of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary) speaks derogatively of “. . . the use of instruments as though they can praise God without content of words is questionable” (p. 4.).

<sup>132</sup>Smith, p. 4.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

5. The use of instruments support vocal music. This supportive application of musical instruments is fairly universally recognized in the Western church, as well as in many other cultures. Even if no mention of musical instruments were found anywhere in the Bible, I would venture to say that even minimal *instrumental accompaniment* (not the fullest use of music in worship) could be an appropriate application of the edification principle (1Co 14:26). Just as the use of musical notation in a hymnal, of which there no command to read during worship, to write a hymnal and publish it, etc., but clearly hymnals are instruments which aid praise in a literate society. Given such common aids and supports, the minimal use of accompaniment seems hardly objectionable.

6. The crucial premise in the argument (2) is that the worship use of musical instruments in the Old Testament is bound to the Levitical priesthood and sacrificial system. But this is demonstrably false: (a) “And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing” (Exo 15:20). Miriam was no Levite and neither were the women who went out after her and nothing in the text indicates a sacrifice. (b) There is no reason to think that the pre-Temple “prophets coming down from the high place with harp, tambourine, flute, and a lyre before them” were involved in “ceremonial observances” or in any way necessarily connected to the temple-sacrificial rites (1Sa 10:5). It is much more likely that they were praising God with instruments just as those temple musicians who “with the harp . . . prophesied in giving thanks and praising the LORD” (1Ch 25:3). (c) The Psalms frequently speak of instruments in a way which is not inextricably bound to ceremonial observances and temple-sacrificial worship. For example, Psalm 92 says, “It is good to give thanks to the LORD, and to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High; to declare Thy lovingkindness *in the morning*, and Thy faithfulness *by night, with the ten-stringed lute, and with the harp*; with resounding music upon the lyre” (vv 1-3). These kinds of references seem to be more reflective of personal worship than a temple-sacrificial rite. Musical instruments function to be supportive, indicative, and demonstrative of *praise* — an activity not restricted to the Old Testament.

7. Those who deny the validity of the use of instruments in worship, such as Reed, recognize their use *only* in (a) temple services (e.g., Psa 150), (b) in conjunction with the prophetic offices (1Sa 10:5-6), and (c) “musical pursuits associated with everyday life,” like when “women came out . . . to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy and with musical instruments” (1Sa 18:6).<sup>133</sup>

On (a) “temple services,” it is evident from many passages that instruments were used in private worship, both from the Psalms (Psa 57, 92, 108) and from the life of David who was chosen to minister to Saul with the harp because “a skillful musician” and “the LORD is with him” (1Sa 16:18). Although a distinction between private and congregational worship may be made, it seems rather artificial to separate private worship in the Psalms (using instruments) and congregational worship with in the Psalms by the same people, with the same instruments, such as David. Here is a forced distinction which in no way natural arises from exegetical considerations. Particularly since it was David himself who introduced many new instruments into congregational worship (1Ch 23:5). It is a slim rationale that permits such Biblical models of private worship to be swept under the rug, never again to emerge in our congregational worship—even though private and congregational worship are so intimately connected in Scripture, even more in the worship book of Israel (Psalms). On (b) “instruments in conjunction with the prophetic offices,” observe how arbitrary this is with reference to the sacrificial-instrument thesis. Does the use of instruments in telling forth the Word of God not seem more like the support of praise than the offering of blood sacrifices? If instruments were not used in other wide ranging applications of praise, only in prophecy, then the point may have some weight. On (c) “musical pursuits associated with

---

<sup>133</sup>See Reed, p. 63.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

everyday life,” the strict and (apparently) arbitrary separation of common modes of expression from similar modes of expression in gathered worship, seems entirely foreign to the holistic life-styles of the Hebrews. Moreover, it seems like a near-Gnostic trait in the Protestant church which so spiritualizes expressions of praise to bare vocal recitation, while all the while singing: “Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. . .” (Psa 150:3)!

8. For those that suppose that the emotions are to be suppressed in worship, John Frame is almost certainly correct in pointing out that Plato may have influenced certain of the Reformers on this matter much more than they realized.<sup>134</sup> Some Reformers argued that instruments would stir the emotions rather than the mind. But this is to assume that emotions are to be absent from worship. And this is clearly false (e.g., Psa 5:11, 32:11, gladness; Psa 18:6, crying out in the Temple; Psa 68:3, exulting; just to list a few expressions). Are we to relegate these *actual*, not ethereal-spiritual emotions to the “Old Covenant” too? Were such emotions also part of the sacrificial system? Having become so much more “spiritual” than Moses and David, are we now to leave our emotional expressions of praise back with the blood of bulls and goats? No. We need not choose between a head or heart religion. We are to sing with the spirit and with the mind also (1Co 14:15). Perhaps in our age of pure emotionalism, we must strive to make worship music ever more intellectually edifying and not succumb to the spirit of the age which bids us to *feel* rather than *think*. But we do not have to choose between truth and spirit, knowing and feeling, or true worship and genuine emotional experience. Real worship is not gnostic intellectualism and neither is it emotional subjectivism.

---

<sup>134</sup>See the section on music in *Worship in Spirit and Truth* (Prebyterian and Reformed, 1995); Plato says “Then beauty of style and harmony and grace and good rhythm depend on simplicity—I mean the true simplicity of a rightly and nobly ordered mind and character . . .” (*Republic*, III:400 in the *Great Books of the Western World*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, [Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc, 1994], Vol 6, p. 333).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

### **The nature of music**

Some have suggested that instrumental music in Biblical worship is parasitic on vocal music in its function and purpose.<sup>135</sup> Because of the prominence of the theology of the Word (of God), it may be argued that music should be primarily vocal and thus be another means of the ministry of the Word. We may label this the *verbal view*. If the *verbal view* of music is correct, instrumental music should depend on vocal music in its intent and function. Vocal imitation or accompaniment should be the rule of orchestration while verbal content is to be central in the message of instrumental music. An obvious application of this view would be to limit instrumental music in worship to support singing or to “songs” which the congregation knows and therefore can be reminded musically of the verbal message of the lyrics. Therefore, for the offertory a hymn such as “It is Well with My Soul” or “Amazing Grace” should be played rather than a Bach prelude or fugue.

A competing view might be labeled the *aesthetic view*. In this view music is valued for its own sake *aesthetically* or artistically apart from a message or even a function associated with it. An example of this would be the use of a Bach fugue or invention as an offertory. Thus, the experience, for most of us, is aesthetic and emotional rather than verbal, propositional, or cognitive.

A more Biblically comprehensive and experientially confirmable position may be discussed however, a *via media*: the *aesthetic-verbal view*—which is, as you might imagine, involves perspectives from both positions. This is because music is essentially *aesthetic*, as well as a kind of aural *language*. Thus, it is both emotive and communicative. It is a vehicle for beauty and for truth. Music can be true music under the Lordship of Christ without a verbal association or message. Especially following the metaphysical foundation of the Trinity as the basis for the equal ultimacy of the “one and the many” — we do not have to choose between the cognitive and the aesthetic. Human beings in God’s image are emotional and intellectual, as well as physical, etc. Truth, goodness, and beauty need not be ontologically prioritized.

The Evangelical church today desperately needs to recover the truth that beauty *without utility* was ordained by God in worship (Exo 28ff.). In fact, the first person recorded as being filled with the Holy Spirit is not filled to give verbal message but to create works of art (Bazelel, Exo 35:30ff.). The Psalmist reminds us, “Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God has shone forth” (50:2). The beauty we perceive in this fallen world is merely a dim reflection of the “perfection of beauty.” Music as a non-verbal art can minister (1Sa 16:15-23) and can reflect the beauty of God (Psa 27:4).

Common experience, as well as the aforementioned references testify that “pure” music (without verbal associations) *can* be used to the edification of the congregation and the glory of God. Yet, there is a strong verbal and cognitive necessity to edification and thus, worship. We cannot reach Nirvana as worshipers of the Living Triune God—we must *know* God to worship. When the worshiper engages in exalting the true God while hearing instrumental music, thought is not to be banished. Certainly lyric associations are often helpful in promoting intelligibility. It is not necessary, however, for the words of an instrumentally performed song to be in our minds for thought resulting in edification to occur. The beauty of skillful music itself can remind us of deeply theological truths, for example, the beauty of the Lord, the analogy of the Trinity in unity and diversity exhibited in music, the sweetness of salvation, blessing, covenant, creation, grace — and a hundred other matters which find an occasion in our minds because of music. This is especially true when such music is thoughtfully prepared and properly placed in a God-centered, Word-focused service. In such a context instrumental music is not “music appreciation” nor do we remove the highest worship culture for the sake of “the message.” Of course

---

<sup>135</sup>John Frame, “Music and Salvation.”

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

those that have not been taught of God will not be edified even by the most crass word-associations. We should strive to balance obvious word-association instrumental music with music which testifies to the glory of God in the most comprehensive, worldview manner.

### Music and the Aesthetic Problem

Throughout much of the history of music in the church, music has been harnessed in *conformity* to a mere expression of the spoken word. The Rev'd Dr. Jeremy Begbie of Cambridge University (no less) points out the watershed in church music history when chant moved from being *Syllabic* (on note per syllable) to *Mellismatic* (multiple notes per syllable).<sup>136</sup> As soon as music is freed from the constraint of directly corresponding to the spoken word (a non-intrinsic property to music), the floodgates are open. Music, like the drive of life in the film, "Jurassic Park," will *find a way* to transgress those artificial boundaries. Most of church history (excluding Biblical-times music) illustrates the attempt to beat music into conformity with the propositional word. Certainly music is a powerful transport for the propositional word and such usage is clearly sanctioned in Scripture (Colossians 3:16). The power of music to convey the lexical level of the propositional word is well-known (i.e., singing is a tool to learn words). But there is no Biblical reason to confine music to that role. Popular criticisms of church music, even traditional church music, often focus on the semantic correspondence of music to the meaning of the text. E.g., a hymn is bad when the meaning of the lyric is not (somehow) conveyed in the music. Conversely, Christians rejoice in the artful delivery of the truth in music (e.g., insert your favorite hymn here \_\_\_\_\_). The difficulty is not with music's conformity to the propositional word – but with confining music exclusively to the place of conformity to words.

Begbie insists that we need a "complementation" model, rather than a "conformance" model. Music, as complimentary, is freed from being merely the beast of burden for "the words." Music can, as Begbie says (in technical Cambridge terms), "fill in the gaps." It is my suggestion that this is true even in the Biblical text. This is one of the indications of the musical term from Psalms, "Selah" (e.g., Psalm 3:2, 4, 8). Music's interaction with the spoken word can be representative, illustrative, parallel, analogical, contrasting, and so forth.

### The Theological Solution to the Aesthetic Problem

Upon theological reflection, it is the unique Christian reality of the Trinity which provides a basis for the equal ultimacy of unity and diversity. It can even be argued that non-Trinitarian world and life views will be unable to even account for the "one and the many" in thought, art, and experience.<sup>137</sup> This certainly has application to aesthetics.

Further, all music is an employment of a concrete, actual sound. While it is helpful in analysis to speak abstractly of a music style, in actuality, there are only songs and movements and symphonies and dances and jingles and soundtracks . . . There are principles (abstract) and instances (actual sounds) of

---

<sup>136</sup>For the categories of "conformance" and "complementation," I am indebted to Dr. Begbie's presentation, "Thinking Theologically About the Arts," a presentation from the Calvin Symposium on Worship and the Arts (January 15, 2000), Grand Rapids, MI. His important books include, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2000) and *Voicing Creations Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

<sup>137</sup>This thought has been notably articulated in the works of the late Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA. For an example of the development of this thesis see, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy*, R. J. Rushdoony (Fairfax, VA: Thoburn, 1978).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

music. Here, we have again an example that only Biblical Christianity provides the necessary presuppositions which provide for an intelligible basis for reality, specifically aesthetics. Christianity is Christian because of Christ - an incarnate God. Jesus is true God and true man. Since this is so, we need not imagine that only the idealized principles of goodness, truth, and beauty are to be conveyed in our art/music. The history of music in the West, at least, is a pendulum swinging between the extremes of unity and diversity, abstract and concrete, classical and folk, principled and unrestrained, the intellectual and the emotional, the ordered and the less-ordered, and on and on it goes. Since Christ *is* God-man, we have a theological basis to envision the universal principles, while enjoying the most concrete individual expressions and instances.

This is good news when we cross some cultural boundaries only to discover that there's no conscious God-ward purpose in the art/music of that culture. Does this mean that God is not there? Does this mean that the culture has *actually* left the reality of the Christian world and life view? Of course not. Men cannot escape God's Word and world. Their conscious principles of worldview may tell them to fly out the window, since they make their own reality, but guess what? They still have to walk down the stairs. Gravity is an object-lesson that we are the fallen sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. Men, hostile in nature toward God, may intend their aesthetic productions to blaspheme the only God and Savior - but, in the most ignoble, ingenious, intalented, perv-formances of devil-worshiping groups - at best - such are distortions of the good gifts of our Father. Even the most profane cannot escape God's world and Word. And all the time demonic clones, as are featured on many cable networks, profess their idolatry, they suppress the truth. While all the time they are slapping at the face of God, they can only do so because God is holding them in His lap.<sup>138</sup>

Just a word further on this. We know that Jesus was in nature God and was the second Adam. This is "principle" - but Jesus was not a teflon cyber-Man with only universal features. No, he was once a Galilean boy with dirt under his fingernails and with an accent that was recognizable. And what an imaginative reality is the Biblical, orthodox, and theological truth that Jesus "is God and man in two distinct natures and one person, *forever*" (Westminster Shorter Catechism, 31).

Thinking Christianly about music and its aesthetic dimensions will provide the foundation for a philosophy of true beauty in music. If music abstractly expresses the aesthetic realities which are grounded in the beauty of God, music is inherently valuable within a Christian worldview. In my opinion, evangelicals are in great need of an aesthetic overhaul, complete with a new transmission to deliver the goods. It ought not be the case that those who have the truth of the gospel, lack a worldview inclusive of beauty and goodness - or worse, only accommodate art as a tool of propaganda. The keen student will notice a larger role for music in Scripture than mere conformance. The reflective theologian will envision a grander and deeper basis for music's value. And the imaginative musician will certainly demand a greater part for their cherished art. Thus, music is to be an aesthetic prism of the beauty of the Triune God.

Several practical applications of such a view arise. On the basis of the above discussion I believe the following observations hold and provide principles for practical application.

1. Instrumental music should be employed to edify "with the sound of melody" to remind the congregation of the message of a song (the words). (e.g., an instrumental prelude of "Holy, Holy, Holy"). Such an application is particularly valuable if there is thematic coherence between the songs and the sermon.

---

<sup>138</sup>This is an illustration from Cornelius Van Til.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

2. Instrumental music should be employed to support the singing of the congregation, not only in accompaniment, but by the use of introductions, interludes, and postludes to songs (e.g., a *selah*).

3. Instrumental music should be employed to soothe and minister (spiritually) directly to people, as in the case of David and Saul.

4. Instrumental music should be employed to prelude other aspects of worship and functionally, as well as aesthetically prepare people for other elements of worship (such as teaching).

5. Instrumentalists can praise God directly by “playing unto Him” with skill and acknowledge with humility God-given gifts and abilities. Church musicians should be exhorted to focus on “playing unto Him.”

### Exclusive Psalm-singing?

The validity of using songs of “human composition” has also been challenged by various church traditions, but primarily by those which hold to the Westminster Standards and interpret the regulative principle in the most narrow sense. This position is known as “exclusive psalm-singing” or “exclusive psalmody.” As a historical example, hear the blistering words of William Romaine (1796) as he bitterly criticizes the use of uninspired hymns saying,

I want a name for that man who should pretend that he could make better hymns than the Holy Ghost. . . It is just the same as if he was to write a new Bible, not only better than the old, but so much better, that the old may be thrown aside. What a blasphemous attempt! And yet our hymn-mongers, inadvertently, I hope, have come very near to this blasphemy...

The basic argument of exclusive psalmody is that (1) each element of worship requires warrant; (2) the singing of uninspired hymns is an element of worship; (3) no Biblical warrant exists for this (in worship); (4) hence the singing of uninspired hymns is invalid in worship.

The exclusive psalm-singers depend heavily on a semantic argument in their understanding of the phrase “psalms (*psalmos*), hymns (*hymnos*), and spiritual songs (*odee*)” (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19). The Greek words for these three designations are found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX) throughout the Psalms to refer to the Psalms. Exclusive psalmist G.I. Williamson nicely summarizes this evidence, “In 67 of the titles the word ‘hymn’ is used, rather than ‘psalm’, and in 35 the word ‘song’ appears. Even more important 12 titles use both ‘psalm’ and ‘song’, and two have ‘psalm’ and ‘hymn’. Psalm 76 is designated ‘psalm, hymn and song’. And at the end of the first 72 psalms we read that ‘the hymns of David the son of Jesse are ended.’”<sup>139</sup>

As I pointed out in the previous discussion of creeds, there is a strong irony, if not incoherency in this position. If there is no regulative principle that we are to “invent hymns,” there is still less that we should narrowly restrict our practice to “creeds of human composition.” Of course, I do not accept the claim that the Bible does not give warrant for the composition and use of “uninspired” songs for worship. Neither do I deny the validity of the right use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms. There are many arguments which convince me that exclusive psalmody is not required.<sup>140</sup>

---

<sup>139</sup>*The Singing of Psalms in the Worship of God*, from *Blue Banner Faith and Life*, J.G. Vos, Ed., July-September 1970 in booklet form, p. 10.

<sup>140</sup>For a review of the contemporary literature relating to exclusive psalmody, see Thomas G. Reid, Jr.’s chapter, “‘The Acceptable Way of Worshipping the True God’: Recent Writings on Worship of Particular Interest to Reformed Christians” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, eds. Frank J. Smith and David C.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

1. *The exegetical flow argument.* The position that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” are merely titles for the Psalms is initially impressive until the context of the two passages (Col 3:16, Eph 5:19) is taken into consideration. In the Colossians passage we are told that the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are the result of the word of Christ richly dwelling within believers. “As the word of Christ richly indwells the Colossians, so by means of its operation they will ‘teach and admonish one another in all wisdom by means of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.’”<sup>141</sup> “Both teaching-by-singing and ordinary teaching are part of the basic prophetic task of applying the word of God to men’s hearts.”<sup>142</sup> The exclusive psalm-singing position must justify the interpretation that the word of Christ results in teaching and admonishing one another *exclusively* with the Old Testament Psalms. Christ’s word surely includes the apostolic testimony not exhausted in the Psalms. Similarly, in Ephesians 5:19 the filling of the Spirit produces the songs of believers for the purpose of edification. The parallel passages on the filling of the Spirit indicate a similar usage (Acts 2:4, 4:8, 4:31, 13:9). The filling of the Spirit produces “uninspired” evangelism and preaching. To think that the indwelling Spirit or the Word of Christ produces “speaking,” “teaching,” and “counseling-admonishing” (*noutheteo*) *exclusively with Psalms* is certainly an untenable interpretation in the exegetical flow of the passages in question.

2. *The lexical argument.* It is not denied that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” may refer to the Psalms among other content, but a contextual exegesis does not warrant an exclusive reference to the Psalms. The words can equally refer to overlapping genres of music which are certainly inclusive of the Psalms, but *not limited to them*. Even Calvin says, “Moreover, under these three terms he includes all kinds of songs. They are commonly distinguished in this way: a psalm is sung to the accompaniment of some musical instrument; a hymn is properly a song of praise, whether it be sung simply with the voice or otherwise; an ode contains not merely praises, but exhortations and other matters. He wants the songs of Christians to be spiritual, and not made up of frivolities and worthless trifles.”<sup>143</sup> *Psalmos* refers to “a song of praise (1Co 14:26; Eph 5:19) of which the OT psalms were probably regarded as spiritual prototypes. . . *hymnos*, a general term in Biblical literature, denotes any ‘festive hymn of praise’. . . *odee* is used in the NT of the song in which God’s acts are praised and glorified (cf. Rev 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). . . taken together these three words ‘psalms,’ ‘hymns’ and ‘songs’ describe ‘the full range of singing which the Spirit prompts.’”<sup>144</sup>

3. *The lexical argument strengthened with the LXX and NT uses.* The argument from the use of the words “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” referring exclusively to the Psalms is sufficiently weakened when we see that Septuagint (LXX) uses the word *psalmos* to refer to non-Psalter songs (e.g., Psa 69:12; Job 21:12; Lam. 3:14) and so does *odee* (see references below). Also, *psalmos* does not refer exclusively to the Psalms in 1Corinthians 14:26 since it is paralleled with teaching, a revelation, a

---

Lachman (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), pp. 356ff.

<sup>141</sup>P.T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, p. 207. O’Brien’s exegesis is thorough and concurs with that of F.F. Bruce at this point.

<sup>142</sup>V. Poythress, “Ezra 3, Union with Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody,” p. 233.

<sup>143</sup>*Colossians* (A. W. Morrison, trans.) (Eerdmans, 1965).

<sup>144</sup>O’Brien, p. 210-211. I might add that almost every exegetical commentary that I have consulted generally agrees with this interpretation of the terms.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

tongue, and an interpretation—products of the Spirit according to the word of Christ.<sup>145</sup> As a matter of vocabulary, these three terms are the basic words for songs of in Koine Greek. To refer to the creation of uninspired non-Psalter songs, Paul would have had to use the same terms.<sup>146</sup> Had Paul wanted to insist that the Psalms be used exclusively he could have referred to the canon<sup>147</sup> (even *the Psalms*, with *ho*, the definite article). When the New Testament writers desire to identify *the Psalms*, the context and adjoining words make the exclusive reference perfectly clear (“book of Psalms,” *biblos psalmos*, Luk 2:42-44, Acts 1:20, or “second Psalm” 13:33).<sup>148</sup> In the other occurrence of *psalmos* (other than Col 3:16 and Eph 5:19) it is paralleled with new revelation and teaching (1Co 14:26), and it is therefore, extremely doubtful that Paul intended it to mean the “book of Psalms.”

4. *The name of Jesus argument.* Contextually, the subsequent verse (Col 3:17) teaches us to “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Thus, it seems inconsistent with the context to maintain that every Christian worship song should actually exclude singing the very name of Jesus. (Of course the Psalms do not include the name “Jesus Christ.”) Or to use the Trinitarian formula: “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” Moreover, Hebrews 13:15 teaches us to offer the sacrifice of praise “through Him [Jesus].” We can be sure that a Christocentric interpretation of the Psalms is right since Christ Himself tells us this,

Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” (Luk 24:44)

In light of this, how ironic would it be if Christ tells us the songs of the Psalter teach His gospel (death and resurrection), yet we are actually forbidden from singing the very words of Jesus’s gospel (?).

5. *The parallel to other communication activities.* If we are told to praise God verbally, pray, speak to one another, teach, etc. we would not normally think this means that we are only allowed to repeat the words of Scripture. Likewise, even when we are not told to praise the Lord explicitly with new songs, any commands to praise God with music presuppose that individuals are able to do so without simply repeating the words of the Bible (e.g., Psa 7:17, 9:2, 21:13). We are to praise according to the Scripture and depending on Scripture in a foundational way, but not simply by the recitation the words of Scripture.

6. *The difficulty of singing the very words of the Psalms.* Hardly any psalter arranged for modern use meets the strict challenge of singing *the Psalms*. Psalters promoted by exclusive Psalm-singers are arranged with verses in a rhyming and metrical scheme foreign to the words and intentions of the Psalmists. Expository faithfulness is the best that we can do in our attempt to sing *Psalms*; cultural conventions such as meter and rhyme are the best we can do in our attempt to *sing* the Psalms. One

---

<sup>145</sup>A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975) p. 312.

<sup>146</sup>The verbs “to praise” are even forms of *hymnos* and *psalmos* (Acts 16:25, Heb 2:12, Jam 5:13).

<sup>147</sup>For example, “book of Psalms” (*biblos psalmos*) (Luk 20:42), “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” “the Scriptures,” (Luk 24:42), “book of Psalms,” (Acts 1:20) “the second Psalm,” (Acts 13:33).

<sup>148</sup>See Colin Brown (Ed.), *New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology* (Zondervan). (NIDNTT)

## *Worship and Worship Services*

should ponder what the substantial differences are between (1) a metrical version of a Psalm (e.g., “The Lord’s My Shepherd,” Psa 23); (2) contemporary choruses using only a passage from a Psalm (e.g., “As the Deer,” Psa 42); (3) a hymn using expository thoughts of a Psalm (e.g., “O Worship the King,” Psa 104); (4) a hymn which applies the message of a Psalm to a current situation (e.g., “A Mighty Fortress,” Psa 46); and a Christocentric interpretation of a Psalm (e.g., “Joy to the World,” Psa 98). Is it really true that with such a diversity of Psalm-based songs Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 teach that only the first example (metrical Psalms) is permissible for New Testament believers? Do we, after all have a Biblical prescription for *metricizing* the Psalms?

7. *The Biblical examples of non-Psalter singing.* If we sing songs not included in the Psalter, we are only following the example of many of the Biblical saints including Elihu (Job 35:10), Moses and all of Israel (Exo 15:1; Num. 21:17; Dt. 31:19), Deborah (Jdg. 5:12), the sons of Judah (2Sa 1:18), David (who sings the *law of God*, Psa 119:54), Solomon (1005 songs, 1Ki 4:32), all peoples in the land of Judah (Is. 26:1), Habakkak (3:19), all the earth (singing a new song, Is. 42:10), and the songs of the heavenly choir (Rev 5:9, 14:3, 15:3). All of the above examples are explicitly called *songs*, yet they are not *the Psalms*. Moreover, there are many other “canticles” that were very probably sung, but not explicitly called songs in the Biblical text.<sup>149</sup> Since the exclusive psalmody position concedes that all of these could “stand just as well in the Psalter itself,”<sup>150</sup> then the principle is really that believers are to sing is the teaching of the Word of God. But since even a metrical psalter is at best a faithful, yet interpretive rewording of the Psalms (the Word of God), there is really no *in principle reason* why hymns or songs which are less textual, but nonetheless faithful expositions of the Word should not be allowed. This, if our exclusive psalmody brethren will admit, brings us closer to an exemplary psalmody position.

8. *The parallel of prayer.* Praying is a strong parallel to singing in the Bible. For example, Psalm 72:20 says of a section of the Psalms, “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” Also, 1Corinthians strongly parallels the acts of praying and singing, “What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.” This means that valid Christian singing can be spontaneous<sup>151</sup> (just as the Psalms command, e.g., 40, 98, 149). Exclusive psalmody must deny that this is valid. However, Psalm 72:20 makes prayer-like songs or hymns a matter of composition as in David’s Psalm-prayers. Just as A.A. Hodge says, “hymns and psalms of praise are in their essence only metrical and musically-uttered prayers.”<sup>152</sup> The historian Schaff calls the song in Apostolic Christianity “a form of prayer.”<sup>153</sup>

---

<sup>149</sup>The exclusive psalmody position find themselves in opposition to virtually all New Testament scholarship (believing and unbelieving) when they refuse to see certain passages as hymn fragments (e.g., Luk 1:46-55; Phi 2:6-11; 1Ti 3:16; Eph 5:11; Rev 4:8, 11, 5:9-10). See Martin’s *Worship in the Early Church* and the bibliography of O’Brien on Col 1:15.

<sup>150</sup>M. Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 57. *NIDNT* (C. Brown, ed.) also says, “Extra-canonical collections of hymns have also come down to us from various Jewish circles in Palestine; from the Qumran sect. . . and from Pharisaic circles. . .” (p. 669). Moreover, the Apocrypha includes the “Song the Three Children (1:28-67) and the 2nd Century B.C. “Psalms of Solomon” and the “Odes of Solomon” (pseudepigraphical works sometimes included in early manuscripts of the Apocrypha).

<sup>151</sup>Even Bushell recognizes this interpretation as exegetically probable in 1Corinthians 14, p. 80.

<sup>152</sup>*The Confession of Faith* (Banner of Truth, [reprint] 1958) p. 275.

<sup>153</sup>*History of the Christian Church, Vol. I: Apostolic Christianity* (Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910 [1988]) p. 463.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

9. *The history of the church.* The early history of the church corroborates the interpretation of the New Testament which allows the use of other hymns than those in Psalter in worship. Schaff says of worship in the apostolic church (1-100 A.D.) that they added to the Psalms “original, specifically Christian psalms, hymns, doxologies, and benedictions.”<sup>154</sup> In about 117 A.D. in Bythina, Pliny wrote that Christians “recite a hymn antiphonally to Christ, as to a god.”<sup>155</sup> Also, Clement of Alexandria wrote a hymn (ca. 202) used for the instruction of youth, “Bridle of Untamed Colts”<sup>156</sup>—a purpose in accord with Colossians 3:16. At the close of the 2nd Century apologist Justin said, “How many psalms and odes of the Christian are there now, which have been written from the beginning by believers, and which, in their theology, praise Christ as the Logos of God?”<sup>157</sup> Schaff says that as early as the Second Century “the angelic anthem (Luke 2:14) was expanded into the *Gloria in Excelsis*.” Tertullian (ca. 160-220) said of worship in the church, “Each is invited to sing to God in the presence of the others from what he knows of the holy scriptures or from his own heart.”<sup>158</sup> We still sing the *Gloria Patri* which was an anonymous second century hymn.<sup>159</sup>

10. *The new song commands.* The Psalms that exclusive psalm-singers sing command the composition of new songs. (a) “Sing to Him a new song (*chadash shiyr*); Play skillfully with a shout of joy” (33:3). This is addressed to “you righteous ones” (v 1) and paralleled with singing, praising, giving thanks, and playing (vv 1-3). (b) “Sing to the Lord a new song (*chadash shiyr*); Sing to the Lord, all the earth” (96:1). This is addressed to “all the earth” (v 1). It is paralleled with singing, blessing, proclaiming, and telling “His salvation from day to day . . . among the nations.” This is similar to the prophetic call of Isaiah, “Sing to the LORD a new song, Sing His praise from the end of the earth! You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it. You islands and those who dwell on them” (42:10) — which is connected to the new covenant’s fulfillment of “light to the nations” through the Messiah (42:6, Luk 2:32, Acts 3:37, 26:23). (c) “O Sing to the Lord a new song, For He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him” (98:1). Because of His salvation and coming judgment, “all the earth is called to “shout joyfully to the LORD,” “break forth,” “sing for joy,” “sing praises” “with the lyre and the sound of melody,” “trumpets and the sound of the horn” (vv 4-6). (d) “Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song (*chadash shiyr*), And His praise in the congregation of the godly ones” (149:1). This text is particularly strong since singing a “a new song” is to be done “in the congregation” (v 1). The reason for such praising is because Israel is to be “glad in his Maker” and to “let

---

<sup>154</sup>Vol. I, p. 463. These include the canticles of Simeon, the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the thanksgiving of Peter (Acts 4:24-30), songs in tongues (1Co 14), and the NT hymn fragments.

<sup>155</sup>H. Bettenson, *The Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1962) p. 4.

<sup>156</sup>Many hymnals include the reproduction and modernization of this hymn “Shepherd of Tender Youth” (accomplished by H. M. Dexter), Schaff (Vol. II) p. 230-231. See also K. W. Osbeck’s *The Endless Song* (Kregel, 1987) p. 52.

<sup>157</sup>Schaff, *Vol. II: Ante-Nicene Christianity*, p. 228.

<sup>158</sup>*Apology*, 39.

<sup>159</sup>I must also observe here that Williamson (1970) flatly overstates his case in saying “there is no evidence that uninspired songs, hymns or psalms were ever used in the worship of the Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Church.”

## *Worship and Worship Services*

the sons of Zion rejoice in their King” (v 2). (e) In other texts, new songs are exemplified as part of the personal experience of the worshiper. Psalm 40:3, the psalmist “waited patiently for the LORD” and after deliverance “put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.” Because of this “many will see and fear and will trust in the LORD.” In Psalm 144:9, the psalmist proclaims that because of salvation, “I will sing a new song to Thee, O God” and this is paralleled with singing praises “upon a harp of ten strings” (v 10).

Bushell spends part of a paragraph (out of 240 pp.) dismissing these commands saying, “Obviously the reference to a ‘new song’ in each of these instances is either a reference to the particular psalm in question or else a figure of speech to be interpreted metonymically for a doxology or prayer of thanksgiving. In any event they do not constitute a warrant for us to produce uninspired worship songs any more than they did for the Old Testament saints.”<sup>160</sup> It is not obvious to this reader that the Psalms’ commands of this nature can be so easily dismissed (without even the slimmest exegetical thought), and doubly so if elements of worship may be practiced because of “good and necessary consequence.”<sup>161</sup> Even if one comes to the unlikely position that none of these commands are direct imperatives for the people of God to sing new songs (contrary to their plain reading), then on what basis can an application from the example of Psalmist be ruled out? If these commands do not warrant the composition of new songs, then I am at a loss to know exactly what, in the mind of exclusive psalm-singers, would constitute warrant for new songs! The exclusive psalmodists demand a prescription for singing new songs— these commands provide an explicit basis (Psa 33, 40, 96, 98, 144, 149; Isa 42:10).

In conclusion, the most articulate contemporary defense of exclusive psalmody, *The Songs of Zion*, by Michael Bushell says of the Biblical warrant needed for elements of worship,

“When we say that each element of worship requires a divine warrant, we do not mean that an explicit command in a single text is required in every instance. Commandment in the narrow sense of the term is not necessary to establish divine prescription. Approved example or inference from relevant scriptural data is sufficient to determine the proper manner of worship” (p. 122).

I believe the above arguments strongly meet Bushell’s requirement of divine warrant for singing along with the Psalter, new songs, and hymns to Christ (our God). I have cited commandments (Psa 33:3, 96:1, 98:1), examples (Job 35:10, Exo 15:1; Num. 21:17; Deu 31:19 Jdg 5:12, 2Sa 1:18, Psa 119:54, 1Ki 4:32, Is. 26:1, Hab 3:19, Isa 42:10, Rev 5:9, 14:3, 15:3), and surely valid inference has been made.

### **Exemplary Psalmody**

The exclusive psalmodists fall off the right side of the horse, but the evangelical world falls off the left side. We are guilty, as evangelicals, of despising the whole counsel of God as expressed in the Psalter. We do not sing the Psalms. At best we reduce and truncate the Psalter to certain happy portions and catch phrases wretched from the depth of the God-inspired songs. It is truth that in a certain sense the exclusive psalm-singers actually minimize the importance of the Psalms, since they sing them but do not

---

<sup>160</sup>Bushell, p. 95.

<sup>161</sup>I find it amazing that Williamson says, “the express commandments of the Old Testament are sufficient without repetition in the New Testament. But this is precisely what we do not have. We do not have, in this matter, an Old Testament command that is lacking in the New Testament” (p. 29). Williamson never mentions the “new song” commands in the Psalms, though he repeats *ad infinitum* that just such a command is needed.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

obey what they say in respect to “singing a new song” (Psa 33:3, 96:1, 98:1, 40:3, 144:9, 119:54). To add, most within the exclusive psalmody camp also deny the validity of musical instruments in worship. So they doubly misunderstand and even disobey the clear statements. But let us repent of not even desiring to sing the full songs of God!<sup>162</sup>

Worship is clearly exemplified in the Psalms and we desperately need an *exemplary psalmody* in worship. I am advocating exemplary psalmody, rather than an *exclusive psalmody*. This is true both in following the heart-exposing expressions and emotions of the psalmists (the *how of worship*), as well as the motivations of the psalmists to worship (the *why of worship*), and especially in following the psalmists in the content of worship—worshiping the God of the Psalms (the *what of worship*). Perhaps then we will be more like David, a man after God’s own heart (1Sa 13:14).

As a guide for the songs we sing in worship, the Psalms form an exemplary model of what is truly *good*. We learn that the psalmists not only sing praise and give thanks to God, but also cry out to God in deep grief and personal anguish (e.g., Psa 55). The psalmists praise, pray, plead, repent, imprecate, and inspect their own hearts in every kind of lyrical expression. The psalmists praise because of their vision of God’s greatness and goodness, reflecting on His redemptive acts in history and call for worship that is congregational, individual and omni-situational, joyful, audible, novel, lyrical, instrumental, physical, professional, continual, cross-cultural, and universal (see Appendix G: “Categories of Praise”).

We find very simple assertions and mini-choruses like Psalm 117 (only 2 verses),

Praise the LORD, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! 2 For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the LORD is everlasting. Praise the LORD!

And we find acrostics of thematic poetry like Psalm 119. There are profound statements with vast theological depth, “Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne” (Psa 97:2)—i.e., that though God is both righteous and just, still darkness surrounds him (mystery). There are repetitious refrains like, “For His lovingkindness is everlasting” repeated 26 times in Psalm 136. Many Biblical songs in the Psalms display a depth in meaning so that the interpretation is not immediately obvious, especially when drawing upon the ancient peoples, lands, and geographical references (e.g., “Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me” 2:12). The Psalms model transparent expression, profound imagery of the Most High, and even poetic elusiveness. Imagine how many times over hundreds of years Psalm 118:22 was sung in temple processions, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone” with no understanding of how it would be fulfilled. Many Psalms are prophetic and typological, referring to David initially and ultimately to Christ (e.g., Psa 16 & 22). Some are even analogous to Messiah’s reign (Psa 72). We see more clearly the fulness in our new covenant revelation. Let us thank God for our fuller view, on this side of the cross of Christ.

Sometimes critics of contemporary music too hastily conclude that “contemporary sacred song expresses more feelings, emotions, and conditions about ‘you,’ ‘me,’ ‘my,’ and ‘I’ than it communicates about the Lord.”<sup>163</sup> Using the Psalms as our model would prevent such an unreflective conclusion since in

---

<sup>162</sup>I am thankful for a recovery of the full expression of the Psalms in many psalters, but especially in the *Cantus Christi* hymnal produced by Canon Press. It is taking us back and deeper into the historic church expression.

<sup>163</sup>*Music in the Balance*, Frank Garlock and Kurt Woetzel (Greenville, SC: Majesty Music, Inc, 1992), p. 120.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

the 150 Psalms the pronoun “I” is used 557 times. “My” is used 595 times. “Me” is used 464 times. “You” is used 113 times. That totals 1729 usages of such pronouns in *inerrant lyrics*, an average of 12 times a Psalm. Now I also share the basic concern of such critics, that many contemporary writers express a basic “man-centeredness” in their songs. A more Biblically comprehensive response is needed. My plea is for a truly balanced understanding of worship music, using the Psalms as our model. Further, if the Psalms guide worship, the varieties of emotional-musical expression in the Psalms will find a place in worship.<sup>164</sup>

The New Testament, in two places speaks of a three-fold designation of songs, *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. O’Brien is certainly correct in stating, “taken together these three words ‘psalms,’ ‘hymns’ and ‘songs’ describe ‘the full range of singing which the Spirit prompts.’”<sup>165</sup> Upon examination, a Biblical balance for song content may be deduced from these passages. These are emblematic all the kinds of proper worship music.

1. We should sing the Old Testament *Psalms*. Principally, this is singing Scripture itself. We should enjoy the richness of chanting Psalms, the Genevan Psalms, the Scottish Psalter, and more!<sup>166</sup> The benefits of this are replete; but, an obvious one is to learn the words of the Word. Singing Scripture, for example, in Scripture songs, canticles (songs other than the Psalms in Scripture, e.g., Mary’s *Magnificat*, Zacharias’ *Benedictus*, etc.). Within this category, we may also consider singing the Psalms in metrical form. Singing Scripture in the most direct fashion should be a central part of the musical diet of a healthy church.

2. We should sing theocentric and Christocentric *hymns*. Principally, these are doctrinal songs which express and articulate our Christian theology. Here is the place for the classic hymns of the ancient church (e.g., *At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing*), the Reformed church (e.g., *A Mighty Fortress is Our God* and *I Greet Thee Who My Sure Redeemer Art*), and the modern church (e.g., Watts, Newton, Cowper, Wesley, etc.). Such examples are full of direct Biblical content and scriptural images. Moreover, the Biblical content is interpreted by a doctrinally mature writer. These songs extol God in a poetic and theologically in-depth way, as is fitting for a mature church (Eph 4:11ff).

3. It is also important that we sing *spiritual songs*<sup>167</sup> —odes— which may be simple and personal. Historically these become “service music” as in the *Doxology* and the *Gloria Patri*. This is also the place for all authentic spiritual songs. Throughout all history of the gospel of grace God’s people praise Him. This is wonderful and should be appreciated. The African praises like, “*Kumbaya*” “Come by Here,” was glorious as a simple, authentic praise. The music of the newly converted Jesus People has value. On the other hand, the commercialization and ‘dumbing down’ of the church in the contemporary praise choruses is not authentic. This brings us to our next discussion.

---

<sup>164</sup>See the chapter on “Ordering Worship” for more information on using the Psalms to guide worship.

<sup>165</sup>O’Brien, p. 211.

<sup>166</sup>Again, I refer you here to the *Cantus Christi* hymnal (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003).

<sup>167</sup>Notwithstanding all I have said about exclusive psalmody, I must lament the fact that so many churches major on spiritual songs, erroneously calling them “hymns,” and hardly ever sing the Psalms or doctrinal hymns.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

### Contemporary Musical Styles and Worship

Let us consider the content of contemporary praise music, first. John Piper's words on this subject are worth repeating here.

In the last twenty years or so there has been a phenomenal explosion of worship singing that is good. . . . Hundreds of worship songs that if I were to start singing them right now you could all finish them. *Thou Art Worthy . . . Father I Adore You . . . Open Our Eyes Lord . . . We Worship and Adore You . . . Thou O Lord Art a Shield About Me . . . You Are Lord . . .* One thing is unmistakable as a trend in these songs. They are Godward . . . addressed directly to God. Not sung about God in His presence but to God in each other's presence. And therefore these worship songs force the issue of authentic worship. Are you right now engaging in a spiritual, authentic, genuine, real way with the Living God? That's what those songs force as an issue on Sunday morning in a way that many of the old choruses that my parents and I sang did not force. . . . So I look at this worship awakening and what stands out above all things to me and strikes me and makes me ask questions is its God-centered lyrics . . . *God is exalted, He is Lord, He is risen from the dead, He is majestic, He is mighty, He is Holy, He has conquered the power of death, He is a shield, He is glory, He is the Lifter of our heads, He is great, He is wonderful, He is a Rock, He is a Fortress, He is a Deliverer, He is the coming King, Redeemer, Name above all names, Messiah, Lamb of God, Holy One, He is God and Our God Reigns.*<sup>168</sup>

Despite the somewhat overlapping nature of "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs," the Biblical requirements of the content of worship songs demand consistency with the dynamic of the filling of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:19), the control of the word of Christ (Col 3:16), and are exemplified in the inspired Psalms.<sup>169</sup> Songs which are Biblically regulated in content and are congregationally edifying in other respects fully meet the standard.

I believe the best way to approach the question of music style is to realize that music style is inseparably related to culture. In the colonial efforts of Nineteenth Century missions, rather than the unchanging Word, Western culture was sometimes imposed on non-western peoples. Most missiologists have recognized this in the 20th Century and there has been a clear effort by evangelical missionaries to grapple with the transformation of culture through Christ rather than the imposition of the missionary's expatriate culture.

Similarly, many pastors and theologians have not, I believe, adequately reflected on the fact that music has been changing from Jubal on (Gen 4:21). From Old Testament times through New Testament times and throughout church history to the present music, musical instruments, music style, etc. has been developing. Further, from culture to culture musical style, instrumentation and convention is diverse. Which musical style then is to be considered normative? Most informed theologians within the heritage of the Reformation, would quickly condemn Rome for holding the Mass in Latin as an unintelligible tongue and providing no vernacular (the language of the common people) translation of the Scripture.

---

<sup>168</sup>Cited in *Reformation and Revival Journal*, on Music, p. 60.

<sup>169</sup>We might think of it in the helpful Aristotelian categories of causation. The efficient cause of Christian music is the Holy Spirit, the formal cause is the Scriptures, the material cause is the contemporary musical conventions, and the final cause is the glory of God.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Ironically, however, the same theologians might unjustly criticize musical styles in worship which are not in the vein of traditional Western hymnody.

Certainly our North American culture is not the standard by which we should judge other cultures. We have no more right to impose a North American or Western European style of music on other cultures as we do to make them have their services in Latin. We do have a primary obligation to teach them the Biblical prescriptions about music. However, we must be clear on *what the Bible says and does not say*.

We must recognize that people need the “vulgate,” that is, the worship of God in their common tongue. Our concern must be for the communication of meaning and truth. For example, if an individual’s musical experience contains only folk music, it may take time and growth for that person to appreciate Watt’s and Wesley’s hymns and their received tunes. In fact, the individual may never appreciate Western art music. Are we to conclude that this individual cannot grow to maturity in Christ and fulfill the Biblical mandates of worship? Certainly not. The proper goal is for every individual is to be conformed to Christ through His Word, not to Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Western cultural/musical forms.

However much we would wish for a full Biblical aesthetic which sees the beauty and complexity of Western art music as conforming to the Christian worldview, in worship we must strive for *edification based on true communication*. We also hope for a richer and fuller application of Biblical aesthetic standards in music, even than Watts and Wesley!

I recognize that my argument depends on whether the Bible teaches that change in cultural mediums of communication is acceptable. However, I believe that a strong case can be made for the idea that Scripture allows for cultural differences and changes within time. My argument is three-fold: Cultural diversity and change is (1) assumed throughout the Old Testament and New Testament, (2) implicitly taught and (3) explicitly predicted.

1. The revelation of the Messiah is brought through the medium of the Greco-Roman language/culture with Judaistic roots rather than the language/culture of the Abrahamic, Mosaic, or Davidic eras. Therefore, cultural change is assumed throughout redemptive revelation.

2. The prescriptions to “sing a new song” are linked to ethnic groups. Cultural change is indicated since these people are to invent praise within their cultural frame (Psa 96:1-2; Is. 42:10-11). “Sing to the Lord a new song; Sing to the Lord, *all the earth*” (Psa 96:1). The praise of the nations, musical and verbal, is central to the purpose of salvation:

“For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “Therefore I will give praise to Thee among the Gentiles, And I will sing to Thy name.” And again he says, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people.” And again, “Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him.” (Rom 15:8-11)

3. Jesus purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and made them to be a kingdom of priests to reign on the earth (Rev 5:9-10). This text explicitly teaches that the culture of believers in the New Covenant era is diverse and has changed from the single and somewhat uniform culture of Israel.

I also recognize that my basic argument regarding music style is premised on an analogy to verbal language. I believe that the best analogy for music is verbal language and that Biblical support for this analogy can be mounted. Consider the Apostle Paul’s use of this analogy:

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. (1 Cor. 14:7-11)

Music style is similar to verbal language in the sense that it is bound to culture and therefore, varies with culture. We can no longer use Tyndale's translation of the Bible (though it was greatly utilized in the Authorized Version) because our vocabulary, spelling, syntax, and semantics have changed since the 1400's. In the same way, our aim in choosing music styles appropriate for worship therefore, should be communication. Only when the message of the music is communicated can edification occur (1Co 14). Sometimes the vernacular music style is so different than that which is traditional that edification is not possible through traditional music. This turns out to be another issue which is determined congregationally.

Whatever music is used must be edifying to the congregation worshipping to it. The Bible does not condemn Assyrian syntax or Phoenician phonetics or the English of the New International Version of the Bible. The specific sounds of words are merely the *form*. For the most part, the Bible is concerned with the *substance*, the meaning.<sup>170</sup> God requires the meaning of language and its use to come under His lordship and to tell the truth about Him and His creation. God also requires music and its use to come under His lordship by praising His name and edifying His children.

Music as a manifestation of culture, like language, changes. Many believers who wish to sanctify a certain musical tradition have simply not recognized that music is communication within a cultural context. In so doing they fail to distinguish Biblical absolutes from cultural relatives. Lest anyone suggest this is "relativism," The one individual who made the term "absolutes" part of the current Christian vocabulary, Francis Schaeffer, in *Art and the Bible* made the above distinction in this assertion, "Let me say firmly that there is no such thing as a godly style or an ungodly style."<sup>171</sup> Schaeffer is a noble model for believers to emulate in his thinking regarding the complex issues surrounding Biblical absolutes and cultural forms. He said, "And as a Christian adopts and adapts various contemporary techniques, he must wrestle with the whole question, looking to the Holy Spirit for help to know when to invent, when to adopt, when to adapt and to not use a specific style at all. This is something each artist wrestles with for a life time, not something he settles once and for all."<sup>172</sup>

Thus, the issues of music style, worship format, language, etc. must be analyzed in a way that exalts Biblical standards while leaving room for Biblical recognized change. While it is true that all culture stands under the judgment of God, we may not establish any particular culture as *the* standard. If we can repudiate or affirm some aspects of cultural expression as consistent with Biblical teaching we

---

<sup>170</sup>The idea that certain styles and sounds of music are inherently evil is know as the doctrine of *ethos* and has much more in common with pagan animism and Platonic philosophy than the Bible "for the earth is the Lord's, and all it contains" (1Co 10:26; Psa 24) (see also *Zondervan Encyclopedia* on Music).

<sup>171</sup>(Intervarsity Press, 1973) p. 51.

<sup>172</sup>Schaeffer, p. 55.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

should. In this way I applaud any serious attempt to scrutinize some aspect of our culture (music or something else) in the light of Scripture. The transformation of culture through such scrutiny is an important part of the church's responsibility (Mat 5:13-16).

If we seek to develop truly Biblical standards for music style, we will find support for the idea of stylistic latitude with great cultural diversity. For example, surveying the Biblical information regarding instruments, we find the use of many and varied instruments (Appendix F). They include percussion, stringed, and wind instruments of both a "brass" (sometimes they are ram's horns) and a woodwind type. As a result of the nature of the instruments themselves we may conclude that music in Biblical times sounded radically different than the music that we call traditional Christian music. Consider the helpful summary of Vida Chenoweth (an ethnomusicologist associated with Wycliffe Bible Translators) and Darlene Bee.

Christianity has certainly influenced the course of Western musical development; some of our greatest music has been inspired by a strong Christian faith. Nevertheless, we cannot say that our Western musical tradition is the same as the Christian musical tradition. It is not the musical idiom of the New Testament; the founders of our faith would have been ill-at-ease in it. There was no musical notation at the time of Christ so we will never know what melodies were sung by Jesus and His disciples. What we do know about their musical style is that it was Near Eastern. Our modern hymns are also different from Hebrew and Greek music, even though the gospel reached us through the cultural matrix of these societies. Our Western hymns are a heritage which we rightly cherish, but they belong to our faith through our culture. They are not in themselves part of any Christian culture. . . Music is a vital part of both worship and witness, and it is important for new believers to witness and worship in song. . . When a people develops its own hymns with both vernacular words and music, it is good evidence that Christianity has truly taken root.<sup>173</sup>

Further, the sound of music in the Bible must have been at times very loud since there were 4,000 "praising the Lord with the instruments which David made for giving praise" (1Ch 23:5).

It is quite clear in my mind that from the Biblical material a broad range of musical usage can be derived from the droning and pensive harps to the loud boisterous clashing cymbals. Therefore, we should allow different cultural developments in the music of the church and practically seek to employ music which is congregationally edifying.<sup>174</sup>

### **Inter-Congregational Music: Soloists, Ensembles, and Choirs**

In my experience, many of those who have sought to examine worship in light of the Biblical teaching, have been critical of modern church services that have an appearance of being entertainment-orientated. While it is true that much of the teaching on contemporary worship and the practice of worship services has been without Biblical scrutiny, nevertheless, each element and specific practice of worship must be considered when controversy arises. Many of those who would claim to hold to the

---

<sup>173</sup>“On Ethnic Music,” *Practical Anthropology* 15(5), 1968, p. 211-212.

<sup>174</sup>For further discussion on music styles see my “Music in the Bible and Music in the Church” ([www.WordMp3.com](http://www.WordMp3.com)).

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

regulative principle (usually assuming a narrow interpretation), would critically dismiss the common practice of musical soloists or ensembles or any kind of “special music.” The exclusion of soloists or related musical presentations is usually criticized because of (1) a Biblical argument for the priority of congregational singing and (2) the exclusion of that which is entertainment-oriented from worship. Are these criticisms which ban the practice of musical soloists and ensembles in worship services Biblically justified? For review, consider the regulative principle and its demand,

The regulative principle of worship states that true worship includes only that which has Biblical warrant. Explicit or implicit Biblical support must be found for all that forms a part of worship (as contrasted with a circumstance of worship).<sup>175</sup>

Having put the issue in these terms, the question which remains is whether special music has explicit or implicit Biblical warrant. There are at least three lines of argument which support the validity of soloists or ensembles making a musical presentation in the assembly of believers.

1. The Old Testament background to the New Testament assembly is recorded for us in the book of Psalms. As I have suggested previously, we should use the Psalms to give us Biblical examples of expressions of praise. There is no disagreement that the people of God should praise God. But how should praise be done? What are the valid (Biblical) expressions of praise? The Psalms, to a large measure, answer these questions. For example, since the Psalms command that the people of God praise him with musical instruments (Psa 33), then playing skillfully unto the Lord is an appropriate *expression* of praise. In the case of special music, the Psalms give us inspired examples of musical solos which later became of use for congregational praise.

2. Another line of argument which generally supports the Biblical validity of special music is the explicit statements of the psalmists indicating their personal praise or thanksgiving to God in the midst of the congregation. Consider the following selections which teach the appropriateness of individuals praising and thanking God in the context of the congregation or even the nations which is typological of the New Testament people of God, cf. Romans. 15:8-11, Rev 5:11, 1Ti 3:16.

Psalms 35:18 I will give Thee thanks in the great congregation; I will praise Thee among a mighty throng.

Psalms 18:49 Therefore I will give thanks to Thee among the nations, O Lord, And I will sing praises to Thy name.

Psalms 57:9 I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to Thee among the nations.

Psalms 89:1 (A Maskil of Ethan the Ezrahite.) I will sing of the lovingkindness of the Lord forever; To all generations I will make known Thy faithfulness with my mouth.

Psalms 108:3 I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord, among the peoples; And I will sing praises to Thee among the nations.

Psalms 138:1 (A Psalm of David.) I will give Thee thanks with all my heart; I will sing praises to Thee before the gods.

Psalms 107:32 Let them extol Him also in the congregation of the people, And praise Him at the seat of the elders.

---

<sup>175</sup>Engle, p. 77.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Psalm 22:22 I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee.

Psalm 22:25 From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.

Psalm 89:5 And the heavens will praise Thy wonders, O Lord; Thy faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones.

Psalm 111:1 Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart, In the company of the upright and in the assembly.

While it could be objected that all of these verses do not refer to singing, but rather to verbal praise, it should be remembered that the Hebrew people made no sharp division between speaking, shouting, praising, singing, and chanting. In many cases it is difficult to tell exactly which of these activities the Psalmist had in mind. While we may distinguish between these activities, we cannot divorce one act from another. Singing, praising, thanking, and speaking are used in poetic parallelism. I believe it can be confidently asserted that for the psalmists, *whatever is appropriate to say is appropriate to sing*.<sup>176</sup>

3. With the previous two lines of argumentation, I believe we have a solid foundation for using solos as a part of worship, given the other general edification considerations (content, skillfulness, heart of the soloist, etc.). However, I would like to offer one more line of argumentation which is the most direct. If we use the standard of the New Testament's explicit statements as to what should be done during the assembly, several texts directly support the use of special music or soloists in worship. 1Corinthians 14:26 says, "What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, *each one has a psalm*, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." The text clearly parallels bringing a psalm and a teaching. The force of this parallel militates against an interpretation of exclusive congregational singing. All the parallels involve *individuals* using their gifts. It seems then, the New Testament Edification Principle itself includes a strong indication of the validity of using special music.

Further, the two other most notable statements in the New Testament regarding church music involve a similar suggestion. Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with Psalm and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God"; Ephesians 5:18-19 says, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in Psalm and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord."

Both these passages use the phrase "one another" to indicate the perspective from which the music is ministered. In light of the parallel uses of this phrase, one cannot insist that "teaching one another" and "speaking to one another" in music is merely congregational in the sense of everyone singing the same song at once. Consider the following uses of "one another" in the New Testament:

Romans 15:7 Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.

1Corinthians 7:5 Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again lest Satan tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Galatians 5:13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

---

<sup>176</sup>See the previous discussion of the continuum of verbal expression.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

Ephesians 5:21 . . . and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,

I Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

Hebrews 10:24 . . . and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds . . .

James 5:16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

I Peter 4:10 As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

I John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Clearly, the concept of ministering to “one another” is not exclusively a simultaneously corporate activity. In fact, it is difficult to secure one verse in which the one another activity is truly a simultaneous corporate activity in the same way as congregational singing. Therefore, we have the strongest indication that teaching or speaking to one another with Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs may include solos and ensembles in the assembly of believers.

4. Finally, we have a beautiful example to follow in the act of soloing for the glory of God. In the Messianic Psalm 22, we are told that the Psalmist praises God in the assembly (22:22). The writer of Hebrews divinely interprets this as Messianic in His incarnational activity of being completely identified with His brethren.

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, “*I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise*” (Hebrews 2:10-12).

Jesus, Himself, is the incarnational cantor. Jesus sings in the midst of the congregation. Jesus, therefore, is our supreme example for special music since He is singing to identify with and edify His brethren and in that, He praises and glorifies God.

### A Biblical Philosophy of Choral Groups

The First Testament choirs find their apex in the Davidic period. They were primarily composed of Levites, though we do see others participating in musical and singing ensembles earlier, such as Myriam (Exo 15). The term *shiyir* is often translated “singers.” This term is used many times, especially in the Davidic period.<sup>177</sup> Psalm 68, a text quite significant to the Pauline teaching on spiritual gifts and is cited in Ephesians 4. This text provides a good example of the singers in worship.

They have seen Thy procession, O God, The procession of my God, my King, into the sanctuary. The singers went on, the musicians after them, In the midst of the maidens beating tambourines.

---

<sup>177</sup>(1Ch 9:33, 15:16, 15:19, 15:27, 2Ch 5:12-13), and the post-exilic period (Ezr 2:41, Ezr 2:70, Ezr 7:7, Ezr 7:24, Ezr 10:24, Neh 7:1, Neh 7:44, Neh 7:67, Neh 7:73, Neh 10:28, Neh 10:39, Neh 11:22, Neh 12:28, Neh 12:29, Neh 12:42, Neh 12:45, Neh 12:46, Neh 12:47, Neh 13:5, Neh 13:10).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Bless God in the congregations, Even the LORD, you who are of the fountain of Israel. (Psa 66:24-26)

This passage indicates the temple worship which included musicians and choirs and the people in procession. The term for “choir director” (NAS) or “director of music” (NIV) is *natsach* in Hebrew. It is usually translated as “Chief Musician” in the AV. In the Psalm ascriptions there are directions for this man which include tunes, instruments, modes, etc. In more historical terms, this is the *cantor*. Such a person leads out in music and in more robust times develops musicians and facilitates the flourishing of music for worship.

Given the Old Testament foundation for choral groups, how do we relate this to New Covenant worship? Music specialists, such as Myriam (Exo 15:20) participate in worship music very early in Israel’s history. Is Levitical service a mere transformation into priesthood of the entire body of believers? It may not be so clear-cut. Even the OT states the “priesthood of believers” - the entire nation functioned as the priesthood: “you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exo 19:6). Yet the specific acts of tabernacle ritual were delegated to those with calling, training, and expertise, the Levites.<sup>178</sup>

In the NT it is principally true that the congregation is the temple (Eph 2:21), the priesthood (1Pe 2:5), and royalty (Rev 5:10): “and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father” (Rev 1:6, 5:10). “But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that ye may show forth the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1Pe 2:9, ASV). “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1Pe 2:5). Because of the once for all work of our High Priest, we have no need for a special caste to offer blood sacrifices. Certainly the whole priesthood offers the sacrifice of praise. “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15). Although, one may find that the same is true even in the OT, though there is less emphasis on the realization of this.

Nevertheless, there is a certain pattern of Levites and Priests which foreshadow church officers: deacons and elders. The Hebrew term for priest, *kohen* is used of household administrators of kings (1Sa 8:18 says David's sons were also “priests”). Peter Leithart has argued that the best overall description of priests is “Administrator of [the] Royal Household.”<sup>179</sup> This means, also, that church leadership, whether in training or officers or administrative servants are similar to the *kohen* of the OT.

Certainly choral and musical ensembles do not render a distinct service to God which no other body member can do. This is certainly different from the Levitical system. They are not secluded in their lives from “normal” congregational members. They have no special privileges as a distinct “tribe in Israel” - contrary to the way certain music directors may act!

What then remains? Musical ensembles and their leaders are to be a kind of Royal Administrator among the “one anothers” of the body. They are to be those who ad-minister and specialize in the skills of praise, teaching, and admonition through music (Col 3:16, Eph 5:19). Fundamentally, choirs are to be *classes in praise*. We have classes that focus on Bible study techniques. We have classes that focus on

---

<sup>178</sup>In the NT, still there are offices of leaders that correspond to some OT functions: Levites-Deacons, Priests-Elders.

<sup>179</sup>What Is a Priest? <http://www.biblicalthorizons.com/bh/bh033.htm>.

## 5. Building Blocks: Music

specific topics, interests, and ministry skills. Why not have specific service and study devoted to the music ministry of the congregation?

Let us not forget the aesthetic dimension of worship: we are to “make His praise glorious” (Psa 66:2). Just as the visual aspects of tabernacle and its priests were “for glory and for beauty” (Exo 28:2, 40), surely our music is for glory and beauty. This requires training, skill, and talent: in short, work! Choirs or vocal ensembles can compliment the beauty of worship, as well as serve to assist the congregation. Even conservative (minimalist) Presbyterian Morton Smith recognizes “the use of instruments and choirs to assist the congregation.”<sup>180</sup>

Add to that we may see such groups as an elective class in praise to “teach and admonish one another” with music and “make His praise glorious” (Psa 66:2). Aiming at this surely accomplishes the purpose of “assisting,” and is one more way to guard against the entertainment mindset with which the evangelical church is presently afflicted. Choirs are to function as individuals especially committed to the service of praise. Choirs function, not as entertainment ensembles, but as ministering exemplary models, supports, and stimuli to praise with excellence. They sound forth truth in a beautiful way what is exemplary of our hearts’ desires.

Some practical admonitions follow from these considerations:

1. Choirs, if they are “classes in praise” are to function with a view toward instruction, as well as performance (presentation in the liturgy). What should the choir study? Certainly, choirs should study the details of musical excellence, reading, theory, music style. But even more, one who spends years in the choir should know and grow in the theology of praise. One can do no better here than to make the Psalms central to rehearsal and performance.

2. If choirs are to support the praise of God, they cannot function in an autonomous way from the congregation. Some level of thematic coherence must be evident in the service. The choir must support the function and message within the liturgy. Too often choirs function as a group with a mere mission of performance. In this case, they are just there to do their “number.” On the contrary, the group should be the most well-tuned hearts, heads, and voices in the congregation. They are to be exemplary in singing not only their anthem or presentation, but also the congregational music.

3. Choirs are to support the praise of God in the congregation. They should sing well the songs of the congregation in each services. Early Puritans did not part-sing in worship, though they did so in less formal times. Their purpose in this was to do nothing to distract from the unity of the message of the Psalm (not hymn). Perhaps we have a more robust view of harmony in its relation to theology in worship. Their example is still an important illustration. I would argue, given a full harmonical base for a song/hymn, the choir supports the congregation in singing all the parts. This aids the congregant who is insecure as a vocalist, but in heart a worshiper.

4. If choirs support the congregational worship, rather than become a mere performing group within the service, the selection of music ought to have an instructional quality. For many congregations, the Psalms have been altogether lost. The classic and ancient hymns are barely known. The Reformation Psalter-based hymns are unknown. Instead of serving to help the church grow deeper many choirs are only interested in the latest pop gospel piece. Of course they only do this 25 years after that music style was pop. Why not let the choir function to teach the Word through these kinds of great church anthems?

---

<sup>180</sup>“The Elements of Worship Continued,” *The Bulletin of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*, VII:1, p. 4

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Would it not be a better use of resources to sing the unknown, but grand hymns of the faith, than to buy latest canned Nashville sound ?

### **A Biblical Philosophy of Musical Ensembles**

The groundwork has been laid for the validity of musical instruments in Christian worship. There is no need to restate the above Biblical material. A number of considerations arise when we consider the function of instrumental musical ensembles.

A richness in instrumental praise is magnificent as an aesthetic, aural symbol of every kind of thing praising the Lord. This seems to be the point of Psalm 150. The delicate things, stringy things, the windy things, the hard things, clashing things, the moving things, the loud things: “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” Away with the piano! Bring out the symphony. Away with the organ! Bring out the instruments represented on the organ.

David’s example is to enrich the worship of God with all manner of instruments. The concept of an ensemble or symphony is another spiritual lesson. Each part works together for the common good. There is a “score” to which each part contributes. This is an aural example of the teaching of 1 Corinthians 12 regarding the differing, but complimentary functions of the members of the body.

Here we might even raise some criticism to the more traditional practice of only a piano and/or organ. The organ’s stops, after all, represent the sounds of the symphonic instruments (including some percussion) — what a ridiculous perspective to deny the real instruments the organ mimics for the synthetic ones produced by the organ. Even more when we consider that most organs are digitally reproducing the instrument sounds (i.e., Allen digital organs). This leads us to see that our conception of the sacredness of sounds is quite culturally conditioned. The sounds of the music of the Psalms with ancient instruments would scare us. We think saxophones are not holy, but pianos are — though pipe organs are more holy. Our conventions and traditions of sacred sounds are not to be trampled on, surely; neither are they to be raised as pseudo-absolutes.

One area of controversy in musical instruments is percussion. But we actually have more Biblically direct support for the inclusion of percussion instruments than for pianos (!). Two kinds (at least) of percussion instruments are directly constricted for holy praise: timbrels (a hand drum, like our modern tambourine) and several kinds of cymbals. I’ll print these verses for the unbelieving:

Exodus 15:20 Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines [timbrels] and dancing. (NIV)

Psalm 81:2 Raise a song, strike the timbrel, The sweet sounding lyre with the harp.

Psalm 149:3 Let them praise His name with dancing; Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre.

Psalm 150:4 Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! (NRS)

Psalm 150:5 Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals (see also 2Sa 6:5, 1Ch 13:8, 15:16, 19, 28, 16:5, 42, 25:1, 6, 2Ch 5:12, 13, 29:25, Ezr 3:10, Neh 12:27 for other examples of the godly use of cymbals).

## *5. Building Blocks: Music*

### **Concluding Principles of Church Music**

1. Music of the people of God should flow from their deepening experience in the Word of God, especially the songs in the Word (Psalms). Congregations growing in theological depth should be encouraged to express this in new Psalm settings, songs, and hymns, as well as by learning more of the praise of past generations. Music of the people of God should involve the words of Scripture, as well as theological and experiential summaries consistent with Scripture. We cannot afford, in this day of Biblical illiteracy, to miss any opportunity to lead people in learning the Word of God, especially with such an effective means as music.

2. Music of the people of God should be performed by the “one anothers” of the body of Christ. There is a balance between professional skillfulness and the oft repeated commands for the congregation to *do* music. The balance is found in each congregation as pastors and church musicians should work to raise a new generation of Bachs who have a robust theology, a worldview grasp on music, and perform unto the Lord with excellence. Choirs and musical ensembles should contribute in exemplary ways, aurally demonstrating excellence, as well as in making the praises of Zion for glory and beauty.

3. Music of the people of God should subjectively be performed with gratitude from the heart and an attitude of prayer (“unto the Lord”). Aside from all the correctness of the doctrine, the majesty of the poetic form, and the excellencies with which music is carried out, the people of God must worship “in spirit and truth.”

## **6. Lead On O King Eternal: Ordering Worship**

### **Summary of a Biblical Approach to Worship Services**

The argument I have made thus far has been aimed at supporting the thesis that congregational worship is to be regulated by (1) obeying the New Testament prescriptions regarding worship, (2) understanding and applying the entire body of Biblical teaching on worship, (3) refining all our congregational worship with the regulative principle of *Sola Scripture* and the Edification Principle of 1Corinthians 14:26b and (4) structuring our worship by the Biblical Principle of Order. From this foundation we may turn to reflect further on a Biblical understanding of the elements of worship and their arrangement in the worship service.

### **Principles of liturgy**

Once we realize that the Bible does not explicitly give us a liturgy, we must consider on what basis the ordering of worship is to be done. Ordering worship can be reduced to the application of three principles. In every worship tradition some interplay of these three principles is evident. There is (1) a *theological ordering principle*, (2) a *psychological ordering principle*, and (3) a *traditional ordering principle*.

(1) The theological principle involves a theological, principled rationale for a sequence of events in worship. For example, it is theologically necessary to have a confession of sin event at the front of the service. The rationale is that we must come before God with a clean heart, which is accomplished by confession and conscious trust in Christ's finished work.

(2) The psychological principle involves recognizing that human beings must be accommodated in the sequence of events. Psychologically, people need to be acclimated to a situation before the most profound aspects of worship can be fully received. For example, music seems to prepare people for a deeper experience of prayer or the Word, etc. So singing is sometimes placed at the beginning of worship. Moreover, the limits of attention span and bodily comfort enter our planning here. Some preachers would like to preach to disembodied spirits who can hear hours of exposition and application, but reality conflicts with this desire.

(3) The traditional principle is simply that we *receive* many sequences of worship via our past heritage. "We've always done it that way." For most evangelicals this means a rather short tradition, not hundreds of years, but a decade. Now, this principle is not to be dismissed, though it can certainly be invoked inappropriately. Many times the sequence of one event before another by tradition is simply unavoidable. We all step into worship services in some tradition, regardless of its age.

The psychological principle and the traditional principle have an important overlapping relationship. People often resist both that which is unfamiliar (change for change's sake) and that which is uncreatively predictable (a rut). Change can be, therefore, a matter of psychological accommodation and psychological aggravation. Similarly the traditional and theological principle overlap, since we tend to justify our tradition in Biblical and theological terms.

These three principles are not watertight compartments. Probably no single sequence of elements stands on only one of these principles. However, I believe that our ordering of worship can be reduced to the interplay of these three principles.

These three principles help clarify certain church practices in worship. Clearly in some traditions one or another of these principles dominate the rationale for the liturgy. For example in the Greek

## 6. Ordering Worship

Orthodox liturgy, the traditional principle is dominant. Perhaps in a traditional Presbyterian church, the pastor would like to see the theological principle dominate. Yet, many aspects of the sequence are merely traditional. Certainly, there is a great movement to underrate both theological and traditional rationales in the effort to be “seeker sensitive.” This move is to depend on the psychological principle heavily. Not only that, but to do so from the point of view of the psychology of the unchurched person.

### The Gospel Liturgy

Many in the Reformed tradition have suggested that the structure of the worship service should follow the Gospel. For example, Terry Johnson asserts that Biblical liturgy is “structured by the gospel” with,

1. A cycle of praise (call/invocation/hymn/Gloria Patri/Creed)
2. A cycle of confession (Law of God/confession of sin/assurance of pardon)
3. A cycle employing the means of grace (intercessory prayers/sacraments/Scripture reading/sermon)
4. A cycle of thanksgiving and blessing (concluding hymn/collection/benediction)<sup>181</sup>

From this structure we would expect worship to begin by declaring the greatness, holiness, mercy, and sovereignty of God. The response to this would follow in the confession of sin and exulting in the grace of God in the work of Christ. From this gospel kernel, the balm of Gilead is applied in the means of grace, namely prayers, the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and finally the benedictory blessing of God to send the people of the Lord into the world for service.

James Jordan, in *Theses on Worship*, argues similarly that there is a definitive five-fold liturgy of worship:

1. Call
2. Confession and absolution
3. Consecration
4. Communion
5. Commission

He argues on the basis of OT type from the Levitical sacrifice pattern that this is the direct intention of Scripture.<sup>182</sup> This is a structure which is referred to as “covenant renewal” or “sacrificial.” The definitive work to move Reformed folks in this direction is Jeffrey Myers, *The Lord’s Service*. He writes that “there is a distinctive way of renewing covenantal relationships in the Bible, and that is by way of sacrifice.”

This means that we could also call our corporate service “sacrificial worship,” because God renews his covenant with us by way of sacrifice. That is, the Lord himself graciously gathers us

---

<sup>181</sup>Leading in Worship (Oak Ridge, TN: Covenant Foundation, 1996), p. 15.

<sup>182</sup>See especially, *Theses on Worship: Notes Toward the Reformation of Worship* (Niceville, FL: Transfiguration Press, 1994) and *The Liturgy Trap: The Bible Versus Mere Tradition in Worship*. His numerous publications and vast helpful resources are related to this are available at [www.BiblicalHorizons.com](http://www.BiblicalHorizons.com).

## *Worship and Worship Services*

together as the church to draw us anew into his glorious, life-giving presence by way of sacrifice.<sup>183</sup>

The end result of the basic sequence is the same between Johnson and Jordan, perhaps with the notable exception of the necessity of communion for “covenant renewal.” Meyers recommends Johnson’s works (the book and other articles), but comments that “one minor flaw” is “Terry’s attempt to order the elements of the worship service according to a ‘sensible, logical’ way instead of allowing the order to arise out of the sacrificial, covenant renewal ‘logic’ of Scripture.” Meyers notes that Johnson’s “‘Gospel logic’ produces what is, in effect, a covenant renewal worship service.”<sup>184</sup>

However, Johnson warns against the fuller liturgical approach that would be characteristic of what James and Meyers commend.

The temptation to move the church in a more liturgical direction is strong. Especially as an antidote to today’s trivialities. We urge that this temptation be resisted as it moves beyond the use of the Lord’s Prayer, Creed, Ten Commandments, and confession of sin, for the following reasons: [and I summarize] 1. It will “crowd out free prayers.” 2. “Responsive litanies will tend to seem contrived or artificial” “for those accustomed to freer forms.” 3. “Congregational responses are difficult to coordinate.” 4. “The Reformers saw no need to continue the use of additional fixed forms beyond the above.”<sup>185</sup>

Let us evaluate Johnson’s reasons.

1. It will “crowd out free prayers.” Free prayers and fixed prayers may coexist in liturgical worship. As discussed above the typical evangelical service is inundated with poorly formed, poorly worded, extemporaneous prayers which are unlike Biblical fixed prayers of any previous era. Ministers, elders, and men in the congregation may make petitions at appropriate times in a fully liturgical, covenant renewal service. Should we not press for more responsorial and congregational participation in prayers? Are these not more like the Bible’s congregational prayers after all? This means more responsive forms. Or else we get what we have now, the ridiculous free prayers like, The Just Prayer - “I *just* want to thank you, Lord ...I *just* want to ask.....I *just* want...” - The Army Prayer - “O Lord, help us to be *all that we can be*.” The AT&T Prayer - Lord, help us to *reach out and touch someone* this week.” The Evangelical Rosary Prayer - “Lead, guide, and direct us.”<sup>186</sup>

2. The perceptions of “those accustomed to freer forms” in no way tell us what God requires or provide a Biblical critique of worship form. Johnson has previously urged that trends in worship which “dumb-down” or become “user friendly” should also be resisted.<sup>187</sup> So, we are to accept the perceptions of people when they are critical of liturgical worship, but reject them when they criticize Presbyterian

---

<sup>183</sup>This important book is being published by Canon Press (Moscow, ID). These quotes are from the manuscript edition (St. Louis: Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church, 1999), pp.16-17.

<sup>184</sup>Meyers, p. 84.

<sup>185</sup>Johnson, p. 17.

<sup>186</sup>See Meyers.

<sup>187</sup>Johnson, p. 7.

## 6. Ordering Worship

formalism. This is a very convenient arrangement. What Johnson advocates as Presbyterian worship is at least as contrived to most evangelicals and charasmatics as higher liturgy. Many in low church evangelicalism call his Presbyterian worship, “high church”! Johnson prefers “singing ‘Now Thank We all Our God,’ Psalm 103, or some other appropriate hymn or Psalm” over simple statements of response like, “Thanks be to God.”<sup>188</sup> On the contrary, using long readings or full hymns as responses to Absolution/Pardon or Scripture readings, etc. would be cumbersome and unnecessarily long, creating the perception that such is not a response at all, but another element. This means congregational participation is limited or else we must be inclusive of responses like those being rejected.

3. Instead of moving in a more liturgical direction with much congregational dialogue and participation, Johnson replies, “Congregational responses are difficult to coordinate.” But couldn’t we just print everything out to easily follow the responses? Johnson warns, “Churches that are printing the whole service each week in order to avoid this acknowledged problem are running huge printing costs”(!)<sup>189</sup> So we will break the church budget if we print, “Thanks be to God,” but not if we print the Lord’s Prayer, Creed, Ten Commandments, “Now Thank We all Our God,” Psalm 103, or some other appropriate hymn or Psalm.” The responsive litanies like the *sanctus*, *sursum corda*, *kyrie eleison* and the peace (The Lord be with you...) which he calls, “stifling” several times are easily memorized if we do not object to a predictable forms of worship. Of course minimalistic Presbyterian formalism is not “stifling” — apparently it is “flourishing”?

4. When he writes, “The Reformers saw no need to continue the use of additional fixed forms beyond the above”— I believe that he is flatly mistaken of much of the early Reformation.<sup>190</sup> Of course he is certainly mistaken inasmuch as Luther is a Reformer or the Anglican Cranmer is a Reformer. He is doubly mistaken if take the First and Second Prayer Books of King Edward VI Reformed books of worship. Prayer book worship was a product of the Reformation! But aside from these obvious refutations, even Zwingli’s Zurich liturgy includes the *gloria in excelsis*, the *agnus Dei*, then peace (“Lord be with you”) in responsive form, then from the people, “Praise [Thanks] be to God,” and an antiphonal version of the Creed.<sup>191</sup> This is all peppered with the formal congregational “Amen.” Bucer’s Strassburg liturgy has the an “Introit” and an alternation of “a Psalm or hymn” and sometimes “the *kyrie eleison* and *gloria in excelsis*.” Almost every segment of the liturgy begins with the peace, “The Lord be with you.”<sup>192</sup> Calvin, himself, was the champion of the *sursam corda* (“Lift up your hearts”) as the fullest explanation of the meaning of worship. We are lifted up to Him. That is mode of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. This can be traced to Farel.<sup>193</sup> Of course, Calvin also used the Strassburg liturgy and adapted these earlier forms. All this just shows how the term “Reformed” has become appropriated as a provincial term to mean much less that the Reformers’ unified teaching and practice.

---

<sup>188</sup>Johnson, p. 17.

<sup>189</sup>Johnson, p. 17.

<sup>190</sup>Johnson, p. 17.

<sup>191</sup>Bard Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1961), pp. 152-155.

<sup>192</sup>Thompson, pp. 167-179.

<sup>193</sup>Thompson, p. 223, 307.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

### **The Covenantal Liturgy**

As previously argued, no specific liturgy can be imposed as normative, though no church can avoid the question of liturgy. The most fundamental question which can be asked then is, what kind of service provides the best application of the fullest Biblical teaching? What kind of service best relates the three principles of ordering the elements (above)? The practical model that I will suggest as a result of the previous discussion is called a “Covenantal Liturgy”<sup>194</sup> The following principles aim to define this kind of service.

This is an example of the shape of a liturgy consistent with the above principles. services. The Lord's Day worship liturgy is understood to be a service of renewing the covenantal relationship between God and His people. We desire worship which is informed and Reformed by the patterns of historic Christian worship. The theology which defines this approach to God is unapologetically Reformed and Protestant. Lord's Day worship should include Word and Sacrament. Worship is the regular means of Covenant Renewal for the people of God. Thus, we celebrate the feast of the Supper weekly and enjoin all baptized members of the covenant to participate in the Lord's Table. God calls us into His presence to worship; God charges us to corporately confess our sins; God comforts us with the declaration of our forgiveness through the gospel; God joins us with the Church triumphant in our confession of faith; God speaks to us through His Word; God feeds us at His Table; God receives the fruit of our lives and labors in the offering; God blesses us in the benediction and sends us to out to serve in His victorious kingdom.

### **The Lord's Day Liturgy**

#### **\*CALL TO WORSHIP**

(\*The congregation standing.)

Such as Psalm 118:1-4

Minister: Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Let Israel now say,

**People: His mercy endures forever.**

Minister: Let the house of Aaron now say,

**People: His mercy endures forever.**

Minister: Let those who fear the LORD now say,

**All: His mercy endures forever.**

\*Hymn of Praise (Such as “All Creatures of Our God and King,” “Psalm 148,” “A Mighty Fortress”)

#### **CONFESSION OF SIN**

(The congregation is invited to kneel through the Declaration of Absolution.)

Unison congregational prayer, such as: "Almighty and most merciful Father; We have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done; And there is no health in us. O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable offenders. Spare those, O God, who confess their faults. Restore those who are penitent; According to Your promises declared unto mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.

---

<sup>194</sup>I patterned the name from a prayer movement in the Great Awakening in the 1740's and its modern counter part popularized by David Bryant, the “Concert of Prayer” movement.

## 6. Ordering Worship

And grant, O merciful Father, for His sake; That we may hereafter live a godly, righteous, and sober life; To the glory of Your holy name. Amen."  
(Silent prayers of confession are offered.)

### DECLARATION OF ABSOLUTION [PARDON]

(Such as the Minister saying: "As a minister of the new covenant, I proclaim to you the gospel's promise for those trusting in Christ: As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Therefore, in the name of the triune God, I declare that, we are forgiven of all our sins."  
With a response from the People: "Thanks be to God. Our sins are forgiven in Jesus name. Amen."

\*Psalms or Hymns of Response and Praise for Gospel Forgiveness  
Such as "And Can It Be?," "The Solid Rock" "[This an appropriate time for a sequence of praise performed musically, antiphonally, etc.]

### \*CONFESSION OF FAITH

Such as the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed  
Congregational Response, such as the Gloria Patri

### PRAYERS OF GOD'S PEOPLE

(This could be led with congregational responses, prescribed, free with selected individuals, led by one leader, with the use of the Lord's Prayer as a pattern, the Ten Commandments as a pattern with petitions, etc.)

[This is a unison example with silent prayer and responses.]

**O God, from whom come all holy desires, all good counsel, and all just works. Give to us, Your servants, that peace which the world cannot give, that our hearts may be set to obey Your commandments; and also that we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may live in peace and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Savior, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, God forever. Amen.**

Leader: For the church of Jesus Christ, that it may be filled with truth and love, and be found without fault at the day of Your coming, we pray to You, O Lord. (Silent or vocal petitions)

**People: Lord, have mercy.**

For all ministers, missionaries, and the mission of the Church, that in faithful witness the Gospel may be preached, we pray to You, O Lord.

**People: Lord, have mercy.**

For those in positions of public trust, that they may serve justice. and promote the dignity and freedom of every person, we pray to You, O Lord.

**People: Lord, have mercy.**

For the poor, the persecuted, the sick, and all who suffer; for refugees, prisoners, and all who are in danger; that they may be relieved and protected, we pray to You, O Lord.

**People: Lord, have mercy.**

## *Worship and Worship Services*

For this congregation, for those who are present, and for those who are absent, that we may be delivered from hardness of heart, and show forth Your glory in all that we do, we pray to You, O Lord.

**People: Lord, have mercy.**

### **The Liturgy of the Word**

#### OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Perhaps with a Response: Hear the Word of God: **Our ears are open and our hearts are eager to receive the Word of God.**

Reading from the Old Testament

#### PSALM RESPONSE (sung)

#### GOSPEL LESSON

Response: Hear the Word of God: **Our ears are open and our hearts are eager to receive the Word of God.**

Reading from the Gospels

#### PSALM (sung)

#### THE READING FROM THE EPISTLES

Response: Hear the Word of God: **Our ears are open and our hearts are eager to receive the Word of God.**

Reading from the Epistles

#### PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

#### SERMON

#### THE LORD'S SUPPER

Introduction by Minister

*Sursam corda* -

Minister: Lift up your hearts.

**People: We lift them up unto the Lord.**

Minister: Let us give thanks unto our Lord God.

**People: It is good and right so to do.**

Minister: IT is very good, right, and our joyful duty, that we should at all times, and in all places, give thanks unto thee, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty, Everlasting God.

#### THE OFFERING

\*PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

\*DOXOLOGY

\*Hymn

\*BENEDICTION & COMMISSION

## *6. Ordering Worship*

Minister: Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Heb 13:20-21, NKJ)

Minister: Go in peace to love and serve the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ.

**People: Thanks be to God!**

DISMISSAL - One could use service music here, such as "The Song of Simeon" (Nunc Dimittis)

## **7. Stand Up, Stand Up For Jesus: Bodily Postures**

### **Bodily Postures and Regulative Worship**

Emotional expressions which usher forth in bodily postures are a natural part of worship and have Biblical precedent and warrant. In fact, the very term “worship” in the original Biblical languages denoted a bodily posture, namely, to “bow down to kiss someone’s feet” or to “fall prostrate.”<sup>195</sup> At times, it would do most of us well to take the word in its more literal connotation. In the C.S. Lewis masterpiece, *Screwtape* urges his younger devil that “At the very least, they [believers] can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to their prayers; for they constantly forget, what you must always remember, that they are animals and that whatever their bodies do affects their souls.”<sup>196</sup>

Other gestures and postures can also be found in the pages of Scripture. While sincere worshipers may not feel any necessity to kneel, prostrate themselves, or lift their hands, I wish to argue that there is Biblical warrant for a variety of worship postures and physical gestures in corporate worship. In what follows, I will list several postures found in the Biblical record, discussing some general objections to such practices, and considering the Biblical material on the gesture of worshiping with uplifted hands.

It is somewhat obvious to a general reading of Scripture that the Biblical people were very expressive and not constrained in their bodily expressions. Even when no specific posture is mentioned in the commands and examples of Scripture, it is not hard to imagine that in the original audience of Scripture the worshipers were much less constrained than their modern counterparts. Even if my general observation is misguided, there are specific postures recorded in Scripture which support my contention. Some of the kinds of gestures and postures found in Scripture are worship and prayer with hands uplifted (1Ti 2:8; 1 Kg. 8:22, 54), kneeling (1Ki 8:54; Dan 6:10; Acts 21:5), falling to the ground (Mar 14:35), standing (Neh 9:5), sitting (1Ch 17:16), bowing (Exo 34:8), and with raised eyes (Joh 11:41).

One very observable posture which has become an issue in contemporary worship is the lifting of a worshipers hands in praise or the opening of the worshiper’s hands in a posture of reception. These bodily expressions of worship have often been excluded from legitimacy on the slimmest rationale. However, if we are to develop a Biblical view of worship postures, we must investigate what Scripture teaches about the matter.

### **Relevant Biblical Passages**

Exodus 9:29 And Moses said to him, “As soon as I go out of the city, I will *spread out my hands* to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be hail no longer, that you may know that the earth is the Lord’s.

Exodus 9:33 So Moses went out of the city from Pharaoh, and *spread out his hands* to the LORD; and the thunder and the hail ceased, and rain no longer poured on the earth.

1Kings 8:22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and *spread out his hands* toward heaven.

---

<sup>195</sup>For example, “proskuneo” (Joh 4:20) in the *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek new Testament (ANLEX)*, Friberg (1994).

<sup>196</sup>C.S. Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters*, written from the point of view of a devil training a younger tempter, p. 20.

## 7. Resolving Contemporary Issues

- 2Chronicles 6:12 Then he stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and *spread out his hands*.
- 2Chronicles 6:13 Now Solomon had a bronze platform, five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and he stood on it, knelt on his knees in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and *spread out his hands* toward heaven.
- Ezra 9:5 But at the evening offering I arose from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn, and I fell on my knees and *stretched out my hands* to the LORD my God;
- Psalms 88:9 My eye has wasted away because of affliction; I have called upon Thee every day, O LORD; I have *spread out my hands* to Thee.
- Psalms 143:6 I *stretch out my hands* to Thee; My soul *longs* for Thee, as a parched land. Selah.
- Isaiah 1:15 “So when you *spread out your hands in prayer*, I will hide My eyes from you, Yes, even though you multiply prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are covered with blood.
- Leviticus 9:22 Then Aaron *lifted up his hands* toward the people and blessed them, and he stepped down after making the sin offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings.
- Nehemiah 8:6 Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while *lifting up their hands*; then they bowed low and worshiped the LORD with *their faces* to the ground.
- Psalms 28:2 Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to Thee for help, When I *lift up my hands* toward Thy holy sanctuary.
- Psalms 63:4 So I will bless Thee as long as I live; I will *lift up my hands* in Thy name.
- Psalms 119:48 And I shall *lift up my hands* to Thy commandments, Which I love; And I will meditate on Thy statutes.
- Psalms 134:2 *Lift up your hands* to the sanctuary, And bless the LORD.
- Psalms 141:2 May my prayer be counted as incense before Thee; The *lifting up of my hands* as the evening offering.
- Lamentations 2:19 “Arise, cry aloud in the night At the beginning of the night watches; Pour out your heart like water Before the presence of the Lord; *Lift up your hands* to Him For the life of your little ones Who are faint because of hunger At the head of every street.”
- Lamentations 3:41 We *lift up our heart and hands* Toward God in heaven;
- Luke 24:50 And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He *lifted up His hands* and blessed them.
- 1Timothy 2:8 Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, *lifting up holy hands*, without wrath and dissension.
- Revelation 10:5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land *lifted up his right hand* to heaven, 6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there shall be delay no longer. . .

### **The Biblical Meaning and Practice of Lifting One’s Hands<sup>197</sup>**

1. Lifting one’s hands has validity as a gesture for *supplication*. Paul says, “Therefore I want the men in every place to *pray, lifting up holy hands*, without wrath and dissension” (1Ti 2:8). Similarly, the psalmist says, “Hear the voice of my supplications when I cry to Thee for help, *When I lift up my hands*

---

<sup>197</sup>The phrase, “lift hands” or similar phrases in the Bible sometimes have other meanings irrelevant to this discussion, such as the figurative use to express aggressive actions, e.g., “lifted his hands against me.”

## *Worship and Worship Services*

toward Thy holy sanctuary” (Psa 28:2). There is a parallelism between supplications and lifting one’s hands. Thus, it is appropriate to beseech God verbally and with a posture of ardent request.

2. Lifting one’s hands has validity as a gesture of *blessing and praise*. The Greek word which the LXX<sup>198</sup> translators and the New Testament writers used for “bless” was *eulogeo*, “eulogize.” Several usages of this word may be found in the New Testament which support my contention: “(1) of man’s duty to speak well of God in the form of praise or thanksgiving [to] *praise, extol* (Luk 1:64); *give thanks* (1Co 14:16); (2) as calling down God’s gracious power on a person [to] *bless, invoke a blessing on* (Luk. 24:50); on things *bless, consecrate, pronounce a blessing on* (Mat. 26:26); (3) of God’s action in bestowing blessing [to] *confer favor or blessing on, graciously benefit, act kindly toward* (Heb 6:14); passive voice, [to] *be blessed, be favored* (Luk. 1:42).”<sup>199</sup> Thus, blessing in the Biblical sense has a strong verbal component. It is a pronouncement of the positive attributes of the person and in this way is synonymous with praise. Further, *eulogeo* (“bless”) is sometimes translated “praise,” as in the case of Luke 24:53, speaking of the disciples who “were continually in the temple, *praising* God.” Psalm 63:4 says of the posture of blessing God, “So I will *bless* Thee as long as I live; *I will lift up my hands in Thy name*” and Psalm 134:2 says, “*Lift up your hands to the sanctuary, and bless the LORD.*”

3. Lifting one’s hands has validity as a gesture of *affirmation*. There is an overlapping sense in which affirmation is a part of blessing; yet, the lifting of one’s hands is appropriate as a simple symbol of agreement without the verbal component of praise or blessing. We find this in Nehemiah 8:6, “Then Ezra blessed the LORD the great God. And all the people answered, ‘*Amen, Amen!*’ while *lifting up their hands.*” This sense of *affirmation* also seems to be what is seen in Psalm 119:48, “And I shall *lift up my hands to Thy commandments, which I love; and I will meditate on Thy statutes.*” This is also true in the judicial act of raising one’s hands in taking an oath (see above, Rev 10:5).

The Bible clearly commends the worship gesture of lifting up one’s hands in praise, prayer and blessing as a posture for both worship leadership and the congregation generally. It is hard to see how someone willing to submit to the Biblical prescriptions regarding praise could find legitimate grounds for any real objection. There is abundant Biblical warrant for expressing our worship with various postures and gestures. It is likely that objections are more a result of an un-Biblical dichotomy of body and soul which limits worship to that which is internal, non-physical, and non-emotional. Such Gnostic rationalism is especially refuted in the Biblical (especially Hebrew) anthropology of both Old and New Testaments which never divorces heart, mind, emotions, and physical expression. More specifically, however, the texts cited above settle the matter. The worship gesture of lifting one’s hands has validity for corporate, family, and private worship, for worship leaders and the congregation.

In application, some churches have determined an appropriate time or times for a corporate lifting of hands. This is in opposition to the charismatic free-form approach. Churches, such as Christ Church (Moscow, ID) corporately lift hands during the “Gloria Patri.” Others suggest this during the Offertory Prayer (since this is when we dedicated the fruit of our lives and labors). It would also seem quite appropriate during the Intercessory Prayer time for “that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands” (1Ti 2:8). Whatever the application, the Bible is clear that worship is a bodily activity, not just a mental one.

---

<sup>198</sup>The Greek translation of the Old Testament (ca. 200 B.C.).

<sup>199</sup>ANLEX.

## 7. Resolving Contemporary Issues

### Dance and Regulative Worship

As far as I have found, in the history of the church only the Shakers of early America practiced dance as a regular part of worship, until the Twentieth Century Pentecostal and charismatic believers assumed (primarily) spontaneous dance as regular part of worship. Partly due to the charismatic movement, lately, we have seen a surge of liturgical dance groups who use dance in a professional choreographed way for worship and even evangelism.<sup>200</sup>

### Dance in the Bible

It is interesting that many Reformed thinkers virtually mock the idea of dance in worship with an appeal to the regulative principle. Several books on regulative worship dismiss dance without a single word about the Scriptural examples and commands. What does the Bible teach about dance? Is it an element of worship, like prayer or preaching? Or is it ever an acceptable expression of praise?

Looking at the Biblical data on dance we find that “dance,” “dances,” “dancing,” and “danced” shows up in the English text about 25 times. Of these, dance is identified as holy eight times (Exo 15:20, 2Sa 6:14, 2Sa 6:16, Psa 30:11, Psa 149:3, Psa 150:4, Jer 31:4, Jer 31:13), cultural (12 verses, at least 6 are viewed positively by the author), and clearly sinful in only two passages: “the daughter of Herodias danced before them and pleased Herod” (Mat 14:6, Mar 6:22). In addition, it may be that the New Revised Standard Version is correct in translating the word “play” as “dance” in 2 Samuel 6:5, “David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals” (NAS has “played”). And the NRSV is certainly correct in the translation of 2 Samuel 6:21, “David said to Michal, ‘It was before the LORD, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD, that I have danced before the LORD.’”<sup>201</sup>

In the Apocryphal literature of the inter-testamental period there are several interesting references to dance, also. Judith 15:12-13 illustrates the intersect cultural and worship dance,

All the women of Israel gathered to see her, and blessed her, and some of them performed a dance in her honor. She took ivy-wreathed wands in her hands and distributed them to the women who were with her; and she and those who were with her crowned themselves with olive wreaths. She went before all the people in the dance, leading all the women, while all the men of Israel followed, bearing their arms and wearing garlands and singing hymns.

Directly relevant to our discussion, however, are the two commands in the Psalms:

Psalm 150:4 Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.

Psalm 149:1-3 Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, And His praise in the congregation of the godly ones. Let Israel be glad in his Maker; Let the sons of Zion rejoice in their

---

<sup>200</sup>For a history and critique of dance in worship see Brian Edwards, *Shall We Dance: Dance and Drama in Worship* (Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1991).

<sup>201</sup>The Hebrew word is “play” or “dance” in these two passages is *sachaq* and does mean, among other things, “dance.” The Greek translation has *paizo* which Friberg and the UBS dictionary both render as “dance.”

## *Worship and Worship Services*

King. Let them praise His name with dancing; Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre.

Notice that Psalm 149 explicitly places the dancing “*in the congregation of the godly ones.*” The reason these verses are so important is because they are commands which seemed to be directed toward actions of *congregational praise*. The command is not to dance, *per se*, but to “praise Him with dancing.” The Hebrew term here is *machowl*, a term lexicographers give only one meaning for, “dancing.”<sup>202</sup> It is also used in Psalm 30:11, “Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou hast loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness” (as well as Jer 31:4, Jer 31:13, and Lam 5:15). It is used in parallel with gladness, indicating that such dancing expresses rejoicing. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint [LXX]) translates *machowl* as *choro*, the term from which *choreography* is derived.

### **Attitudes Toward Dance**

Commentators differ in their treatment of these verses. Some have made such commands a relic of ancient Israel saying that “they used to dance.” Some have spiritualized these commands by making them only symbolic of joy and gladness. Herbert Lockyer says, “It is when Jehovah holds court in the heart that the joy-bells ring”<sup>203</sup> and Spurgeon likewise said, “Let us give the utmost liberty to joy. Let us never attempt its suppression, but issue in the terms of this verse is a double license for exultation.”<sup>204</sup> Others have taken them as elements of worship that are discontinuous with the New Testament in the same way as animal sacrifices, specifically relegated to Temple worship. Many evangelicals who would not identify themselves with the charismatic movement are nevertheless inclined to agree with the moderate practices of dance in worship. Don Wyrzten says, “Not only are we to use our voices and musical instruments, but also our bodies in complete, free, and uninhibited rejoicing.” Though there has always been opposition to dance (culturally and in worship), some of the greatest music in the Western art music heritage was dance music. Wilson-Dickson’s comment concerning the music of J.S. Bach is instructive.

Calvinists may have protested against dance-music in church worship, but on the whole they readily accepted its place in the secular world. It is worth noting that between 1717 and 1723 Bach was employed by Prince Leopold at the Calvinist court of Cothen. Consequently, during that time Bach had practically no church-music duties whatever, but he wrote much instrumental music—extensive collections of dance-movements (Allamandes, Sarabandes, Giges, Minuets) and countless other pieces which are dances in all but name. When he returned to writing music for the church, he did not hesitate to borrow material for his cantatas from the instrumental concertos he had originally written years before. Just as dance was present in courtly music, it was equally evident in Bach’s music for the church.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup>For example, this the definition in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* by Harris and Waltke in the BWB.

<sup>203</sup>*Psalms* (Kregel, 1993) p. 785.

<sup>204</sup>*The Treasury of David* (Hendrickson) p. 453.

<sup>205</sup>*The Story of Christian Music*, pp. 99-100. Notice that historically even Calvinists have not rejected dance culturally. See Edwards for further discussion on this.

## 7. Resolving Contemporary Issues

This brings us to the question, Is there Biblical warrant for dance in worship? Several distinctions must be drawn regarding this question. We are compelled by the Biblical evidence to recognize that dance may be an *expression of praise* (Psa 149:3, 150:4). An individual who does not believe that dance can be an appropriate expression of praise, at least in some sense, is simply uninformed regarding Scripture. I have argued for the use of instruments and instrumental music in worship because *all Biblical expressions of worship are valid* unless there is an obvious abrogation by Christ (e.g., blood sacrifices). Matthew Henry observed, “They who from hence [referring to the Psalms’ commands regarding instruments] urge the use of music in religious worship, must, by the same rule, introduce dancing, for they went together, as in David’s dancing before the ark (Judges 21:21).” Now it is true that in principle such dancing (what ever it should look like?) is parallel to the use of musical instruments. However, in the emphasis of Scripture, they are not parallel at all. There are literally hundreds of references to the use of musical instruments, and dozens which command their use in worship, private and congregational. They are routine. This kind of emphasis is not present regarding dance. Really, there are only two verses which place dance in what might be thought of as congregational worship.

David’s dancing was at a special festival event, even and kind of redemptive event: the bringing of the ark to Jerusalem and the establishment of the “tabernacle of David.” This leads to another observation: a rich congregational life which parallels the OT involves more than a mere synagogue meeting on the Sabbath for prayer and instruction.

It would appear from the expressions of praise at the Red Sea crossing (Exo 15), from David and ark, and from the placement of the two commands at the end of the Psalter, that dance is something of an exceptional act of praise. The church may worship in accordance with the New Testament without the use of dance, but not without praise. The Edification Principle is an important rule of congregational, New Covenant worship. To some extent, this principle places the particulars of praise into the realm of congregational approval. Thus, patience and wisdom, with a recognition of cultural diversity, must accompany any application of dance into worship.

From the previous discussion, I believe that the minimal implications are as follows:

1. Dancing, generally, is not to be considered taboo. Surely sin can be involved in it, as in any activity. It strikes me as ironic that the unbelieving world, who has the least true joy to express, has really capitalized on this Biblical expression. Christians have the most reason of all to dance, even more than Old Testament saints who could only look through the spectacles of prophecy at the glory of Jesus Christ!

2. There are appropriate kinds and times of dance. Ecclesiastes poetically expresses it: There is “a time to dance” (Ecc 3:14). If the Bible serves as a model to shape our culture, dance applies outside of worship as well (e.g., ballet, folk dances, etc.).

3. Dance surely *can be an acceptable means of praise*. Yet, is dance to be a consistent part of the covenant renewal worship service? This is a very important consideration for congregational Lord’s Day worship. If one believes praise is co-extensive with Lord’s Day worship. Then dance should be part of it. If one sees from all of Scripture that our worship service is to be a covenant renewal, then not every expression of praise functions to renew covenant. Thus, dance, being an exceptional expression of praise should not be expected in the Lord’s Day service of covenant renewal.

4. Though dance is acceptable as praise, there is a certain amount of variance that is attached to the implementation of Old Testament expressions of praise. In the same way that not everyone is equipped to praise Him with trumpet, harp, lyre, timbrels, stringed instruments, pipes or our modern

### *Worship and Worship Services*

equivalents, it would seem reasonable to assume that each individual in the congregation is equally not equipped to perform dance in worship. We need not see the Pentecostal “free-form” or ecstatic gyrations as a requirement for each worshiper. The implementation of dance is certainly to be congregationally edifying (1Co 14:26).

## 7. Resolving Contemporary Issues

### References for Further Investigation

- Allen, R., & Borrer, G. (1982). *Worship, Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*. Portland, OR: Multnomah.
- Best, H. M. & Huttar, D. (1976). Music: Musical instruments. *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, pp. 311-324. In M. C. Tenny (General Ed.). Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Bettenson, H. (1962). *The Documents of the Christian Church*. Oxford.
- Brown, C. (Ed.). (1975). *New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Bushell, M. (1993). *The Songs of Zion (2nd ed.)*. Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant.
- Calvin, J. (1953). *Institutes, Vol II*, (H. Beveridge, trans.) London: James Clarke Co.
- Calvin, J. (1965). *Colossians*. (A. W. Morrison, trans.). Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Carson, D. A. (1993). *Worship the Lord Your God: The Perennial Challenge in Worship: Adoration and Action*. Baker: Grand Rapids.
- Chenoweth, V., & Bee, D. (1968). On ethnic music. *Practical Anthropology* 15(5), 205-212.
- Cornwall, J. (1985). *Elements of Worship*. South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge.
- Davies, H. (1997 [1948]). *The Worship of the English Puritans*. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria.
- Edwards, B. (1991). *Shall We Dance: Dance and Drama in Worship*. Durham, England: Evangelical Press.
- Engle, P. E. (1978). *Discovering the Fulness of Worship*. Philadelphia: Great Commission.
- Engle, P. E. (1981). *Worship Planbook: A Manual for Worship Leaders*. Philadelphia: Great Commission.
- Erickson, M. J. (1987). *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Fisher, R. (Speaker). The Regulative Principle in Worship. (Tape #RF-B-1 & RF-B-2). Trinity Book Service.
- Frame, J. (Speaker). Music and Salvation. (Mat Olive Tape Library).
- Frame, J. (1987). *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed.
- Godfrey, R. A. (1983). Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition. J. Woodbridge & D. A. Carson (Ed.) *Scripture and Truth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Guthrie, D. (1983). *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Tyndale.
- Harris, R. L., Archer, G. L., & Waltke, B. K. (1980). *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody.
- Hodge, A. A. (1958). *The Confession of Faith*. Banner of Truth.
- Hughes, P. E. (1977). *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Hustad, D. P. (1981). *Jubilate! Church Music in the Evangelical Tradition*. Carol Stream, IL: Hope.
- Jordan, J. B. (1994). *Theses on Worship: Notes Toward the Reformation of Worship & The Liturgy Trap: The Bible Versus Mere Tradition in Worship*. Transfiguration Press: Niceville, FL.
- Lockyer, H. (1993). *Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Kregel.
- Martin, R. P. (1975 [1992]). *Worship in the Early Church*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- McNaughter, J. (Ed.). (1907 [1992]). *The Psalms in Worship*. Still Waters Revival Books.
- Meyers, J. (1999). *The Lord's Service: Worship at Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church*. To be published by Canon Press, Moscow, ID. The manuscript edition cited is from St. Louis: Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church.
- Morey, R. A. (1984). *Worship is All of Life*. Camphill, PA: Christian Pub.
- O'Brien, P. T. (1982). *Colossians, Philemon*. Waco, TX: Word.
- Osbeck, K. W. (1987). *The Endless Song*. Grand Rapids: Kregel.
- Peterson, D. (1993). *Worship in the New Testament in Worship: Adoration and Action*. (Ed. D. A. Carson). Baker: Grand Rapids.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

- Poythress, V. S. (1974-1975). Ezra 3, Union with Christ, and Exclusive Psalmody. *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XXXVII. 74-94, 218-235.
- Poythress, V. S. (1993). *Biblical Theology, Van Tilian Apologetics and Symphonic Theology: Some Developments at Westminster Theological Seminary*. (Presented at the 1993 Evangelical Theological Society Meeting).
- Rayburn, R. G. (1980). *O Come, Let Us Worship*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Rayburn, R. S. (1989). *Hebrews in the Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Robertson, A., & Plummer, A. (1975). *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
- Schaff, P. (1993). *The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. II*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Schaff, P. (1910 [1988]). *History of the Christian Church, Vol. I: Apostolic Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Schaff, P. (1910 [1988]). *History of the Christian Church, Vol. II: Ante-Nicene Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- Schaeffer, F. A. (1973). *Art and the Bible*. Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Smith, M. H. (1994). The Elements of Worship Continued. *The Bulletin of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary*, VII(1).
- Spear, W. (1980). *Biblical Theology of Prayer*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
- Spurgeon, C. H. *The Treasury of David*. Hendrickson.
- The Didache (The Teaching of the Apostles)*. (J. B. Lightfoot & J. R. Harmer, trans.), in *The Apostolic Fathers*. Grand Rapids: Baker (1989).
- Vaughn, C. (1981). Colossians. In *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Waldron, S. E. The Regulative Principle of the Church. (Unpublished Paper)
- Waldron, S. E. (1989). *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. Durham, England: Evangelical Press.
- Walton, R. C. (1986). *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Webber, R. E. (1982). *Worship Old & New*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Williamson, G. I. (1970). *The Singing of Psalms in the Worship of God*. in J.G. Vos (Ed.), *Blue Banner Faith and Life, July-September (in booklet form)*.
- Williamson, G. I. (1964). *The Westminster Confession of Faith: For Study Classes*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed.
- Wilson-Dickson, A. (1992). *The Story of Christian Music*. Oxford: Lion.

## **Appendix A: Objectives for Congregational Worship**

1. Our services should provide an atmosphere which involves congregational participation in an orderly manner (1Co 14:26, 40).
2. The sacraments should be celebrated as frequently as possible (1Co 11) in Lord's Day worship (please see the above argument for weekly communion).
3. Our services should have the atmosphere of celebration, praise, and giving thanks (Psa 111:1).
4. Our services should not only include prayers which form part of our order of service but should seek to incorporate prayer times of intercession in accordance with all the Scripture tells us to pray for. (a) We should regularly pray for those in authority over us (1Ti 2:1-2). (b) We should regularly pray for missions (1Th 3:1). Further, we should regularly pray for believers in the congregation (Eph 6:18), and other congregations (Eph 4:1 ff).
5. Our services should include music using a variety of instrumentation and thus, encourage the development of musical skill (Psa 150). Skillful instrumental music is fitting for certain opportunities throughout the services (e.g., the offering, preludes, and the distribution of the elements during the Lord's Supper). The music used in our services should be stylistically appropriate for the message the song is communicating. A balanced mix of musical styles such as ancient, Reformation, and traditional hymns and new Psalm settings and hymns should be selected for the most edifying musical communication (1Co 14:26). Moreover, the music should seek to fulfill the Biblical directive of singing psalms (actual Scripture—primarily the Psalms), hymns (songs of praise to God) and spiritual songs (concerning our life in Christ, generally every song of a spiritual nature not in the previous two categories) (Col 3:16).
6. Our services should maintain clear (elder) leadership and order in worship with a God-centered, Biblically guided service (1Co 14:40).
7. Our leadership should encourage preparation for the Lord's Day and anticipation of the meeting of the people of God for fellowship, teaching and praise (Psa 93:5, 122:1).

## **Standards for Those Participating in Worship**

To some extent every person is called to worship God and give Him glory in the assembly. Yet those who are visibly and prominently leading, speaking, reading, singing, playing, etc. have a special responsibility. Certain principles apply for those involved more visibly in the worship ministry.

1. The Old Testament musicians were very skilled (1Ch 15:22) and the Psalms call for skillful playing and singing (Psa 33:3; 47:7). The general character of God calls for excellence in all that we do, especially acts of worship (Psa 66:2). Thus, we want to cultivate excellence in what is done in our services. This requires preparation, study, and ability on the part of those who participate in worship. There are two perspectives to be taken on the qualification of excellence:

a. In regular times of worship and especially as we seek to soberly prepare for the teaching of the Word, we wish to have the qualification of excellence applied more definitively.

b. However, there are less critical times in the Sunday services (e.g., preludes) and many times other throughout the year in which we have special services of thanksgiving and praise, as well as musicals and other presentations when it is appropriate to cultivate the musical abilities of all believers, especially children and immature musicians.

3. The Psalms call for praise from the congregation and the New Testament promotes service by the "one another's" of the assembly. Thus, we wish to regularly utilize members of the church.

4. There is a fine distinction between skillful ministry and professional performance. Apart from an individual's relationship to Christ and general level of sanctification, this line is virtually indistinguishable. Therefore, it is imperative that those who minister in worship be holy people having dedicated their talents to Christ, seeking to serve His Body with their abilities.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

5. Although every believer is called to live a holy life, whenever the Scripture recognizes individuals for special service, more responsibility for obedience to God is required. The Levites were to consecrate themselves for service (Num. 8:11; 1Ch 15:14; 1Ch 29:5), elders and deacons have special qualifications (1Ti 3; Tit 1:5-9) and by extension music directors (Psa 11:1), singers (Ezr. 2:65), and instrumentalists (1Ch 23:5) have a special responsibility to honor God in their lives.

6. Given the Biblical responsibilities of elders (1Ti 5:17), all of those participating in the worship ministry of the church must be approved by the elders.

## Appendix B: Examples of Thematic Liturgies

### Hallelujah! Praise Jehovah! A Thematic Liturgy of Praise from Psalm 146

*Praise to Jehovah* . . . . . (Psalm 146: 1-2)

“Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

**I will praise the Lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish.** How blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, Whose hope is in the Lord his God; Who made heaven and earth, The sea and all that is in them; Who keeps faith forever; Who executes justice for the oppressed; Who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; The Lord raises up those who are bowed down; The Lord loves the righteous; The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow; But He thwarts the way of the wicked. **The Lord will reign forever, Thy God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!”**

“HALLELUJAH PRAISE JEHOVAH”

“MIGHTY GOD WHILE ANGELS BLESS THEE”

*Faith in Jehovah* . . . . . (Psalm 146:3-5; Psalm 115:2-13)

Why should the nations say, “Where, now, is their God?” But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, The work of man’s hands. They have mouths, but they cannot speak; They have eyes, but they cannot see; They have ears, but they cannot hear; They have noses, but they cannot smell; They have hands, but they cannot feel; They have feet, but they cannot walk; They cannot make a sound with their throat. Those who make them will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them. O Israel, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield. You who fear the Lord, trust in the Lord; He is their help and their shield. The Lord has been mindful of us; He will bless us; He will bless the house of Israel; He will bless the house of Aaron. He will bless those who fear the Lord, The small together with the great.

“JESUS, THY BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS”

*Reign of Jehovah* . . . . . (Psalm 146:6-10; Hebrews 1:1-6, 13)

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say, “Thou art My Son, Today I have begotten Thee”? And again, “I will be a Father to Him And He shall be a Son to Me”? And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, And His ministers a flame of fire.” But of the Son He says, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. . . . But to which of the angels has He ever said, “Sit at My right hand, Until I make Thine enemies A footstool for Thy feet”?

“JESUS SHALL REIGN”

## Worship and Worship Services

### Christ Our Passover: A Thematic Liturgy of Praise

“AND CAN IT BE?”

*Our Substitute* . . . . . *Exodus 12:1-7, Galatians 3:13-14*

Now the Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you. “Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, ‘On the tenth of this month they are each one to take a lamb for themselves, according to their fathers’ households, a lamb for each household. ‘Now if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his neighbor nearest to his house are to take one according to the number of persons in them; according to what each man should eat, you are to divide the lamb. ‘Your lamb shall be an unblemished male a year old; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. ‘And you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month, then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel is to kill it at twilight. ‘Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”-- in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

“MAN OF SORROWS”

*Our Sacrifice* . . . . . *Exodus 12:21-27, Hebrews 10:10, 14*

Then Moses called for all the elders of Israel, and said to them, “Go and take for yourselves lambs according to your families, and slay the Passover lamb. “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and apply some of the blood that is in the basin to the lintel and the two doorposts; and none of you shall go outside the door of his house until morning. “For the Lord will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite you. “And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. “And it will come about when you enter the land which the Lord will give you, as He has promised, that you shall observe this rite. “And it will come about when your children will say to you, ‘What does this rite mean to you?’ that you shall say, ‘It is a Passover sacrifice to the Lord who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.’ “And the people bowed low and worshiped. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

“AT THE LAMB’S HIGH FEAST”

(Anon., Latin 6th Century Tr. Robert Campbell, 1849 Tune: Hark the Herald Angel’s Sing Author Unknown)

AT THE LAMB’S HIGH FEAST WE SING PRAISE TO OUR VICTORIOUS KING,  
WHO HATH WASHED US IN THE TIDE FLOWING FROM HIS PIERCED SIDE;  
PRAISE WE HIM WHOSE LOVE DIVINE GIVES HIS SACRED BLOOD FOR WINE,  
GIVES HIS BODY FOR THE FEAST, CHRIST THE VICTIM, CHRIST THE PRIEST,  
GIVES HIS BODY FOR THE FEAST, CHRIST THE VICTIM, CHRIST THE PRIEST.

WHERE THE PASCHAL BLOOD IS Poured, DEATH’S DARK ANGEL SHEATHES HIS SWORD;  
ISRAEL’S HOSTS TRIUMPHANT GO THROUGH THE WAVE THAT DROWNS THE FOE.  
PRAISE WE CHRIST, WHOSE BLOOD ABOVE.  
WITH SINCERITY AND LOVE EAT WE MANNA FROM ABOVE.

MIGHTY VICTIM FROM THE SKY, POW’RS OF HELL BENEATH THEE LIE;  
DEATH IS CONQUERED IN THE FIGHT, THOU HAST BROUGHT US LIFE AND LIGHT: HYMNS OF GLORY AND OF  
PRAISE, RISEN LORD, TO THEE WE RAISE;  
HOLY FATHER, PRAISE TO THEE, WITH THE SPIRIT, EVER BE.  
HOLY FATHER, PRAISE TO THEE, WITH THE SPIRIT, EVER BE.

“THE DAY OF RESURRECTION”

Appendix B: Examples of Thematic Liturgies

**The Blessing: A Thematic Liturgy of Praise from Psalm 67**

God’s Blessing for the Nations . . . . . Psalm 67:1-3

“God be gracious to us and bless us, **And cause His face to shine upon us.**  
That Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations.  
**Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; Let all the peoples praise Thee.”**

“LORD, I LIFT YOUR NAME ON HIGH”

“ALL NATIONS HEAR HIS PRAISES RING” (Tune: “The Solid Rock,” Psalm 22:27-30)

THE ENDS OF ALL THE EARTH SHALL HEAR  
AND TURN UNTO THE LORD IN FEAR;  
ALL KINDREDS OF THE EARTH SHALL OWN  
AND WORSHIP HIM AS GOD ALONE.

(refrain) ALL NATIONS HEAR HIS PRAISES RING,  
THE CRUCIFIED NOW REIGNS AS KING.  
THE CRUCIFIED NOW REIGNS AS KING.  
FOR HIS THE KINGDOM, HIS OF RIGHT,  
HE RULES THE NATION BY HIS MIGHT;  
ALL EARTH TO HIM HER HOMAGE BRINGS,  
THE LORD OF LORDS, THE KING OF KINGS.

(refrain)  
BOTH RICH AND POOR, BOTH BOND AND FREE,  
SHALL WORSHIP HIM ON BENDED KNEE,  
AND CHILDREN’S CHILDREN SHALL PROCLAIM  
THE GLORIOUS HONOR OF HIS NAME.

(refrain)

God’s Praise from the Nations . . . . . Psalm 67:1-2(NIV) & 4-7(NASB)

“May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known  
on earth, your salvation among all nations.

**Let the nations be glad and sing for joy;**

For Thou wilt judge the peoples with uprightness, And guide the nations on the earth.

**Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; Let all the peoples praise Thee.**

The earth has yielded its produce; God, our God, blesses us.

**God blesses us, That all the ends of the earth may fear Him.”**

“O GOD TO US SHOW MERCY” . . . . . (Tune: “The Church’s One Foundation,” Psalm 67)

O GOD, TO US SHOW MERCY AND BLESS US IN THY GRACE;  
CAUSE THOU TO SHINE UPON US THE BRIGHTNESS OF THY FACE;  
SO THAT THY WAY MOST HOLY ON EARTH MAY SOON BE KNOWN,  
AND UNTO EV’RY PEOPLE THY SAVING GRACE BE SHOWN.

O GOD, LET ALL MEN PRAISE THEE, LET ALL THE NATIONS SING;  
IN EV’RY LAND LET PRAISES AND SONGS OF GLADNESS RING;  
FOR THOU SHALT JUDGE THE PEOPLE IN TRUTH AND RIGHTEOUSNESS,  
AND THROUGH THE EARTH THE NATIONS SHALL THY JUST RULE CONFESS.

O GOD, LET PEOPLE PRAISE THEE LET ALL THE NATIONS SING,  
FOR EARTH IN RICH ABUNDANCE TO US HER FRUIT SHALL BRING.  
THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL BLESS US, OUR GOD SHALL BLESSING SEND,  
AND ALL THE EARTH SHALL FEAR HIM TO ITS REMOTEST END.

[Appropriate before a Missions Presentation]

*Worship and Worship Services*

**Enter His Courts with Praise: A Thematic Liturgy of Praise from Psalm 100**

Concert or Antiphonal Reading of Psalm 100

**Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth.**

“PRAISE TO THE LORD”

**Serve the Lord with gladness; come before Him with joyful singing.**

Medley of Praise Songs/Psalms: “WE BRING THE SACRIFICE”; “I WILL ENTER HIS GATES”;

“CLAP YOUR HANDS” (shout hosanna!)

**Know that the Lord Himself is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.**

“PSALM 23”

Prayers of God’s People

**Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name.**

“IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, GOD ONLY WISE”

Praise Time (with instructions to give verbal thanksgiving and praise aloud)

**For the Lord is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting. And His faithfulness to all generations.**

“DOXOLOGY”

## Appendix C: Printed References to the Elements

### Appendix C: The printed references to the prescribed elements (NASB)

#### The Scripture

- I Timothy 4:13 Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.
- Colossians 4:16 And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.
- I Thessalonians 5:27 I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.
- Luke 4:16 And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.
- Luke 4:17 And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book, and found the place where it was written. . .
- II Timothy 4:2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.
- I Timothy 4:6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.
- I Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.
- I Timothy 6:2 And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.
- TIT 1:9 holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.
- Ephesians 4:11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers. . .
- Ephesians 4:12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;
- I Timothy 3:2 An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach. . .
- I Corinthians 14:26 What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.
- Acts 20:20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you publicly and from house to house. . .
- Acts 20:21 solemnly testifying to both Jews and Greeks of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### Prayer

- Matthew 6:9 "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.
- Matthew 6:10 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.
- Matthew 6:11 'Give us this day our daily bread.
- Matthew 6:12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.
- Matthew 6:13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.'

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Acts 2:42 And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 4:24 And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is Thou who didst make the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them. . .

Acts 12:15 And they said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. And they kept saying, "It is his angel."

Acts 12:5 So Peter was kept in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God.

1Corinthians 14:17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

1Corinthians 14:13 Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.

1Corinthians 14:14 For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful.

### **Music**

Matthew 26:30 And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

1Corinthians 14:15 What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.

1Corinthians 14:26 What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Ephesians 5:18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit. . .

Ephesians 5:19 speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;

Ephesians 5:20 always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Hebrews 2:12 saying, "I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise."

### **Sacraments**

#### **The Lord's Supper**

Matthew 26:17 Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

Mark 14:12 And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb was being sacrificed, His disciples said to Him, "Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

Luke 22:7 Then came the first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.

1Corinthians 11:20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. . .

1Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;

1Corinthians 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

1Corinthians 11:25 In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

## Appendix C: Printed References to the Elements

1Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

1Corinthians 10:16 Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?

1Corinthians 10:17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

### **Baptism**

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

Matthew 28:20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. "

Mark 16:15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

Mark 16:16 "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned.

1Corinthians 1:14 I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius. . .

1Corinthians 1:15 that no man should say you were baptized in my name.

Acts 8:12 But when they believed Philip preaching the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike.

Acts 8:36 And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?"

Acts 8:37 And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."

Acts 8:38 And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Acts 8:39 And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch saw him no more, but went on his way rejoicing. Acts 10:46 For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God. Then Peter answered. . .

Acts 10:47 "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we did, can he?"

Acts 10:48 And he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.

Acts 16:15 And when she and her household had been baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay." And she prevailed upon us.

Acts 16:25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;

Acts 16:33 And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, and immediately he was baptized, he and all his household.

Acts 22:12 "And a certain Ananias, a man who was devout by the standard of the Law, and well spoken of by all the Jews who lived there. . .

Acts 22:14 "And he said, 'The God of our fathers has appointed you to know His will, and to see the Righteous One, and to hear an utterance from His mouth.

Acts 22:15 'For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.

Acts 22:16 'And now why do you delay? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on His name.'

### **Giving Thanks**

## *Worship and Worship Services*

Hebrews 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

Hebrews 10:24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. . .

Hebrews 10:25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

Hebrews 13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

Hebrews 13:16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

1Corinthians 14:16 Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the “Amen” at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying?

1Corinthians 14:17 For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

### **Giving**

Hebrews 13:16 And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Acts 2:43 And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles.

Acts 2:44 And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common;

Acts 2:45 and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need.

Acts 2:46 And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, Acts 2:47 praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

1Corinthians 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing.” God is not concerned about oxen, is He?

1Corinthians 9:10 Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops.

1Corinthians 9:11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?

1Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.

1Corinthians 16:2 On the first day of every week let each one of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.

1Corinthians 16:3 And when I arrive, whomever you may approve, I shall send them with letters to carry your gift to Jerusalem;

2Corinthians 9:5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brethren that they would go on ahead to you and arrange beforehand your previously promised bountiful gift, that the same might be ready as a bountiful gift, and not affected by covetousness.

2Corinthians 9:6 Now this I say, he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly; and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully.

2Corinthians 9:7 Let each one do just as he has purposed in his heart; not grudgingly or under compulsion; for God loves a cheerful giver.

2Corinthians 9:8 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

2Corinthians 9:11 you will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing thanksgiving to God.

Galatians 6:6 And let the one who is taught the word share all good things with him who teaches.

### Appendix C: Printed References to the Elements

Galatians 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

Galatians 6:8 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Galatians 6:9 And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.

Galatians 6:10 So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

Philippians 4:15 And you yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I departed from Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone;

Philippians 4:16 for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs.

Philippians 4:18 But I have received everything in full, and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.

Philippians 4:19 And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

### **Appendix D: Ecumenical Councils and Creeds of the Early Church**

1. The Council at Nicea (325) under emperor Constantine declared the Son coequal, consubstantial, and coeternal (homoousios) with the Father; condemned Arius; drafted the original form of the Nicene Creed.<sup>206</sup>

#### The Nicene Creed (revised 381 AD)

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages. Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father, by whom all things were made. For us and for our salvation, He came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and He suffered and was buried. On the third day He rose according to the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end. And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who spoke through the prophets. In one holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I expect the resurrection of the dead. And the life of the age to come. Amen.

2. The Council at Constantinople (381) under emperor Theodosius confirmed the results of the council of Nicea; produced a revised Nicene Creed; ended the Trinitarian controversy; affirmed the deity of the Holy Spirit; and condemned Apollinarianism.

#### The Athanasian Creed

Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith; which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal. And yet they are not three eternals, but one eternal. As also there are not three uncreated or three incomprehensibles, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible. So likewise the Father is almighty, the son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty; and yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; And yet they are not three Gods, but one God. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord; And yet they are not three Lords, but one Lord. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every person by himself to be God and Lord; So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say: There are three Gods or three Lords. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor

---

<sup>206</sup>My summaries are based on R. C. Walton's *Chronological and Background Charts of Church History* (Zondervan, 1986).

## Appendix D: Ecumenical Councils and Creeds

begotten, but proceeding. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits. And in the Trinity none is afore, or after another; none is greater, or less than another. But the whole three persons are co-eternal, and co-equal. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped. He therefore that will be saved must this think of the Trinity. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of the substance of His mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood. Who, although He is God and man, yet he is not two, but one Christ. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead; He ascended into heaven He sitteth on the right hand of the Father, God Almighty; From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies; And shall give account of their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire. This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

3. The council at Ephesus (431) under Theodosius II declared Nestorianism heretical; accepted by implication Alexandrian Christology; and condemned Pelagius.

4. The council at Chalcedon (451) declared Christ's two natures unmixed, unchanged, undivided, inseparable; and condemned Eutychianism.

Note: Usually the Apostle's Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed are cited as the three ecumenical creeds. However, the Athanasian Creed is not often used liturgically and was never adopted by the Eastern Church.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

### **Appendix E: A Summary of the Biblical Doctrine of Prayer**

1. *Prayer is to be Relational*: Prayer is speech addressed by man to God expressing affections, needs, desires in a relationship: adoration, thanks, confession, submission, commitment, petition. (Joh 17:3)

2. *Prayer is to be Personal*: Prayer may be addressed to the Triune God though the Father has the distinct role of hearing. (To Father, through Son, by Spirit) (Col 3:17; Mat 6:9)

3. *Prayer is to be Mediatorial*: Sin separates man from God, but by Jesus Christ we may come to God. He is our High Priest. (Heb 4:16)

4. *Prayer is to be Spiritual*: The Spirit destroys the power of sin, enables, and gives understanding, faith, and love for God and men and along with all this He assists us in prayer. (Rom 8:26-27)

5. *Prayer is to be Conditional*: As a result of grace the believer exhibits reverence, sincerity, submission, faith, and obedience which do not merit answered prayer, but are evidence of being a Child and thus God answers because of promise. (Joh 15:7)

6. *Prayer is to be Biblical*: God's will is sovereign and thus prayer must be qualified by His revelation. To pray effectively one prays according to promise/command. (1Jo 5:14-15)

7. *Prayer is to be Effectual*: The effectiveness of prayer is produced by the response of God, not mystically or magically, or virtue of the one praying. (Jam 5:16b)<sup>207</sup>

---

<sup>207</sup>These are based on W. Spear, *A Biblical Theology of Prayer*.

## Appendix F: Biblical Musical Instruments

### 1. Percussion Instruments

Bells: Possibly a fixed pitch instrument

Cymbals: Metal non-pitched, called “loud” in Psalm 150

Timbrels and Tabrets: Like a tamborine with the skin, actually a frame drum with jingles used throughout the Near Eastern chiefly played by women.

### 2. Stringed Instruments

Harp or Kinnor: Trapezoid lyre (stringed instrument) of the Hebrews, in Biblical times. It and was the “harp” of King David, related to the kinnor, both a Temple a secular instrument. It was made of wood and strung with sheep-gut strings, it was splayed with a plectrum when accompanying dances, otherwise with bare fingers.

Psaltery or Nebel: Vertical angular harp of the ancient Hebrews used as an instrument of the Levites in Biblical times, with a variable number of gut strings, possibly of Egyptian origin.

Sackbut: A triangular harp.

Dulcimer: Possibly an instrument similar to a bagpipe.

### 3. Wind Instruments

Pipe: Possibly like a crude flute.

Horns, trumpets (shofars), and cornet: Often made from ram’s horns and sometimes metals.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>208</sup>This outline is based on K. Osbeck’s, *The Endless Song* p. 42. See also the discussion on Musical Instruments, *Zondervan Encyclopedia* for further discussion.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

### **Appendix G: Biblical Categories of Praise**

#### **PRAISE IS BECAUSE OF GOD'S GREATNESS**

Psalm 99:3 Let them praise Thy great and awesome name; Holy is He.

- Psalm 150:2 Praise Him for His mighty deeds; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness.
- Isaiah 42:8 "I am the Lord, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images.
- Psalm 100:4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name.
- Psalm 106:1 Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; For His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- Psalm 135:3 Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely.
- Psalm 106:2 Who can speak of the mighty deeds of the Lord, Or can show forth all His praise?
- Matthew 11:25 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes.
- Matthew 21:16 and said to Him, "Do You hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babes Thou hast prepared praise for Thyself?'"
- Psalm 106:12 Then they believed His words; They sang His praise. Psalm 106:47 Save us, O Lord our God, And gather us from among the nations, To give thanks to Thy holy name, And glory in Thy praise.
- Psalm 106:48 Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, From everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the Lord!
- **PRAISE SHOULD BE HAPPY/JOYFUL**
  - Psalm 9:2 I will be glad and exult in Thee; I will sing praise to Thy name, O Most High.
  - Psalm 33:1 Sing for joy in the Lord, O you righteous ones; Praise is becoming to the upright.
- **PRAISE SHOULD BE CONGREGATIONAL**
  - Psalm 22:22 I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee.
  - Hebrews 2:12 saying, "I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, In the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise."
  - Psalm 22:25 From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.
  - Psalm 107:32 Let them extol Him also in the congregation of the people, And praise Him at the seat of the elders.
  - Psalm 109:1 (For the choir director. A Psalm of David.) O God of my praise, Do not be silent!
  - Psalm 109:30 With my mouth I will give thanks abundantly to the Lord; And in the midst of many I will praise Him.
  - Psalm 111:1 Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with all my heart, In the company of the upright and in the assembly.
- **PRAISE IS FOR ALL SITUATIONS**

## Appendix G: Biblical Categories of Praise

- Psalm 22:26 The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever!
- Psalm 74:21 Let not the oppressed return dishonored; Let the afflicted and needy praise Thy name.
- Psalm 30:4 Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name.
- Psalm 79:13 So we Thy people and the sheep of Thy pasture Will give thanks to Thee forever; To all generations we will tell of Thy praise.
- Psalm 148:14 And He has lifted up a horn for His people, Praise for all His godly ones; Even for the sons of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise the Lord!
- Psalm 76:10 For the wrath of man shall praise Thee; With a remnant of wrath Thou shalt gird Thyself.
- Psalm 102:18 This will be written for the generation to come; That a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.
- Psalm 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever.
- Psalm 115:17 The dead do not praise the Lord, Nor do any who go down into silence;
- Psalm 145:4 One generation shall praise Thy works to another, And shall declare Thy mighty acts.
- Acts 16:25 But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them;
- Romans 14:11 For it is written, “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God.”
- Revelation 19:5 And a voice came from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you His bond- servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.”
- PRAISE SHOULD BE AUDIBLE/LOUD
  - Psalm 30:12 That my soul may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever.
  - Psalm 51:15 O Lord, open my lips, That my mouth may declare Thy praise.
  - Psalm 63:3 Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise Thee.
  - Psalm 145:21 My mouth will speak the praise of the Lord; And all flesh will bless His holy name forever and ever.
- PRAISE SHOULD BE CONTINUAL
  - Psalm 34:1 I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. Psalm 35:28 And my tongue shall declare Thy righteousness And Thy praise all day long.
  - Psalm 61:8 So I will sing praise to Thy name forever, That I may pay my vows day by day.
  - Psalm 71:8 My mouth is filled with Thy praise, And with Thy glory all day long. Psalm 104:33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.
  - Psalm 145:2 Every day I will bless Thee, And I will praise Thy name forever and ever.
  - Hebrews 13:15 Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.
- PRAISE SHOULD SPONTANEOUS AND USING NEW SONGS/WORDS
  - Psalm 40:3 And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God; Many will see and fear, And will trust in the Lord.

## *Worship and Worship Services*

- Psalm 149:1 Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, And His praise in the congregation of the godly ones.
- Isaiah 42:10 Sing to the Lord a new song, Sing His praise from the end of the earth! You who go down to the sea, and all that is in it. You islands and those who dwell on them.
- PRAISE SHOULD BE MUSICAL
  - Psalm 69:30 I will praise the name of God with song, And shall magnify Him with thanksgiving.
  - Psalm 147:1 Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant and praise is becoming.
  - Isaiah 12:5 Praise the Lord in song, for He has done excellent things; Let this be known throughout the earth.
- PRAISE SHOULD BE WITH INSTRUMENTS
  - Psalm 43:4 Then I will go to the altar of God, To God my exceeding joy; And upon the lyre I shall praise Thee, O God, my God.
  - Psalm 71:22 I will also praise Thee with a harp, Even Thy truth, O my God; To Thee I will sing praises with the lyre, O Thou Holy One of Israel.
  - Psalm 149:3 Let them praise His name with dancing; Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre.
  - Psalm 150:3 Praise Him with trumpet sound; Praise Him with harp and lyre. Psalm 150:4 Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.
  - Psalm 150:5 Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with resounding cymbals.
- PRAISE SHOULD BE ACCORDING TO AND BECAUSE OF HIS WORD
  - Psalm 56:4 In God, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me?
  - Psalm 56:10 In God, whose word I praise, In the Lord, whose word I praise,
  - Psalm 119:164 Seven times a day I praise Thee, Because of Thy righteous ordinances.
  - Psalm 119:171 Let my lips utter praise, For Thou dost teach me Thy statutes.
  - Psalm 119:175 Let my soul live that it may praise Thee, And let Thine ordinances help me.
- PRAISE SHOULD BE EXCELLENT
  - Psalm 66:2 Sing the glory of His name; Make His praise glorious.
  - Psalm 33:3 Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.
  - Psalm 47:7 For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm.
- PRAISE SHOULD BE A MISSIONARY TASK
  - Psalm 66:8 Bless our God, O peoples, And sound His praise abroad,
  - Psalm 67:3 Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; Let all the peoples praise Thee.
  - Psalm 67:5 Let the peoples praise Thee, O God; Let all the peoples praise Thee.
  - Psalm 117:1 Praise the Lord, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! Psalm 117:2 For His lovingkindness is great toward us, And the truth of the Lord is everlasting. Praise the Lord!
  - Isaiah 42:12 Let them give glory to the Lord, And declare His praise in the coastlands.
  - Isaiah 43:21 “The people whom I formed for Myself, Will declare My praise.
  - Jeremiah 13:11 ‘For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,’ declares the Lord, ‘that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they did not listen.’
  - Romans 15:9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “Therefore I will give praise to Thee among the Gentiles, And I will sing to Thy name.”

## Appendix G: Biblical Categories of Praise

Romans 15:11 And again, “Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, And let all the peoples praise Him.”

- Ephesians 1:6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.
- Ephesians 1:12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.
- Ephesians 1:14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.
- PRAISE SHOULD BE UNIVERSAL
  - Psalm 69:34 Let heaven and earth praise Him, The seas and everything that moves in them.
  - Psalm 89:5 And the heavens will praise Thy wonders, O Lord; Thy faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones.
  - Psalm 148:1 Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights!
  - Psalm 148:2 Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts!
  - Psalm 148:3 Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all stars of light!
  - Psalm 148:4 Praise Him, highest heavens, And the waters that are above the heavens!
  - Psalm 148:5 Let them praise the name of the Lord, For He commanded and they were created.
  - Psalm 148:7 Praise the Lord from the earth, Sea monsters and all deeps;
  - Psalm 148:13 Let them praise the name of the Lord, For His name alone is exalted; His glory is above earth and heaven.
  - Psalm 150:6 Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!
- PRAISE SHOULD BE PHYSICAL
  - Psalm 149:3 Let them praise His name with dancing; Let them sing praises to Him with timbrel and lyre.
  - Psalm 150:4 Praise Him with timbrel and dancing; Praise Him with stringed instruments and pipe.