

Our Worship

Part 8:
The Regulative Principle
Of Worship



1

Quotes



“Clearly, all of life is to be regulated by Scripture (Rom 12:1-2)...there is therefore, in one sense, a regulative principle for all of life...However, the Reformers (John Calvin especially) and the Westminster Divines...viewed the matter of corporate worship differently. In this instance, a general principle of obedience to Scripture is insufficient; there must be a specific prescription governing how God is to be worshiped corporately. In the public worship of God, specific requirements are made, and we are not free either to ignore them or add to them.”

- Derek Thomas

2

Quotes



“God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his Word”

- John Calvin
 (“On the Necessity of Reforming the Church”)

3

Definition



Our God demands to be worshipped. The Lord has graciously provided His people through special revelation, the Word, with the proper elements to worship Him. Furthermore, He commands us not to add to those means or to deviate from them.

4

Outline



- The Lord Demands to be Worshipped
- The Lord Provides the Elements for His Worship
- The Lord Commands Us to Not Deviate from those Provided Elements
- Areas of Freedom
- Common Objections
- Benefits of the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW)

5

The Lord Demands to Be Worshipped



Nature

Psalm 19:1-4 - The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge.³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Acts 17:28 - "In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring.'

6

The Lord Demands to Be Worshipped



Scripture

Psalm 19:7-8 – The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes”

Deuteronomy 6:4 - ⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Deuteronomy 6:13 - ¹³ It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.

Romans 12:1 - I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

7

The Lord Demands to Be Worshipped



Westminster Confession of Faith Ch XXI.I

- *The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and doeth good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might*

How, then, do we worship the Lord?

8

The Lord Provides the Means for His Worship



Old Testament Examples

Genesis 2:16-17 - ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Exodus 25:9 - ⁹ Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

- The phrase “as the Lord commanded” is repeated 18 times after the golden calf incident
- The same phrase is repeated 14 times in the book of Leviticus
- This pattern is pointed out by the author of Hebrews in 8:5

9

The Lord Provides the Means for Worship



Old Testament Examples

Deuteronomy 12:11 – ⁸ “You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, ⁹ for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you. ¹⁰ But when you go over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and when he gives you rest from all your enemies around, so that you live in safety, ¹¹ then to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name dwell there, there you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and the contribution that you present, and all your finest vow offerings that you vow to the Lord.

Psalms 132:13-14 - For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: ¹⁴ “This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it.

10

The Lord Provides the Means for Worship



Old Testament Examples

1 Kings 6:37-38 - ³⁷In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid, in the month of Ziv. ³⁸And in the eleventh year, in the month of Bul, which is the eighth month, the house was finished in all its parts, and according to all its specifications. He was seven years in building it.

1 Chronicles 28:11, 19 - ¹¹Then David gave Solomon his son the plan of the vestibule of the temple...¹⁹“All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the Lord, all the work to be done according to the plan.”

11

The Lord Provides the Means for Worship



New Testament Examples

John 4:21-24 - ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²²You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

12

Means of Grace



Prayer

1 Timothy 2:1-2, 8 - First of all, then, I urge that *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people*, ² for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way... ⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling

Philippians 4:6 - ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Matthew 6:5-13 - ⁵ "And when you pray..." ⁷ "And when you pray..." ⁹ Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven..."

13

Means of Grace



Sacraments

Matthew 28:19-20 - ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Acts 2:38 - ³⁸ And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ..."

14

Means of Grace



Sacraments

Luke 22:15-20 - ¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer...¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, “Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”

Private/Public

15

Means of Grace



Singing of Psalms and Hymns

Colossians 3:16 - ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Ephesians 5:18-19 - ¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody* to the Lord with your heart.

James 5:13 - ¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.

16

Means of Grace



Reading/Preaching the Word

Acts 15:21 - ²¹ For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”

Revelation 1:3 - ³ Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

Matthew 4:4 - “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

17

Means of Grace



Reading/Preaching the Word

Matthew 4:17 - ¹⁷ From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

2 Timothy 4:1-2 - I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Acts 2:42 - ⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 6:2 - ² And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables...”

18

Means of Grace



Westminster Confession of Faith Ch XXI

- **III.** - *Prayer with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men...*
- **V.** - *The **reading of the Scriptures** with godly fear; **the sound preaching**, and conscionable **hearing of the Word**, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence; **singing of psalms** with grace in the heart; as, also, the due administration and worthy **receiving of the sacraments** instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: besides **religious oaths**, and **vows**, **solemn fastings**, and **thanksgivings** upon special occasion; which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.*

19

The Lord Commands Us Not to Deviate From Those Provided Means



Westminster Confession of Faith Ch XXI.I

- *But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the **imaginations and devices of men**, or the **suggestions of Satan**, under any visible representation or **any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture**.*

Why is this so important a point?

- *“The human heart is a factory of idols...” – John Calvin*

20

The Lord Commands Us Not to Deviate From Those Provided Means



OT Examples

Exodus 20:4-5 - ⁴“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”

Leviticus 10:1-3 - Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’”

21

The Lord Commands Us Not to Deviate From Those Provided Means



OT Examples

Deuteronomy 4:1-2 - ²You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

Judges 21:25 - ²⁵In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

2 Samuel 6:6-7 - ⁶And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. ⁷And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.

22

The Lord Commands Us Not to Deviate From Those Provided Means



OT Examples

Jeremiah 19:4-5 - ⁴ Because the people have forsaken me and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their fathers nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, ⁵ and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, *which I did not command or decree*, nor did it come into my mind—

23

The Lord Commands Us Not to Deviate From Those Provided Means



NT Examples

Matt 15:7-9 - ⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:⁸ “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;⁹ in vain do they worship me, *teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*”

Colossians 2:20-23 - ²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations...according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in *promoting self-made religion* and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

24

The Lord Commands Us Not to Deviate From Those Provided Means



NT Examples

Romans 10:17 - ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

These are the reasons we do not deviate from the Means of Grace in our Worship service.

25

Areas of Freedom



Elements vs. Circumstances

- What is the precise order of our worship service?
- Should we sing or pray first?
- What passages of Scripture should be preached?
- How long should a sermon be?
- When should we meet on the Lord's Day?
- How often should we celebrate the Lord's Supper?
- What songs should we sing? How should we sing them?
- What instruments should we use? Should we have a choir? A projector? A Hymnal?

26

Areas of Freedom



Elements vs. Circumstances

1 Corinthians 15:40 - ⁴⁰ But all things should be done decently and in order.

- If all the Elements of a service are in place, there is a profound freedom with the circumstances.

27

Common Objections



“Show me the verse!”

“You’re being a legalist!”

- This kind of person will believe nothing unless there is an incredibly clear, point-by-point, verse explaining the RPW
- A common objection that is difficult to respond to quickly and succinctly
- Best approach: choose one narrative passage to walk through
- Make the person wrestle with the justice and holiness of the Lord

28

Common Objections



Normative Principle of Worship

We may freely worship God in any way as long as His positive commands are followed, none of His negative commands are broken, and the practice is agreeable with Church unity and peace

- Staunch on what we know and freedom in what we do not know
 - Lutherans, Anglicans, most Baptists, and Roman Catholics
 - Examples: rituals, drama, media, dancing, etc...
- “Worship is ultimately from the heart!”
 - This is a strong objection; Reformed folk would do well to not brush this off lightly

29

Common Objections



Response to the Normative Principle of Worship

- It is a Scriptural truth that worship begins at the heart-level
 - Deuteronomy 6:4; Hosea 6:6; 1 Samuel 17:6; etc...
 - Sometimes in Scripture, people doing the right thing are condemned
 - E.g. Jeremiah 6:20; Amos 5:21-23; Isaiah 1:11-15
- Scripture passages that seem to support the NPW
 - Namaan the Syrian (2 Kings 5)
 - Hezekiah’s Passover (2 Chronicles 30-33)
 - Gentile God-fearers (Acts 10)

30

Common Objections



Response to the Normative Principle of Worship

- All such examples of freedom are showcasing, not God's indifference, but His mercy
- God is the same then that He is today; we should see a high level of continuity between the two covenants

31

Benefits of the Regulative Principle of Worship



- Freedom from ever-changing, cultural pressures
- Freedom from fighting over preferences
- Freedom from burdening consciences
- Freedom to focus entirely on the center

32

References



- *Bible*
- *Westminster Confession of Faith*
- *The Church of Christ* – James Bannerman
- *Institutes of the Christian Religion* – John Calvin
- *Confessing the Faith: A Reader's Guide to the Westminster Confession of Faith* – Chad Van Dixhoorn
- *Westminster Confession of Faith* - G.I. Williamson