THE ELEMENT OF DANCE IN WORSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT
The Element of Dance in Worship
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The primary contribution of this thesis is that it opens a discussion regarding the appropriate use of dance in the worship of God. This discussion is carried out by examining biblical texts in the context of the Reformed doctrine known as the Regulative Principle of Worship. In summary, this thesis ends with the conclusion that dancing was an element of Old Testament worship that expired with the sacrificial system, and that it is no longer a normative element of worship for the Christian church.
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I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Frame for his willingness to advise me on this thesis. As Dr. Frame would readily admit, our conclusions on this topic are far apart, and our application of the Regulative Principle of Worship is not in total agreement. Dr. Frame was aware of these differences before entering into this project but did so nevertheless. I consider this to be a gesture of love for a brother in Christ, and I am grateful for his service to me. I also take comfort in the fact that Dr. Frame and I will not disagree on this topic forever. The Bible tells us that a day is coming when we will “all come in the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13) and in that day we will see things as they really are. Until then, it is my desire to walk in unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ as much as possible. This, apparently, is Dr. Frame’s position too as he has patiently worked with me on this thesis while giving me the benefit of the doubt at every turn. I am sincerely indebted to Dr. Frame for many things.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Motivation

This thesis has been written to better understand the proper use of dance as an element of Christian worship. At first glance, most readers will not consider this to be a topic of great importance to the Church. After all, it would certainly be a minority of churches that would seek to incorporate dance in the worship service. However, we live in a day and age when little attention is given to the theology of worship, and many things appear in Christian worship without first being subjected to biblical scrutiny. As it turns out, the content of Christian worship is often decided based upon whether or not the church leaders or the people in the pew will like it. Using a rubric of this type we are not surprised to find several elements of Christian worship that appear to be more entertaining than worshipful. Among these elements of worship we find the growing implementation of liturgical dance which is used to express and invoke somber and exuberant emotions of the worshipper. For instance, dance routines and methods of mime have been implemented to retell the story of Christ’s crucifixion as well as the virgin birth of Christ. Other forms of liturgical dance are more obscure, intending to “project the human spirit” through arm movements, various postures and facial expressions. Liturgical dance is typically done using slow movements of the body with streamers, flags, and ribbons but there is generally no set form for liturgical dance. The worship element of liturgical dance is occasionally used by the United Methodist
Church, the Disciples of Christ, Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, Congregationalists, among others. Special companies have been established to teach the methods of liturgical dance and to provide costumes for the performance.¹

The questions to be addressed in this thesis are as follows: Is dancing a divinely warranted element of worship for the Christian Church? If so, what biblical warrants do we have to govern its forms and circumstances? In this thesis, the answer to these questions will be sought using the Regulative Principle of Worship as our guide. Although this principle is not universally accepted by all Christian sects, and is even debated within denominations, it is assumed from the outset that divinely ordered rules of worship do exist, and that the Regulative Principle of Worship may generally be used to discover them.

**Literature Review**

This thesis concludes with a bibliography where various types of literature have been listed. Since the topic of this thesis concerns itself primarily with the Old Testament,² the bibliography contains many references for Old Testament worship practices, most of which pertain to the sacrificial system but few that explicitly address the topic of worshipful dancing. The literature that seems most germane to this thesis addresses the Regulative Principle of Worship and its application. Although the Regulative Principle has been used in the history of Presbyterianism to exclude musical instruments and extra-biblical hymnody, contemporary literature has also been written on this topic. There is also a small body of

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¹ Using the internet, one will find hundreds of websites addressing the key phrase “liturgical dance”.

² There are no references to worshipful dancing in the New Testament.
literature that addresses the specific topic of dancing in worship. This literature will be reviewed briefly in the following subsections.

Regulative Principle of Worship

The Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) has been summarized as a biblical principle which says that whatever God does not command in worship is to be forbidden. This principle has been described in almost every Reformed creed, and Calvin himself is known to have held this view. In recent literature, the traditional understanding of this view has been challenged by John Frame and R. J. Gore. In both cases, the challenges have arisen from difficulties in applying the RPW, and its traditional application is considered to be too restrictive for the worship practices of the Church. Frame’s objections will be discussed in Chapter 2; however, Gore’s arguments tend to rest upon the lack of uniformity in worship that has been produced by the RPW. In particular, Gore observes that very few Presbyterians even hold the RPW and suggests that we discard the notion in its traditional form.

Responses in the literature to these concerns have been scanty, but are primarily aimed at addressing Dr. Frame’s concerns. For instance, T. D. Gordon responds to Frame’s earliest work by concluding that he and others who struggle with the RPW have not

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J.M Frame, A Fresh Look at the Regulative Principle (Unpublished ms., 1998)

considered it in its original context. According to Gordon, “The issue that gave birth to the regulative principle was the nature and limits of church power.” Seen in this light, Gordon suggests that the applications of the RPW can be more easily understood. In another paper, J. A. Delivuk sets forth a contemporary proof of the RPW by showing its original meaning and intention. ⁵ Although this work is not a direct response to Dr. Frame, in a footnote Delivuk says, “Dr. Frame has made the error of interpreting the regulative principle without an understanding of its historical meaning.” An anticipated response from Dr. Frame would be that the RPW is supposed to justify all worship practice based upon Scripture, not history.

Musical Instruments and Exclusive Psalmody

The application of the RPW produced the simplicity of worship that was observed by the Puritans. In particular, these applications have forbidden the use of musical instruments and extra-biblical hymnody in worship; i.e., only Psalms were sung by the Puritans. Most recent defenses for eliminating musical instruments in Christian worship have been offered by J. Glasgow, J. Girardeau, M. C. Ramsay, and G. I. Williamson. ⁶ These defenses have been primarily based upon arguments that the musical instruments were tied to the sacrificial

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⁶ Glasgow 1872; Girardeau 1888; Ramsay 1968; Williamson (date unknown).


M.C. Ramsay, *Purity of Worship* (Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, Church and Nation Committee, Sydney Australia, 1968).

system of the Old Testament, and that the New Testament is relatively silent concerning musical instruments. This is a similar argument and conclusion drawn in the present thesis regarding the worship element of dancing.

Contemporary defenses for exclusive psalmody have been set forth by J. Murray and Wm. Young, M.C. Ramsay, and M. S. Bushell.7 These defenses share the common view that “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” in Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16 refers to the canonical Psalter. As such, these texts do not authorize the singing of extra-biblical hymns according to the RPW. Bushell also provides an historical argument to show that extra-biblical hymnody did not appear in the church until the 4th Century. These views are opposed by many Presbyterians including J. Frame and J. B. Jordan.8

Dance

Although dancing has become a fashionable element of worship in various Christian settings (see the first subheading of this chapter), a critical analysis of worshipful dancing is difficult to find in the literature. The most scholarly work available has been set forth by J. H. Eaton in which he illustrates the typical circumstances of dance as it relates primarily to


M.C. Ramsay, 1968.


the Israelite worship festivals. In this work, Eaton is not concerned about applications of dance for New Testament worship. Other literature has been written in a more popular style and generally favors the expression of dance from a non-critical point of view. This work has been offered by M. A. Buchanan and D. L. Johns. Buchanan bases his discussion on the dancing of David as he brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. Johns bases his argument on the natural desires of the human being to engage in physical expression and dancing in worship – even pagan worship. There have been no attempts in the literature to analyze dancing from the traditional viewpoint of the RPW.

Contribution

The primary contribution of this thesis is that it opens a discussion regarding the appropriate use of dance in the worship of God. So far, the appropriate use of dance in God’s worship has not been widely discussed in the literature from a critical point of view, and therefore this thesis may serve to introduce the debate. As previously noted, the discussion in this thesis is carried out in the context of the Reformed doctrine known as the Regulative Principle of Worship. In summary, this thesis ends with the probable conclusion that dancing was an element of worship that expired with the sacrificial system, and that it is no longer a normative element of worship for the Christian church. As the thesis unfolds, the following contributions are made to the literature:

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10 M.A. Buchanan, Dance of the God-Struck: There’s Something about Worship That Can Drive Even a King to Strip Down and Leap Up (Christianity Today, 46, No. 11, 2002), 51-4.

1. That biblical analysis shows dancing to be a divinely warranted element of worship in the Old Testament, as shown by a combination of explicit commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inferences.

2. That lawful examples of worshipful dancing may be found in the following Bible passages: a) the dance of the daughters of Shiloh in Judg 21:16-25, b) David’s second attempt to transport the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Sam 6:12-23 and 1 Chr 15:1-16:3, c) implied dancing in Ps 118:27, d) commanded dancing in Ps 149:3, and e) commanded dancing in Ps 150:4.

3. That the lawfulness of Miriam’s dance in Exod 15:20-22 is debatable.

4. That unlawful examples of worshipful dancing may be found in the following Bible passages: a) the dance of Israel and the golden calf in Exod 32:19-24, and b) David’s first attempt to transport the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Sam 6:1-11 and 1 Chr 13:1-14.

5. That the warranted form of lawful dancing occurs with exuberant motions of the body and a joyful demeanor. Although this is not a very specific form of dancing, it does serve to illustrate that the Bible knows nothing of a solemn and melancholy dance in God’s worship.

6. That the warranted circumstances of lawful dancing include a time and place when singing, musical instruments, and sacrifice are present. More specifically, the lawful worship service including dance involves a) blowing trumpets over the sacrifice, b) the sacrifice of an animal, and c) dancing, playing of musical instruments, and singing.

7. That because lawful dancing in worship requires the presence of sacrifice, and because sacrifices are no longer offered in the Church, the New Testament Church should no
longer practice the worship element of dance. As shown in this thesis, the worship element of dance expired with the Old Testament worship element of sacrifice.

To show these contributions, the thesis begins with a discussion of the Regulative Principle of Worship which governs God’s worship in both the old and new dispensations of the Church. Next, all Bible passages that record the element of dancing are examined in light of the Regulative Principle of Worship. Using this principle as a rule for worship, exegetical methods are employed for finding divine commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inferences concerning the lawful use of dance. Finally, this thesis ends with a discussion relative to the proper use of dance in the New Testament church.
CHAPTER 2
THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP

Introduction

This thesis is being written to better understand the appropriate use of dance in the worship of God. It is important, therefore, as a matter of worship, that we begin this effort by establishing the rule that governs worship. This rule has been known historically as the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW), which is the topic of this chapter. In the sections that follow, the RPW will be defined and the traditional methods for applying the principle will be presented. A biblical rationale for the RPW will also be offered and recent objections to the principle will be addressed in brief.

Definition

The RPW is a biblical principle that governs the proper worship of God. This principle may be defined by the following statement: *God must be worshipped according to his own specific desires, and not according to the autonomous desires of men.* Calvin\(^{11}\) summarized this principle by saying, “Now we ought to bear in mind that Scripture repeatedly describes superstitions in this language: they are the ‘work of men’s hands’ which lack God’s authority; this is done to establish the fact that *all the cults men devise of themselves are detestable* [italics added].” The RPW of worship also appears in the

confessional literature of the 16th and 17th Centuries. For instance the Belgic Confession, Article VII (1561) states that “the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written”. The answer to Question 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) states, “That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.” In the Westminster Standards (1647-48) we see the clearest form of this doctrine anywhere:

Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter XXI, Article 1. … 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 worshipped 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 [italics added].

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 51. The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.

Westminster Large Catechism, Question 109. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself …

In short, the RPW seeks to find a divine warrant in Scripture for everything that is done in the worship of God. This principle applies to all public and private activities of worship. In this thesis, the RPW will be applied to understand the appropriate place for dancing in the worship of God.
Exegetical Methods

As one may suspect, finding a divine warrant for everything in worship is not as straightforward as it first appears, and for this reason theologians have sought to extract these divine warrants from the Bible using one or more of the following exegetical methods: 1) finding explicit commands, 2) identifying approved examples, or 3) using good and necessary inference based upon other divine warrants.¹² Note: A “good” inference is one that produces a conclusion in apparent agreement with a set of truthful premises. A “necessary” inference is one that produces the only conclusion possible from a set of truthful premises.

To illustrate the method of explicit commands, consider Col 3:16 which reads, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord [italics added].” The explicit reference of singing to the Lord shows this to be an act of worship. From the explicit command to sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord, we conclude that there is a divine warrant for singing in God’s worship. Therefore, according to the RPW, we ought to sing in God’s worship.

Similarly, the method of approved examples may be illustrated by considering Acts 20:27. In this passage we read, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight [italics added].” In this passage we see that the church is gathered for worship on Sunday rather than Saturday (as the Jews were accustomed to doing). Apparently this is an approved practice because we find the church doing it again in

¹² Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Article 6.
1 Cor 16:2. From this approved example we conclude that gathering for corporate worship on Sunday, rather than Saturday, carries with it a divine warrant from God. Therefore, according to the RPW, we should gather for corporate worship on Sunday. Note: this does not forbid the practice of worship on other days as well, since days of thanksgiving and impromptu worship apart from the regular Sabbath observance are shown in Scripture by approved example.\(^{14}\)

Finally, the method of good and necessary inference may be illustrated by considering Psalm 22:25 which reads, “My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: \textit{I will pay my vows before them that fear him} [italics added].” From this text we infer that lawful oaths and vows should be made in the worship of God.\(^{15}\) The syllogism for this inference goes like this:

\begin{itemize}
  \item A. Vows should be paid in the congregation of saints.
  \item B. The congregation of saints is gathered for God’s worship.
  \item C. Therefore, vows should be paid in God’s worship.
\end{itemize}

Based upon this inference, typical vows that are made in God’s worship are: marriage vows, church membership vows, and baptism vows. It is conceivable that other lawful vows would also be acceptable.

These examples have been put forward to illustrate the task of finding divine warrant in Scripture for the practices of worship, both public and private. Other divine warrants for worship should be determined in a similar way.

\(^{13}\) Although there is not an explicit reference to worship in this passage, other evidence of first-day worship reinforces the conclusion that this was a reference to the regular worship practice of the Church.

\(^{14}\) Ps 107, Esth 9:22, Acts 16:25, Jas 5:13, etc.

\(^{15}\) Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 22, Article 1.
Elements, Forms, and Circumstances

While the three exegetical methods mentioned in the previous section are sufficient in and of themselves for determining divine warrants from Scripture for practices of worship, it has also been historically helpful to think about these divine warrants in the following categories: 1) elements, 2) forms, and 3) circumstances. These three categories will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

An element of worship may be defined as *an activity of worship that is distinct from other activities of worship*. For instance, an element of worship may be identified when the worship service stops doing one thing, and starts doing something else. Ordinarily, these elements of worship are identified by the activities that are listed in a church bulletin (singing, preaching, etc.). The Westminster Confession of Faith lists divinely warranted elements of worship as follows: prayer, reading, preaching, singing, receiving sacraments, taking vows, fasting, and observing days of thanksgiving. While there have been some attempts to mingle these elements with each other by claiming that one is simply a different mode of the other (e.g., singing may be viewed as a different mode of praying), this oblation of distinctions is untenable as the Bible itself recognizes distinctions in worship elements as does the light of nature. At this point the reader may ask, “What is the usefulness of distinguishing between divinely warranted elements of worship?” The answer to this question is as follows: By distinguishing between elements of worship, a systematic approach for finding divine warrants in Scripture is established. In other words, a search for a divinely warranted element of worship is a useful beginning of our investigation into what God commands to be done in worship. Elements are the highest level of our search, and

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16 Ibid, Chapter 21, Article 5.
once we have identified an element, we continue in our search to find more specific divine warrants by asking the question: What does God expect the form and circumstance of this element to be? Forms and circumstances will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

The definition for an element of worship has historically been presented in several ways. One of the more common distinctions for an element of worship has been that it is a substantial part of divine worship, and that it carries with it religious significance.\textsuperscript{17} While these are true descriptions of an element of worship, they have left many asking the questions: How do we assess religious significance, and what is a substantial versus non-substantial part of divine worship? Rather than stirring up these questions which are fairly unprofitable, a more general definition for an element of worship has been proposed in the previous paragraph and will be used throughout this thesis.

A form of worship may be defined as \textit{the content of an element of worship}. For example, consider the worship element of preaching which has been established by explicit command in 2 Tim 4:2 and approved examples.\textsuperscript{18} The form of preaching includes the words that are used and the pitch of one’s voice in delivery. Another example of a form may be found in the element of singing. The form of singing includes the words that are sung and the musical arrangement that is selected. Other elements of worship carry their own forms with them; and, according to the RPW, the Scriptures are to be consulted for divine warrants concerning these forms. Our three exegetical methods for determining divine commands concerning forms are applicable. In particular we look for explicit commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inferences. In some cases we will find that God’s divine

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] M.S. Bushell, 132-3.
\end{footnotes}
warrant concerning a form is very specific; but in other cases His divine warrant may be less specific. For instance, in the worship element of reading which is established by approved examples,\textsuperscript{19} we can also show by approved examples that God is somewhat specific about the form of reading that He desires in worship. In other words, we cannot choose to read anything we want in worship, like the newspaper or Homer’s Iliad. Rather, we must read God’s word in the hearing of all the people. This is a specific form of reading that is governed by the RPW. Another element of worship that carries a less specific form is that of prayer. Again, both the element and the form of prayer are divinely warranted by the method of approved examples,\textsuperscript{20} and from these examples we see that the form of prayer is less specific than that of, say, the form of reading. Indeed the form of prayer is warranted by the “manner” spoken of in the Lord’s Prayer; but, by the approved examples shown in Scripture we see that the actual words used in prayer are ordinarily extemporaneous. Other forms of worship will be warranted in a similar manner.

Finally, a circumstance of worship may be defined as the temporal and spatial condition in which an element of worship is carried out. Classical examples of circumstances are given by the time and place of worship. But circumstances of worship may also include the sequential order in which the elements of worship are conducted and the physical setting that facilitates an element of worship. For instance, a circumstance of worship would determine whether or not we sing two songs instead of three. Other examples of circumstances include whether or not we use a pulpit for preaching, or pews for the congregation. Again, our three exegetical methods for determining divine commands may be

\textsuperscript{19} Neh 9:3, Luke 4:16-17.

used for the category of circumstances. In particular, we look for explicit commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inferences. Similar to the case of forms, we sometimes find that God’s command is very specific concerning some particular circumstances of worship, while other circumstances of worship are warranted less specifically. For instance, in the Old Testament God was very specific about the circumstances associated with the element of sacrifice – after David conquered Jerusalem a sacrifice could only be offered in Jerusalem where God had chosen to place his name.\textsuperscript{21} In contrast, and in dealing with a different circumstance of worship, we find the New Testament to warrant the appropriate time of worship services but with a less specific command. In 1 Cor 11:33 we read, “Wherefore, my brethren, \textit{when ye come together} to eat [the Lord’s Supper], tarry one for another [italics added].” Within this divine warrant which addresses the circumstance of meeting time, we find a mandate to tarry one for another. In other words, our meeting time should take into consideration as much as possible the weaknesses and schedules of other believers. This is a divine warrant.

One of the most general divine warrants which tends to apply to many circumstances of worship is found in 1 Cor 14:40 which says, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”\textsuperscript{22} This is obviously an appeal to the divine law of God written in the hearts of all men,\textsuperscript{23} and this is what the Westminster Confession of Faith means when it 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

\textsuperscript{21} Deut 12:2-7, 1 Chr 22:1. Note: with the abrogation of sacrifice, the specific circumstance of location was also abrogated (John 4:19-24).

\textsuperscript{22} Luke 6:31 provides another divine warrant that applies generally to all of life, including worship.

\textsuperscript{23} Rom 2:14,15.
prudence [italics added].” Notice that the confession is careful to say that there are “some” circumstances that are governed by light of nature. In other words, as we have seen, God does not leave all circumstances of worship to be governed by 1 Cor 14:40 alone. However, until a more specific divine warrant for a circumstance is found in Scripture, the light of nature anticipated in 1 Cor 14:40 is intended to suffice for our direction in worship. When this happens, we do not speak of the circumstance as having “no divine warrant” – we simply recognize that the divine warrant is not very specific and we don’t add to God’s word by requiring more than the light of nature requires.

**Biblical Evidence**

It is generally agreed that the RPW is an inferred doctrine from Scripture, much like the doctrines of the Trinity, and the Covenants of Works and Grace. Nevertheless, there are a few Bible passages that come very close to stating the RPW explicitly. These passages are listed as follows:

Deut 4:2. *Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it*, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you [italics added].

Deut 12:32. *What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it* [italics added].

Mark 7:6-8. He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, *This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for*  

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24 Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Article 6.
doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of
God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many
other such like things ye do [italics added].

Col 2:20-23. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the
world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,
(Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after
the commandments and doctrines of men? 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 [italics added].

These passages contextually include the subject of God’s worship, and the fault to be avoided
in these passages is to worship God according to the autonomous desires of man as opposed
to His own specific desires. This fault is illustrated time and time again in the Bible.

Wherever false worship may be found in Scripture, a violation of the RPW is its cause. For
example, the reason Cain’s sacrifice was unacceptable to God was because he violated the
RPW when he offered a sacrifice that was unacceptable to God.\textsuperscript{25} The reason high places of
worship were forbidden was because they violated the RPW when offerings were made
contrary to God’s commands outside of Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{26} The reason Jeroboam is said twenty-
two times to have “made Israel to sin” was because he violated the RPW by setting up altars
outside of Jerusalem and appointing non-Levites to minister before the Lord.\textsuperscript{27} The reason
Israel was exiled was because they violated the RPW by consistently introducing the

\textsuperscript{25} Gen 4:3-7.

\textsuperscript{26} Deut 12:13-14, 2 Chr 6:5-6.

\textsuperscript{27} 1 Kgs 12:26-33.
worshipful abominations of Manessah in throughout Jerusalem and Judea.\textsuperscript{28} The reason Israel was plagued with God’s displeasure throughout their history was because they violated the RPW by introducing their own inventions (additions) into worship rather than seeking to obey God’s commands.\textsuperscript{29} The reason Jesus was disgusted with the worship of the Pharisees was because they violated the RPW when they set aside the commandments of God in favor of their own manmade traditions.\textsuperscript{30} The reason Paul warned the Colossians about “will worship” was because it violated the RPW being rooted in the commandments of men rather than the commandments of God.\textsuperscript{31} The reason Titus rebuked the Cretians sharply was because they violated the RPW when they sought to obey Jewish fables and commandments of men rather than turning to the truth.\textsuperscript{32} In short, the biblical evidence for the RPW is overwhelming and we find it under every rock and in every crevice of the Scriptures.

**Objections**

The RPW is known primarily as a Reformed doctrine, and many have gone so far as to say that the principle has been rejected by Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anglicans. However, Professor Frame has recently pointed out that “Most everything in Lutheran and Anglican worship … such as vestments, processionals and incense, arise from some theological reflection, including a biblical rationale. So Lutherans and Anglicans too, in the

\textsuperscript{28} 2 Kgs 23:26-27.

\textsuperscript{29} Deut 17:3, Ps 99:8, 106:39, Eccl 7:29, Jer 19:5, 32:35, Amos 6:5.

\textsuperscript{30} Mark 7:5-13.

\textsuperscript{31} Col 2:16-23.

\textsuperscript{32} Titus 1:12-14.
final analysis, want worship that is justified by Scripture.” Even so, among those who would consider themselves to be Reformed there has been considerable debate over the categorizing methods that are used and the proper conclusions that should be drawn from the RPW.

Perhaps Professor Frame has been the most influential voice in challenging the traditional categories that have been used to exercise the RPW. While affirming the basic principle that God’s worship must be derived from the Scriptures alone, in a recent book article Professor Frame finds fault with the “traditional view” of the RPW in the following ways:

1. Frame objects to applying the RPW to formal worship settings only and advocates an extension of the principle to include all of life. In other words, at some level we must have a divine warrant for everything we do. This position is based on such passages as 1 Cor 10:31 and Rom 12:1.

2. Frame says there is no biblical basis for making distinctions between elements and circumstances of worship. He asks, “Where does Scripture define elements in contrast with circumstances?”

3. Frame says that the traditional idea of worship being divided into certain elements independent of other elements is a form of philosophical atomism, rather than anything that can be derived from Scripture (Aristotelian, not biblical). For instance, Frame denies John Murray’s claim that rules governing prayer do not govern song even though they may have similar form and content.

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4. Frame says that our actions of worship [meaning elements] are not carried out independent of one another. Frame says our songs often have the content of prayer and teaching. Beyond that, everything we say in worship is prayer, and everything we do in worship is teaching.

5. Frame objects to distinguishing between those aspects of worship that have “religious significance” and those that don’t. This objection is made to refute the idea that an element of worship is defined as a religiously significant part of worship.

6. Frame says that the Bible does not provide a divine list of elements for different worship settings. Here Frame is looking for a specific list of elements that pertain to synagogue worship, post-resurrection worship, private worship, family worship, devotions at community events, etc.

7. Frame points out that the Bible does not use the traditional concept of circumstance in relationship to worship. In other words, the Bible does not provide a list of circumstances any more than it provides a list of elements.

8. Frame does not find the distinction between circumstances and elements as being particularly helpful. In his words, “applying it is not easy”.

9. Frame warns his readers about adding more precision to the Scriptures than they are meant to convey by using the categories of elements and circumstances to apply the RPW.

Without a doubt, Professor Frame has caused many in the Reformed faith to rethink their position on the RPW, and for the most part this challenge has been good. In the paragraphs that follow, a brief response will be made to each of Professor Frame’s concerns.
First, Professor Frame is correct and helpful in his recognition that the RPW (in principle) applies to all of life. Indeed, this is what the Westminster Confession of Faith means when it says, “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men [italics added].” \(^{35}\) In applying the RPW to all of life, as well as to the more traditional realm of conscious worship (public or private), Professor Frame is quick to distinguish between “narrow” and “broad” applications of the RPW. In doing so, he shows an understanding that is critical to his point; namely, that the application of the same principle to different problems does not make the problems equal. This fact may be illustrated by considering an analogous situation. Say an engineer applies the same principles of mathematics to design a space shuttle as he does to design a rocking chair. Certainly the principles of analysis are the same, but the problems are not. If the engineer misapplies the mathematical principles while designing the space shuttle, multiple lives may be lost and millions of dollars could be wasted. On the other hand, if the engineer misapplies the mathematical principles while designing the rocking chair, there is very little chance that anyone would get hurt and very little money will be wasted. In the same way, applying the RPW to the conscientious worship of God is different from applying this principle to the everyday task of changing a tire or buying cabbage. God’s own zeal for his worship is tremendously high, \(^{36}\) and violations of his precepts in matters of worship have

\(^{35}\) Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Article 6.

\(^{36}\) Exod 20:4-6, 34:14.
resulted in sudden death.\textsuperscript{37} This is not to minimize a sin of any type, but not all sins are equally heinous in the sight of God,\textsuperscript{38} and sins that pertain to false worship are most evidently offensive to Him.

Professor Frame’s second objection to the traditional view of the RPW is that the Bible does not make distinctions between elements and circumstances of worship. For that matter, it does not distinguish between forms either. While Professor Frame’s observation is correct, he would certainly not object to using extra-biblical language if it helped to clarify a biblical teaching. Examples of this occur when we distinguish between the three parts of saving faith,\textsuperscript{39} or when we talk about the two natures of Christ.\textsuperscript{40} The words behind these doctrines are not necessarily biblical, but the concepts are. In the Bible, we do not find an explicit reference to three different categories of divine warrant (elements, forms, and circumstances). But these categories are distinguishable from each other and they provide a systematic approach for studying the commands of God in worship, and in all of life for that matter.

Professor Frame’s third and fourth concern is that we should be cautious about using Aristotelian logic to identify elements of worship as though they were independent of each other. In other words, the rules that govern one element of worship may be intended to govern another element of worship as well. There are three responses to this concern of Dr. Frame’s. First, it is not Aristotelian logic that draws us to think about worship in terms of

\begin{itemize}
\item Lev 10:1-2, 1 Chr 13:9-10, 15:13, 1 Cor 11:29-30.
\item Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q&A 83.
\item Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 14, Article 2.
\item Ibid, Chapter 8, Article 2.
\end{itemize}
elements and categories – it is God’s own example. When God gave laws concerning his worship in the Old Testament he told the Israelites to sacrifice animals a certain way, he told them sanctify themselves according to specific commands, and he told them to erect the Tabernacle and Temple with laws of great detail. Many other categories of God’s instruction could be proffered. These instructions did not have general applications to other elements of God’s worship; they had very specific applications for the categories that were being discussed. Even so, we take our example from God (not Aristotle) and continue to think about worship in terms of elements and categories. Secondly, it is quite true that different elements of worship have a common form and circumstance. For example, the words of a song may be similar to the words of a prayer and we may do both standing up, but this does not destroy the basic “independence” of the element. Singing and praying are distinctive activities with their own governing rules, just as teaching and preaching are.\textsuperscript{41} It is not philosophical atomism that separates these things; it is philosophical idealism that unites them. It may be helpful to pose the example of preaching and singing. Certainly these elements share a common form and content, but are the rules which govern them the same? If they were, wouldn’t it be lawful to have children, women, and other non-ordained individuals in the pulpit preaching on Sunday morning? No, the distinctions must be preserved because God makes the distinctions and because he provides his own principles for their governance. It is the task of the theologian to extract these principles from Scripture in so far as God presents them – this is the application of the RPW. Thirdly, if Frame is correct about his concern for imposing a false system of logic on the Scriptures and we take his cue to discard the whole system, we lose our ability to apply exegetical methods for determining

\textsuperscript{41} Matt 11:1, Acts 5:42.
what God approves of in worship. For instance, if we don’t identify an independent element of worship, how do we look for an explicit command concerning that element, or an approved example of it, or a good and necessary inference related to it? In short, we lose our ability to think about God’s worship. If we tear down one system we must replace it with something else, or walk away completely. It is not clear what Frame’s replacement is.

In Professor Frame’s fifth concern, he objects to identifying an element of worship as something with “religious significance”. Frame’s point is correct: all things in worship have religious significance and it is improper to identify the category of circumstance as not having any religious significance. But if we afford our brothers who make these statements a measure of charity, we must confess that we understand what they are trying to say. There is a scale of religious significance that we understand, and we certainly don’t place most circumstances of worship on the same level with elements and forms. Was the fact the Eutychus sat in the window while Paul preached as significant as the message itself? Even so, the distinction of “religious significance” is probably not the most helpful for identifying an element of worship. Rather, it is preferable to use the definition given in this thesis; namely, that an element of worship is an activity of worship that is distinct from other activities of worship (e.g. singing, preaching, etc.).

Professor Frame’s sixth and seventh concern with the traditional view of the RPW is that the Bible does not provide a list of so called elements and circumstances of worship as they pertain to different types of worship (e.g., public versus private worship). For the most part this observation is true; however, one passage in the Old Testament does provide a substantial list of worship elements for that particular dispensation:

2 Chr 2:4. Behold, I build an house to the name of the LORD my God, to dedicate it to him, and to burn before him sweet *incense*, and for the continual *shewbread*, and for the *burnt offerings* morning and evening, on the *sabbaths*, and on the *new moons*, and on the *solemn feasts* of the LORD our God. This is an ordinance for ever to Israel [italics added].

From this passage we see that elements of worship in the Temple included burning incense, offering shewbread, sacrificing animals, and observing sabbaths, new moons, and feast days. Using other passages in the Old Testament, we could add burning candlesticks, singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, praying, and offering benedictions for the people. But is it proper to look for such a concise summary of elements when we recognize that our analysis is somewhat artificial and imposed on the text for the purpose of systematizing our thoughts? What other doctrine of Systematic Theology would be required to meet such a standard? For instance, where do we require the Scriptures to list for us the three parts of saving faith, the two natures of Christ, or the three persons in the Trinity? The answer is we don’t. Nor should we require the Scriptures to provide a complete list of elements, forms, and circumstances of worship pertaining to varies types and settings of worship. These things should be gleaned through the systematic application of the RPW.

Professor Frame’s eighth concern is that he has difficulty using the concepts of elements, forms, and circumstances for applying the RPW. If that is the case, Professor Frame and others who struggle with this method of study ought not to use it. After all, there is nothing sacred about this form of analysis. What *is* sacred is the RPW itself. As mentioned earlier, the three methods of exegesis which include finding explicit commands, identifying approved examples, and using good and necessary inference, can be employed for
determining divine warrants without distinguishing sharply between categories of elements, forms, and circumstances. This has been done on pages 11 and 12 for singing, the Christian Sabbath, and taking lawful oaths. Having said this, it is the decided opinion of the author that these categories are extremely helpful and that the most proper application of the RPW can be made by retaining them.

Finally, Professor Frame’s ninth concern is that the traditional understanding of elements and circumstances of worship has crossed the line, and has sought to add to the Scriptures rather than helping us to obey what is written. In other words, the categories themselves have turned on the RPW and have produced the exact opposite result for which they were intended. In Frame’s short document, he did not have space to elaborate on this concern, but if his concern were true it would be a serious charge indeed. Undoubtedly, Frame’s warnings must be heeded and all who seek to apply the RPW should be on the lookout for this fault.

Conclusion

In this chapter, an overview of the RPW has been presented by way of definition, exegetical method, and traditional categories of divine warrant. It is further shown that this principle is eminently biblical, but not without controversy. As Professor Frame has provided the most thought provoking material in recent literature concerning the RPW, his concerns about the “traditional view” of the RPW have been responded to briefly in this chapter. In summary, the traditional view of the RPW is upheld in this chapter and will be used later to study the appropriate use of dance in the worship of God.
CHAPTER 3
BIBLICAL ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to exercise the Regulative Principle of Worship as it applies to the element of worshipful dance. In this chapter, biblical texts that reference dancing will be examined to see if they provide a divine warrant for including dance in God’s worship. The exegetical methods described in the previous chapter will be used to conduct this examination. In particular the methods of identifying an explicit command, finding an approved example, or making a good and necessary inference will be used. As will be shown in this chapter, dance is indeed a divinely warranted element of God’s worship. Based upon this finding, the biblical texts are examined further to determine if any divine warrants of specific form or circumstance concerning this element exist. In the end it is shown that lawful dancing in the Bible is carried out in a form that uses exuberant motions of the body and a joyful demeanor. Furthermore, the circumstances of this lawful worship reveal that it is consistently carried out in the context of singing, musical instruments, sacrifice, and feasting.

The Warranted Element of Dancing

In this section of the thesis, all Bible passages in which dancing is mentioned will be presented to determine whether or not dancing has a divine warrant as an element of worship.
Before we begin this exercise, it is important to state more clearly what we are looking for under the heading of dance as an element of worship. Perhaps this is more easily done by stating what we are not looking for under this heading. For example, we are not looking for the accidental motions of God’s people while they are attending to His worship. This means that minor motions in the church pew are not to be considered as elements of worship, even if they are attended by rhythmic music that encourages one to sway back and forth, or to shift their weight from one foot to the other – these are circumstances of worship that are governed by their own divine warrants (e.g., 1 Cor 14:40). Furthermore, we are not looking for the element of dance among nationalistic processions, secular festivities, or extemporaneous expressions of joy. Rather, we are looking for a distinct activity of God’s worship that is divinely warranted in Scripture by either an explicit command, an approved example, or a good and necessary inference. If a divine warrant of this type can be found, then dancing should be included as an element of worship that appears, say, in the church bulletin as being distinct from other worship elements listed in the bulletin. For example, a pastor may lead his congregation in worship by saying, “We will begin our worship by singing hymn number 408. Immediately following this hymn we will enjoy a performance of our liturgical dancing troupe and then the sermon will begin.” This order of worship is intended to illustrate what we are looking for when we seek to identify dance as an element of worship. With this understanding, let us begin our search for a divine warrant of this type.

The Dance of Miriam in Exod 15:20-22

The first episode of dance that occurs in the Bible is the dance of Miriam recorded in Exod 15:20-22. This dance follows directly on the heels of Israel’s crossing the Red Sea,
which showed God’s magnificent deliverance of his people from the hands of Pharaoh. In response to this miraculous event, we are told that Moses and the children of Israel broke into a song that has been recorded for us in the Bible. Either after the singing of Israel stopped, or while it was continuing, Miriam led all the women in a worshipful response by using timbrels, song, and dance. Immediately following this event, Moses led the people of Israel from the Red Sea into the wilderness of Shur where we are told that they traveled for three days without water. To extract a divine warrant for dance as an element of worship from this text, we must employ one or more of our exegetical methods. Namely, we must find an explicit command, an approved example, or a good and necessary inference that identifies dancing as a divinely warranted element of worship in this event.

In the first case it is clear that the text contains no explicit warrant for dance as an element of God’s worship. For instance, there are no statements that say, “Dance unto the Lord,” or “Praise the Lord with your dance,” or anything of this sort. Therefore, the method of explicit command does not expose a divine warrant for including dance as an element of God’s worship.

In the second case, however, one is initially prone to consider Miriam’s dance as an approved example of worship. But on second blush, there may be some uncertainty with this conclusion. For instance, what are we to make of the three days journey without water, and the subsequent admonishment of the Lord? In this admonition God says:

Exod 15:26. … If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his

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commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee [italics added].

By withholding water for three days, God had brought upon the Israelites a plague similar (though not identical) to one experienced by the Egyptians; namely, the plague of thirst that accompanied the bloody waters of Egypt.\(^\text{44}\) This admonition of God implies that Israel had not diligently harkened unto the voice of the Lord and had not done that which was right in His sight. If this was the case, what was it that caused God’s displeasure?

In correspondence with Professor Frame on this topic, he has upheld the theory that Miriam’s dance was carried out in the context of an approved example of worship. Professor Frame defends this position by offering the following points:

1. That the three days without water are disconnected from the crossing of the Red Sea, the song of Moses, and the dance of Miriam.

2. That admonitions like the one found in Exod 15:26 are common throughout the Pentateuch and that they don’t necessarily refer backward to any particular sin of Israel.

3. That a comparable passage in Exod 17:1 exists which describes God bringing his people to Rephidim where there is no water. In comparing these two passages Frame asks, “Should we infer, then, that there was something sinful in their gathering of manna in Exod 16:31-36?”

4. That God’s displeasure is not truly shown in this case since He responded to Moses’ intercession before any negative consequences took place (Exod 15:25).

\(^{44}\text{Exod 7:19.}\)
5. That an allusion to Miriam’s dance is made in Ps 149:3 and Ps 150:4 and that this reference settles the question about God’s approval of Israel’s worship in Exod 15. These are thought provoking points; however, they do not completely expel all doubt concerning the approved nature of Israel’s worship in this passage. The following paragraphs are used to discuss Professor Frame’s points.

First, Professor Frame denies a necessary connection between the worship of Israel (including Miriam’s dance) and the three days without water. Professor Frame may be correct; there may be no connection between these two events. But we are talking about contiguous events in time – the worship of Israel was followed immediately by three days of water deprivation. It is more natural for the author to connect these events rather than to disconnect them.

Secondly, Professor Frame points out that warnings similar to Exod 15:26 are common throughout the Pentateuch and that they don’t necessarily refer back to a particular sin. Indeed, there are formulations of this same warning throughout the Pentateuch; however, when examined closely it may be shown that these warnings are given in a significantly different context compared to that of Exod 15:26. The difference in context may be explained as follows: All other warnings of this type in the Pentateuch are found amidst a proactive and extensive dialogue with God concerning the blessing of future obedience and the curse of future disobedience. In contrast, the warning of Exod 15:26 appears all alone in the midst of a reactive situation – Israel had already disobeyed and been admonished through suffering. God’s admonition stood as a reminder of what would continue to happen if they persisted in their sin. In short, the reactive context of Exodus

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15:26 causes one to look back for a *particular* sin to which the admonition applied. This is not the case with other similar passages in the Pentateuch. Note: in the opinion of the author, it is likely that the particular sin in question had to do with the worship offered by Miriam. Of course, another opinion offered by Dr. Frame would be that God’s admonition applied to the grumbling of Israel in verse 24. It is possible that both situations contributed to God’s displeasure.

Professor Frame’s third point is based upon a comparable water passage that exists in Exod 17:1. Here Israel is brought to Rephidim where there is no water to drink and the people murmur against Moses as they did in Exod 15:24. Using the same logic applied to the water incident of Exod 15:24-25, Frame seeks to find an antecedent sin that is responsible for Israel’s suffering in Exod 17:1. Here Frame asks if the gathering of manna in Exod 16:31-36 could possibly be that antecedent sin? The implied answer to that question is obviously no. However, in response to Frame’s point it should be noted that these two passages are not as comparable as they seem at first blush. First of all there is no warning in Exod 17:1ff similar to Exod 15:26 to indicate that Israel’s suffering at Rephidim was the direct result of sin. It may not have been. Secondly, the preceding account of gathering manna in Exod 16:31-36 is not a story of a particular event in the life of Israel – it is a rehearsal of God’s commands concerning manna and a general statement as to how long the provisions of manna lasted. There is no sin to be found in passages like this.

Professor Frame’s fourth point is that no displeasure of God was truly shown in Exod 15:23-25 since God responded to Moses’ intercession before any negative consequences took place. Presumably Professor Frame is looking for a more severe consequence than thirst.

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46 See Chapter 4 for further discussion of this possibility.
But here we must allow for the fact that all consequences of this event may not have been disclosed in the passage. A three day privation of water is enough to nearly kill a healthy human being who is exposed to the elements of nature, and it would certainly kill a human being that was suffering from other illnesses or from advanced years of life. In other words, it is likely that people died from this event! If this was true, then the consequences of this event would indeed be severe enough to indicate God’s displeasure. Of course, this point only addresses the severity of the situation; it does not necessarily connect the suffering of Israel to a particular sin.

Professor Frame’s last point is that Psalms 149 and 150 refer to Miriam’s dance and that these references carry with them God’s approval of Israel’s worship in Exod 15. In response to this point, the author respectfully submits the observation that Miriam is not mentioned at all in these two psalms, nor is the worship of Exod 15. However, these two psalms do show approved examples of musical instruments and dance in Israel’s worship. This point will be address more fully later.

Professor Frame’s points illustrate the fact that we cannot be absolutely certain about God’s displeasure concerning Israel’s worship in Exod 15:20-22. However, there is enough doubt in the author’s mind concerning this case to make him withhold judgment concerning God’s approval of this worship. In conclusion, we simply cannot tell if this was an approved example or not, and we must seek our divine warrant for dance as an element of worship (using the method of approved examples) from other passages of Scripture.

Before leaving this text of Scripture, we must ask whether or not there are any good and necessary inferences that we can draw from the passage that would provide a divine warrant for dance as an element of God’s worship? The answer to this question is no.
Nothing in this passage requires us to infer that dance is a divinely warranted element of Israel’s worship; but, the mere presence of Miriam’s dance shows that Israel was inclined to include dance as part of their worship. This inclination of Israel, however, does not reach the status of divine warrant since even pagan nations are inclined to do the same.

The Dance of Israel and the Golden Calf in Exod 32:19-24

Another account in the Bible that shows dancing in Israel’s worship is found in Exod 32:19-24. This account describes the false worship of Israel that had developed while Moses communed with God on the top of Mount Sinai; when God had written his laws on stone tables with his own finger and delivered them to Moses. In this event, the people of Israel had taken parts of their golden jewelry and melted it down to make the image of a golden calf. Aaron then built an altar before the golden calf, and the people worshipped the calf as the god which had brought them up out of the land of Egypt. Sacrifice and dance were part of this worship. When Moses came down from the mountain and saw the golden calf and the people dancing, his anger waxed hot and he broke the stone tables that God had given him. Moses then burned the calf in the fire, ground it to powder, sprinkled the power upon water, and made the children of Israel to drink it.

It is not necessary to spend much time on this passage to determine whether or not a divine warrant for dancing in worship can be extracted. It is fairly obvious that there are no explicit commands mandating the people to dance, the example of worship is far from being approved, and there are no good and necessary inferences that can be drawn from the text to provide the divine warrant that we seek. If anything, an inference could be made from this

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Exod 32:6, 1 Cor 10:7.
text to show that God disapproves of dance in worship; and although this inference might be a good one, it would be difficult to show that it is necessary.

The Dance of the Daughters of Shiloh in Judg 21:16-25

Another example of dancing in Israel’s worship is found in Judg 21:16-25. This example is found in the context of war between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of Israel concerning the lewd behavior of the men of Gibeah.48 In this battle, a great slaughter of the tribe of Benjamin occurred and many of their cities were destroyed including cattle and women. The men of Benjamin who remained did not have enough wives to reproduce their tribe, and so the rest of Israel devised a plan in which a sufficient number of wives from Israel could be procured without offering them voluntarily. The plan was as follows: During a yearly feast in Shiloh, the men of Benjamin were to lie in wait for the daughters of Shiloh to appear dancing at the festival. Upon seeing the daughters of Shiloh, the men of Benjamin were to “catch every man his wife” and carry them off to the land of Benjamin. In Judg 21:23 we read, “And the children of Benjamin did so, and took them wives, according to their number, of them that danced, whom they caught: and they went and returned unto their inheritance, and repaired the cities, and dwelt in them [italics added].”

In this example, it is important to see that the daughters of Shiloh we not simply engaged in an extemporaneous outburst of joy as they danced; but rather, they were engaged in a ceremonial activity that was part of the yearly feast at Shiloh. This is shown by verse 21 which says, “… if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance (chul) in the dances (mecholah).” In other words, the daughters of Shiloh participated (chul) in the

choreographed elements (mecholah) of the feast. The question that remains is whether or not we can extract a divine warrant for dancing in God’s worship from this text using our standard exegetical methods?

First of all, it is clear that our text does not include an explicit command that requires the daughters of Shiloh to dance at the yearly feast. Indeed, if anything the text seems to leave their particular involvement as an option. Verse 21 says, “… if the daughters of Shiloh come out to dance … [italics added].” In other words, no divine warrant for dancing may be found in this text by way of explicit command.

Our second exegetical method for determining a divine warrant for dance is to look for an approved example of worship. At first blush, one might be prone to deny a positive interpretation of this text, since it clearly involves the forbidden practice of man-stealing\(^\text{49}\) and ends with the disclaimer, “In those days, there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own sight.” However, our positive warrant is not to be sought in the man-stealing component of this text. We are looking for an approved example of Israel’s worship that incorporates the element of dancing. Undoubtedly a lawful worship service may be disrupted by sins that are unrelated to the worship service itself. This may have been the situation here.

As it turns out, our text provides neither an explicit approval nor disapproval for the worship service of Israel. But, in the midst of this silence, we are prone to lean toward the conclusion that God approved of this worship. The reasons for leaning in this direction are as follows: First, verse 19 tells us that this was an annual feast of the LORD (Yahweh). As

\(^{49}\) Exod 21:16, Deut 24:7, 1 Tim 1:10.
such, it must have been one of the three annual feasts required by God in the Pentateuch and the obedience of God’s people is shown by their care in keeping this feast at the appointed time. Secondly, we are told that the feast was held at Shiloh where the Tabernacle was pitched in the days of the Judges. The Bible tells us that God was very careful to specify the place of these feasts (a circumstance of worship governed by its own divine warrant) and the obedience of God’s people in this matter is further evidence that they sought to conduct their worship in a lawful way. So, based upon these considerations, we conclude that God was likely to have approved of the worship service at Shiloh, and that dancing is established by this text as a divinely warranted element of Israel’s worship.

David’s First Attempt to Transport the Ark in
2 Sam 6:1-11 and 1 Chr 13:1-14

The Bible texts under this heading pertain to David’s first attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant from Kirjathjearim to Jerusalem. During this attempt, David assembled all of Israel together for a worshipful procession in which the Ark was transported on a new ox-drawn cart, and all the people “played before God with all their might” while singing and playing harps, psalteries, timbrels, cymbals, and trumpets. Along the way, Uzza put forth his hand to steady the cart and was struck dead by God. As a result of this calamity, David was made afraid and turned aside to temporarily place the Ark in the house of Obededom the Gittite who was subsequently blessed. In 1 Sam 18:6-7 and 1 Chr 15:29, the word “play” is used to describe dancing.

50 Exod 34:23, Deut 16:16.
51 Deut 12:5-7,13-14, 16:16, Lev 17:2-5.
52 Kirjathjearim was approximately two miles east of Jerusalem.
An important question to answer before continuing forward in our study is whether or not these passages describe a worship service at all? One’s first inclination is to consider this traveling caravan as a traveling caravan – not a worship service. But upon examining David’s second attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem (an event to be discussed later), we find that God expected this procession to be ordered according to the divine warrants of public worship.\(^{53}\) By virtue of this fact, we conclude that this was a worship service, albeit a traveling one, and that we are justified in looking for divine warrants concerning worship in these texts. In the following paragraphs, a divine warrant for including dance as an element of God’s worship will be sought using the exegetical methods previously discussed.

First, we observe that there are no explicit commands in these texts concerning dance as an element of worship. Indeed, there are no imperative statements at all; therefore, we conclude that a divine warrant for including dance in worship may not be found in these texts using the method of explicit commands.

Secondly, we seek to find a divine warrant for dance using the method of approved examples. But can we rightly say that the worship of Israel in these texts was approved? The answer to this question is no, and the following reasons are offered to justify this conclusion: 1) The procession was attended with God’s disapproval as shown by striking Uzza dead. Although this judgment would appear to be rendered upon a single person, David clearly recognized this as a judgment that was rendered upon the whole procession.\(^{54}\) 2) The procession ended in relative separation between God and David as indicated by David’s response in 2 Sam 6:9 and 1 Chr 13:12. 3) The worshipful procession was not

\(^{53}\) 1 Chr 15:13-14.

\(^{54}\) 2 Sam 6:8, 1 Chr 13:11, 1 Chr 15:13.
successful – the Ark did not make it to Jerusalem and the entire service was interrupted by a sign of divine displeasure. Based upon these considerations, we conclude that this was not an exemplary worship service, and that no divine warrant for including dance as an element of worship may be extracted from these texts using the exegetical method of approved examples.

Finally, it is also obvious that there are no good and necessary inferences to be drawn from these texts that would expose a divine warrant for including dance as an element of God’s worship. David’s first attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem was a disaster, and we should find no divine warrants for ordering our worship in this case. But David’s second attempt to transport the Ark to Jerusalem was a different story.

David’s Second Attempt to Transport the Ark in
2 Sam 6:12-23 and 1 Chr 15:1-16:3

In the texts under this heading, we find David’s second attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. These texts also contain references to dancing. We are told in the Bible that the second attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem was made three months after the first attempt; which was enough time for David to reflect upon the failure of the first attempt and to observe the blessing that was being enjoyed by Obededom in whose house the Ark had been placed.\textsuperscript{55} With a renewed commitment to bring the Ark successfully to Jerusalem, David reorders the entire procession “after the due order … as Moses commanded according to the word of the LORD.”\textsuperscript{56} As such, David implements a number of reforms: 1) the Ark was to be carried on staves by the Levites, 2) the priests and the Levites were to

\textsuperscript{55} 2 Sam 6:11-12, 1 Chr 13:14.

\textsuperscript{56} 1 Chr 15:13-15.
sanctify themselves, 3) the Levites were appointed to be singers, musicians, and doorkeepers for the Ark, and 4) sacrifices were added to the procession. Note: the element of dance was retained. The conclusion of David’s second attempt was glorious! The Ark was successfully transported to Jerusalem, burnt offerings and peace offerings continued to be sacrificed, and a feast of celebration ensued. Now, the question remains, can a divine warrant for dance as an element of worship be extracted from these texts using our methods of exegesis?

Using our first method of exegesis, which looks for explicit commands concerning God’s worship, we notice that our texts do contain explicit commands but not in reference to dancing. The explicit commands in our text involve carrying the Ark of God, sanctifying the priests and Levites, and appointing singers and musicians. In the absence of an explicit command concerning dance, we conclude that our first method of exegesis does not reveal a divine warrant for including dance as an element of God’s worship.

Our second method of exegesis looks for an approved example of worship to establish a divine warrant concerning its elements. The question is this: Do our texts describe an approved example of God’s worship? And the answer to this question is emphatically yes. Our text tells us that in the preparations for this worship, David took extreme care to follow the prescribed order of Moses “according to the word of the Lord”. Furthermore, David’s own relationship with the Lord appears to be healed, and the entire procession was successful – the Ark actually made it to Jerusalem! If ever there was an

57 2 Sam 6:14,16,21, 1 Chr 15:29.
58 1 Chr 15:2,12,16.
59 2 Sam 6:9,21.
approved example of worship in Scripture, this is it! And among all of the elements of this approved worship, we find the element of dancing. Therefore, based upon these observations, and using the exegetical method of approved examples, we conclude more strongly than ever that dancing is a divinely warranted element of God’s worship.

Dancing in Psalm 118:27

Under this heading we discuss a psalm that at first glance appears to have no reference to dancing; however, a question of translation brings this psalm to our attention. Psalm 118:27 reads, “God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar” [italics added]. The word “sacrifice”, as translated by the Authorized Version, is translated by the New American Standard Version as “festival sacrifice” and by the New International Version as “festal procession”. Eaton believes that a better translation for this word is “pilgrim dance”. If indeed there is a reference in this text to dancing, it is clear that all three exegetical methods are satisfied for extracting a divine warrant for dance in the worship of God. Consider the following points: 1) There is an explicit command here because the statement is imperative, “Bind the pilgrim dance to the altar.” Binding may refer to an exclusive use of dance relative to the sacrificial altar. 2) This is an approved example of worship by virtue of the fact that the psalms were primarily sung in the Temple (though they certainly had a broader use than that) and therefore they are in exact agreement with God’s precepts concerning worship. 3) Based upon the previous two

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60 2 Sam 6:14,16,21, 1 Chr 15:29.

61 J. H. Eaton.


M.S. Bushell, 63.
exegetical methods, a good and necessary inference may be drawn to show that dancing is a
divinely warranted element, but this conclusion would be redundant. In summary, we
conclude that Psalm 118:27 contains a divine warrant for including dance as an element of
God’s worship, which supports the conclusions drawn from two previous texts.

**Dancing in Psalm 149:3 and Psalm 150:4**

Two other psalms in the Psalter are famous for referencing the worshipful element of
dance. These psalms are Psalm 149 and Psalm 150. Psalm 149:3 reads, “Let them praise his
name in the *dance*: let them sing praises unto him with the timbrel and harp [italics added].”
Psalm 150:4 read, “Praise him with the timbrel and *dance*: praise him with stringed
instruments and organs [italics added].” Similar to the discussion concerning Psalm 118:27,
it is clear that all three exegetical methods are satisfied for extracting a divine warrant for
dance from these psalms. Once again, this exercise has rallied support for the conclusions
that have been drawn from three previous texts.

**Other References to Dancing**

The previous subsections have considered biblical texts that reference dancing in
relationship to the worship service of God. However, there are other references to dancing in
the Bible that pertain to activities outside the context of conscientious worship. These texts
tend to reference one or more of the following: a) extemporaneous expressions of joy, b) nationalistic processions, and c) secular festivities. References for these texts are: Judg
11:34; 1 Sam 18:6,7, 21:11, 29:5, 30:6; Job 21:11, 40:20; Ps 30:11, 104:26; Eccl 3:4; Isa
Note: these texts will not be discussed further since they are outside the scope of this thesis.
The Warranted Form of Dancing

In the previous section, it was shown that five Bible passages provide a divine warrant for including dance as an element of God’s worship. These passages include: 1) the dance of the daughters of Shiloh in Judg 21:16-25, 2) David’s second attempt to transport the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6:12-23 and 1 Chr 15:1-16:3, 3) Psalm 118:27, 4) Psalm 149:3, and 5) Psalm 150:4. In this section of the thesis, we seek to use these same passages to identify the “form” of dancing that was divinely warranted in each case. In other words, what did the dancing look like? What was its content? To carry out this investigation, we will employ our standard exegetical methods to reveal the divine warrants for the form of dancing that pleases God in his worship. In particular, we will look for explicit commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inferences.

The Dance of the Daughters of Shiloh in Judg 21:16-25

The background of this text has been described previously where it has also been shown by the method of approved examples that dancing is a divinely warranted element in God’s worship. In this subsection, we will use our three exegetical methods to extract as much information as possible from the text for determining divinely warranted forms of dance.

First, let us consider whether or not the text contains any explicit commands regarding the proper form of dance that should be used. Upon a brief perusal of the text, we find no imperative statements that say, “Dance like this,” or, “Dance like that.” So we conclude that divinely warranted forms cannot be uncovered from this text using the method of explicit command.
Secondly, let us consider whether or not the text contains any divine warrant by way of approved examples for determining the proper form of dance. The reader will recall that it has already been determined that the case before us is approved; therefore, our task is to glean as much as possible from the example itself. But what does the example tell us about the proper form of dance? The answer is absolutely nothing. We are not told if the dancers moved quickly or slowly. We are not told if their motions were synchronized or random. In short, using this text we can glean no divine warrants by way of approved example for the proper form of dance in worship.

The third method of exegesis involving good and necessary inference is not helpful in this case either. There are no necessary inferences to make.

David's Second Attempt to Transport the Ark in 2 Sam 6:12-23 and 1 Chr 15:1-16:3

Similar to the previous passage, this passage says nothing by way of explicit command concerning the proper form of dance to be used in worship. However, a glimpse of light is shed on this topic by way of approved example. In 2 Sam 6:16 we read, “And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart [italics added].” The Hebrew word for “leap” in this passage is transliterated into English as “pizaz” and throughout the entire Bible this word is used only once and in this verse. Although the etymology of our English word “pizzazz” is probably uncertain, it is an interesting coincidence to say the least that David’s dancing was carried out with pizzazz. In any case, the meaning from the text is clear: the approved form of worshipful dance in this example is one that involves great excitement with physical motions that are likened to
leaping and jumping. Beyond this our text does not say; and we can learn no more by way of good and necessary inference either. There are no necessary inferences to make.

Dancing in Psalm 118:27, Psalm 149:3 and Psalm 150:4

While these psalms provide a clear divine warrant for including dance as an element of worship, they say virtually nothing about an approved form of dance. The most that can be gleaned from these psalms is by way of good and necessary inference in which we can see that these psalms are written in the context of great joy; and therefore the dancing mentioned in these psalms must also be carried out joyfully. This inference is necessary in order to make the dance fit the passage. The syllogism for this inference goes like this:

A. Psalms 118, 149, and 150 are joyful psalms.
B. Worshipful dancing is a part of these psalms.
C. Therefore worshipful dancing should be joyful.

To some it may seem unnecessary to prove that biblical dancing should be done joyfully. However, in our day and age when choreography is used to convey nearly all human emotions, it is fitting to point out that the Bible knows nothing of a sad or somber dance being conducted in God’s worship. Worshipful dancing should be done with great joy!

The Warranted Circumstance of Dancing

So far we have managed to conclude from Scripture that dance is an element of worship that has been warranted by divine precept. Furthermore, we have identified lawful forms of dance that include exuberant motions and a joyful demeanor. Note: these forms are not very specific. In the following subsections, we will explore the ordinary circumstances
of dance that attend each passage of Scripture in which lawful dancing has been identified. In particular, it will be useful to identify other worship elements that are present during a lawful dance,\(^{63}\) while recognizing that non-element type circumstances in our texts may be governed by the light of nature.\(^{64}\) As there are no explicit commands concerning the circumstances of dance, our considerations will be based upon the method of approved examples and good and necessary inference.

The Dance of the Daughters of Shiloh in Judg 21:16-25

The reader will recall that this example of worshipful dancing was shown to be lawful precisely because the circumstances of the dance were eminently biblical. In particular, Judg 21:19 tells us that the dancing took place at an appointed annual feast of the Lord,\(^{65}\) and that the feast was held in the appointed place of Shiloh where the Tabernacle was pitched. In this context, the coexisting elements of worship that serve to characterize the circumstances of this event are: sacrifice, musical instruments, singing, and feasting.\(^{66}\)

David's Second Attempt to Transport the Ark in 2 Sam 6:12-23 and 1 Chr 15:1-16:3

Under this heading, the circumstances of lawful dancing were characterized by a traveling caravan which moved from the house of Obededom the Gittite to the city of Jerusalem. As discussed previously, God expected this traveling caravan to be regulated by

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63 Elements of worship that are carried out in the same worship service are by definition circumstances of one another. This is because coexisting elements serve to characterize the time and place of worship.

64 Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 1, Article 6.

65 Eaton believes that this must have been the autumn Feast of Tabernacles as this was the most prominent feast in Israel between the time of Joshua and the Exile.

the worship laws that had been handed down by Moses according to the word of the Lord. As such, David carefully planned the element-type circumstances of the event to include singing, musical instruments, sacrifice, and feasting.\(^{67}\) Note: this list of circumstances is the same as that given in the previous example.

Dancing in Psalm 118:27

As noted previously, the psalms were primarily written to be sung in the Temple during worship services which were characterized by singing, musical instruments, sacrifice, and feasting. In the words of Michael Bushell, “The Psalter was intended for use as a ‘songbook’ for the Temple … This is evident from such psalm headings as those for Palms 30, 92, 100; from the headings of the Septuagint for Psalms 24, 29, 48, 93, and 94; from traditions of the Mishna and Talmud; as well as from the many technical, liturgical, and musical terms that appear both in the headings and in the texts of the various psalms.”\(^{68}\) The psalm referenced under this heading is clearly carried out in the context of sacrifice as the translation in question has been rendered as either “sacrifice”, “festival sacrifice”, or “festal procession”. Again, Eaton renders this translation as “pilgrim dance”. If this were not enough, the psalm in question also references the “horns of the altar”. The good and necessary inference to be made in this case is that the element-type circumstances of this psalm are the same as those which have been listed in the previous two subsections. The syllogism for this inference is as follows:

\(^{67}\) 2 Sam 6:15,17-19, 1 Chr 15:16, 16:1-3.

\(^{68}\) M.S. Bushell, 63.
A. Temple worship was attended by the element-type circumstances of singing, musical instruments, sacrifice, and feasting.

B. Psalm 118:27 was written in the context of Temple worship.

C. Therefore, the element-type circumstances of Psalm 118:27 include singing, musical instruments, sacrifice, and feasting.

This inference is a good inference based upon its logic; it is a necessary inference based upon our need to understand the circumstances in which the dancing of Psalm 118:27 was carried out.

Dancing in Psalm 149:3 and Psalm 150:4

The context of these two psalms is given by a reference to the “congregation of the saints” and the “sanctuary” of God. Furthermore, the strong reference to musical instruments in these two psalms indicates that the congregation of the saints and the sanctuary of God are found in the Temple itself where the elements of sacrifice, singing, and feasting were present. In other words, the element-type circumstances that attended the lawful dancing in these two psalms were the same as those found in the previous three examples. This conclusion is based upon the same inference and syllogism presented in the previous subsection.

Conclusion

This chapter has been written to investigate the divine warrant for including dance as an element of God’s worship. In this process we have discovered five Bible texts which seem to warrant the element of dance according to the exegetical methods of explicit

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69 Ps 149:1, 150:1.
commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inferences. Upon investigation of these texts, it has also been shown that the divinely warranted form of lawful dance is characterized by exuberant motions of the body and a joyful performance (not a tremendously specific form). Furthermore, it has been shown that the element-type circumstances of lawful dance are consistently given by the circumstances of singing, musical instruments, sacrifice, and feasting. These circumstances were germane to both the Tabernacle and Temple worship of ancient Israel and will be used in the following chapter to consider the appropriate use of dance as an element of worship in the Christian church today.
CHAPTER 4
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the biblical analysis of the previous chapter will be discussed. In particular, a picture of worshipful dancing will be constructed to illustrate the symbolic meaning of this worship, and to give the reader an appreciation for the integrated nature of dance with sacrifice. In conclusion, applications for the New Testament church will be drawn and other points of interest will be summarized.

A Picture of Worshipful Dancing

In the last chapter, it was shown by explicit commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inference, that dancing was a divinely warranted element of worship in ancient Israel. Examination of the biblical texts has also shown that this dance was carried out using exuberant motions of the body and a joyful demeanor. Furthermore, it has been shown that worshipful dancing was consistently carried out in the setting of song, musical instruments, sacrifice, and feasting. This section of the thesis is being written to illustrate, as far as possible, what a worship service may have looked like, including the element of dance. Beyond this, an attempt to describe the symbolic meaning of this worship will be made.

Figure 1 shows a picture of worshipful dancing in ancient Israel. The elements of this worship are shown to include: 1) trumpets being blown over the top of a sacrifice, 2) a
sacrifice being offered on an altar, and 3) worshippers dancing, playing musical instruments and singing. By studying this arrangement of worship in the light of the New Testament, we see the beautiful imagery of the Gospel proclamation, the redemptive work of Christ, and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit for those who believe. In the words of James Glasgow, “The trumpets [blown over the sacrifice] represented the gospel by the preaching

Figure 1. A lawful worship ceremony in Ancient Israel, involving trumpets, sacrifice, dance, musical instruments, and singing.

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71 This picture was drawn by Eon-Ju Jeon, 2708 Grant Lane, Columbia MO 65203
of which sinners are gathered to Jesus.” Indeed, this is the most natural understanding of the trumpets. Trumpets are notoriously used to announce good tidings and the priests blowing trumpets represent the preacher who heralds good news of salvation. The representation of the sacrifice is certainly no mystery for the Church. Heb 9:12 says, “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his [Jesus’] own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” The sacrifice on the altar represents Christ, who gave his own life to be a propitiation for our sins. By Christ’s own death, as represented by the sacrifice, God’s anger toward our sin was appeased and put to rest. This is the good news that is proclaimed by the trumpets as they are blown over the sacrifice in accordance with Num 10:10. To extend the imagery of this worship, we see the worshippers in front of the altar as they dance with exuberance and joy! This is the natural response of those who believe the good news that is being proclaimed by the trumpets as they sound over the sacrifice on the altar. To them, life has been proclaimed! And this life is shown in the lively dance, in the celebration accompanied by musical instruments, in the shouts for joy and in the singing of the saints. According to John Eaton, “The dancing is an expression of life in its richest form. The coming of the Saviour into Zion makes it the place of the waters of life. The worshippers drink the springs of divine life; their dance betokens the height of life, being the antithesis of the rolling of mourners in the valley of the death-shadow.” In this worship ceremony of ancient Israel, we have the gospel pictured with much symbolism and beauty. The elements of preaching, atonement, and life are all present.

72 J. Glasgow, 56.
73 Rom 3:25.
74 J.H. Eaton, 139.
Biblical Analysis in Retrospect

In this section we step back to look at the biblical texts that were examined in the preceding chapter in light of our reconstruction of a lawful worship service which included dance as an element. This reconstruction is shown in Figure 1 and has been discussed in the previous section. The elements of worship that were present in this reconstruction include: 1) trumpets being blown over the top of a sacrifice, 2) a sacrifice being offered on an altar, and 3) worshippers dancing, playing musical instruments and singing. In Chapter 3, it was shown that each of these elements was present in the five examples of approved worship. It will now be instructive to consider the unapproved examples of worship and to carefully speculate upon the reasons for their rejection.

The Dance of Miriam in Exod 15:20-22

As we reconsider the text under this heading, we recognize first of all that this example has not been shown to be “unapproved” in a conclusive sense. In Chapter 3 Professor Frame’s arguments for an approved situation were discussed but without dispelling all doubt concerning the case. In summary, it was decided that absolute certainty concerning God’s approval of this worship could not be obtained from the text because of a possible relationship to judgment that followed. Since the case could possibly be approved or unapproved, we will consider both possibilities in light of what we have learned from the cases that were clearly approved.

First, let us assume that the case of Miriam was approved by God. If this assumption is correct, in this example we would find a divine warrant for dancing in God’s worship that

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is unique when compared to the normative circumstance of the other approved cases. The most important difference is that we find no explicit or implicit reasons in our text for believing that sacrifices were present during the worshipful dance of Miriam. In all other respects, this dance seems to be similar to that of other lawful worship services that we have examined. For instance the form of dance appears to be joyful and exuberant, and the circumstances of the dance are attended by musical instruments and singing. If this example is considered to be a lawful example of worship, one must conclude that dancing apart from the presence of sacrifice is acceptable with God, all other things being equal.

On the other hand, let us assume that God did not approve of Miriam’s dance. What possible reason could be found for God’s disapproval of this worship? Two possible explanations come to mind: 1) that a female led a worship service, and that this is a forbidden practice in Scripture, or 2) that Miriam carried out elements of worship (dancing, musical instruments, etc.) that were only approved in the context of sacrifice. The first explanation can be eliminated by the approved example of the daughters of Shiloh that have been studied in Judg 21:16-25. In this text we see women participating in worship in much the same way as Miriam and her companions did in Exod 15:20-22; and under these circumstances we found no fault with the daughters of Shiloh. Even so, we should find no fault with Miriam and her companions for the same reason. This is not to say that we have uncovered a contradiction between the New and Old Testaments concerning the role of women in worship, we only note that whatever Miriam and the daughters of Shiloh were doing was not a violation of the roles of women in worship. It is probable that worshipful dancing was an

76 1 Cor 14:34, 1 Tim 2:12.

77 See Chapter 3 for this study.
activity that both men and women participated in, much like the element of singing. The second explanation for God’s possible displeasure in Miriam’s dance is more plausible; namely, that she carried out elements of worship that were only lawful in the context of sacrifice. Since there were no sacrifices being offered during Miriam’s dance, God’s displeasure with Israel’s worship was made manifest by the subsequent judgment of thirst and suffering. Indeed, this is the favored conclusion of the author.

But, if Miriam’s dancing and playing was unapproved because it accompanied no sacrifice, what would be God’s reasons for rejecting it? Why would the presence of a sacrifice be such an integral part of lawful dancing in an Old Testament worship service? While any answer offered for this question must be speculative, it seems reasonable to think about this question in light of Figure 1. If we were to remove the sacrifice from the figure, what would the remaining imagery say? In this modified figure we would see a priest blowing trumpets, but not over a sacrifice. The trumpets would be blown without any clear reference to the message of Jesus Christ and his atoning death. (This sounding of trumpets in God’s worship without a sacrifice has been noted by previous authors to constitute an unlawful worship service in Israel.)

However, our imagery concerning the dancing and playing in Figure 1 raises more eyebrows yet. Why are the worshippers dancing? Where is the well from which they draw their exuberant and joyful powers of life? If there is no sacrifice, what has given the worshippers the life that they are so pleased to display? Clearly, the answer to our question must be that blowing trumpets and dancing apart from the

78 J. Glasgow.

M.C. Ramsay, 1968, 10-14.

J. Girardeau.
sacrifice in the Old Testament would be the equivalent of preaching and living another gospel.\textsuperscript{79} If the sacrifice was not central to this imagery, the preaching of the trumpets could declare anything that they wanted, and the wellspring of life could be obtained in some other way apart from Christ. As every believer knows, this imagery would be repugnant to God as Acts 4:12 tells us, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” If the reconstruction of Figure 1 has any merit (and we think it does), and if the sacrifice in the case of Miriam’s dance was removed from the worship, there is a good and necessary inference that would point to the displeasure of God in this case. Under such circumstances, the following judgment in the wilderness of Shur makes perfect sense;\textsuperscript{80} and it is based upon this kind of holistic reasoning that we prefer the conclusion that Miriam’s dance was not an approved example of worship.

The Dance of Israel and the Golden Calf in Exod 32:19-24

There can be little doubt that God’s reason for rejecting the worship under this heading was the fact that Israel had fashioned for themselves an idol in direct violation of the Second Commandment. But, it is interesting to note that other aspects of this worship appear to have been in agreement with what one would expect of a lawful worship service. In the verses that precede our immediate text we read:

Exodus 32:3-6. And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and

\textsuperscript{79} Gal 1:6-8.

\textsuperscript{80} Exod 15:22-27.
they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD. And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play [dance, etc.].

Aside from the pagan practice of making an idol, this worship service may have mimicked parts of the normal worship practice of the Israelites, which included dancing and playing before the sacrificial altar. When Moses came down from the mountain he saw two things that displeased him especially: the golden calf, and the dancing (Exod 32:19). In other words, the Israelites were giving credit to the golden calf for their redeemed life from Egypt. And the life that had been redeemed was symbolized in the dancing and playing before the sacrificial altar. This was false worship seeking to use certain elements of lawful worship. In Figure 1 this would have been the equivalent of replacing the priests and trumpets with the statue of the golden calf.

David’s First Attempt to Transport the Ark in 2 Sam 6:1-11 and 1 Chr 13:1-14

Finally, our last example of unapproved worship is given by David’s first attempt to bring the Ark of the Covenant from Kirajathjearim to Jerusalem. As David noted himself, the reason that he failed to bring the Ark to Jerusalem was because he had not sought God after the due order.81 To correct for this mistake, David made several reforms in the second attempt that were presumably made in accordance with the due order. These reforms included: 1) the Ark was to be carried on staves by the Levites, 2) the priests and the Levites

81 1 Chr 15:13.
were to sanctify themselves, 3) the Levites were appointed to be singers, musicians, and doorkeepers for the Ark, and 4) sacrifices were added to the procession. Note: the worship element of dance was retained in both the first and second attempts of this procession.\textsuperscript{82}

Because David made several changes at once, we cannot tell from this text if one of the changes was critical with respect to dancing. But using the same rationale that was used previously, it would seem reasonable to conclude that dancing without the presence of a sacrifice was tantamount to preaching another gospel, and that the inclusion of sacrifices in David’s second attempt was in recognition of this fact. The Scriptures are beautiful when they describe the order of events in David’s second attempt:

\begin{verbatim}
2 Sam 6:13-15. And it was so, that when they that bare the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, he sacrificed oxen and fatlings. And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet [italics added].
\end{verbatim}

Is this not the perfect description of Figure 1? In the first attempt to transport the Ark, the worship service included all of this except for the sacrifice of animals. In the second attempt, however, sacrifices are clearly present and they are mentioned in multiple places of this account.\textsuperscript{83} The addition of sacrifice to the second attempt was not an incidental matter – it was a matter critical to the winning of God’s approval for the worship service at hand.

\textsuperscript{82}2 Sam 6:14,16,21, 1 Chr 15:29.

\textsuperscript{83}2 Sam 6:13,17-18, 1 Chr 15:26, 16:2.
Application for the Church

There are several issues that have not been addressed in this thesis with respect to dancing and sacrificial worship. For example, one might ask: Are there cases in the Old Testament where only sacrifices are present, without the blowing of trumpets and dancing? Or, are cases of lawful singing or playing musical instruments always carried out in the presence of sacrifice as well? These are good questions, but they are not the question of this thesis. The question of this thesis is not, “When are sacrifices, singing, or musical instruments pleasing to God?” but, “When is dancing pleasing to God?” As shown in this thesis, lawful worship services in the Bible that include dancing are always accompanied with the element-type circumstance of sacrifice. There is no exception to this rule. Furthermore, the rationale for keeping these two elements together has been explained using Figure 1 and previous discussions. In particular, dancing without sacrifice seems to indicate that salvation and life may be had apart from the atoning work of Jesus Christ. This situation would strip the worship service of all things pleasing to God, and therefore dance must be accompanied with sacrifice.

But what about the New Testament? What is to preclude us from using the worship element of dance in the church today? The short answer to this question is given by the fact that the church no longer practices the sacrificial worship of the Old Testament, and therefore dancing is no longer to be practiced either. In accord with our discussion of Psalm 118:27, dancing should be bound to the altar. In other words, if the acceptable use of worshipful

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84 The answer to this question appears to be yes (e.g., Gen 4:4, Lev 9:24).

85 The Church is divided on the question of musical instruments. A precedent for singing in the church is established by Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16.
dance must be accompanied by sacrifice, then there is no acceptable use of worshipful dance in the church because we do not sacrifice animals any longer. The reason for not sacrificing animals is because Christ has fulfilled this imagery in the New Testament and we are living in a day of reality, not shadows and types. The imagery of Figure 1 is fulfilled. In Christian worship, the preaching of the gospel is carried out by the ministry of God’s word, the sacrificial work of Christ is complete, and the life-giving regeneration of the Holy Spirit goes on in the hearts of believers in reality – not in a symbolic picture of worship. To reinstate the symbolic worship of the Old Testament in the church would be to return to the weak and beggarly elements of the law.

While the arguments in the preceding paragraph may not be totally persuasive to the reader, another consideration that should carry weight at least with dispensationalists is the fact that the New Testament gives us no example of a worship service in which dancing is an included element. This, of course, is not the case with other elements of worship such as singing, reading, etc. The example of worshipful dance, however, remains conspicuously absent in the New Testament. This element is also essentially absent from the records of Church history and is seldom practiced by the Church today.

**Conclusion**

The following conclusions are supported by the presentation, analysis, and discussion of this thesis:

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87 Gal 4:9.
1. That the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) states: *God must be worshipped according to his own specific desires, and not according to the autonomous desires of men.* In other words, before implementing a given practice in worship, we must find a divine warrant for doing it. We cannot introduce elements of worship simply because we think they are good ideas.

2. That the RPW is a biblical and confessional doctrine, being primarily emphasized by the Reformed faith.

3. That three exegetical methods of Scripture may be used for exercising the RPW: a) finding explicit commands that tell us how God wants to be worshipped, b) identifying approved examples of God’s worship, and c) using good and necessary inference to determine what is pleasing to God concerning worship.

4. That the traditional categories of divine warrants in worship are: a) elements of worship, b) forms of worship, and c) circumstances of worship. An element of worship is defined as an activity of worship that is distinct from other activities of worship. A form of worship is defined as the content of an element of worship. A circumstance is defined as the temporal and spatial condition in which an element of worship is carried out.

5. That there is nothing sacred about the divisions of divine warrant given by elements, forms, and circumstances. These categories are simply a systematic way to investigate the sacred doctrine of the RPW, and have been useful to many students of the Bible.

6. That biblical analysis shows dancing to be a divinely warranted element of worship, as shown by a combination of explicit commands, approved examples, and good and necessary inferences.
7. That lawful examples of worshipful dancing may be found in the following Bible passages: a) the dance of the daughters of Shiloh in Judg 21:16-25, b) David’s second attempt to transport the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Sam 6:12-23 and 1 Chr 15:1-16:3, c) implied dancing in Ps 118:27, d) commanded dancing in Ps 149:3, and c) commanded dancing in Ps 150:4.

8. That the lawfulness of Miriam’s dance in Exod 15:20-22 is debatable.

9. That unlawful examples of worshipful dancing may be found in the following Bible passages: a) the dance of Israel and the golden calf in Exod 32:19-24, and b) David’s first attempt to transport the Ark of the Covenant in 2 Sam 6:1-11 and 1 Chr 13:1-14.

10. That the warranted form of lawful dancing occurs with exuberant motions of the body and a joyful demeanor. Although this is not a very specific form of dancing, it does serve to illustrate that the Bible knows nothing of a solemn and melancholy dance in God’s worship.

11. That the warranted circumstances of lawful dancing include a time and place when singing, musical instruments, and sacrifice are present. More specifically, the lawful worship service including dance involves a) blowing trumpets over the sacrifice, b) the sacrifice of an animal, and c) dancing, playing of musical instruments, and singing. See Figure 1.

12. That because lawful dancing in worship requires the presence of sacrifice, and because sacrifices are no longer offered in the Church, the New Testament Church should no longer practice the worship element of dance. As shown in this thesis, the worship element of dance expired with the Old Testament worship element of sacrifice.
While these points ultimately conclude with the cessation of dance as a lawful worship element for the Church, the Body of Christ can gain much by looking back to this Old Testament worship symbol to appreciate God’s condescension in communicating with his people. The shadows and types of Ancient Israel’s worship were beautiful and communicative. In particular, the display of dancing and sacrifice was a way for God to teach his people that life was theirs in Christ, and that this was an abundant life!
REFERENCE LIST


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