ONE HOLY, CATHOLIC, AND “EVANGELICAL” CHURCH:
SEEKING A FAITHFUL AND UNIFIED DOCTRINE
FOR EVANGELICAL WORSHIP

by

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An Integrative Thesis
Submitted to the faculty
Of Reformed Theological Seminary
In fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Master of Arts in Religion

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November 2007
ABSTRACT
One Holy, Catholic, And “Evangelical” Church: Seeking A Faithful And Unified Doctrine For Evangelical Worship
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The goal of this paper is to examine the significance, purpose, and practice of worship within evangelical Christianity and to call for a recovery of understanding and sound worship practices. The paper acknowledges the significant debate surrounding the issue of worship, even within like-minded communities of faith, and seeks to provide a rationale and approach for furthering the discussion and providing realistic, practical goals of unity and catholicity.

The first portion of the paper seeks to examine the demise of worship, which the author attributes in large part to the nearly universal influence of the seeker movement. The second portion of the paper presents the biblical-historical roots of corporate worship, with the goal of recovering a proper understanding of the primacy, requirement, and nature of worship. Based upon the material examined in the second portion of the paper, the third segment presents five non-negotiable components which must be present or acknowledged in order for worship to be considered faithful and biblically valid. The final section of the paper presents a series of practical tools and suggestions for implementing and applying the information covered in the earlier portions of the study.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Lord’s Day worship is a subject of much debate in today’s evangelical world. Much confusion exists over the significance, purpose, practice, and desired outcome of the Lord’s Day worship assembly.¹ As a result of the lack of agreement on this subject, many are concerned that the unity, catholicity, and general overall spiritual health of the “evangelical church” are in jeopardy.²

Even within denominations where certain traditions have been upheld for hundreds of years there exists a vast diversity of principle and practice regarding the Lord’s Day worship service.³ This has become more apparent in the last several decades than at any time since the


² By the terms evangelical, evangelicalism, or the evangelical church or churches, the writer is referring to a system of belief that looks to Christ alone for salvation by faith. Evangelical or evangelicalism in this work does not here refer to a movement of any kind per se. Rather this terminology is used to identify all Christian churches that seek to uphold a certain doctrinal system that opposes works-based salvation, without embracing antinomianism. In general it refers to Protestant churches that understand and embrace the solas of the Reformation—salvation by faith alone through the person and work of Jesus Christ alone—who are committed to the authority of Scripture as the infallible guide for Christian faith and practice—and who understand the sacraments as true means of grace, not merely memory exercises or self-working rituals.

Reformation.⁴ To be sure, such diversity has not gone uncontested. Many scholars agree that, of late, few matters kindle more heated discussion, division, and confusion than the subject of worship.⁵ The so-called “Worship Wars” are the cause of much of the tragic division within the Protestant Church,⁶ now said to consist of over 33,000 denominations worldwide.⁷

The division is generally seen as a battle between “traditionalist” and “progressive” camps.⁸ It is believed that traditionalists are reluctant to radically change the way the church has functioned for centuries.⁹ They believe frequent change has and will continue to lead to the demise of the evangelical church.¹⁰ The progressives, or ‘moderns,’ believe just the

Presbyterian Church in America practices a worship shaped by the updated Westminster Directory. However, because the directory is only a guide and not obligatory, there is no uniformity of worship in the PCA.”


⁵ Carson, *Worship by the Book*, 11-12.

⁶ Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 11. Here Horton asserts: “Into this arena come the so-called “worship wars,” with both sides amassing their proof-texts that supposedly settle the debate once and for all, resulting in a tragic division of Christ’s body into “traditionalist” and “progressive” camps, each with its own Sunday morning service.”


⁹ Traditionalists would be more inclined to uphold something along the lines of the “Regulative Principle” in the Westminster Confession of Faith 21:1 which states: “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited to 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 representations, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture.” Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 59 & 110; Belgic Confession Article 7 & 32 are similar.

opposite; they see change as the only way to save Christianity. They believe that if we keep doing things ‘the old-fashioned way’ the church will continue its downward spiral until nothing is left to pass on to future generations. Both sides claim to be God-centered. D.A. Carson notes: “The moderns think the traditionalists defend comfortable and rationalistic truths while ignoring emotions and feelings. Traditionalists are concerned that the progressives are so enamored by hyped experience that they are unconcerned about truth.”

There is yet another wing within the evangelical world called the “Church Growth” movement that began in the early 1970s. The founders of this movement set out to change the way the church would look and operate. Specifically they would change the public worship dramatically from a weekly event where Christians historically assembled to worship their covenant God, to an entertainment driven outreach event. These evangelistic meetings, designed for unbelievers known as “seekers,” would be carefully crafted productions intended to reach unbelievers by making the gospel more appealing. It is believed by many, and here proposed, that this “Church Growth” or “Seeker” movement, even where it is openly rejected as errant, has had a nearly universal influence on evangelical Christianity and worship. It is alleged that this effect has led evangelical churches toward an

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12 Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone*, 6-9; particularly the quote from Thomas Howard on page 9.


14 Ibid., 11-12.


16 Warren, *Purpose Driven Church*, 255.
unhealthy shift in focus from God to the self.\textsuperscript{17} That is, instead of God being the central focus of worship, man becomes the focus. It is further alleged that this man-centered movement is the underlying cause and crisis behind the diversity of opinion and the many years of unresolved debate regarding worship. Many Christians, from both traditional and somewhat more progressive camps, are concerned that such diversity and disagreement over worship is putting our evangelical legacy and heritage at risk. D.A. Carson articulates this concern:

Although one wants to applaud the drive that is willing, for the sake of the gospel, to remove all offenses except the offense of the cross, sooner or later one is troubled by the sheer lack of stability, of a sense of heritage and substance passed on to another generation, of patterns of corporate worship shared with Christians who have gone before, or of any shared vision of what corporate worship should look like.\textsuperscript{18}

Carson is rightly concerned that such diversity and lack of stability in worship will eventually undermine our evangelical heritage altogether. As with any war, the ‘worship wars’ have produced many casualties. Fed up with the confusion, division, and lack of unity that exists in evangelical worship today, many longtime evangelicals are abandoning Protestantism altogether and turning to Rome or Constantinople.\textsuperscript{19} Others are abandoning the organized church altogether.\textsuperscript{20} In essence, both groups conclude that the evangelical Church, with all its disunity and perpetual change, cannot possibly be what Jesus had in mind for the true Church.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} David F. Wells, \textit{No Place For Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology} (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 95.

\textsuperscript{18} Carson, \textit{Worship by the Book}, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{19} The reference to Rome is actually referring to the Roman Catholic Church and the reference to Constantinople is referring to the Eastern Orthodox Church.


\textsuperscript{21} In deciding to defect to the Roman Catholic Church, Hahn writes: “I found the various [Eastern] Orthodox churches to be hopelessly divided among themselves, similar to the Protestants.”
Though this situation appears rather grim at this point in time, the matter of disunity in worship is not hopeless. However, if positive change and progress toward unity is to occur, serious and faithful action is necessary. The thesis of this work is that the future health and well-being of the evangelical church will require the establishment of a sound biblical and historical doctrine and practice of worship within the evangelical community. A fourfold plan of Discovery; Recovery; Agreement; and Guiding Formulas is necessary to accomplish this.

1. Discovery—Chapter two involves a discovery that will expose the foundational errors and outcomes behind the Church Growth movement and the nearly universal negative effect the movement has had on the evangelical church and worship.
2. Recovery—Chapter three presents a recovery of understanding about the meaning and goal of worship as well as the foundational principles that every Christian needs to know about the high calling of worship.
3. Agreement—Chapter four addresses and expands upon the need for general agreement on five overarching components necessary for faithful worship. It is hoped and believed that both progressive and traditional churches will be able to find agreement on these overarching components.
4. Guiding Formulas—Chapter five, the concluding chapter of this work, provides the reader with a two-fold formula for churches to consider: (1) a proposal calling for agreement with the principles herein found to be essential to faithful worship; (2) a proposed decision-making grid to help guide churches to determine what may or may not, should or should not, be deemed permissible or appropriate within the worship assembly.

This work does call into question much of what is being wrongly passed off as faithful worship, but it is not intended to be overly critical or hurtful to any of the dear brothers and

sisters who belong to the one holy catholic and apostolic Church we confess to believe in, their current worship practices notwithstanding. Also, this work is not suggesting that what is here proposed is the only hope for a unifying worship doctrine. Rather the goal here is to advance an honest and serious dialog that may be helpful in establishing an agreeable and unifying doctrine of worship; one that might restore and preserve a legacy in the One, Holy, Catholic, and “Evangelical” Church.
CHAPTER TWO
THE DEMISE OF WORSHIP

Modern evangelicalism is faced with a crisis. In stark contrast to the understanding and practice of worship dating back to the first century, many Christians today appear to be unconvinced that anything spiritually significant is taking place when they are assembled for worship.\(^1\) Others find significance, strictly in their own activity within the church, (personal involvement on the praise team, worship team, drama team, evangelism team, etc.), but not in God’s divine activity toward them during worship. In fact, in some circles volunteerism is being elevated above worship.\(^2\) Where this is happening, other admittedly important activities of the church such as evangelism, community, and humanitarianism are generally given primacy over worship.\(^3\) At least in part, this is because the significance and divine

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\(^1\) Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1-5. On page 1, Hurtado asserts: “one of the characteristic things early Christians did was to worship,” and then on page 5—“and early Christians worship was endowed with rich meaning, even with transcendent significance;” Os Guinness, *Prophetic Untimeliness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 51-57, (specifically 54); Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 24—“Whenever we gather for public worship, it is because we have been summoned [by God].” Also see pages 125-140 on “Tasting the Powers of the Age to Come.”

\(^2\) Churches today are faced with a situation where some people are willing to stay if they can “serve” in some way desirable to them (worship team, etc.), otherwise they will leave and find a church where they can find the self-serving significance they seek. Where for centuries, worship and its divine administrations of grace and covenant obligation were the underlying forces behind faithful participation in worship, today, personal involvement is becoming the means to the significance and driving motivation behind one’s life in the church. In this mindset, such things as the ordinary means of grace (word, sacrament, and prayer), become secondary.
nature of what is taking place, or should be taking place, in the worship assembly, has somehow been lost.  

The concern here isn’t with harmless or minor changes that might readily be welcomed as faithful improvements. Rather, the concern is with what is being seen as a full blown assault on what the Church has historically viewed as the most significant activity in Christendom—worship. Many are concerned that the weekly Lord’s Day worship assembly, is being minimized to just another hour or day of the week.  

It is difficult to deny that, in large part, this crisis has to do with a dramatic shift in focus from God to the self that has occurred within modern evangelical Christianity. Over the course of the last 250 years, but more specifically in the last three to four decades the central focus of the Christian faith has shifted dramatically from God to man, and this shift is most visible in the realm of corporate worship. More and more renowned scholars are becoming concerned about this trend. For instance David Wells, in his book *No Place for*...
Truth, voices his concern this way: “Many in the Church have now turned in upon themselves and substituted for the knowledge of God a search for the knowledge of self.” If Wells is correct, undoubtedly various factors have played a role in this shift toward self and individualism. Some would point to the eighteenth century Enlightenment, others to the nineteenth century revivalist movements, and some even to the First Amendment of the Constitution, which allegedly opened the door to an unprecedented and unaccountable ecclesiastical freedom. Mark Noll in his work The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind speaks to this and points to the combination of revivalism’s Second Great Awakening and ‘disestablishment’ (Separation of Church and State) as the culprit:

. . . the combination of revivalism and disestablishment meant that pragmatic concerns would prevail over principle. What the churches required were results—new adherents—or they would simply go out of business. Thus, the production of results had to override all other considerations.

Wells, No Place for Truth, 6-7.

David, F. Wells, Above All Earthly Pow’rs (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 277-278. Wells asserts: “History has a curious way of repeating itself, though few in this current reprise of the past seem aware of what happened before. The argument made by those on the forefront of Protestant liberalism and Catholic modernism in the nineteenth century in Europe was that the modern world was passing Christian faith by, that it was becoming obsolete and outmoded, and that if significant changes were not made, it would be consigned to the dust heap of history. It was a line of thought which reached America a little later. . . [unlike the Europeans liberals and modernists, worried they were out of step with the high end of culture, American] “evangelicals worried that they were out of step with those on the popular end of culture. . . driven more by therapeutic and consumer desires.”

Hart, John Williamson Nevin, 19-20, 22, 44, 85, 87-88, 102, 237 (Nevin’s Anxious Bench critique of Finney’s revival).

Noll, Scandal of the Evangelical Mind, 64-67; Hart, John Williamson Nevin, 20-22. Nevin shows how the First Amendment of the Constitution was worded in such a way that it unintentionally allowed for uncontrollable activity, including this pragmatic, man-centered ideology, within the church (emphasis mine).
Despite the role these and other earlier factors may have had in effecting the drift toward individualism and the ‘demise’ of faithful worship, the leaders of the modern “Church Growth Movement,” in effect, admit responsibility.

**Church Growth or “Seeker” Movement**

The twentieth century “Church Growth” or “Seeker” mentality was the work of several influential leaders within the evangelical church world in America. Missionary and author Donald McGavran is considered “The father of the Church Growth movement.” In 1955 he authored *The Bridges of God* and *New Methods for a New Age in Missions*. From that time through the balance of the 20th century, McGavran went on to write at least a dozen “how to” books on growing the church through the use of non-biblical, man-devised methods. A more visible leader of this movement early on was Robert Schuller, senior pastor of the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, CA. As such, “One would be accurate calling McGavran the academic founder of the movement and Robert Schuller the popular founder.” These and others are rightly associated with the movement. However, This new philosophy for growing churches more officially became know as the “Seeker” or “Church Growth Movement,” and gained particular momentum through the birthing and explosive growth of Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, Illinois beginning in 1973. In fact, Robert Schuller himself acknowledges that Willow Creek senior pastor Bill Hybels is to be credited:

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I was the first person to introduce real church growth to the American Church . . . He [Hybels] became the first guy to take these principles, refine them, maximize them to the ultimate length of their potential.\textsuperscript{13}

Schuller adds that Hybels “took it the whole shot, a lot farther than he [Schuller] ever took it.”\textsuperscript{14} Willow Creek founder and Schuller understudy, Bill Hybels, with ill-regard for longstanding Christian traditions, and unbound by any denominational restriction,\textsuperscript{15} set out, in his words, “to change the way we do church.”\textsuperscript{16} With clearly articulated vision, core values, strategies and methodologies, Hybels sought to recast the historic Lord’s Day worship service into a tightly-ordered evangelistic event.\textsuperscript{17} These evangelistic meetings—designed for unbelievers known as “Seekers”—are carefully crafted productions.\textsuperscript{18} The purpose of these meetings is to connect with unbelievers through the use of entertaining drama, dance, contemporary music, and culturally relevant ‘spiritual messages.’\textsuperscript{19} Such devices are intended to persuade those Hybels would call “Unchurched

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Pritchard, \textit{Willow Creek}, 56.
\item[15] At various seminars Hybels speaks about his embarrassment as a young man when taking a friend to church because it wasn’t relevant, and inevitably the church would be talking about money.
\item[16] Pritchard, \textit{Willow Creek}, 21-29; Bill Hybels' 1990 message: “Who We Are at Willow Creek,” (cassette tape).
\item[17] Pritchard, \textit{Willow Creek}, 80-115.
\item[18] Hybels, “Who We Are,” (cassette); Warren, \textit{Purpose Driven Church}, 255.
\item[19] Ibid. In this message Hybels says: “We have put a lot of time and thought into what non-churched people want from a Sunday morning service. And we have concluded that they basically want four things: (1) anonymity; (2) truth presented at an introductory level; (3) time to ‘make a decision’; and (4) excellence in programming. creativity, humor, contemporary [worship], relevancy, etc.” Critics claim that in this model the world set the agenda for the Church.
\end{footnotes}
Harry and Mary” (or “seekers”) of their need for a Savior. The goal is to keep unbelievers coming back, and to continue to stir their emotions through these carefully crafted productions, until they eventually surrender, admit their need for a Savior, and make a decision to become a Christian.

G.A. Pritchard spent three years researching and interviewing staff people at Willow Creek Community Church. The published results of his work, *Willow Creek Seeker Services*, as well as an increasing number of subsequent works, have led many to much skepticism regarding this movement. As such, the leaders and proponents of this movement are now being accused of several non-Christian practices. They are accused of being driven by the desire to build personal fame and ministry empires. As a result, they are frequently accused of being heartless toward anyone who challenges their vision and ruthless in their handling of staff and volunteers who don’t measure up to the uncompromising ‘excellence’ required to “pull it off.” The movement’s proponents with deny all such claims, consistently maintaining they are merely driven by hearts for

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20 Ibid. Un-churched Harry and Mary are the original official nicknames given to those seekers the movement hoped to reach.

21 It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter into a doctrinal discussion of what has been called “decisional regeneration” (i.e., that one can “decide” to be Christian, thus effectively regenerating himself by sheer willpower). However, this erroneous doctrine is at the root of many faulty practices in worship. When one rejects the biblical teaching regarding man’s total inability to save himself and God’s sovereignty in salvation, one will necessarily embrace all manner of foolishness in an effort to bring about the decision of the will that supposedly causes one to become a Christian.

22 Pritchard, *Willow Creek*, 272-290. Pritchard begins the conclusion of his work with this comment: “Hybels and his team have not thoroughly evaluated the American culture from a Christian perspective. In short, Creekers generally do not think with a consistent Christian worldview.”

23 Wells, *No Place For Truth*, 4. Having served as a founding elder and teaching pastor at a CGM for a short time before I attended seminary, on several occasions people who didn’t quite measure up were fired with a crassness that I had not seen in the first half of my life in the secular business world.
reaching lost and hurting people whom they claim traditional churches have failed to reach. Hybels and his followers are accused of building numbers through false conversion rooted in emotional manipulation and “sheep stealing” from other less entertaining or emotionally charged churches. Pritchard claims to have witnessed this kind of emotional manipulation consistently during his three year observation and states here the goal of Willow’s programming staff: “Willow Creek’s drama, music, and words attempt either to soothe or excite various emotions, depending on the goal of the programming at a particular time.” Former Willow Creek teaching pastor, Lee Strobel, seems to affirm this when explaining why it is important, in his words, to “program these emotional moments.” Strobel continues, “[Unchurched] Harry doesn’t just want to know something; he wants to experience it…for many Unchurched Harrys who are on a spiritual journey, experience—not evidence—is their mode of discovery.” Critics do not seem to question the unavoidable experience or emotion that is and should be a part of any worship service, but they find it disturbing that in this movement, experience and emotion are sought over and against evidence and truth.

With the “Seeker” service as the central focus of Willow’s ministry, the leaders were not naïve enough to believe that Christians would follow a movement that completely neglected worship. Therefore, Willow Creek and other “Creeker churches”

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25 Pritchard, Willow Creek, 111.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.
developed midweek worship services specifically designed for believers.^{29} Although this may sound like a viable option, this practice is scrutinized by the movement’s opponents for at least four reasons: (1) a lack of respect for biblical and historical Lord’s Day (Sunday) practices. From the days of the apostles the first day of the week, the day of resurrection, was designated the day of worship;^{30} (2) from a practical standpoint, many Christians are unable to attend a midweek worship service and are therefore affirmed in forsaking public worship altogether;^{31} (3) the midweek worship service takes place after the busyness of a full day’s activities, making it difficult to prepare one’s heart and mind to engage in authentic worship; (4) the midweek service ends up being nothing more than a hybrid of the seeker service because the transition from the entertainment driven seeker mindset is difficult and not easily accomplished. The staff and volunteers who produce the “worship services” are the same people who signed on to a methodology that uses arts and entertainment to produce a certain emotional and experiential result. The reality allegedly ends up the same for staff and lay-people: “what you win them with, is what

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^{28} “Creekers” is a term applied to members of Willow Creek, and Creeker churches are those churches that closely follow and emulate Willow Creek.

^{29} Pritchard, Willow Creek, 25. Step four of Willow’s seven step strategy is the seeker begins to attend “New Community,” the midweek believer service; Warren, Purpose Driven Church, 245. Warren talks of specialized services according to their purpose.


^{31} As of 1992 Willow Creek Weekend Seeker services were attended by some 17,000-20,000 people, while the midweek, so-called, worship services were attended by some 3,000 people. (See “Worshiping God Big Time,” Woman’s Day, October 15, 1992); Also, Rick Warren, interviewed on Fox News in 2006, boasts of only one fourth (approx. 20,000), of those who call Saddleback their church home (approx. 80,000), in attendance for weekend services. If one third attend the midweek worship service, Warren can boast of 7000 regular attendees for public worship out of 80,000.
you win them to.” 32 The result is midweek “worship service productions” that merely
seek to move believers to worship in a certain way (raising hands, weeping, etc.). 33 Both
the Sunday “seeker” services and the midweek “believer” services elevate the means of
entertainment and emotionalism to obtain their desired ends, while largely minimizing
and, in some cases, even mocking longstanding traditions worship practices. 34 Regardless
of the underlying motives or intentions of this movement, it cannot be denied that the
movement has had a nearly universal effect on evangelical churches and their worship.
Church consultant George Barna claims [by 1997] that since Willow Creek was founded,
“the seeker approach has grown to more than ten thousand churches nationwide” and “as
many as one-fifth of all churches claim they have some kind of seeker service. 35

Nearly Universal Influence

Although most evangelical Christian churches today still hold to the historical practice
of the Lord’s Day worship service, the influence the Church Growth movement has had on

32 Marva J. Dawn, Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down (Grand Rapids: William B.

33 In a personal visit to Willow Creek, I was invited to observe a worship team rehearsal for the
“New Community” midweek worship service. At that rehearsal, the main worship leader instructed
the vocalists and musicians to change the tone and volume at a certain point in a particular song in
order to invoke a certain emotion that would “[tear their hearts out].” He also asserted that at this
precise moment “[the people will most certainly stand and raise their arms in awe and praise].” At the
service that evening, it happened precisely as he planned it.

34 In worship at a “Creeker” church, I personally witnessed a drama taken directly from Willow
Creek that blatantly mocked basic traditional preaching styles, while seeking to promote the seeker
teaching style used at Willow Creek. Clearly the motivation was to communicate that Christians in
this day and age shouldn’t have to subject themselves to typical or traditional preaching,

35 “Church consultant George Barna claims [by 1997] that since Willow Creek was founded,
“the seeker approach has grown to more than ten thousand churches nationwide” and “as many as
one-fifth of all churches claim they have some kind of seeker service,” cited from George Barna,
Evangelism that Works (Ventura: Regal Books, 1997). Kimon Howland Sargeant, Seeker Churches:
Promoting Traditional Religion in a Nontraditional Way (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press,
2000), 9.
most churches in America is inescapable. The explanation for this is actually quite simple. In short, word got out. By the early 1980’s tens of thousands of believers from thousands of churches began flocking to Willow Creek to experience this explosive Church Growth phenomenon for themselves. After experiencing these culturally relevant, emotional, and entertaining services—many people, lay-people and leader alike, returned to their home churches with a “wow factor,” and a zeal for doing whatever might be necessary to experience this phenomenon in their own churches. This pressure for change by those who discovered how entertaining and emotionally charged going to church could be, combined with the enticement of explosive numerical increase, have driven many churches to move in this direction. Even churches that would openly reject the seeker movement have unwittingly been taken in by it. For a vast number of evangelical churches today, their allegedly faithful worship service, just like the seeker service, is centered on man and his felt desires and needs. David Wells, voices his concern for the toll this man-centered mindset is taking on evangelical Christianity at large, including the intolerance issue discussed above:

Many taking the plunge seem to imagine that they are simply following a path to success, but the effects of this great change in the evangelical soul are evident in every incoming class in the seminaries, in most publications, in the great majority of churches, and in most pastors. . . It is a change so large and so encompassing that those who dissent from what is happening are easily dismissed as individuals who cannot get along, who want to

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36 The services’ ‘wow’ factor is aided by 50 vocalists, a 75-voice choir, 7 rhythm bands, a 65-piece orchestra, 41 actors, a video production department, and an arts center with 200 students that serves as a farm club for future talent.” (Reported in part in the 12/2/95, Bloomington Herald-Times, an Associated Press article by Debra Hale, “Welcome to the Un-Church, Video Screens and All,” p. A8; “Community Is Their Middle Name,” Christianity Today, September 13, 2000; Willow Creek Community Church website, accessed 2/2004, available at http://www.willowcreek.org/default.asp; Internet.

37 Sargeant, Seeker Churches, 3.

scruple over what is inconsequential, who are not loyal, and who are, in any case, quite irrelevant.\textsuperscript{39}

Wells here articulates what I believe can fairly be described as cult-like behavior toward those who question, disagree, or challenge this new vision and methodology. From a slightly different angle, Os Guinness explains both the influence of the movement and the response of those being taken in by it—those he labels as the “New Evangelicals,” through what he calls a process of “Uncritical Adaptation:”

Uncritical Adaptation [begins] when some aspect of modern thought…is assumed either to be significant…or superior to what Christians know or do, and is therefore worth adopting. . . Soon the assumption in question becomes an integral part of Christian thought and practice. . . The next phase in the process is abandonment. [Once the church begins to adopt new ideas they uncritically and wrongly accepted as significant] everything that does not fit in with the new assumption is either cut out deliberately or slowly relegated to a limbo of neglect. . . Truths and customs that do not fit in the modern assumption . . . are of no more use. The modification or removal of the [traditional] offending assumptions is permanent.\textsuperscript{40}

Note the similarity between Guinness’ statements and those of David Wells’ quoted above.

The proponents of the Seeker Movement are so bent on eliminating anything that challenges their innovations that those who disagree with them are dismissed as those who can’t get along. Or worse yet, they are accused of loving their traditions more than lost people.

Although such concerns may be true of some staunch traditionalists, this is a strawman view of many traditionalists who certainly value evangelism, but who are not willing to throw away twenty centuries of tradition, including the ordinary means of grace, in an attempt to succeed in accordance with the standards these new innovators have established.

\textsuperscript{39} Wells, \textit{No Place For Truth}, 4.

\textsuperscript{40} Guinness, \textit{Prophetic Untimeliness}, 58; Horton, \textit{A Better Way}, 13. Horton asserts that “Many advocates of traditional worship have also realized that they have not thought too deeply about the principles that guide their reflection.”
The nearly universal influence the Church Growth Movement has had on the evangelical church has not been an accident. In fact, the “Willow Creek Association” was founded for that very purpose.\textsuperscript{41} Their logo, a sketch of four waves, represents the vision for the four ways they would set out to affect the entire evangelical world with this “new way of doing church.”\textsuperscript{42} According to well-known church consultant, Lyle Schaller and other church consultants such as Barna, the plan is working. In fact, Schaller describes Willow Creek “as the most influential church in North America and perhaps the world.”\textsuperscript{43}

Three Alleged Outcomes: Psychology, Individualism, Pragmatism

There is little doubt that the Church Growth movement’s strategies and methods are largely responsible for the man-centeredness that is being witnessed in evangelical worship today. In seeking to develop and establish a faithful and unifying doctrine of worship, it is important to learn from the past and the present. Some three and one half decades into the full blown Church Growth movement, three alleged outcomes being witnessed across the evangelical landscape are worth pointing out: (1) Psychology is replacing theology from the

\textsuperscript{41} Despite (or because of) Hybels' humanistic gospel, other churches hungry for that kind of numerical growth have been flocking to the Willow Creek to learn the techniques of “church growth.” Hybels says his staff cannot keep up with the increasing number of requests for help from other churches. So in 1992, the Willow Creek Association (WCA) was formed. WCA began as an international network of 96 like-minded churches; as of 6/03, there were nearly 10,000 Association member churches in more than 25 countries, representing 90 denominations, many of which are linked with liberal denominations, and some with cults. (Santa Barbara Press, January 8, 1995).

\textsuperscript{42} Pritchard, Willow Creek, 11-13. Here Pritchard speaks of the Four Waves of Willow Creek’s influence: 1) Willow Creek association sells and distributes more than 280,000 Willow Creek “Seeds Ministry” audiotapes; 2) Marketing which has produced as of 1996 had produced large numbers of “Creeker” churches; 3) Thousands of pastors and churches that have altered their music, programming, and preaching to be “seeker friendly,” or “seeker sensitive;” 4) Thousands of churches and individuals around the world who have been influenced by the Willow Creek programs, principles, books, and tools that the church has produced.

\textsuperscript{43} Barna, Evangelism that Works, 12. In the year 2000, the Willow Creek Association hosted 76,000 “church leaders” in conferences on Willow’s campus and around the world.
pulpit; (2) Individualized experience and emotionalism are replacing object biblical truth and divine reality; (3) Pragmatism is becoming the driving force behind the vision and purpose for public worship. Wells touches on all three back in 1993:

The disappearance of Theology from the life of the Church, and the orchestration of that disappearance by some of its leaders, is hard to miss . . . in the evangelical world—in the vacuous worship that is so prevalent. . . . in the shift from God to the self as the central focus of faith, in the psychologized preaching that follows this shift, in the erosion of its conviction, in its strident pragmatism, in its inability to think incisively about the culture, in its reveling in the irrational. And it would have made few of these capitulations to modernity had not its capacity for truth diminished. It is not hard to see these things; avoiding them is what is difficult.

Wells notes that such widespread changes of vision and focus do not come without widespread change in visible practices and outcomes, namely, that churches moving in this new direction have exchanged central biblical principles and practices for those which are arguably unbiblical. Following is a brief summary of three alleged outcomes that are being witnessed in many of our evangelical churches due to the widespread influence of the Church Growth movement.

Psychology over Theology

The first concern is an alleged shift from scripturally sound preaching, to psychologized or therapeutic preaching. Guinness comments that many preachers today are “shrinks in their pulpits and CEOs in their offices,” and in “swapping psychology for theology in their preaching and enthroning management in marketing, evangelicals make the same mistakes as the liberals had earlier [1960’s].” As the church neglected or rejected an

44 Wells, No Place for Truth, 95 (emphasis mine).

45 Guinness, Prophetic Untimeliness, 60. In comparing 1960’s liberals with modern evangelicals Guinness notes: “Whatever the newly sharpened statements about biblical authority; the real authority of the Bible had been eclipsed in practice by the assumptions of the modern world;” Hart, Mother Kirk, 86.
honest understanding of Scripture on various matters to promote their liberal agendas, so too, those involved in the Church Growth movement, perhaps unwittingly, must neglect, reject, or reinterpret Scripture in a way that will support their new way of doing church and worship.

The right preaching of the word, illuminated and applied to the hearts and minds of the people by the Holy Spirit, is a longstanding biblical and historical principle and practice central to authentic Christian faith and worship. This dates back to the birthing of the Christian Church at Pentecost. There is little doubt but that “Defective theology yields inferior or inappropriate forms of worship.”

Given the allegations of unfaithfulness in much evangelical preaching today, Paul’s warning to Timothy may be especially apropos: “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires” (2 Tim. 4:3). The inspired apostle commissioned Timothy and all ordinary ministers to “preach the word,” warning them not to fall into the trap of substituting the truth of God’s word for something else in an effort to appease people. Paul is also clear that the ministers have an obligation to accurately handle the word of truth: “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also . . . preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction” (2 Tim. 2:2 and 4:2). Notice there is no mention of appeasing people for the sake of numerical increase.

Many years prior to the organized birthing of the Church Growth movement, Dorothy Sayers raised concerns about churches beginning to abandon their most precious

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commodity—their dogma—for psychology and man-made innovations. She warned that such change is the exact opposite of what was needed:

Official Christianity, of late [1950’s], has been having what is known as “a bad press.” We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine—"dull dogma," as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man—and the dogma is the drama.48

By the mid-twentieth century, Sayers was concerned that churches were beginning to move away from their doctrinal foundations while dabbling with man-centered innovations to liven up worship to appease people. One half century later, Sayers’ concerns are realized in full measure. And many people today would agree that Sayers’ was right, and that such changes and innovations actually detract from the Christian story and suggest that the straightforward preaching of God’s word is insufficient to transform lives and to produce real growth in churches.

Many churches that have adopted a somewhat progressive approach to ministry and worship are quick to reject any notion that they have shifted toward psychology or man-centerededness. But such objections do not lessen the reality, and very often “... an honest appraisal of their ministry would reveal that, to remain relevant, they too have fallen victim to this man-centered trap.”49 For some churches the shift toward man-centeredness may be unintentional or even slight, but the emphasis of catering to the felt and psychological needs of their audience over against the authentic preaching of the word cannot evade the damaging long term effects on the Church. A further and more in depth discussion between right and


49 Wells, Above All Earthly Pow’rs, 269.
wrong preaching of the word will be addressed in chapter four of this work under the subheading: “The Word Read and Rightly Preached.”

Individual Experience and Emotionalism

The second alleged outcome, in addition to psychology replacing theology from the pulpit, is the shift toward individualism and emotionalism. In the absence of a sound theological foundation, worship has become overly rooted in emotionalism and individualized experience. This is a sentiment that has led many people to defect from evangelical Christianity altogether. One such defector is Frank Schaeffer, son of the late Francis Schaeffer. In *Dancing Alone*, Schaeffer articulates his disappointment and eventual departure from the evangelical world due largely to an over-emphasis on emotion and individualized experience:

There is a delusion shared by even those Protestants who call themselves “conservative” or “traditional” or “evangelical.” They too have reduced faith to an individualized experience. They have even gone so far as to reduce their concept of the Church to a subjective interpretation.

Schaeffer’s defection to Eastern Orthodoxy was, in my view, overly radical, but his observations are valid and they are being shared by more and more Christians who believe objective truth (theology) is being outright abandoned for “inner experience.”

Wade Clark Roof, in his book *A Generation of Seekers*, in my view, gets to the bottom of why there is little loyalty to objective truth and tradition. He articulates this problem through what he calls “inductive and deductive meaning systems.” He proposes that the *inductive meaning system* is centered on the subjective aspect of life with “an

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51 Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone*, 192.

52 Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 172.
emphasis on feelings and life experiences.” In the inductive meaning system, “God is no longer the subject or the object of worship; instead, momentary experience is the goal.” In contrast, the deductive meaning system is centered on the objective belief in God, which, according to Roof, “results in loyalty to religious tradition, faithfulness to the covenant with God and morality rooted in obedience.” Roof is saying that the inductive meaning system sees truth as something determined by the self, based upon feeling or experience, while the deductive meaning system sees truth as outside the self and something that is true regardless of feeling or experience. Churches today are weighing far too heavily on the scale of the inductive, where feeling and experience determine the meaning or success of worship. For this reason, many worship planners are consumed with devising new and more effective ways to move people emotionally and to give them an experience that will subsequently ensure their approval and return.

This is extraordinarily apropos of an earlier statement that was referenced by Willow Creek staff person Lee Strobel, in fact, one worth repeating: “[Unchurched] Harry doesn’t just want to know something; he wants to experience it…for many Unchurched Harrys who are on a spiritual journey, experience—not evidence—is their mode of discovery.” This is exactly what Roof has labeled as his inductive meaning system. New Testament scholar D. A. Carson is another author who is deeply concerned about this trend and he calls the church to careful thought on this matter:

53 Wade Clark Roof, A Generation of Seekers, 120-21, from Dawn, Reaching Out, .84.

54 Dawn, Reaching Out, 81, 107. As quoted earlier in this work, the reader should recall Lee Strobel’s statement: “[Unchurched] Harry doesn’t just want to know something; he wants to experience it…for many Unchurched Harry’s who are on a spiritual journey, experience—not evidence—is their mode of discovery.”

55 Dawn, Reaching Out, 81, 107.
In an age increasingly suspicious of (linear) thought, there is much more respect for the “feeling” of things – whether a film or a church service. It is disturbingly easy to plot surveys of people, especially young people, drifting from a church of excellent preaching and teaching to one with excellent music because, it is alleged, there is “better worship” there. But we need to think carefully about this matter.\textsuperscript{56}

Carson is not considered a traditionalist, but rather one who is open-minded and actually somewhat progressive in his thinking. But he is concerned about unhealthy trends that will, in the end, damage our Protestant and evangelical heritage if our churches continue down this path. It is interesting to note that the Reformers had a particular distrust for personal experience:

The Reformers held that human beings should be loved but, because they are sinners, they ought not to be blindly trusted. And they granted that personal experience is powerful because it is intense, but they insisted that we should not allow this power to delude us into thinking that experience is always right.\textsuperscript{57}

The Reformers insisted that the power of experience should never delude Christians into thinking that a certain experience is always right. And though personal experience can be intense and powerful, it is never to be the source of truth or the test of orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{58} The Reformers were not denying that worship is to be experienced in a real and powerful way and will undoubtedly even be emotional at times, instead, they were concerned that the foundations of our faith, including our worship, remain centered in the objective past, present, and future realities of God’s grace through faith in Christ—our subjective experiences and emotions notwithstanding.

\textsuperscript{56} Carson, \textit{Worship by the Book}, 30.

\textsuperscript{57} Wells, \textit{No Place For Truth}, 145.

\textsuperscript{58} Wells, \textit{No Place For Truth}, 145-149.
Pragmatism: Marketplace Christianity

The third significant concern, following the disappearance of theology and an overemphasis on experience and emotionalism, is pragmatism. It is said of many evangelical churches today that in this man-centered shift, objective truth becomes secondary to “what works.” And “what works” is based on what popular opinion says works, and much of what supposedly works is often accepted without challenge. Donald McGavran may be the first to pursue sociological studies to determine how people could be better enticed to become Christians as early as the 1940’s, but those walking down the path of the Church Growth movement have followed suit. “This is a buyer’s market, and what the buyer wants has become as large a consideration as what the church wants to give.” Church Growth movement guru Rick Warren makes this pragmatic approach clear when discussing the secret behind drawing a crowd:

The answer is quite simple: Create a service that is intentionally designed for your members to bring their friends to. And make the service so attractive, appealing, and relevant to the unchurched that your members are eager to share it with lost people they care about.

In responding specifically to Warren’s statement DeWaay comments: “This means that the felt needs of a particular target group of the unregenerate determines what happens in the church.” DeWaay also notes: “This thinking has taken root so deeply in American

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59 Guinness, Prophetic Untimeliness, 60.

60 This consumer driven approach, perhaps pioneered by McGavran, later became know as what is now, in the early 21st century, called “missiology.”

61 Wells, Above All Earthly Pow’rs, 271.

62 DeWaay, Redefining Christianity, 14.
evangelicalism that pastors have become desperate for anything that promises church
growth.”

In a country built on democracy, pragmatism tends to sound about right to Americans. But torn from the objective realities of biblical Christianity, with man replacing God as the central focus of the church and worship, such thinking is flawed. Nathan Hatch, whose work focused primarily on the pragmatism of nineteenth century revivalism, articulates the same fundamental thinking behind the pragmatism seen in much of evangelicalism today:

At the psychological center of much evangelical faith are two ideas that are also at the heart of the practice of democracy: (1) the audience is sovereign, and (2) ideas find legitimacy and value only within the marketplace (73-76) . . . Ideas have no intrinsic or self-evident value; it is the people’s right to give ideas their legitimacy (207).

In a pragmatic church, “the pollster” is as important to the well-being of the church as the preacher. The latest research and statistics assure the preacher of what the people want, and, therefore, what he needs to do in order to succeed. George Barna, a pollster famous for researching and publishing statistics within evangelical Christianity has promoted this pragmatic approach to his readers, and many have heeded his advice. For instance, in his book The Habits of Highly Successful Churches, he suggests that the “Church must respond to the felt needs of the baby boomers,” and in several of his other published works and updates he reports exactly what those needs are at any given time. And we must keep in mind that even when Barna’s propositions seem to be biblically sound, time has revealed that Barna recommends what he believes will work at that given time, period.

63 Ibid., 13.

64 Wells, No Place for Truth, quoting Hatch, 73-76, 207.

65 Dawn, Reaching Out, 62-64.

66 George Barna, The Habits of Highly Effective Churches (Ventura: Regal Books, 1999);
latest works, *Revolution*, Barna actually endorses an abandoning of the organized Church and worship altogether with a number of back to back statements so alarming that, in my view, it undermines whatever shred of credibility he may have held among evangelicals to this point.

Barna comments:

> When the Bible admonishes us to gather together, it does not imply that that should be a church service or congregational event. Such interaction could be in a worship service or at Starbucks . . . The same God who is more concerned about what’s in our hearts than about mindless observance of meaningless routine refuses to impose specific regulations about our religious practices. He wants us to use the creative abilities he entrusted to us to express in our own way how much we love him and want to glorify him. *In fact, there is no verse in Scripture that links the concepts of worshipping God and a “Church meeting.”* The Bible does not tell us that worship must happen in a Church sanctuary and therefore we must be actively associated with a local church. It simply tells us that we must worship God regularly and purely, in spirit and truth. Take particular note of the fact that *Jesus dismissed the organized worship of his day as a “farce”* and intimated that we ought not to be so limited as to how and when we worship God (emphasis mine).67

It is not within the scope of this paper to here critique Barna’s new *Revolution* and his misunderstandings and mistaken notions regarding the Scriptures, the Church, and worship, Therefore, please compare his statements to chapter three of this work; specifically


Marva Dawn is a respected author who is concerned with the pragmatic approach to worship and comments on how churches today, in trying to respond to “felt needs are scrambling for better worship ‘methods’ to increase their membership or stewardship.”68 In *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down*, Dawn articulates it this way:

> The Christian mind accepts God’s pronouncements concerning the meaning of life as the only measure in that regard; the modern mind rejects such revelation as the figment of a

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68 Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 107
religious imagination…Today, reality is so privatized and relativized that truth is often understood only in terms of what it means to each person. A pragmatic culture will see truth as whatever works for any given person.69

Dawn is concerned about these pragmatic trends and believes they are undermining the Christian mind to think and react more like the modern (secular) mind.70

Os Guinness is another author who is concerned with this pragmatic approach to church and worship and he warns churches of the danger of “[accepting assumption without any thought just because it’s modern and would appear to yield a desired result].”71 Philip Reiff, in his best seller The Triumph of the Therapeutic, critiques these pragmatic tendencies as “a fundamentally non-Christian paradigm” and wonders if, “…our market-determined, therapeutic, and entertainment-shaped views of worship parallel in some ways to the clamor of Israel in its moments of apostasy for the gods of the nations?”72 Reiff then asks an important question that he believes all churches should be asking themselves again and again: “Even if they [therapeutic and entertainment-shaped views of worship] are nothing more than an attempt to make worship relevant for those who no longer understand the Bible “straight-up,” will they end up reaching the lost or losing the reached?73 Reiff’s question is significant in light of the many people who grieve because their children have either walked away from the faith or have shown little to no interest in the church or worship. I personally

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69 Dawn, Reaching Out, 86; Wells, No Place for Truth, 184.

70 For further understanding of Dawn’s concerns about current trends in Church and worship I recommend both of her works on the subject; Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down and A Royal Waste of Time.

71 Guinness, Prophetic Untimeliness, 57-58.


73 Reiff, Triumph, x-xii, quoted in Horton, A Better Way, 11.
have experienced situations where people are deeply involved in the church and evangelism and, in a sense, getting lost people in the front door, while at the same they were losing their own children out the back door.

**Summary**

Those committed to a pragmatic approach, with an emphasis on psychology and individualized experience, in the end will miss out on the rich worship heritage and the benefits therein that await them. Perhaps being blinded by self, novelty, and/or the subjectivity of personal and emotional experience, the proponents of the Church Growth movement and the many millions that have been influenced by the movement, either do not know how or do not care to embrace the fullness of the Christian life—particularly in worship. Ironically, all the clamoring after things which they believe will sustain their faith in this life; psychologized preaching and personalized experience, in pragmatic churches, is actually keeping them from the true substance and power they actually long for this side of heaven. While temporal stimuli may exist at these innovative services, the divine realities are lacking. One question that lurks for those involved in this Church Growth movement or those who embrace some of the methods they promote, is whether they are doing it for the lost or whether they have themselves become attracted to the entertainment over true worship.

And certainly, we must consider that perhaps the reason most people, leaders and lay-people alike, have walked down this man-centered path is because they have never been taught about worship and what takes place in worship and why. In the following chapter I will attempt to unfold the foundational principles necessary to begin to look at an actual doctrine for Christian worship. This will involve an unfolding of the foundational
significance of worship, the transcendent and efficacious nature of worship, and the necessary forms for authentic and sustainable worship.
CHAPTER THREE
BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL ROOTS

Establishing a faithful doctrine for Christian worship that could be embraced by churches across the evangelical landscape is vital to the future overall health of evangelical Christianity. In light of the man-centered shift and the nearly universal effect of the Church Growth movement, there is a widespread lack of understanding regarding the priority, purpose, and nature of true Christian worship. This necessitates a further discovery, not about what is wrong with modern worship in our evangelical churches, but what was and is right about worship from Moses, to Jesus, through the Reformation and to this day in a small number of churches.

Recovery of Understanding

Due to the fallout of the three inevitable outcomes discussed in chapter two—psychologized preaching, individualized experience, and pragmatism—many people today are struggling to find spiritual significance in worship.\(^1\) Therefore, in an effort to help Christians gain the full and intended benefits of worship, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a better understanding of biblical worship. With this in mind it is important to begin

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\(^1\) Sally Morgenthaler, “Worship As Evangelism” Rev! Magazine, 4 September 2007; Michael Horton, *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of God-Centered Worship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 13. Horton here says: “I am persuaded that one of the reasons why so many churches have gone to drama and other theatrical arts in worship is because the sermon and the larger liturgical setting have failed to provide the sense that something important and dramatic is happening here, now, as we gather before God;” Barna Update, “State of the Church 2000.”
with the most basic concept of worship. Like every aspect of the Christian faith we begin with God. Worship first of all is to be “explicitly theocentric,” that is, God-centered. As such, worship is commonly defined as “the act of ascribing worth to God as the one who deserves homage and service.” However, such definitions of worship do not account for the goal of the corporate worshipping assembly as “a mutual exchange between God and his people.”

A more comprehensive definition could therefore be: “In the authority of His Son, our Savior Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, God’s summons His people to assemble. And in that assembly, they bow down and pay homage and lift their voices in praise to their covenant God—a God who meets with them and administers His grace to them through the ordinary means He has prescribed to do so.” In short, this sacred meeting is to be ordered in a way that facilitates a desired twofold goal, namely, God’s people worshipping their God, and of God accepting their worship and administering spiritual food to them that will endure unto eternal life. This understanding of the Lord’s Day worship service has been largely lost in our day and is in desperate need of recovery.

With this in mind, there are at least four underlying principles that need to be recovered to establish a faithful doctrine for Christian worship: (1) a recovery of understanding of the Primacy of Worship; (2) a recovery of understanding of the Requirement of Worship; (3) a recovery of understanding of the Nature of Worship; and (4) a

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3 Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki and Cherith Fee Nordling, Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 122.

recovery of understanding of the *Necessity of Forms for Worship*. These four principles will be elaborated upon and discussed in the pages that follow.

**Primacy of Worship**

The highest priority for God’s chosen people in both covenants is to assemble together to worship their God. This is clear both biblically and historically from the onset of organized, God-ordained worship.

**Out of Egypt**

When God called His people out of Egypt in the days of Moses it was a matter of great significance as it pertains to public worship. The first and foremost purpose of God’s deliverance of his people was that they might assemble together, in the presence of God (their deliverer), at a certain time and place for the specific purpose of worship. God deemed worship so important that he designated it as the very sign of his miraculous deliverance:

“…Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (Ex. 3:12). God repeats: “And this shall be the sign…you shall worship God at this mountain… God, furthermore, said to Moses…Go and gather the elders of Israel together…and you with the elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and you will say to

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him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. So now, please, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God’” (Ex. 3:15a, 16-18). For Moses and the elders, the Israelite people, and even for the heart-hardened Pharaoh, there was little confusion about the foremost purpose for God’s delivered people (see Exodus 12:30-32).  

The scriptures contain a number of terms to denote the cultic activity of public worship. God declared that his people were to be freed to: “worship” Ex. 3:12; 12:31; “sacrifice” Ex. 3:18; 5:3, 8, 17; 8:8, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29; “serve” Ex. 4:23; 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7, 8, 11, 24, 26; and “celebrate a feast” Ex. 5:1; 12:14, 47, 48. With all this emphasis on the details of public worship, it becomes clear that the first and foremost calling for the Israelites was to assemble before their God to worship.  

Jesus and Ekklesia

In Matthew chapter 16 Jesus declared: “…I will build my church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18). The word Jesus used for “church,” is the Greek word ekklesia. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), the term ekklesia has an interesting origin. Derived from the Hebrew word ‘qahal,’ the etymology of the word conveys the meaning of those “called out” of the world by God for the purpose of “assembling together” to worship. In declaring that he would build his

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8 John D. Witvliet, Worship Seeking Understanding (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 28-29; Exodus 12:30-32;

9 Hurtado, Origins, 1, 44-46, 51.

10 Clowney, The Church, 30-31.
ekklesia, Jesus is reiterating a familiar theme. Many scholars believe this is reminiscent of the ‘calling out’ of God’s old covenant community. Ed Clowney is one such scholar. After directing his reader’s attention to the Exodus assembly at Mount Sinai he asserts: “The principal term in the New Testament for the Church, ekklesia, looks back to that event.” In his work entitled At the Origin of Christian Worship, Larry Hurtado highlights the significance of worship to the earliest Christians:

The strong sense of the Christian worship assembly as the prime occasion for the Spirit’s manifestation in demonstrative forms and heightened sense of the significance of their groups both reflected and promoted a strong religious fervor. These little house-groups saw themselves as bearing salvation-historical significance, their meetings constituting God’s ekklesia called together in response to the divine summons issued in the gospel message. Their worship assembly was itself an event of eschatological meaning, a foretaste of the blessings of the coming age, and partook of heavenly realities, including the presence of holy angels and the presence and power of Christ experienced through the phenomena that they saw as manifestations of divine power.

Calvin and Reformers

The priority, requirement, and nature of worship seen in the old covenant system was not only embraced, taught, and practiced, but perhaps even heightened in the new covenant Church. Like the Israelites, Christians would be called out of the bondage of this fallen and sin-stained world, to assemble into their respective congregations first and foremost for the

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11 Ibid., 30.


13 Clowney, The Church, 30. Clowney directs his reader’s attention to the Exodus assembly at Mount Sinai, and then asserts: “The principal term in the New Testament for the Church, ekklesia, looks back to that event.”

14 Hurtado, Origins, 62. Also see page 56 where Hurtado states: “It certainly seems to me difficult to avoid the impression that the term kyriakos functioned to attribute to Christian worship practices an importance of the highest order.”
purpose of worship. As with the Sabbath Day worship assembly for the Israelites, the Lord’s Day worship assembly would be a perpetual sign of the Christian calling. This high view of Christian worship was generally maintained throughout the centuries. Even the Reformers, who were deeply focused on establishing an orthodox understanding of the doctrines of grace, saw public worship as equal in importance. Calvin concentrated on four areas in his reforms; worship, theology, sacraments and church government. But of these four, none was more important or more essential than worship.

Calvin asserts:

If it be inquired, then, by what things chiefly the Christian religion has a standing existence amongst us and maintains its truth, it will be found that the following two not only occupy the principal place, but comprehend under them all the other parts, and consequently the whole substance of Christianity, viz., ‘a knowledge first of the mode in which God is duly worshipped; and secondly of the source from which salvation is to be obtained.’ When these are kept out of view, ‘though we may glory in the name of Christians, our profession is empty and vain.’

Worship for Calvin is on par with salvation itself. This is because salvation is an already but not yet reality that is being perfected, particularly when we are assembled for worship.

Luther and others also believed that restoring a faithful understanding and practice of worship was foremost in significance and went hand and hand with an orthodox understanding of grace and faith.

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15 Hurtado, Origins, 1.

16 John Calvin, The Necessity of Reforming the Church (Audubon: Old Paths Publications, 1994), 4-5. This work was first published in 1544. It is here cited from Paul E. Engle and Steven B. Cowan ed., Who Runs the Church (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 90-91.

17 Ibid.


19 Hart and Muether, Reverence and Awe, 55-59.
Not until recent times has the vital significance of worship come under attack. If the evangelical church is going to survive, the primacy of worship must be recovered. Today there are a plethora of activities within our churches that Christians can be drawn into, but no matter how good and valid various activities may be, they are misguided if they minimize or undermine faithful participation in worship. Like the Israelites who were called out of Egypt, Jesus’ *ekklesia*, and the historical understanding held through the Reformation and beyond, Christians are called out of darkness, first and foremost, to assemble together, with others who have been “called out” to worship God. Christians who seek to be faithful “each day” are called to meet with their covenant God on the “first day”—the Lord’s Day. The faithful Christian life doesn’t just include worship, it is derived from worship. This understanding is vital for all Christians across the evangelical landscape.

**Requirement of Worship**

Participation in the Christian’s highest and foremost calling—the assembly of the saints for the express purpose of worship—is not to be left to the whims of the people or their leaders.²¹ Historically, Christians have had a keen awareness that weekly participation in public worship is not an optional add-on to their faith, but a requirement.²² As long as the saints of the Most High God remain in this world, they are to assemble for worship. In this light, Michael Horton asserts:

> Whenever we gather for public worship, it is because we have been summoned. That is what “church” means: *ekklesia*, “called out.” It is not a voluntary society of those whose

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²¹ Clowney, *The Church*, 118.

²² Ibid., 122-123.
chief concern is to share, to build community, to enjoy fellowship, to have moral instruction for their children, and so forth. Rather, it is a society of those who have been chosen, redeemed, called, justified, and are being sanctified until one day they will finally be glorified in heaven. We gather each Lord’s Day not merely out of habit, social custom, or felt needs but because God has chosen this weekly festival as a foretaste of the everlasting Sabbath day that will be enjoyed fully at the marriage supper of the Lamb. God has called us out of the world and into his marvelous light—that is why we gather.  

Horton rightly points out that those who have been regenerated, called-out, given the gift of faith and assurance of eternal life are required to attend and participate in the regular worship assembly. Only during times of unfaithful disobedience have God’s children neglected this most basic requirement. The author to the Hebrews is clearly speaking of public worship when he says:

> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near (Hebrews 10:19-25, emphasis mine).

The author of Hebrews is not speaking of an unstructured get-together to take place whenever the people may feel up to it; he is speaking of the sacred assembly of worship—a well-ordered event where God’s people would meet with their covenant Lord, present their offerings, and receive spiritual food from heaven.

A recovery of the requirement of public worship is not to be construed as mindless bondage to see how committed people really are. Rather, it should be recovered and faithfully upheld for at least two reasons: (1) Out of gratitude for what God has done for His people through His Son Jesus Christ, and (2) because faithful participation in worship is

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foremost where God meets His people to continue the work of salvation He began. God’s work is ongoing as His people have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved. And this work is not just personally. In ekklesia we learned that Jesus always had the whole worshipping community in mind. For this reason, a Christian congregation in scripture is often depicted as a body, which requires all its parts to function effectively. Paul’s admonition in Ephesians 4 would certainly have included a faithful commitment to assemble as one body in public worship:

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4:15-16).

The same theme is reiterated with similar clarity in Paul’s letter to the Romans: “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5).

Jesus too, in His high priestly prayer to the Father, speaks of Christians being one—perfected in unity (John 17:21-23). Christians will do well to understand that such language would have first and foremost included the oneness that achieved when they are assembled as one body in worship. Those for whom the Lord Jesus Christ gave his life ought to most gladly submit themselves to the highest calling of the Christian life—worship. Such a vision will be more widely embraced by Christians as they gain understanding into the true nature of worship; that is, when they understand what is actually taking place when they assemble.
Nature of Worship: Transcendent and Efficacious

Historically God’s children have understood worship as required, not just because the Bible says so, but because they understood the powerfully transcendent and efficacious nature of worship.24 A sound doctrine of worship must include the recovery, understanding, and application of the true divine nature of worship. Without this understanding worship will continue to lack the significance Christians are longing for.

Transcendent Worship

In worship the faithful come into the presence of their God and deliverer. God himself meets and greets his chosen ones, thus imbuing the worship service with divine transcendence. It’s not so much that God is brought down to earth when the people are assembled for worship, but Paul speaks of the Christians being lifted up. To the Colossians Paul says: “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col. 3:1). To the Philippians Paul says: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20). This is consistent with what the author of Hebrews is alleging when he says: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven” (Heb 12:22-23). Darryl Hart speaks of transcendent worship like this: “. . . because Christ has provided access into the Holy of Holies, believers may now participate in that heavenly worship to which the observances of the Old Testament pointed.”25 Hart points out that Christians ascend a spiritual mountain that leads to the throne.

room of heaven where believers present themselves to their God through thanksgiving, confession, and praise, and where divine administrations of grace from the Triune God are truly manifested and, in fact, can and should be expected.\textsuperscript{26} This thinking is rooted very early in the church. Larry Hurtado comments on how early Christian worship was endowed with rich, transcendent significance consistent with the biblical texts sighted above:

Their worship gatherings were an extension of and participation in the idealized worship of the heavenly hosts, and in their view of their gatherings as graced with God’s holy angels, they express a vivid transcendent significance pertaining to these occasions. . . From the beginning believers saw their humble worship gatherings in small groups in houses as events with this transcendent significance and character.\textsuperscript{27}

Hurtado points out that the early Christians did not gather simply to talk about Jesus, they assembled to meet with Him. If only for a brief time, they transcended this fallen world, and entered into heaven. And this would be the most significant and intimate time they would have with the Triune God until the end of this life.

Efficacious Worship

The definition of \textit{efficacy} is “the power to produce the desired results.”\textsuperscript{28} Historically, the desired results for worship have rightly been twofold: (1) The assembly of the faithful gathered to offer praise and thanksgiving to their Lord and Savior in a manner pleasing and acceptable to him, and (2) for God’s children to receive the gifts of grace through faith. Worship is efficacious because it makes provision for both; it provides the setting for a thank and praise offering of the people both individually and as one body, in the name of Jesus and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{25} Hart, \textit{Mother Kirk}, 99.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Hart, \textit{Mother Kirk}, 97-99.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Hurtado, \textit{Origins}, 5, 113.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Summarized definition derived from several widely accepted dictionaries, Webster, Heritage, etc.
\end{itemize}
by the power of the Holy Spirit, deemed acceptable and pleasing before Almighty God. At the same time it provides the setting for God’s people to confess, make their requests known, and most assuredly receive spiritual food that will endure unto eternal life; namely, through the word rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered. Historically worship has been viewed as centering on divine activity. Horton asserts:

The gospel having been eclipsed by humanly devised doctrines and practices, the Reformers knew that the power was in the preaching of the gospel—not only in the sermon but in the entire service. The service, they recognized was not primarily about human action but centered on divine action. God was not only central as an object of worship but also as a subject—an actor, who reconstitutes strangers and aliens as his own redeemed people each week.

Calvin and other reformers also believed the worship assembly to be charged with divine activity:

Wherever the faithful, who worship him purely and in due form, according to the appointment of his word, are assembled together to engage in the solemn acts of religious worship, he is graciously present, and presides in the midst of them.

Certainly Calvin held to a high view of what would take place when God’s people were assembled for worship each Lord’s Day. Such an understanding of worship as transcendent and efficacious was the view of the earliest church, it was the view of the Reformers, and it is the proper view to this day. This understanding of worship needs to be recovered in our day. Accordingly, Larry Hurtado that may be easier said than done:

In our time, it will be a challenge for Christians to re-appropriate meaningfully the idea of being in the presence of angels in worship, and the meaning of the notion that earthly worship can be a participation in the liturgy of heaven itself.

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30 Ibid., 15.


Hurtado’s concerns are good ones in light of the physical nature of our existence and the self-directed and pragmatic approaches to worship today. It will be a challenge to convince people to abandon self-innovated frills to “enter into heaven” if they are unaware that such spiritual realities are possible in worship. But that does not change what the Scriptures teach, namely, that we do worship in heaven with angels and the saints who have gone before us; a reality well understood by the early Church.\textsuperscript{33}

In summary, an understanding of the true transcendent and efficacious nature of worship needs to be recovered and restored into the hearts and minds of worshippers. Until then, the temptation to trivialize worship will continue, and God’s covenant children will continue to struggle to find spiritual significance in worship. Now, in the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century, with over 100 million unchurched Christians in America alone, the unfortunate outcomes are already quite apparent. When Christians begin to understand the activities taking place within the worship service as divinely ordained and possessing the power to feed the soul and strengthen faith, the \textit{primacy}, \textit{requirement}, \textit{transcendence}, and \textit{efficacy} will begin to make more sense, and a proper biblical-historical understanding of public worship will once again begin to prevail. As such, when these things are realized, the activities within the worship service will no longer be driven by novelty, nor will they be left to chance. Rather, they will be biblically sound, historically thoughtful, and reverently applied.

\textsuperscript{33} See Hebrews 12:18-29.
Certain Liturgical Forms for Worship

From the very onset of corporate Christian worship, there was a sense of freedom that had not existed in the days of Old Covenant Israel. On the other hand, this freedom was not interpreted as a license for every church or person to do what was right in their own eyes in worship. In fact, evidence suggests the wide use of and commitment to certain orderly forms for public worship very early on in the Christian Church. Further, early apostolic tradition actually promotes the need for thoughtful worship liturgy. Church historian Phillip Shaff notes, “This liturgical spirit of the ancient church could not have so generally prevailed both in the East and the West without some apostolic and post-apostolic precedent.” What Schaff is implying is that certain liturgical forms for worship were promoted by the apostles.

It is important at this point to briefly clarify what is meant by “certain liturgical forms” for worship. Liturgy literally means “the work of the people.” In ecclesiastical terms, according to Phillip Shaff, liturgy can be defined as “the order and administration of public worship in general, and the celebration of the Eucharist in particular.” Through certain liturgical elements, according to Robert Webber, worship becomes “the work of the body in praise, repentance, the hearing of the word, the remembrance of Christ’s death and the


35 Clowney, The Church, 14-17, 117, 123


38 Ibid.
celebration of Christ’s resurrection and return to glory.” As a result of these definitions, it is reasonable to conclude that the goal of liturgy is to facilitate the effective communication and proper administration of things ordained by God in worship. Therefore, every part of the liturgy should facilitate the worship activity God has required of his people and the administration of God’s gifts to his people.

Promoting the need for certain liturgical forms is not to suggest that the ‘traditionalists’ have it right and the ‘progressives’ have it wrong. Traditionalist or Progressive, scripture calls church leaders to give careful thought to what might take place in worship. Though Christians have some distinct advantages as they approach worship in light of Christ’s completed work, never were Christians instructed to approach the throne of grace in worship in a casual, complacent, disorganized, or cavalier manner. And certainly, God and His divine activity would be the central focus. The author to the Hebrews makes this quite clear in comparing new covenant worship to old covenant worship:

For you have not come to a mountain that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind . . . But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven . . . See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking . . . Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire (from Hebrews 12:18-29).


To be sure, reverent and orderly worship is not to be ordered out of terror, as was the case with many old covenant saints, but rather it is to be ordered with a spirit of thanksgiving and praise, and with great anticipation of what the Lord would do.

**Patristic Roots of Reformed Liturgy**

The reformers exhaustively studied and sought to understand and ultimately recover the Patristic roots of Christian worship. Hugh Oliphant Old points out in the preface of his book entitled *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship*:

> When John Calvin had the Genevan Psalter of 1542 published, he wrote into the title the claim that the form of worship contained in the psalter was “according to the custom of the ancient Church.” Yet today one takes for granted that Reformed worship has neither interest nor precedent in the liturgical traditions of the patristic age.

In addition to gaining a better understanding of the worship practices of the early church, the Reformer’s research also revealed grave errors within the worship services of their own day. Though the late medieval church embraced the use of liturgical forms, “the simplicity of worship” was clearly lost by the time of the Reformation. The liturgical commitment in the early church (particularly the first three centuries) did not involve complicated and confusing forms. Rather, the forms for public worship were simple, spiritually moving, and easily understood. Their function was to articulate the great realities of the nature of worship to the people, and they did just that.

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The late medieval worship service had become a complicated, mystical, allegorized mass. The beauty of faithful worship had become so convoluted and obscured by the inventions and imaginations of men that reform was essential. The liturgy was being performed in a language uncommon to lay-people and was no longer guided by a simple form that reflected a “service of reconciliation” between God and his covenant children. Perhaps because of the liturgical abuses of the late medieval churches, many people to this day (primarily in evangelicalism) reject even the notion of certain liturgical forms as if such forms were inherently evil, unbiblical, and un-Reformed. This disdain for liturgy often results in an anti-liturgical free-for-all in worship. But such thinking is ill-founded and inconsistent with how the reformers responded.

The answer for the reformers was not to abandon liturgy but rather to return to the simple, faithful, and rightly motivated orders of worship. The great reformer John Calvin is often painted as one who advocated places of worship being stripped bare and worship services that were devoid of liturgy while focusing almost exclusively on the word read and preached. Accordingly, Frank Schaeffer notes the following on his way out of Protestantism and into Eastern Orthodoxy: “If we were Reformed Presbyterians, we stuck to our Calvinist tradition – church consisted of four white walls and a lengthy sermon – and “worship” was the feeling you got if the sermon was good.” But this is not

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46 Hart, *Mother Kirk*, 86-87. Note the comments from C.S Lewis and Cornelius Van Til on the silliness of overly extemporaneous or “non-liturgical” worship.

47 Hart and Muether, *Reverence and Awe*, 91-95; Thompson, *Liturgies*, 141-341.

48 Schaeffer, *Dancing Alone*, 2.
at all an accurate appraisal of Calvin’s thought and practice. Schaeffer’s view of Calvin was skewed by later and more revolutionary reform, particularly in the arena of worship. Though Calvin may not have been as fond of huge fanfare and lengthy processions, he believed that certain liturgical forms for worship were so important to the ongoing health of the church that they should be required of ministers and churches as seen in the following statement:

I highly approve of it that there be a certain form…from which the ministers be not allowed to vary: that first, some provision be made to help the simplicity and un-skillfulness of some; secondly that the consent and harmony of the churches one with another may appear; and lastly, that the capricious giddiness and levity of such as affect innovations may be prevented.  

When combining this statement with the understanding that Calvin desired a weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper, it is clear that Calvin had a vision for orderly worship, and clearly saw worship as something far more than a good sermon. And further, without some level of liturgical requirement among churches, Calvin feared the inevitability of three things: (1) the less gifted ministers would struggle in an overly extemporaneous worship environment; (2) every church doing its own thing would harm his much desired unity between churches; and (3) apart from certain liturgical forms, sinful men would begin to use their imaginations to eventually devise and introduce various unbiblical and unfaithful schemes into the worship service. In short, Calvin believed that, left to every individual pastor or congregation, the church would risk the loss of vital and necessary elements of worship, elements necessary for true, authentic, transcendent, and efficacious worship.

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Many churches today are actually bearing witness to the disarray Calvin was concerned about. Edmund Clowney well summarizes the demise of the liturgical form in our day:

For centuries nothing was more fixed in Christendom than the form of worship. Today, nothing seems fixed: the varied styles of Christian worship reflect the patchwork of world cultures and the kaleidoscope tastes of current entertainment. 

Historically God’s children have understood the need for liturgical forms to safeguard the faithful communication of the realities promised within the rightly ordered worship assembly. In many churches today liturgical forms are despised and in some cases even mocked.

If a doctrine for evangelical worship is to be established, there must be a widespread renewal of interest and commitment to explore certain liturgical forms to faithfully guide our worship. A liturgical renewal would satisfactorily address each of Calvin’s concerns. It would be somewhat of an equalizer for pastors with various levels of giftedness; it would promote unity between our churches; and it would safeguard our much needed sensibilities in worship. But even more importantly, it would help to promote and ensure a clearer understanding of the truly transcendent and efficacious event that takes place when we assemble for worship.

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Summary

From Moses to Calvin and to our day, faithful churches have upheld the primacy, requirement, transcendence, and efficacy of worship. Flowing from these convictions, they have deemed certain liturgical forms as necessary to facilitate faithful worship. To recover a biblical doctrine of Christian worship in the evangelical world today, leaders need to get re-rooted in the historical facts of the “one holy catholic and apostolic church.” With well-ordered liturgical form as a significant part of our heritage, the next chapter will promote five overarching components for faithful worship.
CHAPTER FOUR

SUBSCRIPTION TO FIVE
FAITHFUL COMPONENTS OF WORSHIP

In addition to recovering a proper biblical and historical understanding of worship, a faithful doctrine of worship will require subscription to certain overarching foundational components.\(^1\) The worship wars are often focused on, “What should be allowed or disallowed in worship?” But the more important question is, “What should be required in worship?” Until the latter question is faithfully answered, there is little value in debating the former. Evangelical Christians and leaders must first agree on the foundational components required to ensure faithful worship.

As stated in chapter three, and in contrast to old covenant Israel, Christian worship from the onset enjoyed a certain freedom from such requirement of detail, and certainly that freedom should be maintained. In fact, this is one of the principles the Reformers sought to recover from the early Church. But such freedom was never intended to negate the obligations incumbent upon all Christian churches to maintain a faithful worship doctrine. In

other words, the church was not given freedom for freedom’s sake so churches could worship in ways that are inconsistent with what the scriptures and, secondarily, with what historical Christian tradition has deemed essential to faithful worship.\(^2\) This is why the early Christian churches and the Reformation churches labored and continued to refine their liturgies; namely, to better facilitate and communicate the magnificent realities foundational to authentic Christian worship.\(^3\)

In considering the requirements for faithful worship, five overarching components are here identified. These components are both biblical and consistent with the practices of faithful worshipping communities over the ages: (1) acknowledge the presence of God; (2) prayer; (3) offering; (4) the word rightly preached; and (5) proper administration of the sacraments.\(^4\) Since each of these overarching components is biblical and historically faithful, and were in fact recovered and upheld by our Reformed fathers, neglecting any of them would indicate either some level of misunderstanding or some level of rebellion. Gordon Lathrop touches on the requirement of several of these components:

> The center is this: Christian assemblies gather around a washing rite now done in Jesus’ name, around the Scriptures read so that the cross and resurrection which bring all people to God may be proclaimed, and around the thanksgiving over the shared bread and cup. These things are not optional, if the assembly wishes to be Christian.\(^5\)


Here Lathrop begins to touch on the special presence of Christ when the assembly is gathered for worship, but he clearly articulates the requirement of the word read and proclaimed [preached], and the sacraments administered. Though Lathrop has not here laid forth all five components that will here follow in detail, the idea is quite similar.

**Acknowledge God’s Presence**

The first, foremost and foundational component that needs be required for a faithful doctrine of worship is the recognizing, understanding and acknowledging the unique and special presence of God among his people when they are assembled for the specific purpose of worship. This ties closely with, and can be argued from, the sections of this work that deal with the transcendent nature of worship. On the one hand, God is certainly omnipresent. As such, he is always present with us, both privately and publicly. But this should not be confused with the promised unique and special presence of God when he meets his covenant children in the worship assembly.⁶

In seeking to promote a Christianity that goes much deeper than an hour’s commitment on Sunday mornings, John Frame, D.A. Carson, and other biblical scholars rightly go to great lengths to preserve a concept that “all of life is worship”—not just what we do on Sunday morning. We can agree that true faith in Jesus Christ is something that involves every moment of our lives. However, virtually to the person, each of these scholars is quick to clarify the unique significance and, most particularly, the special presence of God in the public worship assembly. John Frame clearly wanting to preserve this transcendent reality, as well as the requirement for Christians to assemble weekly for worship, discusses the unique

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and intimate nature of God’s presence with his people when they are assembled specifically for worship:

In [public] worship, we experience God’s presence. As the covenant Lord, he comes to us in worship to be with us. The tabernacle and the temple in the Old Testament were place where God Himself met with His people (Ex. 20:24). The worshipper shouts with joy that God is in the midst of his people (Zeph. 3:17).  

Frame then beautifully connects this Old Covenant picture of worship with its New Covenant counterpart: “The name of Jesus, the name in which we worship is Immanuel, which means ‘God with us’ (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23).” Rightly convinced of God’s unique presence and power among the assembled body in worship, Frame asserts that, “even an unbeliever could conceivably be so taken in by the presence and power of God with us in our worship that he might fall down and worship God, exclaiming ‘God is really among you!’” (1 Cor. 14:25). Although most people would not deny God’s presence in public worship per se, the concept is being increasingly compromised. A proper biblical-historical understanding of God’s unique presence in the worship service must be recovered, taught, understood, and applied as part of a sound doctrine of worship.

This can be accomplished in several ways. It can simply be stated to the people that God meets them in the assembly for a specific and unique purpose. However, to convey the magnitude of what is taking place in worship, the presence of God historically has been acknowledged through various elements  within the worship service, such as: The Call to

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 8.
10 For the purpose of this work, elements are specific actions that take place within the worship service. Each of these elements would fall under one of the five overarching components. Since the
Worship; the Invocation; the Greeting; and the Benediction. These elements, still found in many worship services to this day, declare God’s unique presence to the assembled people, either implicitly or explicitly. The following elements, though not intended to promote rigid adherence to the specific elements themselves, have proven to be effective in communicating the reality of the unique presence of God in public worship:

The Call to Worship

At the onset of worship, a call to worship generally includes a reading of Scripture calling the people into the presence of God to worship him. One of many such passages is taken from Psalm 95: “Come, let us worship and bow down, Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker. For He is our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand” (Psalm 95:6-7a). This element implies that God’s people are about to enter into God’s presence.

The Greeting

The greeting is possibly the most vivid statement declaring God’s presence among his people. The greeting, though stated by the minister, is from God himself: The most classic greeting is: “Grace to you and peace, from God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” This greeting serves a twofold purpose. First, it makes clear that God is present in the assembly, and second, it makes clear that he is not angry with his people who are assembled in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, by faith. This sets the tone for a service of rejoicing and awe as God’s children are reminded of the “peace on earth and good will toward men” (Luke 2:14) made possible by the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Specific elements offered in this chapter are intended as mere examples of how the proposed overarching components might be faithfully observed, footnotes of such elements will be left to a minimum.
The Benediction

The benediction is the final clear statement regarding the unique and special presence of God among his people in the worship assembly. It is, in a sense, a recommissioning. Through the worship service, God’s people are filled with grace, peace, forgiveness, and assurance in and through the power of God who has met with them for this very purpose. Now at the conclusion of the service, God sends his people back out into a hostile world with his parting blessing. They leave the assembly and return to the world as his confident, Spirit-filled witnesses, until they reassemble one week later to meet with their covenant God, and to be reminded, renewed, filled and blessed again. The benediction that was generally embraced by the early church was taken directly from Numbers 6:24-26 and continues to this day. The Lord told Moses to speak to Aaron and his sons to bless the sons of Israel, saying: “The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace” (vv.24-26). Then God concludes by declaring the efficacy of such a blessing: “So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them” (Num 6:27).

Unfortunately, the presence of God has been an area of neglect in evangelical worship. Regardless of how particular churches deem it best to acknowledge the unique and special presence of God among his worshipping assembly, this first component of faithful worship is essential. Such an understanding and acknowledgment is imperative to the recovery and preservation of a proper doctrine for worship. Acknowledging the unique and special presence of God in the worship assembly must be required of true churches seeking to promote a proper understanding of the significance of what is taking place when the Lord’s people assemble for the Lord’s service, on the Lord’s Day.
Prayer

The second foundational component necessary to recover a sound doctrine of Christian worship is prayer. Prayer is a component that will draw little disagreement when it comes to what must be included in faithful public worship. Evangelical churches generally agree that prayer is an important and required component of worship, even though there is much diversity as to the exact details of how prayer is to be carried out in the service. Historically, particular churches have been given much freedom in prayer, i.e., precisely how many prayers take place within a service, how long the prayers are, the actual content of the prayers, or whether the prayers are composed or extemporaneous. Many churches today incorporate few prayers into their worship services, and the prayers are generally offered to God on behalf of the people by leaders. Others promote greater freedom in prayer, even allowing the congregation to extemporaneously offer prayers aloud. The practice of prayer is and should remain an area of discretion for each individual congregation, but all churches would do well to at least attempt to understand a liturgical order as it pertains to prayer. In most traditional services, multiple prayers are offered at various points within the worship service and for good and specific reasons.\(^\text{11}\)

Prayer of Invocation

Many Churches, both traditional and progressive, begin their service with an opening prayer or prayer of invocation. Some believe such a prayer actually “invokes” God’s presence among them,\(^\text{12}\) while others simply believe the invocation to be a time of declaring great things about our God. The reality may be both. Assembled for the express purpose of

\(^\text{11}\) Sproul, A Taste of Heaven, 49-58.

worship, God’s people declare the greatness of their God and God meets them in covenant 
renewal. Some however object to this meaning, and argue that the invocation, although 
involving the entrance or beginning of worship, merely is intended to declare wonderful 
things about our covenant God, who is already present with us, and does not need to be 
invoked. Either way, the invocation declares the purpose for the gathering and offers thanks 
to God who most certainly meets his people in this gathering. As a result, this prayer serves 
to acknowledge God’s presence among the congregation.

Prayer of Confession

Also early in the service, it has been deemed fitting to offer a prayer of confession. Though God declares grace and peace to his people who assembly in the name of his Son, in 
his holy presence they are keenly aware of their fallenness and need to confess their 
particular sins. The weekly prayer of confession, typically followed by the absolution or 
declaration of pardon, is a constant reminder of God’s holiness, the people’s sinfulness, and 
their need for repentance. It also emphasizes the ongoing means God has provided to 
administer his grace to poor miserable sinners through Jesus Christ, our perpetual high priest. 
A classic statement from Scripture that attests to this practice is found in 1 John:

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and 
in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet

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14 Jeffrey J. Meyers, The Lords Service: The Grace of Covenant Renewal Worship (Moscow: 
Canon Press, 2003), 151-162.

15 Old, Patristic Roots, 9. The Manuale curatorum gives directions for guiding the faithful to 
offer prayers offer a prayer of confession. Note: The Manuale curatorum is the nineteenth century 
work of Johann Ulrich Surgant. Old points out that ‘this remarkable pastors’ manual is a book of 
techniques of offering a more effective ministry. But it is far more, because it grounds its practical 
thought on the principles of canon law and on classical doctrine of the ministry to be found in 
Gregory the Great’s Regula pastoralis and Augustine’s De doctrina Christiana.
walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us (1 John 1:5-10).

Prayer for Illumination

Before the sermon is preached and in some cases before the Scriptures are read it is fitting to offer a prayer for illumination.¹⁶ In our fallen conditions, our hearts and minds are clouded. The apostle Paul told the Church at Corinth: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known” (I Cor 13:12). Jesus told the Pharisees they couldn’t discern the truth because it had not been granted to them to do so. In accordance with Scripture and our confessions we believe that proper understanding of God’s word is impossible apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, as the word is read and preached, it is important to entreat the Lord for eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts and minds to be penetrated and transformed by the truth of God’s word. Since the word preached is one of the very means God ordained to administer grace to his people, it is also fitting within the prayer to make request that the preacher’s words would be faithful and true. For this reason, one of the classic parts of this prayer, particularly when offered by the preacher himself, often includes the words of David as follows: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer (Psalm 19:14). The goal is for the preacher to

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¹⁶ Old, Patristic Roots, 9. The Manuale curatorium suggests a short prayer before the sermon asking God’s help in proclaiming His word.
speak life-giving truth faithful to the scriptures, and for the people to be fed and strengthened by that truth.\textsuperscript{17}

Prayers of Intercession

There is much diversity when it comes to intercessory prayer within the worship service.\textsuperscript{18} Some churches deem it fitting to lift up every need imaginable, both within their congregation, and outside the congregation, offering very lengthy prayers. Other churches find it more appropriate to pray specifically for immediate and pressing needs, and beyond that, to pray generally for the needs of the people. Either way, intercessory prayer is an important part of the prayers within the worship service. Paul says to the congregation at Philippi: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). However it is accomplished, intercessory prayer, particularly for those who suffer, is vital and should not be neglected in worship.\textsuperscript{19}

The Lord’s Prayer

There is little argument against the use of the Lord’s Prayer in public worship. Some would argue that nothing could be more fitting for any congregation than to pray the Lord’s Prayer together. Over the centuries churches have held this prayer in high esteem, in some cases even requiring it. Of late however, it is a prayer that is seldom used in many of our evangelical churches. It is difficult to say why this prayer would be neglected. Though

\textsuperscript{17} Wallace,\textit{ Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament}, 115-116.

\textsuperscript{18} Old,\textit{ Patristic Roots}, 9. The Manuale curatorium gives directions for guiding the faithful to offer prayers of intercession.

\textsuperscript{19} Byars,\textit{ The Future of Protestant Worship}, 70.
evangelical churches are given discretion here, they need to think very carefully about what they are doing. In my view, for our sakes, for the sake of our children, and the value of an ongoing legacy Jesus has given to us, the Lord’s Prayer should not too quickly be neglected.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

With the exception of the Lord’s Prayer, the prayer of thanksgiving is perhaps the most widely used prayer in non-evangelical churches today. However, this is a prayer that warrants some consideration within evangelical circles. This prayer has maintained a regular place in the worship service for nearly the entire history of the New Testament Church, dating back at least to the apostolic tradition of second century Hippolytus,\textsuperscript{20} and possibly even to the first century.\textsuperscript{21} This prayer was and is most often used as the prayer leading into the Lord’s Supper. Quite simply, it is a giving of thanks before the institution and receiving of the covenant meal, which is a perfectly fitting place to offer such a meaningful prayer. The prayer starts with a blessing and interaction between the minister and the people. From there the minister generally offers up the actual prayer itself.

Pastor:  The Lord be with you.
People:  And also with you.
Pastor:  Lift up your hearts!
People:  We lift them up to the Lord!
Pastor:  Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
People:  It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

Pastor:  Truly it is right and our greatest joy to give thanks to You heavenly Father, at all times and in every place. We praise You, joining our voices with choirs of angels, and with all the faithful of every time and place, who forever sing to the glory of Your name:

\textsuperscript{20} Thompson, \textit{Liturgies}, 20.

What is beautifully evident in this prayer is its transcendent language, a theme that has been repeated throughout this work. The picture is one of worship in heaven. The king is on his throne and all God’s angels, people who have already passed, and those visibly present in the local congregation, are together in offering thanks and praise to Almighty God. The transcendent reality of the Christian worship assembly given by the author of Hebrews comes to mind:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel (Heb. 12:22-24).

There are many variations and much longer versions of this historic Eucharistic prayer of thanksgiving. As with the other prayers mentioned, it is not that this specific prayer should be required. But like the Lord’s Prayer, this prayer provides today’s church with a practical connection to the one holy catholic and apostolic church, which, in our individualistic culture, should not be dismissed too quickly.

Although there is no proposal here for requiring specific forms of prayer, ministers and all Christians should at least try to understand the reasoning for these historical forms for prayer, and the meaning behind them. They may very likely find them to be invaluable in their content and what they communicate, both to God and to his people. Carefully thought out prayer must remain a required component of faithful Christian worship. And these historical forms certainly meet that criterion.

**The Offering**

The fourth foundational component necessary to recover a sound doctrine of Christian worship is the offering. Since worship is efficacious and transcendent, and since God’s
people are being spiritually lifted up into the special presence of Almighty God, it is only natural that they approach the throne of grace with an offering. When speaking of an offering, the first thing that often comes to people’s minds is money. Although the offering may include a monetary contribution, such is the least significant aspect of the threefold Christian offering in public worship. The Christian offering is first a *self-offering*; secondly, and tied very closely with the first, is an *offering of thanksgiving and praise*; and thirdly, the financial giving of *tithes and offerings*.

**Self Offering**

Early in the book of Genesis we learn that Cain and Abel were taught to bring an offering to God when coming into his presence. This offering involved sacrifice. For Abel (a keeper of flocks), the offering was to be a sacrifice of one of the firstlings of his flock. For Cain (a tiller of the ground), the offering was to be a sacrifice of a portion of his choicest produce. In both cases, the requirement was to offer to God their very best, which would have involved a sacrifice of something very valuable to them. This pattern of offering and sacrifice continued to be a requirement when coming into God’s presence, and it continued to develop over the centuries until these rituals were revealed to Moses in vivid detail by God himself. These offerings were to be taken so seriously that two of Aaron’s sons were killed by God when they decided to make a mockery of what God had commanded as follows:

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, “It is what

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the LORD spoke, saying, ‘By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored’ (Lev. 10:1-3).

Detailed sacrificial offerings of many different types for many different purposes would continue until they were fulfilled in the self-offering and sacrifice of “the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ) who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Paul speaks to this as follows:

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:3-4).

Because the final sacrifice has been made in Christ, the offering we engage in today is no longer an obligation of material sacrifices involving the blood of goats and bulls or various grain offerings to be burned. Instead, with redemption now sealed in Christ, who alone made peace with God on behalf of all his covenant children, the new covenant children are to enter the presence of Almighty God with a self-offering of praise and thanksgiving. Peter speaks of the assembly of Christians as the acceptable offering: “…you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5). Compare this with similar language from Paul: “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom. 12:1). Though Paul’s statement is most often interpreted and applied to individual Christians and what they must do individually, one only needs to read further to see that Paul is speaking of the plurality of the Body of Christ’s Church assembled in worship: “For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same
function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5).

Offering of Thanksgiving and Praise

The book of Hebrews provides us with powerful statements concerning gratitude as the underlying motivation for what we do in worship:

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28-29)... Through Him [Jesus our high priest] let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (Heb 13:15 emphasis added).

Having established the fact that New Covenant offering is centered on gratitude, namely, thanksgiving and praise for what has been realized in Christ, it is interesting to note that such was always the goal of offering and sacrifice. Even in the Old System where tangible sacrifices and offerings were required, that which God ultimately desired was not the blood of goats and bulls, but a relationship with his people rooted in his grace and their thanks. Psalm 50 stands out in this regard as God rebukes his people for turning their sacrifice and offerings into a material obligation as opposed to a self-offering of praise and thanksgiving:

8 “I do not reprove you for your sacrifices,
And your burnt offerings are continually before Me.
9 “I shall take no young bull out of your house
Nor male goats out of your folds.
10 “For every beast of the forest is Mine,
The cattle on a thousand hills.
13 “Shall I eat the flesh of bulls
Or drink the blood of male goats?
14 “Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving
And pay your vows to the Most High;
15 Call upon Me in the day of trouble;
I shall rescue you, and you will honor Me” (Psalm 50:8-10, 13-15).

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In the very midst of all of their offerings and sacrifices, the people failed to understand that their salvation rested entirely in God’s grace alone; which revealed the fact that they didn’t really know God. The same holds true in the church today. Salvation by grace alone through the God-given gift of faith alone in Christ alone does not result in an offering of thanksgiving and praise as an obligation in order to remain in God’s good graces. Rather, salvation results in the praise of a people who can’t get over what the Lord has done for them. Those who find it difficult to lift up their hearts in gratitude likely need to be reminded of what the Lord has done. And God makes sure they are reminded of that at least each Lord’s Day.

This understanding of God’s love and grace can manifest itself tangibly in many different ways in worship. But generally speaking the offering involves various prayers of thanksgiving; songs of praise and thanksgiving; serving in the church as each one is gifted and able; extending love to one another, especially to the weaker brother or sister; and finally, by giving a portion of one’s financial resources as one is able.

Tithes and Offerings

There is much discussion and debate about tithes and offerings in the evangelical church today, and it is not within the scope of this work to debate that specifically. What we do know about this from the very early church is that Christians were to give of their resources, or offerings, as they were able to provide for the poor among them. Over the centuries the church has adopted a practice similar to that of the Old Covenant of tithing; that is, all Christians are to give the first ten percent of their income to the church. Beyond the tithe, Christians are asked to give an offering as they are able. In most evangelical churches,

both tithes and offerings are left to the honor system. Although this is probably the right approach, it is good for the people of the church to be reminded of the importance of giving, not out of obligation, but again, out of hearts overflowing with gratitude and thanksgiving.

In summary, the offering, in its various forms has been an essential component of public worship from the beginning, and should remain a central part of all worship assemblies. The offering, in its various forms—self-offering, offering of thanksgiving and praise, and tithes and offerings, is an essential component to authentic worship and a faithful doctrine for worship.

The Word Read and Rightly Preached

The third foundational component necessary to recover a sound doctrine for Christian worship is the reading and faithful preaching of the word. Although there is no explicit command requiring the reading of Scripture, it is clear that this has been an element of Christian worship over the history of the Church, and it should not be neglected.²⁶

The Word Read

In the very early church the Scriptures were read at length during worship because the common people were unable to read the Scriptures for themselves, due to illiteracy and the non-availability of private copies. Many factors should be carefully taken into consideration when determining what and how much Scripture ought to be read in worship, keeping in mind the goal is edification.

The longstanding practice of four readings within many mainline denominations, (Old Testament, Psalms, Gospel, and Epistle), in my view, is a good and sustainable tradition.

This element of reading Scripture consistently, if embraced within evangelicalism, could be a
good and unifying element in worship among our churches. Despite the freedom given to
particular churches when it comes to the reading of Scripture, there can be little latitude when
it comes to the right preaching of the word in worship.

The Word Rightly Preached

The word rightly preached is one of the marks of a true church agreed upon in the
Reformation and articulated in various Reformed confessions. One such confession puts it
this way: “Wherever the word is rightly preached, the sacraments are properly administered,
and discipline is faithfully exercised, there you have a true church.” Preaching is also one
of two or three means of grace. Saving faith comes by hearing the word rightly preached
(see Rom. 10:17). Paul was called to preach the gospel because the gospel is the very means
through which God’s chosen people would come to faith in Jesus Christ. Paul writes: “For
since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God
was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”
(1 Cor 1:21). A similar emphasis on the necessity of preaching and the grace administered
through it can be seen in Paul’s letter to the Romans:

How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe
in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will
they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF
THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!” However, they did not all heed the
good news; for Isaiah says, “LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT?” So faith comes
from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:14-17).

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27 Belgic Confession, Article 29: “The true Church is to be recognized by the following marks:
It practices the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as
Christ instituted them. It exercises Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins.”

28 The historic Reformation means of grace are “the word rightly preached, the sacraments
rightly administered, and prayer.”
Preaching is not only a means of grace to bring about conversion. Even after conversion, throughout this life, there is an ongoing need for God’s grace. Alongside prayer and the sacraments, the word rightly preached is the primary means through which God continues to administer grace to his children.29 “For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). Paul charged Timothy and all pastors to remain faithful in their preaching:

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

The ongoing grace of word and sacrament is intended by God to be the efficacious food for endurance unto eternal life. It’s not that believers should doubt their salvation or that their salvation is at risk until the end. Rather, their salvation is not fully realized or consummated until the end. Jesus told his disciples: “the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matt. 24:13; cf. 10:22; Mark 13:13). God’s elect are inaugurated into the faith through the word rightly preached. And they continue and are perpetually strengthened as members of his body through the word rightly preached.

Of late, there is much being passed off as “preaching” that would not pass the test of “right preaching.” Psychology from the pulpit does not constitute the right preaching of the word. In chapter two of this work, The Demise of Worship, this issue was addressed. Psychologized messages may be helpful to Christians at some level, and there may be a legitimate time and a place for that kind of instruction, but such is not to be misconstrued as the proper Christ-centered preaching of the word. All aspects of preaching, reproof, rebuke, exhortation, or instruction, must be done through the lens of Jesus Christ and his completed

work on behalf of the sinner. The current shift in focus from God to self has tempted many preachers to preach sermons centered on man, rather than on Christ. Granted the two are connected from the standpoint that Christ is man’s only hope. But the hope Christians have in Christ is redemptive in nature, not psychological. In other words, Christ is to be preached as Lord and Savior not therapist and buddy. Christ is to be preached the way he is seen in the full counsel of Scripture: redeemer, reconciler between God and sinful man, sustainer of our faith, keeper of his flock, fully God and yet fully man. As fully man he has the prerogative to perfectly represent us; as fully God he has the power to save us. Jesus himself made this clear on the road to Emmaus:

And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27).

Jesus also made this clear to the Jews of his day. He chastised the leaders who thought knowledge of scripture produced life, but they had utterly missed the very One to whom the entire scriptures testified. Jesus said to them: “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life” (John 5:39-40, emphasis mine). The same applies for all Christians and churches today. The Scriptures are about Jesus Christ and the redemption of God’s elect in him. The power to transform lives, both initially in conversion and continually in sanctification, can only be found in and through a relationship with Christ. This is why Paul was careful to avoid trivializing the word preached with worldly chatter, including human psychology: “I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus

An excellent discussion of the necessity of Christ-centered preaching can be found in the following volumes: Bryan Chapel, Christ-Centered Preaching; Graeme Goldsworthy, Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Preachers and Preaching.
Christ, and Him crucified… not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:2-5). The power of God to transform the soul does not rest in psychology or the craftiness of men but in the power of the gospel: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). Paul warned Timothy (1 Tim. 4:3-5) that the day would come when people would reject the sound preaching of the word. Preachers who have shifted from the true Christ-centered gospel to psychology very often tout a style that simply “meets the people where they’re at, in real life.” But psychology, self-help theories, and practical tips for living cannot meet the true needs of the Christian life. Only Christ has “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68), and only “in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:3). It is the word of Christ, “from hearing,” that creates and strengthens faith (Rom. 10:17). At the foot of the cross, believers are to be reminded again and again (in every sermon) not to trust in themselves or man-devised schemes to save them from the wretchedness of their fallen sin nature. They are to be reminded of the Savior who loved them, also lived for them, died for them, was resurrected for them, and now lives to make intercession for them until He comes.

Regardless of the difficulties, the guilt, the shame, or the temporal pain of this life, the right preaching of the word transforms hearts and strengthens faith (1 Cor. 1:21, 23; 2:4). When the temptation arises for preachers to shift the focus of their messages to the temporal struggles of this life, they would do well to remember Jesus’ words to Peter, “what is that to you, you follow me” (John 21:22).
In summary, the word rightly preached points the sinner and the saint to Jesus. If a sound doctrine for worship is to be established, Christ-centered preaching is an essential component and must be recovered.

**Proper Administration of the Sacraments**

The fifth and final foundational component necessary to recover a sound doctrine of Christian worship is the proper administration of the sacraments. As with prayer and the right preaching of the word, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper are also a *means of God’s grace*. As such, they are not in any way to be neglected or administered improperly. Unfortunately many evangelical churches are withholding God’s grace from the congregation by the neglect or improper use of the sacraments. The proper administration of the sacraments must be recovered in worship. That said, we need to establish some agreement as to what constitutes the proper administration of the sacraments. Though it is beyond the scope of this work to attempt to deal with such a complicated matter, there are certain principles worth noting that can and should be considered.

There are no disagreements among evangelical churches regarding the number of sacraments, but there is much disagreement over their meaning and how they are to be practiced. In attempting to establish some foundational principles regarding the sacraments, evangelical churches would be well-advised to look to their reformed fathers and the confessions that resulted from the Reformation. When the reformers believed that significant changes were essential to ensure an orthodox understanding and practice of the sacraments, they made changes in a very methodical and respectful manner. But the burden of proof was indeed on the reformers. In other words, the reformers didn’t reinvent doctrine and lay the burden of proof on the historic church to refute it. They systematically proved that Rome had
strayed from biblical truth and faithful practice. In like manner, if modern evangelical churches wish to abandon the historic Reformed correction in favor of non-historic revision or invention, the burden of proof lies with them.

The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the First and Second Helvetic Confessions, the Canons of Dort, and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its Larger and Shorter Catechisms are in general agreement with one another on the doctrine of the sacraments. These documents help identify four key parts to this essential component of the proper administration of the sacraments for public worship: (1) Signs and seals of God’s covenant of grace; (2) True administrations of God’s grace; (3) Not to be unnecessarily withheld or delayed; (4) For members only.³¹

Signs and Seals of God’s Covenant of Grace

Baptism is the sign and seal of entrance into the covenant community. The Lord’s Supper is a sign and seal of continuance and endurance in God’s covenant community. As an imbedded stamp is present on a birth certificate to ensure its legitimacy, the stamp of baptism is imbedded into the eyes, hearts, and minds of those present at a baptism, including the one being baptized. As a seal is sometimes placed on the outside of an envelope to ensure the authenticity of its contents, so a seal is placed upon the one being baptized to ensure the meaning and administration baptism signifies.³² The same thing applies in the Lord’s Supper.

³¹Heidelberg Catechism, Q & A 70; Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 27; Westminster Larger Catechism Q & A 162.

The bread and wine are signs and seals of Christ’s body given and his blood shed for those who partake of the sacrament by faith in Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{33}

As signs and seals of God’s covenant, neither sacrament should be understood as an indication of what the believer is doing, but rather as an indication of God’s promise and work. Of course, in both baptism and the Lord’s Supper, believers are actively participating. But the truthfulness and legitimacy of either sacrament is not in any way dependent upon the one(s) participating. Calvin, in his commentary on Galatians clarifies this important point:

They [the sacraments] are not strictly the works of men, but of God. In Baptism or the Lord’s Supper we do nothing; we simply come to God to receive his grace. Baptism, from our side, is a passive work (\textit{respectua nostril est opus passivum}). We bring nothing to it but faith, which has all things laid up in Christ.\textsuperscript{34}

Calvin sees the sacraments as true signs and seals of grace. This is something that each of the early Reformed confessions would confirm, up to and including the seventeenth century Westminster Confession of Faith with the larger and shorter catechisms.\textsuperscript{35} Calvin and others, as well as the confessions, even concluded that the efficacy of the sacraments was not negated when administered by the unregenerate (those ministers who would later leave the faith). Even the unbelief of the one administering does not negate the truth of God’s promises in these means of grace to God’s elect.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33} Canons of Dort, Articles 14 and 17.

\textsuperscript{34} John Calvin, \textit{Calvin’s Commentaries: Commentary on Galatians} (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), Gal. 5:3

\textsuperscript{35} Belgic Confession, Article 33; The Canons of Dort-Fifth Head of Doctrine, Article 14; Westminster Confession of Faith, XXVII; Westminster Larger Catechism, Q & A 162.

\textsuperscript{36} James F. White, \textit{Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition} (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 82. Anabaptists wrongly divide the Body of Christ, not necessarily by preferring credo-Baptism but by categorically rejecting the legitimacy of nearly 1500 years of saints that were baptized as infants as well all who hold to a historic, covenantal view of Baptism.
True Administrations of God’s Grace.

To the faithful, the sacraments, like the right preaching of the word, are to be considered true spiritual food and a true means of ongoing grace for the strengthening of one’s faith for endurance to the end.\(^{37}\) To the unregenerate it is still efficacious in the sense that their unfaithful participation further seals their condemnation.\(^{38}\)

Both sacraments involve an aspect of “remembering” as they call to mind the historic realities of Christ’s work on behalf of the elect. Nevertheless, the sacraments are so much more than mere memorials of these things. Throughout the history of the Church is has been believed that baptism is not simply a picture of the washing away of sin, but a true means of grace through the pouring out, not of water, but of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Similarly, the Lord’s Supper is not simply a time for remembering Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary. It certainly involves remembering what he has done,\(^{39}\) but according to the earliest church up through the Reformation the Lord’s Supper was also seen as a true administration of God’s grace.\(^{40}\) The one who partakes of the Lord’s Supper by faith, trusting completely in Christ for their salvation, can be certain they receive true food for the soul as they share in the body and blood of Christ (see 1 Cor 10:16-17). It is with this in mind that Hughes Oliphant Old

\(^{37}\) Westminster Confession of Faith 29:7 reads: “Worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament (1 Cor 11:28), do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death.”

\(^{38}\) Westminster Confession of Faith 29:8 reads: “Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament: yet they receive not the thing signified thereby, but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord to their own damnation.”

\(^{39}\) 1 Corinthians 11:24: “and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me’” (emphasis mine).

comments on why the Reformers, coached by the early Church fathers, made the change from altar to the table:

> It was because the Reformers believed that in the Lord’s Supper God really did something that they wanted the outward sign [table instead of altar], to correspond to what God did do, that is, feed His people.  

In my view, those who promote a strict memorialist view of the Supper are inadvertently robbing their people of one of the most significant administrations of God’s grace available to Christians this side of heaven. The recovery of a more comprehensive understanding and practice of the sacraments as “true means of grace” is vital to a sound recovery of worship.

### Not to Be Unnecessarily Delayed or Withheld

Once a person is regenerated and given the gift of faith upon the hearing of the gospel, they are to be baptized as soon thereafter as is practically possible.\(^4\) Likewise, parents of the covenant are not to neglect or delay the baptism of their covenant children.\(^3\) Also, participation in the Lord’s Supper should not be unnecessarily delayed, withheld, or neglected. When a believer has met the biblical criterion for participation in the Lord’s Supper—i.e., is baptized, able to discern the realities taking place in the Supper, and can give a simple, age appropriate profession of faith—they are to partake of the Lord’s Supper. There is also an aspect of self-examination, which assuredly illuminates sin present in the believer’s life. However, the repentant sinner is not to be kept from the Table; instead he should come to be nourished and strengthened in his faith. The Lord’s Supper is true spiritual food for repentant sinners, not for the already perfected. In the early Reformation, churches admitted

\(^1\) Old, *Patristic Roots*, 28.
\(^2\) Westminster Confession of Faith 28:4-28:7; Westminster Larger Catechism Q & A 166.
their children upon meeting the requirement of a simple profession of faith.\textsuperscript{44} In the late 1500’s, in the words of historian Phillip Benedict: “the Congregationalists took a long step beyond all previous Reformed churches when they began to require evidence of saving faith for admission to Communion.”\textsuperscript{45} Although Calvin hoped to institute weekly Communion,\textsuperscript{46} this piety movement brought forth less frequent Communion. As a result, in some Scottish churches Communion was withheld from entire congregations for as long as ten years.\textsuperscript{47}

While we are warned in Scripture of the seriousness of the Lord’s Supper, and the judgment that may be incurred by wrongfully partaking, this sacrament is true food for ailing souls and should be administered frequently; in my view, weekly to repentant and professing Christians of all ages.


\hspace{1cm} 45 Ibid., 500-501, 509; R. C. Sproul, A Taste of Heaven: Worship in the Light of Eternity (Orlando: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2006), 109-124. In many Reformed churches to this day, children actually graduate from high school without ever receiving the Lord’s Supper. In my view this is a misunderstanding of the age requirement Jesus or Paul had in mind for worthily partaking of the sacrament. Jesus said to let the little children come to Him because the kingdom belonged to them, and Paul’s restrictions and warnings actually pointed exclusively at adults in the congregations who were wrongly dividing the Body into classes. Where the Lord’s Supper is withheld from professing Christian children, it is no wonder that the practice of infrequent Communion continues. A practice of weekly Communion would mean withholding Communion from professing Christian children 52 times per year, or 520 times between the ages of 8 and 18.

\hspace{1cm} 46 John Calvin, Bretschneider, Corpus Reformatorum, XXXVIII, i, p. 213; quoted in David C. Koyzis, “The Lord’s Supper: How Often?” Reformed Worship, Issue 15 (March 1990), accessed 28 November 2007, available from http://www.reformedworship.org/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=277; Internet—Speaking of the inability to have Communion each time the word was preached (at least weekly). Before his life’s end Calvin declared: “I have taken care to record publicly that our custom is defective, so that those who come after me may be able to correct it the more freely and easily.”

\hspace{1cm} 46 Old, Worship Reformed, 144. It is a well known fact that Calvin and other early reformers sought weekly Communion. But in light of the infrequent practice among Baptist churches, it is also interesting to note that Spurgeon not only held strongly to the real presence, but “he was a strong believer in the weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper,” and did in fact celebrate the sacrament weekly!

\hspace{1cm} 47 Benedict, Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed, 501-502.
Church membership, or shall we say, non-membership is perhaps one of the most telling symptoms of what is taking place among evangelical churches today. Large and unaccounted for numbers of people are being baptized and receiving the Lord’s Supper without having first taken vows of membership in a particular church. Yet administering the sacraments to those who have not been baptized, have not made a public profession of faith, or have not taken vows of membership is an errant practice, both on confessional and biblical grounds. From the earliest Church and following it is clear, the sacraments were not only withheld from unbelievers, but also from alleged believers, who, though desiring the full benefits of the Christian life and practice, had not properly joined and submitted themselves to the visible Church and her leaders. With few exceptions, a believer should not be communicate (able to receive Communion), unless it is possible for them to become excommunicated (banned from the Table). Faithful members of Christ’s body are not to hide from their leaders, but gladly submit to them as those who will give an account for their souls. Many people today are too proud or rebellious to submit to elders and vows of

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48 D.G. Hart, *Recovering Mother Kirk: The Case for Liturgy in the Reformed Tradition*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 161; Rick Muchow, *The Worship Answer Book: More Than A Musical Experience* (Nashville: J. Countryman, 2006), 55. Hart remarks, “There is no such thing as a perfect church but every believer needs to belong to a congregation because the local church is God’s family.” The vast majority of evangelical churches in America today cannot properly fence the Lord’s Table because they do not even require membership to begin with. Very early in the Church the vows of membership and baptism were required in order to share in the benefits and special privileges appointed for members only.


50 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America, *The Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Lawrenceville: 2004) or otherwise approved by the Elders.

51 Hebrews 13:17 says to all Christians: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”
membership. But it is difficult for the elders to know if people are rightly examining themselves and discerning the body when they do not even know their names, and when they have not been examined for membership by any particular church. Unfortunately, many church leaders, fixated on building their ministry empires within marketplace Christianity, readily compromise their ministerial vows to accommodate their ministerial “success.” And proper fencing of the Lord’s Table often conflicts with their agenda and their vision, because people might be offended if they are asked to refrain from the Table for not submitting themselves to membership of a local church.

The component of the right administration of the sacraments is critical in recovering and restoring a faithful doctrine of worship in the evangelical Church. This right administration of the sacraments includes a proper understanding of the sacraments as signs and seals of God’s covenant of grace. The sacraments are to be understood as true administrations of grace, not mere memorials of historical events. The sacraments should not be unnecessarily delayed, withheld, or neglected. The sacraments, except in extraordinary circumstances, are to be administered by clergy. The sacraments, except when specific, unique, and temporary provision has been previously approved by the minister and elders, are reserved for members only.

Summary

52 Hughes Oliphant Old, Worship: Reformed According to Scripture (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 144-145. Many Baptist and Reformed Baptists that lean toward memorialism would do well to glean from Charles Haddon Spurgeon believed that in celebration we experience the real presence of Christ.
To recover and preserve a faithful doctrine and practice of worship in the evangelical Christian community, the aforementioned five biblical-historical components must be reestablished and subscribed to by churches seeking to be authentic, true churches. With these components faithfully taught and practiced, we can be assured of a restored understanding of the primacy, requirement, transcendence, and efficacy of worship, as well as the need for some level of fixed liturgical form. At the same time, these faithful, biblical-historical components for worship will preserve the freedom that has been part of Christian worship from the beginning, because there is no proposal here for subscription to strict forms or to a book of common prayer. Our freedom in worship should be maintained while our unity and legacy is preserved. The five overarching components that were discussed in this chapter were intended to ensure a restored unity without stripping away our freedom; to protect against the further demise of worship; and to ensure the benefits true worship promises to its faithful participants.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: A PLAN FOR PROGRESS

Author Richard F. Lovelace once said: “It is hard to overestimate the damage done through this traumatic loss of bearings in the Evangelical tradition.”¹ Perhaps the worship wars continue on because few people within evangelical churches have been able to make sense of what has actually happened i.e., where we have been, where we are, where we are going, and why. In agreement with Lovelace, Frank Schaeffer, upon his departure from Protestantism to Eastern Orthodoxy, expresses a most grim future for the evangelical world:

Judging by the failure of modern Protestantism to lead its people along the sacramental paths of the ancient Church, it appears that no amount of being popular, relevant, evangelistic or trendy – or even Bible believing – can replace the basic need of Christians to fulfill their destiny as worshippers of God in the context of One Holy Catholic (i.e., complete, universal) and Apostolic Church.²

Clearly Schaeffer’s greatest concern is what he sees as disunity and dysfunction in worship amidst a tradition that seemingly cares little about either problem; or for that matter about tradition itself—even their own. In my view, Schaeffer’s departure to Eastern Orthodoxy was an exchange of truth for catholicity. Obviously, in a perfect world we would enjoy both.

Only time will tell if evangelical churches will develop a desire for a unified future, rise above the din of opinion and division, and genuinely seek the overall well-being of the Protestant, evangelical Church. Any hope of unity will require churches and leaders to see

¹ Richard F. Lovelace, Dynamics of the Spiritual Life, cited in Schaeffer, Dancing Alone, 7.

the urgent need for an agreeable doctrine of worship as something more significant and desirable than the man-centered, individualism that has plagued and weakened our churches for the last several decades. Admittedly, such a task is more easily stated than accomplished.

Facilitating Plan

If an evangelical doctrine of worship is to be established, and a unified recovery is to occur, two facilitating formulas will be needed: (1) a statement of agreement among churches wishing to participate in restoring unity between churches; (2) a grid for making practical decisions about worship. The general statement of agreement should set forth a series of biblical and historical principles that will focus on requirement in worship. This would certainly be a working document that would enumerate the overarching principles discussed in this work. The goal ultimately would be to obtain a sincere commitment to the statement of agreement in its final form from all true churches that long to recover a unified front. A list of these agreeing churches would be published and continually updated to let participating churches know which other evangelical churches have subscribed to the statement. As such, whether vacationing or whether teaching the younger generations about the true marks of a true church, we would have an identity marker through this statement of agreement.

An addendum to the statement of agreement would be a grid for making decisions about worship. This grid will contain a set of questions, the answers to which will help determine the activities (elements) that are deemed consistent with the agreed upon principles, and, therefore, allowable in public Christian evangelical worship. In short, the element or activity in question for worship must pass a certain test. As with the statement of agreement, the decision grid will ensure some greater level of stability and trust between
evangelical churches. Following is a proposed sample of both the agreement and decision grid.

Statement of Agreement

We believe in and seek to be part of the one holy catholic, apostolic, and evangelical church. As such we believe that God’s children are called out of this world of sin and into a place of reconciliation with God, first and foremost to assemble with other believers to worship.

We believe the Lord’s Day worship assembly to be a transcendent event in that God meets and greets his people in a way that is unique in all of life and is more like a foretaste of his presence in eternity.

We believe the rightly ordered worship assembly is efficacious. In worship the believer approaches with a self-offering of thanksgiving and praise, and the Lord nourishes and strengthens each of his covenant children through the word rightly preached and the sacraments properly administered.

We believe that Christian Churches from the earliest days were granted a certain freedom of form and expression in worship unlike that of Old Testament Israel. Also consistent with the early church, we believe in the need for establishing faithful forms for public worship as necessary to rightly facilitate and communicate the divine administrations of grace to the worshipper.

We believe there are five overarching components that should be faithfully observed in every worship service: (1) acknowledgement of the special presence of God; (2) thoughtful prayers; (3) offering of self, thanksgiving and praise, and tithes and offerings; (4) right preaching of the word; (5) the proper administration of the sacraments.

We believe the word rightly preached is Christ rightly preached, and we believe the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper rightly administered is an administration of the spiritual body and blood of Jesus given as true food to feed Christian souls. As such, a frequent, even weekly Lord’s Day administration of the Lord’s Supper should be the goal for all evangelical churches.

We believe any activity or element being considered for usage within the Lord’s Day worship service should pass a “decision-making grid” test. Unless an affirmative answer can honorably be given to each of the certain predetermined questions, the activity or element in question shall be disallowed in the worship.
Decision-Making Grid

There must be a plan or formula of sorts for advancing the debate and actually establishing a generally accepted set of questions to aid in making decisions about worship. Following is an attempt to begin that discussion. The obvious hope of course is that churches might come to a place of agreement regarding the questions that must be asked about allowable elements in worship. Following is a first attempt at a list of questions for this very purpose.

Is it biblically sound? First and foremost, regardless of one’s view on the regulative principle, churches must allow honesty and integrity to prevail in answering the simple question. Is it consistent with what is found in the Holy Scriptures? If the question cannot overwhelmingly be answered “YES,” then why introduce it at all? In answering this question a good rule of thumb would be to consider how well the proposed element would fit with the Five Required Components.

Is it historically faithful? Does it honor the saints who have walked before us? In other words, despite various changes in technology, culture, and even various freedoms that exist in formulating the worship service, would the apostle Paul, Justin Martyr, Cyprian, Augustine, Chrysostom, Calvin, Knox, Edwards, Wesley, Spurgeon, Oswald Chambers, C.S. Lewis, A.W. Tozer, and others be able to walk into the service and recognize what was taking place and why, and rejoice with the saints who have come after them? The answer must be, “YES.” Anything approved for worship should honor all generations of saints.

Will it aid in better facilitating the divine realities taking place in worship? The parts or elements of worship are not for the purpose of introducing novelty into the assembly, but to facilitate and communicate divine realities to God’s covenant children. When considering an element for worship, it must be able to withstand the scrutiny of the above question. The answer must be “YES.” If it will not do so, the motive and/or goal for its inclusion in the service should be questioned.

Is it likely to be edifying to every generation of people living today? Many churches today claim to be reaching today’s generation through certain stylistic changes. This thinking is very often flawed from the standpoint that today’s generation includes at least four distinct generations. At best when imposing modern cultural style, two of the four generations may “relate” and be edified, while the others are alienated or passed-over. Such is a blatant case of wrongly dividing the body. Modern inventions in worship, musical or otherwise, that leave the older people dumbfounded as to what is going on, must be avoided.

Can it be faithfully carried out in a home or a catacomb? If churches today were to come under persecution once again, could the proposed activity be faithfully carried out in a home
or a catacomb? Or would it so complicate things that in such a move the element would have to be negated? Regardless of the fanfare that coincides with certain elements in worship currently, could they still be faithfully and effectively carried out if need be—minus the fanfare? The answer must be “YES.” Example: A church could have the greatest pipe organ in the world which is wonderful, because Christians could still sing hymns without it. If elements are introduced that require extravagant facilities or certain props that are unavailable to many churches, the element should be rejected on the biblical and historical basis of simplicity.

**Final Thoughts**

This work, although directly purporting certain biblical and historical realities, is not intended to be the final word on what needs to happen in the evangelical world to recover faithful worship. The hope is that the propositions set forth in this work might play some small role in beginning discussions with pastors, elders, and leaders within our churches. Further, the means of persuading church leaders to come together in potential agreement on these things, or even how such an undertaking might be facilitated, was not within the scope of this work. Facilitating such a “coming together and dialog” toward a unified doctrine for faithful worship is itself a matter for future discussion and work. However it may unfold, in the end the goal is the recovery of the One Holy, Catholic, and “Evangelical” Church; an outcome of unity and agreement on worship that will require a move of the Holy Spirit, as it should.
REFERENCE LIST


