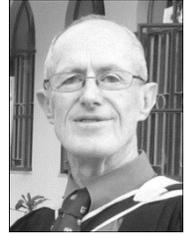


# Worship: Then and Now

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## 1. Introduction

Almost all sincere Christian people attend church and have opinions as to the right way to do it. Worship is therefore a topic of general interest. This paper attempts to summarize developments in corporate worship principles and activities across the Old and New Testaments. It argues that, despite some developments across the Testaments, there is an underlying consistency of principles and practices that offers direction as to what God expects of worshippers today. The paper includes and ends with practical remarks.

## 2. Worship in the Old Testament

### 2.1 Introduction

Scripture does not give a formal definition of worship but it may be defined in a preliminary way as being love and loyalty directed towards God and the outward actions by which these are expressed.<sup>1</sup> This definition notes an inner attitude (Mat 22:37-42) and its outward expression (Gn 2:3; Ps 116:1).

Scripture does not provide a systematic theology of worship nor a complete system of instructions as to the way in which God wants His people to do it.<sup>2</sup> It proceeds on the basis that God's people, already worshipping week

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<sup>1</sup> J. Barrs, "Worship", (Video series) (St Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary, n.d.), Tape 1.

<sup>2</sup> The Pentateuch in particular appears to assume that God's people are familiar with the routines of right worship and therefore does not clarify every detail.

by week, know what to do. However studying those directions that are given together with the descriptions of worship given enables the reader to gain insights.

## 2.2 Words for worship

The most important Old Testament word for worship is *chawa* meaning "to prostrate" or "to worship."<sup>3</sup> The word was used when people showed respect to visitors or human superiors (Gn 18:2; 19:1; 42:6) and when they worshipped God (Gn 22:5).<sup>4</sup> This suggests that worship of God was understood as similar to the respect offered to significant humans. The difference was that God is a very great and holy King and Father.

*Abhadh*, means "to labor, to give service." This word was especially used in relation to the tasks performed by the Levites in the tabernacle and temple.<sup>5</sup> This work often involved heavy physical labour (Num 4:24-28).

*Yare* means *to fear, to be afraid*, and is also used of worship (Jos 22:25) TWOT suggests that this verb used in relation to worship of the LORD means to obey God's commands in relation to worship practices (2 Ki 17:32-34). However the word is also used in contexts that indicate the subject is terrified (Dt 5:5).<sup>6</sup>

In the New Testament the most important word is *proskuneo* "to kiss toward someone." It is used in Scripture for showing respect to men, angels, demons, the devil, the "beast," idols, and to God. The Septuagint uses this word to translate Hebrew *hawah*.<sup>7</sup>

The second significant New Testament word is *Latreuo* meaning "to serve, to attend or participate in religious worship services" (Acts 7:42; 24:14; Phil 3:3). Arngt-Gingrich asserts that this word in the NT always means to serve in the sense of performing religious rituals.<sup>8</sup>

*Sebō* is commonly used of God-fearers, Gentiles who worship Israel's God without accepting the duties of the ceremonial law<sup>9</sup>

Word usage in the Old and New Testaments shows continuity of thought. The uses of Hebrew *chawah* and Greek *proskuneo* to denote actions expressing respect to both human and divine superiors defines worship as focused on God and giving honour to Him.

## 2.3 Genesis 1-2

God is three eternal, infinite unchangeable persons. He created humans in His own image as personal, relational, moral beings. As such, we are built

<sup>3</sup> In the older literature this word is often noted mistakenly as *shachah*. However Ugaritic studies have refuted this view.

<sup>4</sup> TWOT, vol. I, 267-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, vol. II, 640-641.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, vol. II, 399-400.

<sup>7</sup> A-G, 723-724.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 468.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 753.

with the duty, and need, to worship God (Ex 20:3; Lev 23:3; Eccl 3:11). This duty and need were and are essential to the nature of man as creature and person and to his relationship to God. They were present in Adam and Eve in Eden before the fall, continue for fallen humans, are present in redeemed sinners, and continue in the renewed creation after the completion of salvation. The elements of worship might arguably change from era to era but not the duty and need themselves.

God set apart the seventh day of the week for rest from daily duties and *holy convocation*. (Gn 2:3-4; Lev 23:3)<sup>10</sup> Gn 2:3 and Ex 20:8-11 note the duty to remember God's work of creation while Dt 5:12-15 refers to the Exodus as the reason for the observance. Old sees the day as a thanksgiving for all the blessings of creation and redemption, noting that the references to creation and exodus state the part for the whole.<sup>11</sup> This seems reasonable. If, as is suggested, the day and its gathering is intended as a day primarily of thanksgiving, then focus of the gatherings on that day is primarily God-ward.

In Eden Adam and Eve enjoyed the privilege of communion with God, who was graciously coming to Adam and Eve in visible, physical theophany for fellowship. After our first parents sinned in Genesis 3 they heard the sound of God coming in the cool of the evening, and knew it was Him.

#### 2.4 Sacrifice

It is very arguable that in Gn 3:21 God commanded sacrifices to cover sin at the time He covered Adam and Eve with skins. Certainly, animals were killed in order to provide these coverings. These deaths and coverings were a picture of covering sin by means of the death of Christ (Heb 10:11-12).<sup>12</sup> Worship included sacrifice from this time onwards, as is illustrated by the offerings of Cain and Abel, and then continued all through the Old Testament and until the death of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

Abba argues that OT worship is summed up in sacrifice, and that sacrifice expressed "recognition of God's supreme worth."<sup>14</sup> However, more accurately the meaning of the Old Testament blood sacrifices was the idea of obtain-

<sup>10</sup> The idea of rest from daily labour as such is stressed in Gn 2:2-3, in the Decalogue Ex 8-11, and also in Heb 3:7-13. Therefore the WSC argues for somewhat too much when it insists that the whole day should be given to the "public and private exercises of worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy". WSC Q.60.

<sup>11</sup> H.O. Old, *Worship Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p.24.

<sup>12</sup> If this verse does not refer to sacrifice in general, and to the death of Christ as an atoning sacrifice, it is not possible to know the meaning.

<sup>13</sup> Cain's offering was not a blood offering, but it was not refused on that account. It was refused because he was not a believer (Heb 11:4).

<sup>14</sup> R. Abba, *Principles of Worship*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.2.

ing forgiveness of sins by means of the death of a substitute (Lev 17:11). This understood, the focus of blood sacrifice is Godward.

Even when sacrifices were offered the key to right worship was a right heart. In Gn 4:3 sacrifices, both bloody and bloodless, were offered by Cain and Abel. The sequence of words implies that God's acceptance of Abel's offering followed on from acceptance of his person, and that His rejection of Cain's offering was the result of rejection of that person.<sup>15</sup>

This does not mean that Abel was justified by work, that of making his offering. Heb 11:4 states that he was justified by faith. Gn 15:6 makes the same point in relation to Abraham. Psalms 32 and 51 also illustrate this understanding as does the experience of the exiles in Babylon. Daniel had no opportunity to offer sacrifices but he understood himself to be a saved man. Hebrews 11 argues likewise in relation to a significant number of Old Testament saints.<sup>16</sup> Right thinking Old Testament people knew that animal sacrifices, while commanded, were not essential to forgiveness of sins.

Ge 4:26 probably indicates the beginning of congregational worship after the fall. Rayburn suggests that before this time worship had been done in family groups and that from this time worship by larger communities began.<sup>17</sup> Worship must have reverted to the household setting for some time after the flood.<sup>18</sup>

Worship with sacrifices continued after the flood. Noah built an altar and offered sacrifices with his family (Gn 8:20). This can be understood as a response of love and gratitude. In this specific case, the focus of the act of worship noted is Godward. This passage gives the first specific references to an altar, burnt offering, clean animals and fire as part of worship. However, we need not think that these things were new innovations. Noah would have been continuing devout pre-flood practices.

## 2.5 Abraham

Genesis shows Abraham leading his household in offering sacrifices (Gn 12:8; 13:17-18; 26:25). The fact that he could call on 318 trained men from his household to rescue Lot after the capture of Sodom indicates a household of about 2,000 adults and children (Gn 14). When Abraham led all these in

<sup>15</sup> The passage says that God "looked with favour on Abel and his offering" then notes that "on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour." It seems that God looked at each man first and then made decision whether to accept each offering or not.

<sup>16</sup> It might be argued that use of New Testament references to argue in relation to Old Testament theology and viewpoints is anachronistic. However, this argument ignores the doctrine of Biblical inspiration. The Bible, even when interpreting past events, is authoritative and infallible.

<sup>17</sup> R. Rayburn, *O Come, Let Us Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), p.47.

<sup>18</sup> When Noah came out of the ark his household were the only people still alive to worship!

worship, presumably on each Sabbath, the gathering was that of a large community. In Egypt Jacob's family multiplied and became numerically a nation. Given that, one, worship is a creational mandate, two, that worship is a universal and unceasing human duty and need, and, three, that God's people worshipped in community both before and after the sojourn in Egypt, it may reasonably be understood that they gathered for worship in the Egyptian period.

Abram gave tithes to Melchizedek (Gn 14:20). This is the first Biblical reference to tithing. Jacob also promised to tithe (Gn 28:22). These points indicate that tithing was already a regular devotional practice even in the period before the Mosaic legislation (Lev 27:30). This action, tithing, does not meet the need of the worshipper; it is God-focused.

### *2.6 Tabernacle and Temple Worship*

Moses, under God, established tabernacle worship which later developed into temple worship. Both structures followed the same pattern.<sup>19</sup> At this stage, the tribe of Levi was set apart for ministry in relation to the tabernacle (Ex 32:29) and Aaron and his descendants were set apart as priests (Ex 29:8).

The tabernacle and temple were built without regard to cost, and the best artisans were employed. Only the best and most beautiful was good enough. There is no antithesis between true worship and beautiful worship.<sup>20</sup> We ought not devalue the importance of other physical things that we use in worship along with our God given sacraments: our bodies and what we do with them, the seating, the song books, the good order of the room and so on.

The function of the tabernacle and, later, of the temple was that of a dwelling place of God among His people (Ex 25:18; 40:34-35).<sup>21</sup> When the priests and people came to these, they were in effect visiting their King in His palace to do homage, to seek forgiveness, and to present their petitions.

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<sup>19</sup> The tabernacle and its furnishings were types of the spiritual ministry of Christ and so also of our worship today in the New Testament order (Heb. 8:5). However the Bible does not explain the meaning of things like the lamp, the table, the altar of incense, etc. We are left to understand these things as best we can.

<sup>20</sup> Our services should bear the marks of talent (spiritual gifts), creativity and beauty. God deserves our best. Why should we presume to think that worship that seems dowdy, dull and boring to us is pleasing to God? There remains of course the danger that sensual enjoyment of the beautiful as such might for some folk become a substitute for spiritual enjoyment of God. Nevertheless, this danger does not destroy the points previously made. Beauty in temple worship did not destroy spiritual worship, otherwise God would not have commanded that beauty.

<sup>21</sup> The Hebrew word *hekal* is used for both temple and king's palace. The concept is essentially the same in both cases. The *hekal* was a royal residence.

Tabernacle and temple worship centred on sacrifices.<sup>22</sup> Apart from these, there was song and music, teaching and prayer (2 Chron 5:13; Dt 26; 2 Chr 6). The presence of the Psalter within the Old Testament canon shows the importance of these. There were also the annual feasts. There is no need to assume that any of these activities were new with the building of the tabernacle. There would have been historical continuity.

The Deuteronomic covenant required that it (the book of Deuteronomy) be read at the seven yearly covenant renewals (Dt 31:10-13). Prophets on some occasion at least preached in the temple area. However, there is no evidence that this was part of the regular routine of temple worship (Jer 19:14; 36:8). There are however verses that suggest a teaching ministry by priests (Ne 8:9; Jer 18:18; Eze 7:26; Mal 2:7) whether or not they fulfilled this function within regular temple worship or in other, though related, gatherings is possible but not proven. However, the fact of a teaching ministry is clear.<sup>23</sup>

In these ways Old Testament worship was God-centred.

The tabernacle and temple system created an emphasis on the contrast between the majesty and holiness of God on the one hand and on the sinful nature of humans on the other. God was symbolically located in the holy of holies, and very little access was granted. The sacrifices stressed human sin and the need to cover it. However, God granted covering for sin. Fellowship with Him was possible and real. Difference in this respect between the Old and New Testaments is one of emphasis, not essence. It will be necessary to consider in what ways, if any, this change of emphasis impacts upon application of Old Testament principles of worship to gatherings today.

### 2.7 Synagogue Worship

Synagogue worship probably began in the exile and is validated by our Lord's participation. The temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. It was the only lawful place of sacrifice (Dt 12:5-6) Therefore the exiles could not continue that particular form of worship in Babylon. They developed the synagogue pattern in order to continue worship in the new situation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John McClean argues that, more correctly, sacrifice is the entrance into worship. It is that which makes access to God and fellowship with him possible, and that worship is the activities that follow when that access has been obtained by means of the offerings. There is merit in this view, especially when the relationship in the New Testament between access by means of the atonement of Christ and worship is considered. However, a reading of the Biblical material from Genesis through to the exile, indicates that sacrifice is fundamental – always in view. Therefore this writer has retained the word “central” at this point. John McClean, “Personal Communication”. PTS, Dehra Dun, 11 October, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> Old, *Worship Reformed According to Scripture*, p.59f.

<sup>24</sup> It seems clear from the fact that the Jews established synagogues – and that Jesus, living under the law, attended synagogue – that it was sacrifice away from the central shrine that was forbidden, not corporate worship as such.

While the robes of priests, the sacrifices and a few other matters of tabernacle-temple worship were regulated by the Torah, it did not give detailed directions for the conduct of worship services as a whole. It is also true that the Old Testament likewise gave no directions concerning the manner of synagogue worship. It seems reasonable to understand that the Jews of the exile, commanded and desiring to worship on the Sabbath, reproduced the patterns of the temple services using the reading and preaching of the Word in the place of sacrifice. The details of the service were to that extent left by God to be decided by His people.

These points granted, God controlled what was done in Old Testament worship. Moses was commanded to build the tabernacle according to the pattern shown to him by God (Ex 25:9). The account of the building process for the tabernacle emphasizes that it was indeed built in accordance to God's commands (Ex 36:1; 38:22; 39:1, 6-7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 32, 42, 43). God's judgment of Korah was at least in part a punishment for desiring a pattern of worship not approved by God (Nu 16:40). His rejection of King Uzziah's unbiblical worship, making him a leper as he sought to offer incense, is also a proof that we must worship in the ways that God commands (2 Chr 26:16-19).

This carried on the features of temple worship that were possible in Babylon: teaching, praise and prayer. The part played by sacrifice in the temple services was replaced by reading and teaching of the Scriptures. The people now understood that the exile had come as God's judgment on their disobedience to His law and now desired to be taught the law in order to follow it.

Synagogue worship also involved a wider level of participation by male members of the congregation than had temple worship. It lacked a distinctive place for the Levitical clergy.

The simplicity of synagogue worship in comparison to temple worship has been often remarked on. It is unlikely that the exiles thought, "Simpler is more spiritual." They would more have been longing to have something more like temple ritual worship than the simplicities now forced upon them by poverty. The assumption that simpler is necessarily more spiritual is an assumption that arguably ignores the spiritual possibilities of temple worship. The main reason for the simplicity of the synagogue system was more probably the poverty of the exiles in the early years of the Babylonian period.

The earliest extant descriptions of synagogue worship date from the latter part of the first century AD.<sup>25</sup> Just how far back in the Old Testament times

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<sup>25</sup> It is easy to exaggerate the extent of presently available knowledge of the content of synagogue services before the first century. Levertoff is clear that in his day there were no known extant sources dated in our Lord's life-time for the pattern of synagogue worship. P.P. Levertoff, "Synagogue worship in the first century", in *Liturgy and Worship: a Companion to the Prayer Book of the Anglican Communion* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1932), pp.60-77. The remarks given in this section are therefore based on first century evidence later than the time of our Lord. Howev-

these practices began we do not know. In the first century AD, the service had five principal parts: the recitation of the Shema (Dt 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41) by prayers, readings from the Law and the Prophets, the Targum (explanation in the vernacular of the readings), along with read and sung praise.<sup>26</sup>

Old describes the pattern of prayer in the synagogue services of the first century.<sup>27</sup> The main prayers came in the centre of the service and were called the *Eighteen Benedictions* or the *Amida (Standing)*. There were eighteen sections and these were prayed with the congregation standing. It began with three benedictions of praise and thanksgivings, followed by six prayers concerning the needs of the congregation and six prayers for the nation of Israel. The prayers were then completed by three more prayers of praise and thanksgiving. Old remarks that the most striking features of this system of prayers is that it began and ended with praise, and adds that each individual intercession was also completed with praise. He quotes the sixth benediction: "*Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned; pardon us, our King, for we have transgressed, for thou art good and forgiving. Blessed be thou, O Lord, who art gracious and dost abundantly forgive.*" He also quotes the eleventh: "*Restore our judges as at first, and our counselors as at the beginning and reign thou over us, O Lord, alone, in grace and mercy and righteousness and judgment. Blessed be thou, O Lord, the King who lovest righteousness and judgment.*"<sup>28</sup>

As the examples illustrate, the intercessions were marked by praise and in each case the content of the praise was related to the theme of the petition. This pattern is suggestive for prayer today. These were set prayers, read or recited.

## 2.8 The Psalter

Barrs notes that worship leaders today often encourage congregations at worship to set aside the cares and troubles and thoughts of the week in order to focus on God. He argues that the Psalms, in contrast to this tendency, encouraged the people of God to bring the whole of their personal, family and national life into worship.<sup>29</sup>

The Psalter is full of daily life themes: delight in creation (19, 104, 148), joy in human existence (8, 139), praise to God for sustaining of life (104, 145), praise of the commandments of God (19, 119), confession of sin (51),

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er the practices of the Jews in, say, 100 AD would have had a history of previous development and use before that date.

<sup>26</sup> It is questioned by a few whether singing formed a part of the service but, considering the place of music in Jewish religious life as presented by the Psalter and other Old Testament passages on worship, and its subsequent large place in Christian worship, it is hardly likely that singing and music was absent from the synagogue.

<sup>27</sup> Old, *Worship Reformed According to Scripture*, p.95ff.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, pp.5-6.

<sup>29</sup> J. Barrs, "Worship", Tape 4.

delight in forgiveness and salvation (32). Other themes include deliverance (107), cries concerning illness, enemies, abandonment (22), famine (105), war (89), false accusation (5), answers to prayer (116), meditations on the frailty of human life (90), warnings against unbelief and idolatry (95), prayers concerning the plans of nations against the LORD (Ps 2), cries for judgment on evil and for rulers to do justice (Ps 109), prayers concerning the problem of evil (10), prayer concerning the family (128), work (127), right living (1), and prayers concerning the coming of Christ and His kingdom (Ps 2; 110). The Psalter, as it developed, became the hymn book of the first and second temple. This indicated that although Old Testament worship was basically God-centred there was also a strong concern in that worship for edification.

### *2.9 Summary*

The most important words for worship in the two Testaments are parallel in meaning and show that true worship involves words and actions to show reverent respect to God. All through the Old Testament era, worship was dominated by sacrifices to cover sins. The offerings, especially the blood offerings, were God-focused rather than man-centred. There was also teaching, praise and prayer as the contents of Psalter indicate.<sup>30</sup> Tabernacle and temple worship stressed the majesty and holiness of God and the sin of the people and yet offered true fellowship with God. Sacrifices as then offered however were not essential to forgiveness and access to God. The essential quality required in worshippers was a trust in God expressed in obedient daily living. Synagogue worship led to more teaching of the Scriptures than previously, a loss of function for priests and Levites within that system and greater participation by laymen. This increased emphasis on teaching would have introduced an increased emphasis on edification of the congregation. This was consistent with the more man-centred themes of the Psalter as used in the first and second temple. Worship all through the older Testament was always God-centred and human-related. There is development in worship practices within the Old Testament but there are no contradictions.

## **3. Worship in the New Testament**

### *3.1 Gospels and Acts*

The Lord Jesus came to the temple from time to time and worshipped regularly in synagogues (Mk 1:21, 39; 3:1; 6:2; Lk 6:6). However, in John 4:21-24 He indicated the coming end of temple worship. The tearing of the veil of the temple when the Lord died probably indicated the actual moment

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<sup>30</sup> The two Old Testament sacraments, circumcision and Passover have not been discussed thus far, as they were not administered in regular corporate worship gatherings. Both were celebrated in homes.

of its end as a system required by God. Even so, the apostles and Jerusalem Christians in the early years of the church (Acts 2:46; 3:1) attended temple and synagogue services. Paul saw synagogue services as a setting in which to evangelize. The temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD and the breach between synagogues and Christian Jews also became complete.

From the earliest days of the church, Christians also gathered in homes for worship. The apostles and converts at Jerusalem were “breaking bread” in homes (Acts 2:46). There are other references to house churches scattered through the letters of Paul.

In Mat 18:20 the Lord Jesus says, “*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*” The context is a discussion of church discipline. However, Christ’s promise is an unqualified general statement and its application to worship gatherings is therefore reasonable. The Bible verses that refer to the church as the temple of God have the same suggestion that Christ is present among His people when they gather (1Pe 2:5). What we do in our worship gatherings we do in the presence of the Lord. This understanding maintains the God-centred focus of worship that was clear in Old Testament worship.

In Jesus’ discussion with the Samaritan woman, He states that God seeks worshippers who will worship *in spirit and in truth* and says *God is spirit and those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth* (Jn 4:23-24). In v. 24 He is most likely proving or explaining His statement in v. 23. In v. 24, the statement *God is spirit* is the basis for the second statement, *those who worship must worship in spirit and in truth*. The phrase *God is spirit* includes the understanding that God is a personal being. The thought is that worship of the infinite but personal God by personal beings must be grounded in love for Him in order to be acceptable (Mat 22:37-40).<sup>31</sup> Once again, it is clear that worship is something that the congregation does in relation to God. The God-centred nature of worship is maintained in this verse.

After Pentecost the early Jewish believers were slow to break with worship in temple and synagogue.<sup>32</sup> However, they also held their own meetings marked by the new teaching, fellowship, prayers and the “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42). Apostolic practice in teaching followed that of Christ, explaining Old Testament in terms of its fulfillment in Him (Luke 24:44ff; Acts 2:14ff). The *apostle’s fellowship* means that the believers were often with the apostles. Since Luke notes this he sees it as important. The meaning of *breaking of bread* is not quite so clear. This may mean that the Christians often shared

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<sup>31</sup> Our Lord describes Himself in John’s Gospel as the truth and gives the Spirit. Therefore v24 may have wider Christological implications. However the words and immediate context give the sense indicated above.

<sup>32</sup> The Apostle Paul, when a Christian, attended Jewish festivals and made to God vows in the Jewish manner, and other references tell us that many other Christian Jews did the same (Acts 18:18, 20:6, 16:1; Cor 16:8; Acts 21:26). They had done these things before they become Christians. After they became believers they continued these practices.

meals or that they celebrated the Lord's Supper together in groups or both. The Lord's Supper in New Testament times was celebrated in the setting of a full meal (1Cor 11:17-34). The phrase *the prayers*, given the use of the article, may refer to the appointed times of prayer at the Temple. Alternatively, it refers to prayers within the Christian gathering.<sup>33</sup>

The day of worship changed in New Testament times from the seventh to the first day of the week. There are only three New Testament verses to support this major change (Acts 20:7ff; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10). However since each reference is linked to an apostle, it is arguable that the change had their authorization. John in Revelation uses the expression *kuriake hemera, Lord's Day*. This is usually understood as referring to first day of the week on which the Lord rose from the dead. The Christian Sabbath honours the resurrected Christ. The concept is God-centred.

There are a number of references to baptism in Acts. None of the baptisms recorded in the New Testament appear to have occurred in the setting of established congregational gatherings.

### 3.2 1 Corinthians 11-14

1Cor 11-14 gives teaching about the Supper, ministry and behavior by women and the use of spiritual gifts in worship in the congregation at Corinth.<sup>34</sup>

Limitations on ministry by women are stated in 1Cor 11:1-16 and 14:34-35. It is necessary to understand these two passages in a harmonizing way, and together with 1Tim 2:11-15.<sup>35</sup> Chapter 11 notes that women may pray and prophesy in church provided they wear an appropriate covering or authority.<sup>36</sup> Chapter 14:34-35 states that women must not speak in church. Probably the key to reconciling the two passages lies in v. 35. The command for silence probably relates to unnecessary chatter.

It is arguable that in 1Cor 11:1-16, there is, firstly, the matter of head covering as such, and secondly, an underlying principle.<sup>37</sup> Paul is urging that women who speak in church show respect for the adult male members of the

<sup>33</sup>Rayburn sees a reference to singing praise in v 47 *Ibid*, p.89.

<sup>34</sup>Some argue that this church had two meetings, a public meeting in which the spiritual gifts were used, and a private meeting which consisted of a meal and the Lord's Supper. The passage offers no evidence in support of this point. However, Pliny the Younger notes two separate meetings on the Lord's Day. However, this period was later than that of the New Testament.

<sup>35</sup>The Bible is a unity and we must not so teach one place that it contradicts another.

<sup>36</sup>The Greek word used is ἐξουσία.

<sup>37</sup>NIV offers a footnote providing an alternative translation of verses 4-7. This suggests that if a woman has longer, or longer hair than is usual for men in her culture, then this is an adequate head covering that would fulfill the requirements of this passage. The matter is one of exegesis; concerned persons should consult the Greek text and/or relevant commentaries.

congregation. In the culture of Corinth head covering was the appropriate way of expressing this.<sup>38</sup>

1 Cor 11:17-34 notes that divisions were in evidence at gatherings in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated (v. 18). Also there were rich believers who got drunk while other believers were hungry (v. 21). It seems that the Supper was celebrated in the setting of a full meal following the example of Christ and the disciples on Easter Thursday night. Vv. 23-25 describe the way in which the Lord Jesus instituted the Supper on the first Easter Thursday night. The key steps were the thanksgiving, the breaking of the bread, the bread and cup sayings, and the giving and receiving of the elements. V. 26 is Paul's own comment: "The Lord's Supper is an 'acted' preaching of the death of Jesus on the cross until he returns." Paul commanded self-examination before coming to the Table (v. 28). In context he was making this point in response to the abuses.<sup>39</sup>

There has been debate as to whether the words *the body of the Lord* in v. 29 refer to the church or to the physical body of Christ. Verse 28 refers to the Lord's physical body and therefore that is the better sense here. Paul is saying that a man may eat without appreciating that the supper is about the death of Christ and so treat the Supper like an ordinary meal.

"The Supper was a meal and a shared meal is essentially a social means of fellowship. The early Church had an actual fellowship meal between the giving of the bread and the wine."<sup>40</sup> Fellowship was a part of the Supper. The modern practice of serving refreshments after worship services is of some help in this respect.<sup>41</sup>

The Corinthian congregation held a regular public meeting in which spiritual gifts were used. Unconverted people were present and were sometimes

<sup>38</sup> A comparison with Romans 16:16 may assist understanding of the point being made. In this verse Paul encourages the Christians to greet one another *with a holy kiss* when they come together. The underlying principle is the obligation to greet one another warmly and sincerely. The Middle Eastern cultural expression of the principle is to greet one another with a kiss. In many parts of India the more likely cultural expression is traditionally to place the hands together in a vertical position in front of the chest. Another option is a hearty handshake.

<sup>39</sup> Paul does not expect that we will examine ourselves and not come; he assumes that we will examine ourselves and get our hearts right and come. This insight should be in our minds when we give the invitation to the Supper and the warning against unworthy communion. It should not be our intention that people should not receive the elements. We want them to come, but with right hearts.

<sup>40</sup> R.S. Wallace, "Lord's Supper", in *The International Bible Encyclopaedia*, G.W. Bromiley General Editor, 4 Volumes, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), Vol III, p.170.

<sup>41</sup> V. 22 is not a command from Paul to cease having the meal. If he had meant that he would have said so in plainer words. He is correcting the abuses in order that the congregation fulfill its present practice in the right way. He is merely saying, "If you are so hungry you have to be hasty and immoderate in eating at the shared meal, well then, eat at home."

converted in the meeting (14:24). There is no mention in the passage of official leaders, though the meeting was under the direction, presumably, of local elders (14:40).

Any member was free – at least in some part of the meeting – to take part as the Spirit prompted him. A person might speak a prophecy or a tongue, or give a word of wisdom. Someone might share a hymn or a lesson (14:26). However, good order was required. Any given type of activity had to be limited to one or two speakers. No individual was permitted to “go on and on” speaking to the exclusion of others (14:26-33; 40). It was necessary that tongues be interpreted in order that all might understand and be edified, including unsaved persons and new believers (14:5). Many congregations today believe that gifts of revelation in word have ceased. However, the principle is arguably implied that leadership of worship should be carried out by a number of voices. Certainly the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the universal gift of the Spirit and the fact that each believer has a gift with each to edify the body offer theological grounds for multiple ministries in the service.<sup>42</sup>

This pattern of worship was in part along synagogue lines but with more congregational participation, a greater variety of ministry activities, and with both genders engaged in ministry. There was also the Lord’s Supper. However, these elements (practices) as such, apart from the Supper, were part of tabernacle-temple and synagogue devotion. There is also nothing in this passage that is incompatible with the characteristics of the Jerusalem church in Acts 2:42.

1Cor 12-14 is primarily concerned with the right use of spiritual gifts. It gives a number of principles of worship: the aim should be edification; the service should provide broad participation but also must be orderly and with no individual dominating to the exclusion of others; it must be carried out in the language of the people; and women may have some spoken ministry provided they do so with a proper respect to the men.

In the Old Testament, circumcision and Passover were celebrated in homes and not “in church.” As noticed above, in the New Testament there is no example of a baptism being administered in a worship gathering. It is difficult for practical reasons to see how the spiritual gifts would have been used during the actual Lord’s Supper meal. Therefore the gifts were probably used before or after the meal, or perhaps both. Pliny the Younger indicates that the Christians in his area were holding two separate meetings on the Lord’s Day. Most modern church services follow the practice of Irenaeus by

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<sup>42</sup> It is usually argued from this passage that principles of worship are implied: the worship must be understood by the congregation; it must be orderly. It would be special pleading to avoid this further principle. Eph 4:11-16 shows a church with a simpler range of spiritual gifts of speech but also a stress on ministry by all for the good of all. Paul also in this passage requires that the worship edify the believers. He says this three times.

incorporating the Lord's Supper into regular corporate worship by eliminating the meal and incorporate baptism into the service by means of a "built-in" tank or font.

### 3.3 1 Timothy

In 1 Timothy 2, Paul's first concern is that prayer should be made in worship services for all persons and especially for those in authority (vv1-7). He notes that God desires that all persons be saved, implying that the prayers will share that concern. The passage gives two reasons to pray for the world: firstly, that Christians themselves may benefit and, secondly, that unbelievers may receive blessing.

Public prayer should be led by men (v8), though he allows in another place that women may pray provided they wear a head covering (1 Cor 11:1-16). The best way to combine the two ideas is understand that both men and women may pray but that it is especially the responsibility of the men to do so. The words *holy hands* stress, not the posture, but the holiness (Ps 28:2; 68:31; 134:2; 143:6; Prov 1:24). Paul also asks for unity in the congregation as the setting for prayer (v8). As in the Corinthian situation, in this passage prayer is led by more than one person.

Vv. 9-10 instruct that women should be concerned with good deeds rather than appearance. Godly daily life is the necessary background of public worship. Vv. 11-15 complete Paul's teaching on the role of women in public worship. They are not to assume leadership or the teaching office. As the reason, Paul cites the order of creation (See also 1 Cor 11:8-9) and the fall.<sup>43</sup> Paul's reasons were therefore not based on then current cultural practices but on creational and theological grounds. Paul is not forbidding women to speak in worship but is asserting that they ought not teach or exercise authority over men. This passage is consistent with 1 Corinthians 11-14 and, as the more systematic teaching, controls our understanding of the group of passages.<sup>44</sup>

Other passages in the New Testament show that the primary time of worship for local congregations was the Lord's Day, both for the Jewish church-

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<sup>43</sup>*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 Moody Press.

<sup>44</sup> It might be argued that 1 Corinthians 11:2-15 is a teaching passage and is more extended than 1 Timothy 2:11-15 and therefore is the true core passage on the topic of women's ministry in public worship. Mere length though does not decide the significance of a passage. 1 Corinthians does have teaching content that offers a rationale for head covering by women while speaking in worship. However 1 Timothy has both creational and disciplinary reasons for its commands. The former, the argument from creation, is consistent with that of 1 Corinthians 11. The disciplinary argument that Eve was deceived is additional to the material in 1 Corinthians 11. Also 1 Timothy 2 adds to the material in 1 Corinthians 11 its own statement of principle: *I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over men*. Therefore it seems clear that 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is the more fundamental passage.

es (Jn 20:19; 26) and also for the Gentile congregations (Ac 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2), and that this had the consent of apostle. There are no references in the New Testament to yearly Christian festivals.

### 3.4 *Philippians*

Philippians 3:3 describes Christians as those *who worship by the Spirit of God*. The verb is *latreuomai*, *to serve, or to worship*. The verse is not about being emotional in worship. It is about the Spirit of God enabling and directing us in worship or service so that we will do what is Biblical and be sincere.

### 3.5 *Praise*

Christian hymns are quoted in the New Testament: Benedictus, Magnificat, Nunc Dimittis, etc (Luke 1:46-55; 1:67-79; Rev 5:9-13; Rev 15:3; 11:17; 1 Tim 3:16; Phil 2:6-11). It therefore seems that song was characteristic of Christian gatherings in New Testament times. Praise had been part of both temple and synagogue worship.

### 3.6 *Teaching*

A Biblical service requires regular, systematic teaching and application of the Scriptures. The synagogue background of Christian services suggests this duty to present systematic teaching as do the practice of reading Paul's letters in worship and Paul's directions to Timothy and Titus concerning preaching and teaching (1Tim 4:13; 5:17; 2 Tim 4:2. Also Col 4:16).<sup>45</sup> 1Tim 5:17 indicates orderly and sustained teaching. 1Tim 4:13 notes public reading of scripture, exhortation and teaching. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 implies public teaching of the word. This is also noted in Acts 2:42, 1 Cor 12:28 and Eph 4:11. The teaching of the Old Testament would have focused on Christ as the fulfillment of its messages.

### 3.7 *Prayer*

God the Father and the Lord Jesus are central in the hymns and prayers of the church in the New Testament (Ac 4:24; Ro 1:7; Eph 1:17-23; 3:14-21).<sup>46</sup>

Our Lord taught His disciples to pray for their enemies (Matt 5: 43-47). He prayed for the whole church in the whole world (Jn 17:20-23). Paul urged Christians to pray for rulers and those in authority (1 Tim 2:1-4). Christian prayer seeks God's blessing for the world as well as for the church. It is

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<sup>45</sup> Paul preached at great length to the congregation at Troas (Acts 20:7). This was a special occasion, Paul's last opportunity to address them, and so perhaps not too much should be inferred in relation to regular Sunday worship gatherings.

<sup>46</sup> Herbert Carson emphasizes that the Father is the object of worship, the Son is the Mediator of worship, and the Spirit is the enabler of worship. Herbert Carson, *Hallelujah*. (Welwyn: Evangelical Press, 1980).

noteworthy that thanksgiving goes along with petition in New Testament prayer. This follows the manner of the *Amida*.

The Lord's Prayer appears to be a set prayer. The context in Luke is that Jesus' disciples asked Him to teach them to pray and He in response gave them this prayer. The implication is that the twelve memorized, taught their converts to do the same, and used it in worship. *Marana tha* "Come, O Lord" (1 Cor 16:22) is also a set prayer. The fact that it is quoted in Aramaic in a letter written to a Gentile congregation suggests its creation in the Jewish church and also indicates its importance to both Jewish and Gentile Christians. It is arguable therefore that set prayers were used in New Testament worship gatherings as well as extempore ones. This would have been a continuation of synagogue practice. The congregation at Corinth was accustomed to saying "Amen" at the end of prayers (1 Cor 14:16).

### 3.8 Conclusion

This rather rapid survey of New Testament passages on corporate worship does not expose any contradictions of doctrine or practice within this Testament itself nor are there contradictions with those of the Old Testament, at least to the mind that is disposed to see the Scripture as a unity. Mat 15:20 notes that New Testament worship is done in the presence of God, and in that way is God-centred as it is in the Old Testament. The teaching and instructional passages show that what is done in worship should edify the congregation. This follows the emphasis on edification present in the Psalter and Synagogue system of worship. It is also clear worship practices were not left to the option of the congregation. This was channeled by the apostle's commands. The Old Testament theme that worship elements and practices are controlled by God is maintained here.

## 4. Old Testament and New Testament Worship

### 4.1 Continuities in Old and New Testament Salvation

There is no essential difference between Old and New Testament saints in relation to salvation and subjective experiences of the spiritual life. From Genesis to Revelation all are saved by grace through Christ's mediation and work received by faith alone (Jer 17:9; Ro 3:25-26; Ge 15:6). Every godly person in both Testaments was born again and indwelt by the Spirit for fallen humans will not desire and choose salvation apart from renewal by the Spirit (Jer 31:33; Ezek 26:36; Jn 3:3-5; 2 Cor 4:3-6). A reading of the Book of Psalms shows us that the life experiences, thoughts, emotions and prayers of God's Old Testament people are not substantially different from those of New Testament believers. Therefore continuity in worship principles and practices from one Testament to the other is to be expected.

#### *4.2 Continuity in Worship*

Most writers on Christian worship argue that it had its origins in synagogue worship. The point would be better expressed as that there is continuity and development from Abel's time through tabernacle-temple and synagogue worship to Christian worship. This final link between synagogue worship and Christian patterns is logical in that synagogue worship is temple worship without the sacrifices. The first Christians were Jews who believed that Jesus is the Messiah, and that the priesthood and the sacrifices were pictures, types, of His saving work, and therefore these priests and sacrifices were now redundant. These Jewish believers were accustomed to temple and synagogue worship and it would have been natural for them to worship as Christians in ways approximating synagogue worship. This essential continuity and consistency is illustrated by the fact that early Jewish Christians at Jerusalem, with Paul among them from time to time, saw no incongruity in attending temple – and synagogue – services as well as their own Christian gatherings. Continuity is clear.

#### *4.2 Abolition of Sacrifices*

The sacrificial system, the Levitical priesthood, and other ceremonies of temple worship ceased when Christ offered Himself as a sin offering (Heb 10:1-18). However, just as the sacrifices were at the heart of Old Testament worship, so also sacrifice remains at the heart of New Testament worship. Worship has always had its true basis, not in the typological sacrifices, but in the efficacious work of Christ (Ro 3:25-26; 1Tim 2:5-6). In all history post-fall the only way to God has always been through Christ. We come to God through Christ and on the basis of His work (1Tim 2:5-6; Heb 5:15-16; 9:14).

The Old Testament people understood that animal sacrifices were not essential to acceptable worship. Abraham was justified by faith (Gn 15:6). Psalms 51 and 32 make the same point. The exiles in Babylon understood this when they established synagogue worship.

While the abolition of the sacrificial system and the Aaronic priesthood was a very great change in the externals of worship, the principle that worship has always been based on the covering the worshippers' sins on the basis of the death of Christ – this received by faith – is abundantly clear, at least to the reader of the New Testament. The Old Testament saints understood salvation is by grace, by penal substitutionary atonement, received by faith and worshipped God in this basis. There is continuity of the basis of worship in reconciliation of sinners to God through both Testaments.

#### *4.4 Greater Freedom*

There are some greater freedoms in New Testament life and worship. There is freedom from the ceremonial law and in particular the duty of offering sacrifices. This is a great blessing. Peter called the ceremonial law “a

*yoke which our fathers were not able to bear*” (Acts 15:10).

It has been noted above that that God did not provide regulations for synagogue worship but left the Jews in Babylon and later to be guided by the principles of temple worship and the Scriptures in general in planning services. This opened the way to at least some greater freedom in patterns of worship than in the temple context. However, this freedom is not absolute as is indicated by God’s judgment on King’s Uzziah’s presumptuous worship. Worship is regulated by God’s Word.

Corinth’s pattern of worship permitted any individual, including women, to exercise spiritual gifts, though under the constraints of good order and so under the oversight of elders. Given that there are references to spiritual gifts in other New Testament letters, and also references to multiple leaders, it is reasonable to deduce that the Corinthian pattern of worship was not limited to that congregation (Rom 12:3-8; Eph 4:7-13; 1 Thess 5:19-20). This is another element of greater freedom.

It may be argued that with the completion of the New Testament canon, and when it became widely available, the miraculous gifts of word ceased and gave way to more stable patterns of worship and prepared sermons along the lines implied by the Pastoral Epistles. This argument, especially when it reads back into the New Testament modern, western “*Directory of Public Worship*” orders of service and the formal thirty-minute monologue, is rather tendentious.

There is a greater freedom in participation and activities in worship in the newer Testament. It remains true that the elements of worship have always been prayer, praise, and the reading and teaching of Scripture. The principle that worship should be both God-centred and edifying is however maintained in both Testaments as is also the understanding that its conduct lies under God’s control.

#### 4.5 Change of Day

The change of the divinely designated day of worship from the seventh to the first day of the week should not be passed over. We worship on the day of the Lord’s resurrection and that resurrection was the manifestation of His victory and the completion of the work of salvation. In the older Testament the Sabbath celebrated God’s gifts of creation and Exodus and all other blessings. Celebration of the resurrection on the Lord’s Day does not remove the previous reasons for joy. It adds this new theme. This means that the tone of Lord’s Day worship should be basically celebratory. Psalms indicates that other emotions also enter in as appropriate.

It has been argued that regular rest and worship is a creation mandate, a human duty and a need that extends from creation into eternity forward. The day has changed but not the duty. There is continuity.

#### 4.6 *Change of Emphasis*

The Old Testament stresses that access to God is possible but difficult because of His holiness and our sin while the New Testament emphasizes that access is open to all believers. This leads in the new era to an emphasis on fellowship with God in worship and on the edification of believers (Mat 27:51; Rom 8:15-16; Gal 4:6; Heb 4:16; 1 Cor 14:19).

This new emphasis on freedom and confidence appears because New Testament worship is informed by new revelations, especially those relating to the person and work of Christ. The Spirit indwelling believers enables them to understand the new gospel revelations of the New Testament mentally and experientially. Therefore God's people today have, or ought to have, a richer subjective experience of forgiveness, gratitude, and of the Fatherhood of God and so also a heightened confidence and joy in access and fellowship with Him (Rom 8:16; Gal 4:4). This impacts worship, creating assurance, confidence and joy.

We cannot be simply "Old Testament" in our understanding. We begin our Christian worship in the church in awareness of the gospel revelation of the character of God. Therefore, the awe that is the spirit of worship in the presence of Almighty God is not separable from the gratitude we feel that God, even God himself, loves us and has given his Son for us.<sup>47</sup>

We must still remember that the words for worship in both Testaments mean to bow down and show respect. Even in the new era we must still remember the glory, holiness and majesty of our Father. Awe, joy and confidence blend together in Christian worship. The Old Testament sense of His holiness and our sin, inform but do not alone control our worship. We must look to the New Testament for further guidance. This brings an emphasis on fellowship with God in worship, and on the edification of believers (Mt 27:51; Gal 4:6; Heb 4:16; 1 Cor 14:19).

Both Testaments require reverence and love, assurance and submission expressed through the elements of worship. There is an adjustment of emphasis but also continuity.

### 5. Conclusion

There is a development of worship practices in the course of Biblical history and some change: especially in the development of the synagogue system of worship, abolition of the sacrifice and ceremonials of the tabernacle-temple system when Christ died, the change of worship day, and a greater level of freedom, spontaneity and increased lay participation in leading ac-

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<sup>47</sup> H.G. Quillin, Jr. and J.F. White, *The Celebration of the Gospel, A Study in Christian Worship* (London: The Epworth Press, 1964), pp.25-26.

ording to spiritual gifts in the new Christian era. This said, the foundational features of worship have never changed: the human duty and need to worship, and God's eagerness, on the basis of Christ's atonement, to receive those who are willing and able to worship Him in spirit and in truth. The elements of worship continue always: atonement, hearing God's words, and response in praise and prayer. There are various ways of doing the necessary elements. The New Testament allows reasonable freedom and spontaneity. 1 Corinthians makes this clear. God-centredness, edification and the God-controlled nature of worship appear as obligations in both Testaments.

## 6. Remarks

Worship is governed not only by the Bible passages directly specified to this topic but also "by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed."<sup>48</sup> In particular, worship activities and behavior in general should be consistent with the fact that these are done in the presence of God who is both King and Father. Furthermore, worship is for the purposes of honouring Him and consistently strengthening the congregation with the spirit of the gospel of grace and in the language – and culture – of the congregation. The present writer remembers a comment of Donald MacLeod, "The people of the local culture should be able to recognize the meeting as a proper religious service of that culture."<sup>49</sup>

Worship leaders in our own time and cultures naturally tend towards worship patterns based on their own previous experiences of worship and also their personality types. Some personality types may prefer formal services with a strong emphasis on the greatness and holiness of God on the one side and on human creatureliness and sin on the other. These services may then become lacking in sentiment and a sense of connection towards God and also towards other worshippers. Those who advocate these patterns appeal to the Old Testament for support. Others tend to plan services that lead, among other things, into emotions of fellowship with God and other worshippers. These patterns have the danger of losing respect for God. These leaders tend to appeal to New Testament passages for support.

Balance is needed. However, the Old Testament is preparatory revelation and the New Testament is the completion of God's saving relation and instruction. Therefore, when seeking a balance between formal and relational worship styles, some leaning more towards the relational approach is Biblical. Our services should be in tune with the good news of sins forgiven and acceptance with God (Heb 4:16).

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<sup>48</sup> WCF I,6.

<sup>49</sup> Donald MacLeod, "Class Lecture", (Melbourne: Unpublished, 1986).

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