
What on Earth is Christian Worship?

by Digby L. James

Introduction

There is often confusion over the use of the word *church*. Christians regularly use it to refer to the building in which they meet. This is justifiable on the basis that the English word *church* comes from the Greek work *kuriakon*, meaning “belonging to the Lord”.¹ But the word is also used as a translation of the New Testament Greek word *ekklesia* which literally means “assembly”. The Christian Brethren are justified in referring to their churches as assemblies because of this. In the New Testament the word *ekklesia* is used for the local church and the universal church. It should be in these latter two senses that we use the word, but in practice we don’t.

What does this have to do with the subject of worship? A great deal. We suffer exactly the same problem with this word and its meaning. The subject of worship is one which has been a matter of debate among professing Christians for most of the history of the church. One of the major debates during the Reformation and Puritan periods was what was and what was not permitted in the public worship of God. Things have not changed much since then and professing Christians today are still arguing about what is and what is not allowed in worship. Some say that we should stick to a traditional hymn sandwich, others that we should raise our hands and sing choruses, others believe that we should have greater ceremonial.

The issue of worship appears to be the apparent cause of numerous defections from evangelicalism to Eastern or Greek Orthodoxy. The 18 May 1992 issue of *Christianity Today* reported:

It has been five years since a group of 2,000 evangelical Protestants in 17 congregations, headed by former Campus Crusade for Christ staff member Peter Gillquist, entered the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America. Since then, 15 more congregations have been added. And the new Orthodox are now proselytizing their evangelical friends, with notable success. “There are so many enquiries, I don’t have time to scratch up new contacts,” said Gillquist, now chairman of the archdiocese’s Department of Missions and Evangelism. “Evangelicals have a growing awareness of reductionism – what’s been left out – and a true hunger for worship. They need something more.” That “something more” is tradition which the Orthodox claim they have handed down in pure form from the early church.²

A thirst for a “deeper worship” or “something more” is the attraction of a number of the older denominations. I know an Anglican vicar who says that the Anglican contribution to the modern church is their knowledge and experience of “worship” (by which he means liturgy). Many non-conformists are moving over to Anglicanism because they believe it offers better “worship”. An example is Robert E Webber. The son of a Baptist minister, he graduated from Bob Jones University, became a Presbyterian minister and professor in theology at an evangelical college. He then moved to American episcopalianism. The prime reason for this shift was his sense of a lack of Christ-centred “worship” in non-episcopal churches. In his dissatisfaction with the “worship” of his

church, he describes how he discussed the issue with some friends. They dismissed evangelistic, educational and social reasons for church attendance. The only reason they had was obedience to Hebrews 10:25.³ He then experienced an Easter time service in a Roman Catholic church. This led him to establish a house church seeking to follow the early church's practice of "worship" that he had been studying, and then into an episcopal church. His new experience of "worship" in episcopalianism has now satisfied his heartfelt longings for "deeper worship". He says at the end of the chapter on worship,

I have discovered that a major reason why people are leaving evangelical churches for Episcopal churches is their longing for a more satisfying experience of worship. Maybe the key to satisfaction within the Evangelical tradition can be found by restoring a worship in which Christ is front center not only in our weekly worship, but in our pattern of yearly personal and corporate worship as well.⁴

He then further supports his case by giving the testimonies of several others who have made the same journey to episcopalianism that he has. The sad thing is that his whole quest has not been based upon Scripture, but upon an existential feeling that there should be something more. This illustrates that to a large degree the word "worship" has become a connotation word which has no defined meaning, but which each person who hears or uses it "feels" that he knows what it means.

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 accepts what it says.

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. There we find that the word worship is derived from the Old English word *weorthscipe* which means to ascribe worth to God.⁵ Therefore, it is said, this is what worship is, and this definition is then read into all the passages of Scripture where the word occurs. Check any articles and books that you have read on the subject recently. All of the books and articles on the subject that I have consulted are guilty of this.

Perhaps the most shocking example comes from JI 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 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 "worthship" (Anglo-Saxon, "weorthscipe"). Used as a verb, it means "to ascribe worth", or to acknowledge value. To worship God is to make recognition of his "worth", or "worthiness"; to look God-ward, 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 one point of view, the whole duty of man. "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name" (Psalms 29:2; 96:6). "Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).⁶

Another example of this is Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer in their book, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*. In their preface to the book they state that they have

taken their lead (and the title) from AW Tozer's book *Worship: The Missing Jewel of the Evangelical Church*. They imply that worship is an activity of praise and adoration of God that is done corporately. They then seek in chapter 1 to define worship.

What then is worship? Worship is an active response to God whereby we declare his worth ... Sometimes seminary-trained preachers bedazzle and benumb a congregation with repeated emphasis on the meaning of Hebrew and Greek words "in the original text," acting as evangelical priests with new substitutes for Latin barriers which only they may breach. But on occasion the English words we use are of surpassing worth and it is they that should be explained. So it is with the term worship.

The English word worship is wonderfully expressive of the act that it describes. This term comes from the Anglo-Saxon *weorthscipe*, which was then modified to *worthship*, and finally to *worship*. *Worship* means "to attribute worth" to something or someone.⁷

This is then followed by a supporting quote from RP Martin⁸ and three Scriptures speaking of praising God. Thus, the rest of the book has been based upon a definition that does not derive from the pages of Scripture, but from the pages of an English etymological 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. Thank God for translators, but they are not always accurate and right when translating, because of their own backgrounds and prejudices (this can be seen, for example, in the differences between the AV and the NIV. The latter has more occurrences of the English word "worship" because its translators chose to translate the Hebrew word *ABAD* as "worship" which the AV translators translated as "service" or "work". *ABAD* often occurs with *SHACHAH* as in Exodus 20:5, "You shall not bow down to them (*SHACHAH*) or serve them (*ABAD*)."). It is our responsibility, with the aid of the vast wealth of dictionaries, lexicons, etc. that God has provided us with, to check our translations of the Bible. Allen and Borrer's book is made all the more sad because later on in the book they refer to the Hebrew word used and are quite correct in their understanding of what it means. Unfortunately, they discuss it in the context of whether or not believers should kneel to pray in "worship".⁹

It is necessary, therefore, to determine what words the Scriptures use and the way in which the Scriptures use them. The easiest way to do this is to use a concordance, such as Young's or Strong's or one of the many computer Bibles, to find and then examine all of the references. All Christians should have such tools on their shelves. Though more expensive than most books they will be of use throughout life. How many cheap paperbacks are left on Christians' shelves having been read only once? *The On-Line Bible* is available for both Macintosh and PC and is available free from the Internet¹⁰ or cheaply on CD-ROM. These will show every occurrence of the English word *worship* and of the underlying Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek words where they are translated by different English words.

The primary Hebrew word translated into English as *worship* is *SHACHAH*. According to the *On-Line Bible* it occurs 172 times in the Old Testament of the KJV, although not always translated *worship*. Its literal meaning is to depress, bow down or

prostrate oneself. According to Brown, Driver and Briggs, the word is a verb which means to bow down. They quote Winckler who says that it is related to the word *SAHAHU* from Tel-el-Amarna, which means to prostrate oneself, and is probably a Canaanism deriving from the Assyrian *SAHAHU* meaning to oppress or torment.¹¹

Harris, Archer and Waltke consider *SHACHAH* under the *hithpael*, *HISHTAHAWA*. It is a cognate of the Ugaritic *HWY* which means “to bow down” and is used in parallel with *KBD* “to honour”. They give examples of this usage in the Old Testament. They say that prostration was a common act of submission before a superior.

Vassals in the Amarna letters write, “At the feet of the king ... seven times, seven times I fall, forwards and backwards.” Jehu or his servant bows down on his knees with his forehead touching the ground before Shalmaneser III on the Black Obelisk.¹²

They go on to compare such action with the *salah* or prayer by an elaborately prescribed *sugud* in which the forehead must touch the ground. This is much the same as the practice of Muslims at prayer which can still be observed today.

The meaning of the words thus carry with them the following senses. Firstly, a physical act of prostration for whatever reason. It is then applied specifically to a physical prostration as an act of homage and then, by extension, to the attitude of heart that such homage is supposed to represent, whether humility or depression.

In the Latin Vulgate, translated in the fourth century by Jerome, *SHACHAH* is translated as the Latin word *adoro*, which means to entreat, worship or revere. This is where the English word *adore* comes from, meaning to worship or love intently. It does not quite connote the same as *SHACHAH* (certainly not to the modern mind) and may be, in part, the origin of the Roman Catholic view of worship.

The Aramaic word *SEGAD*, only occurs in the Aramaic portions of the book of Daniel. It also literally means to bow down or prostrate oneself and is equivalent to *SHACHAH*.

While the etymology of words can be helpful in understanding their meaning, it can only be illustrative. For example, the Greek word for paradise originally meant a Persian hunting ground. The actual meaning of a word is not determined by its etymology, but by the way it is used. Most particularly, with regard to the things of God, it is determined by its usage in the Scriptures. Hence, books like Thomas Conant’s *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*,¹³ while interesting in discovering the uses of the word in classical Greek literature, are not relevant in determining its usage in the Scriptures. Some words are technical words which the Biblical writers pick up and give a different meaning.

The first occurrence of *SHACHAH* in the Old Testament is in Genesis 18:2 where it is used to describe the greeting given by Abraham to the three angels who visited him. Here Abraham prostrates himself as an expression of humility in receiving guests. This was the normal method of respectful salutation in eastern countries, as is acknowledged by commentators such as Calvin,¹⁴ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown,¹⁵ Leupold¹⁶ and Aalders.¹⁷ Calvin comments that some commentators had seen a recognition by Abraham that one of these three was God, or that God existed in three persons, but rejects it as frivolous. This is a view consistent with Genesis 19:1 (see below). In this context, *SHACHAH* is used to signify an attitude of reverence to his visitors. This is not dissimilar to the modern practice of Orientals, particularly the Japanese, to bow to one another in greeting. The degree of bowing is an indication of the relative social or

business positions of the people concerned. Thus, an exalted person would bow a little, but a servant would bow profusely. Abraham appears to be expressing something of this in greeting these strangers. It is thus not a recognition that one of them was God, but the common greeting of the people of that age.

In Genesis 19:1 Lot bowed down to the ground in greeting the two angels when they arrived at the gate of Sodom. As with Abraham, above, this appears to be no more than the common form of greeting. There is no indication at this stage that Lot recognised them as angels, that he viewed them as God, or that he was rebuked for so doing, as the Apostle John was later to be (Revelation 22:8,9). Once again, *SHACHAH* is used in the sense of a reverential greeting to honoured guests.

It is not until Genesis 22:5 that *SHACHAH* is used in direct relation to God. Abraham is on his way to offer his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice at God's command. When they approached the designated place, Abraham told his servants to stay there with the animals while he and Isaac went on to worship (*SHACHAH*). There is no description in the passage of what worship involved, although there is a suggestion that this involved the building of the altar and the offering of Isaac. Few commentators make anything of this beyond importing a modern view of worship into the text. Morris, however, gives a much fuller consideration of this, which is worthy of quotation.

But what about Abraham's statement that he and Isaac were going to worship? Could such an act as killing his own son be considered worshiping? Yes, this was a supreme act of worship. The word "worship", as we have noted earlier, means simply "bow down," and is often so translated. Singing hymns and giving testimonies, hearing a preacher and enjoying Christian fellowship is not worshiping, although we speak of such activities as a "worship service." To worship God is simply to bow down to His will, recognising and acknowledging that His will is best. What He does is right, by definition, whether we understand it now or not. His will may involve waiting and suffering, even dying; but if it is His will, then we must bow down to it and accept it with thanksgiving. It is then, and only then, that we worship God. Abraham and Isaac indeed were going to worship God. Not understanding, but believing, they were willing to do His will. Somehow they knew that even such a command as this, in the eternal counsels of God, was for their good.¹⁸

In this context, then, *SHACHAH* is used for the act of physical prostration before God as a sign of submission to his will.

The response of the people at the dedication of the Temple is described in 2 Chronicles 7:3, when fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifices, and the glory of God filled the Temple, so that no one could enter. The people bowed down to the ground and worshipped and praised the Lord. This is a significant verse, because here there is a description of worship and, in addition, the people praised God, indicating that worship is a distinct activity from praise. Keil and Delitzsch say that the assembled congregation bowed themselves with their faces to the ground upon the pavement and worshipped God to praise.¹⁹ Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's comment is worth quoting in full:

This form of prostration (that of lying on one's knees with the forehead touching the earth), is the manner in which the Hebrews, and Orientals in general, express the most profound sentiments of reverence and humility. The courts of the temple were densely crowded on the occasion, and the immense multitude threw themselves on the ground. What led the Israelites suddenly to assume that prostrate attitude on the occasion referred

to, was the spectacle of the symbolical cloud slowly and majestically descending upon the temple, and then entering it.²⁰

Jeremiah 7:2 is the start of a message from God to all those who entered the Temple to worship the Lord. Thompson's comment here is worthy of quoting in full:

The Hebrew verb worship (*HISTAHAWÁ*) brings to mind a significant picture. The verb arises from a metaphor, namely, that of bowing down or prostrating oneself before someone whose high state is thereby acknowledged and to whom allegiance should be offered. When the Hebrew text was rendered into Greek, an equally expressive word was used to translate it, *proskuneo*, which likewise denotes the physical act of bowing down. A term that was used in the secular context of a vassal bowing down before his suzerain is thus pressed into a cultic and religious use. The great majority of the occurrences of the term in the OT refer to the veneration and worship of Yahweh or to that of false gods. This powerful figure is a particularly apt one to describe the proper attitude of the man of Israel to Yahweh. When the man of Israel came to worship Yahweh, he acknowledged on the one hand Yahweh's high status and his complete and sole sovereignty over the worshipper's life, and at the same time he recognised his own dependent status and the need for personal submission to his sovereign Lord, Yahweh. Worship thus involved him in the willing acknowledgement of Yahweh's Lordship and the glad acceptance of his covenant demands. He was therefore obligated to obedience to the commandments, the laws, and the statutes in which the covenant demands came to expression. There were thus powerful ethical demands laid upon every worshipper who came to the temple.²¹

He adds, in a footnote, that of 171 instances of *SHACHAH* in the Old Testament Masoretic text, 164 are rendered by *proskuneo* in the Septuagint translation.

In the New Testament there is an almost exact parallel to the words used in the Old Testament. *Proskuneo* is the equivalent of *SHACHAH* and *latría* is the equivalent of *ABAD*. *Latría*, which means to be a servant, or to serve, occurs in references such as Romans 12:1 and describes the kind of service that Christians should give to God. There are other Greek words translated into English as worship, but they occur infrequently in the New Testament. *Proskuneo* is the Greek word which is most often translated by the English word worship. Etymologically, it means to do reverence by kissing the hand. This is the action performed by people approaching Karol Wojtyła (the Pope). They bow down, usually on their knees, and kiss his hand. Thus, *proskuneo* is seen to be an almost exact translation of *SHACHAH*.

Schönweiss and Brown considered the word under prayer. In classical Greek,

The basic meaning of *proskuneo*, in the opinion of most scholars, is to kiss. The prefix indicates a connection with cultic practises going back beyond Gk. history. On Egyptian reliefs worshippers are represented with outstretched hand throwing a kiss to (pros-) the deity. Among the Greeks the vb. is a technical term for the adoration of the gods, meaning to fall down, prostrate oneself, adore on one's knees. Probably it came to have this meaning because in order to kiss the earth (ie the earth deity) or the image of a god, one had to cast oneself on the ground. Later *proskuneo* was also used in connection with the deification of rulers and the Roman emperor cult. In addition to the external act of prostrating oneself in worship, *proskuneo* can denote the corresponding inward attitude of reverence and humility.²²

Two examples of its use in the New Testament are Matthew 4:9 and Acts 10:25.

And [the devil] said to [Jesus], “All these things I will give you if you will fall down and worship me.”

As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshipped him.

Lenski says that *proskuneo* in Matthew 4:9 is an aorist subjunctive and signifies a single act. The word is used for the prostration of Orientals before great human lords, but especially for prostration before God in the deepest religious reverence and adoration, and this latter is what the devil was asking Jesus to do to him.

Among the many other references, Matthew 28:9; Mark 15:19; Revelation 5:14; 22:8 make clear the physical action involved. So it can be seen that in the New Testament, the word is used to mean physical prostration in the presence of a superior being as an act of reverential submission. The word therefore is identical to the meaning of the Old Testament word, *SHACHAH*.

There is one exception to this general rule of the meaning of the word *proskuneo*, and that is the use of the term by the Lord Jesus Christ in speaking to the woman at the well in John 4:23,24 where he says that true worshippers of the Father will worship in spirit and in truth. What he means is that no longer 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. There are, of course, degrees to which a person lives in submission to Christ. The degree of submission may be increased as a result of a Christian meeting, or reading the Scriptures or reading a good Christian biography, or meditating on how good God has been to our souls.

In John 4 Jesus said that worship was not only in spirit (in the heart) 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. 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 of God 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. Muslims may worship (in that they prostrate themselves), but it not according to truth as they reject basic truths that God has revealed.

Implications

If this is the teaching of the Scriptures (and I would urge all readers to check the Scriptures for themselves) then it has a number of implications. Because worship is 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. I believe that 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 almighty and most holy God, the creator of the universe, should lower himself to not only 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”? 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.

It is my conviction that many 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 are what really matter. At the time of the Reformation the Reformers cleared away many of the errors and abuses of Rome, but carried over the basic Roman view of the meaning of worship. This was never subsequently challenged by the successors of the Reformers down to the present day. I believe that it is also true that worship and praise have become confused. Praise is an activity that Christians should partake in, a reminder to them of what God has done, and should be a humbling activity.

The architecture of church buildings (not churches!) should be of a simple practical design for Christian meetings. The building should not be designed around the communion table, the pulpit or the baptistry. The purposes of Christian meetings are apostolic doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. Our architecture should allow for this. Since the buildings are not “holy” or “the house of God” or “the sanctuary” there should be nothing wrong with them being multipurpose buildings. This view undermines all thoughts that God’s blessing is dependent upon us having beautiful and well-maintained buildings. It also undermines the view that Christian meetings are an “appointment with God” and that we should wear our best clothes “just as we would if we visited the Queen”. God is concerned with our hearts not our architecture or wardrobe.

What about what we sing? There are continuing debates concerning exclusive psalmody. Those in favour insist we should only sing inspired words “in the worship of God”. If the view of worship presented here is correct this becomes a non-issue – unless it is insisted that Christians should only *ever* sing psalms under *any* circumstances. To speak of “worship songs” is meaningless.

So where is the “regulative principle” in all this? It has disappeared along with the wrong view of worship it derived from. It brings the discussion back to Scripture and its actual meaning, rather than, as often happens, using Scripture to support personal preferences in formats of meetings. The view presented here will be a more powerful defence against the oft repeated phrase “we need more lively worship” (whatever that means) than that often put forward. It also undermines the cause of drift towards greater stress on ceremonial noted earlier.

What is the Purpose of Christian Meetings?

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.

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. Following Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost many were converted, “and they devoted themselves to the Apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer”. 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. Other references (such as Ephesians 5:19) speak about singing God’s praises. 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. How many can remember silly songs that we learned in our early years? Singing God’s truth to music is a powerful way of helping us remember it. An examination of the history of various denominations will show that those which had a strong tradition of singing sound hymns and psalms resisted the longest the ravages of liberalism. It is therefore vital that we consider carefully what we sing. How much false doctrine are we innocently singing because “we like the tune”?

An example of a New Testament Christian meeting is found in Acts 20:7-11 where Paul met with the Christians at Troas for the purpose of breaking bread. So concerned was he about instructing them in the faith that his message went on late into the night (don’t complain too much when the minister preaches for an hour! You can take comfort, too, in the fact that even then people fell asleep during sermons – but be warned by what happened to Eutychus!). Having finished his message he then broke bread with them (the Lord’s Supper) and spoke to them (fellowshipped) until dawn (!) and then went on his way. Other examples can be found in Ephesians 4:12-16 (the purpose of Christ giving the gifted men in verse 11); 5:18-20 (singing to one another); Hebrews 3:12,13; 10:19-25 (encouraging one another); 1 Corinthians 14:26 (all must be done in meetings for edification).

Throughout the New Testament, the great emphasis is upon Christians receiving right teaching (eg Romans 16:17; 1 Timothy 4:6,11; 2 Timothy 2:2; 4:1-5; Titus 1:11) since wrong teaching or a lack of teaching leads to wrong living. This does not mean that Christian meetings are to be dull 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, we shouldn’t discuss the weather or politics or fashions with other believers, but rather discuss what has been preached and discuss also its practical applications – God is concerned that the truth changes our 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 Corinthians 14:40). Meetings are not to be free for all, but then they need not be rigidly structured. Thus, the traditional “hymn sandwich”, so belittled today, is probably closer to apostolic practice than many “knees-ups”, except that there needs to be more emphasis on fellowship.

For further reading I would suggest I Howard Marshall’s article, “To What Extent Did the Early Christians Worship God?” in *The Churchman*, 1985 where he discusses the subject in the context of liturgy.

References

- ¹ *Chambers Etymological Dictionary*, p. 105.
- ² *Christianity Today*, 18 May 1992, p. 50.
- ³ Robert E. Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* (Waco, Texas, Jarrell Books, 1985), p. 36.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press), pp. 319-322
- ⁶ JI Packer, *Tomorrow’s Worship*, Church Book Room Press, London, 1966, p. 5.
- ⁷ Ronald Allen and Gordon Borrer, *Worship: Rediscovering the Missing Jewel*, (Portland, Oregon, Multnomah Press, 1982), p. 16.
- ⁸ Ralph P Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1974), p. 10.
- ⁹ Allen and Borrer, p. 127.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.onlinebible.net/>
- ¹¹ William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Francis Brown, SR Driver and Charles Briggs, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 1005.
- ¹² R Laird Harris, Gleason L Archer, Jr, Bruce K Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., (Chicago, Moody Press, 1980), 1:268.
- ¹³ Thomas Conant, *The Meaning and Use of Baptizein*, (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 1977 reprint of 1864 edition).
- ¹⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols., (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1979 reprint), 1:470.
- ¹⁵ Robert Jamieson, AR Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, (London, Oliphants Ltd, 1961), p. 28.
- ¹⁶ HC Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 2 vols, (Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1979), 1:536
- ¹⁷ GCh Aalders, *Genesis*, 2 vols, The Bible Student’s Commentary, Translated by William Heynen, Regency Reference Library, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, Michigan, 1981), 2:3.
- ¹⁸ Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record*, (San Diego, Creation-Life Publishers, 1976), p. 338.
- ¹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 7, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1976), p. 328.
- ²⁰ Jamieson, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 315.
- ²¹ JA Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1980), p. 275.
- ²² H Schönweiss and C Brown in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Volume 2, ed. Colin Brown, Regency Reference Library, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1976, 1986), pp. 875-879.

Dr Digby L James is minister of the Quinta Independent Evangelical Church, Weston Rhyn, and reprints old theological works through Quinta Press
