

**Please turn in your copies of God's Word to Deuteronomy chapter 12. We will be considering verses 30 through 32 this morning. We are still in what could be called the introduction to this sermon series on worship in which we are looking at the basic principles of worship in order to then get into the specifics of the parts of worship. We have consider what worship is. Last time we considered why public worship is necessary for the life of a believer. This morning we ask yet another fundamental question concerning worship, and that is how we are to worship. Let us turn our attention now to the reading of God's Holy Word as we seek to answer this question. Hear now the inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word of our Lord from Deuteronomy chapter 12 beginning at verse 30.**

**\*Read Deuteronomy 12:30-32\***

**\*Pray\***

**Within the protestant faith there are two prevailing principles of worship that guide how most churches conduct their services. The most popular one has been come to be known as the normative principle of worship. This principle states that whatever is not forbidden by God to be done in worship is permissible. This is the position of the Lutherans, most evangelical churches, and even that of Rome. It is this guiding principle that gives rise to the wide variance in worship styles among different churches. Some are very high-church and liturgical, incorporating vestments and candles and incense and the church calendar. This is most easily seen in Lutheran, Anglican, and even some Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Others are more low-church, with very little liturgical elements. These can be anything from your traditional Baptist churches to the modernist non-denominational churches. You could see hand-bell performances, choirs, rock bands, light shows, old time hymns, modern music from the radio, skits, stages decorated to look like football fields, and basically anything else you could think of. What's interesting is that, while this seems to be a very wide variety of worship practices, they all are operating from the same**

**principle: anything that God does not forbid to be done in worship is permissible. This has led to great conflicts within the church over what is the preferred style. You may remember several years ago talk about the worship wars within evangelical churches over whether to be traditional and sing old time hymns to a piano or organ, or to be contemporary and sing the modern songs with a full band accompanying. Very quickly you will see that this is a major dividing line between those who hold to this normative principle and those of us who hold to what's called the regulative principle of worship. Our Confession of Faith states, "But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited to his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture." Simply put, whatever is not commanded by God to be done in worship is forbidden. Our text today is the basis for this principle, and we will see from it the implication for our worship. So the theme of our time together today is that the Lord regulates how He is to be worshipped in the Scriptures. We will consider this theme under three heads: first, that divine warrant is required; next, that strict obedience is commanded; and finally, we will seek to answer some objections which have been raised against this principle.**

**First let us consider that divine warrant is required. The Lord says, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it." It is those things which the Lord commands that are to be done, particularly in regards to how He is to be worshipped. This is because of who God is. He is the Sovereign over all, the King of kings, the Lord of all creation, the only true and living God. That is why He tells His people that He is not to be worshipped in the ways of the heathen in verse 30, "Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise." Matthew Henry says, "They must not so much as enquire into the modes and**

forms of idolatrous worship. What good would it do to them to know those depths of Satan? Rev. 2:24. It is best to be ignorant of that which there is danger of being infected by.” Friends, why would you look to those outside the will of God to determine how you are to worship Him? What height of wickedness it is to seek counsel from the sons of Belial and incorporate their ways into the worship of Jehovah. Verse 31 goes on to call these practices an abomination to God, “Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God: for every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.” Because their idolatrous customs were an abomination to the Lord, the incorporating of them into His worship would make even that an abomination and an affront to Him by which they should give Him honor, and by which they hoped to obtain His favor. Brothers and sisters, this is a great evil, and yet thousands of churches across the world are doing this exact thing. This is the sin of syncretism, taking that which is pagan and wicked and painting it to have the appearance of being Christian. This was one of the great sins of Israel, it was one of the great sins within the early church, and it is one of the great prevailing sins throughout the ages. Satan would love nothing more than to infiltrate, deceive, and destroy Christ’s church. There is no easier way for him to do this than by infiltrating the worship practices and corrupting them with his own suggestions. Do not fall prey to this great sin.

But it is not just protection from the schemes of satan that Jehovah regulates His worship. Divine warrant is required because of His royal position as Sovereign. If you recall back to our first sermon in this series when we looked at what worship is, you will remember that worship is service. It is service rendered unto the Lord because He is the King and we are His people. He is worthy of praise because he is the Sovereign over all and has all things in subjection to Him. Because God is the sole object of religious worship, it is His prerogative to prescribe the mode of it. He is a jealous God, jealous for His worship. He will not share His glory with another. This is the basis for the second commandment found

**in Exodus chapter 20, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.” The first commandment tells us who we are to worship, but the second commandment tells us how we are to worship. The second commandment doesn’t say that God is jealous of His people worshipping false gods. No, it says He is jealous of His people worshipping Him in a way that He had not commanded. Remember the incident with the golden calf at the base of Mount Sinai, while Moses was still atop the mountain, and before this commandment was even given. Who was it that was worshipped in the calf? It was Jehovah. Exodus 32:3-5, “And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the Lord.” Or remember Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus chapter 10, “And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”**

**Friends, we must be careful that whatever is done in the worship of the Lord has divine warrant. To fail to do so is to not only violate the second commandment, but to incur the wrath of God. Remember what happened to those who were involved in the golden calf incident. “And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every**

man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.” What happened to those two sons of Aaron? “And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.” Friends, without divine warrant at best your worship will not be found acceptable in the sight of the Lord, and at worst it will incur His righteous judgement and may even lead to your destruction. Anything that happens in the worship of God, whether public, private, or in family worship must come from the commands of God or it is an abomination to Him. Friends, divine warrant is required.

Next, we see that strict obedience is commanded. Adherence to this principle is not a suggestion or even a matter of wisdom or Christian prudence, but instead it is a command from God Himself. “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” You must observe to do what thing soever He commands you. It is not an option, but a command. Children, if your parents tell you to do something, what are you supposed to do? You do whatever it is that they commanded you. If you don’t then there are consequences such as spankings or time out. Adults, if your boss tells you to do something, are you expected to do it? Absolutely. To not do so would be insubordination and would likely result in you either being chastised or even fired. If the government tells you to do something (understand we are talking about lawful things), then you are expected to obey them. To not obey is to incur the wrath of the sword. Throughout most of history disobedience to the king would mean the death penalty. So when the King of kings, the Sovereign over all things, the Lord of the universe commands you to do something, what is expected of you? Is anything other than absolute obedience to the commands of the Lord acceptable? Of course not! To not obey the commands of the Lord is nothing but high-handed sin. What is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. Simply put, sin

**is not doing what God commands you to do, or doing what He commands you not to do.**

**So what is this command that you are to observe? “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” The command is that we are not to add unto the things prescribed by God, nor diminish from them. On this Calvin writes, “By forbidding the addition, or diminishing of anything, he plainly condemns as illegitimate whatever men invent of their own imagination; whence it follows that they, who in worshipping God are guided by any rule save that which He Himself has prescribed, make to themselves false gods; and, therefore, horrible vengeance is denounced by Him against those who are guilty of this temerity.” Friends, you must not add to the worship of God any inventions of your own, under pretense of making the parts of worship either more significant or more magnificent, nor diminish from it, under pretense of making it more easy and practicable. You also cannot set aside anything that the Lord has commanded to be done, but you must observe to do all that, and that only, which God has commanded. This principle is not new here in Deuteronomy chapter 12 either. We see nearly identical language back in chapter 4, “Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” And yet this sin is found all throughout Scripture. Cain’s insufficient sacrifice, the worshippers of the golden calf, Korah and his co-conspirators, Nadab and Abihu, and the list goes on and on.**

**And yet the people of God do not seem to learn their lesson. Jeroboam established a feast day which he had devised in his own heart. The Jeremiah speaks of the wickedness of the people’s worship during his time in 7:31, “And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn**

**their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my heart.” It was not the heinous act of sacrificing their sons and their daughters in the fire that the Lord is highlighting as the wickedness of the people, but the improper worship that they rendered by doing something which was so foreign to Him that he says not only did He not command them to do it, but it never even came into His heart. So the question then is if Jehovah has consistently commanded His people to worship Him in a certain way and any manner of worship not prescribed by Him was deemed a sinful abomination and resulted very frequently in their destruction, why then would you be so foolish to attempt to offer Him worship He has not commanded? The question we should always be asking ourselves every time we come into worship is ‘has God commanded this’. If the answer is no to anything that is done in worship then it must be reformed. This is true of our individual worship practices, as well as our worship corporately. This regulative principle of worship must be the basis for why we do what we do. Disobedience to this command of the Lord will not only be an affront to the holy and righteous God who we profess to worship, but will bring us under His just judgement. Why is the evangelical church in such a terrible position today? Because they have forsaken the commands of the Lord. Why are Reformed churches so weak and sickly? Because we have allowed impurities and perversions to corrupt our practices. If you want to see the church thrive, obey the Lord. He promises to bless faithfulness. Friends, you must realize that this is not an option, but that strict obedience is commanded.**

**This principle is plain to see from Scripture, so why then do the majority of professing believers not practice it? There are a myriad of reasons that can be given for why people reject this Biblical principle, but time forbids us to examine in depth all of them. Instead, I would like to spend the closing minutes of our time together answering some of the most common objections you will experience. Probably the most heard objection to this principle is that it focuses on the Old Testament but neglects the New. They**

**argue that this command for only observing in worship what the Lord commands is part of the ceremonial system, but in the New Testament there is freedom. But Christ Himself affirms this principle in Mark 7:7-8, “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do.” Jesus cites these words from the book of the prophet Isaiah, disclosing that there is a continuity of principle between Old and New Testament. Yes, there are changes involved in abrogation of the ceremonial law, but there is no change in the divine prerogative of appointing the worship to be rendered by the Church. William Young shows that this divine prerogative is part of Christ as the mediatorial King, “Christ is the sole Head and King over His body, the Church. In the exercise of His headship and kingship, the Lord Jesus Christ has appointed the ordinances of His house. This applies in particular to the public worship of the New Testament Church.” To say that this principle is reserved only for the Old Covenant people of God is to strip Christ of His crown rights, something which every person professing His name should shudder at the thought of.**

**Another very common objection is that this principle is legalism and violates liberty of conscience. We’ve already seen that Christ says the Pharisees, those who truly were legalists, were guilty of violating this principle by imposing their man-made traditions upon others. The Apostle Paul speaks on this as well, calling this imposition of man-made traditions and regulations ‘will-worship’ in Colossians 2:20-23, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.” Robert Shaw in his exposition of the Confession of Faith points out that this is what happens when this**



regulative principle of worship is ignored, “To introduce into the worship of God what may be deemed significant ceremonies, under the pretext of beautifying the worship, and exciting the devotion of the worshippers, is to be guilty of superstition and will-worship.” It is absurd to me that people think obedience to what God commands is legalism, but yet they think it is freedom to impose man-made innovations upon others. The only way in which a church can worship God and protect liberty of conscience is to observe the regulative principle, to worship as God has commanded. It liberates worshipers from the tyranny of churches that impose on their people elements of public worship that have no biblical warrant. Friends, nothing you are instructed to do in worship here comes from the innovation of man or out of personal preference. It is in Biblically regulated worship that true freedom is found.

The final objection that I feel needs to be addressed is that while it may be true that God took improper worship so seriously he killed people because of it, He is much more gracious now. After all, the majority of churches don't follow this principle and they are not being struck dead, so God must be more lenient. Friends, if this thought ever crosses your mind immediately repent of it. How dare you play fast and loose with God's righteous indignation. Is the death of just one person in all of human history for the sin of unauthorized worship not enough to strike terror into your heart? Do you not fear God? But friends, not only is it tempting God, but this notion that New Testament worship is safe compared to Old Testament worship is absolutely false. What do we see in Acts chapter 5 when Ananias and Sapphira withheld their gift from the Lord? They were struck dead. What does Paul say in 1 Corinthians 11 about the danger of eating and drinking communion in an unworthy manner? “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” And what do we see in the Epistle to the Hebrews, those who would have been very familiar with the story of Nadab and Abihu? “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be

**moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.” Dear saints, New Testament worship is not safer. God does not give a pass for will-worship in this new dispensation because He is more gracious than before. That is rubbish. No, New Testament worship is just as dangerous, if not more, than that of Old, because you don’t have an earthly priest entering the presence of God for you, but instead you enter His throne room yourself. The warning against improper worship is clear: the Lord very well may take your life as a judgement for it.**

**Brothers and sisters, the pattern for true worship is laid out for you in the Word. Nothing else but what God has commanded can be brought into His worship, for it will profane what He has made holy. Do you dare think you can improve upon what He has instituted? Do you dare think that you can introduce your own innovations into His worship? Friends, if we do not obey this command, if we do not observe this principle, then we have no reason to think that Jehovah will accept our worship. We are told to worship Him in Spirit and in truth, so why would we neglect this truth that is so plain in Scripture. Dear saints, for the sake of yourselves, for the sake of the church, and most importantly for the sake of Jehovah’s holy name, never forget this principle that the Lord regulates how He is to be worshipped in the Scriptures.**