

Christian Worship

Weekly Worship Service

Every Sunday morning, all over the United States and in diverse places throughout the world, professing Christians gather together to conduct their “worship services” or “corporate worship” together. Many who thus gather would tell you that the weekly worship service is a non-negotiable requirement for all who are truly Christian. Some would insist that Sunday represents a Christian Sabbath, and that the day must be kept holy and devoted to worship of the Lord. Others are not so dogmatic, but the nearly universal belief is that the purpose of the weekly gathering is to worship God by their presence, prayer, singing, and attention to the preaching of God’s messenger: the pastor. Any opinion contradicting the essential nature of the Christian gatherings on the first day of the week would be considered, at the least, heterodoxy, and would perhaps be deemed heretical.

There’s one problem; this concept of the gatherings of the saints is not to be found in Scripture.

In the NASB there are two places where the words “service” and “worship” can be found in the same context:

Neh 12:44-45

⁴⁴ On that day men were also appointed over the chambers for the stores, the contributions, the first fruits, and the tithes, to gather into them from the fields of the cities the portions **required by the law** for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced over **the priests and Levites who served**. ⁴⁵ **For they performed the worship of their God and the service of purification**, together with the singers and the gatekeepers in accordance with the command of David and of his son Solomon.

Rom 12:1-2

^{12:1} I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice**, acceptable to God, **which is your spiritual service of worship**. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

You’ll note that in the first context it is the priests and Levites (along with the singers and gatekeepers) who performed the worship. This was not performed in a “worship service”, but as a part of the purification service as required for Israel under the law.

The second instance is addressed to those who know Christ as Savior. The “therefore” refers back to Paul’s discussion of our position in Christ, the mercy that we have been shown, and the blessings we receive which are undeserved (by God’s choice and His gifts and mercies are irrevocable!) What follows is a lengthy discussion of Christian conduct. What is the “worship service”? It’s the way you live and conduct your life!

Interestingly, for those who subscribe to the KJV-only view, if you get out your electronic concordance and try to find “worship” and “service” together in the King James Version, you’ll

be disappointed. In fact, in the Romans verse, the phrase “service of worship” is actually taken from a single Greek word, λατρεία, which means:

NT:2999 latreia, latreias, hee

1. in Greek authors service rendered for hire; then any service or ministration
2. in the Greek Bible, the service or worship of God according to the requirements of the Levitical law Rom 9:4

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In other words, the phrase “service of worship” is more an interpretation than a direct translation. The translators of the NASB and the NIV equated the service with the Levitical law, but it seems more probable that it just means *service due to God*. [In fact, the NASB translates the word as “service” and KJV as “service of God” in the referenced passage of Romans 9:4.]

That the ritual, Levitical worship was not ultimate form of worship that God desires from men was made clear by Jesus when He spoke to the woman at the well:

John 4:21-24

²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, an hour is coming when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall you worship the Father. ²² "You worship that which you do not know; we worship that which we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ **"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers.** ²⁴ "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Our worship of God is not to be mere physical compliance to certain prescribed forms. It is not to be mere singing of songs (especially the meaningless, repetitive dribble called “praise choruses”!). Good and acceptable worship is worship in spirit, which is non-physical, like the service rendered in Romans 12. It is the conscious will and desire to daily place ourselves under the Lord’s will, and the daily renewing of our minds (2 Cor 4:16 – “our inner man is being renewed day by day”). Our worship is to be done in Truth, which **is** God’s word (John 17:17 – “Thy word is truth”) as opposed to the traditions of men.

Col 2:8

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

Titus 1:13-14

¹³ For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith, ¹⁴ not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth.

2 Tim 3:1-5

^{3:1} But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; ⁵ holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these.

2 Tim 4:3-4

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths.

Is this what our obligatory Sunday service accomplishes? Are we worshipping the Lord in spirit and in truth? For the answers to these questions, we must take a closer look at worship as it is found in Scripture.

Worship

The NASB includes 112 instances of the word “worship”, 3 “worships”, 50 “worshipped”, and 4 of “worshiping”. The various Hebrew and Greek words are:

Hebrew Words:

שָׁחָהּ OT:7812 shachah (shaw-khaw'); a primitive root; to depress, i.e. prostrate (especially reflexive, in homage to royalty or God):

KJV - bow (self) down, crouch, fall down (flat), humbly beseech, do (make) obeisance, do reverence, make to stoop, worship.

(Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

Example: **Deut 5:8-9**

'You shall not **worship** them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me,

כָּגַד OT:5456 cagad (saw-gad'); a primitive root; to prostrate oneself (in homage):

KJV - fall down.

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Example: **Isa 46:6**

"Those who lavish gold from the purse
And weigh silver on the scale
Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it into a god;
They bow down, indeed they **worship** it.

אָבַד OT:5647 `abad (aw-bad'); a primitive root; to work (in any sense); by implication, to serve, till, (causatively) enslave, etc.:

KJV - be, keep in bondage, be bondmen, bond-service, compel, do, dress, ear, execute, husbandman, keep, labour (-ing man, bring to pass, (cause to, make to) serve (-ingself,)), (be, become) servant (-s), do (use) service, till (-er), transgress [from margin], (set a) work, be wrought, worshipper,

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Example: **Mal 3:18**

So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who **serves** God and one who does not **serve** Him.

NAS

אָצַב OT:6087 `atsab (aw-tsab'); a primitive root; properly, to carve, i.e. fabricate or fashion; hence (in a bad sense) to worry, pain or anger:

KJV - displease, grieve, hurt, make, be sorry, vex, worship, wrest.

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Example: Jer 44:19

And when we burned incense to the queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto her, did we make her cakes to **worship** her, and pour out drink offerings unto her, without our men? - KJV

Shachah (OT 7812) is the primary Hebrew word for worship, used 95 times in the Old Testament. The meaning of the word is to bow down, and it is often used in the sense of people literally bowing down before the Lord. Here are some verses that use this word:

Gen 18:2

² And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and **bowed himself** toward the ground,
KJV

Gen 42:6

⁶ And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and **bowed down themselves** before him with their faces to the earth.
KJV

Ex 4:31

³¹ And the people believed: and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they **bowed their heads and worshipped**.
KJV

Ex 34:14

¹⁴ For thou shalt **worship** no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God:
KJV

Deut 26:9-10

⁹ And he hath brought us into this place, and hath given us this land, even a land that floweth with milk and honey.

¹⁰ And now, behold, I have brought the firstfruits of the land, which thou, O LORD, hast given me. And thou shalt set it before the LORD thy God, and **worship** before the LORD thy God:
KJV

Ruth 2:10

¹⁰ Then she fell on her face, and **bowed herself to the ground**, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?
KJV

Ps 132:7

⁷ We will go into his tabernacles: we will **worship** at his footstool.
KJV

Jer 1:16

¹⁶ And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and **worshipped** the works of their own hands.
KJV

Greek Words:

WORSHIP (VERB AND NOUN), WORSHIPING

A. Verbs.

1. **proskuneo** NT:4352, "to make obeisance, do reverence to" (from *pros*, "towards," and *kuneo*, "to kiss"), is the most frequent word rendered "to worship." It is used of an act of homage or reverence

(a) to God, e. g., Matt 4:10; John 4:21-24; 1 Cor 14:25; Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:10 (2nd part) and 22:9;

(b) to Christ, e. g., Matt 2:2,8,11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9,17; John 9:38; Heb 1:6, in a quotation from the Sept. of Deut 32:43, referring to Christ's second advent;

(c) to a man, Matt 18:26;

(d) to the Dragon, by men, Rev 13:4;

(e) to the Beast, his human instrument, Rev 13:4,8,12; 14:9,11;

(f) the image of the Beast, 13:15; 14:11; 16:2;

(g) to demons, Rev 9:20; (h) to idols, Acts 7:43.

Note: As to Matt 18:26, this is mentioned as follows, in the "List of readings and renderings preferred by the American Committee" (see RV Classes of Passages, IV): "At the word 'worship' in Matt 2:2, etc., add the marginal note 'The Greek word denotes an act of reverence, whether paid to man (see chap. 18:26) or to God (see chap. 4:10).'" The Note to John 9:38 in the American Standard Version in this connection is most unsound; it implies that Christ was a creature. J. N. Darby renders the verb "do homage" [see the Revised Preface to the Second Edition (1871), of his New Translation].

2. **sebomai** NT:4576, "to revere," stressing the feeling of awe or devotion, is used of "worship"

(a) to God, Matt 15:9; Mark 7:7; Acts 16:14; 18:7,13;

(b) to a goddess, Acts 19:27. See DEVOUT, No. 3.

3. **sebazomai** NT:4573, akin to No. 2, "to honor religiously," is used in Rom 1:25.

4. **latreuo** NT:3000, "to serve, to render religious service or homage," is translated "to worship" in Phil 3:3, "(who) worship (by the Spirit of God)," RV, KJV, "(which) worship (God in the spirit)"; the RV renders it "to serve" (for KJV, "to worship") in Acts 7:42; 24:14; KJV and RV, "(the) worshipers" in Heb 10:2, present participle, lit., "(the ones) worshiping." See SERVE.

5. **eusebeo** NT:2151, "to act piously towards," is translated "ye worship" in Acts 17:23. See PIETY (to show).

Notes: (1) **The worship of God is nowhere defined in Scripture.** A consideration of the above verbs shows that it is not confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgement to God, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgment. (2) In Acts 17:25 *therapeuo*, "to serve, do service to" (so RV), is rendered "is worshiped." See CURE, HEAL.

B. Nouns

1. **sebasma** NT:4574 denotes "an object of worship" (akin to A, No. 3); Acts 17:23 (see DEVOTION); in 2 Thess 2:4, "that is worshiped"; every object of "worship," whether the true God or pagan idols, will come under the ban of the Man of Sin.

2. **ethelothreskeia** (or- ia) NT:1479, "will-worship" (*ethelo*, "to will," *threskeia*, "worship"), occurs in Col 2:23, voluntarily adopted "worship," whether unbidden or forbidden, not that which is imposed by others, but which one affects.

3. **threskeia** NT:2356, for which see RELIGION, is translated "worshiping" in Col 2:18.

Note: In Luke 14:10, KJV, doxa, "glory" (RV), is translated "worship."
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Proskuneo is used 60 times in the New Testament. Here are some examples of its use:

Matt 2:2

"Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east, and have come to **worship** Him."

Luke 4:7-8

And Jesus answered and said to him, "It is written, 'You shall **worship** the Lord your God and serve Him only.'"

Acts 10:25-26

²⁵ And when it came about that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, and fell at his feet and **worshiped** him. ²⁶ But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up; I too am just a man."

[Note: the following 3 instances are the only use of this word in the epistles.]

1 Cor 14:23-25

²⁴ But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an ungifted man enters, he is convicted by all, he is called to account by all; ²⁵ the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so he will fall on his face and **worship** God, declaring that God is certainly among you.

Heb 1:6

And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him."

Heb 11:21

By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and **worshiped**, leaning on the top of his staff

The remainder of the uses for Proskuneo are in Revelation.

Sebomai appears only in Mark and acts. It is usually refers to one who worships, as follows:

Acts 18:7

And he departed from there and went to the house of a certain man named Titius Justus, a **worshiper** of God, whose house was next to the synagogue.

Sebazomai appears only once, as follows:

Rom 1:25

Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and **worshipped** and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. - KJV

Latreuo is most often used to denote service, and is used as follows:

Phil 3:3

For we are the circumcision, which **worship** God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. - KJV

2 Tim 1:3

I thank God, whom I **serve** from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; - KJV

Finally, eusebeo is used only twice, and denotes piety.

Acts 17:23-24

23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' What therefore you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

Corporate or Public Worship

How, when looking at the words used, and discovering, as in Vine, that there is NO prescribed or defined worship of God in the New Testament, did we ever get to where we are now? How did we come up with today's "worship service"? This portion of the "worship" entry in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedea might bring some insight. I've highlighted some things which I find particularly interesting:

WORSHIP

4. Public Christian Worship:

Public Christian worship **necessarily developed along the lines of the synagogue** and not the temple, since the whole sacrificial and ceremonial system terminated for Christianity with the life and death of Jesus. **The perception of this, however,** was gradual, as was the break of Jewish Christians with both synagogue and temple. Jesus Himself held the temple in high honor, loved to frequent it as His Father's house, reverently observed the feasts, and exhibited the characteristic attitude of the devout but un-Pharisaic Israelite toward the temple and its worship. Yet by speaking of Himself as "greater than the temple" (Matt 12:6) and by quoting, Hos 6:6, "I desire goodness and not sacrifice," He indicated the relative subordinateness of the temple and its whole system of worship, and in His utterance to the woman of Samaria He intimated the abolition both of the whole idea of the central sanctuary and of the entire ceremonial worship: "Neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father"; "They that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:21,24).

His chief interest in the temple seems to have been as a "house of prayer" and an opportunity to reach and touch the people. **We cannot help feeling** that with all His love for the holy precincts, He must have turned with relief from the stately, formal, distant ceremonial of the temple, partly relieved though it was by the genuine religious passion of many worshippers, to the freer, more vital, closer heart-worship of the **synagogue, loaded though that also was with form, tradition, ritual and error.** Here He was a regular and reverent attendant and participant (Mark 1:21,39; 3:1; 6:2; Luke 6:6). **Jesus did not Himself prescribe public worship for His disciples,** no doubt assuming that instinct and practice, and His own spirit and example, would bring it about spontaneously, but He did seek to guard their worship from the merely outward and spectacular, and laid great emphasis on privacy and real "innerness" in it (Matt 6:1-18, etc.). **Synagogue-worship was probably not abandoned with Pentecost, but private brotherhood meetings, like that in the upper chamber, and from house to house, were added.**

The young church could hardly have "grown in favor with the people," if it had completely withdrawn from the popular worship, either in temple or synagogue, although no attendance on the latter is ever mentioned. Possibly the Christians drew themselves together in a synagogue of their own, as did the different nationalities. The reference in James: "if there come unto your synagogue" (James 2:2), while not conclusive, since "synagogue" **may have gained** a Christian significance by this time, nevertheless, joined with the traditions concerning James's ascetic zeal and popular repute, argues against such a complete separation early. **Necessarily with the development into clearness of the Christian ideas,** and with the heightening persecution, together with the hard industrial struggle of life, the observance of the Jewish

Sabbath in temple or synagogue, and of the Christian's Lord's Day, grew incompatible. Yet the full development of this must have been rather late in Paul's life. Compare his missionary tactics of beginning his work at the synagogue, and his custom of observing as far as possible the Jewish feasts (Acts 20:16; 1 Cor 16:8). **Our notions of the worship of the early church must be constructed out of the scattered notices descriptive of different stages in the history, and different churches present different phases of development.** The time was clearly the Lord's Day, both by the Jewish churches (John 20:19,26) and by the Greek (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2) The daily meeting of Acts 2:46 was probably not continued, no mention occurring later.

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Notice that this is almost entirely speculation. The Christian worship service had “necessarily” to follow the Synagogue because Jesus completed and repudiated the Temple? We are not told to attend either or to pattern our assemblies on either the Temple or the Synagogue! The writers say they feel that despite Jesus’ love of the Temple He “must have,” (how would they know if Scripture doesn’t say so?) “turned with relief from the... temple.. to the... synagogue.” Again, how could they know what Scripture doesn’t tell them? Furthermore, what they are assuming here sounds an awful lot like a *development* of Christianity, a Christian evolution, rather than a concept that was complete in God’s mind from the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). They make these assumptions while admitting that **“Jesus did not Himself prescribe public worship for His disciples”!** Then they say that “no doubt” Jesus assumed His disciples would find their way to Synagogue-type worship, spontaneously, because of instinct and practice, and the Spirit! Then it’s “necessarily with the development...”! It’s all speculation, and ultimately the Church Inc. conception of the weekly meeting as a “worship service” comes down to “experts” believing what they want to believe. Of course, that’s pretty much the norm for the Institutional Church, anyway.

Here is another defense of the “worship service”; this one from McIntock and Strong’s Encyclopedia. Here, instead of highlighting, you’ll see my comments in brackets and a different font (like so... **ldifferent font**).

3. Public Worship, i.e., religious services conducted in the general congregation. Some who have acknowledged the propriety of private worship have objected to that of a public nature, but without any sufficient ground. For Christ attended public worship himself (Luke 4) **lAs a Jew under the Dispensation of the Law, wherein religious gatherings rites, festivals and sacrifices were prescribed by God!** ; he prayed with his disciples (Luke 9:28,29; 11:1) **lWhich is not a “worship service”!**; he promises his presence to social worshippers (Matt 18:20) **l“For where two or three have gathered together in My name, there I am in their midst.” This is not social worship, as in a Church Service! Look on what shaky ground dogma is based upon!** . It may be argued also from the conduct of the apostles (Acts 1:24; 2; 4:24; 6:4; 20:36; Rom 15:30; 1 Cor 14:1; 2 Thess 3:1,2; 1 Cor 11:1) **lLook these verses up! Please! They do not teach gathering together formally, especially in a “Church Building” and going through an “order of service”, etc.**l and from general principles (Deut 31:12; Ps 100:4 1 Tim 2:2,8; Heb 10:25) **lDeut. 31- God is telling Moses to assemble the Israelites! PS 100:4 Says to enter “His courts” and “His gates” and is speaking of the Temple precincts. 1 Tim 2:2 speaks of a tranquil life; vs 8 is an exhortation for all men to pray! Heb 10:25 is the old standard about not forsaking assembling together (See: Assembly.PDF on this site.) Not only does this last reference not mean what most Church Inc. devotees want it to, but even if it did, it says nothing about gathering for a “worship service”! This is why one must look up every reference when some “Authority” strings a bunch of verse references after a declarative statement. NONE OF THESE VERSES PROVE ANYTHING ABOUT CORPORATE WORSHIP, AND MANY OF THEM DO NOT EVEN TOUCH THE SUBJECT!**

The obligation **[Now, without Scriptural cause (as seen above) they proclaim “public worship” an obligation.]** of public worship is partly founded upon example, and partly upon precept; so that no person who admits that authority can question this great duty without manifest and criminal inconsistency **[They hereby call anyone who disagrees a heretic, and yet their Scriptural support doesn't even support them! The fact is, they cannot defend their position without resort to so-called Church Fathers, tradition and the history of the “Church” which is by no means a standard of life or doctrine].** The institution of public worship under the law, and the practice of synagogue worship among the Jews, from at least the time of Ezra, cannot be questioned **[No, but we are not under Law but under grace: Rom 6:14-15 “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!];** both of which were sanctioned by the practice of our Lord and his apostles **[Who were living as Jews under the Law until Acts 2!].** The preceptive authority for our regular attendance upon public worship is either inferential or direct. The command to publish the gospel includes the obligation of assembling to hear it; the name by which a Christian society is designated in Scripture is a Church, which signifies an assembly for the transaction of business; and, in the case of a Christian assembly, that business must necessarily be spiritual, and include the sacred exercises of prayer, praise, and hearing the Scriptures **[Why not just do what Scripture emphatically says that we are to do when we gather together? Why not gather as the Apostles gathered, and with the purpose stated in the Word? See “How to Gather” below].**

But we have more direct precepts, although the practice was obviously continued from Judaism, and was therefore consuetudinary. Some of the epistles of Paul are commanded to be read in the churches. The singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is enjoined as an act of solemn worship to the Lord; and Paul cautions the Hebrews that they "forsake not the assembling of themselves together."

!OK, let's look at this closely. Well, we've already looked at the “assembling together” verse, so let's deal with the “solemn worship” in psalms, hymns, etc.

Eph 5:18-21

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ.

Col 3:16-17

¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.

Here is that solemn worship service they spoke of? No way, Jose! This is the way we are supposed to live our lives! Notice that we are always giving thanks. Notice that we sing and are thankful in our hearts! Notice, also, that we are to admonish and subject ourselves to one another; not to some ecclesiastical authority! But notice once again that these verses are not talking, in any way, about a Sunday Worship Service!

The practice of the primitive age is also manifest from the epistles of Paul. The Lord's Supper was celebrated by the body of believers collectively **[As a meal in peoples' houses!];** and this apostle prescribes to the Corinthians regulations for the exercises of prayer and prophesyings **[See below for the purpose for these things!],** "when they came together in the Church" -- the assembly. The periodicity and order of these holy offices in the primitive Church, appear also from the apostolic epistle of Clement of Rome **[See, “Church Fathers”, didn't I tell you? Are his words God-breathed? – 2 Tim 3:16, Literal Also, considering the fact that there were Gnostics, Judiazers, etc. right from the beginning of the Church, and man's desire for ritual and “Strange Fire”, should it surprise one that error and religiosity would be taught as early as 96 AD?!]** "We ought also, looking into the depths of the divine knowledge, to do all things in order, whatsoever

the Lord hath commanded to be done. We ought to make our oblations, and perform our holy offices, at their appointed seasons; for these he hath commanded to be done, not irregularly or by chance, but at determinate times and hours; as he hath likewise ordained by his supreme will where, and by what persons, they shall be performed; that so all things being done according to his pleasure, may be acceptable in his sight." This passage is remarkable for urging a divine authority for the public services of the Church, by which Clement, no doubt, **[Really? Then how could the man of God have been: "adequate, equipped for every good work" back when Paul wrote 1 Tim 3:17? How could Peter say that we had received everything we needed regarding "life and godliness" when Clement's epistle hadn't been written yet? The only authority we can trust is the Word!!** means the authority of the inspired directions of the apostles. See SERVICE. (from McClintock and Strong Encyclopedia, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 2000 by BibleSoft)

This is the nature of much of the ritual and practice of the Institutional Church, whether the particular institution calls itself Roman Catholic, Protestant Reformed, Lutheran, Independent Fundamentalist or Baptist. Most of the institutions owe more to Catholicism, and the pagan religions that were absorbed into the "catholic" church at the time of Constantine's declaration of support for "Christianity" in the early 300's AD (yet he kept the headship of Rome's pagan religion and practiced it until his death), than they do with Scripture. Look at the forms and practices around you on a Sunday morning (or a Saturday night), and compare what you see to the Church in Acts, and as envisioned in Paul's letters. Be like the believers in Berea, and search the Scriptures diligently.

Acts 17:11

¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.

Why Are We To Meet?

There is one clear statement of purpose for the assembly of believers. It is found in 1 Cor. 14.

1 Cor 14:26-40

²⁶ What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. **Let ALL things be done for edification.** ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, it should be by two or at the most three, and each in turn, and let one interpret; ²⁸ but if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church; and let him speak to himself and to God. ²⁹ And let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment. ³⁰ But if a revelation is made to another who is seated, let the first keep silent. ³¹ For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted; ³² and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets; ³³ for God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.

³⁴ Let the women keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but let them subject themselves, just as the Law also says. ³⁵ And if they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church. ³⁶ Was it from you that the word of God first went forth? Or has it come to you only?

³⁷ If anyone thinks he is a prophet or spiritual, let him recognize that the things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment. ³⁸ But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.

³⁹ Therefore, my brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak in tongues. ⁴⁰ But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.

Please notice that the subject here is “when you assemble together”. Here is the church meeting. When McClintock and Strong say that the “worship service” must be orderly, they are speaking from this context (vs. 40.) Now notice what it says at the end of verse 26: “Let all things be done for edification.”! This is a statement of purpose if ever there was one! The purpose of the church gathering together is to edify believers! How do we know the edification is of believers? Well, it’s the only thing that makes any sense in context, but we also see this same idea expressed elsewhere.

1 Cor 14:3

³ But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. 4 One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies **edifies the church**.

1 Cor 14:12

¹² So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound **for the edification of the church**.

Eph 4:29

²⁹ Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Rom 15:2

² Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification

1 Thess 5:11

¹¹ Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

The purpose of the weekly meetings is not worship – worship is part of the Christian’s way of life, and God has not designated any rites or rituals for worship under this present dispensation. The purpose of the weekly meetings is the building-up of the body.

Heb 10:23-25

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another**; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

We are to worship as part of our daily lives, and **true** worship, **true** love for our Lord, is seen in our **obedience** to Christ. (John 14:15 **"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."**) We are to each minister to one another, and to witness to what the Lord has done for us. We are to live, in this fallen world, as those who have been saved by the grace of God, and that’s not an easy thing to do. Therefore, when we come together to share the remembrance meal at the love feast, we are to build each other up, and help each other to stand against that world.

Conclusions

What the Institutional Church has done is to substitute a vague concept of worship, which many insist is to be solemn and reverential (can’t you hear the organ and the quiet, drawn out tones of

the “leaders”) for the interactive and vibrant gatherings that would involve us in each others lives, facilitate real discipleship and give genuine support to Christian living. Some groups equate worship with singing (thus: the “Worship Leader”), but the “worship” songs are all about “me”, “I” or “we”, or are rife with vain repetitions (see Matthew 6:7).

Only a genuine child of God, saved by grace through faith can offer true and acceptable worship that pleases God.

Heb 11:6

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

1 Peter 2:5

⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The Institutional Church is a state-sanctioned corporation filled with believers, unbelievers and professors of every ilk. Church discipline, as practiced in Matthew 18 (or 1 Tim 1:20, 1 Cor 5:11, etc.), is seldom practiced, and the very nature of Church Inc. makes the discipline that is practiced far less effective than it would be in a Philemon 2 sort of church. The unbelievers and professors appear as solemn as the believers; they sing as loudly, pray as reverently, lift up their hands, and recite the proper formulae. They follow the traditions of their religion, and are often the ones who follow it more “religiously” than the rest. However, in this present age, true worship is apart from any ritual, formula, or physical display, and the purveyors of the traditions of men have nothing to offer but “strange fire.” (See: StrangeFire.pdf on this site)

Millions are caught in the trap. They follow the forms rigorously. They say the right things. Attend the services. Volunteer for the programs and ministries. They’re sincere, but sincerely misled into following the precepts of men rather than the Word of God alone. They are just as clueless as the Pharisees.

Mark 7:6-9

⁶ And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

'This people honors Me with their lips,
But their heart is far away from Me.

⁷ 'But **in vain do they worship Me,**
Teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'

⁸ "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." ⁹ He was also saying to them, "You nicely set aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.

What can done?

For many years I tried to be a reformer, who questioned things within the Institutional Church that were at variance with Scripture, but I came, eventually, to see that the variations went to the very core of what we were doing. This finally (and painfully) forced me to become a separatist, and to try (unfortunately, on my own) to do things right (lest I become a hypocrite.) It took a

long time for this conviction to grow within my understanding, and even longer for me to act upon it. Ultimately, it was more important to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29 is our example). If you conclude that the precepts of men are the basis of your doctrine and practice (life and Godliness), you might want to consider separating from such a fellowship, hopefully along with other like-minded believers, and meeting as Scripture tells us to meet.

“Is it really that important?” you may ask. You must decide that for yourself, but I would challenge you to base your decisions solely on God’s Word, and to judge man’s doctrine by the God-breathed, and not the other way around.

2 Peter 1:1-3

² Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; ³ seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called

2 Cor 6:14-18

¹⁴ Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? ¹⁵ Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said,

"I will dwell in them and walk among them;
And I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

¹⁷ "Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord.

"And do not touch what is unclean;
And I will welcome you.

¹⁸ "And I will be a father to you,
And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,"
Says the Lord Almighty.