

The Regulative Principle of Worship (Part II).

I. The Regulative Principle Derived.

A. The Source of the RPW: the Second Commandment: Ex. 20:4-6. People mistake the mention of graven images here to refer to all idols; since most people equate idols with the worship of false gods, they simply make the 2nd commandment no more than the prohibition against false gods. But that is what the 1st commandment addresses; it says we must have no other gods before the true and living God, including any false gods and any idols that might represent them. The 2nd commandment deals with *how we are to worship* the true and living God. Thus, the 2nd commandment is usually overlooked with regard to understanding worship and the Biblical principle that regulates it.

B. The Derivation of the RPW.

1. God Establishes the Spirituality of Worship.

a. The 2nd Commandment gives a two-fold prohibition.

(1) Physical representations of God are forbidden, vs. 4.

(2) Worship to any object is forbidden, vs. 5.

b. Images, therefore, are forbidden, including images of Christ.

The Bible allows baptism and the Lord's Supper as the only allowable physical representations of Christ, and they are not set forth as images *per se*.

- c. Worshipping through images is also, therefore, forbidden.
2. God Establishes the Principle of Worship.
- a. Larger Catechism 99 teaches Biblical interpretive principles for the 10 Commandments. These draw the RPW out of the 2nd Commandment.
 - (1) 6). “That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded.” Implication: Therefore, worshipping through mental images is also forbidden, as is anything that may entice to the sin of improper worship, such as any invention of our own because these are the same kind of sins as making and worshipping physical representations or images of God.
 - (2) 4). “That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded.” Implications: Therefore, if we are forbidden to worship God according to our imaginations (see (1) above), then the contrary duty is commanded, and we are thus commanded to worship God according to His revelation instead; i.e., His Word.
3. Summary. This is the essence of the Regulative Principle of Worship. It has been derived from the 2nd Commandment. We must further draw out the deduction by good and necessary consequence

(i.e., valid logic applied to Scripture to draw a conclusion that God requires be drawn) that if worship must be according to His Word, then if He forbids something in worship by His Word, it is prohibited; if He commands something in worship by His Word, it is required. But also, if we are forbidden from worshiping according to our imaginations and required to worship only according to God's revelation, then anything that God does not command us to do in worship must be prohibited because it has to have come from our own imagination and not from His Word.

II. The Regulative Principle Defended.

A. Defended from Scripture.

1. Deut. 12:32 & its context. Note that it includes that third part of the RPW that sets it apart from unbiblical competitors: what God does not command to be done in worship must not be done. We are not allowed to add to His revelation or act without it when it comes to worship.
2. Mark 7:7-8; every tradition of man – first they neglected the Word, then they invalidated the Word. This is what happens when Christians pursue the traditions of men in worship.
3. Also Isa. 29:13; Jn. 4:21-24.
4. Scripture teaches the principle, then affirms that we are to worship God as His word commands.

B. Defended from the Nature of God and Covenant Revelation.

1. Job 11:7-10.
2. God brings us into covenant w/Himself by self-revelation.
3. We cannot know Him apart from special revelation and regeneration.
4. Thus, we must worship Him with whom we are in covenant according to His special revelation; i.e., His Word.

C. Defended from the Depravity of Man.

1. Due to our sin, only God can establish and permit our approach to Him.
2. Only God has the right to name the terms of our approach to Him.
3. Due to the influence of sin upon us, even when regenerate, if left to our own imaginations, we would go astray from the true worship of God, or from the worship of the true God. I.e., if we try to do it our own way, we will get it wrong. Cf. the golden calf in the wilderness. Thus, we must follow God's revelation, not our imaginations.

D. Defended from the Sufficiency of Scripture.

1. 2 Tim. 3:16.
2. WCF 1:6.
3. If we add to the Biblically defined elements of worship, we are in effect saying that we do not believe the Scripture to be sufficient in the area of worship.
4. To the regenerate mind, God's commandments in this matter are sufficient, just as the means by which He draws people to Christ, the foolishness of preaching, is sufficient.

- E. Defended from the Doctrine of Christian Liberty.
 - 1. WCF 20:2.
 - 2. Rom. 14:23.
 - 3. No one can require us to act against conscience, which is bound by the word of God. Some consciences simply need training.

- F. Defended from Biblical Examples.
 - 1. Nadab and Abihu: their punishment.
 - 2. Rejection of Saul's unprescribed worship.

- G. Defended from NT Application.
 - 1. Jn. 4:24.
 - 2. In Spirit: approach to God must be in a spiritual manner: as regenerated by the Spirit, approaching through Christ.
 - 3. In truth: by God's truth, that is, His revelation. We must worship God as He has revealed that He wants to be worshiped.