

Biblical Worship #2 – The Regulative Principle of Worship

WCF 21.1. *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.*

Regulative Principle of Worship - that which is not commanded, either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures, is prohibited to the church. If a practice cannot be supported by Scripture, it should not be allowed in the worship service. View traditionally held by Reformed and Presbyterian churches

Normative Principle of Worship – that which is not expressly forbidden in Scripture, is permitted. If a practice is not shown to be forbidden in Scripture, then it is acceptable to allow it in the worship service, i.e. dance, dramas, special songs, etc. View held by majority of modern evangelical churches, including Baptist, Pentecostal/Charismatic, Lutheran, etc.

Exodus 20:1-6 *And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 “You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*

Q. 51. What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The second commandment forbiddeth the worshiping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.

(See WLC 107-110 for further on 2nd commandment)

Other examples of RPW in scripture:

- Golden calf (Exodus 32) unacceptable for use in worship because unauthorized
- Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10)
- Rejection of Saul’s un-prescribed worship (1 Sam 15) – God rejects Saul’s sacrifice because it is not what God had commanded from Him. God says to obey is better than sacrifice.
- Jesus rejection of Pharasaic worship (Mark 7) – Jesus quotes from Isaiah and says, “...in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”
- Jesus cleansing of the temple (John 2) – Our Lord is “zealous” for His worship and hates false worship
- Jesus meeting with Samaritan woman (John 4) - Worship must be conducted with both the right attitude AND the right form, with both Spirit and truth
- Rejection of “will-worship” or self-made religion (Col 2) – Worship according to human commands, precepts, and teachings becomes worship NOT according to God’s commands, precepts, and teachings

Deut 12:32 *Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.*

God does not change. He is still “jealous” for His worship today. He still rejects worship that He has not prescribed or approved, just as He did over and over again in His Word. Man also does not change. Our sinful hearts are “idol factories”, regularly trying to worship God falsely. Therefore, we must go to Scripture to find how God commands and expects us to properly worship Him, rather than relying on our own imagination to determine how God will be worshipped.