

The Regulative Principle of Worship (Part 1).

I. Introduction.

A. Review of introductory lesson: The Basis for Worship.

1. The need for the study. Discussed that it is an important and timely topic. Found that we are neither contemporary or traditional, because either of those categories carries its own unbiblical assumptions and presuppositions. Rather, we are covenantal and regulative.

2. The Nature of Worship.

a. Definition of covenantal worship: Adoration of God and service offered to God as Father through a Mediator, in dependence on the Holy Spirit, in response to the grace of God revealed in the gospel in acceptable communion.

b. Definition restated or expanded: Worship is the way in which gathered sinners saved by grace are allowed to hold communication and communion with God collectively and acceptably to render to Him the glory, honor, and submission which are His due.

c. Biblical terms and texts. Surveyed various ways in which worship is described. (Restate sample texts that were cut due to editing: Ex. 20:5 with Mt. 4:9-10: falling down in adoration; Ex. 3:12 with Phil. 3:3: serve as a slave; Ex. 28:35

with Acts 13:2: minister by doing acts of worship; Mt. 15:9: venerate; Col. 2:18: religious observance.)

3. Duty to Worship God: because He Created us; because He redeemed us; because of who He is and what He does. Duty extends to all of life broadly. Duty especially extends in narrow sense to private, family, & public worship, with public being most important. Psalm 87:2.

B. Today's Plan: complete Biblical Basis for Worship, & move into the Regulative Principle of Worship. First, to finish establishing Biblical Basis for Worship, we look at 3 purposes of worship and the Object of worship.

II. (Complete Biblical Basis from Worship Outline 1.)

III. The Regulative Principle Defined. (Discuss by question: what are Christians allowed to do in worship?) God regulates our worship of Himself by His word. In worship, we may only do what God commands in the Bible by explicit word or by good and necessary consequence.

A. The Definition of the Regulative Principle, in Understandable Terms.

1. Whatever God commands to be done in worship is required.
2. Whatever God prohibits in worship is forbidden.
3. **Whatever God *does not command* to be done in worship is forbidden. This is the element of the Bible's principle regarding worship that sets the Regulative Principle apart from the principles that others advocate and follow, and is the least perceived and understood by many, if not most, Christians.

B. The Statement of the Regulative Principle in our Standards: our secondary standards reflect what we confess the Bible teaches. We will look at how they state and teach the RPW, then we will spend the next entire lesson learning how the principle is drawn from the Word of God and confirmed in the Word of God by plain statements.

1. WCF 1.6 (READ).

a. Note: “nothing at any time is to be added” to what the word of God or what is deduced from it by good and necessary consequence gives as sufficient for faith and life, which includes worship. Thus, nothing is to be placed beside it as an authority; we have no right to invent new doctrine or worship. What does the WCF mean by “good and necessary consequence”? (Discuss.)

b. Note also the comment about the circumstances of worship. In Scripture. God regulates how He is to be worshiped in terms of the elements that He requires in worship, but He does not regulate every circumstance such as time of day on Sundays, etc. We will learn about those distinctions later.

2. WCF 20.2 (READ). Christian liberty means that we are free *to* obey God, no matter what any man says, and we are free *from* the doctrines and commandments of men, including in the area of worship.

3. WCF 21.1 (READ). Notice the 3 parts of the RPW: God must be worshiped as He has said in His revealed will; God must not be

worshiped according to ways He has forbidden (namely the imaginations of men or suggestions of satan); God must not be worshiped “in any other way not prescribed in Scripture,” which equates to “whatever God has not commanded is forbidden.”

4. WSC - 50: “What is required in the second commandment? The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His word.” 51 - “What is forbidden in the second commandment? The second commandment forbideth the worship of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His word.”
5. Heidelberg Catechism # 96 also states it: “What does God require in the second commandment? We are not to make an image of God in any way, nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His word.” Though this is not specifically the OPC’s secondary standard, it is one of the Reformed confessional documents and held by many of our sister churches.

C. Its Competitors.

1. Normative Principle of Luther: Whatever God does not forbid to be done in worship is allowable. Only what God prohibits is forbidden. What does this then imply about what God requires in worship? That, in the view of the Normative Principle, God specifies nothing in Scripture with regard to worship.
2. “Informed” Principle.

- a. John Frame's Redefined "Regulative" Principle. In his book, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, Frame says that he holds to the RPW and that his book is an application of it. However, he stealthily redefines the principle at first, then builds his entire case on a Regulative Principle that is not the Bible's Regulative Principle of Worship. It is a very similar approach to that of others, who call their approach the Informed Principle of Worship. It is the Normative Principle in disguise, for it allows application of a so-called general principle in almost any way possible, as long as it can be called "the true, the beautiful, and the good" (Frame's application).
- b. R. J. Gore, *Covenantal Worship: Reconsidering the Puritan Regulative Principle*. We must be careful to understand that when we described ourselves as covenantal, we were not placing ourselves in Mr. Gore's camp. Mr. Gore apparently takes an approach to worship similar to John Frame; Dr. Frame endorsed Mr. Gore's book. What must be remembered is that the RPW is not a Puritan principle, but a Biblical principle. If the Puritans understood and applied it properly, which they did, all well and good. But that is not the primary reason for us to follow it, though we should always be alert to the historical interpretation of the Bible by godly men.

- c. Informed Principle of Worship: Steve Schlissel, and others:
essentially the same as Frame's idea. It is the normative
principle in disguise. We will look at their objections to the
classical statement of the Regulative Principle, and defend it
successfully against them.
3. Can you think of any churches that follow the Normative Principle of
Worship rather than the Regulative Principle of Worship?