

## *The Annotated Extracts*

I start with Tony Payne's article 'Why do we worship as we do?'.<sup>1</sup> He began, as he should, not with Christendom (what is considered normal today),<sup>2</sup> but with the New Testament:

If we were to go on tour through the world of the New Testament, and look and see how believers<sup>3</sup> were worshipping, and what worship was, what would we find?... The first thing we would notice is that no believer worshipped at all, because 'worship' is an English word. What we would find is people doing a variety of things, [things that are] described by a variety of [Greek] words, some of which are at times translated as 'worship' in our English Bibles. This can be one of our problems in thinking about worship... There are four such Greek words... These four words are translated at various points in our Bibles as... 'worship', or 'serve', or 'minister', or 'be devout'. The common thread or overlapping domain of meaning with all of them, that allows them to be translated by the one English word 'worship', is that they all involve a response to a deity of submission and honour. That response may be to bow to the ground in fear, or to offer some sacrifice, or to pay homage or tribute, or to offer service and obedience to the deity in reverent fear. In each case, the response is from the lesser to the greater, from a humbled [humble?] 'worshipper' to the great deity, to whom service and honour and submission are owed.

He continued:

As we might expect, we would find these... Greek words applied to quite a range of things... Remarkably (at least to us), the one

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Payne: 'Why do we worship as we do?', *The Briefing*.

<sup>2</sup> The Church/State monstrosity produced by the Fathers and the Emperors Constantine and Theodosius. The Reformers, though they took some steps back to the new covenant, left Christendom basically intact, as it still is, even for most evangelicals today. See my *Pastor*; the Appendix 'Christendom' in my *Relationship*.

<sup>3</sup> Original 'people'; in my work, I am not concerned with how pagans worship their gods. This note applies to all the extracts from Payne's work.

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place in the New Testament that the different words we translate as ‘worship’ are striking by their absence is in describing what we do in church.

He moved to the explanation:

Theologically [better, biblically – DG], there is a cast-iron reason for this,<sup>4</sup> stemming from the way Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament forms and categories of temple, priest and worship. As David Peterson, Howard Marshall and others have pointed out, the New Testament de-sacralises<sup>5</sup> worship, or rather it sacralises every sphere of life as the place where worship of God should take place. God is no longer met locally, at a particular place, where we draw near to him in order to bow before his presence, and offer worship. Now [that is, in the days of the new covenant] this submission and service are to be the constant stuff of daily experience, since Christ has fulfilled the apparatus of temple and sacrifice, and brought us through the curtain of his body into the holy of holies, so that we may serve God continually as we do his will in our lives. Every sphere of life is one in which grateful sacrifice, offering and worship is to be conducted in the presence of God.

Flying in the face of this vital biblical principle – the discontinuity of the old and new covenants – Christendom (that which is considered normal today) has produced a world which is very different to that which is set out in the post-Pentecost Scriptures<sup>6</sup>:

The curious thing is that if we were to take a tour of Christendom now... we would find worship mainly taking place in the one place where we don’t find it in the New Testament – and that is in our church meetings, or ‘services’ as we sometimes call them... There’s no doubt that in the modern worship network,

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<sup>4</sup> Original ‘Theologically, there seems to be a logical enough reason for this’, which is far too weak. The letter to the Hebrews could not be more explicit.

<sup>5</sup> That is, ‘removes, gets rid of, the notion of “making holy, sanctified, consecrated, given a godly aura”’.

<sup>6</sup> By ‘post-Pentecost [or apostolic] Scriptures’, I mean Romans-Revelation. All Scripture is equally inspired, but the clearest unfolding of the new covenant is to be found in those books – as Jesus promised (John 16:12-15).

Central Station is the church meeting. That's where worship really happens.<sup>7</sup>

Payne made a highly significant observation:

Of course, everyone acknowledges that worship is more than what we do on Sunday, that it is about all of one's life lived in obedience to God. Romans 12 is given due deference. But in our language and practice, 'worship-central' is still church. 'Worship' remains the over-arching category by which the activities that take place on Sunday are described, throughout the Christian world. Moreover, the past twenty-five years<sup>8</sup> have seen, if anything, an intensification of this trend.

This, alas, is only too true – lip-service is paid to scriptural principles such as worship being a 24/7 lifestyle and the priesthood of all believers – just to mention two such principles – but (to change the imagery from railways to farmyard) Christendom's 'worship services in church' rule the roost in this matter.

As for recent developments, Payne drew attention to 'the 'praise and worship revolution' in Christendom, noting the critical appointment – critical, that is, in the eyes of many – of 'worship leaders', observing that 'no church can hope to get anywhere without a vibrant, contemporary, authentic worship, by which is meant a meeting style infused with the right music, well-played'. I would expand this to bring in talk of the idea of 'performance',<sup>9</sup> and extend the list to include the notion of pre-worship worship designed to get the congregation into the right mood or get the meeting warmed up – as *per* stage performances and TV spectacles.

Payne, having rightly argued the doctrine so clearly laid out in the letter to the Hebrews, declared:

The language of worship... is not applied in the New Testament to the activities of Christian pastors or ministers in their church

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<sup>7</sup> That is, for the majority, 'worship' is what one does 'in church' at a 'worship service'.

<sup>8</sup> Payne was writing in 2003.

<sup>9</sup> See my *Performance*.

meetings... analogous to old-covenant priests. Indeed, such a conception would be bizarre [in fact, it would be getting very close to, or becoming, blasphemous – DG] in the light of how Christ has fulfilled that category. The Old Testament priest is a type of Christ, not of the New Testament pastor [who does not exist – DG].<sup>10</sup> And the Old Testament temple worship is a type of the heavenly tabernacle, not our local church gatherings. Thus our earthly gatherings, in space and time, are not about ‘drawing near’ in the way that Hebrews... uses the term. For the drawing near of the new covenant takes place in a different realm altogether; [namely,] the realm of heaven. It takes place in a different sort of tent, one not made with hands, in which Christ offers the perfect sacrifice, and his people thus draw near to the presence of God in the holiest place.

Payne then turned to the fact that, although the book of Hebrews speaks of the way believers ‘draw near’ or ‘assemble’ in a heavenly sense, it has vital material on the earthly aspects of *ekklēsia* assemblies:

[The writer of Hebrews] goes on to urge [that is, to press upon his readers – and us] that there is still a point [in] meeting together (Heb. 10:24-25). It is for the purpose of encouragement, and mutual help, as the day [of judgment] draws near. This of course agrees with what we... [see] elsewhere in the New Testament about the Christian gathering, where the chief categories that are used to describe it are those of ‘fellowship’ (that is, a communion of people already sharing a God-centred common life through their fellowship with the Father through the Son [by the Spirit – DG]) and ‘edification’ (an encouragement and building up of that life, in advance of the day [of judgment] that is drawing near).

What havoc Christendom has wrought with this! How did it happen? Payne:

[Alas, under the influence of the Fathers] in the early centuries of Christianity, worship terms [drawn especially from the old covenant]... were quite quickly applied to Christian pastors, and to the activities of the church... This was not simply a semantic change, a harmless synonymous replacement of one word by another. The categories and theological structures in which

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<sup>10</sup> See my *Pastor*.

‘church’ was understood gradually began to shift from what we see in the New Testament, with drastic and long-lasting implications for the corporate life of Christians for centuries to come, [even down to our own time; that is why I have written many of my books, not least my *Public Worship* – DG]. Essentially, the shift that took place was from what we might call a fellowship model of church life to a liturgical one.

Do not restrict ‘liturgical’ to written prayers. Think of ‘ceremonial, hierarchical, priestly, sacramental, sacerdotal,<sup>11</sup> solemn convention, formal, set pattern’. However vociferous the protests might be, such words not infrequently apply to evangelical Christendom today.

Payne enlarged on some of the catastrophic changes introduced by the Fathers, not least the notions of ‘a sacred space’ and ‘a worship service’:

An earthly tent was once more built, one made with hands, in which worship takes place... In the ensuing centuries, this public-worship event became the central and necessary means of receiving God’s blessing. The event itself, and the work of the priests within it, became the means by which salvation and blessing could be mediated to the individual worshipper.<sup>12</sup>

Payne rightly spoke of this as ‘the re-Judaising’ ‘of the church’ by the Fathers. Thus the Judaisers – who had been defeated by Paul at Galatia and elsewhere<sup>13</sup> – became victorious after all,<sup>14</sup> leaving

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<sup>11</sup> Men are sacerdotalists when they delegate their worship to others who they feel are better able, more qualified to carry it out for them. In such a system, worship is a specialised task best left to a special class – priests (however disguised – as pastors, ministers, God’s sent-servants, for example). Hence arose the unbiblical notion of the clergy and the laity. The clergy are those who give ministry; the laity are those who receive it. The two classes are mutually exclusive. In fact, the one is defined in terms of the other; or, rather, in contrast with, to the exclusion of, the other. The clergy are not the laity; the laity are not the clergy. In this way, the church has been divided into two.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Payne: ‘Why do we worship as we do?’, *The Briefing*.

<sup>13</sup> See my *Christ*.

us still suffering the consequences of their triumph – after 1800 years.

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I turn now to Howard Marshall and his ‘How far did the early Christians worship God?’<sup>15</sup> Let me start with something Marshall wrote by way of conclusion:

Although the whole activity of Christians can be described as the service of God and they are engaged throughout their lives in worshipping him, yet this vocabulary is not applied [in the post-Pentecost Scriptures] in any specific way to Christian meetings. It is true that Christian meetings can be described from the outside as occasions for worshipping God, and also that elements of service to God took place in them, but the remarkable fact is that Christian meetings are not said to take place specifically in order to worship God, and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them. To sum up what goes on in a Christian meeting as being specifically for the purpose of worship is without New Testament precedent. ‘Worship’ is not an umbrella-term for what goes on when Christians gather together.

So much for Marshall’s conclusion. Now for his argument:

Two words are in common use for describing what Christians do when they meet together in church. They assemble for ‘worship’ or ‘service’... The question which arises is whether these accepted terms are the best or the most appropriate ones to describe what Christians do, *or what they ought to be doing* [emphasis mine – DG], when they gather together.

Quite! But Marshall should have approached ‘in church’ in the same way. What does ‘in church’ mean? For most it means going to a building, a sacred space, a sanctuary, whereas in the context of the New Testament – the new covenant – it has nothing to do with a building, but it has everything to do with assembling with

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<sup>14</sup> As Archbishop William Laud triumphed over the Puritans; though he was executed in 1645, his views – not theirs – won the day for Anglicanism in 1660/2, and still do to this day. See my *Battle*.

<sup>15</sup> Howard Marshall: ‘How far did the early Christians worship God?’, *Churchman*, issue 99.3, 1985.

fellow-believers in spiritual fellowship in order to participate in *ekklesia* life. Two very different things!

Marshall continued, raising a point that is often overlooked:

The character of anything [everything? – DG] we do is determined to some extent by the name which we give to it, and, if the name is misleading, the action itself may well not be what it ought to be. Despite their vagueness, both the terms ‘worship’ and ‘service’ strongly suggest that the central thing that takes place when Christians gather together is that they do something which is addressed in some way to God. They meet primarily to worship God and to offer him service.

So most believers think. But is this scriptural? Marshall:

It is my thesis that this use of language [it is a ubiquitous *misuse* of language – DG] incorporates a fundamental misunderstanding of what ought to be at the centre of Christian meetings, and that it leads to a serious shift in practice from what ought to be happening when we gather together.

Just so! It is wrong thinking which, in turn, inevitably leads to wrong practice, with very serious consequences.

Marshall went on:

When we compare the understanding of what Christians do when they meet together... with the account of the beliefs and practices of the first Christians recorded in the New Testament, then we become aware of a decisive difference. If we regard the New Testament pattern for Christian meetings as a normative one [as, allowing for the extraordinary, we surely must – DG], then clearly we need to explore this difference with care and consider whether our understanding of Christian practice needs to be reformed in the light of the word of God...

Quite!

After a close examination of the vocabulary of the New Testament, Marshall came to the conclusion with which I began the extracts from his article:

Although the whole activity of Christians can be described as the service of God, and they are engaged throughout their lives in

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worshipping him, yet this vocabulary is not applied in any specific way to Christian meetings.

Let me break in to underline this. Believers worship God, serve God, are in his service, 24/7. The New Testament never gives any hint of describing this as ‘going to church to worship God’. The loss in moving from the new-covenant definition of ‘worship’ – a life lived 24/7 – to Christendom’s attendance at, and participation in, ‘a church service’ or performance, is incalculable.

Marshall:

It is true that Christian meetings [recorded in the New Testament – DG] can be described from the outside as occasions for worshipping God, and also that elements of service to God took place in them, but the remarkable fact is that Christian meetings are not said [in the New Testament – DG] to take place specifically in order to worship God, and the language of worship is not used as a means of referring to them or describing them. To sum up what goes on in a Christian meeting as being specifically for the purpose of worship is without New Testament precedent. ‘Worship’ is not an umbrella-term for what goes on when Christians gather together.

As the New Testament shows beyond a shadow of a doubt, meetings of the *ekklēsia* were local gatherings of believers in union with each other, mutually committed to obedience to Christ’s law. In the New Testament, as Marshall argued in detail, the meetings of the *ekklēsia* were marked by believers addressing God, praising God, thanking God, praying to God, and by God speaking to them as they mutually built each other up. He went on:

In all these cases the divine activity took place through the mediation of members of the church. When the Holy Spirit was at work, it was through specific individuals who acted as his spokesmen and agents. In the early days, this activity was charismatic in the sense that individuals acted in virtue of the spiritual gifts which they possessed. Later, however, the emphasis shifted to persons who were appointed to specific offices, such as the eldership, but their activity was still carried on in virtue of the gifts of the Spirit with which they were endowed. It is significant that the descriptions of the church



offices in the letters to Timothy and Titus<sup>16</sup> lay most stress on the capacity to teach. Evidently teaching of the believers gathered<sup>17</sup> was the primary function of these teachers, and special honour or remuneration was given to those who laboured in teaching (1 Tim. 5:17). Thus, when the New Testament describes the character of church leaders and their functions, it is their ability to speak to men on behalf of God that is central; nothing<sup>18</sup> is said about their ability to represent men before God and to lead worship.

So far, so good, but here we reach a critical juncture. Was this spiritual activity confined to just a few of the believers? or what? Marshall:

The main emphasis in church meetings lay upon what the members did for one another in virtue of their charismatic<sup>19</sup> endowment from God.

Note Marshall's 'the main emphasis'. Contrary to common practice today, but clearly according to the New Testament, the main purpose of the gatherings of the *ekklēsia* has to be for the mutual building up or edification of the believers, with the emphasis coming down heavily equally upon 'mutual' and 'edification'. Saints do not gather to watch or merely listen to one man (or a group) perform. Far from it. Marshall:

The term *diakonos* is not used in the New Testament for the person whom we nowadays call 'the minister' as being usually the one ordained person in a congregation carrying out most, if not all, of the ministerial tasks. It is used generally of any and all kinds of service in the church, and also more specifically for a specific group of church functionaries who are mentioned alongside the... elders.

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<sup>16</sup> Original 'Pastoral Epistles'.

<sup>17</sup> Original 'congregation'.

<sup>18</sup> I have altered the original 'little if anything'. There is no sacerdotalism whatsoever in the *ekklēsia*. The notion is abhorrent. Christ, and Christ alone, is the believer's priest. See my *Priesthood*.

<sup>19</sup> Remember Marshall's own explanation of 'charismatic': 'in the sense that individuals acted in virtue of the spiritual gifts which they possessed'.

Not so! The word applies to all the saints without a single exception. Marshall himself, as he continued, made this very point:

The objects of ministry, the causes of persons who are served, are various. Persons who work in the church are of course regarded as serving God or Christ, and can be spoken of as God's servants (2 Cor. 6:4) or as Christ's servants (2 Cor. 11:23; Col. 1:7). They are engaged in the service of the gospel (Eph. 3:7; Col. 1:23), or of the new covenant (2 Cor. 3:6), but frequently it is people who are the actual objects of their service. Their service of God is expressed in serving one another. This rests on the principle enunciated by Jesus that disciples must not act as leaders, expecting to be served by others, but must act as servants (Mark 9:35; 10:43).

There is all the difference between, on the one hand, participation in mutual edification and, on the other, watching a performance. Meetings of the *ekklēsia* are not for spectators but sharers. Watching the antics of a one-man band may be a pleasant diversion on a wet evening while standing in a queue for the doors to open for some event or other, but it has no place in the *ekklēsia*.  
Marshall:

The important point is that [in the New Testament] the service of the gospel was rendered by members of the congregation [believers gathered] to other members (*cf.* Acts 19:22; Rom. 15:25; 2 Cor. 8:19f.; 2 Tim. 1:18; Philem. 13; Heb. 6:10; 1 Pet. 1:12; and Rom. 15:31; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:1; 11:8; 2 Tim. 4:11; Rom. 16:1).

Just so!

Marshall:

The church is basically... the assembly of the people of God. The importance of the coming together of God's people is shown by the frequency with which words expressing coming together... are used to describe the meetings of Christians; it is their actual coming together which is significant. This point is further substantiated by the use of the word 'church' itself. The thought of assembly is explicitly present, as in 1 Corinthians 11:18; 14:19,28,35, where the expression is quite literally 'in church'... Only once is the corresponding Jewish word 'synagogue' used

for the church (Jas. 2:2), and here the idea of a meeting or assembly is uppermost. It may well be that the early Christians adopted the term 'church' as the nearest synonym to 'synagogue' that did not contain the strongly Jewish undertones of the latter. It follows that the nearest contemporary analogy to the church meeting was provided by the synagogue and not by the temple [whether Jewish or pagan]. This is a more significant fact than is often recognised. The environment of Christianity in the Hellenistic world was that of pagan worship conducted in temples and shrines, but there is no evidence that the Christians modelled their gatherings on temple worship. It appears rather that their inspiration was, as might have been expected, thoroughly and basically Jewish, and that the inspiration came from the synagogue... What, then, was the purpose of the synagogue? It was 'primarily the place of the Torah, which is to be read and taught, heard and learned here'... Among the Jews,<sup>20</sup> the synagogue was a place of instruction and of prayer which bore testimony to the one God and glorified him by these activities. To a certain extent the church might be regarded as 'the Christian synagogue', but this description does not fully account for all the features of the church, such as its common meals.

I break in. Food plays a very important part in evangelical church life today, but this is nearly always as a ploy – a bait, not to put too fine a word on it – used for evangelism, often increasingly seeming to be becoming little more than an effort to attract 'the unchurched' into attendance at church, in hope of getting them to take part in a course of instruction on the elements of Christianity. In the New Testament – except when they were being disorderly (1 Cor. 11) – the church used food entirely in-house, among themselves, not only for necessary sustenance (Acts 6:1-4; see also 1 Tim. 5:1-16), but as an opportunity for fellowship (particularly sharing in spiritual conversation) and the Lord's supper. As always, Christendom principles and practice differ markedly from those of the new covenant.

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<sup>20</sup> Original 'In the formative years of the church'. This, at best, is ambiguous. See my *Gospel Church*.

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In the old covenant, the temple was the place where God would presence himself among his people. As for the new covenant, as Marshall put it:

The church is more than a company of human beings. God himself is present when it meets, a thought which can be expressed in terms of the Father (1 Cor. 14:25), the Son (Matt. 18:20) [see also 1 Cor. 5:4; 2 Cor. 2:10] and the Spirit (Gal. 3:5). The second thought is that the church is to praise God.

As for the Lord's supper:

The presence of God is known in the gathering of his people. They experience his power and love both in their individual experience and in their corporate experience, and they respond with prayer and praise. According to Paul this fellowship is mediated in the Lord's supper, and by the Spirit, but his stress is more on the fellowship between believers as they share together in the one loaf and in the service of God. The concept is perhaps more characteristic of John. He writes explicitly of the fellowship which believers have with one another and with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (1 John 1:3), and the teaching in the fourth Gospel about the unity of the disciples in love for one another and as part of the true vine [John 15:1-11] implicitly makes the same point. Although the word 'fellowship' is not used all that commonly, the concept perhaps brings out best the relationship between God and his church. It expresses the way in which the church is the place where God's presence is known and experienced. He is present to serve and up-build his people through his spiritual gifts, and his people respond to him in prayer and praise.

Marshall again:

No understanding of the church would be complete which did not include Paul's description of it as a body. In his earlier letters (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12) the accent is undoubtedly on the mutual help of the members, which enables each member to function properly and the whole body to act harmoniously. Paul's point is that the individual members must each use their spiritual gifts, of whatever kind they may be, for the good of one another and of the whole. At the same time, the body is there to serve God, and it does this as the members carry out their divinely-intended functions.

What an important observation! It is as believers edify one another, each believer using his/her Spirit-given gift, that God is worshipped or served. And this occurs – not merely in meetings – but 24/7. As Marshall went on to say:

In Paul's later writings, the thought is more of the organic growth and strengthening of the body as a whole from the divine life which streams through it from the head. The concept of the body is not used to portray the church meeting as a means of worshipping God; the thought is of the parts of the body receiving strength from God and serving one another in an organic whole.

Again:

Finally, we need to take account of the way in which the church is sometimes described as a building – a thought linked with that of its being a temple – and as a household or family. This idea is obviously closely linked to that of the church as an assembly for fellowship.<sup>21</sup> It brings out the thought of the brotherhood of the members who share together in a common life as the children of God. As Paul uses the terminology, it stresses particularly the loving relations which should exist between the members. It can also allow for the development of the idea of persons appointed by God to fulfil functions within the family structure. One gains the impression that in a sense the creation of this family is an end in itself. God's purpose is to develop a people whose loving relationships both vertical and horizontal are their own justification.<sup>22</sup>

Excellent!

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I now turn to Robert Banks and his *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*:

One of the most puzzling features of Paul's understanding of *ekklēsia* for his contemporaries, whether Jews or Gentiles, must

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<sup>21</sup> Original 'a fellowship'. I do not know of any such use of the word in the New Testament.

<sup>22</sup> Howard Marshall: 'How far did the early Christians worship God?', *Churchman*, issue 99.3, 1985.

have been his failure to say that a person went to church primarily to worship. Not once in all his writings does he suggest that this is the case. Indeed it could not be, for he held a view of worship that prevented him from doing so... Since all places and times have now become the venue for worship [and all experiences have now become the vehicle for worship – DG,] Paul cannot speak of Christians assembling in church *distinctively* for this purpose. They are already worshipping God, acceptably or unacceptably, in whatever they are doing. While this means that when they are ‘in church’ they are worshipping as well, it is not worship but something else that marks off their coming together from everything else that they are doing.<sup>23</sup>

Allowing his mistaken acceptance of Christendom’s concept of ‘going to church’, Banks was getting to the root of the matter when he went on:

Consequently, it is a mistake to regard the main or indeed the only purpose of Christian meetings as being the worship of God, a view which leads to their structure being determined in terms of what we offer to God in and through Christ. This view appears to rest on the continuing influence of the sacrificial ritual in Old Testament times on our understanding of the... church.<sup>24</sup>

Quite! Christendom has imposed the old covenant on the *ekklēsia*. Banks continued:

But the language used in the New Testament indicates that this was not the primary or the only understanding of what church meetings were for. In fact, it has been apparent that there was a three-way movement in the early church’s meetings: from God to man, from man to God, and from man to man. The primary element is the God-man movement, downward rather than upward, in which God comes to his people and uses his human servants to convey his salvation to them, to strengthen and up-build them. He bestows his charismata in order to equip the members of the church to serve one another. Of course the effect of such service by God to his people will be to move them to

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Banks: *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*, Exeter 1980, p91f.

<sup>24</sup> Original ‘the New Testament church’. Israel was old covenant; *ekklēsia* is new covenant. The two must not be confused; alas they often are (see my *Gospel Church*).

praise, thanksgiving and prayer, but the point is that this response is secondary to what is primary; namely the flow of divine grace. When[, in the apostolic Scriptures,] a specific function or purpose is ascribed to a church meeting, it is not the glorification of God, but the building up of the church and the ministry to its members. Church meetings are for the benefit of the believers gathered,<sup>25</sup> and so indirectly for the glory of God. Worship in the sense of giving praise to God is thus logically secondary to ministry in the sense of God's ministry to us. At the same time, since this ministry is exercised between persons, the church meeting has the character of fellowship in which the keynote is mutual love. The symbol of the church, therefore, is not simply an upward arrow from man to God, nor simply a downward arrow from God to man, but rather a triangle representing the lines of grace coming down from God to his people, the flow of grace from person to person, and the response of thanks and petition to God.

Yes, indeed! And it was so, not only in the days of the apostles, but it remains scriptural teaching on the *ekklēsia* today.

Banks went on:

Some practical points follow:

1. It is misleading to continue to call our meetings 'services' or 'worship', if the effect of this phrase is to concentrate attention on what we offer to God, whether to the exclusion of any other constitutive motif, or by making it the primary motif. Worship is obviously an element in Christian meetings, but it is not the principal one. Of course worship is involved in all that we do in our *ekklēsia* assemblies,<sup>26</sup> just as it is involved in all our activity as Christians, but it is misleading to take the fact that in all that we do we serve God and then make this the direct and particular description of what we should do in our *ekklēsia* assemblies. The New Testament shows that the early Christians did not do this.
2. We need an alternative name that will express better what we are doing. 'Service' would be a possibility, provided that it could be understood that it is primarily a case of God serving us and not *vice versa*; unfortunately, the traditional [that is, Christendom] associations of the word are probably ineradicable. Yet in a real sense the church is 'a service station' where Christians are

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<sup>25</sup> Original 'congregation'.

<sup>26</sup> My 'our *ekklēsia* assemblies' replaces Banks' 'church'. This applies elsewhere in the extracts from Banks. See my opening note.

‘serviced’ so that they may serve God better. Perhaps ‘church meeting’ or ‘assembly’ is the most appropriate term [*ekklēsia* is the scriptural term – DG], bringing out the fact that what is happening is that God’s people are meeting together with him.

This takes us to the heart of what I said in my *Public Worship*; namely, that the *ekklēsia* is for believers, and believers only. Of course, the dependants of believers and occasional unconverted visitors may be present as observers, but church – the *ekklēsia* – is, in the proper sense of the word, ‘exclusive’ – for believers only.<sup>27</sup> The gatherings of the *ekklēsia* are not designed for open ‘attendance’ by the world; the early believers did not think of them in that way.<sup>28</sup> This, it goes without saying, is utterly at variance with the view of the overwhelming majority today. Church is for everyone! What better vehicle for evangelising them? And so on.

Banks now made some major observations:

3. We need a fresh look at the structure of what we do in our *ekklēsia* assemblies. The example of the early church may suggest that their meetings were relatively flexible and unstructured. Nevertheless, there may be a structure in terms of various essential constitutive elements in an *ekklēsia* meeting. Teaching and up-building are primary, and this suggests that the broad structure of proclamation of the word leading to response to the word is the right one, although this does not necessarily mean that these two elements must always be present in rigid chronological order. Rather proclamation and response should be the guiding principle. [The] suggestion that celebration of God in his supreme worth is the essence of what we are doing has its place here, if we take it that ministry [in the fullest New Testament meaning of the word – DG] is the means by which God presents his grace and worth to us and we celebrate the experience<sup>29</sup> by our response in praise and thanksgiving.

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<sup>27</sup> See Appendix 5: ‘Gospel Preaching in Church: Eight Reasons’ in my *Relationship*.

<sup>28</sup> See my *Relationship*; *Gadfly*.

<sup>29</sup> Original ‘revelation’. This word carries massive overtones, and should be used with great care.



It is vital to keep reminding ourselves that ‘ministry’, contrary to widespread usage, must not be limited to a monologue by a stated ‘minister’. All God’s children are ministers, all are new-covenant priests, and all exercise a ministry.

Banks continued:

4. Finally, the elements of fellowship and mutual up-building in love need to be brought to the fore. Here we are greatly hampered by the one-man ministry which is still so common. Somehow we need to give the individual members of the congregation the opportunity to exercise the gifts of the Spirit, to receive from one another and to show love to one another. It is not ‘leaders of worship’ that we need, but people who have gifts to share with one another. This clearly does not mean that we do not want people who are able to teach<sup>30</sup> to function in the *ekklēsia*, or that there is no place for something corresponding to the present-day ministry. It is rather to suggest that we need to encourage all believers to exercise their spiritual gift,<sup>31</sup> and we need a far wider concept of ministry than is possible so long as we cling to the idea of the ‘one-man’ ministry. In this way we shall come to a fuller appreciation of the nature and activity of the *ekklēsia* instead of distorting it by forcing it all into the unnatural mould that we know as ‘worship’.<sup>32</sup>

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Streeter S.Stuart, in his ‘A New Testament Perspective on Worship’, declared:

There is still a rather universal Christian passion for ‘going to church to worship’. Thus my<sup>33</sup> purpose in this article<sup>34</sup> is to support the efforts that have been made to correct this misunderstanding.

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<sup>30</sup> Original ‘are trained in theology’. Quite wrong!

<sup>31</sup> Original ‘we need far more people with some theological training’. Quite wrong!

<sup>32</sup> Robert Banks: *Paul’s Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*, Exeter 1980, p91f, emphasis original.

<sup>33</sup> Original ‘our’, replacing the authorial affectation. This applies to all Stuart’s extracts.

<sup>34</sup> Original ‘here’.

Stuart dealt with the one scriptural passage which speaks of pagans worshipping in an assembly of believers:

Special note should be taken of 1 Corinthians 14:24-25, in a context which, for the sake of Paul's argument, represents the gathering of Christian believers, and which says: 'But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship [*proskuneō*] God and declare that God is really among you'. This passage does not apply *proskuneō* to the gathering of Christian believers, but indicates instead that an unbeliever may be prompted to spontaneous worship by the believing and prophesying congregation... [It] tend[s] to suggest spontaneity... There is hardly a suggestion of the traditional notion of worship...

Streeter moved to John 4:

[In] John 4... worship... is not defined by reference to any particular place... Worship is not about places... The... New Testament consistently avoids connecting worship with a particular place, other than the place where Jesus happens to be.

Moreover:

The second crucial item in John 4 is the spiritualising of worship... There must be a transformation by the Spirit for one to worship adequately... True worshippers worship God because Jesus himself is truth... It is not just a matter of worshipping God in the inner resources of one's own spirit. Jesus himself replaces the temple, and it is the Spirit given by Jesus that animates the worship which replaces worship at the temple... The intent here... is not just that traditional practices of worship be performed with some new emphasis upon or awareness of Spirit and truth, no matter how desirable or worthy such practices might be. It is not that the old things are to be done in a new way. I<sup>35</sup> believe that the intent [of Christ] is to redefine worship in terms of Spirit and truth, and that this understanding of worship is the key to understanding the early Christian use of *proskuneō*. The key is the preposition 'in', which I suggest must be understood not as signifying agency, but as indicating close personal relationship. It is the kind of relationship and use of *en* which shows up so often

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<sup>35</sup> Original 'we'.

in Paul when he refers to the union between the believer and Christ by [his] use of the *en Christo* construction. The fourth Gospel makes use of this same kind of construction in John 14:20: ‘In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you’, and in John 15:4-11 in the often repeated phrase ‘in me’ (*cf.* also the ‘in the Father’/‘in me’ relationship in John 10:38 and John 14:10). It is this emphasis on relationship, on being ‘in’ Spirit and ‘in’ truth, which now defines worship according to John. Worship happens when one participates in the life of the Spirit and accepts the truth found in Christ. This is consistent with [John’s] Gospel’s emphasis on entrance into the life of the Spirit (John 3) through a new birth, such life providing access to or leading to truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). For the fourth Gospel, worship is a spiritual transformation. One worships God by entering into his presence, by establishing a spiritual relationship with him. It is not physical acts done in physical places which define worship. We worship God by participating in the life that is spiritually defined and by living in the truth. It is life on a new spiritual level and life that acknowledges truth which is worship.<sup>36</sup>

And so:

[In] conclusion... much of the concern for worship today obscures the fourth Gospel’s emphasis on spirit and truth, being centered instead on physical accoutrements that facilitate the acts we term ‘worship’. We build church buildings to provide the proper setting for worship. We worry about pews or seats, about electric organs and pipe organs, about whether pianos should be used with organs. Orchestras, choirs, soloists, litanies and liturgies help to define worship in many cases. Even physical sound waves become a standard of worship, because if the sound produced by the choirs or the soloists or instrumentalists is not pleasing to our ears, we do not regard it as conducive to worship. Chancels, pulpits, altars, candelabra, rugs, *etc.* become our passion.

It is necessary to bring this list up to date. For a growing number of evangelicals today, church needs hot-dog stands, coffee

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<sup>36</sup> Stuart drew attention to a most interesting point concerning the use of *proskuneō*: ‘It occurs [only] six times in the Apostolic Fathers, usually in reference to pagan practices, and in this setting supports the perspective of John 4 and the New Testament’.

machines, fast-food outlets with free newspapers, facilities for the provision of diversions, holiday trips, and the like.<sup>37</sup>

Stuart continued with a classic understatement:

But this does not accord with the New Testament perspective on worship.

So why did the first believers assemble? What did they do? Stuart:

What I have said should not be misconstrued as suggesting that the New Testament does not refer to acts or practices which we associate with worship. It is clear from Acts that believers during the New Testament period met together for various purposes. Hebrews 10:25 urges its readers 'to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another...'. In 1 Corinthians 11:2, Paul directs believers to 'maintain the traditions [that is, the teachings] even as I have delivered them to you'. In 1 Corinthians 11:17 he gives the 'following instructions' for 'when you come together', and in 1 Corinthians 11:18 laments the fact that 'when you assemble as a church' there are divisions. In 1 Corinthians 11:20, he says that 'when you meet together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat', and in 1 Corinthians 11:33 he urges his readers: 'When you come together to eat', to first eat at home, 'lest you come together to be condemned'. When addressing the problem of spiritual gifts, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:26: 'When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a language,<sup>38</sup> or an interpretation'. Thus a variety of acts is recognised in the assembling of the church, but this is not termed 'worship'.

Other passages in the New Testament, which also reflect the church in acts that we might call 'worship', likewise do not use the language of worship for such acts. Ephesians 5:19-20 urges readers to be filled with the Spirit, 'addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks... Colossians 3:16 says: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs... And 1 Timothy 4:13 says: 'Till I come, attend to the public

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<sup>37</sup> See my 'Cleansing the Temple Today'; *Relationship; Performance*.

<sup>38</sup> Original 'tongue'.

reading of Scripture, to preaching, to teaching'. The fact that these and other New Testament passages do not refer to gatherings and acts of Christian believers as worship gives strong support to my<sup>39</sup> contention that worship was not associated with particular acts or practices done at particular locations as we are accustomed to think of worship.

Although we find and extricate rituals and sermons and hymns and creeds from its pages, the New Testament does not promote these in terms of worship as we are inclined to do. It never describes the gathering of believers in uniquely Christian assemblies as worship, nor does it describe individual acts of Christian believers in those terms, the possible exceptions being Matthew 28:17 and 1 Corinthians 14:24-25. Such findings pose a stark contrast to the common popularity of and approach to worship in our day.

The silence of much of the New Testament about worship lends tacit support to the Johannine perspective. If the Johannine perspective is a community perspective, then certainly the rest of the New Testament community at large either shared the Johannine perspective or mysteriously refrained from identifying individual or corporate Christian acts in terms of worship. The very common use of worship today blunts and even obscures the New Testament perspective.

Perhaps we can never be freed from the traditional identification of worship in terms of acts or practices and locations, but the New Testament perspective should lead us to be cautious or hesitant about such an identification. The implications of such an identification are clear. When specific acts at specific locations are identified with or confused with worship, then those who participate in such acts at such places may assume that they are worshipping, an assumption which may be no more than that.

While it is clear that believers during the New Testament period assembled, prayed, sang, preached, taught, observed the Lord's supper, baptised, *etc.*, New Testament writers are markedly reticent about describing such activity as worship. With the Old Testament setting the precedent for using 'worship' in significantly different ways, the early Christians apparently opted for an understanding of worship not characterised by specific acts or locations. The most important New Testament statement about worship, found in John 4, suggests that worship is tantamount to participation in spiritual life and the truth that is found in such

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<sup>39</sup> Original 'our'.

## *The Annotated Extracts*

life. Worship is a matter of relationship to God and his Son rather than a matter of acts or places.

Stuart summarised his thesis:

Worship in the contemporary Christian setting is often applied to the specific acts or rituals of believers in a particular place of worship, usually a church building. Recent attempts to clarify the meaning of ‘worship’ as it is found in the New Testament suggest that the contemporary usage is in error and/or misleading. There is infrequent use of *proskuneō* in the New Testament and it is never applied to the gathering of Christians in the sense that ‘worship’ is used today. John 4 defines worship as a relationship to the Spirit and truth of Christ in the sense of Paul’s *en Christo* formula.<sup>40</sup>

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I have taken the liberty of quoting material drawn from my *Church: Performance or Participation?: Learning from the Lockdown*:

A young lady (Miss A) was instrumental in leading her friend (Miss B) to Christ. Miss B, who knew that Miss A met with local believers, asked when the service began and how long it lasted. ‘It began the moment you were converted’, came the reply, ‘and it never ends’.

And this:

A stranger attended a Quaker meeting. After sitting for ten minutes in silence, he asked his neighbour when the service would begin. ‘Right after the meeting is over’, he was told.<sup>41</sup>

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Here is an extract from C.H.Spurgeon on the need for the church to keep itself separate from the world:

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<sup>40</sup> Streeter S.Stuart: ‘A New Testament Perspective on Worship’, *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 68:3 (1996), pp209-221.

<sup>41</sup> Donald F.Durnbaugh: *The Believers’ Church: The History and Character of Radical Protestantism*, Herald Press, Scottsdale, 1985, pp264-265.

A garden is a plot of ground separated from the common waste for a special purpose: such is the church. The church is a separate and distinct thing from the world. I suppose there is such a thing as ‘the Christian world’; but I do not know what it is, or where it can be found. It must be an exceptional mixture. I know what is meant by a worldly Christian; and I suppose the Christian world must be an aggregate of worldly Christians. But the church of Christ is not of the world. ‘You are not of the world’, says Christ, ‘even as I am not of the world’. Great attempts have been made recently to make the church receive the world, and wherever it has succeeded it has come to this result, the world has swallowed up the church. It must be so. The greater is sure to swamp the less. They say: ‘Do not let us draw any hard-and-fast lines. A great many good people attend our services who may not be quite decided, but...<sup>42</sup> there should be entertainments and amusements, in which they can assist [and will keep them attending – DG]’.<sup>43</sup> The theory seems to be, that it is good to have a broad gangway from the church to the world: if this is carried out, the result will be that the nominal church will use that gangway to go over to the world, but it will not be used in the other direction.<sup>44</sup> It is thought by some that it would perhaps be better to have no distinct church at all. If the world will not come up to the church, let the church go down to the world; that seems to be the theory. Let the Israelites live with the Canaanites, and become one happy family. Such a blending does not appear to have been anticipated by our Lord in the chapter which was read just now [that is, John 15]: ‘If the world hates you, you know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you’ (John 15:18-19). Did Jesus ever say: ‘Try to make an alliance with the world, and in all things be conformed to its ways’? Nothing could have been further from our Lord’s mind. Oh, that we could see

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<sup>42</sup> I have omitted ‘still their opinion should be consulted, and their vote should be taken upon the choice of a minister, and...’.

<sup>43</sup> Remember that this sermon was published in 1887; when it was preached I do not know. Spurgeon explained: ‘I have issued this sermon rather than the discourse of last Lord’s day because I am greatly occupied by preparing for the Conference of the ministers who have been educated in our College’.

<sup>44</sup> Today, many believers are erecting a gangway from the world into the church – and a broad gangway, at that. See my *Relationship; Attracting*.

## *The Annotated Extracts*

more of holy separation; more dissent from ungodliness, more nonconformity to the world! This is ‘the dissidence of Dissent’ that I care for...

I long to see Christian people become more distinct from the world than ever, because I am persuaded that, until they are so, the church will never become such a power for blessing men as her Lord intended her to be. It is for the world’s good that there should be no alliance between the church and the world by way of compromise, even to a shade. See what came to pass when spiritual men<sup>45</sup> and the world became one in Noah’s day: when ‘the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair’, and were joined with them.<sup>46</sup> Then came the deluge. Another deluge, more desolating even than the former, will come, if the church ever forgets her high calling, and enters into confederacy with the world.<sup>47</sup>

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And now for a cluster of extracts from what might be considered unlikely sources.

First, in connection with the 1937 Oxford Conference on ‘Church, Community and State’:

The Oxford Conference is well known for the phrase: ‘Let the church be the church’, a central issue at the meeting.<sup>48</sup>

And not just in Oxford in 1937. For believers everywhere, and at all times, ‘Let the church be the church’ must be a constant concern.

Then this from the report presented to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1942:

There is great need today for laying fresh emphasis upon the doctrine of the church.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Spurgeon had ‘the church’. Israel was not ‘the church’. The *ekklesiā* is a new-covenant phenomenon. See my *Gospel Church*.

<sup>46</sup> See my ‘Sons of God & Daughters of Men’ on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page.

<sup>47</sup> C.H.Spurgeon sermon 1957.

<sup>48</sup> David McCreary: ‘John Bennett on Oxford [19]37’.



And not only in 1942!

Finally, Adolf Harnack, writing in 1899-1900:

[Christ] founded no community in the sense of an organised union for divine worship...

Christendom... there is no sadder spectacle than this transformation of the Christian religion<sup>50</sup> from a worship of God in spirit and in truth into a worship of God in signs, formulas, and idols. To feel the whole pity of this development, we need not descend to such adherents of this form of Christendom as are religiously and intellectually in a state of complete abandonment, like the Copts and Abyssinians; the Syrians, Greeks, and Russians are, taken as a whole, only a little better. Where, however, can we find in Jesus' message even a trace of any injunction that a man is to submit to solemn ceremonies as though they were mysterious ministrations, to be punctilious in observing a ritual, to put up pictures, and to mumble maxims and formulas in a prescribed fashion? It was to destroy this sort of religion that Jesus Christ suffered himself to be nailed to the cross, and now we find it re-established under his name and authority!<sup>51</sup>

As for Harnack's observation, with the passage of more than a hundred years, and with the broadening of his audience to include modern evangelical churches, the essence of his rebuke of 'solemn ceremonies as though they were mysterious ministrations, to be punctilious in observing a ritual, to put up pictures, and to mumble maxims and formulas in a prescribed fashion' must not be limited to, say, Anglo-Catholicism. It condemns much of what goes on in contemporary evangelical 'worship services'.

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<sup>49</sup> 'God's Will in Our Time', the report presented to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1942.

<sup>50</sup> I allow the objectionable word to stand.

<sup>51</sup> Adolf Harnack: *What is Christianity? Lectures Delivered in the University of Berlin during the Winter Term 1899-1900*. For all three, see Earnest A. Payne: *The Fellowship of Believers: Baptist Thought and Practice Yesterday and Today*, The Carey Kingsgate Press, Ltd., London, 1952, pp7,9,11.

I come now to A.W.Pink's 'Worship':

One of the most solemn and soul-destroying fallacies of the day is that unregenerate souls are capable of worshipping God. Probably one chief reason why this error has gained so much ground is because of the widespread ignorance which obtains concerning the...

#### REAL NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

People imagine that if they attend a religious service, are reverent in their demeanour, join in the singing of the hymns, listen respectfully to the preacher, and contribute to the collection, they have really worshipped God. Poor deluded souls! [This is] a delusion which is helped forward by the priestcraft and preachercraft of the day. Over against this delusion are the words of Christ in John 4:24, which are startling in their plainness and pungency: 'God is Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'.

#### VANITY OF FALSE WORSHIP

'Well has Isaiah prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men' (Mark 7:6-7). These solemn words were spoken by the Lord Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees. They had come to him with the complaint that his disciples did not conform to their traditions and practices in connection with ceremonial washings and cleansings.

In his reply, Christ exposed the worthlessness of their religion... These scribes and Pharisees were raising the question of the ceremonial 'washing of hands', while their hearts remained filthy before God. Ah, dear reader, the traditions of the elders may be diligently attended to, their religious ordinances strictly observed, their doctrines devoutly upheld, and yet the conscience had never been searched in the presence of God as to the question of sin. The fact is that religion is one of the greatest hindrances against the truth of God blessing men's souls. God's truth addresses us on the ground that God and man are as far apart as sin is from holiness: therefore his first great need is cleansing and reconciliation. But *religion* proceeds on the assumption that depraved and guilty men may have dealings with God, may approach unto him, yes, worship and serve him. The world over, human religion is based on the fallacy that fallen and sinful man can have dealings with God. Religion is the principal means used

by Satan to blind men to their true and terrible condition. It is the devil's anaesthetic for making lost sinners feel comfortable and easy in their guilty distance from God. It hides God from them in his real character – as a holy God who is of 'purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity' (Hab. 1:13)...

Satan is the inspirer and director of the world's religion. Yes, he seeks worship, and is the chief promoter of all false worship.

#### THE EXCLUSIVENESS OF TRUE WORSHIP

'God is Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth' (John 4:24). This 'must' is final; there is no alternative, no choice in the matter. It is not the first time that we have this very emphatic word in John's Gospel. There are two notable verses where it occurs previously. 'Marvel not that I said unto you: You must be born again' (John 3:7). 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up' (John 3:14). Each of these three 'musts' is equally important and unequivocal. The first has reference to God the Spirit, for he it is who regenerates. The second refers to the work of God the Son, for he it is who made atonement for sin. The third has reference to God the Father, for he it is that seeks worshippers (John 4:23). This order cannot be changed; it is only those who have been born of the Spirit, and who are resting upon the atoning work of Christ, that can worship the Father. To quote again the words of Christ to the religionists in his day: 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit in vain do they worship me'. Ah, my reader, the worldling may be a generous philanthropist, a sincere religionist, a zealous denominationalist, a devout churchman, a regular communicant, yet is he no more capable of worshipping God than a dumb man is of singing. Cain tried it, and failed. He was not irreligious: he 'brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD' (Gen. 4:3). But 'unto Cain and his offering [God] had not respect'. Why? Because he [that is, Cain] refused to own his undone condition and his need of an atoning sacrifice. In order to worship God, God must be known: and he cannot be known apart from Christ. Much may be predicated and believed about a theoretical or a theological 'God', but he cannot be known apart from the Lord Jesus. Said he: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man comes unto the Father but by me' (John 14:6). Therefore it is a sinful make-believe, a fatal delusion, a wicked farce, to cause unregenerate people to imagine that they can worship God. While the sinner remains away from Christ, he is the enemy of God, a child of wrath.

How then can he worship God? While he remains in his unregenerate state he is 'dead in trespasses and sins'; how then can he worship God? What has just been said above is almost universally repudiated today, and repudiated in the name of religion. And, we repeat, religion is the principal instrument used by the devil in deceiving souls, for it insists – whether it be the Buddhist religion, [Islam,...] or the Christian religion – that man, yet in his sins, can have dealings with and approach unto the thrice holy God. To deny this is to stir up the enmity and call down upon one so doing the opposition of all mere religionists. Yes, it was that very thing which brought down upon Christ the merciless hatred of the religionists of his day. He refuted their claims, exposed their hypocrisy, and so incurred their wrath. To the 'chief priests and the elders of the people' (Matt. 21:23), Christ said: 'The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you' (Matt. 21:31), and at the close of his discourse it is added: 'They sought to lay hands on him' (verse 46). They attended to outward things, but their inward state was neglected. And why was it that the 'publicans and harlots' entered the kingdom of God before them? Because no religious pretensions stood in their way; they had no self-righteous profession to maintain at all costs, no pious reputation to keep up. Under the preaching of the word they were convicted of their lost condition, so took their true place before God and were saved. Only such can be worshippers.

#### THE NATURE OF TRUE WORSHIP

'God is Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth'. To worship 'in spirit' stands contrasted to the fleshly rites and imposing ceremonies of Judaism. To worship 'in truth' stands opposed to the superstitions and idolatrous delusions of the heathen. To worship God 'in spirit and in truth' means in a manner suited to the full and final revelation which God has now made of himself in Christ. It means to worship spiritually and truly. It means giving to him the homage of an enlightened understanding and the love of a regenerated heart. To worship 'in spirit and in truth' stands opposed to a carnal worship which is external and spectacular. It refutes<sup>52</sup> all worshipping of God with the senses. We cannot worship him who is 'Spirit' by gazing on ornate architecture and stained glass windows, by listening to the peals of a costly organ, by smelling sweet incense or 'telling' of

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<sup>52</sup> Original 'It bars out'. This applies to all the extract from Pink.

beads. We cannot worship God with our eyes and ears, or nose and hands, for they are ‘flesh’ not ‘spirit’. ‘Must worship in spirit and in truth’ excludes everything that is of the natural man. To worship ‘in spirit and in truth’ refutes all sentimental<sup>53</sup> worship. The soul is the seat of the emotions, and very much of the so-called worship of present-day Christendom is only sentimental. Touching anecdotes, stirring appeals, thrilling oratory of a religious character, are all calculated to produce this very thing. Beautiful anthems by a well-trained choir, rendered in such a way as to move to tears or to ecstasies of joy, may stir the soul, but will not and cannot affect the inner man.

True worship is the adoration of a redeemed people, occupied with God himself... Worship is the spirit<sup>54</sup> in the believer stirred into activity, turning to its divine and heavenly source. It is that which is ‘spirit’ (John 3:6) turning to him who is ‘Spirit’. It is that which is the ‘workmanship’ of Christ (Eph. 2:10) turning to him who re-created us. It is the children spontaneously and gratefully turning in love to their Father. It is the new heart crying out: ‘Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift’ (2 Cor. 9:15). It is sinners, cleansed by blood, exclaiming: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ’ (Eph. 1:3). That is worship; assured of our acceptance in the Beloved, adoring God for what he has made Christ to be unto us, and what he has made us to be in Christ. It is worthy of our closest attention to observe that the only time the Lord Jesus ever spoke on the subject of worship was in John 4. Both Matthew 4:9 and Mark 7:6-7, were quotations from the Old Testament. It should indeed stir our hearts to discover that the sole occasion when Christ made any direct and personal observations on worship was when he was speaking, not to a religious man like Nicodemus, nor even to his apostles, but to a woman, an adulteress, a Samaritan – a semi-heathen! Truly God’s ways are different from ours. To that poor woman our blessed Lord declared: ‘The hour comes, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeks such to worship him’ (John 4:23). And how did the Father ‘seek’ worshippers? Does not the whole of the context supply the answer? At the

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<sup>53</sup> Original ‘soulical’. ‘Sentimental, mere feelings’ is my guess at Pink’s meaning. This note applies throughout this extract.

<sup>54</sup> Original ‘new nature’. While the believer knows the conflict between flesh and spirit – see my *Public Worship* – he does not have two natures.

beginning of the chapter the Son of God is seen taking a journey (verses 3-4). His object was to seek out one of his lost sheep, to reveal himself to a soul that knew him not, to wean her from the lusts of the flesh, and fill her heart with his satisfying grace; and this, in order that she might meet the longings of divine love and give in return that praise and adoration which only a saved sinner can give. Who can fail to see in the journey which he took to Sychar's well in order to meet that desolate soul and win her to himself, that we have a most blessed adumbration of that still greater journey which God's Son took – leaving heaven's peace and bliss and light, coming down to this world of strife and darkness and wretchedness? He came here seeking sinners, not only to save them from sin and death but to give them to drink in and enjoy the love of God as no angel can enjoy it; that from hearts overflowing with the consciousness of their indebtedness to the Saviour and his dear Son for them, they, realising and accepting his superlative excellency, might pour forth unto him the sweet incense of praise.

That is worship, and the remembrance of God's seeking love and Christ's redeeming blood are the springs of it. One of the most blessed and beautiful examples recorded in the New Testament of worship is<sup>55</sup> found in John 12:2-3. 'There they made him a supper, and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment'. As another has said: 'She came not to hear a sermon, though the prince of preachers was there. To sit at his feet and hear his word was not now her object, blessed as that was in its proper place. She came not to meet the saints, though precious saints were there; but fellowship with them, though blessed, was not now her object. She came not, after a week's toil, for refreshment; though none knew better the blessed springs of refreshment which are in him. No, she came to pour out upon him that which she had long treasured up, which was the most valuable of all her earthly possessions. She thought not of Simon the leper, sitting there a cleansed man; she passed by the apostles; so, too, Martha and Lazarus, her sister and brother in the flesh and in Christ. The Lord Jesus [himself] filled her thoughts: he had won her heart and now absorbed all her affections. She had

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<sup>55</sup> Original 'of what worship is, is' is ungrammatical, but 'of what worship is is' would be very awkward.

eyes for no one but him. Adoration and homage were now her one thought to pour out her heart's devotion before him'. That is worship.

The subject of worship is most important, yet it is one upon which many have but the haziest ideas. We read in Matthew 2 that the 'wise men' were laden with 'treasures' to present to Christ (verse 11). They brought to him rich 'gifts'. That is what worship is. It is not [only] a coming to receive from him, but to render unto him. It is the pouring out of the heart's adoration. O that we may bring to the Saviour 'gold and frankincense and myrrh'; that is adoring him because of his divine glory, his moral perfections, his fragrant death. The object of worship is God, and the inspirer of worship is God. Only that can satisfy God which he has himself produced: 'LORD... you also have wrought all our works in us' (Isa. 26:12). It is only as the Lamb is exalted in the power of the Spirit that saints are made to cry: 'My soul does magnify the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Saviour' (Luke 1:46-47). The general and conspicuous absence of that worship which is 'in spirit and in truth' is due to an order of things over which the Spirit of God does not preside, where the world, the flesh and the devil have free play. But even in circles where worldliness, in its grosser forms at least, is not tolerated, and where outward orthodoxy is still preserved, there is, almost always, a noticeable absence of that unction, that freedom, that joyousness, which are inseparable from the spirit of true worship. Why is this? Why is it that in numbers of churches, meeting houses, Brethren assemblies, where the letter of God's word is ministered, that we now so rarely find those overflowings of heart, those spontaneous outbursts of adoration, that 'sacrifice of praise' which should ever be found among God's people?

I break in. Alas, Pink was thinking in Christendom terms, including 'place', and meetings or 'services'.

Pink continued, answering the question he had posed:

Ah, is the answer hard to find? It is because there is a grieved spirit<sup>56</sup> in the midst. This, my brethren, is the reason why there is so little living, refreshing, worship-producing ministry of Christ today.

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<sup>56</sup> Should that be 'Spirit'?

#### HINDRANCES TO WORSHIP

What is worship? Praise? Yes, more; it is the adoration flowing forth from a heart which is fully assured of the excellency of him before whom it bows, expressing its profoundest gratitude for his unspeakable gift. There it is at once apparent that the first hindrance to worship in a child of God is lack of assurance. While I entertain doubts as to my acceptance in Christ, as long as I remain in a state of uncertainty as to whether my sins were atoned for at Calvary, I cannot really praise and adore him for his death for me; I cannot actually say: 'My Beloved is mine, and I am his'. It is one of the favourite devices of the enemy to keep Christians in the 'Slough of Despond', his object being that Christ should not receive from them the homage of their hearts... Another great hindrance to worship is failure to judge ourselves by the holy word of God... (*cf.* 1 Cor. 11:31)...

Now just as the sons of Aaron were required under pain of death (Ex. 30:20) to wash at the laver before they entered the holy place to burn incense, so must the Christian today have the defilements of the way removed before he can suitably approach unto God as a worshipper. Failure at this point brings in death; that is, I remain under the contaminating power of dead things. The defilements of the way are the result of my passing through a world which is 'alienated from the life of God' (Eph. 4:18). If these are not removed, then I continue under the power of death in a spiritual way, and worship becomes impossible. This is brought out fully in John 13 where the Lord said to Peter: 'If I wash you not, you have no part with me'. How many Christians there are who, through failure to place their feet in the hands of Christ for cleansing, are hindered from exercising their priestly functions and privileges [as members of the priesthood of all believers]. One other fatal hindrance to worship needs to be mentioned, and that is worldliness, which means the things of the world obtaining a place in the Christian's affections, his ways becoming 'conformed to this world' (Rom. 12:2)... O how many children of God today are compromising, dwelling at half-way house, and in consequence they are not worshippers. O that the Spirit of God may so work upon and within all of us that the language of our lives, as well as that of our hearts and lips, may be: 'Worthy is the Lamb' – worthy of whole-hearted consecration, worthy of unstinted devotion, worthy of that love



which is manifested by keeping his commandments, worthy of real worship. May it be so for his name's sake.<sup>57</sup>

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Ivan Steeds, in his 'Worship', wrote:

It might be suggested that many who use the word 'worship' in [a] free and easy fashion have only a limited understanding of its true meaning, according to the teaching of Scripture. For example, it is sometimes thought of as no more than attendance at a 'place of worship', as if we may assume our physical presence in that setting represents worshipping God. Often, it is confused with ritualistic and ceremonial practices that figure prominently in organised religion, and this suggests [that] such repetitive procedures are glorifying to God and bring him pleasure. As Christians we need to be more specific than this in our definition of worship, seeking guidance from God's word as to all that is involved, and that we might fulfil his expectations. Here then is a simple statement on Christian worship...

As 'God is spirit' (John 4:24), all who would worship him must be able to respond to him spiritually...The rendering of worship to God involves certain factors that are absolutely necessary and from which we may establish principles for all time... Only those who have knowledge of God can worship him acceptably. Knowledge of God's person, his greatness and his works, is essential for worship, for only out of such knowledge can a proper response to him proceed. The promptings of the Holy Spirit will always be according to knowledge. Without this knowledge the whole exercise will lack meaning and depth, being nothing more than a superstitious tradition; it will be as hollow as the practice of the Athenians who erected among their many pagan shrines one that was dedicated TO THE UNKNOWN GOD (Acts 17:23). How could they acceptably render worship to one who was unknown to them? How great was he? Where was his dwelling place? What was his link with mankind? How available was he to those who would approach him? These and other questions Paul dealt with after first declaring: 'Whom therefore you ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you' (Acts 17:23). Our Lord's word to the Samaritan woman emphasises the gulf that exists between those who are ignorant and those who have knowledge of God: 'You worship

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<sup>57</sup> A.W.Pink: 'Worship'.

## *The Annotated Extracts*

you know not what: we know what we worship' (John 4:22)... Those who would worship God must first enter into a true relationship with him...

Worshipping God involves offering to him that which he requires...

Our Lord's instruction to the woman of Samaria (John 4:19-26) indicates that there is ample provision in a dispensation of grace for the would-be worshipper to approach God. Indeed, he stated that the Father seeks true worshippers, and said: 'The hour comes and now is, when all such would worship him'. It is made clear, however, that there would be fundamental changes in the practices of those worshippers to what had gone before... As 'God is spirit' so all that would worship him **MUST** worship him 'in spirit'. In such a way, as born-again Christians, we can approach God our Father. We have no need of fleshly, material resources that are the visual and audible trappings of religion. That which was so necessary under the old order of worship [that is, in the old covenant] has been made redundant... 'for we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit and have no confidence in the flesh' (Phil. 3:3).

All who now worship God must worship him 'in truth' – an expression with a composite meaning. First, it conveys the truth that the form of worship must be in line with the divine revelation of God's word (John 17:17). But again, it teaches that absolute integrity is essential in all that we do in worship, for that which is formal, casual, or insincere is unworthy of presentation, and must be unacceptable to God. We should 'draw near with a true heart' (Heb. 10:22).

The Father has made wonderful provision for his people that they may worship him. The way into his presence has been opened by the death of Christ: 'The veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom' (Matt. 27:51). Our great High Priest, 'Jesus the Son of God, is for us entered within the veil' (Heb. 6:19-20). With boldness we may 'enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he has consecrated for us through the veil' (Heb. 10:19-20). Also, we are established as a 'holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pet. 2:5). All members of the Godhead are involved when we worship: 'For through him (Christ Jesus) we both (Jew and Gentile) have access by one Spirit unto the Father' (Eph. 2:18)...

Worship should be a continuous experience...

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Worship is praise from adoring hearts: it is thanksgiving from grateful hearts... This is worship in the sanctuary, spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, and offered by 'an holy priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:5). As we serve God, we are called upon to give freely of those things we possess as a form of worship, our bodies, devoted to God as his servants (Rom. 12:1), sharing with others, (our belongings, our efforts, our time, our sympathy, *etc.*) (Heb. 13:16; Phil. 4:18).

Unregenerate persons have no part in worship; being 'dead in trespasses and sins', they cannot be 'living stones', capable of responding to One who is the 'living stone' (1 Pet. 2:4-5); they have no relationship with God that they might acknowledge him in worship as Father (1 John 3:1); only true believers have part in 'an holy priesthood' (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:5-6). These provide the reasons whereby the unsaved are prevented from engaging in worship with Christians...

May our knowledge of God increase, so that we may rise to higher things in our worship. May we appreciate more and more our relationship with our God and Father through his Son, Christ Jesus our Lord. Then let us approach God in the way he has appointed, and gladly render to him all that his grace enables us to offer in grateful and adoring worship.<sup>58</sup>

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Andrew Murray, in his 'Worship in the Spirit' in *The Spirit of Christ*, addressed John 4:23-24 and Philipians 3:3, saying:

To worship is man's highest glory. He was created for fellowship with God: of that fellowship, worship is the sublimest expression. All the exercises of the religious life – meditation and prayer, love and faith, surrender and obedience – all culminate in worship. Recognising what God is in his holiness, his glory, and his love, realising what I am as a sinful creature, and as the Father's redeemed child, in worship I gather up my whole being and present myself to my God, to offer him the adoration and the glory which is his due. The truest and fullest and nearest approach to God is worship. Every sentiment and every service of the spiritual<sup>59</sup> life is included in it: to worship is man's highest destiny, because in it God is all.

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<sup>58</sup> Ivan Steeds: 'Worship', *Precious Seed*, Vol. 51 Issue 5, 1996.

<sup>59</sup> Original 'religious'.

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Jesus tells us that with his coming a new worship would commence. All that [the] heathen or Samaritans had called ‘worship’, all even that the Jews had known of worship in accordance with the provisional revelation of God’s law [that is, the old covenant, which was temporary – see my *Three*], would make way for something entirely and distinctively new – the worship in spirit and in truth. This is the worship he was to inaugurate by the giving of the Holy Spirit. This is the worship which now alone is well pleasing to the Father. It is for this worship specially that we have received the Holy Spirit.

Let me stress that last. As I argued in my *Public Worship*, God’s ultimate end in converting sinners is that they might be brought to worship him instead of idols, self in particular; in other words, God’s underlying purpose is his own glory.

But what is that ‘worship’? Murray:

Let us, at the very commencement of our study of the work of the Spirit, take in the blessed thought that the great object for which the Holy Spirit is within us is that we worship in spirit and in truth. ‘Such the Father seeks to be his worshippers’; for this he sent forth his Son and his Spirit...

Murray moved on to the vital distinction between flesh and spirit. The unregenerate are in the flesh, fleshly; the regenerate are spiritual, they have the Spirit. A man or woman is either in Adam or in Christ; the two are mutually exclusive. Murray, alas, was not clear enough on this vital distinction:

In reference to religion and worship, [there are] the two principles from which they may proceed: there is a fleshly wisdom and a spiritual wisdom (1 Cor. 2:12; Col. 1:9). There is a service of God trusting in the flesh and glorying in the flesh, and a service of God by the spirit (Phil. 3:3-4; Gal. 6:13). There is a fleshly mind and a spiritual mind (Col. 1:9; 2:18). There is a will of the flesh, and a will which is of God working by his Spirit (John 1:13; Phil. 2:13). There is a worship which is a satisfying of [to?] the flesh, because it is in the power of what flesh can do (Col. 2:18,23). And [there is] a worship of God which is in the Spirit. It is this worship Jesus came to make possible, and to realise in us, by giving a new spirit in our inmost part, and then, within that, God’s Holy Spirit.

Murray had more to say on ‘in spirit and in truth’:

Just as the words ‘in spirit’ do not [simply] mean ‘internal’ as contrasted with ‘external’ observances, but ‘spiritual, inwrought by God’s Spirit’ as opposed to what man’s natural power can effect, so the words ‘in truth’ do not [simply] mean ‘hearty, sincere, upright’... If we take ‘truth’ as opposed to ‘falsehood’, the law of Moses was just as true as the gospel of Jesus; they both came from God. But if we understand what it means [when it says] that the law gave only a shadow of ‘good things to come’, and that Christ brought us the things themselves, their very substance, we see how he was full of truth, because he was himself the truth, the reality, the very life and love and power of God imparting itself to us. We then also see how it is only a worship in spirit that can be a worship in truth, in the actual enjoyment of that divine power – which is Christ’s own life and fellowship with the Father, revealed and maintained within us by the Holy Spirit. ‘The true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and in truth’.

Murray moved to the solemn truth:

All worshippers are not true worshippers. There may be a great deal of earnest honest worship without its being worship in spirit and in truth. The mind may be intensely occupied, the feelings may be deeply moved, the will may be mightily roused, while [as] yet there is but little of the spiritual worship which stands in the truth of God. There may be great attachment to Bible truth, and yet through the predominating activity of that which comes not from God’s working but from man’s effort, it may not be the Christ-given, Spirit-breathed worship which God seeks. There must be accordance, harmony, unity between God – who is a Spirit – and the worshippers drawing near in the Spirit. Such does the Father seek to worship him. The infinite, perfect, Holy Spirit which God the Father is,<sup>60</sup> must have some reflection in the spirit which is in the child.

And this can only be as the Spirit of God dwells in us. If we would strive to become such worshippers in spirit and in truth, true worshippers, the first thing we need is a sense of the danger in which we are from the flesh and its worship...

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<sup>60</sup> Murray’s expression is troubling. I am tempted to replace it with ‘The infinite, perfect, holy spirit which God the Father is’.

We need the Holy Spirit's indwelling for life and worship alike. And to receive this we need first of all to have the flesh silenced... Our own thoughts of divine things, our own efforts to waken or work the right feelings must be given up, our own power to worship must be brought down and laid low, and every approach to God must take place under a very distinct and very quiet surrender to the Holy Spirit. And as we learn how impossible it is at our will any moment to ensure the Spirit's working, we shall learn that if we would worship in the Spirit we must walk in the Spirit. 'You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if so be the Spirit of God dwells in you' [Rom. 8:9]. As [that is, since] the Spirit dwells and rules in me, I am in the Spirit, and can worship in the Spirit...<sup>61</sup>

The Father seeks such [spirit and truth] worshippers, and what he seeks he finds, because he himself works it. That we might be such worshippers, he sent his own Son to seek and to save the lost; to save us with this salvation, that we should become his true worshippers, who enter in through the rent veil of the flesh, and worship him in the Spirit.

Once again, that most important principle: the ultimate end of conversion is the worship of God. And it is the Holy Spirit alone who can accomplish this conversion work; it is a work of his sovereign, gracious power:

And then [God] sent the Spirit of his Son, the Spirit of Christ, to be in us the truth and reality of what Christ had been, his actual presence, to communicate within us the very life that Christ had lived. Blessed be God! the hour has come, and is now, we are living in it this very moment, that the true worshippers shall [and

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<sup>61</sup> 'Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh... If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit' (Gal. 5:16,25). Paul, please note, used a stronger word for 'walk' in Gal. 5:25 than in Gal. 5:16, employing a word which has the idea of a row (an orderly line) or a rule. It describes a movement in a definite line, such as in a military formation or a dance, a choreography. The NIV has 'keep in step with'. See also Acts 21:24, 'walk orderly', and Gal. 6:16, 'walk according to this rule'. The idea is going in order, walking in the steps of someone, following an example, directing one's life, being in line with, standing beside, holding to, agreeing with, following. In particular, on Gal. 5:25, 'if or since the Holy Spirit animates us... let us exhibit that control of the Spirit in our life'.

do!] worship the Father in spirit and in truth. Let us believe it; the Spirit has been given, and dwells within us, for this one reason, because the Father seeks such worshippers. Let us rejoice in the confidence that we can attain to it, we can be true worshippers, because the Holy Spirit has been given.

Let us realise in holy fear and awe that he dwells within us. Let us humbly, in the silence of the flesh, yield ourselves to his leading and teaching. Let us wait in faith before God for his workings. And let us practice this worship. Let every new insight into what the work of the Spirit means, every exercise of faith in his indwelling or experience of his working, terminate in this as its highest glory: the adoring worship of the Father, the giving him the praise, the thanks, the honour, and love which are his alone.<sup>62</sup>

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Arthur G. Clarke's 'Worship and the Christian Priesthood':

Worship is the highest privilege and duty of a redeemed people – properly a continual exercise, the normal attitude of soul towards God, rather than a series of isolated acts (Heb. 13:15; *cf.* Ps. 34.1-3)... Here is fruit of the new life in Christ and consequent relationship to God in which believers stand. Worship flows only from the hearts of those who have a knowledge of salvation through faith in Christ. The unregenerate cannot worship God. Man must be a receiver of the gift of God, the living water of the Spirit, before he can worship in spirit and truth (John. 4:10-14, 23-24). Only believers are constituted a holy and royal priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet. 2:4-10)... [In the old covenant, in repeated scriptures – see, for instance, the Psalms] worshippers were taught to seek Jehovah; [in the new]... the Father seeks worshippers (John. 4:23). Worship of the Father takes place in the holy intimacy of the family circle. His children approach with reverent love, all having access to him on equal footing from the youngest to the oldest... Worship must conform to the nature of God (John. 4:20-24). He is Spirit, therefore worship must be spiritual (*cf.* Acts 17:24-25). Israel had the shadows (the typical), and worship was in the realm of the material. The Christian [the believer] has the substance, the reality – Christ – and worship is in the realm of the spiritual (Heb. 8:5; 10:1; Col. 2:16-17). All formality therefore is

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<sup>62</sup> Andrew Murray: 'Worship in the Spirit' in *The Spirit of Christ*, 1888.

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excluded. As a spiritual act, worship requires the prompting of our spirits by the Holy Spirit, the sole power for worship (Phil. 3:3), the flesh being incapable of it...

Clarke moved to Christendom's ruination of worship:

In no Christian exercise have fleshly expedients intruded more than in the worship of God. In so-called 'public worship' or 'divine service', human formularies have displaced the divine order. Such religious services commonly use a liturgy [written or unwritten] hurried through, often heedlessly, by a mixed company of believers and unbelievers; the sermon is the central feature. This is not true worship. Outward form only serves to cover inward failure. Fleshly aids, such as ornate buildings, imposing ceremonies, affecting music, and eloquent sermonising on political or social problems of the day rather than expounding the word of God, all betray a sad, carnal condition of soul. It is 'strange fire' (Lev. 10:1-2) that sooner or later<sup>63</sup> will call down the judgment of God, a spurious worship that dishonours his name. Multitudes of nominal Christians, like the Samaritans, 'know not what' they worship (John 4:22).<sup>64</sup>

Once again, this list needs updating: plenty of water has gone under the bridge in the nearly seventy years since Clarke wrote the above.

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Thomas Kelly on separation:

*Lord, behold us in thy grace,  
Humbly at thy feet we fall.  
See, we come to seek thy face:  
Deign, O deign to hear our call!*<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Original 'soon or late'.

<sup>64</sup> Arthur G. Clarke: 'Worship and the Christian Priesthood', *Precious Seed*, Vol.6 Issue 7, 1954. See also Arthur G. Clarke: *New Testament Church Principles*, John Ritchie, 1962.

<sup>65</sup> Or: 'Lord, behold us few and weak,/ Humbly at thy feet we fall/ See, we come thy face to seek:/ Deign, O deign to hear our call'.



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*When we lay in sin and death,  
Thou didst pass and bid us live,  
Thou didst give thy people faith,  
Thou didst all our sin forgive.*

*Jesus, thou didst shed thy blood,  
On this rock our hope we raise;  
Thou hast brought us nigh to God,  
Thine the work, and thine the praise.*

*'Tis thy will that we should be  
Separate from all around;  
Let our will with thine agree,  
Let thy people thus be found.*

*Teach us, Lord, to walk with thee,  
Teach us to adorn thy cause;  
Let us live in unity,  
Foes to pride and self-applause!*

*Let us bear each other's load,  
Faithful to each other prove,  
Till we gain the saints' abode,  
Till we take our place above –*

*There to see without a cloud –  
There with zeal untired<sup>66</sup> to sing;  
Mix with heav'n's triumphant crowd,  
And for ever praise our King.*

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A.W.Pink on separation:

‘Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness?’ (2 Cor. 6:14-18). This passage gives utterance to a divine exhortation for those belonging to Christ to hold aloof from all intimate associations with the ungodly. It expressly forbids them entering into alliances with the unconverted. It definitely prohibits the children of God walking arm-in-arm with worldlings. It is an admonition applying to every phase and department of our lives – religious, domestic, social, commercial. And never, perhaps, was there a time when it

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<sup>66</sup> Or ‘without fatigue’.

more needed pressing on Christians than now. The days in which we are living are marked by the spirit of compromise. On every side we behold unholy mixtures, ungodly alliances, unequal yokes. Many professing Christians appear to be trying how near to the world they may walk and yet go to heaven.<sup>67</sup>

'Be not unequally yoked together'. This is a call to godly separation. In each dispensation this divine demand has been made. To Abraham, Jehovah's peremptory word was: 'Get out of your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house' [Gen. 12:1]. To Israel, he said: 'After the doings of the land of Egypt wherein you dwelt, shall you not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall you not do; neither shall you walk in their ordinances' (Lev. 18:3). And again: 'You shall not walk in the manners of the nation which I cast out before you' (Lev. 20:23). It was for their disregard of these very prohibitions that Israel brought down upon themselves such severe chastisements.

At the beginning of the New Testament we are shown the forerunner of Christ [John the Baptist] standing outside the organised Judaism of his day, calling on men to flee from the wrath to come. The Saviour announced that: '[I call my] own sheep by name, and lead them out' (John 10:3). On the day of Pentecost the word to the crowd, perhaps especially to those under conviction of sin,<sup>68</sup> was: 'Save yourselves from this untoward generation' (Acts 2:40). Later, the author of Hebrews wrote: 'Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp' (Heb. 13:13). God's call to his people in Babylon is: 'Come out of her, my people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues' (Rev. 18:4).

'Be not unequally yoked together'. This is God's word unto his people today. Nor does it stand alone. In Romans 16:17, it is said: 'Mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which you have learned, and avoid them'. In 2 Timothy 2:20, we read: 'In a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from

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<sup>67</sup> Pink was writing in 1928. How much more such teaching is needed a century later.

<sup>68</sup> Original 'the word to believers'. The point is, this is what conversion is and involves: separation from the world. Frances Ridley Havergal put it in the form of a question: 'Who will leave the world's side?'. Preachers have to put it in the imperative – as Peter did.

these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use'.<sup>69</sup> 2 Timothy 3:5 speaks of those 'having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof'; then it is added: 'from such turn away'. What a word is that in 2 Thessalonians 3:14: 'If any man obey not our word by this letter, note that man, and have no company with him'! How radical is the admonition of 1 Corinthians 5:11: 'Now I have written unto you not to keep company with<sup>70</sup> any man that is called a brother [if he] be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner: with such an one no, not to eat'!

'Be not unequally yoked together'. We are fully persuaded that it is disregard of this commandment – for command it is – which is largely responsible for the low state which now obtains so generally among Christians, both individually and corporately. No wonder the spiritual pulse of many churches beats so feebly. No wonder their prayer meetings are so thinly attended; Christians who are unequally yoked have no heart for prayer. Disobedience at this point is a certain preventative to real and whole-hearted devotion to Christ. No one can be an unshackled follower of the Lord Jesus who is, in any way 'yoked' to his enemies. He may be a truly saved person, but the testimony of his life, the witness his walk, will not honour and glorify Christ.

'Be not unequally yoked together'. This applies first to our spiritual<sup>71</sup> or ecclesiastical connections. How many Christians are members of so-called 'churches', where much is going on which they know is in<sup>72</sup> direct variance with the word of God – either the teaching from the pulpit, the worldly attractions used to draw the ungodly, and the worldly methods employed to finance it, or the constant receiving into its membership of those who give no evidence of having been born again. Believers in Christ who remain in such 'churches' are dishonouring their Lord. Should they answer: 'Practically all the churches are the same, and were we to resign, what could we do? We must go somewhere on Sundays', such language would show they are putting their own interests before the glory of Christ. Better stay at home and read

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<sup>69</sup> 2 Tim. 2:20 refers to believers purging themselves from sin, but Pink's application to the *ekklēsia* being separate from the world is right.

<sup>70</sup> Original 'if' as in KJV.

<sup>71</sup> Original 'religious'.

<sup>72</sup> Original 'at'.

God's word, than fellowship with that<sup>73</sup> which his word condemns.

'Be not unequally yoked together'...<sup>74</sup> A 'yoke' is that which unites...'Can two walk together except they be agreed?' (Amos 3:3). Can those who owe their all to Christ, both for time and eternity, have fellowship with those who 'despise and reject' him? Let any Christian reader who is thus unequally yoked get from under it without delay.

'Be not unequally yoked together'...<sup>75</sup>

'Be not unequally yoked together'...<sup>76</sup>

We are to hate even the 'garment' – a figure for our habits and ways – spotted by the flesh (Jude 23), and are to keep ourselves 'unspotted from the world' (Jas. 1:27). What a searching and sweeping word is that in 2 Corinthians 7:1: 'Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God'! If any occupation or association is

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<sup>73</sup> Original 'that which'. Alternative rendering: 'fellowship which'.

<sup>74</sup> Pink now addressed membership of the Freemasons – original 'Secret Orders'.

<sup>75</sup> Pink went on: 'This applies to marriage. There are but two families in this world: the children of God, and the children of the devil (1 John 3:10). If, then, a daughter of God marries a son of the evil one, she becomes a daughter-in-law to Satan! If a son of God marries a daughter of Satan, he becomes a son-in-law to the devil! By such an infamous step an affinity is formed between one belonging to the Most High and one belonging to his archenemy. "Strong language!" Yes, but not too strong. And oh the bitter reaping from such a sowing. In every case, it is the poor Christian who suffers. Read the inspired histories of Samson, Solomon, and Ahab, and see what followed their unholy alliances in wedlock [not that the people mentioned were Christians, of course]. As well might an athlete, who attached to himself a heavy weight, expect to win a race, as a Christian to progress spiritually by marrying a worldling. O what watchfulness in prayer is needed in the regulation of our affections!'

<sup>76</sup> Pink went on: 'This applies to business partnerships. Disobedience at this point has wrecked many a Christian's testimony and pierced him through with many sorrows. Whatever may be gained of this world by seeking its avenues to wealth and social prestige, will but poorly compensate for the loss of fellowship with the Father and his Son Jesus Christ. Read Prov. 1:10-14. The path which the disciple of Christ is called to tread is a narrow one, and if he leaves it for a wider road, it will mean severe chastenings, heartbreaking losses, and perhaps the forfeiting the Saviour's "Well done" at the end of the journey'.

found to hinder our communion with God, or our enjoyment of spiritual things, then it must be abandoned. Beware of 'leprosy' in the garment (Lev. 13:47). Anything in my habits or ways which mars happy fellowship with the brethren or robs me of power in service, is to be unsparingly judged and made an end of – 'burned' (Lev. 13:52). Whatever I cannot do for God's glory must be avoided.

'For what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion has light with darkness? And what concord has Christ with Belial? or what part has he that believes with an infidel? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?' How explicit and emphatic are the terms used there! No excuse whatever is there for failing to understand the terms of this exhortation, and the reason with which it is supported. 'Fellowship, communion, concord, part, agreement' are so plain they require no interpreter. All unions, alliances, partnerships, entanglements with unbelievers are expressly forbidden to the Christian. It is impossible to find within the whole range of Holy Scripture plainer language on any subject than we have here. 'Righteousness, unrighteousness; light, darkness; Christ, Belial – what have they in common? What bond is there between them?

The contrasts presented are very pointed and searching. 'Righteousness' is right doing; 'unrighteousness' is wrong doing. The unerring and only standard of right doing is 'the word of righteousness' (Heb. 5:13). By this alone is the Christian's life and walk to be regulated. But the worldling disregards and defies it. Then what 'fellowship' can there be between one who is in subjection to God's word with one who is not? 'Light' and 'darkness'. God is light (1 John 1:5), and his saints are 'the children of light' (Luke 16:8). But the children of the Wicked One are 'darkness' (Eph. 5:8). What communion, then, can there be between members of families so dissimilar? 'Christ' and 'Belial' – what concord can there be between one to whom Christ is everything, and one who despises and rejects him?

'For you are the temple of the living God; as God has said: I will dwell in them, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people'. How blessed is this! *First*, we have the exhortation given: 'Be not unequally yoked together'; *second*, the reason adduced: 'For what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness?'; *third*, the inducement proffered. This is a divine promise, and it is striking to note it is a sevenfold one: 1) 'I will dwell in them'; 2) 'and walk in them'; 3) 'and I will be their God'; 4) 'and they shall be my people'; 5) 'and I will

receive you', 6) 'And will be a Father unto you'; 7) 'and you shall be my sons and daughters'.

'I will dwell in them' is fellowship; 'and walk in them' is companionship; 'and I will be their God' is relationship. First, 'in them', then 'for them'; and 'if God be for us, who can be against us?' (Rom. 8:31). 'And they shall be my people' is ownership, acknowledged as his. 'And I will receive you' means being brought to the place of experimental and conscious nearness to God. 'And will be a Father unto you' means 'I will manifest myself to you in this character, impart to your hearts all the joys of such'. 'And you shall be my sons and daughters' means that such godly separation from the world will afford demonstration that we are his 'sons and daughters'. Compare Matthew 5:44.

'Says the Lord Almighty'. This is the only time the divine title 'Almighty' is found in all the twenty-one letters of the New Testament! It seems to be brought in here for the purpose of emphasising the sufficiency of our resource. As another has said: 'Let any Christian act on the command of separation given in 2 Corinthians 6:14-17, and he will find his path so beset with difficulties and so tending to arouse the hostility of all, that if his eyes are not kept fixed on the Almighty God who has thus called him out, he will surely have a breakdown'. But let it be noted that these promises are conditional, conditional on obeying the preceding exhortations. Yet if the heart lays hold of this blessed inducement, then obedience to the command will be easy and pleasant.<sup>77</sup>

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C.H.Spurgeon:

Our sires, the Nonconformists, when they left the State-created religion to maintain a spiritual worship, and gathered themselves together as the servants of God, did well in bearing their protest against the less glaring idolatries of their age. In their day, as now, there existed the very common idolatry of superstitious reverence of buildings. Certain piles of stone, brick and timber are regarded as holy places. It is thought that inside certain walls God is more peculiarly present than outside, where the trees are growing and the birds singing. Our forefathers protested against this by never calling their buildings 'churches'. They knew they

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<sup>77</sup> A.W.Pink: 'A Call to Separation', *Studies in the Scriptures*, March 1928.

could not be; they knew that ‘churches’ mean companies of faithful men and women. They called the places of their usual assembly<sup>78</sup> ‘meeting-houses;’ that is what they were, and nothing more. The veneration of building materials, pulpits, altars, pews, cushions, tables, candlesticks, organs, cups, plates, *etc.*, is sheer, clear idolatry. ‘Worship God’ is a command which needs to be spoken in these days in tones of thunder. There is none holy save the LORD. ‘God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is LORD of heaven and earth, dwells not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he gives to all life, and breath, and all things’. Hear the LORD’s own words: ‘Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool. What house will you build me? says the LORD. Or what is the place of my rest? Has not my hand made all these things?’

Spurgeon moved to another Christendom corruption, one which is still with us; indeed it is growing – the observance of days. Spurgeon looked back to a time when believers saw this for what it was:

Our sires also stood out against another idolatry which still survives in England; namely, the observing of days and months. Certain days are set apart as holy, and observed with great reverence by those calling themselves Christians...<sup>79</sup> They have like Israel of old, when under legal bondage, new moons, and appointed feasts, for which they claim great respect, but to which none whatever is due. Our sires said: ‘This is not of Scripture, therefore it is of man, therefore it is will worship, and idolatrous’; and they showed their contempt of the commandments of men by an open disregard of holy days, and we shall do well in this respect and in all others to maintain their pure testimony. Whenever we see superstition in any shape, we must not flatter the folly, but according to our ability act the iconoclast’s part and denounce it. In this matter too many do the work of the Lord

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<sup>78</sup> Original ‘worship’. Spurgeon had not fully shaken free of Christendom.

<sup>79</sup> I have omitted ‘Not content with the sabbath as the day appointed of God for his worship...’. Spurgeon was making at least two mistakes here: he was imposing the old covenant (the sabbath) on the *ekklesia*, and giving credence to ‘services in church’ as defining ‘worship’.

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deceitfully, and bow in the house of Rimmon, instead of maintaining inviolate the spiritual worship of the great I AM.<sup>80</sup>

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Jeff Riddle, in his 'Worship Is Not Entertainment', reviewed John Owen's *Spiritual Mindedness*. Alas, while the following contains much that is valuable, neither Riddle or Owen showed themselves free of Christendom-speak:

In John Owen's book *Spiritual Mindedness*, [he] discusses the differences between the ways the regenerate ([the] saved) and the unregenerate ([the] unsaved) approach the worship of God. Owen observes that 'the regenerate heart delights to meet with God through Christ in every duty of religious worship' while the unregenerate 'is only concerned with the outward observance of the ceremony of religious worship, appreciating nothing of its spiritual significance'.

Owen then cites five ways by which the unsaved might even seem to 'delight' in worship:

1. They might be attracted to the outward things of religious worship and find it entertaining.
2. They might think that by attending worship they can atone for their sins and pacify their consciences.
3. They might believe that God will accept them for the good works they have done.
4. They might think that attending worship will give them a good name and reputation in the eyes of the world.
5. They might attend worship merely because they are superstitious.

In this discussion, Owen notes that the desire of the unregenerate to be entertained (see 1 above) in worship was one reason that worship became compromised. He observes:

'This was the reason why the... church<sup>81</sup> fell into apostasy. Seeking to keep up the appearances of godliness and love of

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<sup>80</sup> C.H.Spurgeon sermon 960.

<sup>81</sup> Original 'Christian church'. There is no other!



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spiritual things, men introduced worldly, fleshly attractions into evangelical worship. Instead of worship being spiritual and according to truth, it became outwardly attractive to the unregenerate person and inevitably grew more and more pompous and ceremonial.

If all the outward trappings were stripped away, leaving only that which was spiritual and true, the unregenerate would have nothing to attract them to religious worship and instead of delighting in it, they would find it boring and something only to be endured rather than to be enjoyed. But this would be of great advantage to the spiritual mind, which finds all outward trappings of worship invented by men a distraction rather than a help'.

It is far worse than that!

Riddle went on:

Years before Willow Creek and the 'seeker sensitive' movement ever appeared on the stage (pun intended), Owen was offering a cogent critique of the error of suiting worship to the tastes and preferences of the unsaved. Worship is an activity for the saints. When we tinker with worship to cater for the wants of<sup>82</sup> the unsaved, the inevitable result is compromise and the distractions of 'outward trappings'.

Could it be that all the so-called 'worship wars' (including battles over 'traditional' and 'contemporary' music) that plague the contemporary evangelical church are the result of surrender to the preferences of the unsaved? The saints will be satisfied with worship in simplicity and purity. Let us be more concerned in our worship with offering to the Lord what he demands rather than what men prefer.<sup>83</sup>

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Alan Kreider, in his 'Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom (The Laing Lecture 1994)', drew attention to the growth of the number of Christians throughout the Roman Empire in the first two centuries (that is, pre-Christendom), calling it 'an astonishing figure'. He gave his reasons:

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<sup>82</sup> Original 'cater worship to the needs of'.

<sup>83</sup> Jeff Riddle: 'Worship Is Not Entertainment'.

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For the growth of the pre-Christendom church took place in the face of imposing disincentives, [chief of which was persecution]. This persecution was not constant, and many Christians would never experience it directly. But every Christian knew that persecution, because of the imperial edict or local crisis, could break out with community-engulfing virulence. So they passed down [that is, passed on to the next generation] the acts of the martyrs, and celebrated the anniversaries of their deaths which they believed were really *birth* days. They commented on the experiences of being barricaded in their house churches – ‘besieged, and attacked, and kept prisoners actually in our secret congregations’ is how Tertullian put it – or, as Origen reported, of having their buildings burned down. They knew that ‘every Christian by definition was a candidate for death’. To understatement [it]: if one wanted a soft life, or to get ahead in respectable circles, one did not become a Christian.

And yet people became Christians. Why? It has intrigued recent historians to test, and rule out, a whole series of reasons which one might expect ought to have been important.

Quoting various sources, Kreider dealt with these ‘reasons’ which were unexpectedly unimportant:

Public preaching, for example, [was severely limited]: there was... ‘little, if any, direct preaching to the masses’; it was simply too dangerous. [Another suggestion was] organising the congregations for mission... ‘The recruitment to the faith was never institutionalised’... How about prayer for the conversion of pagans?... ‘The Christians prayed for the prosperity and peace of people, but scarcely for their conversion’. Most of the very few prayers for conversion which survive from the early centuries... are in fact prayers in obedience to Jesus’ command to pray for enemies and persecutors... ‘The scarcity of reflection about mission’ is ‘astonishing’... In my reading of early Christian materials, [Kreider recorded], I have been amazed at the absence of pastoral admonitions to evangelise... [Furthermore], the church did not grow because its worship was attractive. From the mid-first century onwards pagans were not admitted to *ekklēsia* meetings.<sup>84</sup> Until non-Christians were willing to submit to the

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<sup>84</sup> Original ‘Christian worship services’. This (or similar) applies throughout these extracts from Kreider’s work.

interrogation necessary to become a catechumen,<sup>85</sup> and as a catechumen to be trained for membership in the Christian community, they were not allowed through the door into an *ekklēsia* meeting. And even then, until they were baptised, they were allowed to stay only for the service of the word – the biblical readings and teaching; they were firmly dismissed before the unitive<sup>86</sup> actions of *ekklēsia* meetings – the prayers and the kiss of peace culminating in the Lord’s supper.<sup>87</sup> The Christians were thus surrounded by what one historian has called an ‘invisible minefield’. Contemporary critics sensed this. Celsius, [for instance]: Christians are ‘a secret society’; Caecilius: ‘Why do [the Christians] never speak in public, never meet in the open, if it be not that the aspect of their worship is either criminal or shameful?’

What a contrast with today! Evangelicals don’t turn a hair when organising – re-engineering<sup>88</sup> – the *ekklēsia* to maximise the opportunity (a current buzzword) for evangelism, organised evangelism being the number-one concern – specifically in terms of encouraging pagans to ‘attend church’, even, in some cases, to participate in the Lord’s supper. Whereas the early believers kept the world out, most modern evangelicals want the world in and welcome. The early believers saw pagans converted then brought into the *ekklēsia*; today, believers want pagans to participate in ‘church’, the believers hoping that somehow or another the pagans might be ‘converted’ (however that is defined). Whereas modern evangelicals radically alter the *ekklēsia* to attract pagans, the early believers kept themselves separate from the world, suffered persecution, and yet saw converts, even though their enemies vilified their secrecy.

How did this tectonic change come about?

Christendom!

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<sup>85</sup> A prospective adherent who was being instructed. The word comes from *katēcheō* (to teach).

<sup>86</sup> That is, actions designed to produce and strengthen union between those participating.

<sup>87</sup> Original ‘eucharist’.

<sup>88</sup> See my *Relationship*.

Kreider continued, providing liberal extracts with sources:

At first, of course, pagans had... been allowed to attend *ekklēsia* meetings. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, urged his enthusiastic friends to comport themselves in such a way that, when ‘outsiders or unbelievers enter’, they will ‘not say that you are out of your mind’ (1 Cor. 14:23).

Kreider read too much into this:

In this, the early Christians were in the tradition of the Jewish synagogues, where outsiders were courted and whose services ‘had the functions both of edification and of solicitation’.

Instructing believers on how they should conduct themselves if an unbeliever happens (for whatever reason) to be in an *ekklēsia* meeting is not the same as soliciting pagan attendance.

Kreider continued:

After Nero’s persecution of the mid-60s, however, the... churches seem to have felt it necessary to close their doors to outsiders. They, unlike the Jews, were now styled a deviation from the norms of acceptable behaviour; now they, as Pliny put it in his correspondence with the Emperor Trajan, were subject to execution not only for their ‘secret crimes’ but also for ‘the mere name’ [of Christian]. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that the Christians closed their doors to outsiders; to let just anybody in was simply too dangerous.

The early Christian documents are explicit about this. The believers feared the presence of... ‘lying informers’. So they... assigned someone to watch on the door to see that only appropriate people came in. Typical of this is the mid-fourth-century *Testament of our Lord*, which describes one of the deacon’s functions as that of the ecclesiastical bouncer: ‘Let him observe and look at those who come into the house of the sanctuary.<sup>89</sup> Let him investigate who they are, so that he may know if they are lambs or wolves. And when he asks, let him bring in him that is worthy, lest, if a spy enter, the liberty of the church be searched out, and his sin be on his head’.

Getting back to surer ground:

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<sup>89</sup> An ambiguous phrase. Note the date – mid-fourth century. Was the writer using Christendom-speak or was he referring to the *ekklēsia*?

In pre-Christendom, there was *no connection* between worship and evangelism. It simply didn't matter whether the church's worship was attractive to outsiders. It wasn't designed for outsiders, and outsiders weren't there. The topic that I [Kreider] have set myself ['Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom'] therefore appears to be a *non sequitur*.

And yet I think there was a connection. I believe that *ekklēsia* meetings, to which pagans were denied admission, was all-important in the spread of the church [better, gospel or converts – DG]. It was important, not because it was attractive [to pagans], but because its rites and practices were designed to re-form those pagans who joined the church into Christians, into distinctive people who lived in a way that individually and corporately looked like Jesus Christ.<sup>90</sup> As such these people, re-formed, would be attractive. And not only attractive, but free. In an age of bondage, of increasing disorder, of a deepening gulf between privileged people and poor people, of life-disfiguring addictions and compulsions, the church was growing because it and its members had a freedom and a fullness of life in Christ that could not be hid. This... was good news, news that was *new*; and this newness in the practices of its corporate life and the behaviour of its members toward non-members was intriguing, inviting, question-posing. Why, people asked, do Christians live like *that*?

This is a cardinal point. The best witness is the believer's lifestyle – so different to the pagan's that it arouses interest, curiosity and questions:

In your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame (1 Pet. 3:15-16).

Kreider:

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<sup>90</sup> This is confusing. According to the New Testament, saints assembled to edify each other (and this includes their progressive sanctification). The *ekklēsia* did not 're-form' or educate (my use of 'process' or 'indoctrinate' might be considered pejorative, but I think they do sum up a common evangelical approach today) pagans into 'Christians'; it edified converts.

The pre-Christendom Christians sensed that they, by God's grace, had been ushered into a privileged place. The mid-third-century Bishop of Carthage, Cyprian, repeatedly referred to it as an 'enclosed garden'. Quoting Song 4:12, in which he heard the voice of Christ, he wrote: 'A garden enclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring sealed up, a well of living water. But if [that is, since] the spouse of Christ, which is the church, is a garden enclosed – a thing that is closed up cannot lie open to strangers and profane persons'. Enclosed: outsiders cannot easily get in. A garden: here is life flowering and flourishing in the presence of Christ. Cyprian and other Christians sought repeatedly to express the delight and the newness of their common life in Christ. 'This is a new people, and there is something divine mingled with it'. This is 'a new race or way of life'. This is 'God's country'. This is 'Paradise'. This is 'the place where the Holy Spirit flourishes'. The heart of the newness was the person and teaching of Jesus Christ.

The pre-Christendom Christians sensed themselves [to be] out of joint with the dominant values [that is, the culture] of their time... The Christians, because of their life in Christ, knew that they were living in a distinctive way that had global and salvation-historical import.

The question forces itself upon us: How did the gospel advance in that alien world, within a pagan culture that was hostile to the gospel both in thought and action? Kreider:

How did [pagan] people learn about that new world? An initial encounter often came through martyrdom, which brought these communities a notoriety that they would have preferred to avoid. Their endurance in the amphitheatre, while being attacked by starved bears, or roasted on chairs of molten iron, was medically inexplicable; their love for each other – for example, giving the kiss of peace before being dispatched by their executioners – was transparent. Those who guarded them reported in admiration that 'there is a power' among them. And the whole process, for those who had never previously given a thought to Christianity, was question-posing. 'What profit has their religion brought them, which they have preferred to their own life?' asked the incredulous onlookers in the Lyons pogrom.<sup>91</sup> Repeatedly the [new] Christians reported that the fidelity of the martyrs had been

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<sup>91</sup> A pogrom is an organised massacre.

one of the first things that had attracted their attention to the faith. As Tertullian put it, faithfulness in public suffering 'is the bait that wins men for our school'.<sup>92</sup>

Contrast 'the blood of the martyrs' with the modern baits offered to pagans – free food, entertainment, diversions, contemporary music, and the like.

Kreider continued:

Others learned about the new world in less dramatic ways. It could happen at work, for example, through a new worker who was employed in one's workshop who remarked quietly that his community 'alone... know the right way to live'; to people who were aware that nothing was going right for them this could be not offensive but intriguing... Or one could learn about Christianity in the apartment building or neighbourhood where one lived. 'Most converts... became acquainted with it through casual contact'. Christians lived scattered throughout the populace, as neighbours... As these Christians built relationships with their neighbours, they would talk about the faith. The pagan Caecilius reported, with distaste, that the Christians were 'silent in public, [but] chattering in corners'. In times of illness or crisis, their neighbours who had learned to trust them, would feel free to turn to Christians, who could offer to provide material help or come and pray for healing and release. Many pagans sensed themselves to be bound, comprehensively un-free, in the midst of social and spiritual forces much larger than themselves...

Pagans, Justin noted, were turning 'away from the ways of violence and tyranny' because they were drawn to Christians as people whose lives were distinctive, free. The pagans' hesitations were overcome 'by observing the consistent lives of their neighbours, or noting the strange patience of their injured acquaintances, or experiencing the way they did business with them'. Women apparently were disproportionately involved in forming evangelistically productive caring links.<sup>93</sup> This is partly because they were from an early date preponderant numerically in the church. It also reflected their ability to listen to people and to be attentive to their questions. Inevitably, then as now, a major concern of women was the salvation of their husbands, who as a

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<sup>92</sup> He also said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.

<sup>93</sup> Original 'affective bonds'.

group seem to have been more locked in paganism than they were... [see 1 Pet. 3:1-6]. Whether with women or with men, it was friendship which was the most common way for individuals to approach the seemingly unapproachable church.

This friendship, unlike the modern evangelical approach, was cultivated outside the *ekklēsia*.

Kreider:

The pagan Caecilius commented: '[The Christians] are a gang of discredited and proscribed desperadoes... They have gathered together from the lowest dregs of the populace ignorant men, incredulous women – and women are naturally unstable – and have formed a rabble of impious conspirators... They fall in love almost before they are acquainted; everywhere they introduce a kind of religion of lust'. Caecilius' was a somewhat [*sic*] uncharitable view, of course, but he was not unperceptive. He noted the preponderance of women... and of 'ignorant' people evidently from the lower social orders... Caecilius was conceding that the... churches<sup>94</sup> were socially inclusive to an extent unparalleled in ancient society... What is notable about the Roman Christians at the time that Caecilius was observing them was their social inclusivity and generosity. Some outsiders [it is true] were mistrustful of this; others [however] wanted to join it.

Caecilius' second observation was also shrewd. For the Christians did indeed view themselves as brothers and sisters, members of the same family, bound together in the love and peace of Christ... The early Christians knew that central to their communities' life was a peace, a peace that was unworldly and deeply attractive.

The Christians were aware that the life of their communities of freedom was remarkable, and they wanted to live in such a way that this was visible enough to draw people to faith and freedom in Christ. 'Beauty of life... causes strangers to join the ranks... We do not talk about great things; we live them'.

What a thought! Pagans envying the practical demonstrations of love among believers, thus fulfilling Christ's words:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this

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<sup>94</sup> Original 'Christian churches'. There are no other!



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all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:34-35).

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:14-16).

As Peter put it:

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation (1 Pet. 2:11-12).

Kreider went on:

A strenuous communal lifestyle required constant pastoral attention, and it is likely that the pastoral leaders gave their primary attention, not to evangelism, but to the church's inner life precisely because of their 'confidence that the clearly and distinctively lived-ideal will most effectively make people attentive to the truth of Christianity'... By nurturing right relationships within the church [that is, in house, among the believers by believers], Christian leaders would be 'helpers with God that the number of those who are saved might be increased'... 'Let us compete among the pagans in being like-minded and sober'... [They desired] that the lives of Christians 'may shine with virtue, not before each other [only], but also before the Gentiles [that is, pagans – DG] so that they may imitate them [that is, want to be like them – DG] and become Christians.

I break in to point out that while there is an abundance of material in the New Testament on how believers should conduct themselves in a pagan world, there is nothing by way of a handbook on how to evangelise. That evangelism, as I have said elsewhere, was spontaneous, amateur, unplanned and uncoordinated (by man). It was also confrontational.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See my *To Confront*.

Contemporary evangelicalism, alas, is very different! Again, personal acts of charity and kindness are more than highly commendable: believers are commanded to engage in such (Matt. 5:45; 25:31-46; Gal. 6:10). But to turn this into re-engineering the *ekklēsia* in order to set up a system of church-based organisations and events in order to attract the ‘unchurched’ to ‘church’ in order to evangelise them by ‘friendship evangelism’ is nothing short of cavalier.<sup>96</sup>

Listen to Peter:

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing... Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behaviour in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil... Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is why the gospel was preached even to those who are dead, that though judged in the flesh the way people are, they might live in the spirit the way God does.

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each

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<sup>96</sup> See my *Relationship*.

has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, [should speak] as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, [should serve] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies – in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And 'If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?' Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good (1 Pet. 3:8 – 4:19).

Does reading that passage in light of the extracts above not make even more sense, and speak even more powerfully, than ever? What greater contrast could there be to the churches in the west today?

Kreider went on to show how the early churches 'were by no means ingrown'; they were renowned for showing practical kindness to pagan neighbours during civil war and plague – outside the church, of course. So much so, the apostate Julian complained that the practical kindness believers showed to pagans hindered his drive to restore paganism as the official religion of the empire.

Kreider:

How was it that Christians were able to behave like this? Here I come to the heart of the matter. I am convinced that the secret was in their worship, which above all shaped individuals and communities that were distinctive. But before one could worship one had to get through the doors of the church. And that, as we have already noted, was not easy.

Although, sadly, Kreider continued to use Christendom-speak when talking about ‘worship’, on the issue of the *ekklēsia* receiving pagans he was right: while the early believers knew that ‘friendship [exercised outside the *ekklēsia* by believers towards pagans] was the way [for them] to approach the church’, the believers insisted that a pagan had to be willing to change ‘his conduct and his habits’ before he was someone who was ‘capable of hearing the word’. Mere head knowledge was not enough. But so eager were the believers to protect the *ekklēsia*’s separation, they went beyond scriptural warrant in the way they prolonged their investigation of would-be adherents. Nevertheless, their sense of separation was right.

Alas, they failed. Their growing errors over baptism further confused the issue. Indeed, because of the spread and dominance of infant baptism leading to baptismal regeneration, the proliferation of Christendom Christians proved unstoppable.

Kreider came to the crunch: although ‘Christianity grew in pre-Christendom’, it was with the so-called ‘conversion’ of Constantine that things changed radically. Constantine gave:

...the toleration to the Christians for which they had longed; then he made Christianity the way to get ahead in respectable circles. As disincentives disappeared and incentives appeared, the Church<sup>97</sup> grew even more rapidly; by 392 approximately half of the imperial populace was ‘Christian’... By the eighth century the baptism of infants had become the norm... In this new world, a self-confessedly Christian world, the Church became a dominant institution.

Christendom had arrived! And it was here to stay – and with disastrous results:

As the Christendom centuries progressed, some Christians confined the radical teachings of Jesus to a clerical (or sectarian) elite. Others handled them so as not to require Christians to behave unconventionally in their public lives. In this Christendom world, early Christian vocabulary took on new

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<sup>97</sup> I use ‘Church’ instead of ‘church’ to try to distinguish between Christendom and the *ekklēsia*.

meanings. In Christendom, Christians were still [given the old nickname, but] the term no longer meant ‘resident aliens’. It now meant residents, parishioners, people whose distinctiveness was not that they were unlike their neighbours, but that they were unlike people in other countries whose rulers espoused some other faith. Where everyone was a ‘Christian’, their primary allegiance was no longer to the transnational family of God; it rather was to people with whom they shared a common race and place. So the internationalism of early Christianity withered, and God came to be associated primarily with one’s own country.

Kreider came to application of all this to us today:

If the church survives, it will not be ‘by might, nor by power’ (Zech. 4:6), but because of God’s Spirit, who is enabling Christians to emerge, not as mere residents but, as in the early centuries, as resident aliens, purveyors of good news to our time. This is a daunting challenge. With an unprecedented thoroughness, our culture categorises us [from our earliest days] in beliefs hostile to Christianity. [Kreider was writing in 1994, remember, when he observed that] an average American, by the age of 18 has watched 36,000 hours of television, and seen 15,000 TV murders. A typical middle-class British child, when not watching television, is peering into a computer screen, while zapping hordes of invaders. Advertisers prey without ceasing upon our susceptibilities. We are enmeshed in a culture of violence, of endless dissatisfaction, the promise of instant gratification, of limitless self-expression. In the supermarket as well as Soho we are assailed by addictions and compulsions. And in this setting, we Christians are called to advocate the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to invite people to true life in him.

In view of the paganism of our times, we would seem to have much in common with the pre-Christendom Christians. I believe that we do. But our circumstances are also very different. We are separated from them not only by 1700 years but also by Christendom. In my experience most people today view Christians not as advocates of something new and exciting, but rather as blinkered defenders of views that are old, which have been tried, and which have failed. They may differ as to whether our... churches<sup>98</sup> and institutions are benign or malign; they largely agree that they are backward-looking and irrelevant. For

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<sup>98</sup> Original ‘Christian churches’. There are no other!

us, I believe, Christendom is a missiological [missionary?] problem.

In this setting, the early Christians [that is, the believers who lived between the time of the apostles and Christendom] cannot tell us what to do. They didn't have everything worked out, and on many points we, for good reason, would not want to copy them. The early Christians can, however, ask some questions. 'At work or at home', they might well ask us, 'are you known to your neighbours? Are you known as members of [a group that holds to] a deviation from the norms of accepted behaviour? Are you distinctive because of Jesus, whose teachings and way offer you perspectives and ways of living that are new? And how about your congregations? In the way that they function in worship, are they becoming communities of peace and freedom which are evidences of the truth of the gospel? And your catechism: as you prepare people for baptism, are you equipping them to live freely in the face of the addictions and compulsions of your time? Are you teaching them new narratives and new folkways, so that they are being re-formed into a people who are distinctively Christian? Finally, in your worship, what do your rites (for you all have them) say about your churches' beliefs and priorities? Are your rites strong and living, enabling you to address the issues that really trouble your communities? Do you evaluate your worship primarily by how it makes you feel, or by the extent to which it shapes your character – as communities of faith and as individual Christians – so that you look like Jesus Christ?'

In German, the early church is called... 'the old church'. I believe that, as we engage in dialogue with it, 'the old church' can help us... to be followers of Jesus Christ in a church that is perennially young.<sup>99</sup>

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Some years after his 1994 lecture, Alan Kreider produced a book – *The Patient Firmament of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* – in which, although he continued his use of Christendom-speak when referring to 'worship', even so, in the chapter 'The Improbable Growth of the

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<sup>99</sup> Alan Kreider: 'Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom (The Laing Lecture 1994)' in *Vox Evangelica* 1994, emphasis original. As can be seen, Kreider was still inclined to use Christendom-speak.

Church’,<sup>100</sup> he made many invaluable points. He showed that the early Christians – pre-Christendom Christians, that is – saw remarkable growth in numbers, despite massive opposition:

Christianity grew despite the opposition of laws and social convention. These were formidable disincentives. In addition, the possibility of death in persecution loomed over the pre-Constantinian church; although few Christians were actually executed... [they] knew that they, as members of a ‘dubious group’, were vulnerable to being ‘turned in’ by their neighbours or by others who wanted to see them deprived of privileges. In the 240s, Origen commented about [better, on] the ‘disgrace among the rest of society’ that Christians experienced. Christians had to be cautious. Nevertheless the churches grew.

Then, of course, came the all-important question. Kreider: Why? Why this growth?

Kreider explained that it was not through the production of literature on evangelism, not through re-engineering<sup>101</sup> the *ekklēsia* to attract pagans; indeed, it was quite the opposite:

The early Christians... attributed it to the patient work of God... [It] was not under anyone’s control. It was uncoordinated, it was unpredictable, and it seemed unstoppable. The ferment was spontaneous... This happened in a patient manner.

What a contrast with today!

Our stress on *ekklēsia* evangelism – especially on techniques to use the *ekklēsia* to attract and hold pagans to evangelise them, and our organised, polished, evangelistic programmes which have much in common with corporate business – surely reflects the poverty of our life-witness to speak of Christ and arouse pagan interest and concern. Furthermore, instead of being regarded as the offscouring of society, persecuted by contemporary culture, too often believers seem to want the church to become a tolerated – if not a welcome – part of the establishment, a familiar, useful

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<sup>100</sup> Alan Kreider: ‘The Improbable Growth of the Church’ in *The Patient Firmament of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire*, Baker Academic, 2016, pp7-12.

<sup>101</sup> See my *Relationship*.

institution. Only when or if the church becomes the *ekklēsia* again will the gospel really advance. Meanwhile, the modern way of boosting growth in church attendance will go on producing more and more Christendom-Christians.

Peri Zahnd reviewed Kreider's book:

According to Kreider, the early church had no organised plan for evangelism; in fact [it] tried to hide itself and prohibited visitors. They were a secret society, not so much because of fear of persecution, but of avoiding throwing pearls to swine. What they had was so precious it had to be protected. Those who sought to join them had to go through a demanding and lengthy catechismal process designed to not only teach doctrine but to change the way of life<sup>102</sup> of converts – a discipleship of programming Christ-like behaviour that would become automatic and habitual – an embodied faith.

The early church had no plan for growth and yet it grew. It spread throughout the world organically, almost imperceptibly, yet relentlessly, like a new species introduced into an ecosystem, which is exactly what it was – a new species, a new humanity, a new kind of people whose DNA was now of the Jesus strain.

The early church believed that God was patient and that Jesus, the Son of God, modelled and embodied patience. They believed that God was at work, slowly and patiently transforming the world, and that they were called to patiently allow that work to be accomplished in each individual as it was being accomplished in them. They didn't feel called to convert the world, but to be the world converted by Jesus. They didn't much preach to the world with words but trusted that the Christ-like behaviour of their converts would intrigue and attract others. This was fermentation at work.

The early church had a strong ethos of patience, and taught often on patience. Many early church writings are devoted to the virtue of patience. They weren't in a hurry to see the world changed. God would do it all – in time.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Original 'habitus'.

<sup>103</sup> Peri Zahnd: 'The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: A Summary'.



Lesley F. Massey, in his 'Paul and Christian Worship in Light of Romans 12:1', observed that for 'all varieties of modern and post-modern Christians':

...worship means the sharing of the... Lord's supper, prayer, music, singing, reading Scripture, preaching and giving material offerings during a special assembly. This format of worship is typically accentuated by certain gestures that display adoration of God; such as bowing heads, closing eyes, raising eyes heavenward, lifting hands, and so on. For most Christians, a 'worship service' is very distinct from other rituals and celebrations, both religious and secular, and is also distinct from the many mundane activities in daily life. Worship consists of special activities, at a special time, and usually at a special place. And because of its perceived importance, modern church leaders typically devote a great deal of time and energy to planning and directing such 'worship services'.

Working on that mistaken – Christendom – basis:

In recent years many churches have changed [their] worship format, moving away from traditional models towards more contemporary music and a casual atmosphere, with the use of electronic media for experiential enhancement. While many 'pagan attenders'<sup>104</sup> find these changes appealing, 'traditional Christians' are often repulsed and offended. Some assert that what is called 'praise music' is not worship at all, but mere entertainment. Some say they cannot worship with all the noise and clamour, suggesting that they do not view worship as [a] joyful celebration but rather [a] quiet meditation. The result is that church leaders are continually challenged to provide a 'worship experience' that appeals to everyone, and fits the individual notions of what worship is about. Many churches, in fact, hold multiple services in different formats to cater for different preferences. This trend underscores the significance that an hour or two of 'worship' holds for many Christians.

So much for today. What about Romans 12? Massey:

[However] the definition of worship that emerges from Romans 12:1 is very different [to] any of the concepts and forms of worship that Paul observed in his time, as well as those that

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<sup>104</sup> Original 'seekers' – a category I do not agree with; see my *Seeking*.

developed in the church after his time [that is, with the rise of Christendom], and continue in various traditions today... Paul's expression 'living sacrifice' contrasts his view of worship with the religious practices of his day, including the temple rituals... This mode of worship, although common in most ancient cultures, in Paul's judgment accomplished nothing of value to God or man. Rather, he says that the Christian [that is, the believer] offers his or her body as a living sacrifice in the [daily, twenty-four hour] service of God. The importance of this contrast is underscored by the [original Greek Paul used] commonly translated 'spiritual worship'.

As Massey argued, Romans 12:1 is Paul's opening of an extended passage concerned with the believer's life devoted and submissive to God, something which is made clear in many other scriptural passages; for example:

James... says that 'pure and undefiled religion in the sight of God the Father is to minister to widows and orphans in their suffering, and to keep oneself unstained by the world' [Jas. 1:27]. [James] uses... a very broad [Greek] term that embraces the whole of one's religious beliefs and practices. However, it is clear to James that the core of 'pure religion' is not ritual and ceremony, but mode of life emphasising benevolent deeds and moral uprightness. Thus, for James, 'doing good and being good' are the essence of devotion to God.

Quoting Gunther Bornkamm, Massey declared that Paul's doctrine left:

...no room for 'holy places, holy times, and the cultic'<sup>105</sup> boundaries between the privileged people of God and pagans, or between priest and people'.

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<sup>105</sup> The word 'cultic' can be used by way of criticism – for instance, when referring to a (probably) extreme religious group. *That is not the way it is used in this work*. Rather, it speaks of: '...the way religious experience is expressed in a service performed by a congregation, almost certainly conducted by one or more appointed officials, in set forms, and usually in a special place' (See Peterson p30). So, for example, a typical church service with the usual hymns or songs, prayers, sermon *etc.*, led by a minister, pastor, elder or whatever, is, in the terms of this book, a cultic performance. This note applies to all the extracts from Massey's work.

Rather:

Paul's radical shift in theology brought him to conclude that the only meaningful worship and service to God was a manner of life that demonstrates faith, enlightenment, and redemptive love for humanity. True worship, therefore, amounts to an approach to mundane activities that gives evidence of an inner conversion and transformation by the living presence of Christ. This, to Paul, was the appropriate response to divine grace, and the only sensible, beneficial and proper means of honouring God. In order to worship God, one must offer a service to God. The interests of God, and the will of God, are not served by [attending a special place at a special time], rituals, symbols, gestures, ceremonies or platitudes. Paul was convinced, from his understanding of the teaching of Jesus, that God cannot be patronised by human lip-service. Rather, God is served by noble and exemplary living, and by attitudes, perspectives, motives, choices and actions that demonstrate divine love and goodness in the world... A Christian's life of service is the only meaningful offering to God.

Further evidence of Paul's radical view of worship can be found in the conspicuous absence in his writings of any association of the common terms for worship with the activities of Christians when they assembled. For a start, we are hard pressed [too weak – it is impossible – DG] to find support for the notion that a church building, chapel or cathedral would have been considered by Paul the 'house of God', or that God's presence must be invoked by prayer, or somehow enhanced by an assembly of believers for 'corporate worship'. Paul's education [in the old covenant] would have provided him with ample vocabulary for such associations as: 'Worship in the Lord's house' (Jer. 26:2); or: 'Enter the gates to worship' (Jer. 7:2) – which were certainly common among Jews in connection with the temple. But such does not appear in his writings. Nor does he ever say: 'When you come together to worship'; or: 'Come to the table to worship the Lord': or: 'Worship God in song and reading... Scripture'; or: 'Lift your voices in worship'; or: 'Bow your head as we worship in prayer'; or: 'Give to the Lord an offering of praise and worship'.

This does not mean that the *ekklēsia* should not assemble:

Paul saw value in an assembly of believers, with practices that nurture personal faith in boldness to face the many challenges of daily life in an often hostile world. The question is whether Paul

thought of the assembly as a ‘worship service’...<sup>106</sup> To Paul, the [Lord’s supper] is a time of remembrance in self-examination, but nowhere does he call it ‘worship’. Prophecy serves to edify the church, but Paul does not speak of either receiving or delivering prophecy as ‘worship’. [True,] in 1 Corinthians 14:25, Paul says that the proper use of spiritual gifts by Christians will prompt an unbeliever to ‘fall down and worship God, declaring that God is truly among you’. [But] in Paul’s day, falling on the knees, or falling prostrate, face to the ground, was a common expression of humility, especially so upon a sudden epiphany. But in this context it does not define or associate a particular posture with the Christian assembly.

Massey went on:

There are a few other texts that merit mention here. In Romans 15:16, Paul uses cultic<sup>107</sup> language with regard to preaching the gospel among the Gentiles.<sup>108</sup> And in Philippians 2:17... Paul... speaks of his experience of hardship for the benefit of others as ‘a libation poured over your sacrifice’, also clearly priestly language. While such texts are colourful portrayals of a life of divine servitude, they do not describe the ceremonial act in a Christian assembly... In Philippians 3:3, [Paul] uses [a Greek word] to contrast the Christian’s life of worship with fleshly rites like circumcision. In [Philippians] 4:18 he speaks of the gifts he received from Christian friends as ‘a fragrant offering’. This is cultic<sup>109</sup> terminology, but here it is used to describe the acts of kindness and generosity, rather than some form of worship ritual. The claim here is that these gifts, whatever they were, were given by devoted disciples and were brought to Paul by Epaphroditus, but this cannot be equated with the traditional ‘tithes and offerings’ given as an act of worship by Christians on Sunday morning. Even the verb... found in 1 Thessalonians 1:9, which is commonly translated ‘to serve’ the living God, also lacks connection to cultic<sup>110</sup> rituals or ceremonies. Rather, it conveys the sense of duty common to bondservants, the noun form

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<sup>106</sup> I have omitted ‘and beyond that whether Paul’s views carry any weight for modern Christians’. I hope there is no question of it! Maybe Massey was being ironical in light of contemporary practice.

<sup>107</sup> See earlier note.

<sup>108</sup> See my *Pastor*.

<sup>109</sup> See earlier note.

<sup>110</sup> See previous note.

implied by Paul and other writers in reference to their submissive and servile relationship to God and to Jesus Christ.

Massey went on to speak of 1 Timothy 2:8 and 2 Timothy 1:3-4, concluding that:

While Paul was devoted to prayer, and frequently mentioned it in his letters, he says nothing to suggest that he considered prayer a form of ‘worship’ or an element of a ‘worship assembly’. It seems rather that for Paul, prayer was a constant state of mind, a relational communion with God through Jesus Christ, and certainly a valuable meditation, but not an ‘act of worship’ in the sense that many Christians today view it.

Indeed, as we know, we are commanded to ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5:17), ‘praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication’ (Eph. 6:18). Any hint of a suggestion that Paul was thinking of believers doing this ‘in church’ at specified times is derisory.

Massey:

Efforts to trace modern worship practises to the New Testament are in reality *eisegesis*, perhaps not by intention but by presumption.

I pause. Massey has drawn attention to the fundamental flaw in Christendom’s effort to justify ‘public worship’, including abuse of the *ekklēsia* for evangelism; namely, by *eisegesis* – that is, starting with a presupposition, an assumption, reading that into the text, and then reading it out. This is exceedingly common. We are all prone to it, but most believers do not realise that they are guilty of it.

Massey continued:

Looking back in time through lenses coated with culture and tradition [that is Christendom], the church of the 20th and 21st centuries has inserted into Paul’s theology notions about worship, even at the simplest level, that in fact he resisted and rejected. The same assumptions have been ‘retro-fitted’ into the teachings of Jesus, and the New Testament as a whole... Thus also is the insertion into the New Testament notions of worship that in reality emerge from human nature and from a global religious

tendency, but were opposed by Paul and others. In the same text under critical discussion [Rom. 12:1], Paul urges: ‘Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will’ (Rom. 12:2).

Citing Howard Marshall’s argument,<sup>111</sup> Massey went on:

Romans 12:1 more or less summarises the view of worship that Paul promoted in the earliest Christian community – that the appropriate way to worship God is by daily service and manner of life, not in ceremonial activities performed in an assembly. Addressing the topic of [the] vocabulary of worship in the New Testament, Marshall takes note of the absence of any association of terms for worship with the earliest Christian assembly. He [rightly] says that to describe the activities of a Christian meeting ‘as being specifically for the purpose of “worship” is without New Testament precedent’.

Massey moved on to the Reformers:

Both Martin Luther and John Calvin viewed the worship of the Roman Catholic Church [the peak of Christendom – DG] as an abomination, and a complete departure from the concept of worship taught<sup>112</sup> in the New Testament. Their agenda, therefore, included a reconstruction of worship [that] they thought would conform to Jesus’ assertion about worship ‘in spirit and truth’ (John 4:24).

Rome had turned worship into a performance by the ‘clergy’ – priests performing their sacerdotal part in a religious play while being watched by the docile ‘laity’. Sadly, the Reformers, although they did much to recover the new covenant (particularly in the matter of justification by grace through faith in Christ alone), failed to go all the way. While they tinkered with it, they left much of Christendom essentially intact.<sup>113</sup>

Massey went on:

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<sup>111</sup> Howard Marshall: ‘How far did the early Christians worship God?’, *Churchman*, issue 99.3, 1985. See earlier extract.

<sup>112</sup> Original ‘reflected’ – too weak.

<sup>113</sup> See my *Battle; Pastor; Infant*.

## *The Annotated Extracts*

Luther... understood ‘true worship’ to be essentially the Christian’s life dedicated to God... He described a mode of life completely apart from, and unrelated to, the trappings of traditional worship. Admittedly, Luther included in that list ‘rightly keeping and hallowing the sabbath’, by which he undoubtedly referred to the Sunday assembly. But he offered no elaboration or discussion of specific forms, ceremonies or liturgy...

John Calvin [argued]... that ‘worship’ must be what God wants, rather than what people like to offer...

The churches that followed the influence of Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Zwingli and other significant Reformation leaders, continued to meet on Sundays, and they conducted what today are commonly called ‘worship services’, although much simpler and with less rigid structure than before. But it is difficult to find the term ‘worship’ used in reference to those assemblies, or terms like ‘act of worship’ ascribed to any component of the assembly.

Massey quoted Philip Schaff:

Luther held that church festivals, and even the weekly sabbath, were abolished in principle, and observed only on account of the requirements of public worship and the weakness of the laity [I let the objectionable term stand]. The righteous need no laws and ceremonies. To them all time is holy, every day [is] a day of rest, and every day a day of good work.

So, I say again, as Massey rightly argued, though the Reformers made significant changes to medieval ‘worship’, basic Romanist – the peak of Christendom – principles continued to hold sway:

While the liturgy of Reformation churches differed significantly from Catholic tradition, and various new doctrines and theological concepts emerged from the beliefs of the Reformation leaders, there prevailed a conscious need for a ‘worship service’ with the essence of worship to God concentrated in liturgy and ritual. So, most Protestant denominations today are heirs of those resilient concepts of ‘worship’ that the Reformers opposed, but were resuscitated and embraced by the leaders of successive generations.

Let me underline that last. It captures my reason for writing *Public Worship*:

## *The Annotated Extracts*

Most Protestant denominations today are heirs of those resilient concepts of ‘worship’ that the Reformers opposed, but were resuscitated and embraced by the leaders of successive generations.

Bringing it to the present, in a vital passage Massey declared:

It is possible [too weak; it is certain – DG] that Christians at large are drawn to the notion that their liturgy, rites and rituals are the essential mode of worshipping God, and that the preservation of Christianity and the gospel message is dependent upon them [that is, dependent on those rites and customs – touch the institution and all will collapse]... In other words, many church leaders might fear that if worship is defined and promoted as Paul presents it in Romans 12:1, people will stop coming to church and the church will cease to exist. Without the organised church, then, there could be no Christianity.

In other words, getting rid of the man-made institution of Christendom would mean that the entire edifice would collapse. Hence, stick with the man-made institution, and don’t question it.

Massey quoted Lycurgus M.Starkey:

The church is not called to worship God with platitudes, symbolic gestures and patronising promises of devotion. Paul challenges believers to give themselves to God in living service offered constantly in the temples of industry and commerce, in the sanctuaries of daily decision – the home, the school, the gym, the courthouse.<sup>114</sup>

To that negative list I would add words such as mindless, heartless, repetitive singing of hymns (or psalms), the passive soaking up of boring lectures or slabs of doctrine titivated by PowerPoint, basking in a slushy, sentimental psychobabble which preens self-esteem, or the successful completion (ticking the boxes) of a training course in the rudiments of the Christian religion. Whatever this is, it is not worship! It is Christendom in action!

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<sup>114</sup> Lesley F.Massey: ‘Paul and Christian Worship in Light of Romans 12:1’, *Churchman*, Summer 2016, pp105-126.



In his “What on Earth *Is* Christian Worship?”, Digby L. James made the obvious (I hope it is obvious) point that:

...in approaching this subject, Christians should be bound by the teaching of the Scriptures. In seeking to determine what worship is we should not follow the approach of the world, seeking to conduct a survey of opinion and declare what the majority think. Neither should we discover what the major religious leaders teach on the subject. Christians should have an ear that listens to God’s word, and accept what it says.

What a truism! All of us agree with that, don’t we? Of course! But fine words butter no parsnips. What is more, it is not only listening to God’s word and agreeing with it that counts; it is its practice:

Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves... The one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing (Jas. 1:22-25).

The parable of the wise and foolish man (Matt. 7:24-27) does not furnish suitable material only for the Sunday school lesson or ‘children’s talk’ in a ‘worship service’; it’s doctrine – the climax of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, remember – applies to every last believer. Christ allows no debate about it:

Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:46-49).

I think it is a justifiable accommodation of Paul’s words in Romans 2:13 to remind ourselves that it is not the hearers of the word who please God, but the doers of it.

Getting back to the question in hand – worship – as God complained of Judah:

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This people draw near with their mouth and honour me with their lips, while... their fear of me is a commandment taught by men (Isa. 29:13).

And Christ's use of the words cuts deeper still:

This people honours me with their lips, but... in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9).

It is amazing, therefore, to see how often those who would blithely tick the opening extract from James' article to assert that they agree to be bound by Scripture, quickly show that they are really governed by tradition, custom, man-made theology or Confession, or whatever. Moreover, even when they do use Scripture, as I showed in my *Public Worship*, they not infrequently do it governed by *eisegesis*,<sup>115</sup> and with a cavalier disregard of the discontinuity in the covenants.

James offered some examples of the way in which solid evangelicals start on the wrong foot – independent of Scripture:

It is therefore surprising that many people who hold to Scripture as the word of God begin their discussions of the subject of worship by quoting from an English dictionary... Take any articles and books that you have read on the subject recently... Perhaps the most shocking example comes from J.I.Packer. Writing in 1966, he made the case for the *status quo* with regard to the *Book of Common Prayer* as central to the religious life of the Church of England. At the start of the booklet, he sought to give a clear definition of worship: 'The first step towards forming sound ideals [ideas?] of worship is to get clear as to its essential nature. So we start by asking what is worship? The history of the word gives us our answer. The noun "worship" is a contraction of "worth ship" (Anglo-Saxon...). Used as a verb, it means "to ascribe worth", or to acknowledge value. To worship God is to make recognition of his "worth", or "worthy-ness"; to look Godward, and acknowledge in all appropriate ways the value of what you see. The Bible calls this activity "glorifying God": "giving glory to God", and views it as the ultimate end and, from

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<sup>115</sup> Starting with a presupposition, an assumption, reading that into the text, and then reading it out.

## *The Annotated Extracts*

one point of view, the whole duty of man. “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name” (Ps. 29:2; 96:6). “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31)’.

### *Touché!*

James pressed it home by showing how, in their book on worship, Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer actually advised teachers and preachers not to numb their hearers’ or readers’ heads by references to the original biblical words for ‘worship’, but simply rely on English (Anglo-Saxon) words to explain its nature! Of course, while a teacher must not swamp believers who are not proficient in the original languages of Scripture with ostentatious displays of linguistic niceties, the fundamental point has to be rigorously maintained at all times; namely, that Scripture – and nothing else – must be pre-eminent. Alas, let me repeat, Scripture can so easily be replaced by tradition, custom, man-made theology or Confession, or whatever. In this case, it was the English dictionary! Consequently, Allen and Borrer’s book, James observed:

...has been based upon the definition that does not derive from the pages of Scripture, but from the pages of an English... dictionary. Sadly for such a view, the Scriptures were not written in Anglo-Saxon[!] The meanings of Anglo-Saxon words, though interesting, are useless when it comes to understanding the doctrines of the Bible. Since the Scriptures were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and since no translation is perfect, we have constantly to go back to the original languages to discover what the Bible says in detail.

Constantly? Yes, indeed! English usage (as with every other living language – indeed, it is the point about a *living* language) changes over time. The original is granite, fixed.

James, having taken his own medicine – by setting out a thorough examination of the relevant scriptural words – pressed on to the cardinal passage; namely, John 4:23-24. (I allow James’ grammar to stand):

[The Lord Jesus Christ]... says that true worshippers of the Father will worship in spirit and in truth. What he means is that no longer [as in the old covenant] is worship to be outward and

physical. No longer is it to be a physical prostration of the body, but rather a spiritual prostration. This is surely a spiritual prostration or submission of the heart to God. Submission to God is the essence of the faith; a Christian is a person who has surrendered their heart to the Lord Jesus Christ, and live their lives in submission to him. Someone who is a Christian is a worshipper of God, and worships God all of the time, in everything that they do. A Christian therefore worships God when they are brushing their teeth, washing the car, drinking tea or when they are meeting with Christians and singing God's praises. It is the attitude of the heart with which a person lives their life (and which of course will affect the way in which they live their lives) which is important to God.<sup>116</sup>

James continued:

In John 4, Jesus said that worship was not only in spirit (in the heart [by or in the Spirit – DG]) but also in truth. He goes on to expand that by telling the woman that the Jews worshipped what they knew, the reason being that God had revealed himself to the Jews. The Samaritans worshipped what they did not know, because they had not received God's truth [nor his Spirit in regeneration – DG]. Therefore, to truly worship God, to truly submit to him in all things, we need to learn more about him. Reading the Scriptures, being instructed in the faith and meditating on the truth so received, is therefore vital. It is impossible to worship God without knowing something about him. It is therefore wrong to speak about unbelievers worshipping God.

Spot on! 'It is... wrong to speak about unbelievers worshipping God'. But not only for lack of spiritual knowledge. They have to be regenerated! The clear biblical principle that the unregenerate are not able to worship – indeed, to engage in any spiritual activity acceptable to God – if allowed to govern our *ekklēsia* life and evangelism, would, at a stroke, put an end to the endless carnal varnish that is being laid so thickly upon evangelicalism today, the *ekklēsia* in particular, in order to attract pagans into church attendance. 'Public worship' would be no more.

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<sup>116</sup> As I said, I have allowed James' grammar to stand. To change it would have involved some serious recasting of the passage.

James came to ‘implications’:

Because worship is [to be] in spirit, it is not restricted to any particular time or place. Jesus said in John 4: ‘Not on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem’. Worship is therefore not geographically localised; it is in the heart of every believer, wherever they happen to be...<sup>117</sup> We are therefore biblically wrong to speak about ‘places of worship’ or the ‘house of God’ when referring to church buildings, since, as Paul said to the Athenians: ‘God does not dwell in temples made by man’ (Acts 17:24). Rather, a Christian is the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place where God dwells – as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. We no longer have a temple in Jerusalem or anywhere else. God dwells in our hearts by his Spirit. This is where God is worshipped. This is an amazing thing to contemplate – that the Lord Almighty and Most Holy God, the Creator of the universe, should lower himself, not only to save us from our wickedness, but then to come and make our hearts – the hearts of sinners – his home. How glorious! Secondly, we are biblically wrong to speak of any Christian meeting as being a ‘time of worship’. Indeed, it is significant that there is not a single reference to Christians meeting together ‘for worship’ anywhere in the New Testament. So to speak of having a ‘time of worship’ is meaningless. This also rules out the addition of the rôle of ‘worship leader’ to the officers of the church. Should we refer to any Christian meeting as ‘a service’? [No! – DG]. God does not need us, so in what way are we serving him by singing, praying and preaching? Christian meetings are for the benefit of believers not God.

...Many<sup>118</sup> views of Christian worship are in fact a hangover from Roman Catholicism, where doing the right things in the right buildings at the right times [is] what really matter[s]... The Reformers cleared away many of the errors and abuses of Rome, but carried over the basic Roman view of the meaning of worship.<sup>119</sup> This was never subsequently challenged by the [overwhelming majority of] successors of the Reformers down to the present day...<sup>120</sup> It is also true that worship and praise have become confused... To speak of ‘worship songs’ is meaningless.

James moved on to the positive:

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<sup>117</sup> I have omitted James’ ‘I believe that...’.

<sup>118</sup> I have omitted James’ ‘It is my conviction...’.

<sup>119</sup> And not merely ‘worship’. See my *Battle; Pastor; Infant*.

<sup>120</sup> I have omitted James’ ‘I believe that...’.

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The purposes of Christian meetings are apostolic doctrine, fellowship, and breaking of bread and prayer. Our architecture should allow for this [far too weak – DG]... The buildings are not ‘holy’ or the ‘house of God’ or the ‘sanctuary’.

James foresaw a danger looming:

There will be some people reading this who will think that this provides ammunition to those people who say: ‘I can worship God just as well at home as in church’. This statement is quite true, but it is not an excuse for absenting oneself from Christian meetings since their purpose is not the worship of God.

How true! James continued:

If Christian meetings are not for the worship of God, then what are they for? The New Testament gives us a clear pattern, summarised in Acts 2:42... The key elements of a Christian meeting should therefore be instruction in the faith (preaching and teaching), fellowship (mutual encouragement and edification of every member by every member), remembering the Lord’s death in the Lord’s supper, and praying together... [See also]... Ephesians 5:19... The purpose of singing God’s praises is not for God’s benefit, but to express our emotions about what God has done for us and to help us to remember God’s truth. [And to edify one another, of course]...

Christian meetings [are] not to be dull and boring lectures. Rather, preachers and teachers are to present God’s truth in a way that is intelligible to all the hearers, and show some of the applications of it. After the sermon [that is, the preaching/teaching], we shouldn’t discuss the weather or politics or fashions [or sport or recipes, and so on] with other believers, but rather discuss what has been preached and discuss also its practical applications – God is concerned that the truth changes are lives, not that we can pass degrees in theology.

So what format should a Christian meeting take? Is there a regular pattern that must always be followed? The Scriptures don’t give us a set format. We have the principles mentioned above, and God has given us freedom in applying them to our own situations. The only additional principle is that ‘all things should be done decently and in order’ (1 Cor. 14:40). Meetings

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are not to be free-for-alls, but then they need not be rigidly structured.<sup>121</sup>

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Now for a change of gear, but still making the point that worship is not to be thought of as attending ‘a service’, but living for God, day in, day out.

George Herbert:

*King of glory, King of peace,  
I will love Thee;  
And that love may never cease,  
I will move Thee.  
Thou hast granted my request,  
Thou hast heard me;  
Thou didst note my working breast,  
Thou hast spared me.*

*Wherefore with my utmost art  
I will sing Thee,  
And the cream of all my heart  
I will bring Thee.  
Though my sins against me cried,  
Thou didst clear me;  
And alone, when they replied,  
Thou didst hear me.*

*Sev'n whole days, not one in sev'n,  
I will praise Thee;  
In my heart, though not in heav'n,  
I can raise Thee.  
Small it is, in this poor sort  
To enrol Thee:  
E'en eternity's too short  
To extol Thee.*

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<sup>121</sup> Digby L.James: “What on Earth Is Christian Worship?”, *Foundations* issue 43, Autumn 1999 pp1-13.

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Again:

*Teach me, my God and King,  
In all things Thee to see,  
And what I do in anything  
To do it as for Thee.*

*A man that looks on glass,  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heav'n espy.*

*All may of Thee partake:  
Nothing can be so mean,  
Which with this tincture – 'for Thy sake' –  
Will not grow bright and clean.*

*A servant with this clause  
Makes drudgery divine:  
Who sweeps a room as for Thy laws,  
Makes that and th'action fine.*

*This is the famous stone  
That turneth all to gold;<sup>122</sup>  
For that which God doth touch and own  
Cannot for less be told.*

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In his 'Worship and the Christian Priesthood' in *New Testament Church Principles*, Arthur G. Clarke stated:

In no Christian function have fleshly expedients intruded more than in the worship of God.<sup>123</sup> Divine order has been displaced in so-called 'public worship' or 'divine service' by human formularies... [used]... by a mixed company of believers and unbelievers, with the sermon as the central feature. This is not true worship. Outward forms serve only to cover inward failure. Use of means that appeal to the aesthetic sense [or, today,

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<sup>122</sup> The philosopher's stone was a mythical substance that supposedly could turn base metals into gold. It came to mean the elixir of life, a symbol of heavenly bliss.

<sup>123</sup> Oddly, Clarke himself made the very common mistake of beginning with the dictionary meaning of the English word 'worship'!



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shopping or entertainment predilections – DG] of the congregation... all betray a sad, carnal condition.<sup>124</sup>

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In his “‘Worship the Lord Your God’: The Perennial Challenge’ in D.A.Carson (ed.): *Worship: Adoration and Action*, D.A.Carson declared:

Since<sup>125</sup> the heart of sinfulness is self-centredness, the heart of all biblical religion is God-centeredness: in short, it is worship. In our fallen-ness we constrict all [that] there is to our petty horizons. [So that] I [Carson was personifying every man – DG] think of all relationships in terms of their impact on *me*; *my* daydreams circle around *my* own life and circumstances; *my* goals and hopes invariably turn on *my* place in the universe [emphases mine – DG]. Such profound self-centredness may result in [among other things]... religious cant... piety and discipline [which is] full of self-satisfaction and fervour. Still the demon SELF marches on. The sign that self is broken is true worship: God becomes the centre, the focus of delight, the joyfully acknowledged King, the Creator, the Redeemer. In this sense, none but the transformed can truly worship – and they too discover how much more transformation is still needed. Thus all worship becomes an eschatological sign, a marker of what will be in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness, when the children of God have been ‘glorified’ (Rom. 8:30), and God is all in all. In anticipation of that day, and ‘in view of God’s mercy’, we offer our bodies ‘as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God’, for this is our ‘spiritual worship’ (Rom. 12:1). Unfortunately, however, in much of the world the term ‘worship’ has been restricted in a number of ways. This would be of minor importance – after all, words regularly change their meaning with time – were it not for the fact that ‘worship’ has become attached to a fair bit of ecclesiastical practices [that is, Christendom tradition – DG]. [So] when [we say] we want to reform ‘worship’, we really mean [that] we want to reform certain ecclesiastical practice. But if the modern word ‘worship’ is now associated with a lot of ideas with little biblical warrant, then those who wish to reform theology and practice by the Bible

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<sup>124</sup> Arthur G.Clark: ‘Worship and the Christian Priesthood’ in *New Testament Church Principles*, John Ritchie, 1962, pp41-43.

<sup>125</sup> Original ‘if’.

must pause and ask some basic biblical questions before following any of the siren voices that beckon...

The most common tendency restricts ‘worship’ to what happens in a corporate setting when a number of Christians gather together for ‘a service’. The word may then be further restricted to what happens in only *part* of that ‘service’: we have ‘worship’,<sup>126</sup> and then we have the sermon; we assign part of the service to a ‘worship leader’ or a ‘worship team’, and then another part to the ‘preacher’ or ‘pastor’ or ‘minister’. The implications are unambiguous. ‘Worship’ has nothing to do with Christian life all through the week, but only with corporate activity during a designated hour or so. Or worse, it refers to only a part of that designated hour, when we are actively voicing something *corporately* (in songs, prayers, and liturgical responses, corporate Bible reading, and so forth). At this point ‘worship’ is something *we do*, where the *we* ensures its corporate nature, and the *do* ensures corporate *activity*...

Should we not remind ourselves that worship is a *transitive* verb?<sup>127</sup> We do not meet to worship (that is, to experience worship); we aim to worship God. ‘Worship the LORD your God, and serve him only’; there is the heart of the matter. In this area, as in so many others, one must not confuse what is central with [what are] by-products. If you seek peace, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find peace. If you seek joy, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find joy. If you seek holiness, you will not find it; if you seek Christ, you will find holiness. If you seek experiences of worship, you will not find them;<sup>128</sup> if you worship the living God, you will experience something of what is reflected in the Psalms. Worship is a transitive verb, and the most important thing about it is the direct object [of that verb – God, himself; if not God, whom or what? – DG].

Carson raised the discontinuity of the covenants:

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<sup>126</sup> In some cases, there is ‘pre-worship “worship”’.

<sup>127</sup> A transitive verb needs an object. We worship someone or something.

<sup>128</sup> I am not sure what Carson meant here. It is altogether too easy to seek and find religious experience: emotionalism and mass hysteria, for example. Witness the death and funeral of Princess Diana in 1997. Many seek – and find – a ‘worship’ experience that has nothing to do with Scripture.

Recent discussions about worship have tended to be either minimally biblical or primarily pragmatic, or narrowly biblical and without adequate integration with inner-canonical development of major themes. The temple of Solomon had choirs: what does that say to us today? The old covenant specified the nature of the priesthood that could offer sacrifice: how do such specifications fare, or in what ways are they transmuted, under the new covenant? Is it appropriate to think of church buildings as ‘tabernacles’ or ‘temples’? If so, why? If not, why not?

The... fact is that none of these and a host of related questions can be responsibly answered apart from the careful articulation of biblical theology – theology that sorts out how the parts of the Bible hang together. Suddenly the subject of worship becomes complex, the more so because by and large the contemporary church has not disciplined itself to think in biblical-theological terms. When one starts asking questions about, say, the relationship between the covenants, one is immediately embroiled in historic questions about law and grace, circumcision, baptism, sabbath and Lord’s day, and a host of more recent debates that turn, often in unrecognised ways, on the way one reads the Bible as a whole book – in short, biblical theology.<sup>129</sup>

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In his response to Ben Witherington’s review of *Pagan Christianity*, Jon Zens stated:

Your entire review is built on a huge but false assumption that you never support. The assumption is the linchpin for your entire argument. Here is the assumption: *That the Christian meeting in the first century was a gathering for worship; i.e., a ‘worship service’*. This assumption cannot be substantiated anywhere from the New Testament. There is no place in all of Scripture that teaches that Christians are to gather for worship.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> D.A.Carson: “‘Worship the Lord Your God’: The Perennial Challenge’ in D.A.Carson (ed.): *Worship: Adoration and Action*, Baker Book House, 1993 pp13-16, emphasis his (apart from exceptions as noted).

<sup>130</sup> Jon Zens: ‘Appendix 2: Excerpts from Jon Zens’ Response to Dr Ben Witherington’s Review of *Pagan Christianity*’ in *The Pastor Has No*

## *The Annotated Extracts*

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Still somewhat embroiled in Christendom-speak, C.H.Spurgeon, preaching on God's word to Judah in their Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 11:16), declared:

A sanctuary signifies also a place of worship. It is a place where the divine presence is peculiarly manifested – a holy place. It usually means a place where God dwells, a place where God has promised to meet with his people, a place of acceptance where prayers, and praises and offerings come up with acceptance on his altar. Now, notice, God says to his people, when they are far away from the temple and Jerusalem: 'I will be to them as a little sanctuary'. Not: 'I have loved the people, and I will build them a synagogue'; or: 'I will lead others to build for them a meeting-place'; but: 'I myself will be to them as a little sanctuary'.

Spurgeon made the new-covenant application:

The Lord Jesus Christ himself is the true place of worship for saved souls.

And so to the personal application:

'There is no chapel in the place where I live', says one. I am sorry to hear it, but chapels are not absolutely essential to worship, surely. Another cries: 'There is no place of public worship of any sort where the gospel is fully and faithfully preached'. This is a great want, certainly, but still, do not say: 'I am far away from a place of worship'. That is a mistake. No godly man is far away from a holy place. What is a place of worship? I hope that our bed-chambers are constantly places of worship. Place of worship? Why, it is one's garden where he walks and meditates. A place of worship? It is the field, the barn, the street, when one has the heart to pray. God will meet us by a well, a stone, a bush, a brook, a tree. He has [a] great range of trysting-places when men's hearts are right.

*Where'er we seek him he is found,  
And every place is hallowed ground.*

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*Clothes: Moving from Clergy-Centered Church to Christ-Centered Ekklesia*, Ekklesia Press, 2016, p139, emphasis his.

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When a man lives near to God, and abides in him, he should shake off the folly of superstition, and talk no more of holy places. God himself, his own presence makes a place of worship. Do you not catch the fullness of the thought? Yonder is Jacob. He lies down to sleep in a desert place with a stone for his pillow. No bishop had ever been upon the spot to consecrate it, no service had been held in the place by way of dedication, and yet when he awoke in the morning, he said: 'How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven'. God had been to his servant a little sanctuary in that instance, as he has been oftentimes since. Whenever you go to sea, God in your cabin shall be to you a little sanctuary. When you travel by railway, the carriage shall, through the Lord's presence, be a little sanctuary. God's presence, seen in a bit of moss, made in the desert for Mungo Park<sup>131</sup> a little sanctuary. How often have the streets of London been to some of us as the golden pavements of the new Jerusalem, for God has been there! The Lord himself is the temple of saints in heaven, and he is their temple on earth. When God draws near to us, we worship and rejoice. Whenever we are abroad, and cannot come to the visible sanctuary where multitudes worship, let us ask the Lord to be to us as 'a little sanctuary'.<sup>132</sup>

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Kenneth E. Bailey, in his *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 – alas, still using Christendom-speak – nevertheless declared:

[This] offers a further window into early church worship. Everyone participated. There were no spectators. Five types of worship involvement are listed. These include a hymn, teaching, revelation, a language,<sup>133</sup> and interpretation. The first involved singing, the second and third are related to prophecy, and the last two have to do with speaking in languages. Paul affirms that all three have their place in worship. With no history of Christian hymns, it seems they composed their own. With no seminaries to

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<sup>131</sup> Original (typo?) 'Mango Park'. Mungo Park (1771-1806) was a Scottish explorer of West Africa.

<sup>132</sup> C.H. Spurgeon sermon 2001.

<sup>133</sup> Original 'tongue'. The same applies throughout this extract.

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train clergy (other than the apostles and their travelling companions), they relied on prophets and teachers in the congregation. To this was added speaking in languages and the necessary interpreters of languages. People apparently attended worship thinking about what they were going to *contribute*, not what they were going to *receive*.<sup>134</sup>

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In his *All Things New: The Significance of Newness for Biblical Theology*, Carl B.Hoch Jr, arguing from the seminal parable of the wineskins, contrasted the new covenant with the old on the question of worship. He opened with the fundamental reality, as it would have appeared to a discerning observer at the opening of Christ's earthly ministry:

While similarities and continuities may exist between the new and the old, the discontinuities are so radical and explosive that the old will need to be replaced (see Heb. 8:13). The new will both surpass and replace [better, supersede – DG] the old.

Massive consequences ensued – which consequences remain to this day. Hoch noted that:

...it is hard [for us] to appreciate the radical newness of Jesus' teaching.

Why is this? Hoch:

Nearly 2000 years of church history have numbed Christians to the changes that [Jesus] made.

Hoch:

So what were some of these changes?

Hoch listed the temple, animal sacrifices, the priesthood, Jerusalem, the partition between Jew and Gentile, leading to:

...freedom of forms of worship would replace detailed prescriptions of forms. Under the leading of the Spirit, believers

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<sup>134</sup> Kenneth E.Bailey: *Paul Through Mediterranean Eyes: Cultural Studies in 1 Corinthians*, SPCK, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2011, pp405-406, emphasis his.

can gather in Jesus' name and exercise complete spontaneity in worship anywhere in the earth. The gospel required elasticity so that believers would not need certain 'props' before they could worship God... All who believed on Jesus could approach God as long as it was in spirit<sup>135</sup> and truth. The inflexibility of Judaism through its ethnic exclusivity, geographic centrality, and socio-economic provinciality could not be used if the gospel were to expand to the far corners of the earth. People of every nation would now be included among God's people; no-one needed to travel to Jerusalem to approach God... All [would] stand side by side as they 'gathered together' in Jesus' name.

Hoch went on:

All these new 'skins' were necessary if the gospel were to achieve its goals. It was not that Judaism and the Mosaic law were inherently bad; they were simply limited in their potential, and incapable of adjusting to an ever-changing culture, although Pharisaism and post-AD 70 Judaism tried to change by means of reinterpretation of its tenets. Jesus knew the struggle of Pharisaism. He knew that it was futile to patch up the system. He had to change the system entirely since it had failed so miserably in Israel.

Hoch came to the contemporary application:

In the light of the exhilaration brought by such liberating change, it is lamentable that the church has reverted to constructing more and more forms like those that characterised Judaism. Although no church buildings were erected until the second century, the church has become so building-centred that in the minds of many people today the church and the building are synonymous. It is almost impossible to teach that the church is [a] *people*, not a building. Other rigidly fixed forms include [the midweek] prayer meeting, two Sunday services, a strict order of service printed in the bulletin that never changes, the ubiquitous pulpit, the fixed pews, the organ console, and many more items [including, today, video and audio equipment, amplification systems, catering facilities, and the like]. They have become such fixed forms that any suggested change or innovation brings the familiar censure: 'We never did it that way before'. This is even more surprising in

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<sup>135</sup> Original 'Spirit'.

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light of the practice earlier in this country [that is, the USA].<sup>136</sup> According to A.G. Matthews: 'The Puritans set little store by sacred buildings; many of them indeed rejected the idea of such consecration as superstitious'.

Hoch returned to Scripture:

In reality, the radical nature of this newness [of the new covenant] incited the Jews to try to stamp out Christianity because its freedom and flexibility tore at the heart of Judaism. This is why Paul 'breathed threats and slaughterings' against the church (Acts 9:1). Paul recognised (especially because Stephen's speech) [recorded in Acts 7, at which he, as Saul of Tarsus, was present (Acts 7:58; 8:1)] that things were 'going to seed'. When Paul converted to Christianity, he made a complete about-face and recognised the implications of the newness. He learned that pagan Gentiles didn't have to change a thing except their lifestyle of sin. He witnessed the 'explosive' wine of the gospel transform people from darkness into light, and recognised the need to fight to the death [for the preservation of the new covenant] for the Gentiles lest the Judaisers impose the old form of circumcision [and more – DG] on Gentiles...

May the drive to impose on the *ekklēsia* a scheme or pattern of<sup>137</sup> 'the old is good enough' not stymie<sup>138</sup> the advance of the gospel a day longer!<sup>139</sup>

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I am grateful to a Canadian correspondent who sent me his lightly edited extracts from commentaries on Romans 12:1-2, some of which, alas, contain vestiges of Christendom-speak.

Douglas J. Moo:

On Romans 12:1, Paul probably intends... 'body' to refer to the entire person, with special emphasis on that person's interaction

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<sup>136</sup> I guess that Hoch was thinking of the attempts of the Puritan colonists on the eastern seaboard of America during the 17th century and beyond.

<sup>137</sup> Original: 'May the procrustean bed of...'

<sup>138</sup> That is, thwart.

<sup>139</sup> Carl B. Hoch Jr: *All Things New: The Significance of Newness for Biblical Theology*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 1995, pp57-59, emphasis original.



with the world in which we live. Paul is making a special point to emphasise that the sacrifice we are called on to make requires a dedication to the service of God in the harsh and often ambiguous life in this world... Christians are all priests, forming together the temple where God now reveals himself in a special way. But Paul does not merely spiritualise the old-covenant worship; rather he extends the sphere of it into every dimension of life. Thus the Christian is called to a worship that is not confined to one place or one time, but which involves all places and all times: [Quoting] 'Christian worship does not consist of what is practiced at sacred sites, at sacred times, and with sacred acts... It is the offering of bodily existence in the otherwise everyday sphere'... Regular meetings together of Christians for praise and mutual edification are appropriate and, indeed, commanded in Scripture. But such special times of corporate worship are only one aspect of the continual worship that each of us is to offer the Lord in the sacrifice of our bodies day by day.

Thomas R.Schreiner:

The worship described does not relate to public assemblies but to the yielding of one's whole life to God in the concrete reality of everyday existence. Paul's application of the Old Testament is of immense importance here. Activity and language that focused on Judaic ritual in the Old Testament is now extended to embrace every facet of the believer's existence... Old Testament language is spiritualised to include the whole of one's existence... Those who worship God give their entire lives over to him so that he is honoured and praised in everything they do.

John Stott:

What, however, is this living sacrifice, this rational, spiritual worship? It is not to be offered in the temple courts or in the church building, but rather in home life and in the market-place. It is the presentation of our bodies to God.

And on John 4:23, Richard Philips:

A.W.Pink comments: 'Worship is a redeemed heart occupied with God, expressing itself in adoration and thanksgiving'. This principle not only condemns all self-centered worship, but also ennobles everything we do that is truly unto God. It means that the mother who toils in the weary labour of raising children, unnoticed and unlauded by the world, if she does it for Christ,

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with gratitude to God and a desire for his pleasure, has her ministry accepted with God's highest commendation. The same is true for the man who labours in obscurity, treating people with dignity and working above the call of duty simply unto the Lord. Whenever and wherever God can say: 'It was for me', this is the spiritual worship that he seeks.

Finally, my correspondent's attempt to sum up:

To 'worship in spirit and truth' means:

To have my mind rightly informed by the truth about God, who he is and what he has done; and have my attention set to focus upon that truth.

To have my heart rightly inspired by the truth about God, who he is and what he has done.

And have my affections stirred to treasure that truth.

And then to have that attention and those affections come out in my actions which put the worth and glory of God on display in the world – which is done through praise and adoration, gratitude and devotion, service and love.

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When he came to the close of his response to the critics of his book on preaching, David Norrington declared:

I will freely confess that in spite of the overwhelming evidence from both Scripture and church history, it is not easy to convince believers to abandon errant convictions and practices that are so deeply rooted in centuries of church history. The natural tendency is to assume the soundness of one's own presuppositions, and to bristle at the suggestion that they may be in error. Simply going with the flow is much more comfortable and less disconcerting than honestly considering challenges to the system, and diligently searching the Scriptures to see 'whether such things are so'. Thus, for most of today's... church, meaningful contributions to the welfare of the body by other than the elite few remains stifled by non-biblical traditions and hierarchical structures. I can only pray that God himself will

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massively jar his people loose from such a debilitating bondage to the *status quo*.<sup>140</sup>

Norrington was giving voice to his protest against the way the churches overwhelmingly are in the hands of the clergy, however ‘clergy’ is disguised. The same might be said for the protest I tried to make in my *Public Worship: God-Ordained or Man-Invented?*

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I close this work with a very serious challenge from the pen of D.A.Carson. The particular ‘inherited values’ and ‘received culture’ I have in mind, of course, are Christendom’s effect on worship. Carson:

Paul recognised that the gospel itself is non-negotiable. In most societies, relatively few individuals are willing to concede the moral limitations of their inherited values, and learn to interpret [judge or weigh – DG] them by an outside standard [which can only be Scripture – DG], and if necessary curtail or abandon them. We find it easier to interpret the gospel in terms of our received culture than the other way round... There will always be some who are controlled by a ‘Christianised’ version of their own culture: that is, their controlling values spring from the inherited culture, even when such values are deeply pagan and not Christian. Christian language may be there; yet the control lies, not with the gospel, but with the pervasive values of the surrounding society and heritage. At that point Paul is inflexible.<sup>141</sup> As far as Christians are concerned, wherever there is a clash between a cherished inherited culture and the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is the former that must give way and accept modification and transformation. Failure at this point calls in question one’s allegiance to the gospel. Unreserved commitment to the priorities of the inherited culture, with select elements of Christianity being merely tacked on, brings with it Paul’s inevitable conclusion that the Jesus being preached is ‘another Jesus’, the gospel being proclaimed is a ‘different gospel’, and those who proclaim such an evangel are ‘deceitful workmen masquerading as apostles of Christ’ (2 Cor. 11:4,13). Moreover,

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<sup>140</sup> David C.Norrington: *To Preach or not to Preach?: The Church’s Urgent Question*, Ekklesia Press, Omaha, 2013?, p207.

<sup>141</sup> See 1 Cor. 1:18 – 4:5, for instance. See my *To Confront*.

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those professing Christians who, like the Corinthians, show themselves to be profoundly sympathetic to this non-Christian orientation of values must at the very least examine themselves again to see if they really are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5).<sup>142</sup>

He who has ears...

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<sup>142</sup> D.A.Carson: *A Model of Christian Maturity: An Exposition of 2 Corinthians 10:13*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, 2007, pp57-58. There is more to be said about 2 Cor. 13:5 – see my *Assurance*.