

**Turn with me in your copies of God's Word to Leviticus chapter 10; also, go ahead and put a finger at 1 Corinthians chapter 14. Last time we considered how we are to worship. We saw very clearly, very plainly, that we are to worship only in the way in which the Lord prescribes in His Word. We looked at the doctrine known as the regulative principle of worship, that whatever is not commanded by God to be done in worship is forbidden. With that principle in place we must now consider the principle applied. Hear now the Word of our Lord from Leviticus chapter 10 verses 1 through 3 and 1 Corinthians chapter 14 verse 40.**

**\*Read Leviticus 10:1-3 and 1 Corinthians 14:40\***

**\*Pray\***

**Today our sermon is going to look a little different than they usually do. My regular practice is to preach on specific passage and give an exposition of that text. While there will be some exposition in this sermon, it will be much more topical, explaining a doctrine that we hold to by using these two Scripture passages as the backbone of this doctrine. It's also basically a continuation of the sermon from last week. It is good for us to know the doctrine of the regulative principle, but if we don't know how that doctrine plays out in the worship of the Lord then we have really gained nothing. We say that nothing is to be done in worship that God has not commanded, but you may look around and see that there are a lot of things here that are not commanded. Nowhere does the Scriptures command that we meet in a church building. Nowhere does the Scriptures command that we sit in pews during worship. Nowhere does the Scriptures command that the pastor preach while standing behind a pulpit. Nowhere does the Scriptures command that we use the Book of Psalms for Singing as our psalter. Nowhere does the Scriptures command that we are to meet at 10:45 for our corporate worship service. But yet all of those things are true of what we do here at Westminster. Does that mean we are sinning in doing those things; after all, to do in worship what the Lord has not commanded to be done is a sinful act of rebellion against God. You may think this**

sounds silly, but I have heard this argument be made against those who hold to the regulative principle many times. This is where a distinction is helpful. There are those things which are necessary parts of worship, those things which make up the essence and acts of worship, which must be commanded in the Scriptures in order to be done in worship. But there are also those things which are not of the essence and acts of worship, but tend to the better ordering of worship. This is the distinction between elements and circumstances of worship. Our theme this morning is whatever is done in worship must be done decently and in order. We will consider this theme under three heads: first, the need for order; next, the elements of worship; and finally, the circumstances of worship.

Let us first consider the need for order. This comes straight from our 1 Corinthians passage, “Let all things be done decently and in order.” If you know anything about the church in Corinth at the time Paul is writing this letter, you know that this church’s practice is anything but decent and in order. Many call Corinth a church in chaos. There was a man sleeping with his father’s wife, something which was unheard of even among the pagans, and yet the church was hesitant to enact discipline against him. There were people who were coming to the corporate gathering and getting drunk on the wine that was intended to be used in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Some were refusing to follow the apostolic tradition given unto them as is seen at the beginning of chapter 11. There were what could be called charismatics within the congregation, those who were speaking in unknown tongues and causing disruptions. Nothing about this church could be deemed decent and in order. Paul spends the majority of this letter seeking to correct these errors. He even says that this reputation of chaos is impacting how the world sees them. He says in verse 23, “If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?” What else could be said of a church in which such things are taking place? Can someone

**walk into that congregation and receive the Word of God if everyone in that place is spouting off gibberish in some unknown tongue?**

**Is this not the same thing that is seen in countless churches throughout the world? The charismatic chaos, as one pastor puts it, is running rampant throughout modern Christianity. If you were to walk into any big-box charismatic non-denominational church and see what is going on there, how could you think anything other than that these people have gone mad? When I was in high school I got caught up in the charismatic frenzy and visited a local non-denominational church. The first and only time that I was there I witness people literally running around and shouting, the “pastor” was on stage mumbling gibberish into the microphone while rocking back and forth like he was in some kind of trance, and at one point I was surrounded by six people who all were shouting gibberish at me. To be honest, I was terrified. I finally was able to get away and I left, and the only thought that I had at that time was that those people were crazy. I lived what Paul is warning the Corinth church against. This is what the world thinks of charismatics. But what’s even worse is that there are those who will take what is done in those types of churches and pin it on protestantism as a whole. There’s this eastern orthodox guy on the internet named Jeremy who makes video after video criticizing protestants and using the charismatics as his evidence. I believe what he is doing is intentionally lying against protestants, but the fact remains that he is an example of those outside of the true religion looking upon the chaos in the modern church and saying we are mad. And he is not alone. Countless others outside the church say the exact same thing, and even lump us in with those who are crazy.**

**Friends, Paul says this must not be the case, “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.” Our worship must be done decently and in order or else what we are doing is not of God. That is why we have an order of things here. That is why in your bulletin there is an order of worship. Our Directory for Public Worship states, “The Scriptures**

do not prescribe a fixed order of worship, but so that all things may be done decently and in order (I Cor. 14:40), it is desirable that the exercises of worship be conducted in a biblical, thoughtful, dignified, and edifying manner.” You know everything that is going to take place during the worship service. There are no moments of spontaneous outbursts or times in which someone stands up and begins spouting off gibberish. Everything is done decently and in order. But friends, there are other ways in which the worship can descend into disorder, ways in which we are much more prone to fall into. How many times have you been to worship and someone has forgotten to turn off or silence their phone? How many times have you heard someone talking to their neighbor during the service? These things threaten the decency and order of the worship service just as much as the charismatic chaos. Make sure that you go to the restroom prior to worship starting so that you do not cause a disruption by getting up and walking out. I understand that there are some who may have medical conditions where it is necessary to leave during the service, and that is fine because the Lord desires mercy not sacrifice. But those are the exceptions. Parents, if your children become unruly during the service and cannot be calmed in a timely manner, quietly go downstairs until the child is calmed and can return. The Lord desires that children be in the service as well as adults, but we have a nursery available if it is needed for a brief period of time. Save your conversations and your questions until after the service so as to not disturb your neighbors. These are all ways in which we can ensure we are following the principle laid out in the Word. Brothers and sisters, when you come into the public worship of God do so soberly and reverently, ensuring that you don’t cause disruptions, because there needs to be order in worship.

Part of the way in which the church maintains this order and does not descend into chaos is by observing the principle that we looked at last week. If one only observes in worship those things which the Lord has commanded to be done, then the possibility of disorder is greatly reduced. So what are the things which must be observed in worship? Those things which are commanded to be

done in worship, those things which are of the essence and acts of worship, are the elements of worship. Our Confession of Faith in chapter 21 lays out these elements or parts of worship for us, “Prayer with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men... The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching; and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as, also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: besides religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon several occasions; which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.” These, and only these, are the elements of worship which are commanded by the Lord. These are the things which the Scripture say are to be done in worship. The rest of this sermon series after next week will focus in detail what each of these elements entail, but for now I want to briefly show you that they are commanded by Scripture.

Where do we see prayer commanded of the people of God? Honestly, it’s all throughout Scripture, but two places we should look to see the divine warrant are Matthew 6 with the introduction to the Lord’s Prayer and Philippians 4:6. Matthew 6:5-9, “And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye...” Philippians 4:6, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with

thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” The reading of Scriptures is found in Acts 15:21, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.” The sound preaching of the Word is found in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.” The conscionable hearing of the Word is found in Hebrews 4:2, “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”

Colossians 3:16 commands the singing of psalms, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” The due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments is seen in multiple places. Concerning the sacrament of baptism we can see it in Matthew 28:18-20, “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Concerning the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper we can look to 1 Corinthians 11:23-27, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” These are the parts of ordinary worship services.

**But there are occasional elements which are to be observed in their proper times as well. Religious oaths are seen in Deuteronomy 6:13, “Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.” Vows are found in the prophecy of the nations coming to Jehovah in Isaiah 19:21, “And the Lord shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the Lord in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the Lord, and perform it.” Solemn fasts are commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 9:15, “And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.” And thanksgivings are seen in Psalm 107, “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.” To not observe these elements, both the ordinary and the occasional, or to add elements which have not been commanded for the New Testament church, is to disobey the command of Deuteronomy 12:32, “What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.” To do so places you in danger of being consumed by the fire of the Lord just as Nadab and Abihu were. Friends, you must be careful that what is done in the public worship of God is according to the elements prescribed by Him.**

**But what of those things that I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon? What of those things that are not commanded by the Lord but are utilized anyway? Those are circumstances of worship, things which are not of the essence and acts of worship, but tend toward the ordering of worship. The Confession of Faith in chapter 1 paragraph 6 states, “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men. Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; 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.” In their nature circumstances do not involve our approach to God or our response to his Word. They are not, as many like to make them out to be, matters wholly indifferent. But instead they are those things which are common to all societies and are ordered by the light of nature. James Bannerman writes, “There are circumstances of time and place and form, necessary for the order and decency of the service of the Church, as much as for the service or actions of any civil or voluntary society; and these, though connected with, are no portion of, Divine worship... There must be a sufficient reason, in the way of securing decency or preventing disorder, to warrant the Church in enacting regulations even in the circumstances of worship as contradistinguished from its ceremonies.”**

**Both human actions and societies as well as the light of nature and Christian prudence dictates we must have a place to meet. When congress meets to discuss matters pertaining to the government, there is a particular place in which the meeting is held. The same is true for us. Could you imagine the disorder of not having a set place to meet and people just arriving wherever they want and expecting to be gathered together with the saints? That doesn't mean that we have to meet in this church building. When the well was messed up you all met in another building. During the beginning of the pandemic the saints at Birmingham RPC met outside at a horse farm. It doesn't matter where you meet, but there must be a set meeting-place. Or you can think about the pews you are sitting in. Any time there is a meeting of people together in our society, especially if there is one person speaking to a group, there is a place for the people to sit and listen. This isn't particular to the church. And there's nothing inherently special about having pews instead of chairs. They are simply a means to help maintain order within the gathering. In fact, in some societies you wouldn't have**



anything to sit on at all. Some sit on the floor, some on cushions, and some societies even stand the entire time. It is a circumstance. Or what about the time at which we gather? Is there anything specifically religious about why we have corporate worship at 10:45? Are those who meet at 9:30 in sin? Of course not. But there must be a specified time for the saints to gather together or else there would be chaos with people coming and going at whatever time they please. The list of circumstances can go on and on.

But a problem arises when those within the church make circumstances of worship into elements of worship. This happens when they attribute religious significance to something that was never intended to have it. This is how man-made traditions enter into the church and corrupt the worship of the Lord. Remember what Christ said to the Pharisees in Mark 7, “This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. 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. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.” The Apostolic rule is,—“Let all things be done decently and in order,” but this general rule does not authorize the introduction into the Church of rites and ceremonies of human invention, in order to set off the worship of God. To admit unwritten traditions would open a door for all the innovations and corruptions which the fancies of men may devise, and would make void the law of God. Where do we often see this? Take candles for instance. If the power were to go out in this building and we needed a light source so that we could continue to be able to read the Scripture and our psalters, then it is perfectly fine to light candles. They are a circumstance. However, what we see is many churches practice lighting candles as a religious act, such as lighting advent candles. This then takes the circumstance of having candles as a light source and makes it an element which the Lord has not commanded. And in this particular instance it is literal strange fire that is offered to the Lord. Friends,

**we must be careful that in the right ordering of our worship, we do not confuse those parts of worship which must be observed and those circumstances which are determined by wisdom.**

**Brothers and sisters, understanding this distinction is key to understanding how we are to worship. This is the outflowing of the regulative principle of worship, that whatever God has not commanded to be done in worship is forbidden. Guard yourselves to ensure that your personal preferences and traditions do not seep into the worship of God. He is a holy and just God who is jealous for the worship of His people. He will not tolerate impurity. As we move forward in this series remember these things. Judge what is done in our worship service against these things to see if what we are doing is according to the Word of God. Do everything within your power to ensure that what is done here among us is not something that the world could look in on and scoff. If they choose to hate us, let it be because we are obedient to the Scriptures, not because we have descended into chaos. Remember this truth: whatever is done in worship must be done decently and in order.**