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Worship of Christ and the Biblical Covenant

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Some things are so obvious we tend to overlook them. Suppose I ask you, "What is the first thing you need to do in order to stay alive?" You might give several different answers, but there is only about a 50 percent chance you would give the obvious answer: "Keep breathing." The act of breathing is so automatic, and the air so invisible, that we forget about them until some respiratory crisis brings them to our attention.

It can be the same with our understanding of biblical teaching. Especially with evangelical Christians, whose high view of biblical authority can lead to prooftexting, it is easy to get caught up in the details and lose sight of the larger picture—what John Wesley called "the whole scope and tenor of Scripture." Thus Christians often focus on specific issues in a way which fails to integrate these issues into the central theme of Scripture. This loss of perspective can result in serious distortion of biblical doctrine, and in the failure to understand what the scriptural authorities are really driving at.

What, then, is this "central theme" of the Bible? The answer lies in asking why the Bible was given in the first place. When you stop to think about it, Scripture came into being as *the expression of the relationship between God and His people*. To use the formula that occurs repeatedly in Scripture, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Lev. 26:12; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 37:27, etc.). The Bible typically portrays this relationship in terms of the *covenant* or its theological equivalents: the kingdom of God, the family of God, new life through union with the Son of God. All issues and concerns raised in Scripture have their place within the ebb and flow of the covenant relationship between the Lord and those who have pledged their loyalty to Him in worship and obedience. In this sense, *covenant is the air we breathe in Scripture*. Even where the concept of the covenant recedes into the background, it still supplies the framework

and the thematic material for understanding all parts of the Old and New Testaments. In particular, it has profound implications for our worship of Christ as Lord and King.

Worship As Covenant

Worship has been defined in many ways, but at heart it is the expression of our relationship with the Lord. Whatever happens in genuine worship (and much passes for worship which is not really worship), some statement is being made about the fact that the Lord is our God and we are His people. Worship, therefore, has an integral connection with covenant: it expresses the covenant, it interprets the covenant, it maintains the covenant, it extends the covenant. To make covenant is to worship, and to worship is to make covenant.

But worship, in the Bible, has more than a theological or motivational connection with the covenant. It has a structural connection as well. That is, more is involved in making a covenant than the simple desire to express our relationship to God. There is also a definite structure or form to the biblical covenant between the Lord and His people, along with a recognizable terminology. When we encounter this structure and terminology, we know we are in the presence of covenant-making, covenant renewal, or covenant interpretation. And, since worship and covenant go hand in hand, we also know we are dealing in some way with an order of worship.

Although the concept of the covenant in general has continuously informed Christian theology, especially in the Reformed tradition, the distinctive structure and terminology of the biblical covenant were recovered only in this century through archaeological discoveries. Several publications brought to light the features of ancient Near Eastern treaties; these were followed by studies demonstrating that the major biblical covenants share many of the same features.[1] The ancient treaties were pacts granted by an imperial ruler, or "great king," to his vassals or client-kings. The great king or "lord" promises protection in return for the total allegiance of the vassal or "servant." The servant must treat as brothers all other client kings who are in covenant with his lord, and is not to harm them or invade their territories. In addition, he is required to appear before the great king at specified times to bring tribute.

Israel's worship of Yahweh was based on this concept. Although Israel's pagan neighbors were familiar with such treaties as part of the general cultural background of the ancient Near East, they did not enter into covenant with their gods, who were regarded as unpredictable and could not be held to any sort of agreement. Yahweh, on the other hand, had revealed Himself as the One who had called the patriarchs and promised them a heritage, and had kept this promise in the deliverance of Israel from bondage.

Appearing in awesome majesty on Sinai, the Lord proclaims a treaty with His servants, reminding them of His faithfulness and asking of them a corresponding pledge of loyalty. Thus Yahweh stands in the position of the great King, with Israel collectively as His servant. Worship at Sinai takes the form of the enactment of the covenant; the covenant in turn provides regulations and a structure for worship. The history of Israelite worship is the story of the maintenance of the covenant, and its periodic renewal after periods of apostasy. The Christian church, which inherits the promises to Israel, takes up the same theme especially in its basic act of worship, the Lord's Supper. Through the framework of the covenant, God's people pledge their allegiance to Him, offer their tribute of praise to Christ the King of kings, and learn His ways.

Covenant Structure in Israelite Worship

Political covenants, or treaties, were drawn up according

to a specific pattern. They began with a historical prologue, in which the great king identified himself and often narrated the history of his relationship with the client king. This was followed by a statement of stipulations, the obligations required of his treaty partner. In the Bible, we see this pattern in the Decalogue, or "ten words," which opens the Sinai covenant. Identifying Himself and rehearsing His acts in behalf of His servants, the great King declares, "I am Yahweh your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt." The Lord continues by laying down the fundamental treaty obligation of His partners: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Ex. 20:2-3). Other stipulations follow.

Typically, ancient treaties included sanctions, or the consequences, to follow if the servant either keeps the agreement or fails to live up to its stipulations. Obedience to the commandments brings blessing and great benefit from the hand of the great king, while violation of the stipulations results in the enactment of curses upon the unfaithful partner. In the Sinai covenant, blessings and curses are found in Leviticus 26. Treaties involved the taking of an *oath* to keep the terms of the agreement (cf. Ex. 24:7), usually swearing with the uplifted hand. The grantor of the treaty invokes *witnesses*, whose role is to listen to the terms of the treaty and carry out its sanctions. In pagan cultures, the gods of the great king and the client king are called as witnesses; in the biblical covenant, the witnesses are usually heaven and earth (e.g., Deut. 30:19).

The making of a covenant is usually accompanied by a *ceremony of ratification.* This ceremony was often a blood sacrifice. The partners walked between the cut pieces of the animal (the Hebrew expression for "make a covenant," *karat berit*, means literally "cut a covenant"); a biblical example is the covenant God made with Abram (Gen. 15:1-21). Or the partners were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice (Ex. 24:8). In these ways they identified with the slain animal;

implied in this action was the thought, "God do so to me, and more also, if I violate the terms of this treaty." Ratification might also involve a meal shared by the covenant partners; in the Sinai ceremony, the elders of Israel "beheld God, and they ate and drank" (Ex. 24:11).

Biblical history records several subsequent acts of covenant renewal. The entire book of Deuteronomy, though cast as a sermon by Moses, is actually the narrative of a ceremony of renewal of the covenant; it is complete with the historical prologue (chapters 1-9, including the narrative of the Sinai Decalogue), the laws or stipulations (chapters 12-27), the pronouncement of sanctions in blessing and curse (chapters 28-29), the invocation of witnesses and the appeal to take the oath of covenant loyalty, or "choose life" (Deut. 30:19). Covenant ceremonies are found in the book of Joshua also. The liturgy recorded in Joshua 8:30-35 involves the reading of the laws and the recitation of blessing and curse. The narrative of the assembly at Shechem (Josh. 24) records the historical preamble rehearsing what the great King has done for His servants (vv. 2-13), the people's oath of loyalty (vv. 14-21), the enactment of covenant statutes (v. 25), and the invocation of witnesses (the people themselves, v. 22, and a memorial stone pillar, vv. 26-27). David appointed musicians to worship in Zion before the ark of the covenant in rotating shifts, to renew and maintain the covenant in the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving; many of the Psalms seem to have originated in this setting. Solomon led the community in a festival of covenant renewal at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:1-9:9). Kings Josiah (2 Chron. 34:15-35:19) and Hezekiah (2 Chron. 29:1-31:21) also attempted to restore the covenant by reading its stipulations to the people and commanding that it be celebrated with a ceremonial meal. Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor renewed the covenant with the remnant of Israel who returned to the land from their

Babylonian captivity (Ezra 9:1-10:19; Neh. 12:26-13:31).

All the elements of covenant structure are material for acts of worship in the biblical tradition. The laws of the Pentateuch, for example, are often arranged in metrical groups, usually of ten or twelve statements (in addition to the Decalogue, examples are Ex. 21:12, 15-17; 23:1-19; 34:7-26; Lev. 18:7-17; Deut. 27:15-26). Such grouping of laws renders them suitable for memorization and recitation, and reveals their real purpose: the covenant commandments were primarily *acts of worship*. They had a liturgical rather than judicial function, and were to be recited as acts of covenant renewal in the ongoing worship of Israel. [2]

The Psalms give evidence that the Decalogue was used in this way. Psalm 50 celebrates the Lord's "shining forth" out of Zion, summoning the covenant witnesses (heaven and earth, v. 4) to judge His people. This is obviously a covenant ceremony: "Gather My faithful ones [*hasidim*, those loyal to the covenant] to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice" (v. 5). Through a prophetic spokesman, God then addresses the assembly: "O Israel, I will testify against you; I am God, your God" (v.7), language reminiscent of the opening of the Decalogue ("I am the Lord your God . . ."). Beginning with verse 16, the Lord pronounces an indictment against the unfaithful, in terms that reflect several of the clauses of the Sinai Decalogue. This indictment opens with the question, "What right have you to tell of My statutes, and to take My covenant in your mouth?" This clearly refers to the ceremonial recitation of the covenant stipulations as a recurring act of worship in the gathered assembly. Psalm 81 has in mind a similar liturgy. The Lord speaks to the assembly, gathered on a festal occasion (cf. v. 3):

> Hear, O My people, and I will warn you . . .
> You shall have no foreign god among you . . .
> I am the Lord your God,

> Who brought you up out of Egypt.
> Open wide your mouth and I will fill it (vv. 8-10).

Here we have the historical prologue which introduces the Sinai Decalogue, together with the first commandment which enjoins loyalty to Yahweh alone; the concluding phrase suggests that the worshipers' mouths were to be filled with the recitation of the covenant commandments.

Covenant in the Psalms

The Book of Psalms, the major deposit of ancient Israel's worship of the Lord, reveals throughout the intimate connection between worship and covenant. Essentially there are two types of Psalms: *Psalms of celebration* and *Psalms of petition*. In the Psalms of celebration, the worshiper, or the congregation, exalts the Lord as the great King and declares His faithfulness, or develops some aspect of the covenant ceremony. Psalms proclaiming the enthronement of the Lord (47, 93, 95-99) portray Him as the great King. Psalms which rehearse redemptive history (78, 105-106, 135-136) reflect the historical prologue of the treaty- covenant, and are recited as acts of covenant reaffirmation. Psalms in praise of the law of the Lord (19, 119) reflect the congregation's renewed submission to the stipulations of covenant, as do Psalms of entrance into the sanctuary (15, 24) which examine the worshipers' conduct in the light of the covenant laws. The covenant associations of these Psalms are clear, for such worship is the tribute the servant offers to the King in fulfillment of His covenant obligation.

But covenant structure and terminology are equally evident in the Psalms of petition, in which the servant pledges his commitment to the great King, and appeals to Him in turn to honor the agreement between them. In such Psalms (the most numerous type in the Psalter), the speaker stands in the place of the servant-king, representing the faithful congregation before the great King. Indeed, in many

of the Psalms the worshiper is the Judean ruler, David or one of his successors, appearing before the Lord in behalf of the community (although his words are actually sung by the Levitical musicians).

These Psalms are filled with affirmations of covenant loyalty, such as "You are my God" (63:1; 118:28; 140:6), "You are my Yahweh" (16:2), or "You are my King" (44:4). Such expressions are the servant's response ratifying the treaty offered him by the great King. A most striking feature of these Psalms is the frequent reference (in more than thirty Psalms) to the worshiper's enemies. A pervasive theme in the Psalter is the opposition between the faithful worshiper and the ungodly; in various forms, this theme is present in half of the Psalms, being set forth in the introductory Psalm:

> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish (Ps. 1:5-6).

Because the worshiper is in covenant with the Lord, the Lord's enemies are his enemies as well; the Psalms are filled with appeals in which the worshiper pledges his own loyalty to God while petitioning Him for deliverance from his enemies, the unfaithful:

> I hate those who cling to worthless idols;
> I trust in the Lord. . . .
> They conspire against me
> And plot to take my life. . .
> But, I trust in You, O Lord;
> I say, "You are my God."
> My times are in Your hands;
> Deliver me from of my enemies and from
> those who persecute me.
> Let Your face shine upon Your servant;
> Save me in Your unfailing-love (31:6, 13-16).

The Psalms of imprecation, or cursing of enemies (35, 69, 109, 137), which have been something of an embarrassment to expositors—Wesley, for example, considered them unworthy of Christian usage—take on new relevance when viewed in the light of covenant affirmation. On the whole, the Psalms do not present a picture of a people worshiping in complacent unity, but reflect an intense struggle between those Israelites faithful to Yahweh's covenant and those viewed as apostate. This is exactly the situation depicted in the pre-exilic prophetic books, in which Yahweh's covenant is seen to be constantly threatened by spiritual indifference and the encroachments of false religious influences. The periodic affirmation of the covenant in festal worship is part of this ongoing struggle, the witness of the faithful to the sovereignty of the great King.

Covenant-love and the Confession of Loyalty

Like the client appealing to the great king for protection, the worshiper appeals to the Lord for deliverance on the basis of Yahweh's own faithfulness to the covenant. Although the community of Israel has bound itself to God and had pledged to abide by His precepts, in the Psalmist's eyes it is chiefly the Lord who, having granted the covenant, continues to uphold it by His grace. Often the Psalms speak of His "faithfulness" and His "righteousness"; these qualities are not randomly displayed attributes of God, but refer to His active intervention specifically in the life of His people to maintain the covenant. Virtually synonymous with these terms, and used more often (more than 120 times in 53 Psalms), is the word *hesed*, usually translated "lovingkindness," "love," "steadfast love," or "mercy." Again, Yahweh's *hesed* is not His impartial benevolence to all creation, but specifically His mercy to His own people, out of loyalty to the covenant. Only those who have obligated themselves in treaty with the great King have the right to

appeal to Him on the basis of His *hesed*; the best translation is therefore covenant-love. It is because of the Lord's covenant-love, His faithfulness to His own word, that the worshiper may plead with Him for help and salvation:

> Rise up and help us;
> And redeem us because of Your covenant-love
> (Ps. 44:26).
> In Your unfailing covenant-love silence my enemies;
> Destroy all my foes,
> For I am Your servant (Ps. 143:12).

In many respects "covenant-love" is the key concept in the Book of Psalms; it pervades all that is said to, or about, Yahweh, whether the word *hesed* is present or not. In its praise of the Lord, Israel joyfully celebrates His covenant-love:

> It is good to praise the Lord,
> And make music to Your name, O Most High,
> To proclaim Your covenant-love in the morning
> And Your faithfulness at night (Ps. 92:1-2).

The most often-repeated thanksgiving in the Psalter (Pss. 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1-26; cf. 1 Chron. 16:34; 2 Chron. 20:21) praises Yahweh for His loyalty to the covenant: "O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His covenant-love endures forever."

This phrase, however, needs to be retranslated, for the usual English rendering conceals another key covenant element of Israelite worship: the oath of loyalty to God. The verb translated "give thanks," *hodah*, is derived from the root *yadah*, which signifies the lifting or extending of the hand (*yad*). To lift the hand is the time-honored gesture of oath-taking; ancient monuments depict officials lifting the hand in oath before rulers, and the gesture remains in use in the modern court system. To cite a biblical example,

Ezekiel refers several times to the Lord's swearing with uplifted hand in granting the covenant (see especially 20:5-6, where the expression "I swore" reads literally, in Hebrew, "I lifted up the hand"). The biblical invitation to "give thanks to the Lord" really means *to confess the Lord as God*, to acknowledge that one's loyalty is to Him alone, through the gesture of lifting the hand in oath.

Covenant Worship in the New Testament

In the New Testament, the concept of covenant is often subsumed under other metaphors which describe the relationship between the Lord and His people. The most important of these is the kingdom of God, which was the primary theme of Jesus' teaching and preaching; the celebration of the dominion of the great King, as we have seen, lies at the heart of the biblical understanding of covenant. The new Israel is also called the body of Christ. Numerous references to God as Father, to believers as brothers and to the church as a household portray the church in terms of a family. There are, however, many references to the covenant itself, and the brief covenant formulary of the Hebrew Scriptures, "I will be their God, and they shall be My people," is applied to the church by several New Testament writers (Heb. 11:16; 1 Pet. 2:10; Rev. 21:3).

With respect to Christian worship, the most obvious reference to covenant in the New Testament is Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper, when He declares, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many" (Mark 14:24). The death of Christ is the sacrifice which enacts the new covenant, which now embraces not only the faithful Jew but the believing Gentile as well (as, indeed, the covenant with Israel originally included any worshiper of Yahweh, regardless of ancestry). The continued observance of the Lord's Supper is a re-presentation of the death of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26) which has created the people of the

new covenant.

Yet the "body" celebrated in the Lord's Supper is not the physical body of Christ on the cross, but the "body" of the new covenant community brought into being through His sacrifice. This is clear from Paul's instructions to the Christians of Corinth:

> And is not the bread that we break a participation [*koinonia*, mutuality or communion at a deep level] in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

In describing the Lord's Supper, Paul's aim is to correct its abuse by those who consumed it carelessly, without regard for other members of the community; his argument is based on the idea that the Lord's Supper is not an individual but a corporate action. The self-examination involved in the Lord's Supper is not a general introspective inventory of one's morality and motivation, but is specifically directed at encouraging each worshiper to "discern the body" in partaking—to receive it, in other words, mindful of his or her identification with the covenant community. Thus the Lord's Supper is the *covenant meal*, an act of covenant ratification reminiscent of the meal shared by the elders of Israel before the Lord on Sinai. To eat it without "discerning the body" is to bring judgment upon oneself for profaning the bread and cup of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:27-29). Here we note another element of covenant structure, the enactment of sanctions when the relationship is violated: the curse of the covenant takes effect in judgment upon the unfaithful.

The focus in Paul's discussion of worship is always *the body*, whether with respect to the Lord's Supper or to the prophetic assembly described in 1 Corinthians 12-14. In the latter, for example, he seeks to regulate the practice of tongues with a concern similar to that involved in his

warning to "discern the body" in the Lord's Supper. Tongues are directed to God in praise and thanksgiving (14:2, 16), but are a "sign" or offense to unbelievers who might be present (14:22-23). When a worshiper speaks in a tongue, this does not edify the assembly unless someone interprets, so that the "ungifted" may say his "Amen" to the giving of thanks (v. 16). The whole thrust of Paul's analysis is the corporate nature of Christian celebration, and the need to monitor individual expressions with a view to the edification of the entire church. All this is part of living out Jesus' new covenant commandment, to "love one another just as I have loved you" (John 13:34); the Christian principle of *agape* is founded throughout on the Old Testament concept of *hesed*, covenant-love.

The New Testament church viewed itself as the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), the true heir of God's covenant promises. Like Israel assembled at Mount Sinai, the church is "a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9; cf. Ex. 19:5-6). The church is "Mount Zion" (Heb. 12:22), the "Jerusalem above" (Gal. 4:26; cf. Ps. 87:5), the city of God in which the Lord dwells in covenant with His people (Rev. 21:2-3). Because of the continuity of the covenant, one might wonder why more of the festal quality of Israelite covenant celebration was not carried over into the New Testament's picture of Christian worship. There was no question, of course, of continuing the priestly rituals of the Jewish temple, since the Mosaic sacrifices had found their completion in the death of the Lamb of God. But Yahwistic covenant worship, as portrayed in the Psalms and elsewhere, involved more than the sacrificial cult. It included processions, the dance, the shout of victory, the clapping of hands, as well as the full panorama of vocal and instrumental music. Why are these aspects of covenant celebration not reflected in the worship of the apostolic church?

There are two principal explanations for this situation. In the first place, the New Testament documents were created during a brief period in the life of the emerging church, probably not more than one generation (A.D. 30-70).[3] There was not sufficient time for the new community to develop a festal tradition of its own. More importantly, the church was a movement under persecution. Its cultural position as a minority within a hostile environment (especially in areas where there was a strong traditional Jewish presence) did not allow it to engage in open festivities of the character portrayed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Such public witness to Christ's kingship would have been regarded as highly provocative.

For these reasons, the apostolic church was largely restricted to portraying festal celebration as an ideal, or future possibility. The Letter to the Hebrews (12:23) calls the church a "festal assembly" (*paneguris*, which literally means "everyone going round and round"). Paul looks ahead to the day when the covenant will be universally acknowledged in visible acts of worship: ". . . that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father " (Phil. 2:10-11).

The biblical words translated "worship" in English (Hebrew *hishtahavah*, Greek *proskuneo*) mean, literally, to "bow down," "bend the knee," "prostrate oneself." Such is the gesture of the vassal doing homage to his lord, the servant acknowledging the dominion of the great king. It is this bodily gesture of submission to Christ that Paul has in mind, together with the confession of His lordship in the form of the oath of covenant allegiance. This confession, along with the recognition of the reality of Christ's resurrection, is what brings a person into the new life of deliverance from old bondages (Rom. 10:9-10).

But the New Testament's vision of covenant worship

comes to a climax in the Book of Revelation. The judgments of the Revelation are the enactment of the curses inherent in the covenant upon those who have turned away from their loyalty to the great King.[4] Furthermore, the structure of the book reveals its covenant associations. The drama unfolds in a series of *sevens* (note also the opening letters to seven churches); the Hebrew word for swearing an oath of loyalty (*nishba'*) means, literally, to "seven oneself."[5] Because the oath of loyalty has been broken, the curses must now take effect. The depiction of these judgments occurs in a context of the worship of the "King of kings and Lord of lords," obvious treaty-covenant nomenclature. This worship is instigated by the four living creatures (4:8), who are the cherubim guarding the ark of the covenant in the Israelite sanctuary. (There were actually four in Solomon's temple, two on the cover of the ark itself and two larger ones guarding it in the "most holy place.") The living creatures are joined by 24 elders representing the totality of the covenant people: 12 for the tribes of Israel, and 12 for the apostolic church, the new Israel. As the worship builds, it expands to incorporate "a great multitude . . . from every nation, tribe, people and language" who offer their tribute of praise and allegiance to God and to the Lamb (7:9-10). As the final scene opens, we see God living with His people, the "new Jerusalem." A voice proclaims the familiar Old Testament covenant formulary, in the form "He will live with them. They will be His people" (21:3), and God pronounces His blessing upon the faithful, followed by curse upon the violators of the covenant (21:6-8). The centrality of Christ, the Lamb, in this worship is emphasized as the scene unfolds (Rev. 21:22-27).

The Revelation to John is perhaps too dramatically visionary to be an actual liturgy, but its covenant structure and pronounced associations with Israelite worship may reveal the liturgical aspirations, and to a degree, the practice of the

apostolic church. Historic Christian liturgy moves through a sequence of *entrance*, service of the *Word*, service of the *Lord's table*, and *dismissal*. This pattern certainly reflects the general outline of biblical covenant structure. The entrance serves as the prologue, a joyful celebration of the Lord's dominion and His acts of salvation. The service of the Word brings forth the Scriptures as the stipulations or charter defining the relationship between the great King and His servants. The service of the Lord's table is an act of covenant affirmation, the worshipers' pledge of loyalty in the intimacy of communion and mutal participation. The dismissal is a time of benediction of blessing pronounced upon the faithful, those who keep the covenant with Christ their King.

Conclusion

From this brief survey of worship and covenant in the Bible, perhaps we can draw some general principles for our own practice of Christian worship.

First, the Lord's covenant is with a people, the "royal priesthood." Christian worship is corporate, an action of the body, in which each worshiper has a role according to his or her gifts, but in which the focus is always upon the action of the community as the servant of the Lord.

Second, worship is the declaration that "Jesus Christ is Lord," the oath of loyalty we take as His servants to acknowledge and obey Him alone as the supreme authority in life. Worship is the principal activity through which the covenant is proclaimed, affirmed, and extended.

Third, worship is the tribute we bring to our great King; it is our obligation as His partners in the covenant. As Christians, we present this tribute because Christ's death has opened the covenant up to us, offering through Him "a sacrifice of praise [to God]—the fruit of lips that confess His name" (Heb. 13:15).

Fourth, there is a historic sequence to Christian worship, a sequence patterned after the celebration of covenant renewal in the religion of Israel. When this sequence is disturbed, or parts of it are missing, worship is incomplete. Especially, if we seldom observe the Lord's Supper, or do so in a perfunctory manner, we have neglected the covenant meal, the act of ratification that says, "You are my God!"

Fifth, because God is one, His covenant is one, and His people are one. The Scriptures of the early Christian community were "the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44), suggesting that the regulative principle of worship might legitimately be established on a broader scriptural foundation, one not entirely limited to the New Testament. Visible actions characteristic of Israel's covenant celebration are perhaps more appropriate in the worship of the church than some authorities have been inclined to accept. As worshipers of the Lord of lords, we *may* find it appropriate to offer our tribute not only through vocal expression, but also through the ceremonial and the festivity of high celebration, the bowing in homage before God as the Holy One, and the lifting of hands in the pledge of loyalty.

Jesus spoke of worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24). It is easy to misinterpret these words to mean that true worship is invisible, or a matter of the intellect alone. In the Bible, however, the spiritual is not the invisible, but that which is informed by the spirit, or breath, of God; as such, it may be highly visible, *spirited* behavior. And truth is that which is faithful to the Word of God (John 17:17). Christian worship, therefore, is *spirited action in conformity with scriptural principles*. Understanding the fundamental concept of the biblical covenant, with its distinctive structure, terminology and accompanying gestures, is basic to the restoration of worship which glorifies Christ "in spirit and truth."

1 The important volume by Viktor Korosec, *Hethitische Staatsvertrage: Ein Beitrag zu ihrer juristischen Wertung* (*Leipziger rechtswissenschaftliche Studien*, 1931) initially laid out the structure of Hittite vassal treaties in particular. George E. Mendenhall's monograph of 1955, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (originally published the previous year in *The Biblical Archaeologist*) called attention to the structural connections between these ancient treaties and the biblical covenant. Subsequent studies further developed the concept of the covenant along these lines. Notable are Klaus Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular* (1964; English translation, *The Covenant Formulary*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1969); and D.J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972). From an evangelical perspective, the work of Meredith G. Kline has been of particular significance in demonstrating the importance of the meaning of biblical revelation. See especially *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972). A full discussion of the implications of covenant structure and terminology for the understanding of biblical theology and worship is found in J.E. Leonard, *I Will Be Their God: Understanding the Covenant* (Chicago: Laudemont Press, 1992).

2 Jesus' principles of the kingdom of God are sometimes similarly cast in metrical form, as in the Beatitudes and other parts of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), suggesting their preservation in a context of new covenant worship and corporate recitation.

3 Most New Testament writings seem to reflect the period prior to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple and its religious establishment. This event was viewed as a momentous vindication of the witness of the persecuted saints (e.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.5:3-7). Since Jesus predicted the temple's destruction as part of His scenario for the "end of the age" (Mark 13:2, 14 and parallels), we should expect to find elsewhere in the New Testament some reference to its having occurred, unless all or most of the apostolic writings predated the event.

4 Therefore, the unfaithful city of the Revelation has to be Jerusalem, with its religious establishment, the persecutor of the early church, and not Rome, which was never in covenant with Yahweh. See J.E. Leonard, *Come Out of Her, My People: A Study of the Revelation to John* (Chicago: Laudemont Press, 1991), pp. 121-36.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

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God is best known in Christ; the sun is not seen but by the light of the sun.

William Bridge

In nature, we see God, as it were, like the sun in a picture; in the law, as the sun in a cloud; in Christ we see Him in His beams; He being "the brightness of His glory, and the exact image of His person."

Stephen Charnock

They lose nothing who gain Christ.

Samuel Rutherford

When God spoke to humanity in Jesus, He said the last thing He has to say.

G. Campbell Morgan

It is a destructive addition to add anything to Christ.

Richard Sibbes

If you cannot say, "Jesus is precious to me," I do not care to what church you belong or what creed you are ready to die for. You do not know the truth of God unless the person of Christ is dear to you.

C. H. Spurgeon

Christianity is summed up in the two facts: Christ *for* us and Christ *in* us.

Augustus H. Strong