

The Free Presbyterian Church in Cloverdale - Adult Sunday School Class
The Westminster Assembly 1643 -1649
The Men, Their Times & Their Work ***Study #7***

Activity In Church Services	Allowed by Contemporary Evangelical churches today	Allowed by Anglicans	Allowed by Rome	Allowed by English Puritans	Allowed by Scripture
Use of Crosses					
Prayer with Candles					
Invented Ceremonies					
Bare heads for ladies / Capes for men					
Drunkenness					
Idols /Images/ pictures of Christ for worship					
Masses					
Vows of celibacy					
Mandatory Religious Holidays					
Musical Instruments					
Casual whispering in Church					
Hymns along with Psalms ¹					

Instituted Worship - Regulative or Normative? How should we think about the Worship of God?

The Puritan Dr. William Ames (1576-1633) had a treatise with 45 points outlining godly worship. He strongly taught the regulative principle of worship and **was known and quoted in the colonies of the New World for his theology more than Calvin and Luther combined.**

“The Puritan principle of Worship was no invention of the Puritans. On the contrary, it is the principle regulative of Worship formulated by Calvin and adopted by all the Reformed Churches, as will appear from a consideration of passages in the writings of Reformed writers and the Reformed creeds. The reformed view of the principle regulative of the external worship of God stands out by way of contrast with the Lutheran view.

LUTHERANS USED THE NORMATIVE PRINCIPLE Lutherans have held that what is not forbidden in the Word of God may be allowed in the Worship of God. Ceremonies in worship are thus regarded as to a large extent indifferent (*Adiaphora*), i.e. things neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures... .The Reformed view has uniformly been that only that which is prescribed by the Word of God may be introduced into the Worship of God.

¹ **Ian Murray, *Should the Psalter be the Only Hymnal of the Church?*** (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 13. John Ball who died in 1640 (before the Westminster Assembly) prepared the way for the Assembly spoke of the free use of hymns in worship. As did all the Puritans with the exception of John Cotton.

Calvin formulated this regulative principle with clarity and applied it with great consistency in the Reformation at Geneva. It is implicit in his celebrated definition of pure and genuine religion as "confidence in God coupled with serious fear -fear which both includes in it willing reverence, and brings along with it such legitimate worship as is prescribed by the law."²

The Regulative Principle in Worship:

by Dr. C. Matthew McMahon (A Puritan's Mind)³

The Regulative Principle was given its classical and definitive statement in the reformed Confessions formulated in the 17th century. It is stated in Chapter 21 paragraph 1 in the Westminster Confession:

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.[1] **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.**[2]

1. Rom. 1:20; Psa. 19:1-4a; 50:6; 86:8-10; 89:5-7; 95:1-6; 97:6; 104:1-35; 145:9-12; Acts 14:17; Deut. 6:4-5
2. Deut. 4:15-20; 12:32; Matt. 4:9-10; 15:9; Acts 17:23-25; Exod. 20:4-6, John 4:23-24; Col. 2:18-23

These balanced statements 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."

Simply the Regulative Principle States this: True worship is only commanded by God; false worship is anything not commanded. This was the Puritan's view of worship.

As Samuel Waldron has said, "It seems that one of the major intellectual stumbling blocks which hinders men from embracing the Regulative Principle is that it involves the idea that the church and its worship is ordered in a regulated way different from the rest of life. In the rest of life God gives men the great precepts and general principles of his word and within the bounds of these directions allows them to order their lives as seems best to them. He does not give them minute directions as to how they shall build their houses or pursue their secular vocations. The Regulative principle, on the other hand, involves a limitation on human initiative in freedom not characteristic of the rest of life. It clearly assumes that there is a distinction between the way the church and its worship is to be ordered and the way the rest of human society and conduct is to be ordered. **Thus, the Regulative Principle is liable to strike many as oppressive, peculiar, and, therefore, suspiciously out of accord with God's dealings with mankind and the rest of life.**" True enough.

It should be seen as appropriate that the house of God be ordered by God's rules. It should be seen as appropriate that God's people are to be ordered by God's rules. It should be seen as appropriate that worship, that which shows reverence, piety, love, desire, and joy in God, be structured and ordered according to God's word and His biblical principles lying

² Dr William Young <http://www.apuritansmind.com/PuritanWorship/YoungWilliamPuritanRegulativePrinciple.htm>

³ <http://www.apuritansmind.com/PuritanWorship/McMahonRegulativePrinciple.htm>

therein. **Worship for the Christian should be an expression of God's heart back to God. We ought to reflect back to God how wonderful and most blessed He is. It is impossible to worship God by human invention. It is impossible to worship God by human ingenuity. It is impossible to worship God in an atmosphere that has not been structured and ordered by God and His word.** The Regulative Principle which is found in the Bible and expressed clearly in its climactic expression by the Puritans should not be placed by the way side because we and our contemporary culture are more fascinated and captivated by being entertained rather than by worshipping God.

The Presbyterian Puritans, in assembling the Westminster standards, and the Reformed Baptist Puritans, in assembling the 1689 London Baptist Confession, were both aiming at the same thing: acceptable worship to Christ.

There are four biblical arguments for the Puritan Regulative principle of the church and its worship seen in the WCF.

First, 1) It is the prerogative of God alone to determine the terms on which sinners may approach Him in worship. The principle that lies in the basis of the whole argument is that in regard to the ordinance of public worship it is the authority of God, and not the will of man, to determine both the terms in a manner of such worshipped.

The second Puritan principle of the regulative principle in worship is this, 2) The introduction of extra Biblical practices into worship inevitably tends to nullify and undermine God's appointed worship. (Matthew 15:3,8,9; 2 Kings 16:10-18) 2 Kings 16:10-18 demonstrates that there is a way in which extra biblical practices inevitably, but often with great subtlety, displaced the appointed worship of God.

The third principle the Puritans drew from the Scriptures is this, 3) That if sinful men were to add any unappointed elements into worship, they would, by this action, be calling into question the wisdom of Jesus Christ and the complete sufficiency of the Scriptures alone. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 states this, "all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that a man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." The man of God referred to in this text is not a reference to every individual Christian. There are compelling reasons rather to identify "the man of God any", as the man who like Timothy was charged to provide order and leadership to the Church of God. The elders in a church are to use the Scriptures in such a way to dictate what the order and structure of worship is to be. It is not that the elders implement their own worship, rather, by holding steadfastly to the word of God, they implement what God states and desires for worship for the people of God.

Fourthly, The Puritans were very adamant to prove that the Bible explicitly condemns all worship that is not commanded by God. Scriptures proving this are the following: Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 17:3; Deuteronomy 4:2; Deuteronomy 12:29-32; Joshua 1:7; 23:6-8; Matthew 15:13; Colossians 2:20-23. We will look Leviticus 10:1-3 and then two New Testament verses that are listed here both in Matthew and Colossians.

The Puritans desired simple, biblical worship. They regulated their worship by the Bible instead of their own "wills". They had no desire to offer strange fire no matter how "exciting" the strange fire would be to the spectators. They were not interested in putting on a show. When Elijah was on Mt. Carmel in 1 Kings 18, he asked the people if they were ready to follow God or Baal. When posed with the question, the people were silent. When Elijah said he wanted to have a "contest" with the priests (a "show"), what did the people do? They were all excited about it. "Yes! Let's have a show!" And so they did. The "contemporary church" is the same today. They want a show. They want fire to fall from heaven. They want the spectacular, or at least as entertaining as "church may be". But God is displeased. And if it were not for the grace of God, most "churches" today would be consumed as Nadab and Abihu were.

Nine Lines of Argument in Favor of the Regulative Principle of Worship

by Dr. T. David Gordon

1. Argument from the Limits of Church-Power (Bannerman makes this argument well)

Brief description of the argument. *The Church is an institution; instituted by the positive command of the risen Christ, and authorized by Him to require obedience to His commands and participation in His ordinances. The Church is given no authority to require obedience to its own commands, and is given no authority to require participation in ordinances of its own making.* The Regulative Principle of Church-Government lies behind the Regulative Principle of Worship.
Sample of relevant texts--Mat. 28:18-20; 2 Cor. 1:24; Rom. 14:7-9

2. Argument from Liberty of Conscience (Ed Clowney makes this case well)

Brief description of the argument. *To induce people to act contrary to what they believe is right is sinful. Further, God requires us to worship Him only as He has revealed. Therefore, to require a person, in corporate worship, to do something that God has not required, forces the person to sin against his/her conscience, by making them do what they do not believe God has called them to do.*
Sample of relevant texts--Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:4-13

3. Argument from Faith (John Owen makes this argument compellingly)

Brief description of the argument. *Where God has not revealed himself, no faithful response is possible, by definition. And, without faith it is impossible to please God. Therefore, God cannot be pleased by worship which is unfaithful, that is, worship which is not an obedient response to his revelation.*
Sample of relevant texts--Rom.14:23; Heb. 11:6, and entire chapter.

4. Argument from the distance between the Creator and the creature (Calvin and Van Til drive in this direction in all of their writings; and, interestingly, so does Barth)

Brief description of the argument. *God's ways and thoughts are above ours as the heavens are above the earth. What makes us think we can possibly fathom what would please God?*
Sample of relevant texts--Isa. 40:12-14 Deut. 29:29; Isa. 55:9; Prov.25:2

5. Argument from the character of God as jealous

Brief description of the argument. *God's character as a jealous God is introduced into texts which prohibit certain things (creating images) in the worship of God. Thus, the prohibition of creating graven images or any other likeness of anything in heaven or earth is grounded in God's character as a jealous God, and thus is not grounded in some peculiarity of the Sinai covenant.*
Sample of relevant texts--Ex.20:4-5; 34:14

6. Argument from those passages where piety is described as doing exclusively what God wishes.

Brief description of the argument. *In many passages, the wicked are described not as doing what is contradictory to God's will, but what is beside His will. Similarly, the pious are described by their trembling in God's presence, by their doing exclusively what God wishes.*
Sample of relevant texts--Isa.66:1-4; Dt.12:29-32; Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Sam.13:8-15; 15:3-22

7. Argument from the severity of the temporal punishments inflicted upon those who offer to God worship other than what He has prescribed.

Brief description of the argument. *There are places where people offer worship to God, in an apparently good-faith desire to please Him, yet they do so in some manner not prescribed by God, and His punishment of them is severe.*
Sample of relevant texts--Lev. 10:1-2; 1 Sam.13:8-15

8. Argument from the sinful tendency towards idolatry (Rom. 1).

Paul's point in Romans 1:19ff is that the human race, in its revolt against God, has "worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator." Further, this is not due to ignorance, but to moral defilement: "Although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give him thanks?" cf. Thomas E. Peck, Miscellanies, vol. I, pp. 96-97: *"Man, then, is incompetent to devise modes of worship, because he knows not what modes are best adapted to express the truth or the emotions which the truth is suited to produce."*

9. Argument from Church History

Brief description of the argument. *Church history amply demonstrates that fallen creatures, left to their own devices, inevitably produce worship which is impious.* Especially the Reformation, as an historical movement, bore testimony to the corruption which creeps slowly into worship when worship is not regulated by the revealed will of God.

Instituted Worship

How should we think about the Worship of God?

Instituted Worship
by Dr. William Ames

1. Instituted worship is the means ordained by the will of God to exercise and increase natural worship.
2. The means ordained by God are wholly set forth in the second commandment, which forbids all contrary means of worship devised by men under the words, graven image and likeness. Since these were once the chief inventions of men for corrupting the worship of God, they are rightly used for all devices of man's wit pertaining to worship (by a synecdoche constantly used in the decalogue).
3. Worship does not depend in kind [in specie] and directly on the nature of God or on that honor which we owe to God because of creation. It depends rather upon the free institution of God.
4. Hence this worship has varied as the structure of the church has varied. It had one form before Christ and another afterwards.
5. Instituted worship is related to natural worship, otherwise it would not be worship, for one cannot give the honor due to God in any way other than by faith, hope, and love (so far as the essence of the act is concerned). Thereby, in due subjection, we receive from God what he sets forth for us and with the same subjection we offer all that may be offered to his honor. These acts of offering are themselves performed in a special manner by means which God has instituted for his honor. Therefore, a kind of secondary worship takes place in them and they share in a way with the acts of receiving.
6. Instituted worship is related to natural worship as an effect to a cause. It is a means and instrument by which faith, hope, and love function — and these are the components of natural worship. It is an auxiliary cause by which these are furthered; and it is an adjunct of natural worship, of which they form the substance.
7. It is most rightly called worship since it serves as a means and auxiliary cause for primary, natural worship.
8. By the command of God instituted worship depends upon and flows from the primary worship of God. This gives the reason and force of those arguments for they are based on the inward and really essential manner of worshiping God, as found in the second commandment, They that love me and keep my commandments; Deut. 10:12, 13, What does the Lord require of you, but that you fear the Lord your God, walk in all his ways, and that you love and worship the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, observing the precepts of the Lord and his statutes.
9. The rule of interpreting the Scriptures usually given by some is not universally true, namely, that all duties are moral and immutable which have moral and immutable reasons joined to them — unless this is understood to mean that such duties follow from such reasons if no special command intervenes. Lev. 11:44, I am the Lord your God, so sanctify yourselves, and be holy, as I am holy. Defile not therefore yourselves with any creeping thing.
10. No instituted worship is lawful unless God is its author and ordainer. Deut. 4:1-2; 12:32, Keep all things which I shall command you. . . . Add not to the word which I command you, neither take from it. . . . Everything which I command you observe to do. Add not to it, or take from it. 1 Chron. 10:14, Our Lord broke in on us because we did not seek him rightly.
11. This is declared in those words of the commandment, You shall not make for yourself, i.e., by your own cogitation or your own judgment. Although the phrase, "for yourself," sometimes has another or broader meaning, here the brief and strict style of the commandments excludes any broadening of the meaning; and it is also clear that dependence upon man's vain cogitation is prohibited in other places of Scripture relating to the same matter. Amos 5:26, Which you made for yourselves; Num. 15:39, Follow not your own heart and your own eyes, after which you follow a-whoring.
12. The same is also brought out in the universality of the prohibition in the commandment, including all Of the things which are in heaven above, in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth.
13. For no one besides God can know what will be acceptable to him and impart that virtue to worship to make it effectual and profitable to us. Nothing can honor God unless it comes from him as the author. Finally, we do not read that the power of ordaining worship at one's pleasure was ever given to any man by God. Matt. 15:9, In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the precepts of men.
14. Therefore, implicitly and by God's own interpretation, we make God ours and give him due honor in religious worship. We subject ourselves to his authority and ordinances.
15. In this sense men are sometimes said to worship the devil when they follow the worship which the devil introduced, 1 Cor. 10:20; Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17.
16. But we must follow the worship which God has appointed with the same zeal with which we receive his word or will and call upon his name, Deut. 6:17, 18; 12:25, 28; 13:18; 28:14.
17. Some of the means so ordained by God lead directly to the exercise and increase of faith, hope, and love, e.g., the public and solemn preaching of the word, celebration of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. And some are for the right performance of these very acts, such as the gathering of the faithful into congregations or churches; the election, ordination, and ministry of ministers ordained by God; and the care of ecclesiastical discipline.
18. The first-named acts belong most properly to the instituted worship of God. The others are also worship, not only in the general sense that every act is one of religious worship which in any way comes from or is guided by religion, but also in their special nature, for their end and use is equally that God should be rightly worshiped.
19. All of these means, therefore, ought to be observed by us both in general and in particular because they are appointed by God. God must be worshiped by us with his own worship, wholly and solely — nothing must be added, taken away, or changed, Deut. 12:32.

20. That is a most empty distinction which some people make to excuse their additions to worship: "Only corrupting and not conserving additions are forbidden." For every addition as well as every subtraction is a departure from the observance and keeping of the commandments of God, and a corruption of them, Deut. 12:32.

21. Of the same nature is the evasion which is made when it is said that only the addition of essentials is forbidden, not accidentals. Although there are some "accidents" or adjuncts in worship, there is no worship which may simply be called accidental, because all worship has in it its own essence. Furthermore, as the least commandments of God even to jots and tittles are to be observed religiously, Matt. 5:18, 19, so additions that seem very small are for the same reason rejected. Last, Moses seals even those laws of place and manner of divine worship, of abstinence from blood, and the like (which are certainly accidental to worship), with the caution not to add to or take away from them, Deut. 12:32.

22. This worship is called obedience for a special reason, because in it we do that which seems right in the eyes of the Lord, although something else might seem more right in our own eyes, Deut. 12:25, 28.

23. Opposed to instituted worship is will-worship which is devised by men and is unlawful, Matt. 15:9; Col. 2:23.

24. The sin committed in will-worship is generally called superstition.

25. Superstition occurs when improper worship is given to God.

26. In superstition God is always the object and in some way the end, but the worship itself is unlawful.

27. It is called improper worship either because of the manner or measure or because of the matter and substance of the worship. The Pharisees offended in the former way on the matter of the sabbath when they urged its observance by the stopping of work beyond the manner and measure appointed by God. And they offended in the latter way by observing and pressing for their own tradition, Mark 7:8.

28. Therefore, superstition is called an excess of religion not in regard to the formal virtue of religion (for no one can be too religious), but in regard to the acts and external means of religion.

29. Excess of this sort is found not only in positive acts involving the use of things, but also in abstinence from things such as meat, which are held to be unclean or unlawful, and the like.

30. Abstinence from lawful things (although they may be considered unlawful) is not, properly speaking, superstition unless some special worship or honor is intended for God by the abstinence.

31. This improper worship stands either against the worship wherein instituted worship is set forth and exercised — hearing the word, celebrating the sacraments, and prayer — or against that worship which deals with the means of instituted worship.

32. The hearing of the word is opposed, first, by teaching through images devised by men, Deut. 4:15, 16; Isa. 40:18; 41:29; Jer. 10:8, 15; Hab. 2:18. Second, it is opposed by a vaunting of traditions which are propounded as rules of religion, Mark 7:8.

33. Religious teaching by images is condemned, first, because they are not sanctified by God to such an end; second, because they can represent to us neither God himself nor his perfections; third, because they debase the soul and call our attention away from the spiritual contemplation of the will of God; fourth, because once admitted into the exercise of worship, by the perversity of man's mind, the worship itself is transferred, at least in part, to them. This is declared in the words of the commandment, Thou shalt not bow down to them nor worship them.

34. Similar to images are all ceremonies instituted by men with mystical or religious meanings.

35. Such ceremonies have no fixed power of teaching given by nature or divine institution, and they can receive no power from human institution because man cannot create this by his command, since it is beyond his authority, or by his demand, since God has promised no such thing to the asker.

36. Men cannot arrogate to themselves the authority for instituting such ceremonies because all churches are commanded to do all things decently and in order, 1 Cor. 14:40. Respect for order and decency requires not that any new holy things should be instituted, but that those instituted by God should be employed in the manner becoming their dignity. Order and decency pertain not only to holy things but also to civil duties — for in each case confusion and unseemliness are vices opposed to the right and necessary way of attaining of the ends and uses for which each are intended.

37. Opposed to the sacraments are, first, sacrifices properly so-called, whether they be bloody or, as the papists say about their mass, bloodless. For since the coming of Christ, all former sacrifices are abrogated; and there is to be no new ordinance because the sacrifice of Christ once offered removes the need of other types, save only those which manifest and seal Christ for our benefit — as is sufficiently done in the sacrament according to God's ordinance — without sacrifices.

38. The institution and use of new seals or ceremonies confirming some grace of God is also opposed to the sacraments, for the one who gives grace can alone seal it.

39. Prayer is opposed by the use of representative images at or before which God is worshiped, even though the worship is referred not to the images themselves — subjectively, as some say — but objectively to God alone.

40. Superstition of this type is called idolatry, Exod. 32:5; Ps. 106:20; Acts 7:41.

41. If idols are themselves worshiped instead of God, this is the idolatry which violates the first commandment. If the true God is worshiped at an image or in an image, this is the idolatry which violates the second commandment.

42. Although such a worshiper does not in intention offend against the primary or highest object in worship, yet from the nature of the thing itself he always offends against the formal worship of God. In his mind a new God, who is delighted with such worship, is imagined as the object of his adoration; religious worship is also given to the image itself. This occurs even when the worship is not considered to be ultimately bound up with the image but is directed to God himself.

43. Therefore, we must shun this kind of idolatry as well as the absolute idolatry of the first commandment. We must also shun the very idols, and the idolothytes or things dedicated to idols, and all the mementos of idols, 1 John 5:21; 1 Cor. 8:10; 10:18, 19, 21; 2 Cor. 6:16; Num. 33:52; Deut. 12:2, 3; Exod. 23:13.
44. Superstition of the second kind is found in the human forms of the church, such as churches that are visibly, and organically ecumenical, provincial, or diocesan, brought in by men. Superstition is also found in the hierarchy which goes with such churches, in the orders of the religious found among the papists, and in their acts and judgments.
45. Intolerable is the audacity of the men who, in order to- save their images, either omit the second commandment altogether or teach that it ought to be so shorn of its meaning that the reading under the New Testament should now be: You shall not adore or worship any likeness or image.