

When the people of God gather on the New Covenant Sabbath (Heb. 4.9), we come to the fulfillment of the hopes and realities of the Temple institution; to heaven, to the presence of the Trinity, to adore and worship *as His Word sufficiently dictates* to renew the covenant that God made with Abraham, with a sacrifice much superior to his or any lamb or goat, we meet at the Table of the Lord, the very peace offering made by Christ Himself to be nourished by Him, a picture of the eschatological banquet in heaven.

We are the sacrifices of the new covenant; sacrifices are not abolished, they are transformed; sacrifices are still made, but not in a Temple in Jerusalem, but in the presentation of our bodies for worship every Lord's Day in the heavenly Jerusalem. Our bodies, unlike the sacrifices of the Old Covenant are not consumed in fire, but offered wholly and renewed mind, body and spirit by God for His service. (Rom. 12.1-4). Paul tells the reader that this new covenant worship is reasonable, that is, Christian worship is intelligible, orderly and *specifically mirrors that of the Old Temple*. Jesus as mediator of a new and better covenant has established the form of new covenant worship:

A New Temple: Jesus, as the new and final Temple of God; and His Body the local church.

New Jerusalem: worship is not tied to the physical Jerusalem, but Hebrews 12 says that we are brought to heaven on the Lord's Day for worship to meet with God, the angels and martyrs as the Temple of the Lord in heavenly places.

New Sacrifices: of praise, discipleship, of giving and service to others

New Sabbath and Feast days- the Lord's Day is the proper day of worship and rest in the new covenant. (Heb. 10.24).

New Passover: "as often as you celebrate it, do this in remembrance of me" - this new Passover is about a new exodus from sin through a new law-giver Jesus the King Messiah.

New Covenant Sign: circumcision was limited to male Israelites who represented their families to God; baptism is universal, given to all who profess Jesus as Lord and is to be given as the sign of the new covenant to their children, replacing circumcision; it is now therefore the Biblical requirement for access to the new covenant Passover, the Eucharist.

Moreover, there is a covenantal structure to baptism, the Lord's Supper, Marriage, church membership, church discipline, ordination, etc. *All of these rites and services assume a covenantal connection between the sign and the thing signified*; between baptism and salvation; between the Eucharist and the presence of the Lord Jesus; between marriage and the Trinity; also between baptism and the visible church; between the Lord's Supper and the visible church. These are not just symbols: God does meet us *by faith* in the discipline of prayer, the Scripture, baptism and the Eucharist, for these are real means of grace—the gifts of God for the people of God.

But the covenant itself does not guarantee the relationship of the believer to God; it defines it and our responsibilities. God's relationship to the believer is by His sovereign grace. He chose a people for Himself, the same for whom Christ died and who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit and given faith to believe, repent and do good works. The benefits of the covenant come only to those with the eyes of faith.

Our Historic Worship Liturgy

We follow therefore this Biblical-Temple pattern of *gathering, proclamation, response and sending*. As we come to Christ, as the new Temple, on the new Sabbath we are called to worship, we sing songs and psalms, we hear the Law of God, confess our sins, hear the assurance of pardon, hear righteous instruction, offer tithes and offerings, confess our faith in the Triune God, share the paschal meal and receive the benediction for another week of sweet communion with the covenant Lord and to serve wherever he has called us.

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ROCK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (est. 1770)



history, heritage, truth & tradition



our worship

Our worship at Rock Presbyterian Church reflects the Scottish liturgical tradition of the Book of Common Order and the 1689 Anglican Prayerbook

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The Worship Wars

There are strong opinions and arguments for *traditional*, "historic" worship (with attention to traditional liturgies, prayers, use of the church calendar, etc.), and for *contemporary*, "relevant" or "blended" worship (with attention to contemporary music styles, tastes, and culture). Also, the Puritan argument for the so-called "Regulative Principle of Worship," states the Scripture alone should determine or dictate worship and where it speaks to worship, we should definitely say "Amen!" and where it is silent, should we likewise be. This approach to the elements of Christian worship is typical of "low church," Mennonite, Congregational and historic Baptist churches. This is in contrast to the Anglican and Lutheran position on worship that what is not forbidden in Scripture is allowable for worship.

The "Covenantal Principle" of Worship

The Church of Scotland took a moderating position between the Puritans and Anglicans. This philosophy of worship has been recently called the "Covenantal Principle of Worship."¹ It recognizes the *sufficiency* of Holy Scripture to guide our worship and inform our worship, but it does not view Holy Scripture as a legal text with which to deduce the form of new covenant worship. For example, the Puritans eschewed observing the church calendar precisely because there is no command to observe it. However, Paul commends those who observe special days "unto the Lord" (Rom. 14). Equally, the Lord Jesus observed a Jewish day of remembrance--Hanukkah-- a day neither mentioned in the Law of God, nor anywhere commanded to be observed (See John 10:22ff).

The Worship Renewal Movement

In recent days there has been interest in a recovery of the Christian tradition of liturgical

worship among Presbyterians. John Knox who helped Thomas Cranmer create the *Book of Common Prayer*, constructed his own liturgy for Scotland and called it the *Book of Common Order*. Knox's liturgy was influenced by Calvin and contained fixed formularies for prayer, weddings, ordinations, etc. It was replaced by the more Puritan *Westminster Directory of Worship* (1647), a document of suggested forms rather than fixed, formal prayers. The worship of American Presbyterianism has been greatly influenced by the Puritans in England. While recognizing the greatness of the Westminster Directory, *the worship at Rock Presbyterian Church follows the Scottish liturgical tradition before the Puritan reforms*.

In the 1960's, there was a renewed interest in the mainline churches for "high-church worship" in recovering historic fixed formularies and use of the Christian Calendar. Efforts were made at a common collection of texts for a "revised common lectionary" in the mainline churches, based upon the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* and the innovations of *Vatican II*, 1965. A Presbyterian *Book of Common Worship* was published in 1966. There was equally renewed interest in returning to the wearing of clerical dress and the use of vestments for high church Episcopal priests, Anglo-Catholics and Lutheran ministers.

The Ethos of Presbyterian Worship

The Minister is Not a Priest

The Presbyterian faction in England as well as the Second Reformation in Scotland was distinctly Calvinist with regard to the sacraments and hence, with regard to the understanding of the office of the clergy. The Teaching Elder is not a mediating priest, and does not "pronounce" absolution for sins, nor does he have power conferred upon him to mediate grace so that the Eucharist is transformed, accidental or otherwise to the actual Body and Blood of Christ. Thus, we affirm the real presence of Christ with us *by faith*, we commune with Him in our fellowship one with another and in Him by the Holy Spirit.

The Teaching Elder has been set apart by the presbytery with *authority* to guard and distribute the sacraments (hence, he is a "steward of the mysteries," cf. 1 Cor. 4.1) under the authority of the presbytery to powerfully communicate the Gospel, perform marriages, funerals and pronounce the Benediction. This self-conscious understanding of ordination drives the reformed minister to see himself as under the authority of the Word of God; himself in need of an assurance of pardon, as much as anyone else. This is informed by the biblical doctrine of the imputation of Christ's active and passive obedience, not an "infused grace," as in Roman Catholic theology. The authority of the presbytery has been imputed or given to the Teaching Elder as much as he is under the covering of Christ's finished work for his sin.

The Geneva Gown verses Vestments

The Reformed movement, based upon John Calvin's lead, preferred the simple, plain dress of the academic gown with accompanying stole to identify the Teaching Elder. As noted above, this was so because of the self-conscious understanding of the office of the clergy. He is not a priest; hence he does not wear priestly vestments as mirrored in the Old Testament. Many in the Reformed tradition, particularly the Church of Scotland, wore (and still wear) the cassock (the parish "house-coat") underneath the preaching gown, accompanied by a preaching stole, academic hood (identifying his level of education) and in many cases "preaching bands."

Covenant Theology and Covenantal Worship

Covenant theology is a Biblical theology, in that it emphasizes that God has worked in human history by means of covenantal relationships (with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David) and those covenants have been updated and finalized in the giving of the New Covenant by the Covenant Lord Christ Jesus. New Covenant worship that is truly worship should reflect the pattern of Temple worship analogically. The Temple in Scripture is the Body of God in the Earth and becomes a motif in the New Testament scriptures for describing the Church as the people of God.

¹ Cf. Gore, R.J. *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle*. Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002.