

The Characteristics of Worship, Part 3

I. Introduction.

A. Review: Elements. (Solicit definition.)

B. Review: Forms.

1. Scripture does not legislate them.

2. Scripture does guide us in determining them: The forms of worship must be in line with the truths of Scripture.

a. Is it wrong to use common prayer (predetermined and written forms)?
Is it wrong to use ONLY common prayer? Is it wrong for governments or even denominations to force common prayer, particular passages of Scripture, other people's sermons, or certain liturgies for holidays, etc., upon the local session, minister and congregation?

II. Circumstances: T. David Gordon: "Those considerations regarding how, when, where, and in what amount to perform the elements." Circumstances of worship are the things that help us to perform the elements of worship. Cf. WCF 1.6 - This refers to things that any public meeting needs to function, whether a church meeting for worship, a club meeting, a city council meeting, etc. Thus, circumstances are things that are peripheral, "around" the meeting, not "part of" the meeting.

A. The Ordering of Circumstances: 1 Cor. 14:40.

1. They are to be ordered by the officers of the church.

2. They are not to be ordered arbitrarily: WCF I: 6; Three governing guidelines, as interpretation, that George Gillespie gave.

- a. It must not be an element, but something truly peripheral, concerning worship.
- b. It must be something we cannot determine from Scripture; Scripture is silent about it, specifically.
- c. It must be something which the officers of the church have sufficient reason for doing. Having met the 1st 2 conditions does not mean that “anything goes.” We must use great caution in adapting things from the contemporary culture. We must be certain that what we use is not contrary and harmful to God’s worship.

B. The Illustration of Circumstances.

1. Jeremiah Burroughs’s definition (*Gospel Worship*): “It’s true that there are some things in the worship of God that are natural and civil helps, and there we do not need to have a command. For instance, when we come to worship God the congregation meets. They must have a convenient place to keep the air and weather from them. Note, this is only a natural help, and so far as I use the place of worship as a natural help, I need have no command. But if I will put anything in a place beyond what it has in its own nature, there I must look for a command, for if I account one place more holy than another, or think that God should accept worship in one place rather than another, this is to raise it above what it is in its own nature.”
2. Advent candles: according to the above definition, candles would be considered a circumstance of worship that is allowable only if the congregation were using them to give light; this is the natural use of a candle.

If we use candles to add symbolic significance to the worship service, such as with advent candles, we are violating the Regulative Principle of Worship because they are no longer circumstances, but elements for which we have no command in Scripture.

C. (Fun) Discussion.

1. Do we order circumstances in a certain way because they are old? Because they are traditional? Because they are contemporary? None of the above: because they are the best way for our congregation to carry out the public worship of God in a manner that glorifies Him and magnifies His word according to His name, as determined by the elders of this church. Can we use old? Traditional? Contemporary? Yes.
2. Overhead projectors: Allowable, or not? (Allowable, if the best way.) Why do we use hymnals instead of an overhead projector? (Better way for us worship to use the printed page than a visual medium; less distracting to worship than putting the screen up and down in the cafeteria, since the screen is right in the middle, pulpit would need to be moved for every hymn, etc.) For what reason might an overhead projector be considered the best alternative for a particular congregation? (Unable to afford hymnals, etc.)
3. Music: hymn tunes: melodies to which various hymns and esp. Pss. are set. Scripture does not command us to use particular melodies, arrangements, etc., to which to set any given Psalm, hymn, or spiritual song. Form, or circumstance? (Circumstance: they help us to perform the element of singing praises to God, and the tune is not the content of the song itself; the lyrics are.

Tunes are used as they are in their own nature.) Ought the session to determine that any tune may be used at any time for any psalm, hymn, or spiritual song? (No.) What helps us determine what tunes to use? (Appropriateness for worship in presenting the varied affections and emotions with which we respond to God as He gives us the truth of His Word applying to the varied modes of the Christian's and the church's life, with proper respect for God and motive to glorify Him; tune that does not so reflect the contemporary culture that it invites worldliness into the church, or tempts the people to become worldly; in same light, tune that does not reflect the uncontrolled nature of the unbelieving world or its wild abandon to its lusts; tune that matches the mood, topic, or content of psalm, hymn, or spiritual song is best.)

4. Instruments. How do we determine what instruments to use? (We must use instruments according to their nature if they are to remain circumstances. If an instrument was designed to accompany voice, it fulfills its nature when we use it to accompany the singing of praises. The session should approve the use of those which best help us to sing.) What about guitars—allowable, or not? (Yes, if session determines that this is what the people are most used to singing to.)