

Biblical Worship #3

To summarize the regulative principle of worship (RPW), the positive aspect of the RPW teaches that we *must* include in worship those elements which Scripture commands. The negative aspect of the RPW, *forbids* we do anything in worship that is *not* commanded.

So what has God commanded us to do in worship? What should be included in our ordinary, corporate worship services?

WCF 21.5. *The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear (Luke 4:16-17; Acts 15:21; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 5:27; Rev 1:3), the sound preaching (2 Tim 4:2; Acts 5:42) and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence (James 1:22; Acts 10:33; Matt 13:19; Heb 4:2; Isa 66:2), singing of psalms with grace in the heart (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19; James 5:13; 1 Cor 14:15); as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.*

DPW 2.2 *The scriptural elements of ordinary public worship are prayer, the singing of Psalms, the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word of God, the presentation of tithes and offerings, and the celebration of the sacraments.*

Pastor Kevin DeYoung: *“What do we know they [early Christians] did in their Christian worship services in the Bible? We know they sang the Bible. We know they preached the Bible. We know they prayed the Bible. We know they read the Bible. We know they saw the Bible in the sacraments. We don’t see dramas or pet blessings or liturgical dance numbers. So why wouldn’t we want to focus on everything we know they did in their services? Why try to improve on the elements we know were pleasing to God and practiced in the early church?”*

We generally do not have to persuade our non-Presbyterian brothers/sisters that prayer, singing, preaching, and the sacraments should be included in worship. We have to persuade them that these elements alone are sufficient!

Elements vs Circumstances in worship

- Elements are the “what” of worship – the fixed and unchanging parts (prayer, reading and preaching of Scripture, sacraments)
- Circumstances are the “how” of worship – conditions that are most conducive to worship that is decent and orderly. (where to meet, time to meet, type of chairs, lighting, heating system, etc)

Circumstances in worship are negotiable and are left up to individual congregations to determine. Elements of worship are specified by Scripture and are therefore not negotiable. God determines the elements of worship.

Now that we know what is to be included in our worship service, the next question is how exactly should our corporate worship service be ordered, or set-up?

DPW 2.1 *The Scriptures do not prescribe a fixed order of worship, but so that all things may be done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40), it is desirable that the exercises of worship be conducted in a biblical, thoughtful, dignified, and edifying manner.*

Covenantal aspect of worship

God is our God and we are His people. God promises and His people respond to His mercy in obedience and consecration. God acts in redemption, and we respond in gratitude. God speaks to us, and we respond in praise. Following this pattern, Christian worship is inherently covenantal.

Call to Worship*Praise**Prayer***Old Testament reading of Scripture****New Testament reading of Scripture***Praise**Prayer***Sermon***Prayer**Praise***Benediction****God speaking***Covenant people respond**Covenant people respond***God speaking****God speaking***Covenant people respond**Covenant people respond***God speaking***Covenant people respond**Covenant people respond***God speaking****Does “liturgy” fall within the RPW?**

- By its strict definition, liturgy is worship following set orders, including set prayers, confessions, and other passages, often recited in unison by the congregation as a whole. (Episcopalian, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox churches)
- By looser definition, liturgy is simply another term for “order of worship”.

Matt 6:9 “In this manner, therefore, pray” In other words, when you pray, follow this pattern. This prayer is an example of how you should pray.

Luke 11:2 “When you pray, say...” This statement is taken as an endorsement of a high-church style, liturgical service because Christ apparently is endorsing a set form of prayer in His church.

The Lord’s prayer is an excellent proof text for the Presbyterian idea of a directory which gives an example of how to pray instead of the set forms of a prayer book.

Proponents of liturgy advocate two reasons:

- 1) Order in worship

Presbyterian answer: RPW

- 2) Desire to have entire congregation participate in worship.

Presbyterian answer: Congregants participate in the sacraments, prayer, the singing of Psalms, and the hearing of the Word read and preached.

“Our central consideration in examining the liturgical concept of public worship is on whether or not common liturgical forms of devotion are biblical. We are not questioning the biblical right to say the Lord’s prayer in public worship. Nor are we saying that carefully crafted written prayers are always wrong. It is the idea of a set liturgy that is used week after week that sets aside prayers from the heart that we are contending with.” – Brian Schwertley

Properly observed, the RPW liberates worshippers from the tyranny of churches that impose on their people elements of public worship that have no biblical warrant.