

Reference VARIOUS
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Church: GRACE Date: WEEK 11

Public Worship - structure of the service

Purpose: To consider why services of worship are structured in the way they are
- to understand what liberty we have to arrange the service.

1. Introduction

Continuing series on worship

What have we seen so far?

What is worship?

Then looked at preaching

Was that a part of worship in the early church?

What is preaching?

Then at prayer

Was that a part of worship in the early church?

Then at singing

Was that a part of worship in the early church?

Then call to worship, reading of Scripture, offering and benediction

Were these parts of worship in the early church?

Where did we look for our evidence in all these cases?

Do we find any other elements of worship in the Scripture that we have not considered?

Then can we introduce other elements?

e.g. if I were gifted at bricklaying

Could I bring this into a service of public worship?

Demonstrate it as worship to God?

Could a congregation worship while they watched this?

Yet this principle is being adopted in some places today!

We worship according to the pattern laid down in Scripture

This week, the order of service.

We have seen the various elements of public worship

We have seen principles that can help us to worship acceptably

Does it really matter how we arrange these things?

2. What Principles Shall we apply to our worship?

Certain things must be true:

Our worship must conform to the commandments of God

Our worship should reflect God's character

- Must be decent and **orderly**
 - Cannot be a shambles
- Must be in Spirit and in Truth
 - Will be externally simple – not appealing to senses
- Must be in reverence and awe

Our worship should reflect that in heaven

3. Order of worship in Synagogues

It was simple, but rather long, and embraced three elements, devotional, didactic, and ritualistic. ***It included prayer, song, reading, and exposition of the Scripture, the rite of circumcision, and ceremonial washings.*** The bloody sacrifices were confined to the temple and ceased with its destruction; they were fulfilled in the eternal sacrifice on the cross. The prayers and songs were chiefly taken from the Psalter, which may be called the first liturgy and hymn book.

The opening prayer was called the *Shema* or *Keriath Shema*, and consisted of two introductory benedictions, the reading of the Ten Commandments (afterward abandoned) and several sections of the Pentateuch, namely, Deut. 6:4–9; 11:13–21; Num. 15:37–41. Then followed the eighteen prayers and benedictions (*Berachoth*). This is one of them: "*Bestow peace, happiness, blessing, grace, mercy, and compassion upon us and upon the whole of Israel, thy people. Our Father, bless us all unitedly with the light of thy countenance, for in the light of thy countenance didst thou give to us, O Lord our God, the law of life, lovingkindness, justice, blessing, compassion, life, and peace. May it please thee to bless thy people Israel at all times, and in every moment, with peace. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who blessest thy people Israel with peace.*" These benedictions are

traced in the Mishna to the one hundred and twenty elders of the Great Synagogue. They were no doubt of gradual growth, some dating from the Maccabean struggles, some from the Roman ascendancy. The prayers were offered by a reader, and the congregation responded "Amen." This custom passed into the Christian church.

The didactic and homiletical part of worship was based on the Hebrew Scriptures. A lesson from the Law (called *parasha*), and one from the Prophets (*haphthara*) were read in the original, and followed by a paraphrase or commentary and homily (*midrash*) in the vernacular Aramaic or Greek. A benediction and the "Amen" of the people closed the service.

- Blessings
- Confession of the unity of God
- Blessings
- Prayers and the Amen
- Reading of the Law
- Reading of the Prophets
- Sermon
- Benediction

4. Order of worship in the early church

The earliest description of the Christian worship is given us by a heathen, the younger Pliny, A.D. 109, in his well-known letter to Trajan, which embodies the result of his judicial investigations in Bithynia. According to this, the Christians assembled on an appointed day (Sunday) at sunrise, sang responsively a song to Christ as to God, and then pledged themselves by an oath (sacramentum) not to do any evil work, to commit no theft, robbery, nor adultery, not to break their word, nor sacrifice property intrusted to them. Afterwards (at evening) they assembled again, to eat ordinary and innocent food (the agape).

- Responsive singing of a song to Christ as God
 - Vows to live godly lives
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Justin Martyr, at the close of his larger Apology, describes the public worship more particularly, as it was conducted about the year 140. After giving a full account of baptism and the holy Supper, to which we shall refer again, he continues:

"On Sunday a meeting of all, who live in the cities and villages, is held, and a section from the Memoirs of the Apostles (the Gospels) and the writings of the Prophets (the Old Testament) is read, as long as the time permits. When the reader has finished, the president, in a discourse, gives all exhortation to the imitation of these noble things. After this we all rise in common prayer. At the close of the prayer, as we have before described, bread and wine with water are brought. The president offers prayer and thanks for them, according to the power given him, and the congregation responds the Amen. Then the consecrated elements are distributed to each one, and partaken, and are carried by the deacons to the houses of the absent. The wealthy and the willing then give contributions according to their free will, and this collection is deposited with the president, who therewith supplies orphans and widows, poor and needy, prisoners and strangers, and takes care of all who are in want. We assemble in common on Sunday because this is the first day, on which God created the world and the light, and because Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples."

- Reading of the Gospels and the Prophets
- Sermon
- Prayer
- Lord's Table
- Offering

5. Calvin's order of worship

The order of public worship in Calvin's congregation at Strassburg was as follows: —

The service began with an invocation, a confession of sin and a brief absolution. Then followed reading of the Scriptures, singing,

and a free prayer. The whole congregation, male and female, joined in chanting the Psalms, and thus took an active part in public worship, while formerly they were but passive listeners or spectators. This was in accordance with the Protestant doctrine of the general priesthood of believers. The sermon came next, and after it a long general prayer and the Lord's Prayer. The service closed with singing and the benediction.

- Invocation
- Confession of sin and absolution
- Reading of Scriptures
- Singing
- Free Prayer
- Congregational chanting of psalms
- Sermon
- General Prayer and Lord's Prayer
- Singing
- Benediction

6. General Principle of modern reformed worship

A dialog – God speaks, we respond
 Preaching of the word is the jewel
 Everything else arranged to set it off to best effect

7. Order of Service in Grace

Meditation, prayer	
Call to Worship	God, taking initiative, calls us to worship Him. No higher calling exists than this.
Invocation	We seek His help to be able to worship aright
Hymn	We extol His greatness – akin to the Confession of His person we saw earlier
Reading of the Law	God speaks through His Law. We love this Law – it is holy and righteous and good. It searches us and convicts us of sin
Hymn	We sing a hymn of response to reading –

	confession & seeking grace yet worship - we are free from condemnation for sin
Offering	We bring God our offering – a mark of love we have for Him in light of debt we have been freed from
Prayer	Bring our praises, requests to Him
Sermon	God speaks to us through His Word
Quiet Prayer	We reflect on what God has said to us
Hymn	We respond in the hymn
Benediction	God's blessing is invoked upon us – grace to live according to all we have been commanded
Gloria Patri	We give glory to God

Quite similar to synagogue; fairly similar to Calvin

8. Conclusions

It is clear there are many ways to order worship
 To this extent, there is freedom within structure given in Scripture
 Important thing:
 Must be order, not chaos
 Must be conducive to God being worshipped according to the principles we have outlined in this series
 The reformed order has a certain logic underlying it
 Whatever the order we must worship with all our heart, soul, mind and strength
 Never blindly work through service but be active, alert

Note – the orders of worship for the synagogue, early church and Calvin are taken from *History of the Christian church* by Schaff, P., & Schaff, D. S.