

The Free Presbyterian Church in Cloverdale - Adult Sunday School Class  
*The Westminster Assembly 1643 -1649*  
*The Men, Their Times & Their Work* Study #8

## Applying the Regulative Principle:

“Man is notoriously a creature of extremes...”<sup>1</sup> The Quakers were guilty of going to one extreme adopting silent worship while the Charismatics and Emergent Church runs to great excess.

### W.C.F. Chapter 21 paragraph 1

The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth 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. **But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped 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.**

## Avoiding Extremism When Applying the Regulative Principle

These balanced statements [within the W.C.F.] avoid the extreme of allowing into the church’s worship and government whatever is not expressly forbidden in the Word and the opposite extreme of **demanding that every detail of our practice should have an explicit command** of Scripture before it is allowable. Many things - e.g. the time and frequency of church services, the particular order of service in public worship, the length of services and sermons, the taking of minutes in session meetings etc. – are not given us in Scripture.

The W.C.F. Ch. 1 Sect 6 states: “and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.”

**A.A. Hodge commented on the Confessions statement:** “They [the Scriptures] do not descend in practical matter into details, but, laying down general principles, leave men to apply them on the exercise of their natural judgment, in the light of experience, and in adaptation to changing circumstances, as they are guided by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit. This liberty, of course, is allowed only within the limits of the strict interpretation of the principles taught in the Word, and in the legitimate application of those principles, and applies to the regulations of the practical life of the individual and of the Church, in detailed adjustments to changing circumstances.”<sup>2</sup>

## Criteria to follow in Applying the Regulative Principle

1. Worship should be Scriptural
  - i. There should be a primary focus on reading and sound exposition of Scripture
2. Worship should be objective God ward not to please men. It is for the glory of God Sh. Cat #1. Heidelberg Cat. #96
  - i. Avoid appeals merely to the human senses apart from teaching aids.
3. Worship should be marked by simplicity - avoid ostentation and pretensions that are intended to impress men with the appearance of things. The aesthetic value is to be in the order of approaching God with reverence not showy ceremonies.

<sup>1</sup> A.W. Pink Interpretation of the Scriptures pg 7

<sup>2</sup> Cited by Dr. Alan Cairns in Dictionary of Theological Terms on Regulative Principle

4. Festive Days relating to Jewish Calendar or other traditions cannot be legislated, thereby made a duty.
5. Man pleasing changes, gimmicks, and inventions are to be avoided.
6. Worship includes singing of the whole congregation O.T. mandate Example of Christ with Disciples in Matt. 26:30, Eph. 5:18-20.
7. Singing by the congregation ought to be unto the Lord from a heart of praise (Eph. 5:19).

### **Exclusive Psalmody an Extreme Application of Regulatory Principle**

1. It is true that Ch. 21 of W.C.F. mentions singing of Psalms but does not mention hymns
2. It is a fact that nonconformists and Presbyterians in the majority only sung Psalms at the time of Westminster Assembly.
3. Hymnology took on a new life in the 1700's pioneered by men like Benjamin Keach and Isaac Watts against certain opponents of Hymn singing in churches.
4. Obviously over time Hymn signing became more popular and accepted in Protestant Churches and even amongst some Presbyterians.

### **Was the introduction of Hymn Singing Biblical?**

1. The Regulative principle was still applied to singing of hymns
2. The essential criterion is that Scripture should regulate the truth of the content of a hymn
3. The name "Jesus Christ" does not appear in the 150 psalms
4. Eph. 5:19 does not say to sing psalms, psalms and more psalms.

**Benjamin Keach**, one of the leaders in introducing hymns, argued that there was spiritual declension in the churches using Psalms only. He believed that the 'want of God's presence' was partly due to 'the neglect of this great duty' of congregational singing. [This was John Calvin's conviction also in Geneva. Calvin encouraged congregational singing as part of the spiritual life of the church. There was a move to ban singing altogether in an effort to model the church on the Jewish synagogue. Some extreme adherents to the regulative principle argue that the model of the temple is to be abandoned for the model of the synagogue therefore musical instruments should be ruled out.]

**We do not believe that the extraordinary gifts are in the church today.** So to disallow everything that is not inspired is to reduce worship to non vocal silent worship after the fashion of the Quakers.

We allow prayer to be freely offered without reading Biblical prayers, just as we allow preaching to be freely crafted by ministers who are grounded in the word. So in spiritual singing songs may be composed freely by mature Christians and selected on their theological merit.

#### **Benjamin Keach stated:**

'...preaching must be learned and improved...singing is easily learned...natural gifts, as well as spiritual, are to be improved to the honour of God...Is not reading of God's Word an ordinance of the Gospel... and must not people learn to read...grace makes natural gifts and arts to become spiritual...'

"Our sermons are no more made for us in God's Word than our hymns, and we have equal direction in both these weighty cases." \_Benjamin Keach

Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*. Vol. 1. (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 461-462. Schaff goes on to list a selection of songs in the New Testament, for example, "at the birth of the Saviour, (Luke 2:14); the "Nunc dimittis" of Simeon, (Luke 2:29); the "Magnificat" of the Virgin Mary, (Luke 1:46); the "Benedictus" of Zacharias (Luke 1:68); the thanksgiving of Peter after his miraculous deliverance (Acts 4:24-30); the speaking with tongues in the apostolic churches, which, whether song or prayer, was always in the elevated language of enthusiasm; the fragments of hymns scattered through the Epistles, (Eph. 5:14, I Tim. 3:16, II Tim. 11:-13, I Peter 3:10-12); and the lyrical and liturgical passages, the doxologies and antiphonies of the Apocalypse, (1:5-8; 3:7, 14; 5:9, 12, 13; 11:15, 17, 19; 15:4; 19:6-8)."

### **We must continue to apply the Regulatory Principle in Choice of Hymns and Music**

To allow someone who is not soundly converted and theologically grounded showing spiritual grace in his life to lead worship is to invite carnality and worldly mindedness into worship.

There must be grace as well as gifts. The neglect of this is a common mistake.

In contemporary churches worship leaders are given a free hand to lead the congregation in music which is distinctly different from the ministry of the word. Often worship is conducted by youth to impress youth. This is contrary to the will of God and leads to decline in the spiritual life of the congregation.

#### **Shorter Catechisms:**

**Quiz on Nov 26<sup>th</sup>** Teens against Adults (Review of whole term Sept – Nov)

