

## Titel

All I Really Need to Know About Worship  
(I Don't Learn from the Regulative Principle)

By Steve M. Schlissel

### 1. Part I Radical Solutions

We humans are easily inclined toward extremes. Think of the pendulum phenomenon: we see it stuck on one side. Then, using great force to dislodge it, we pass the *via media* and find ourselves stuck in the other corner.

Consider how some Christian groups deal with 1 Timothy 2:9: ". . . in like manner also, that the women [must] adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing. . . ."

There you have it. No braided hair, no gold jewelry, no pearls. And if that wasn't clear enough, 1 Peter 3:3 says it again: "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes." Well, isn't it plain that women must be plain? They should wear no makeup whatsoever, should not coiffure their hair and certainly should not wear gold jewelry, pearls, or beautiful clothing.

Similarly, there are Christian groups which, recognizing the dangers of alcohol and knowing that "drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom," put forth what to them is the simplest possible solution: Christians may not drink alcoholic beverages. Period.

Again--though appearing less often in history--there have been groups which, seeing the frequent Scriptural warnings against sexual immorality, insist that celibacy is requisite, and that not merely for clergy but for all members. (Funny that one such group was named the Shakers when they weren't even allowed to shake it, baby, shake it. I think there might be one Shaker left. All that sublimating, though, got routed into great furniture!)

Now, I would say that in these cases, the radical "solution" is definitely to be preferred to the radical problem: better to have plain Christian women than hussies; better to drink a pack of nothing than to be a pack of drunks; better to be celibate than sexually profligate. But no careful student of Scripture would be satisfied to let things lie at either of these two extremes.

Why then do we accept the same sort of ultimatum from advocates of the Regulative Principle of Worship? "It is either/or," they say. Either Rome's rule of worship or their rule of worship? "The contrast is plain," says one of the RPW's leading modern defenders (a personal and beloved friend, by the way). "The one says--What is not forbidden is permitted; the other says--What is not commanded is forbidden."

Consider: In the above cases we all can see a third way. In the first case: We know that God created woman an "adorned" by nature. He bids her in the above passages to keep that instinct under control. Moreover, she can beautify herself better through moderation while focusing on the development of a "gorgeous" character. God is not against female adornment! When Abraham's servant gave Rebecca gold and silver jewelry (Gen. 24:53), they weren't given her to put in a display case. And everywhere in Scripture we read of the normativity of a bride's adorning herself for her husband.

In the second case, when we read God's instructions to the Israelites to spend a portion of a certain tithe on any kind of liquor they wanted (Dt. 14:26), when we read of God's being praised for wine that makes men merry, when we read of Jesus' providing huge vats of vintage Merlot for the celebrants at a feast, then we know that the radical solution has missed something.

In the third case, well, it's pretty clear that sex within marriage is not only okay, it's right on--a very wonderful "norm" from our great and bounteous God!

In all cases we know that both positions--the stated problem (hussies/winos/Don Juans) and the offered solution (ugly women/abstinence/abstinence)--are radical impositions upon the people of

God. Yet many seem to miss this dynamic (radical, unbiblical "solution" to a radical problem) when it comes to the Regulative Principle of Worship. Are the radical problem and the radical solution really our only choices, or is this just another instance of the pendulum phenomenon?

Now remember: We have asserted that in all cases the radical "solution" is to be preferred to the original "problem." But why not admit that each of the proposed solutions pulls up short of commending to us a sound distillation of the Scripture's entire teaching on any of the subjects. The answer to the anti-music of Rap is not silence, however much silence is to be preferred to the problem! There are other solutions!

### The Radical Solution at the Reformation

At the time of the Reformation, the nausea induced in the godly upon their awakening to the sinful Romish excesses and superstitions in worship gave rise to a radical, but not fully thought-out, solution, the Regulative Principle of Worship: If it is not commanded in Scripture to be performed in worship, it is forbidden in worship. It is sometimes said in other words: Only that which God has commanded is permitted.

This pendulum swing by the Reformers was certainly a breath of fresh air! Virtually overnight it cleansed the toxins out of Reformed worship like two months of cold turkey cleanses the horse out of a junkie's veins. Way to go! Out went the relics, the Mariolatry, the adoration of saints, the indulgences, the novenas and the like; in came clear, accessible, soul-saving, edifying Word-centered worship.

Though most excellent and welcome in its historic situation, the Regulative Principle somehow loosed itself from its moorings and took on a life of its own in certain Reformed and Presbyterian circles. Many took it to be not merely a good word on worship but the last word, in fact, God's last word on the subject. And as men are wont to do, zealots--who saw in this principle the only way to acceptably approach God--began to extend and apply it more and more rigorously. Like the AA-inspired teetotaler who swears off not only liquor, wine and beer, but rum candy too, the strict regulativist searched for gnats and, not surprisingly, found them abounding. Camels, however, were often overlooked.

Anything which could not pass the somewhat arbitrary test for "commanded" was viewed with grave suspicion as the very thing which would cause--or begin to cause--the Reformed churches

to return to Babylon. And so, among some, the RPW means not only no Christmas and no Easter, but no musical instruments, no singing except Scripture texts--oops! Scratch that! Only certain Scripture texts, namely, the Psalms, may be sung in worship (some said in or out of worship). Not a few reject the use of creeds in worship, and some even frown upon the corporate praying of the Lord's Prayer in worship.

I might have inserted here further rationales used by its advocates to defend the Regulative Principle of Worship, but I want to get right to the point: while infinitely to be preferred to the problem it was designed to combat, the Regulative Principle of Worship falls short of conveying all that God in Scripture would have us know about regulating worship. It posits a false dilemma which, astonishingly, has bamboozled battalions of my fellow soldiers.

#### Other Choices

The regulativist tells us: It is either "What is not forbidden is permitted," or "What is not commanded is forbidden." This simply is not true. It is not "Either hussies in church or ugly women." It is not "Either slosh-heads or dry prudes." It is not "Either STD's abounding or no sex whatsoever." There are other choices!

In the matter of a principle for acceptable worship, at least one other possibility presents itself immediately upon the most casual reflection, a possibility which, hopefully, will be shown to be the correct alternative to the Romish principle: "What is not commanded might be permitted. It depends upon other considerations." Just what those "other considerations" are we hope eventually to cover. But for now let us consider just how short the RPW itself falls when examined in the light of Scripture.

I will offer seven broad reasons for Reformed people to reject the proposition that the Scripture teaches the Regulative Principle of Worship. But please carefully note these qualifications: 1) I am not arguing against the sort of worship found in RPW churches. For my money, it is vastly superior to most other extant worship forms (of which I am aware). The RPW is a mistake, but if you have to make a mistake, this is a very fine one. 2) By arguing against the regulative principle of worship per se, I'm sorry to say that I part company from many of my colleagues. Most of my compatriots tend to embrace the principle, choosing only to argue whether it is too rigorously or loosely applied in this or that circumstance. No, my argument is not with the application of the principle: it is that the RPW itself is not Biblical.

We can begin to see that this is so when we examine the typical arguments used by regulativists in attempting to establish their case. Examination will show that their case is weak indeed.

#### The (Weak) Case for RPW

The regulativists typically isolate the alleged "proof" texts from their larger contexts. This use of Scripture is questionable at best, deceitful at worst. Rather than providing a firm foundation for their principle, this very selective method suggests that it is built on sand.

In virtually all regulativist literature the same texts are appealed to over and over again, nearly always, it seems, without an honest consideration of their contexts. Such consideration would so qualify the meaning of the chosen verses as to reveal that they lend no support whatsoever to the principle they supposedly prove. In short, the regulativist doesn't employ texts: he conscripts them into thrall. Let's consider a few of their favorites to see if this isn't so.

Leviticus 10:1-11, especially verses 1 and 2. Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them, added incense, and offered unauthorized, strange, "outside" or foreign fire before Jehovah, who then turned them into strange fire. This verse is beat to death by regulativists as somehow proving "if it's not commanded, it's forbidden."

But a simple consultation with Exodus 30:9 shows the true character of their sin:

Ye shall offer no strange incense thereon, nor burnt sacrifice, nor meat offering; neither shall ye pour drink offering thereon

Well now, doesn't that affect our interpretation! Nadab and Abihu did not simply do something not commanded, they did something expressly forbidden. You see that even the principle which the regulativists reject takes care of Nadab and Abihu. "If it's not forbidden, it's permitted," say those at the other extreme. Well, in this case their principle has the base covered: It was forbidden, therefore it was not permitted. Simple, eh? No need for the RPW here.

Furthermore, there is a strong suggestion in the account (v. 8) that the boys were drunk when they performed their folly. It is plausible that in an inebriated condition they failed to distinguish

between the holy and the common (v. 9). God provided an object lesson. But whether or not that is so, their sin clearly consisted in doing what God had expressly forbidden. No RPW here.

Likewise with the texts regulativists cull from the Prophets. Their employment of Isaiah's indictment of hypocritical Israel, for example, is representative of the sort of "proof" they offer. The long list of charges against Israel in chapter 1 is (amazingly) pared down to a mere particle that (happy coincidence!) seems to support their view. "When ye come to appear before Me, who hath required this at your hand?" (v. 12)

Well, let's try to answer that question: Who did require what Israel is said to have been doing? If we are going to find the regulativist's principle here, we ought to expect the prophet to read a bill of particulars brimming with condemnations of man-made innovations. So just what does the passage say Israel was doing?

- 1) They were bringing offerings (as God commanded)
- 2) Burning incense (as God commanded)
- 3) Observing New Moon festivals (as God commanded)
- 4) Observing Sabbaths (as God commanded)
- 5) Observing appointed feasts (as God commanded)
- 6) Offering prayers (again, as God commanded)

When God asks, "Who hath required this at your hand?", if the emphasis is on "Who required," the answer is, "God!" But if the emphasis is on "your hand," ah!, we now find the meaning of the indictment. The sin of Israel in Isaiah 1 did not consist in an error in religious form, i.e., in their bringing into worship something he did not command. He commanded everything Isaiah lists!

On the contrary, their sin was that they brought it with wrong hands. Their hands, God says, were bloody (v. 15), yet they thought that mere religious ceremony would cleanse them! This is Isaiah's version of Psalm 50, especially v. 16: "To the wicked, God says: 'What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate My instruction.'" "I don't need your offerings," says the Lord. "If I were hungry, I wouldn't ask you for something to eat."

Isaiah does not fault Israel for violating the RPW, but for their stinking, hypocritical formalism. They did all the things God asked for except be converted! Isaiah 1 is a wake-up call to religious formalists, all right, but it has nothing whatsoever to say in support of the RPW.

Likewise Jeremiah 7. Regulativists like to cite verse 24:

But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward.

Again, the context is simply ignored! What a different impression is left when the context is supplied:

Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices and eat meat. For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices. But this is what I commanded them, saying, "Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you." Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but followed the counsels and the dictates of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.

Yes, that's right. The broader passage, if it says anything to a worship principle at all, doesn't say it in support of the RPW! God is saying just the opposite: "To appear before me with just the right form and just the right regulations, but to leave your heart at home, is not to appear before me at all." Punctilious form without a heart made new is worthless. God denigrates his own appointed forms to drive home his concern. This is a Jewish manner of speaking, employed by Jesus and Paul in the New Testament Scriptures, employed by the Lord here: It not to be taken as an absolute denigration, but a relative one in order to make a point. It is as if he is saying, "Who asked for your sacrifices? Me? No. I asked for your hearts!"

A couple more citations from "the regulativist files" will demonstrate, I pray, that their typical use of Bible texts is arbitrary and therefore, *prima facie*, ought to be discounted.

Another portion of the Prophets drafted into the RPW's army of Bible snippets is from Jeremiah. I quote a leading regulativist: "Thus the Lord declared (by Jeremiah) 'This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who walk in the imagination of their heart shall even be like this girdle which is good for nothing.'"

Ooh, sure sounds like proof of the RPW, doesn't it? "Whatever is not commanded is forbidden," and men's imaginations are . . . Hmm. Wait a minute . . . I wonder what was in that ellipsis (" . . .")?

Take a look. In fact, let's look at the original verse in its entirety:

This evil people, which refuse to hear my words, which walk in the imagination of their heart, and walk after other gods, to serve them, and to worship them, shall even be as this girdle, which is good for nothing. (Jer. 13:10)

Well, isn't that a different kettle of fish! They were walking after their own hearts into idolatry, they were explicitly worshipping other gods, they were doing something expressly forbidden. Thus, here again is a sin adequately covered by that "other," dreaded principle: You may not do what God forbids.<sup>1</sup>

The RPW author who conscripted Jeremiah, however, says, "[T]he reason given for this strong condemnation [that they'd become good-for-nothingsms] is that they offered worship 'which I never commanded nor spoke, no, neither did it come into my mind'" (He here references Jer. 19:5). "Israel's apostasy from true worship," says our friend, "can be summed up in these words: 'which I did not command them.' Because they were not satisfied to do what God commanded, and only what God commanded, they were condemned."

This is patently false to the text. Israel was there condemned--and that explicitly--not for failing to follow the RPW but for doing what God had forbidden. They worshipped idols. That's what God says they did. But what God says is edited out by RPW advocates to conform to a conclusion they have determined in advance must be reached.

Finding little support in Scripture for a principle that all (should) agree brought so much blessing to Christendom was apparently intolerable to its proponents. Their escape? Do violence to the Scripture to make it speak their language.

Perhaps their most offensive redaction occurs with Jeremiah 19:5, alluded to above. The edited verse ("They offered worship 'which I never commanded nor spoke, no, neither did it come into my mind'") leads readers to believe that God's disapproval of what Israel did is rooted in this: they did something, however innocuous, which he had not commanded, thus violating the RPW.

In fact, what is there condemned is . . . well, read it for yourself:

They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind.

I told you before that at some point the RPW took on a life of its own. This is evidenced in the controlling influence it has exerted over the exegetical methodology of many of its champions. The same texts are carted out and mishandled in similar ways in virtually all their works (better get used to it!).

So firmly in the grip of this principle is one minister presently in their ranks that he actually--in all seriousness--asserted that singing Scripture choruses in worship<sup>2</sup> is the moral equivalent of child sacrifice in the sight of God. He used Jeremiah 19:5 as proof. I cannot but wonder if his is the same religion as mine, so different are our approaches to Scripture!

Anyway, that's number one: Regulatvists consistently ignore the Biblical contexts of their cited passages. One might say that they have, by sheer force of will, domesticated their pet verses.

Voetnoot

1 I should mention that I do agree with regulatvists that this "high church" principle is not completely adequate for all cases; however, it happens to be more than adequate to cover most of the problems they cite!

2 No other portion of the Bible may be sung, you see. Psalms, in his view, have exclusive right to be found on the lips of God's gathered people.

Steve Schlissel has been pastor of Messiah's Congregation in Brooklyn, NY since 1979. He serves as the Overseer of Urban Nations (a mission to the world in a single city), and is the Director of Meantime Ministries (an outreach to women who were sexually abused as children). Steve lives with his wife of 24 years, Jeanne, and their five children.

## 2. Part 2 Regulators Miss It Where It Is

We have shown, through a substantial representative sampling, that the regulators attempt to bolster their position by appealing illegitimately to various texts. They find it where it isn't by consistently ignoring the contexts of their favorite passages. They isolate texts from their meaning-impacting contexts. One might say that they have, by sheer force of will, domesticated their pet verses.

Now we will suggest that the point of what might truly be called the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) in Scripture is altogether missed by them. It is a rather astonishing instance of "forest-for-the-trees." What I mean is this:

The locus classicus, the most frequent and important textual citation for the RPW is Deuteronomy 12:32: "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." But here again, the regulators either ignore or overlook the setting. By isolating this particular verse from its context, its beauty is marred, its force is neutralized, and its power compromised.

Deuteronomy 12:32 appears in an epoch-marking context: we have here a major step in the progress of the religion of the covenant. Before this, covenant-keepers could offer sacrifice wherever they felt like it. Henceforth sacrifice would be severely restricted. It would be restricted, as we said up front, in regard to place, in regard to people, and in regard to particulars.

It is here, then, in Deuteronomy 12 that we do indeed find introduced what might properly be called the Regulative Principle of Worship: If it is commanded, you'd better do it; if it is not commanded, it is forbidden (see v. 32). Don't look to the pagans, either. They do thoroughly whacked-out things that I abominate (vv. 28- 31). You just do what I say and only what I say.

The point, however, is that what is strictly regulated is the sacrificial system of worship, not worship per se. In fact, "mere" sacred assemblies are not covered by this rule. From the beginning God had made known that the path by which man might be restored to him is a path of shed, substitutionary blood. This was indicated in the animal sacrifice God had made when providing coverings for Adam and Eve, and again in his acceptance of Abel's blood offering brought in faith. The atoning path of blood was laid out by God.

But in Genesis 4:26 we read that, at that time "men began to call upon the name of the LORD." Good old Matthew Henry comments, "Now men began to worship God, not only in their closets and families, but in public and solemn assemblies."

We have no evidence or suggestion that there were divinely originating directives for the elements found in these public assemblies. Clearly, prayer was a great part of it (calling upon the Lord), but the point is that they seem to have arisen from the covenant sensibilities of men, not from a known injunction from God.

The matter of sacrifice, on the other hand, was different. That was clearly set forth by God as the norm. We know this both from early Genesis and all subsequent Scripture. However, from the Fall until the entry to the Promised Land, even this sacrificial worship was largely unregulated. Noah offered sacrifices, as did Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These were offered perhaps in a general conformity to a pattern received from Adam or another. Indisputable, however, is the fact that the offerings were decentralized. There was no one place where God caused his name to dwell, where alone sacrifices could be lawfully rendered. They could be-and were-offered anywhere.

However, once Israel would enter the land and God would make known the place where his name would dwell, sacrificial worship would no longer be decentralized. It would be absolutely centralized at one place. From here on, it would be lawfully offered only by authorized persons. No matter how noble the man, if he did not meet the Levitical qualifications, he could not serve at that one authorized location (cf. Uzziah's sin in 2 Chr. 26). And the many particulars of the service were to be strictly adhered to, without addition or subtraction. (1) This is the context of Deuteronomy 12. We need only quote some of the chapter for this to be clear:

Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance ... But when ye go over Jordan ... then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD: Take heed to thyself that thou offer not thy burnt offerings in every place that thou seest ... But in the place which the LORD shall choose in one of thy tribes, there thou shalt offer thy burnt offerings, and there thou shalt do all that I command thee. (vv. 8-14)

To what service did this refer? Clearly it was not worship per se, but the sacrificial worship of Jehovah, that is, the Tabernacle/Temple service.

This conclusion is firm when viewed in the light of Leviticus 23:3. (Make a careful note of this, for we must return to it.) There we read of unregulated, no-instructions- recorded, bloodless, incenseless, non-piacular worship services: There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the LORD.

Why, one naturally asks, was God so lenient concerning sacred assemblies-forbidding to them only what was forbidden in all circumstances-yet so very strict about the Tabernacle/Temple worship? The correct answer is not elusive.

It was because in the Tabernacle/Temple God was displaying, "preaching" Christ, his Person and work, prior to his incarnation. The rigors surrounding Tabernacle/ Temple worship reveal to us the passion, the diligence of our God in protecting the absolute exclusivity of salvation through the work of his Son, our Lord; they demonstrate God's sovereign determination to guard the glory which belongs exclusively to his beloved Son.

Jesus Christ could be incarnate only once to perform his work in history. Israel is poised, in Deuteronomy 12, to bring about a pre-incarnational explication of that work which would abound with Christ-significance in every element, every ordinance, every article, every order, every day, every month, every year; an explication that would reveal, in a manner fit for that period of history, the gospel. God was not fussing over an abstract principle: He was guarding the honor of his Son! He was saying, "Hear this, all ye ends of the earth! In my Son, in Jesus Christ the Lord-that is where salvation is alone to be found! In the work performed here according to my decrees, according to my strict and rigorous decrees, you may see my Son in whom I am well pleased. Come behold in him the marvelous works of the Lord! Come behold him in the marvelous Temple of the Lord!"

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come-in the volume of the book it is written of Me-to do Your will, O God.'" Previously saying, "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor had pleasure in them" (which are offered according to the law), then

He said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God." He takes away the first that He may establish the second. By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Heb. 10:5-10)

The Temple worship was strictly regulated because the Temple worship was the gospel of the Messiah. Thus, when we come to the Scriptures composed after Messiah completed his earthly work-fulfilling the service of types (Col. 2:17)-the rigors we read in the New Testament concern the gospel and sound doctrine.

The New Testament application of the Tabernacle/ Temple Regulative Principle is discovered in its intolerance to false doctrine. The RPW becomes the RPD: the Regulative Principle of Doctrine! This is why Paul could abide poor motives, so long as the content of gospel preaching was sound:

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice....

Yet when someone fiddled with the content of the gospel, Paul would write:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

It is in zeal for sound doctrine that you find the so-called Regulative Principle in the New Testament: don't add to it, don't take away from it.

Worship forms, however, are not the subject of such rigor (beyond, as we hope to demonstrate, general insistence upon good order, proper decorum, propriety, etc.). This is because worship forms in the new administration-the universal administration of the covenant-will vary. The

truth, however, will not vary, cannot vary, must not vary. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever.

This means that wherever we find truly orthodox Christianity being practiced we are among those who are abiding by the real Regulative Principle of Worship as found in the Old and New Testaments: covenant-keepers approaching God in faith through the atonement he has provided in his Son, our Lord. This does not mean that any and all things are permissible in worship, or that all manner of worship is equal! I only insist it means that the Biblical RPW is alive and well in orthodoxy, and there only.

Now let me mention the irony I alluded to earlier. So-called "Strict Regulatitivists" do not permit musical instruments in worship because, they say, that sort of thing belonged to the Temple order, not the New Testament order. And since we are not commanded to bring instruments into worship in the New Order, and since we may not introduce anything not commanded, New Order worship services must be without instruments.

The irony is this: it is not instruments which belong exclusively to the Temple order, but the Regulative Principle of Worship itself!

That's the sort of thing that happens when your exegesis becomes controlled by abstractions.

Before moving on to our third point, let me tell you of another irony regulativists are caught in. To see it requires walking through a few steps.

First, as a colleague in a "Covenanter" communion pointed out, the regulative principle adds a distinct characteristic which differs from our general obligation to obey God. Everyone-regulatitivists and non-regulatitivists- everyone who fears the Lord agrees that we are always required to do what he commands and that we are never permitted to do what he forbids. The RPW, however, adds another requirement pertaining to worship, saying that in worship, if God does not command it, it is forbidden.

Second, the regulativist boasts that this principle frees the people of God from having their consciences violated by unscrupulous leaders who might impose non-Biblical worship forms on the congregation. (2)

Third, when we look for Biblical evidence to support the unique third requirement which the RPW adds to our legal obligations under God (reminder: 1 is: doing what he says, 2 is: not doing

what he forbids, 3 [peculiar to the RPW] is: if he hasn't commanded it for worship, if he is silent concerning it, it is forbidden)-when we look for Biblical proof of this we find none. Most of their alleged proofs are fragments put forth without context: when the context is supplied, the "proofs" evaporate. (Cain did not do what God commanded; Nadab and Abihu did what he had forbidden; the Israelites in Isaiah did what God commanded as far as the elements of worship were concerned but failed to perform worship with clean hands; Jeremiah is condemning the performance of things God forbade: idolatry and child sacrifice; etc.)

Lastly, we have seen that the real regulative principle guarded, not worship per se, but, the sacrificial system as the revelation of the Gospel of Christ, the only path to God. The New Testament bears abundant witness to this in having no regulative principle of worship at all, but an extremely rigorous regulative principle of the gospel: don't add to it, don't take away from it.

Consequently, we find our irony: The Regulative Principle of Worship, said to guard the people of God from the inventions of men, is itself an invention of men and therefore an imposition upon the consciences of those forced to accept it.

I'll be quick to reiterate: we'll take plain women over hussies in the church, and teetotalers over winos, but we'll insist: these are not our only God-honoring choices!

#### Regulativists Miss the Synagogue

The New Testament is beyond clear in teaching that the organizational model for the worshipping communities called "churches" was the synagogue, not the Temple. This is recognized and acknowledged in every standard work on Presbyterianism. For example, John Macpherson, in his excellent volume, *Presbyterianism*, writes: "In general, the Christian forms of worship were modeled on those of the Jewish synagogue, and so where any customs in worship or office in the Christian church are spoken of without explanation, we may reasonably look to the arrangements of the synagogue for enlightenment." And, "the earliest Christian congregations . . . in Palestine were for some time known as Christian synagogues."

In saying that our model is the synagogue, we do not overlook temple-like features metaphorically ascribed to the church and/or its service. These are many. Yet these apply to, and are found ascribed to, individual Christians as well. But when we look for the organizational and

liturgical antecedents of the church, we find them in the synagogue. (Looking to the Temple, especially for the latter, we remind you, is precisely the error of Rome.)

The very existence of the synagogue, however, undoes the regulativist's position! For he knows that synagogues existed. And he knows that Christ and the apostles regularly worshipped at synagogues without so much as a breath of suggestion that they were institutionally or liturgically illegitimate. And he knows that he cannot find so much as a sliver of a divine commandment concerning what ought to be done in the synagogue. And, according to his principle, if God commanded naught concerning what ought to be done, then all was forbidden. And if all was forbidden then the whole of it-institution and liturgy-was a sinful abomination. But that brings him back to Christ's attending upon the service of God there and Christ's following its liturgy: did he sin by participating in an entire order of worship that was without express divine warrant? The thought is blasphemy!

But for us the synagogue presents no problem at all. We find that it is sacrificial worship only, from Deuteronomy 12 on, that is absolutely restricted in regard to place, performers and particulars. Such restrictions never governed common sacred assemblies. (3)

First, sacred assemblies were held all over the place: everywhere, "wherever you live" (Lev. 23:3), wherever covenant people dwelt. Every Sabbath there would be one centralized sacrificial service, but there would be an untold number of sacred assemblies throughout the land.

Second, sacred assemblies could be led by any qualified adult male. It is not surprising, therefore, that "In the very earliest Christian times," according to Macpherson, any of the male "members of the church were called on to preach, and to exercise generally what came afterward to be known as strictly clerical functions." Synagogues were never dependent upon a Levitical order.

Lastly, sacred assemblies, which evolved into synagogues, grew liturgically out of covenant consensus within the general bounds of the word of God.

We'll continue this discussion soon, D.V. There are additional flaws in the Regulative Principle of Worship which need to be confronted. Following that we hope to set before you, for your consideration, several components of what we call the Informed Principle of Worship. We don't

wish to be understood as suggesting that God is silent concerning what he expects in a worship service!

For now, allow me to close with my sincere thanks for your support of our particular Christian synagogue in New York City and its various ministries. If you don't receive our monthly ministry updates it might be because you haven't contributed to these ministries in more than a year. Let's hear from you.

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1. That's right. Even if Nadab and Abihu's sin was doing what was not commanded, since it was in the service of the Tabernacle/Temple, it was illegitimate.

2. It should not be disputed, and I do not dispute it, that the RPW has been a great boon in keeping the church free from just such impositions. That, however, is not my point. Teetotalism, too, has kept many from excess. The question is not only, does it work? But more importantly, is it what God requires?

3. They were, of course, strictly bound by a negative principle: it was not permitted to do in them what God had expressly forbidden. But we should carefully note that expressly forbidden in these assemblies was not only pagan exercises, but any sort of ritual sacrifice whatsoever. That was reserved for the Tabernacle/Temple. Similarly, faithful churches do not pretend to practice any sort of ritual sacrifice, but rather rely on the sacrifice of Christ. That is where the articles of our undoubted Christian Faith direct us.

### **3. Part 3**

We have been arguing that the Regulative Principle of Worship -- if it is not commanded, it is forbidden -- is not the principle given by God to regulate worship in the church of our Lord Jesus

Christ. Important as it is for us to worship scripturally, we ought to recognize that in the advocacy of the RPW we are confronted with something which extends beyond worship alone. As we have seen, we have here a matter inextricably bound up with the way we approach and handle the Bible. In this it is not unlike the issue of baptism.

Antipaedobaptists insist that the New Testament is so entirely new that our obligations are limited to what is commanded therein. Moreover, if it is not commanded in a certain way it is still forbidden, particularly regarding sacraments. (1) Hence, for Baptists, the absence of a clear NT command to baptize babies, joined to the many clear examples of adult baptisms following profession, leads to their conclusion that babies, covenant or otherwise, may not be lawfully baptized. This conclusion is inevitable once their premises are granted, but it is precisely their premises which are in need of repair.

You see a remarkably similar handling of Scripture by regulativists. They assume their principle and make it the unchallengeable starting point. Once the RPW is "baptized" as a given, all worship sins in the Bible are subpoenaed to support it, just like adult baptisms are enlisted to "prove" that infants may not be baptized.

But where did this worship principle come from in the first place? Does the Bible really teach that "only that which God has commanded may be done in worship"? We chose to begin our consideration of the RPW with an examination of its ostensible Biblical justification. In that examination we found a pattern of obfuscation rather than explication. For example, where God condemned Israel for flagrantly idolatrous practices, the regulativists in their citations would conveniently hide the contexts and pretend Israel's condemnation was solely for "adding" to God's requirements. We even found them creating "versettes," citing verse fragments which appeared to support their view. These are hermeneutical no-nos for which they remain unapologetic.

At the opposite extreme of the RPW is what regulativists call the Romish or High-Church Principle (HCP): if it is not forbidden, it is permitted. All Reformed agree that the HCP is inadequate. However, inadequate as it is, in virtually every example of worship sin cited by regulativists, no sin would have occurred if the HCP had been honored. In other words, regulativists regularly cite instances of Israel doing what God had forbidden-sins covered by the HCP-and then make believe that only the RPW could have prevented those abuses. Not so.

In fact, the only credible "proofs" for the RPW could be whittled down to those examples garnered from the strictly regulated Tabernacle/Temple service. But here, we said, the significant change between the Old and New administrations of the covenant must be fully taken into account. In the New Testament, the gospel goes global. With that change, the punctiliousness that once characterized the Temple service now characterizes the guarding of the gospel instead. New Testament anathemas are not issued for those who sin in worship matters, as the regulativists would have it, but for those who tinker with the contents of the gospel. This is as plain as day on the pages of the New Testament.

Remember: Old Testament worship from Sinai forward was bifurcated. There was a rigidly controlled, centralized, Levitically administered worship at the Tabernacle/Temple, and there was a less controlled, decentralized, democratically administered worship throughout the land in what would evolve into synagogues.

To be sure, New Testament worship is anchored to the Tabernacle/Temple in heaven: "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man" ( Heb. 8:1-2).

However, while it is anchored in the heavenly Temple, it takes place on earth in Christian synagogues. "My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, (the Lord) of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come into your synagogue a man with a gold ring, in fine clothing..." ( Jas. 2:1-2 [ASV]).

We worship in Christian synagogues. The only blood we have is Christ's, made known through the gospel. It is the gospel, therefore, which is heir to the strict regulations which governed the Tabernacle/Temple service. The synagogue was never so regulated and is not now. That the synagogue was the model for the organization and worship of the apostolic church is disputed only by two groups: Romanists (and their stepchildren) and regulativists (when it suits them).

Thus our first three headings of argumentation: Regulativists see their principle where it is not, they miss it where it is, and they skip the significance of the synagogue. So much for review. Let us now proceed.

Regulativists Stumble Over "Special Days"

The Regulative Principle of Worship has resulted in much good, but its advocates have committed many offenses. Sometimes it seems that for every worship error which offends them, they commit two exegetical errors in retaliation. A leading scandal is their filtering out of anything in Scripture which refuses to yield to their demand for servile texts. One prime example of this is the matter of special days.

As you know, "consistent" regulativists are adamantly opposed to the observance of any day but the Lord's Day. They have a sea of books, tracts, and articles devoted to this one topic going all the way back to the Reformation. Farel, Viret, Calvin, and Knox were all in favor of rejecting all special days sanctioned and revered by Rome. Undoubtedly, this served a good purpose in its time. It immediately distinguished the Reformed, both on the Continent (2) and in Scotland, from Rome, whose calendar was blanketed with such days. So the Reformation was well served in its early days by such a clear line of demarcation.

But are we to take a position which was manifestly adopted in and due to unique historical circumstances and enshrine it as if it were the Word of God itself on the subject? I think not. In this I stand with the sons of the Reformation from the Netherlands and elsewhere.

Some Reformers and their regulativist heirs went looking for verses to justify their rejection of special days. And I, for one, am glad they did! It served a good purpose. But does that make their use of Scripture on this point above criticism? Certainly not.

In fact, the very rationale used to justify jettisoning holy days is one which could properly be used to justify their qualified observance. It would depend on various other considerations. Let me explain.

The alleged Biblical basis for rejecting all days but the Lord's Day is in two parts: 1) the Lord's Day is (supposedly) clearly commanded, (3) and 2) the observance of special days is supposedly forbidden in Galatians 4:10.

The church was well-served by having a day of rest distinct from the day of the old administration. No argument here. But to grasp this is to be near to understanding why the disapproval of "day observance" in Galatians was, like the same disapproval during the Reformation, historically conditioned and not necessarily normative.

For the problem Paul was fighting in Galatians was not the observance of days per se. It could not have been! A reading of Acts 20 and 21 finds our beloved Apostle eager to get back to Jerusalem for Pentecost and more than willing to observe Jewish customs, even ritualistic/ Temple-centric customs. Notice what rumor Paul hoped to put to rest by the observance of the latter: Paul was told that Jewish believers "have been informed about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs" ( Ac. 21:21).

This charge was false. Paul did not tell Jews they must reject those practices which formerly set them apart, but rather that they must accept Gentiles as coequals without imposing upon them the obligation to keep Jewish ceremonial distinctives. This agrees with what James and the other elders told Paul during the same meeting: "But concerning the Gentiles who believe, we have written and decided that they should observe no such thing, except that they should keep themselves from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality" ( v. 25 ).

The problem at Galatia, then, could not have been the observance of days per se because Jewish Christians were never told that they must not celebrate their distinctive calendar. (4) Rather, the problem was that some were teaching that Gentiles could not be saved unless they, too, observed all the Jewish ceremonial distinctives. That Paul was addressing only Gentile believers in this passage, and was concerned to dissuade them from adopting "Sinai distinctives," is glaringly evident from the fact that Paul warns, "Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all." But it was only Gentiles who could have considered becoming circumcised: the Jewish Christians already were! Remember, remember, remember, the issue in New Testament polemics was this: Must Gentiles become Jews in order to become Christians? Keep that issue front and center and difficulties evaporate.

Paul couldn't care less about days per se, just as he couldn't care less about circumcision. "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts." And again: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." And again: "Neither

circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation" ( 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 5:6; Gal. 6:15).

Consequently, there is nothing in Paul's argument in Galatians which would lead us to believe that the observance of days per se was wrong, evil, unacceptable. What he was battling for was a gospel which held out to the whole world a free and accessible salvation, one not tied to Jewish distinctives.

One might even justly say that Paul was, in effect, arguing that the Regulative Principle of Worship does not apply to the Gentiles. That is, he was arguing on the assumption that the Temple system in its entirety had been realized in such a way in Christ-realized for all nations- that to impose the Sinai worship strictures on the Gentiles would be untrue to the gospel. The reign of Christ from heaven makes those strictures irrelevant to Universal Judaism.

Therefore, Galatians 4:10 is seeking to keep the Gentiles-not from "day-observance," as if they'd offend God by honoring Christ's birth (for example), but rather-from being caught up in a system which could easily cause them to overlook the very core difference of the New administration: the gospel is now global, not local. You do not have to become a Jew to become a Christian. That's the issue. None other.

So it was Jewish days that Gentiles were not obligated to keep. Mind you, to read Paul's whole theology makes the conclusion irresistible that he would not have objected to Gentiles observing Jewish holidays if they did it for good reasons. He was fighting against an imposition which threatened the universal character of the gospel.

I trust that seeing the Galatians argument in this light is helpful. It makes the Reformers' appeal to it legitimate within bounds. If their intention was to deliver the people of God from having "holy days" imposed upon them by the dozens, they were being true to the text and its meaning. But if they would go further and say that the observance of days is essentially sinful, they would be going too far. The community of Faith has always been free to corporately adopt a day or days to honor God's great works in history on behalf of His covenant people. Just as Judaism was destined to grow up and become Christianity, so the Reformed Faith could grow up when historical circumstances warranted. Early adolescence, some say, is characterized by a teen fighting for who he is not. Maturity comes when he recognizes who he is. Distinguishing themselves from Rome by having no special days was very helpful. But a time would come, and

has come, when the Reformed could freely choose to observe days, in moderation, to honor Christ in distinctly Reformed ways, making identification with Rome for that fact most unlikely.

But besides all this we find within Scripture itself sufficient warrant for the people of God to observe days commemorating God's great acts of intervention on their behalf. Since I am writing this on Purim, 5759, let me start with that. Purim is the holiday celebrating the deliverance of the Jews from, and their victory over, their would-be destroyer, Haman. The events surrounding the holiday are, of course, found in the Book of Esther.

Its origin as a day to be observed is explicitly recorded for us in Esther 9:27-28. The passage is enough to cause convulsions in a strict regulativist:

The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.

There you have it. The covenant people themselves, quite apart from any divine precept or command, took it upon themselves and their descendants to observe a special holiday every year, forever. Quite a problem for the regulativists' interpretation of "You shall not add to it." Not only are we given to understand that there was no prophetic guidance, and no immediate divine instruction, to which authorization for this feast could be traced, but we find it originating in a book which has no mention of the name of God at all. Yet, it is in our Bible, "man-made" day and all.

And we, who reject the RPW, have no problem with this whatsoever. We think it is absolutely normal for God's people to mark His extraordinary acts of deliverance with special observances and activities. And Purim wasn't the only time the people of God did it. They did it with Chanukah, too.

Before discussing Chanukah, let me briefly tell you of the truly pathetic accounting of these Scriptural facts offered by the regulativists. They say, "It appears, that these days of Purim were only appointed to be days of civil mirth and gladness. . . ." (5) Consider where this rationale

leads: The people of God and their descendants may remember, honor and celebrate miraculous interventions and extraordinary deliverances of them by their covenant God everywhere except in the churches which bear His name!

This is not merely an example of extremism in the regulativist camp; it is an example of their principle logically applied and carried out. The principle pits itself not only against the Scripture from which it supposedly arose, but also against the historical sense and self-consciousness of God's people. It is not merely the application which is errant: it is the principle itself.

Now let us move on to Chanukah. The word "Chanukah" means "dedication." Thus in John 10:22 we read, "Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade."

The Form for the Solemnization of Marriage, as used in Reformed churches, says, "Our Lord Jesus honored marriage by His blessed presence at the wedding in Cana." He similarly honored Chanukah by His presence at its celebration in John 10:22.

Chanukah is a commemoration of the divine victory over Antiochus Epiphanes at the hand of Judah Maccabee. (6) The events surrounding the recapturing and re dedication (hence the name of the feast) of the Temple are recorded in the apocryphal books, 1 and 2 Maccabees. Since the holiday is traced to that period there can be no question of its being instituted or authorized by a divinely inspired prophet, for there were none during that period. Nevertheless, God was active on behalf of His people and His covenant.

In 2 Maccabees 10 we find the record of the origin of the celebration, a record which would surely induce hives in any regulativist:

It happened on the same day on which the sanctuary had been profaned by the foreigners, the purification of the sanctuary took place, that is, on the twenty-fifth day of the same month, which was Chislew. They celebrated it for eight days with rejoicing, in the manner of the festival of booths, remembering how not long before, during the festival of booths, they had been wandering in the mountains and caves like wild animals. (7) Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful branches and also fronds of palm, they offered hymns of thanksgiving to

him who had given success to the purifying of his own holy place. They decreed by public edict, ratified by vote, that the whole nation of the Jews should observe these days every year.

And Jesus didn't seem to mind. But then, the Lord Jesus Christ is not a regulativist.

Regulativists Stumble Over "Traditions"

Sure, it is easy to offer a misleading caricature of our Lord by portraying Him as altogether opposed to any human traditions whatsoever in the service of God, but such a portrait would be false.

Without doubt, our Lord condemned any human tradition which obscured, nullified, set apart or contradicted the Word of God ( e.g., Mk. 7:9 and context). But there is no indication that He opposed traditions which supported, magnified or drew attention to the Word and works of God. It is not, for us, a question merely of whether an observance can be traced to "human tradition," (8) but it is also a question of fidelity to Scripture, propriety in worship, and profitability to the people of God. (9)

All the New Testament authors are comfortable with tradition. The Epistles brim with references to uninspired texts and practices. Jannes and Jambres ( 2 Tim. 3:8)-for one, tiny example-are named by Paul in accordance with a Jewish tradition. The Apostles absorbed their Jewish traditions and lived them and repeated them in stride, so long as they met the criteria in the preceding paragraph.

To see how comfortable Jesus was with human traditions which properly honored God, it is only necessary to see Him in the synagogue. When we find Him attending synagogue, "as was His custom," we must remember that He was attending a service of worship at an institution which had no divinely authorized blueprint. (10) The standards for establishing one, administering one or disestablishing one were all derived from "human tradition."

Moreover, when we find Him reading from "the scroll of the prophet Isaiah," we find His endorsement of one of many human traditions which constituted the worship of God in the synagogue. We take readings of the prophets so for granted that the point could easily be lost, but according to the Regulative Principle of Worship, that reading of Isaiah by our own Lord in worship might have been called an act of presumptuousness-what they call "will worship."

Slow down -- I am not being ridiculous. Consider this: the only Scripture we find God commanding to be read in public worship is the law ( Dt. 31:9-13). It is the law, or portions of it, which you find publicly read throughout Israel's history whenever any liturgical readings are referred to. Even in the great scene described in Nehemiah 8, a scene which most regard as revelatory of the synagogue order of that day, the Scripture read is the law ( 8:2).

Who, then, has the authority to introduce into worship the public reading of the prophets? If we may only do what God explicitly commands, we'd need a command to legitimate the reading of anything besides Moses in public worship. An OT-regulativist need not have discounted the prophets' inspiration to argue that an obedient people, following the RPW, would simply trust that God had His reasons for commanding only the law be read in public assemblies, and that to add even inspired prophetic books was nothing but effrontery. That, in fact, is the very argument advanced today by regulativists for singing only Psalms!

If the RPW is correct, it was sheer temerity on the part of the Jews to allow non-Mosaic readings. That such readings were customary by the time of Jesus is obvious. That He took them up and hallowed them is also obvious. Equally obvious is this: they were contrary to the RPW. But, since the RPW itself is not Biblical, we shouldn't be concerned about that.

One more example of benign tradition can be found in what is really a network, an entire fabric, of human traditions: the Passover observance in which our Lord freely participated.

Jewish and Christian scholars alike recognize that, "The Bible includes extensive discussions of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread; however, these descriptions do not correspond with later observances of the holiday." (11) That the Seder evolved quite apart from express divine warrant is an inescapable conclusion, unless one is prepared to adopt a Jewish/Romish view which would posit an independent, secondary source of equal authority with the Word of God contained in Scripture. (12)

If the Regulative Principle of Worship is true, and if the Passover is an institution of divine authority, given by God to His people as a means by which He was to be "remembered," honored, praised and thanked (in other words, worshipped), then nothing could have been lawfully added to it by man.

Yet that is exactly, and indisputably, what happened. Therefore, either the holiday was not of divine origin (but it was), or it was not a means of worship (but it was), or the RPW is false (it is). For when we come to the inspired New Testament Scriptures, we find our Lord and Savior celebrating "the Last Seder" with, among other things, (13) wine.

I will ask that we be concerned here with none of the other elements save the wine. Where is the command of God to use wine in the Passover service? It is not there. Commanded were the pesach, the matzoh and the m'rowr, i.e ., the Passover lamb, the unleavened bread and the bitter herbs.

Yet by the time of our Lord we find not only the introduction of wine into the Passover service, but the organization of the entire Seder around four discrete cups of wine, every one of human origin.

If Jesus our Messiah was a regulativist, I tell you, He would have turned over that Seder table that night! Instead, He took the cup of wine called "Thanksgiving" and said, "This cup is the New Covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The RPW -- if it is not commanded, it's forbidden -- is not Biblical. If it were, we wouldn't have our Savior approving of the predicate of what He made into the Lord's Supper, the very emblem of Christian worship.

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1. Though this does not stop them from serving the Lord's Supper to women. This is an inconsistency in their system, since there is no clear NT command to do so. The same method that leads us to recognize women as fit recipients of the Supper can lead us to see covenant children as fit candidates for baptism. It's called "good and necessary consequence." WCF, I, vi.

2. A CRC church order commentary notes that the Synod of Dordt, 1574, held that the observance of all days except the weekly Sabbath should be discouraged. Again, in 1578, the Synod of Dordt declared the desirability of observing Sunday only. Yet concessions were made almost immediately until, at the great Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, Article 67 was adopted which called for the churches to "keep," beside Sundays, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and other days.

Now, since Calvinism has historically, in no small measure, been defined by that Synod, can we glibly assert that it is unreformed to observe special days? We cannot. For though the Bible does not command us to observe them, the Reformed Synod said, "Go right ahead-in moderation." Therefore it is perfectly just to affirm that holding to the Reformed Faith does not require adoption of the RPW.

3. Without getting too far afield, let me just say why I inserted "supposedly" in #1. It modifies the word "clearly" not the word "commanded." I do believe we have more than adequate Biblical justification for observing the first day of the week. But I can see why some have suggested that the church, if it was to continue to have a Sabbath, would have done fine with keeping it as Saturday. There may be more than an ounce of truth to the suggestion that the church eagerly embraced Sunday to distinguish itself from the Jews. Be that as it may, we have apostolic example as well as Christ's own resurrection and appearances to justify a change of day, not to mention great theological reasons. And beyond that we have the nearly universal practice of the church from earliest times, something which should really help settle the matter for those with lightweight objections. So, we accept #1, above. Happily, the Bible requires a Lord's Day rest in our Creator-Redeemer-Sanctifier.

4. Further, Jesus assumes continued Saturday observance by Jews at least through A.D. 70. Matthew 24:20.

5. George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies*, 264.

6. Sermons by SMS which more fully explain the origins and customs of Chanukah are available from Covenant Media Foundation, (800) 553-3938.

7. The careful reader will recognize this phrase from Hebrews 11:37-38. It is not the only allusion in Hebrews 11 to the events surrounding Chanukah and its chronicling in 1 and 2 Maccabees. Both John Owen and John Brown affirm without reservation that it was to the incidents of Chanukah that the inspired author of Hebrews refers in chapter 11.

8. Traditions are inescapable and unavoidable: the Regulative Principle of Worship, after all, is a human tradition. And if its advocates would only admit that, our articles dealing with it would be greatly abbreviated!

9. These grounds would argue for a minimalist approach to traditions, an approach I gladly embrace.

10. In other words, we don't find its details in Scripture, and you don't find a suggestion in Scripture that God otherwise gave an unscriptured blueprint. The synagogue evolved in the community of the covenant.

11. Baruch M. Bokser in *The Origins of the Seder*, xi.

12. For the Jews this authority is imagined to be possessed in the Talmud, for Rome in the Magisterium of the Church. Quite obviously, Protestants reject the claimed authority of both these sources.

13. The reconstruction of the Last Seder can be found in many sources, including Edersheim. It is laden with non-Biblical ( not anti-biblical!) elements and ordinances.

#### **4. Part 4 Regulatvists Stumble Over Themselves**

Thus far we have sought to prove that the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) is untrue to Scripture. We have done this by demonstrating the regulatvists' flawed appeal to texts wherein they imagine to find it when it simply isn't there.

We have also shown that regulatvists miss the meaning of the principle where it is found -- in the Tabernacle/Temple administration which terminated upon and in Christ.<sup>1</sup>

We then noticed how regulatvists (conveniently) fail to notice the synagogue. It is tough to miss an entire institution unless you're really trying.

Then we proved that special days are not necessarily the evil they are cracked up to be by regulatvists. Israel was not allowed to add Tabernacle/Temple-dependent feast days, it is true, just as we are not allowed to add to the gospel. But outside of that "OT gospel" system, they were free to appoint for themselves days to remember extraordinary deliverances by their God. No harm done, no offense taken by God. Christ Himself gives us the "Amen" to that.

And lastly, we saw how regulativists blithely overlook an abundance of New Testament (not to mention Old Testament!) evidence that human tradition is not necessarily evil. It certainly may be evil -- there is no shortage of historical evidence proving that possibility. But human tradition is not necessarily evil. The Regulative Principle of Worship itself serves as proof of that.

Now we would move on to challenge the arbitrariness in the regulativists' applications of their principle. But before we do, please permit a reiteration and clarification. I happily stand squarely in the tradition of RPW-style worship, but I stand here on grounds other than those advanced by regulativists. I propose that there is more consistency in worshipping in the RPW-style while rejecting its arguments than in paying lip-service to its arguments but rejecting the style of worship to which it leads. Some who call themselves believers in the Regulative Principle of Worship, believe a version of it that is so elastic as to make it truly unrecognizable as the RPW to any honest observer.

A close colleague of mine, for example, a man I love and respect, proclaims, "All Protestants must believe in the Regulative Principle." But he defines "regulate" so broadly as to make his principle completely at odds with the historically received RPW.

"God regulates in different ways," he says, arriving at an understanding of "regulate" which makes his theory indistinguishable from those who reject the RPW outright. Why doesn't he just say he doesn't believe it?

No aureole is waiting to alight upon the heads of those who would turn their professed principle into a wax nose, twisting, distorting, reshaping it, then calling themselves its loyal sons. The RPW has a historic, discernible, commonly received meaning. It is passing strange that some who (quite properly) are at odds with deconstructionist methodology would then attempt to pass themselves off as regulativists when they have first divested the word of its historical meaning and injected it with an entirely opposite meaning. We would not take kindly to a man who tries to convince us that a cow is an animal with two legs, feathers and gills. He's describing something other than what we call a cow, no doubt about it. So also, true regulativists are those who at least attempt to apply a discrete principle-if it is not commanded, it is forbidden-even if their attempts include improvements. The key is that they own it in a way which leaves the principle recognizable as the one historically received.

It is better to confess up-front that the regulative principle, being unscriptural, ought to be rejected. We respect the earnest adherents of the RPW, and we treasure the sort of worship God has providentially allowed to flourish in their courts. We would adopt and maintain that worship-indeed, we'd even propagate it-we'd just do so on other premises.

### Exclusive Psalmody

On to applications. Perhaps the favorite application of the principle by those who regard themselves as strict or consistent regulativists is exclusive Psalmody. We have no quarrel with singing Psalms exclusively, in corporate worship, if the practice is defended on proper grounds and recognized as a tradition. Unfortunately, regulativists regard it as anything but.

Beginning with their "principle," they go through the New Testament looking for commanded elements. And at Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, according to one RPW authority, "the difficulty begins."<sup>2</sup> I don't think they've even begun to consider the difficulty which, for them, begins there.

The texts in question, as you know, read as follows: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;" and, "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 regulativists' row<sup>3</sup> over these verses typically revolves around the triple designation, "psalms and, hymns, and spiritual songs." The "strict" regulativist argues, not without power, that these three words all refer to the Psalms, the Psalter as contained in our Christian Bibles. Their evidence for this is that the Septuagint Bible, in common use in the days of our Lord and His apostles, and known to the recipients of these letters, had these three Greek words variously serving as headers over respective psalms: some would say "A Psalm . . . ," others would say, "A Hymn . . . ," others might be denominated as a "Spiritual Song."

We will grant, for argument's sake, the regulativist's contention here. What he hasn't proved, however-whatever these songs might be-is that they are to be sung in Christian worship services at all, on his principles.

For what we do not find in the Ephesians or Colossians passages is evidence to suggest that Paul is giving instructions for what is to take place in a Christian worship service. The fact that a

command is found in a letter to a church is no proof that its fulfillment was to take place in a worship service. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband." However much we believe that, very few today would suggest that this is a command to be fulfilled in public worship (though the New Testament indicates that there were some at that time who were not beyond just such a suggestion: see Jude and 2 Peter).

The contexts of both the Ephesians and Colossians verses indicate that public worship was not in view. The contexts of both citations are general rules for covenant-keeping in all of life. They are found within "rules for God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved." They include commands which aid in the maturation of Christian character, Christian graces, Christian virtues. In both Ephesians and Colossians the commands are immediately followed by sets of commands for domestic life and vocational life. Nothing suggests that these are rules governing worship services.

In those contexts where we do find Paul's explicit, inspired will for what is to take place in worship, we find no command to sing. See, for example, 1 Timothy 2-3 or Titus 1-3.

Yes, Jesus sang at Passover, but that was a) during the pre-Pentecost administration, b) in the home, not the synagogue, and c) after the required elements of service had been performed. (I'm not being any sillier in explaining things away here than regulativists ordinarily are; I just beg you to bear in mind, this is not my position!)

Paul and Silas sang in prison, not a church service. And even Paul's dictum, "I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind," though found in a context dictating worship order, is not normative because (it could be argued) it was regulating the charismata, gifts which most regulativists agree have run their ordained course. We are no more to sing (it could be said) than we are to speak in tongues.

That leaves us with no clear command to sing in Christian worship services. In fact, Conrad Grebel, in his "Letter to Thomas Muntzer," Zurich, 5 September, 1524,<sup>4</sup> argued along similar and other lines that singing may not be introduced into Christian worship. Behold! The consistent regulativist!

We understand that you have translated the Mass into German and composed new German Hymns. This cannot be good, because we find in the New Testament no teaching or example about singing. Paul scolds the Corinthian scholars more than he praises them for murmuring in the congregation, as though they were singing, just as Jews and Italians<sup>5</sup> pronounce their liturgy in the manner of songs. Second, because singing in the Latin language arose without divine teaching and apostolic example, and has not brought about anything good, it will edify still less in German and will create an external, specious faith. Third [watch this one!- sms], Paul most clearly forbids singing in the fifth chapter to the Ephesians and in the third chapter of his letter to the Colossians. He does this by saying that people should talk and instruct one another with psalms and spiritual songs;<sup>6</sup> and if one wants to sing, one should sing and give thanks in one's heart. Fourth, what we are not taught with clear sayings and examples should be as forbidden to us as if it were written: "Do not do that; do not sing." Fifth, Christ tells His messengers to preach only the word that is in the Old and New Testaments. Paul also says that the speech of Christ, not song, should dwell among us. Whoever sings poorly is frustrated; whoever sings well is arrogant. Sixth, we should not add to the word what we think good, nor should we subtract from it. Seventh....

So, on the regulativist's professed principle, we would not say he has gone too far in advocating a cappella psalmody exclusively.<sup>7</sup> Rather, we'd insist that he has not followed his professed principle far enough. He should insist upon no singing at all in corporate worship. Then he would approach consistency.

In all this we have let alone other weighty, oft-lodged arguments which point out the embarrassing twists regulativists put themselves in: 1) Their "Psalms-only" position results in the exclusion from worship of other divinely-inspired hymns (1 Sam. 2:1-10; Ex. 15:1-18; Lk. 1:46-55; not to mention Dt. 32!) and other singable Scripture portions. 2) They are opposed to hymns and so must ignore the presence of hymns or hymn-fragments in the New Testament itself (e.g., Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16). 3) They are opposed to "man-made hymns" in worship but (most) allow them outside worship. Yet the passages they rely on to justify exclusive Psalmody, as we have seen, cover life outside of corporate worship. 4) They oppose "man-made hymns" but accept man-made prayers and sermons, an amazing tension! 5) They say, "Psalms alone are permitted in worship," and so, if consistent, would ironically have Christian worship

characterized as that where the words "Jesus Christ" would never be sung, for that matchless Name is not found in that form in the Psalter. We'll leave it at five.

### Good Intentions

It is not my intention, I remind you, to overthrow or even to challenge the legitimacy of worship as it is found in churches which adhere to the RPW. After all, that is the very sort of worship one finds in our church, Messiah's Congregation. On the contrary, the two modest things I would hope to accomplish are, 1) to encourage the establishment of regulative-style worship on firmer principles, that is, on principles less vulnerable to exegetical overthrow, and 2) to take some of the arrogant wind out of the sails of RPW zealots who speak contemptuously of all non-RPW worship as, for that very reason, an "abomination" to God.

It is precisely because I believe that regulativist-style worship is the most God-glorifying and sheep-edifying worship that I want to see it more widely accepted, adopted, and, perhaps, improved. But if it is to be argued for, it must be argued for on the grounds that it is demonstrably the best sort of worship, not on the grounds that all other worship is, by definition, an abomination.

We must get to the point where honesty prevails and we acknowledge that regulativist worship is a tradition. I happen to believe, and I believe I can demonstrate, that it is the best form of worship, and that for a variety of reasons; but I cannot, with good conscience, pretend that it can be established on the traditional premises, viz., that God forbids in worship anything He has not expressly commanded. I trust we have seen that it is impossible to believe that and the whole Bible, too.

For we have shown that regulativists, in arguing for their particular shibboleth, bend the Bible to make it appear to say what they wish. They say they've found the RPW where, upon closer examination, it is not to be found. And they miss it where it is: in the sacrificial system which has been taken up in Christ in such a way as to void blood-administrations on earth. We now approach God through the Gospel of the blood of the Messiah. It is the Gospel which is strictly "regulated" in the New administration of the covenant, for we have no blood rites and we have no orders dependent upon them. The blood that saves us is sprinkled upon the altar in heaven. Its shedding is not to be, cannot be, repeated upon earth, but is to be believed on and celebrated.

I do sympathize with the apprehension which grips some regulativists. They fear that if their principle is overturned, chaos will reign in worship, that "anything will go." These fears should not govern our exegesis.

In fact, they are just the kind of fears we hear expressed in arguments against the Reformed doctrine of sola gratia. "If you tell people they are saved by grace through faith alone, and not by works of the law, chaos will ensue! People will be unrestrained! Sin will abound!"

Our fathers-thank God!-steam-rolled over such objections. First, they said, the Bible teaches that we are justified by grace through faith. Second, they insisted, good works are most necessary (Heidelberg Q&A, 86-87). We only insist that God is not put into our debt by them. Rather, they are ever-present evidences of thankful hearts set free.<sup>8</sup> If we could be justified by what we do, Christ died for nothing.

Thus our fathers met the challenge of those who said that the Scripture doctrine of grace would lead to antinomian chaos. They followed Paul with a loud, "God forbid!" (Rom. 6:1, 2ff.). So, too, must we insist that if the Regulative Principle of Worship is not taught in Scripture, we serve no one well by pretending that it is.

The solution that offset the fears of those alarmed over the proclamation of free grace was the proclamation of the whole counsel of God. The answer to the question of how, if we are delivered from the RPW, we are to order Christian services of worship, will be found along the same path: the whole counsel of God.

In our next article we will set forth (D.V.) what we call The Informed Principle of Worship<sup>9</sup>: If it is not forbidden, it might be permitted. Whether it is permitted depends on other Biblical requirements and considerations. None are esoteric. They are there lying right on the surface of Scripture for anyone to use. Each serves as a filter by which faithful churches may test proposed elements and aspects of a worship service.

It is our prayer that the Informed Principle of Worship will help in some small way to move us toward a Reformed consensus which honors Christ, orthodoxy and Reformed history, all in the light of, and according to, God's whole Word. Just let us not so misidentify seventeenth-century Presbyterianism as to mistake it for the equivalent of God's last Word spoken to or through the church!

The last word for this present article, however, will be given to a late seventeenth-century Presbyterian, a man widely regarded (from that day until this) as perhaps the greatest Presbyterian of the period: Richard Baxter. I came across these words of Baxter in a book by Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord*.<sup>10</sup>

Mr. Paul explains how Baxter "on the one hand, acknowledged the highest admiration for the [Westminster] assembly and its works, but he recognized the problems associated with synods such as Westminster and Dordt in trying to establish standards of orthodoxy for all time."

Baxter left a record concerning the time he had been approached by a bookseller to write an introduction to the papers of the Assembly. The bookseller was keen to have Baxter stress how the fruits of the Assembly's labors could be profitably used by families. Baxter accepted, with conditions. He asked that his introduction be examined by other theologians, then used or discarded, as they wished. Only, he insisted, print it in its entirety or not at all. He went on to relate that:

The bookseller gets Mr. Manton to put an Epistle before the book, who inserted mine in a different Character in his own, (as mine, but not naming me): But he leaveth out a part, which it seems, was not pleasing to all. When I had commended the Catechisms for the use of Families, I added, That I hoped the Assembly intended not all in that long confession and those Catechisms, to be imposed as a Test of Christian Communion; nor to disown all that scrupled at any word in it; if they had I could not have commended it for any such use, though it be useful for the instruction of Families, &c. All this is left out, which I thought meet to open, lest I be there misunderstood.<sup>11</sup>

Brother Baxter, I pray we all understand your sentiment perfectly-and that we all agree. Amen to your words, amen to your exception, amen to the spirit in which it was written.

Voetnoot

<sup>1</sup> It's important to bear in mind that the Old Testament saints participated in Christ, by faith, through the means appointed for them precisely as we participate in Him through the means appointed for us in the New administration. We should also remember that errors of religious

formalism may be committed just as easily today as before Christ's advent. This is a danger in all Christian communions, whatever their principle of regulating worship.

2 G.I. Williamson, *The Singing of Psalms in the Worship of God*; available at <http://www.lancenews.infi.net/~englandmgiwill.htm>

3 Pronounced "rou," this word means a big uproar; a brawl.

4 I am indebted to Mr. Timothy Wilder for bringing this to my attention.

5 My kids are Jewish Italians!

6 Grebel is accurate here.

7 Thomas Manton, near the top in my personal Puritan pantheon, author of the Epistle to the Reader which still graces the front of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland's edition of the Westminster Standards, acknowledged that orthodoxy does not require exclusive psalmody. In his commentary on James, p. 442, Manton wrote: "I confess that we do not forbid other songs [beside Psalms]; if grave and pious, after good advice they may be received into the Church. Tertullian, in his apology, showeth that in primitive times they used this liberty, either to sing scripture psalms or such as were of a private composure." So much for the oft-heard claim that subscription to the Westminster Standards requires a commitment to exclusive psalmody.

8 "Good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith: and by them believers manifest their thankfulness. . ." (WCF, XVI, ii). Q. "How many things are necessary for you to know, that in this comfort you may live and die happily? A: Three things: First, the greatness of my sin and misery. Second, how I am redeemed from all my sins and misery. Third, how I am to be thankful to God for such redemption" (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A #2).

9 Feel free to call it something else.

10 Thank you, Rev. Jack Carter, for the book!

11 p. 542; italics as in R. S. Paul's book.

## 5. Part 5

we've sought to show why the Regulative Principle of Worship -- if it is not commanded, it is forbidden -- cannot survive when measured against the Scripture.

RPW chauvinists:

1. "Discover" it where it is not. They isolate words and incidents from their qualifying contexts.
2. Miss it where it is. The Tabernacle/Temple system was indeed strictly regulated, but why? Because it was the gospel, not because it was worship.
3. Miss the humongous implications of the synagogue, a "man-made" worship institution functioning alongside the Temple system.
4. Fail to fairly account for the approbated celebration of "man-instituted" special days in Scripture.
5. Fail to fairly account for approbated "man-made" traditions, some of which modified even explicit divine instructions.
6. Fail to be consistent with their own principle, upon which singing in New Testament-era worship services cannot be justified.
7. Have landed themselves in so many pickles they could open a deli.

Speaking of pickles, not more than one or two sourpusses have responded bitterly to our series so far. Sweet mail received from ministers and elders (TR-variety) in the PCA, the OPC, and other Presbyterian denominations were almost uniformly positive (a pleasant surprise), with many expressing sincere gratitude for the salty series.

The responses certainly have been interesting. It's been about six months since our first critique of the RPW was sent out. We estimate that our arguments have been sent to well over 11,000 ministers, elders, churches, and Reformed families. Yet the only feedback resembling an argument against the position taken in these pages was received independently from two men from the same church. We'll let the minister of that church be the spokesman. A proud-to-be-strict-RPW brother, a good and well-loved man whom I rejoice to call my friend (though we certainly disagree on this issue!)-expressed in a colorfully worded question what we suspect is on

the minds of many: If there's no RPW, then "rock `n' roll bands, longhaired hippies, dancing in the aisles, `slain in the Spirit,' incense waving, smoking peyote, singing of my latest poem I wrote two weeks ago, are all OK in worship?"

To this we must say, first, we are not seeking to overthrow the sort of worship found in churches which seek to abide by the RPW. Rather, we are hoping to advance that very sort of worship, but on grounds less vulnerable to informed, Biblical challenge. That is the nail-on-the-head issue: Must we impose a man-made principle, such as the RPW,<sup>1</sup> in order to have God-honoring, people-of-God-edifying worship? Our answer is a flat "No. We do not need a manufactured principle. We have many clear Biblical principles which, if applied, lead to the desired results."

Second, one goal of replacing the RPW with what is hopefully a stronger set of principles is to allow dialogue and debate in terms of "good, better, best," as opposed to those recurring, barren ultimatums of "true/false" or "acceptable/abominable." The ultimatum approach has stagnated the progress and propagation of Reformed-style worship. Further, where it has prevailed it has frequently bequeathed to the church a cadre of Tartuffes who make certain Pharisees look like rank amateurs.<sup>2</sup>

Third, as we suggested in our last installment, the sort of argumentation which insists that chaos is the alternative to the RPW is precisely the sort which Reformed people can reject with a laugh, or even a humble swagger. For it is an argument of identical construction to that which has ever been waged against the Reformed doctrine of justification, a doctrine regarded by many as residing at the very heart of the true Christian faith.

#### Faith Works

"If you tell people they are justified -- declared forensically righteous by God -- apart from their own works, sin will know no restraint, chaos will abound!"

Such arguments against the doctrine of justification by grace through faith were refuted more than 400 years ago in the Heidelberg Catechism. Q64: But does not this doctrine make men careless and profane? A64: No, for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

We are not seeking to overthrow the sort of worship found in churches which seek to abide by the RPW. Rather, we are hoping to advance that very sort of worship, but on grounds less vulnerable to informed, Biblical challenge.

A free and gracious justification was and is regarded as a reality inseparable from sanctification, expressed through good works as defined by God's law. No symbols on earth exalt the law of God, in its rightful place, like the Reformed symbols. The Westminster Confession's treatment of Good Works (Chapter XVI), is excellent. Section II says, ". . . good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith."

The Second Helvetic, in its time the most widely held Reformed confession, speaking of justification by faith in Chapter XV, says, "Wherefore, in this matter we are not speaking of a fictitious, empty, lazy and dead faith, but of a living, quickening faith. It is and is called a living faith because it apprehends Christ who is life and makes alive, and shows that it is alive by living works. And so James does not contradict anything in this doctrine of ours. For he speaks of an empty, dead faith of which some boasted but who did not have Christ living in them by faith (James 2:14 ff.). James said that works justify, yet without contradicting the apostle (otherwise he would have to be rejected) but showing that Abraham proved his living and justifying faith by works. This all the pious do, but they trust in Christ alone and not in their own works."

Earlier (in Chapter XII), Helvetic II refuted antinomianism in a most concise manner: We condemn everything that heretics old and new have taught against the law.

And these have not been mere paper convictions! Reformed and Presbyterian communities have a well-deserved reputation for living out the Puritan sayings, "Justified by faith alone, but faith which appears alone [that is, without good works] does not justify," and, "Faith proves justification; good works prove faith." We Reformed have been a people who have lived lawfully without seeking justification by merit. It is obvious, therefore, not only from the Bible but from the lives of those who believe it, that the fears of bedlam overtaking a freely justified people were unwarranted.

Such a sort of argument, then ("The bogeyman will get you!")-whether offered to retain works-righteousness or the RPW-is weak. In fact, the very offering of this as the only argument left in the case before us may represent the swan song of the RPW. When its advocates can only say-"Oh yeah? Well, wadda ya gonna do without us?"<sup>3</sup>-we suspect that the time is short till the Reformed and Presbyterian world recognizes that the RPW may be put to rest, without fear, as a once popular but nevertheless extreme view. The RPW is giving way, even among orthodox Presbyterians, to the far more Biblical and balanced covenantal view of worship. Shedding the RPW does not leave us with nothing! A faithful husband is not such because he is being followed by a shamus, but because he lawfully loves his wife. We have a heavenly Father we seek to lawfully worship, a blessed Savior we seek to serve, and a Holy Spirit who has given us 66 covenantal books to guide us in so doing.

#### Continental Divide

On the Continental Reformed side of our feedback, we received "So what else is new?" mail. Though some Continental Reformed, through cross-pollination from Puritans, have embraced a version of the RPW, very few have been in the "strict" camp.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the Continental Reformed have long been a people who worship in a God-centered, orderly, and covenantal manner without the RPW.<sup>5</sup> Rev. Donald Van Dyken, pastor of an Orthodox Christian Reformed Church, wrote to us, "I must say that I never heard of the Regulative Principle of Worship until exposure to my ministerial colleagues here in the OCRC's who were from Presbyterian background."

Rev. Van Dyken provided us with an instructive outline. "My understanding of worship is governed by the Covenantal Principle. That works itself out in several ways, all of them, I believe, covenantal:

1. Covenant is relationship, and the relationship we are concerned with in worship is between the Covenant God (Triune) and His people. Worship, therefore, consists of communion between these two: God and His people.
2. As God initiates covenant, and covenant demands response, so worship basically consists of God speaking and His people responding.

3. Worship as a covenant body means every soul in the church (no ecclesiastical daycare centers for children) gathered as covenantal family units.

4. Worship in the New Covenant grows out of the Old and is characterized by immediacy because of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The vicarious character of Old order worship is removed, the congregation of the Lord not being dependent upon human mediators or priests.

5. The New Covenant brings the wonderful liberty of maturity.

"I don't know where people miss the boat on this thing," says Rev. Van Dyken. "The maturity of the church gives her the freedom to work out varying practices so long as they are consistent with the principles in which she was supposed to have been soaked in her OT childhood. New Covenant is covenant maturity. Maturity means work, and perhaps that is why so many want to revert to childhood."

Rev. Van Dyken's thoughts emit the clean fragrance of covenantal air. And his notation concerning maturity is particularly appropriate. But I doubt that our RPW friends are averse to work.

In some ways we might view maintenance of the RPW as more work. An illustration of what I mean by "more work" occurred in the course of ministry here. God provided us an opportunity to witness to an official from a United Nations delegation whose native country is still plunged deep in communist darkness (may God deliver them!). Every contact we had with him, though, was not with him alone: he was accompanied by a "chaperone." Though the cost and inconvenience of assigning the chaperone were great, the commies thought it not only worth it, but necessary. They treat their own officials like infants-nay, like recreants just itching to switch sides.

My RPW friends who are terrified of what might happen to worship without the RPW are a bit like the Communist Party officials afraid of what might happen to their delegates without chaperones. The presupposition is the same in both cases: the people who are supposed to be friends and servants are actually regarded as enemies, turncoats-in-waiting.<sup>6</sup> Such a view sees the church void of friends-of-God. That such is our state by nature, we heartily agree. To think that such is our state by grace, however, turns grace into nothing.

For our purposes, the chaperone in the above example represents the unbiblical "principles" of both extreme positions dealing with the regulation of worship. Both Rome and regulativists treat their votaries as people not to be trusted, ready to bolt at the first opportunity, in desperate need of the Watchful Eye.<sup>7</sup> Rome is totalitarian in what it imposes while regulativists are totalitarian in what they exclude.<sup>8</sup> Both Rome and regulativists treat the people of God like infants, incapable of maturity or sound judgment. Rome tells her minions that they must observe special days (for example; the list of "musts" is long). Those confined to the regulativists' barracks are told that they must not observe special days (the list of "must nots" is nearly as long).

The Informed Principle of Worship, based on a covenantal view of things, rejects both extremes and insists upon considering worship in the light of *tota scriptura*.

All parties agree that what is forbidden must be excluded.<sup>9</sup> But for the rest, what? High-churchers say, "Not forbidden, then fine." Regulativists say, "If it is not commanded, it is forbidden." Both propositions fail to meet the test of *tota scriptura*. We propose the IPW: What is not forbidden might be permitted. It depends. Biblical worship is in harmony with the whole of Scripture and keeps a focused eye on Christ's covenantal achievements in history and the impact of His completed work on worship in the New Order. We'll consider some particulars of the IPW momentarily. First, let's see why the church is to be addressed as bound by principles which approach her as mature. For in capturing this we can see how our appeal on behalf of Reformed worship is more like this: "You should not worship in a manner which is beneath your calling," than this: "You abominable, idolatrous wretches! God hates you, and your worship too!"

### Coming of Age

When children are small, loving parents regulate their behavior down to minutiae. As the children grow the regulations cascade like scales. They fall not to the emergence of antinomian behavior but (one hopes) to the living out of those principles which they learned as children. We forbid our children to go in the gutter when they are toddlers; when they mature, they apply that principle by guarding life. For God's will for us in the sixth commandment is ". . . that I do not harm myself, nor willfully run into any danger."<sup>10</sup> The toddler prohibition was an in-order-to-matter. A 36 year-old who is afraid to cross the street has a problem.

There is no need to rehearse the New Testament Scripture's praise of maturity, but we will remind you that the Pentecost event recorded in Acts 2 was the covenantal equivalent of the

church emerging into a new maturity. In fact, it was then that the church became capable of "reproduction." Pentecost was the adolescent church's first hormonal rush.<sup>11</sup> The church wasn't born at Pentecost: it was bar mitzvah'd.

Just as each individual is reckoned to be the same person though passing through several stages en route to maturity, so also the one church grew up in accordance with God's plan. We confess that the church, from Adam forward, is organically one. Our catechism properly teaches that "the Son of God, through His Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for Himself a community chosen to eternal life and united in true faith."

The one church has been from Eden, but, like a child on its way to adulthood, the church has not had its affairs identically administered at each stage of its development. There was continual, superintended growth of the covenant, leading-according to God's express plan-to "the Christ event" and its consequent fruit which ripened at Pentecost. It was only then that the church could truly "be fruitful and multiply," being freed to carry the meaning of the Tabernacle/Temple system around the world in the very portable form of the gospel. The truth was no longer tied to the apron strings of an earthly center. "Headquarters," Zion, Jerusalem, was now fixed in heaven, equidistant from all earthly locations. The kingdoms of this world had, in principle, become the kingdoms of our Lord.<sup>12</sup>

When Jesus our Savior had accomplished His incarnation, perfect life, substitutionary death on the cross, burial, resurrection, and ascension, the one church (which had existed from the beginning) could enter upon a new phase of its being. It could grow up and begin to live out, in all the world, the principles it had learned from infancy. From Moses to Pentecost the church, like a child, was "kept at home," more or less confined to one geographical location. Now, with the Spirit of maturity, it could leave home, reproduce, and encompass the earth.<sup>13</sup>

Looked at this way, the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost was less the goal of Christ's work than the provided means to empower her and enable her to accomplish the set goal. That goal was clearly articulated by our Lord before His ascension: to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations, to baptize all nations, and to teach all nations to obey everything He has commanded.

The self-identification of a people bound to one geographical location, united by a common language and common customs, and distinguished by an exclusive access to God-for such a people to achieve and maintain a strong self-identification as a people is a rather simple affair. But to give people from all the disparate nations of the earth, speaking different languages and having different customs-to provide a common identity in Christ to this group required a special operation of the Spirit. That is the unity in the Spirit of which Paul speaks.<sup>14</sup> That is how Jews and Gentiles are made one: not by common access to an earthly Temple, but by common reception of the Spirit of Truth, by whom they have access-from anywhere on earth-to the heavenly Temple.

Thus the New administration is characterized by a universalism which forbids the imposition of Jewish-that is, Sinaitic-worship forms upon the Gentiles. Any honest reading of the New Testament Scriptures reveals this to be the administrative issue confronting the church at that time.<sup>15</sup> To impose upon the Gentiles now a principle which regulated only the Temple service during a specific developmental phase of the covenant would be as improper, as covenantally anachronistic, as wrongheaded, as requiring Gentile males to be circumcised or to visit Jerusalem thrice annually. Such regulation belonged to another day.

Yet some regulativists seem positively terrified of treating churches as maturing entities. They would keep them bound to the old Jerusalem's precincts via punctilious regulation.

Such an approach is backwards. It reminds me of the suburban sot who lived on a tree-lined acre. Night after night, driving home from his favorite pub in an intoxicated stupor, he would smash into yet another tree. The tippler's solution was to cut down all the trees on his property. A good regulativist answer. There was a better way, however. He should have controlled himself.

This difference of approach is evident if we examine how the Apostle reasons with God's people.<sup>16</sup> Though this is an argument from "texture"-or as they'd say today, "look and feel"-it is nonetheless instructive. Simply compare any standard regulativist tome with St. Paul's admonitions to, say, the Corinthians. To the Corinthian mantra-"Everything is permissible for me"-Paul responds thus: "But not everything is beneficial." And again: "But I will not be mastered by anything." And once more: "But not everything is beneficial." And lastly: "But not everything is constructive."<sup>17</sup>

Paul spoke to his beloved churches as if they were adult entities; he always spoke to them in terms of their calling.<sup>18</sup> He knew that the nurturing and development of Christian character would yield the desired results: the living out of a God-glorifying life in all spheres.

When Paul devotes several "chapters" to dealing with worship irregularities, he does so without once suggesting that the Corinthian problem was soluble simply by forbidding whatever was not expressly commanded.<sup>19</sup> He could have saved himself a lot of effort! But then, he was constrained by God's actual will.

There are Biblical arguments to govern our behavior and restrain excess which appeal to simple principles, e.g., "Nobody should seek his own good but the good of others." There are also "arguments" which rely on mere authority. When God has spoken on a subject, mere authority is a good form of argument! But when He has not-as is the case with many New Order worship details-one must pursue other avenues of argumentation. Consider church architecture.

"Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount."<sup>20</sup> It can be justly said that from Moses to Messiah the architecture of the "House of God" was as strictly regulated as the worship within it. Yet God has not given to the post-Pentecost church a blueprint for its architecture. To see this freedom that we now have-in fitting church form (architecture) to function (the activities occurring within)-is to see the church exercising one of its many prerogatives as a mature entity in Christ. God treats us as grown-ups; regulativists treat us as toddlers. Instead of basing their appeals for improvement on higher sensibilities and principles, as one would reason with an adult, they seek simply to "child-proof" every house with their "must nots." There are locks everywhere because God's covenant people, in their view, are not to be trusted.

Voetnoot

1 Obviously, we are assuming that the evidence thus far presented in this series satisfactorily demonstrates that the RPW is not true to Scripture. Therefore, the RPW's source is to be found in man-no crime in itself, if only it would be admitted.

2 One further thought about methodology. I've been told by some regulativist brethren that without the RPW we have no grounds to correct either high-chuchers or those who have adopted modern evangelical excesses. First, I don't believe that's so. All schools of worship may be tested by the Informed Principle of Worship. Second, I ask, "Has having the RPW in hand aided you in the conversion of many churches to the Reformed way of life?" I didn't think so. Third, all of us would agree that, in any case, principle is above pragmatism. Therefore, this is a non-issue.

3 We don't want to do without them, just their imposed principle.

4 You will recall that by 1619 they codified the observance of non-prescribed holidays into their church order and calendar.

5 We are aware of those who would enlist in their RPW cause A.96 of the Heidelberg (which teaches that God's will for us in the Second Commandment is that we "in no way make any image of God, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded us in His Word") and perhaps Article 32 of the Belgic (" . . . that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted"). But this is nothing but a grand case of question-begging, for the question remains as to just what God has taught us in His Word about worship, and just what Christ has instituted. We assert that it was God's will, revealed and recorded in His Word, that He be worshipped in a synagogue, for which He did not give "If I have not commanded it, you may not do it"-type instruction. We further assert that it is Christ's express will that the church pattern its worship along synagogual lines.

6 This blatantly anti-Biblical attitude is one which appears in many places, not just in the RPW camp. It is endemic to certain morbidly introspectionistic communions where the children of believers, and the people gathered before the pulpit, are addressed, not as reconciled friends, but as enemies of God.

7 Both positions depend upon and foster an ecclesiocentrism that consolidates clerical power, swiped from the pool of power conferred by God upon the community of covenant men. The power grab is more subtle in some precincts of the Reformed and Presbyterian world, but it is not less real. We still need to confront Protestant sacerdotalism.

8 One correspondent wrote to us describing what he felt to be "the stifling, narrow, almost retentive way in which the [regulativist] crowd expects one to worship. Both my wife and I are

struck by the Roman Catholic 'feel' we have when we are in an RPW service. Just as you say, Rev. Schlissel, 'who would've thought the very principle designed to distance us from Rome would actually link us. But all extreme positions kiss, you know.' How very, very true." I thought his comments interesting, though I do not share his opinion. I was referring to principles, not "look-and-feel." Personally, I find RPW-style worship exhilarating, glorious, secure, and man-at-his-best type worship. But I was not at the church these folks visited. Perhaps it carried the RPW to such an extreme that it experientially kissed Rome.

9 Though not all carry out that conviction.

10 Heidelberg, #105.

11 Adolescence is important but it too must yield to further growth. The early manifestations of the Spirit were not normative for the rest of church history. We are always to be growing, maturing, "aiming for perfection" (2 Cor. 13:11).

12 Rev. 11:15.

13 We are not here asserting that the spiritual experience of covenant believers after Pentecost was superior to the subjective experience of those before; in fact, we deny it.

14 See Eph. 2:11-22; 4:3; 1 Cor. 12:13.

15 Acts 15 is just the beginning. The basis of Gentile inclusion in the covenant is the issue, either expressly mentioned or alluded to, in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians (see chapter 2), Colossians, Philippians-we could go on.

16 Unless they tampered with the gospel.

17 1 Cor. 6:12 and 10:23-4.

18 Eph. 4:1, e.g.: As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

19 In fact, regulativists themselves use the Informed Principle of Worship (viz., "It depends") when they come to 1 Cor. 14:39 where God says, "Do not forbid speaking in tongues." Of course, finding an RPW church which does not forbid speaking in tongues-in a worship service!-is a tough task. And well it should be, on our principles. Tongues, like the RPW, belonged to another day.

20 Heb. 8:5.

## **6. Part 6 Architecture Mirrors Doctrine**

or good or ill, for about the last 14 years, Messiah's Congregation has been worshipping in facilities rented from an Episcopal church.(1) Like virtually all "high" churches, its doctrine is immediately evident in its architecture. About half of the sanctuary is taken up by an "altar" area where the critical drama for high-Episcopalians occurs. A notice is hung at the entrance that the body of Christ (so they say) is in the bread at the altar, therefore "the faithful" ought to genuflect upon entering.(2) There are Stations of the Cross, candles, crosses, and kneeling benches in the pews. The pulpit is stage-right. The problem, though, is not the church's architecture. Rather, it's the church's erroneous set of beliefs which compels it to build church facilities this way. The architecture of the church is merely following its belief system. The form of their building is informed by their form of worship which is informed by their doctrine. The buck stops there.

Our high church friends fail to comprehend the full implications of Christ's work. Specifically, high-churchers fail to see, first, our Savior's work as the terminus of the Tabernacle/Temple system. They seek to maintain, *mutatis mutandis*, the offering system of the Old administration.<sup>3</sup> They believe they need to offer Christ again and again on an altar. To this they add a second error: that for this to happen efficaciously they need a priestly caste.

These two errors replace 1) the Biblical teaching of Christ's once-for-all, sufficient work, and 2) the Biblical treasure which tells us of our right to full, unfettered access to this Christ by faith, apart from earthly mediation.

The architecture of high churches, then, is not the problem. It is their doctrine. To realize my dream of tearing down their "altar" (thus accommodating more living altars, AKA worshippers) requires only the tearing down of their erroneous doctrine. Like night follows day, church architecture follows church doctrine. They'll change their architecture when they change their doctrine. So, too, will many worship errors evaporate as people are instructed in the sound, 200-proof truth of the Reformed Faith. Our response to high church excesses should less often be,

"You're not allowed to!" than, "Why would you want to? After all, 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.'"

Similarly, our response to the silly "worship" of evangelicaldom must avoid treating it as an abstraction, as a thing in itself. Rather, it is the result of theology gone awry or simply left undone. (4) What should bother us is the modern indifference to the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of worship as well as of wisdom. What these churches need so desperately is not the RPW, but a proper vision (so to speak) of God, and of what He has accomplished yes, accomplished in Christ!

#### Worship Mirrors Doctrine

That doctrine is the principal thing in the foundation of worship ought not to surprise us. You will recall that Tabernacle/Temple worship was strictly regulated because Christ was therein being revealed. When our Lord had completed His earthly work, that strictness was immediately, without a beat skipped, transferred to the guardianship of the gospel. New Testament anathemas are pronounced on deviant teachers, not errant worshippers.

The relationship between doctrine and life is revealed in the "architecture" of several Pauline letters: First, what God has done in Christ; then, what we should be and do in response. Christians, above all peoples on earth, must be aware that ideas and beliefs have consequences. Trusting you already hold this as a presupposition, I'll not labor to prove it. I'll only remind you that the weeds of errant doctrines will inevitably appear in worship. Therefore, those concerned with reforming worship must first concern themselves with reforming doctrine.

Errant doctrines of God, of Scripture, of the Spirit's work, of the ordo salutis, of worship (5) - errors concerning these and many doctrines beside will leave a deeper impact on worship than the presence or absence of the RPW.

Like night follows day, church architecture follows church doctrine. They'll change their architecture when they change their doctrine.

Thus, the best way to help God's people worship Him acceptably is to help them see more clearly just who He is! (6) Knowing God and His grace will have a profounder influence on the texture and details of worship than perhaps any other single factor. As St. Paul said, "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire."

### The Synagogue

Informed worship is doctrinally driven, and it is . . . word centered. This, as you might have guessed, is a pretty big chunk of the IPW, for it is here that much of it comes together. Therefore we'll have to divide the subject.

A) To begin, informed worship is Word-centered because it self-consciously follows the synagogue pattern endorsed by our Lord and His apostles.(7) As to the place of the Word in this venerable institution, J. Julius Scott, Jr. says succinctly and well: The synagogue was first and foremost a place for reading of Scripture and for prayer ... Intertestamental Judaism expected everyone to be thoroughly familiar with [God's Law] as a basis for life. It was the synagogue, with its regular reading and interpretation of the Law and the Prophets, and with its schools for the young, that wove the Scriptures into the fabric of life and experience of the people. There were no altars nor sacrifices in the synagogue; instead only the sacred books (scrolls) were absolutely necessary.(8) Just as Moses had been "preached in every city from the earliest times" and was made known by being "read in the synagogues on every Sabbath,"(9) so Christ was to be made known in the very same way: decentralized synagogues of Christ would be planted around the earth, connected to one another and the heavenly Temple by the Spirit.

Whatever the relation between Temple and synagogue and we certainly recognize a relationship they remained quite distinct institutions. And it was the synagogue which became the model for New Order worship. Some seek to argue against the normativity of the synagogue model for the church(10) by asserting that "the temple rather than the synagogue is the ultimate source of a number of the most important aspects of Christian worship." (11) I'm from Missouri. Show me any element of early Biblical Christian (or current Reformed!) worship which can ultimately be traced to the Temple alone or which came to the church in any way other than via the synagogue.

Sermons? Nope. Benedictions? They predate the Temple by at least half a millennium (Gen. 14). Corporate prayer? Uh-uh (Gen. 4). Singing? Don't be silly (Ex. 15). Circumcision was not Temple-dependent. Nor could baptism, as practiced by the Jews, by John, or by Jesus be ultimately traced to the Temple.

No, my friends, the above assertion is mere legerdemain. The Temple was not the liturgical mother of the church. Wandering down that avenue will lead you to an Italian address. The distinction of the Temple was this: God there demonstrated that He was to be found among the people who had the atoning blood which He alone could provide. In that sense we agree, all covenant communities are little Temples.

### The New Testament Synagogue

But the post-Pentecost churches as organized by the apostles were instructed to do nothing uniquely or exclusively related to Temple worship, except if we include believing in the Lord Jesus Christ who had been prefigured there in a thousand ways. Now, however, the knowledge of what He has done is propagated in none of those ways. Now it is by preaching and teaching, the very strengths of the synagogue service.

A pre-A.D. 70 inscription found on the Ophel hill in Jerusalem reads in part: "Theodotus . . . built the synagogue for the reading of the law and for the teaching of the commandments. . . ." (12) Please note that "Scripture reading was not part of the services in the Temple before the Babylonian exile," (13) while "[t]he primary and seminal element in the synagogue was . . . Scripture reading." (14) It was the elements of the synagogue service, not the Temple, which were appropriated by the early, Biblical Christian church.

A look at Acts 2 and subsequent passages lends zero support to any contention to the contrary. There we read how, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." If we take "[t]he breaking of bread" to be communion, we find its antecedent source not in the Temple but in the Passover, a covenant meal celebrated in covenant homes. (15) The other elements are manifestly synagogal.

Interestingly, though they "continued to meet together in the temple courts every day," they there engaged in practices which marked synagogue, not Temple, worship. In fact: "It is thought that there was a synagogue even within the precincts of the Temple." Thus, alongside the sacrificial

rites of the Temple, "there were arrangements for divine service along the lines of what was done in the synagogue, with prayers and Scripture reading." (16) The apostolic church in Jerusalem, even when gathered in the Temple precincts, also is described as engaged in synagogal and familial rites, not Temple rites.

This is why we might find the Apostle liberally employing Temple terminology as metaphor, but never enjoining the practices of the Temple on the church. What we find him doing in the churches is straight out of the synagogue: reading Scripture, explaining Scripture, teaching how to apply Scripture, and praying. Consider what Paul does at the gathering of the church in Troas: he teaches until midnight. After Eutychus falls out the window to his death, Paul revives him, brings him back into the gathered assembly, has communion, then teaches until daylight. The Word is central.

Read through the Pastoral Epistles and see how Paul emphasizes teaching. The church, like the synagogue, exists as a teaching center. Teaching God's Word is both an act of worship and a demand for worship. Teaching is what distinguished the early Christian church (Ac. 4:18; 5:28; 5:42; 11:26). Teaching is what established each early Christian church (Ac. 15:35; 20:20; 1 Cor. 4:17; Eph. 4:21-22; Col. 2:7; 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:2; Tit. 1:9; etc.). Teaching is what continues to identify each Christian church as Christian! (17) Rushdoony has noted that:

The Old Testament clergy was divided into two classes, priests and Levites. The work of the priests was hieratic, sacrifice and offerings being its essential function. For Christians, this aspect of Old Testament ministry ended with Christ....The function of the Levitical ministry was instruction (Dt. 33:10). As a result, education was basic to the life of the synagogue and the Levitical ministry.... Many critical scholars assume a rootless church, i.e., a church without the fact of the synagogue and the Levite in the background as its origin The point is that the church itself in the New Testament was more a school than a temple. The Reformation, and later the Puritans, restored this instructional emphasis to church meetings. (18)

And in so doing they were being true to their synagogue roots. The Informed Principle of Worship insists that New Order worship be heavy on instruction.

The Word Comes to Worship

B) By Word-centered, however, we mean more. It is not merely a matter of the church "replacing" the synagogue, (19) but of the clear Word replacing an entire system of approach to God. It is vitally important for us to grasp the way the Word comes to the fore in the New Order.

In the beginning was the Word. The coming of the Word into the world was anticipated in type and shadow. The Word finally became flesh in history. The shadows and types are taken up in Him and their meaning is now communicated by the Word. Even the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are dependent upon the Word of explication, and their efficacy is tied, in all Reformed confessions, to faith in that Word.

In the Scriptures of the New Testament we find the glorious Word saving (Jas. 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23-25), sanctifying (Jn. 17:17), encouraging (Rom. 15:4), and establishing (Rom. 16:25-26) the Christian churches, made up of Jew and Gentile.

Since Christ has fulfilled the pre-incarnational Sinaitic order, it is impossible to return to that order. Any attempt to return to that hieratic order will necessarily involve pagan or semi-pagan practices. God put an exclamation point after this truth when He allowed the destruction of the earthly Temple.

From Passover (under Moses) until Pentecost (under Christ) God's instructions to Israel about Himself and His covenant included bold graphics, bright colors, and large letters. Since then all eyes are pointed to Christ enthroned, whom we behold by faith. (20) This Christ is presented to the conscience by Word, not image!

We declare in the Christian gospel that Christ has accomplished in reality/history what had been before anticipated in type. He has entered the one perfect place, wherein are found all the perfect particulars, He Himself being both the perfect offering and the perfect priest (see Heb. 9:11, 12, 15a; 7:23; 24-28).

Therefore we are no longer anticipating, no longer waiting: the perfect has come. "He sets aside the first to establish the second" (Heb. 10:9). Thus the difference in administration is like that between counting blocks and calculus, between plastic kiddie tools and the tools that built the World Trade Center, between a box of stuffed animals and a Kenyan wildlife preserve. The real thing is here! (21)

This reality is conveyed and appropriated by words. This is what distinguishes the mature man from the infant. In teaching children we rely heavily on symbol. (22) In teaching adults we rely heavily on words. Words are the things which penetrate the conscience and the heart. Words are what we use to make a direct appeal to a mature man's reason. Words are the true democratizing force behind the gospel, in God's providence. For non-verbal symbols are indirect and not equally accessible by all, while virtually all people rely on verbal communication for nitty-gritty understanding. This is why the apostles urged, appealed, pleaded, reasoned, and explained, and why they didn't dance the message.

### The Word vs. Symbol

Rome is looking for God in all the wrong places. In the Romish/High church approach to things, symbol remains paramount in their liturgy. Accordingly, their message is essentially authoritarian (the priest is the real actor while the "audience" is made up of rankless observers), is directed at child-like vassals (not free men), and encourages implicit faith (faith in the clergy rather than faith in Christ). The drama of the Mass, for most of its existence, need not have been in the vernacular because its supposed efficacy was/is not dependent upon any self-conscious understanding on the part of the worshipper. The Word withers where emblems abound.

High church worship begins with alleged mystery and continues along a path of allusion wherein the true God is not directly encountered. Informed worship, on the other hand, begins with a direct encounter between God and His people through His own Word, and brings God and His people closer throughout worship by the very same means. It begins and ends with covenant clarity: "I am your God, you are my people." Amen.

High church worship, by depending upon symbol, mystery and allusion, hides God and His Word behind incense, altars, confessionals, pantheons of saints, robes, colors, candles, and magic formulas. It is pure show business, keeping the true God apart from the people. High church worshippers are taught in one thousand gross and subtle ways that the God who created the world cannot be approached directly.

Informed worship, following and employing the Word, teaches, by its very elements, the very opposite: that "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Eph. 3:12).

Do you see how much the sort of worship the IPW calls for is beginning to resemble RPW-style worship? Yet we've gotten here cleanly and straightway without it.

There's more, but it will have to await the next installment. Perhaps you'll stay tuned if we whet your appetite by telling you now that among the remaining things we hope to demonstrate is that Scripture, and therefore the IPW, requires worship to be male-led. There are no female pastors any more than there are female fathers. Females might play or usurp the role, but that's a different matter, isn't it?

Voetnoot

1. It's a small (about 120 maximum capacity), 110-year-old, very worn, very uncomfortable, so-hot-you-faint-in-the-summer, facility. But Teddy Roosevelt worshipped there on occasion, and if it's good enough for Teddy. . . .

2. By that standard, none of us at Messiah's is faithful.

3. Just as regulativists rather arbitrarily, I might add, seek to maintain a single, distinguishing feature which governed that system.

4. "Church growth principles have intentionally been kept as atheological as possible," C. Peter Wagner, cited by Martin Murphy in his perceptively titled booklet, "The God of the Church Growth Movement," probably still available from Greenville Theological Seminary. Call them at (864)322-2717. They're good folks.

5. Sadly, many Christians could not offer a coherent definition of what worship is or what should take place in a worship service. We would say that worship is the fitting response of God's people to His self-revelation in the written and incarnate Word.

6. In the same booklet cited above, Mr. Murphy notes, "The more room we give modernity, the less room we give the true and living God. The church growth movement openly admits to embrac[ing] the children of modernity" while "remov[ing] themselves from doctrine and theology" (29).

7. Forgive this very lengthy endnote, but I thought some might find it helpful to review this material which first appeared in our series on church government: It is strange to be in a position of having to prove to Presbyterians the proposition that the church in the New Testament is built upon the synagogue model, seeing that this fact is ordinarily employed by them as a justification for their system of government! In 1873, Dr. Marcus Dods wrote a book entitled, *Presbyterianism Older than Christianity*, by which he meant that the synagogue system (which he regarded as identical to Presbyterianism) predated the New Testament. Rev. John MacPherson, in his excellent handbook, *Presbyterianism*, writes, "In general, the Christian forms of worship were modeled on those of the Jewish synagogue, and so where any customs in worship or office in the Christian church are spoken of without explanation, we may reasonably look to the arrangements of the synagogue for enlightenment." And Dr. D. Douglas Bannerman, in the book most commonly received by Presbyterians as the standard work on the subject, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, devotes considerable space to the establishment of the fact that New Testament church organization and worship is predicated upon the synagogue model. He, too, equates Presbyterianism with the synagogue form, and acclaims the latter as the providentially ordained mechanism by which the true religion was sustained in the world: "It was by this Presbyterian organization, on a broad and popular basis, which united strength with elasticity and capability for adaptation to varied circumstances, that the Diaspora were enabled to hold their ground everywhere throughout the Empire in the face of general dislike and frequent persecution. But in its worship and polity the Hebrew Christian Church [read: New Testament Church] was conformed in all essential respects to the model of the Hebrew synagogue." This holds true, insists Bannerman, in regard to its worship, and "unmistakably with regard to its organization. The form of polity which had been universally established for centuries in the Jewish Church . . . was 'simply accepted and perpetuated by the apostles.'" In this last clause the writer is quoting Dr. Marcus Dods, from the book noted above. We will conclude this section (explaining why we feel so strange in defending the synagogue model of church government to self-described Presbyterians) with the Dods quote in its original context: "This, then, is the reason you do not find distinct traces in the New Testament of the creation of the Presbyterian form of Church government. The apostles could not create what had been in use some hundreds of years before they were born. They themselves were all of them Presbyterians before they were Christians. And these are the two facts, the knowledge of which makes us intelligent

Presbyterians: First, that the form of government in the Church before Christ came was Presbyterian; and secondly, that this form of government was not abolished or altered, but simply accepted and perpetuated by the apostles. It was extended to all groups of people who received Christ." (Extended, I must add, with the same features extolled by Bannerman: a solid core with a flexible, elastic, and adaptable exterior.)

8. Customs and Controversies: Intertestamental Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament (Baker, 1995).

9. Ac. 15:21.

10. One can't help wonder if their difficulty might not be traced to the fact that, "While the Temple was controlled by the priests, the synagogue was basically a lay institution." Julius, 142.

11. Bushell in his, The Songs of Zion.

12. Julius, 140. Also mentioned in the inscription was hospitality as a primary synagogue function: it was to serve as a "guest house [with] rooms and supplies of water as an inn for those who are in need when coming from abroad." See 3 Jn. 5-8, also Rom. 12:13; 16:23; 1 Pet. 4:9. These passages are more significant when it is kept in mind that the early churches met in homes.

13. The Jewish People in the First Century, Volume Two, ed. S. Safari and M. Stern (Amsterdam, 1976).

14. *ibid.*

15. I am not suggesting that its relation to the Passover exhausts the meaning of the Supper.

16. *ibid.*

17. "Nevertheless we believe that it is important to discern with care and prudence which is the true Church, for this title has been much abused. We say, then, according to the Word of God, that it is the company of the faithful who agree to follow his Word, and the pure religion which it teaches." French Confession, XXVII. Cf. Heidelberg Q&A 22-23.

18. Chalcedon Position Paper #1.

19. Rev. 2:9; 3:9.

20. Thus the beautiful instruction from our Form for the Lord's Supper: "That we, then, may be nourished with Christ, the true heavenly bread, let us not cling with our hearts unto the external bread and wine but lift them up on high in heaven, where Christ Jesus is, our Advocate, at the right hand of His heavenly Father, whither also the articles of our Christian faith direct us."

21. As it was, by faith, for the Old Order saints!

22. Does this suggest that the Lord's Supper, far from being unfit for covenant children, might be especially for covenant children? Don't read too much into this. I'm only asking!

## 7. Part 7

As Paul McCartney once pleaded, "Try to see it my way." These articles against the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW) if it is not commanded, it is forbidden, are written by one who had been taught the RPW, who had tried to believe the RPW, and who had sought to defend it. But the testimony of the whole Bible is stubborn and would not yield. Its evidence made it quite clear that the RPW, however salutary, however convenient, however helpful, is simply not scriptural. It is a tradition of men. I have been seeking to demonstrate why I have been overtaken by that conviction seeking in such a way as to retain what is best from the tradition. I am no enemy of RPW worship. But where there is a claim to Biblical authority that rests on a series of faults, it's best to let those who build their homes along that line know that their domiciles are vulnerable to earthquakes.

Many of you have become convinced along with me that the RPW does not serve well as a single, governing principle of worship; you recognize that there's just too much Biblical data the RPW can't account for. Others are skeptical, but open. Still others refuse to consider for so much as a moment that the Scriptures could possibly say anything other than what they've held them to say.<sup>1</sup> That is, for some the RPW cannot, not even for argument's sake, be imagined not to be true. No evidence whatsoever is admitted, period. This makes discussion difficult. Let me give you one of many examples of the methodological problems encountered in discussions with such regulativists.

The Informed Principle of Worship reasons like this:

- Major premise: There are no inscripturated commands concerning the elements, order, or performers required for lawful synagogue worship services, and no full, explicitly normative examples of such prior to the appearance of the institution.
- Minor premise: Jesus, the perfectly righteous One, regularly religiously participated in synagogue worship, which had been pretty well codified before His incarnation.
- Conclusion: Therefore, the rule of righteousness in worship cannot be: if God has not commanded it, it is forbidden.

Regulativist reasoning, however, seems to work somewhat differently. Some adherents look at the data this way:

- Major premise: The Regulative Principle of Worship is true.
- Minor premise: There are no inscripturated commands concerning the elements, order, or performers required for lawful synagogue worship services, and no full, explicitly normative examples of such prior to the appearance of the institution, but Jesus went to synagogue.
- Conclusion: Therefore, there must have been uninscripturated divine commands that we don't know about wherein God told someone what to do and how to do it.

Same Old Same Old

Their major premise is always the same. As you can see, people who start with such a given seek to force all proposed data to "harmonize" with the major premise. It is a method derived from Procrustes. No contrary evidence is permitted: it's either lopped off or stretched to fit. This is so even if an "answer" requires the introduction of an uninscripturated, yet binding and normative, oral tradition. And the kicker, of course, is that regulativists say that the Informed Principle of Worship is incipient Romanism. That shoe be on the other foot!

Let's see if we can make this point a little clearer: The Regulative Principle of Worship undermines itself. By a) insisting that, to justify a worship element we need a clear command (by precept or normative practice) revealed in God's Word, and b) acknowledging that the elements of the synagogue service Jesus participated in originated and developed with no such commands recorded in His Word, c) they are left to insist upon uninscripturated words, thus defeating their

own principle. "We have to have a command, except when we can't find one. Then we have to assume that it must have been there, somewhere." No evidence to the contrary is admitted.

Let me give another example which causes consternation in discussions with my regulativist brothers. Those who regard themselves as the most regulated of all regulativists, let's call them "super-regulativists", typically disallow two elements of worship commonly found in other church services, viz., the singing of anything other than Psalms and instrumental music. Hymns and instruments are variously labeled as carnal, inventions of sinful men, intrusions, wicked devices of Satan, and on and on. Here is a paragraph from one RPCNA minister explaining why instruments must not be used: 2

Since the New Testament teaches that all the ceremonial aspects of temple worship have been abolished, 3 the passages that speak of the use of musical instruments in public worship, under the old covenant, do not provide biblical warrant for the use of musical instruments in public worship today. Jesus Christ rendered the whole ceremonial Levitical system obsolete with the perfect sacrifice of Himself on the cross (cf. Heb. 7:27, 9:28). The inferior (Heb. 9:11-15), the shadow (Heb. 10:1; 8:4-5), the obsolete (Heb. 8:13), the symbolic (Heb. 9:9), and the ineffectual (Heb. 10:4) have been replaced by Jesus Christ and His work. Christians have no more business using musical instruments in public worship than using priestly vestments, candles, incense, altars, and a sacerdotal priesthood. 4

Notice, the regulative principle (a principle derived from the very order here acknowledged to be defunct!) disallows instruments because they belonged to the Levitical shadows (and, they add, instruments are not commanded to be used in the New Testament, leaving Revelation aside). Of course, we pointed out in a previous installment that this method of argument should lead "super-regulativists" to the conclusion that no singing at all be permitted in worship. When this argument against singing was reiterated to the above-quoted minister, this was his response:

...the objection that there is no biblical warrant for singing in public worship is rather astonishing. Once again, if we are using the biblical, broad definition of the RPW, this assertion is ludicrous. There are many examples of singing praise in public worship (e.g., 1 Chron. 16; 2 Chron. 5:13; 20:21; 29:30; Ez. 3:11) and there are many commands to praise Jehovah with the singing of psalms (e.g., Ps. 95:1-2; 81:2; 98:5; 100:2; 105:2). Once again the opponents of the RPW have resorted to straw-man arguments.

Do you see why I feel quite at a loss? First, we see in this response special pleading, for our correspondent is anything but a "broad-definition" regulativist. When he is asked to be consistent with his narrow rhetoric, he responds that we should be broadminded. OK, I'm all for broadmindedness.

But when he is prodded further, he ends up using the very argument, the very texts! He had elsewhere utterly rejected as baseless and irrelevant to the question at hand. If one appeals to the Levites' use of instruments to justify their use today, he is accused of imposing shadows on the people of the New Testament. But when told how this very method is part of a chain of reasoning that leads to a songless church, the reply is, "Nonsense! Astonishing! How could you say such a thing! Look! The Levites sang!"

The same must be said about our brother's appeal to the Psalms. Super-regulativists dismiss, out of hand, appeals to the Psalms for worship elements with which they are not comfortable. They do this by saying, "Well, the Psalms also call for sacrifices (e.g., Ps. 50:14; 66:15; 107:22; 116:17). Therefore we cannot say, 'It's in the Psalms, therefore it's OK.'" This, from men who insist that Psalms alone may be sung in worship.

The foregoing should highlight the simple, apparent fact that the Regulative Principle of Worship does not do justice to the whole of Scripture's actual teaching on the subject. That's why its proponents get themselves hopelessly entangled in these sorts of contradictions.

Lord willing, we'll soon return to an exposition of other elements of the Informed Principle of Worship. Until then, as our regulativist brothers won't be heard saying, have yourself a merry little Christmas.

Yours and His,

Steve

Psalm 34:3

Voetnoot

1. If you have Internet access, allow me to encourage you to visit this site: <http://www.messiahnyc.org/notabilia.html>. There you will find links to two papers. One is a critique of this series written by a fellow Reformed minister, Rev. Brian Schwertley, a "strict" regulativist who is currently seeking to plant a church in the Lansing, MI, area. The other paper is a reply to Rev. Schwertley, written by Mr. Brian Mattson of Montana. Both papers may be downloaded and/or distributed.

2. Many articles defending the RPW, by Rev. Brian Schwertley and others, can be found at [www.reformed.com](http://www.reformed.com). This quote was taken from his work against instruments in worship, posted there under /pub/music.htm. I should note that there are other, fine articles, on this site. Serious students would do well to bookmark it.

3. Including the RPW!--sms

4. Rev. Schwertley cites John Calvin as concurring: "I have no doubt that playing upon cymbals, touching the harp and the viol, and all that kind of music, which is so frequently mentioned in the Psalms, was a part of the education; that is to say, the puerile [i.e., immature] instruction of the law: I speak of the stated service of the temple. For even now, if believers choose to cheer themselves with musical instruments, they should, I think, make it their object not to dissever their cheerfulness from the praises of God. But when they frequent their sacred assemblies, musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to him" (Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol. 1, p. 539). It might be a shock to some, but John Calvin was often wrong. There -- I said it.

## 8. Part 8 Dance, Dance, Dance

I'll now risk getting myself into a lot of trouble for the sake of (one hopes!) making things clearer. Let me minimize that risk by stating that I am not, in what follows, calling for the introduction of dance as an element of the weekly worship service.

I've mentioned already the regulativist's habit of simply assuming, in the face of whatever evidence there might be, that the RPW is "just true, period." This has often been made evident when, on a number of occasions, during a challenge to the RPW, we'll be told, "Why, then you'll have dancing in worship!" And that, it seems, settles the matter.

Is this what the RPW is all about? To save the church from dancing? Perhaps they should just call themselves Michalites. For when Michal, in the famous incident recorded in 2 Samuel 6:16-23 and 1 Chronicles 15:29, "saw King David dancing and celebrating, she despised him in her heart." The fact that the Lord cursed her with barrenness thenceforth doesn't seem to give anyone the slightest pause in condemning dance. It is, for us moderns, quite self-evident that it must be forbidden.

It is difficult to find someone willing to discuss this subject dispassionately. The difficulty, however, lies in culture rather than Scripture. And it is just here that the Informed Principle of Worship (IPW) can be very useful, while the RPW is not.

The reason regulativists utterly reject dancing before the Lord, without so much as "entertaining" the question, has more to do with 1) their Northern European heritage, 2) the failure of some Reformed to utterly break with a Roman overview of worship, and 3) our contemporary culture, than it does with God's express will revealed in Scripture. What I mean is this:

The knee-jerk reaction against dancing has a lot to do with its being linked to sensuality or entertainment. But David's dancing was not lascivious and it was not intentionally entertaining. The problem here seems to be a simple lack of proper dancing "models." We do have such in the Jewish world. On special occasions, Jewish men can be found dancing in synagogues, especially around the Torah (the Word of God, written on scrolls); the dancing might even, on very special occasions, move out into the street. At these infrequent times of infectious, unrestrained joy, there is no thought of unseemliness. It is, at the moment, most normal. It is a cultural thing.

The IPW would say that dancing is not ordinarily warranted or desirable, but that it might be appropriate under certain circumstances. First, Biblical dancing, so far as I can tell, is never inter-gender. Second, Biblical dancing is not for viewing but for doing. Just these two considerations overthrow the legitimacy of virtually all the contested dancing that is discussed today, for such is usually practiced by misguided mainliners or wannabe mainliners looking to provide a greater thrill for the "audience."

The so-called "Davidic dance" which has spilled over from the Messianic movement even onto some Presbyterians, is (based on my personal observation) contrived, forced, phony, and inter-gender.

The so-called "liturgical dance" encountered too often in the PCA and church-growth-type "worship centers" is actually, in part, a radical outworking of a Roman Catholic, as opposed to synagogal, worship structure. Romanist worship consists of actors up front and an audience in the pew.

Against "Davidic" and "liturgical" dance is covenantal dance. If dancing ever takes place in a synagogue (and it doesn't in all), it is done by the worshippers, not by a troupe, and the genders are strictly separated.

My point in bringing this matter up is not to advocate dance. We do quite well without it, I think. I mention it only to say that it is by no means inconceivable that dance, under certain circumstances, may be regarded as proper and acceptable before Jehovah as an expression of unmitigated joy. Such circumstances are difficult, if not impossible, to reproduce in modern congregations of Northern European extraction, so one should not try. As I indicated, the contemporary efforts of "Davidic" and "liturgical" dance advocates reach no higher than the banal.

But there might well be occasions when dancing is most fitting: the end of a gruesome war comes to mind, or the provision of food after famine. Not your everyday events, but should they happen, don't let the regulative principle frighten you. "Praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp." Yes, "praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute." Say to the Lord, "You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy." Because there is "a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (Ps. 30:11; 149:3; 150:4; Ecc. 3:4).

What we've written thus far in this installment has been written only to demonstrate the difficulty we encounter in having fruitful discussions with regulativists who make the RPW into the "indispensable presupposition of all intelligible predication" concerning worship. Can't we let the whole Bible speak?

Were this matter part of our ecumenical creeds, perhaps such a truculent posture would be understandable. But in view of its place in the scheme of things, RPW adherents should be willing to discuss the matter. Unfortunately, its advocates too often look like those who were described by one author as having "backed up into their convictions." We should remember the butcher who backed into his meat grinder and got a little behind in his work. Some regulativists, too, have backed up, "syllogized" themselves, into a position before considering it thoroughly and now they are afraid to admit that there's a problem.

Well, there are lots of problems with the RPW. But if for no other reason than to humor a poor, misguided Jew, I appeal to you, allow me once again to explain my read on the Scripture's teaching concerning the RPW. And after a brief brief, we'll continue to show (perhaps in the next installment) why all is not lost if we yield to the Scriptures' entire testimony on the subject. We will discover, I trust, that we have not been left adrift to do simply anything we might want in worship.

On the contrary. We are here simply insisting that the Westminster Confession's admission concerning "circumstances" of worship "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" is, in truth, a far more comprehensive statement of God's will for New Order worship than is recognized in some quarters.

These "general rules" or, as I've labeled them, the elements of the Informed Principle of Worship, are adequate guides precisely because the Confession is correct when it says that "under the new testament, the liberty of Christians is further enlarged, in their freedom from the yoke of the ceremonial law, to which the Jewish church was subjected." For the Regulative Principle of Worship, as found in the Bible, belongs to the ceremonial law.<sup>5</sup> Let me show you why I think so.

Standing On Ceremony

The regulativist motto, taken from Deuteronomy 12:32,1 "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it," is a seriously abused text. In fact, it has been stretched by some as badly as 12:21 has been stretched by the rabbis. The Jews have a very exact, elaborate, and strict method for the ritual slaughter of animals which are to be eaten. Yet, "[a]ll that R. Judah Hanasi could adduce in proof of this practice are the three words of Deuteronomy 12:21: vezabahta...kaasher tziviticha, 'and thou shalt slaughter...as I commanded thee.'"2 From these three words it was assumed that God must have given numerous details to Moses, who would initiate their oral transmission. Then, through an unbroken succession, they would be codified in the Mishna.

That's a lot to ask from Deuteronomy 12:21. But the Jews, at least, concede that their methods involve stretches. Listen to this heartening confession: "The Mishna frankly states that for some laws (halachot) there are but slender Scriptural proofs." Some halachot "are like mountains suspended by a hair; their scriptural basis is scant and the halachot are abundant..." 3

"Strict" regulativists ask as much from 12:32 as the rabbis ask from 12:21, but they don't admit it. The words of 12:32 are stretched way beyond their contextual meaning. The context (12:1-16:17) deals with the coming centralization of worship at the place where the Lord would cause His name to dwell. Consider how abundantly clear this context is as you read these verses from chapter 12:

But you shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the Lord your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the Lord your God has blessed you. You shall not at all do as we are doing here today, every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes, for as yet you have not come to the rest and the inheritance which the Lord your God is giving you. But when you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the Lord your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your

hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the Lord. And you shall rejoice before the Lord your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you. Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the Lord chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you.

### Give Me My Allowance

No reasonable reader could disagree that what we have here is law for centralized, sacrificial worship. Israel was not permitted to sacrificially approach Jehovah except in the place where His name would dwell and then strictly according to His prescribed manner.

But God, in this passage, expressly allows Israelites to slaughter animals for private consumption if they follow general rules: blood could only be used for expiation and that only according to His prescriptions. Otherwise, the blood would be poured on the ground.

However, you may slaughter and eat meat within all your gates, whatever your heart desires, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you; the unclean and the clean may eat of it, of the gazelle and the deer alike. Only you shall not eat the blood; you shall pour it on the earth like water.

One commentator noted: "12:20 allows for secular meat-eating anywhere; it's only ritual sacrifices which must be offered at the central shrine." By this allowance it is made even clearer that what was being strictly regulated in this passage was ritual, sacrificial, soon-to-be centralized worship. That, and that alone, is what God was here marking off and codifying, not worship per se. Anyone who thinks otherwise must still bring the firstborn of his flocks and herds to Jerusalem. Or put another way, anyone who is not bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, heave offerings, vowed offerings, freewill, and other offerings to Jerusalem is implicitly acknowledging that this chapter is regulating things which do not obligate Christians, at least not in the same way they had once bound Israel.

Still, one regulativist, quite representatively, puts it plainly: "Verse 32 is an explicit statement of God's regulative principle of worship." But to isolate verse 32 from its context, and then make it an obligatory, governing principle for all worship, is just as arbitrary and unsound as saying that

Christians who have a running sore must have it examined by an Aaronic priest. I hope no one has such a sore, but if you do, try finding an Aaronic priest!

Remember, a regulativist who pleads the normativity of 12:32 must, to be consistent, plead the normativity of what 12:32 was guarding, in context. Once he says that he is not obliged to bring all his offerings to a single earthly location, or to do this or to do that, he has violated his own principle: he has taken away something God had, in that very context, commanded.

### The New and Living Way

What is the message of Deuteronomy 12 for Christians? The message, in light of the New Testament, is very clear: reconciliation with God can only be had along the path of the God-provided atonement. Since the blood of bulls and goats merely bore witness to the blood of Christ, it is that blood with which Christians are concerned. For the New Covenant is in His blood (Lk. 22:20); He purchased us with His own blood (Ac. 20:28); Christ was set forth by God as a propitiation by His blood (Rom. 3:25); in Him we have redemption through His blood (Eph. 1:7); Gentiles, who once were far off, have been brought near by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13); we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:14); it was not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood that He entered the Most Holy Place once for all (Heb. 9:12); we may have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus (10:19); it is the blood of Jesus Christ His Son which cleanses us from all sin (1 Jn. 1:7); for He loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood (Rev. 1:5).

Therefore, if we believe in and guard the way opened up by Christ's blood, we are fulfilling the so-called Regulative Principle of Worship. Deuteronomy 12:32 "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" is properly understood only when seen as an insistence upon the exclusivity of God's gospel. When a person is trusting in the blood of Jesus Christ for his salvation, not adding to His work or taking away from it, that person is obeying 12:32 in its fullness.

That is why you read a great deal about the blood of Christ in the New Testament but nothing about the need for Christians to continue to bring blood offerings and nothing about one single principle regulating worship. When we believe in His blood, His atoning sacrifice, His exclusive work, we are doing exactly what God requires of us in Deuteronomy 12:1 through 16:17.

If our thesis (that Deuteronomy 12:32 is given as a regulation governing only the centralized, sacrificial system) is correct and it certainly appears to be! then the implications for the matter under discussion are significant.

### Dominoes

For it would mean that regulativists may not, without qualification, appeal to texts dealing with the sacrificial system as support for their principle. Out goes Nadab and Abihu, out goes Uzzah and Uziah. They don't go "out of the canon," and they don't go out as sources of instruction. They go out as supposed "proofs" of a tortured principle, a principle which was never given to regulate worship in light of Christ's historical accomplishments. The lengthy litanies of instances cited by regulativists, wherein God reproves His people for violations of the centralized worship system, are at most only indirectly germane to the matter at hand. Once they trim the explicit requirements of Deuteronomy 12, regulativists trim their own principle, too.

Some regulativists will attempt to broaden their appeal to the "principle" found in 12:32 by saying that it is found also in Deuteronomy 4:2. But this only further undoes their assertions. The passage reads, "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."

If the regulativist would bring this passage to bear on the question of worship, he has gone even further from the path leading to the light. For this passage refers to all the law of God, not simply to laws governing worship. Very few regulativists would seriously argue that God's intent here is to forbid Israel from doing anything whatsoever in any area of life that is not specifically commanded in the law. I suppose those Amish who eschew buttons for want of finding them mentioned in Scripture might look somewhat favorably on this interpretation, but they'd be mighty lonely in so doing.

Yet that is precisely the conclusion which cannot be evaded if 4:2 is cited as supportive of the regulativist's reading of 12:32. Deuteronomy 4:2 is a general rule, requiring a life that conforms to God's disclosed will in its entirety. The NIV Study Bible note is to the point: "The revelation

the Lord gives is sufficient. All of it must be obeyed and anything that adulterates or contradicts it cannot be tolerated."

God did not intend that the recipients of this verse (4:2) would literally do nothing not mentioned therein (e.g., no skateboarding, using electricity, driving automobiles, or eating lemon ices). Thus, 4:2 as a parallel demonstrates that 12:32 is not to be taken in an absolute sense. If you find a similar phrase used by the same author in the same book, you need to justify applying a radically different sense to each. If it is agreed that 4:2, referring to the whole law, was not to be taken absolutely when it forbids additions and subtractions, neither is 12:32 to be taken as an abstract and absolute rule. Both are to be interpreted in terms of the whole Word of God, a Word that simply does not teach: if it is not commanded, it is forbidden.

Listen, please, and be patient with me. Try to see what our regulativist friends have done. They've taken a "principle" and yanked it from its context wherein sacrificial worship, and that alone, was being regulated. Nevertheless, these same folks, recognizing that the system was to be observed only until the Christ, abstract the principle and then absolutize it. They themselves no longer practice the things the verse was (in context) given to guard, yet they continue to regard the verse as having an independent existence!

Regulativists don't have a human priesthood, which the verse protected; they believe in a priesthood of all believers. They don't have a human-constructed temple, made according to exact requirements, which the verse guarded: they make church buildings any way they please. They don't have daily, weekly, monthly, or annual blood offerings, which the verse oversaw: they use no blood at all in their rituals. They don't do pilgrimages, they don't honor the dietary restrictions, they don't refrain from mixing cloths, they don't keep the same calendar, they don't do any of the things demanded in the verse's immediate context! And all this is well and good. They see in so many ways that all this must be interpreted in light of the whole Word of God. But when it comes to the principle which was part of the same package which terminated upon Christ's sacrificial work...Like men in a swoon and afraid of falling, they reach out to steady themselves with a principle rather than the Christ Who was therein honored. They are left embracing a verse when all the while the verse was given only so that we might embrace the Christ! Its meaning is found in Him.

Careful now! We are not saying of this whole matter, "That was the Old Testament!" Rather, we are saying of the sacrificial system, "That was gospel declaration in the Sinaitic administration." The gospel declaration today is guarded precisely the way it was then: it is forbidden to add to it or take from it (Galatians 1:8 makes that reasonably clear!).

### Jesus Paid It All

Thus with one eye-opening truth, viz., that the rigorous RPW of the Old Administration was unto Christ, by far the greatest amount of regulativist "evidence" becomes inadmissible because their citations become explicable on grounds other than those they advance. Their arsenal is neutralized once we see that the "principle" was a schoolmaster to lead us to Christ.

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want, more than all in Thee I find," not in an abstracted and tortured "principle." But then, strict regulativists are not permitted to corporately worship Christ by singing the words of "Jesus, Lover of My Soul." Their principle forbids it, regarding such an act as presumptuous impiety and a form of idolatry. Let them say this more loudly into the microphone. It is easy to see why nearly the entire Christian world for all of its history has not recognized the RPW as something taught by our Jesus. Imagine, forbidden by "a principle" to express our devotion to our Savior, by name, in corporate song. Yes, speak up into the microphone.

### Voetnoot

1. Yet even there it was not as rigid as some of its modern advocates assert. More anon.
2. In the Hebrew division it is 13:1. Thus it is seen by the Jews as a heading for the warnings against false prophets who might lead them to worship other gods.
3. Samuel S. Cohon, *Essays in Jewish Theology*, (Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. 1986), 63.
4. Hag. 1:8, cited in above.

## 9. Part 9

Even during the gospel's Sinaitic administration, there were some variables permitted in worship. Certain Scriptures lead us to conclude that the RPW of Deuteronomy 12:32 was more elastic than modern regulativists would typically grant. I'm thinking, for example, of additions to the prescribed Temple worship, additions which were countenanced by our Lord.

We've already seen the covenant celebration of Purim, a feast added to Israel's obligations (Est. 9:26-28). And the Feast of Dedication, an important holiday; on Israel's calendar, was added by man alone. Not only was there no divine command for this holiday, there was not even a prophet on earth at the time to consult. Yet it became part of Israel's observances-and the Lord Jesus attended its celebration in Jerusalem (Jn. 10:22).

### Water From the Rock

It may be that these additions were acceptable because they commemorated acts of gracious intervention by the covenant God on behalf of His people, and their observance by the people did not require additional priestly/Temple work. But I'm not sure that covers it all; for we do, in fact, find additions to the priestly/Temple service by the time of the New Testament. Indeed, we find our Lord Jesus taking certain of these additions in comfortable stride, very unlike modern regulativists. Two examples follow.

One: In the Gospel According to John, the Evangelist is much concerned to demonstrate that Jesus fulfills the Jews' expectations of a Messiah like unto Moses. <sup>1</sup> This is evident throughout. Consider, for example, how John begins and ends his book. His first line recalls the first line of the first book of Moses.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen.1:1).

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God (Jn. 1:1).

Then see John's last line echoing the last line of Moses' last book:

Since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses ... in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt ... and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel (Dt. 34:10-12).

And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen (Jn. 21:25).

John's point, of course, is this: You think Moses was something? You're right! But now, not only has a prophet arisen in Israel like unto Moses, but the Prophet has come, one greater than Moses, and His name is Jesus (cf. Dt. 18:14-19; Jn. 1:17, 45; 6:14; see also Ac. 3:22-23).

In John 6, there is explicit comparison between the gift of the bread from heaven associated with Moses, and the gift of the bread from heaven who is Jesus. In John 7 and 8 there are implicit references to the other two wilderness gifts associated with Moses, namely the rock that gave water, and the pillar of light that guided God's people to the Promised Land.

John 7:37f. sets forth Jesus as the Rock that gives water. We are told that Jesus spoke this "on the last and greatest day of the Feast" (v.37). What Feast? Tabernacles. What's the connection between the words Jesus uttered and the last (the seventh) and greatest day of the Feast? A simple yet profoundly beautiful connection.

As Glasson has noted, "It is pretty generally agreed that the words of Christ in John 7:37-39 refer to the water ceremony carried out at the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth)."<sup>3</sup> Priests would go down to the Pool of Siloam and draw water into a golden pitcher. The priest carrying the water would try to time his return to coincide with the moment that the pieces of a sacrifice were being laid on the altar by his fellow-priests.

"As he entered the 'Water-gate,' which obtained its name from this ceremony," Edersheim tells us, "he was received by a threefold blast from the priests' trumpets." He would go up to the rise of the altar where there were two silver basins with narrow holes. Wine would be poured into one while the water from Siloam would be poured into the other, the people shouting, "Raise thy hand," that they might see the outpouring and rejoice. David Baron notes that "the joy accompanying this ceremonial was so great that it became a proverb. 'He that hath not seen

Simchat-bet-ha-Sho'ebah, the joy of the drawing (and the pouring) of the water, hath not seen joy in his life."<sup>4</sup>

### That's Not Funny

The people were very serious about witnessing this event. According to Edersheim, when Alexander Jannaeus, in 95 B.C., showed contempt for this tradition and poured the water on the ground, the people pelted him with citrons and sought to kill him!

The Feast of Tabernacles came to be imagined as the time when God would determine the rainfall to be allotted for the ensuing year.<sup>5</sup> Before you say, "That's totally insane," read Zechariah 14:16-19. Be that as it may, the Talmud suggests that the rabbis were looking for something better in relation to this ceremony: "Why is the name of it called, The drawing out of water? Because of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, according to what is said: 'With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.'"<sup>6</sup>

Now, our Lord Jesus comes upon this addition made by men, this tradition, this ceremony added to the prescribed Temple rites. We know He never pandered or catered to man's prejudices, never pulled any punches. We know He did not hesitate to overturn tables at the Temple on two occasions. What does He do now? Does he upbraid them for their "wickedness"? Does He throw the water out, thrash the golden vessel, interrupt the celebration?

No. He applies it to Himself and His work. He says, "Water? You want water? Let him who thirsts come to Me and find water!" Compare this to John 6:35: Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst." He makes the same use of a human addition, a tradition, as He had of an historical miracle.

### Light From The Pillar

Two: In John 8, Jesus again makes use of a tradition of human origin which became an important part of the

Sukkoth celebration. Let's hear David Baron<sup>7</sup> describe it for us:

Worshippers congregated in the Court of the Women,<sup>8</sup> where a great illumination took place. Four huge golden lamps or candelabras were there, each with four golden bowls against which rested four ladders. Four youths of priestly descent ascended these with large pitchers of oil from

which they filled each bowl. The old worn breeches and girdles of the priests served for wicks to these lamps. So great and brilliant was the light that, according to a saying, "there was not a court in Jerusalem that was not lit by it." Around these great golden burning lamps a sacred dance took place in which even the ...prominent leaders of the people with flaming torches in their hands danced before the people and sang before them hymns of song and praise.

Baron suggests that the illumination had a significance similar to that of the water: a harkening back to a wilderness miracle and a looking forward to a future divine intervention. "It reminded them of the past when God led them in the wilderness with the cloud of glory and the pillar of fire-of the Shekinah glory which dwelt in the first Temple."

What did our Lord do upon encountering this human addition to the worship prescribed by Jehovah? In reference to this illumination, "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jn. 8:12).

We should perhaps note that F. Godet, in his commentary on John,<sup>9</sup> confirms this reading of the material:

That which concerns us is the meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles, which the people had met to keep. This feast was designed to commemorate the favors they had received from God during their sojourn in the wilderness. Hence the booths of foliage. Now among these favours, the two chief were the water from the rock and the pillar of fire. Jesus had just applied to Himself one of these types. He now appropriates the other.<sup>10</sup>

Variegated Vagarious

Isn't it time to yield to the Jesus we've actually been given, rather than the Jesus we wish might be? The knee-jerk reaction of some of my brethren, recoiling at the thought that God would countenance "human additions," is uncalled for. We have found our God putting a non-Mosaic, non-prophet-authorized feast (Purim), into the Bible. We have found our Lord celebrating Chanukah, a holiday the antecedent of which occurred between the Testaments. We have found Him celebrating the Passover according to non-Scriptural, covenant tradition, even down to the use of wine (never commanded). We find Him worshiping in the synagogue, an institution whose

liturgy arose apart from any recorded express divine command. And now we see Jesus participating in commemorative traditions of human origin.

How much do we need to read before we ask ourselves if there might not be a better principle-or set of principles-given in this Word to govern worship, a set of principles which might reasonably account for all the evidence of Scripture, that would allow us to read the Word without subjecting its texts to torture? Let's return then to our exposition of the IPW. We said in our last treatment that informed worship is I) doctrinally-driven and II) Word-centered. We now add...

#### A Matter of Manner

Consider what God's actual will concerning "traditions" might be, in light of the whole Word. On the one hand, we see there are times when human inventions are condemned. On the other hand we see times when they are embraced. What then?

Have you ever noticed that what we found Jesus doing directly in the gospels, we find God doing indirectly (through a prophet) in Zechariah: allowing for the legitimacy of observances with purely human origins, under certain conditions. In a rather remarkable passage beginning in Zechariah 7, the people inquired concerning the fasts they themselves had established as a tradition. Two of these four fasts (still observed by orthodox Jews, by the way) are mentioned:

And it came to pass in the fourth year of king Darius, that the word of the Lord came unto Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, even in Chisleu; When they had sent unto the house of God Sherezer and Regemmelech, and their men, to pray before the Lord, And to speak unto the priests which were in the house of the Lord of hosts, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years? Then came the word of the Lord of hosts unto me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?

God was obviously less concerned with the actual, man-originating practices than with the motive and manner of their observance. After an extended and earnest exhortation to His people

to act like His people, He promises them that a time will come when their (four) fasts 11 will be turned into feasts.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace." (Zec.8:19)

If God were a regulativist, He would have said something quite different, we think. If He were a regulativist, we could imagine Him saying something like, "You think those fast days you invented make you sorry now? Wait till you see what I do to you for adding them to my calendar!" But instead, He says something very different, very gracious. "You are mourning now in remembrance of the judgment I brought upon Jerusalem. Just be faithful, and I will turn those days of gloom into days of joy."

Remember the following phrase as shorthand for God's attitude toward tradition: it's less the matter than the manner. Jesus didn't condemn the human tradition of wearing tefilin (phylacteries) per se, he condemned making them wide for ostentation (Mt. 23:5), as if the wearer of wide tefilin and long tzitzis were holier than others-an attitude not less present in some RPW communions, however externally austere, than in the group Jesus was addressing. It wasn't the matter, it was the manner.

Perhaps the real teaching of Scripture might more accurately, in view of the small light we've gained so far, be summarized as: Meaningful and earnest traditions which serve as memorials of actual interventions by God in history, whether in judgment or grace, or traditions which reflect credible understandings of His commands, are permitted. The meaning of these memorials and traditions, however, must be easily accessible to the common believer.

On the other hand, traditions which are obscure, contradict or contravene God's Word or express will, or traditions which exploit covenant occasions for personal gain-gain in coin or prestige at the expense of others-such traditions are forbidden.

These two paragraphs above seem to incorporate a great deal more Scripture with a great deal more harmony than the RPW.

Yes, this requires wisdom. Yes, this means we must operate without the convenience of the RPW. At least, we must operate without pretending that it is what God requires. If we'd only say,

"We've found the RPW helpful in keeping our communion free from Roman excesses," for example, all well and good. And if someone found another route to the same end, no harm done. But at least we'd be able to talk about worship in categories that hold promise for agreement, categories like "good/better/best," rather than "I'm faithful and acceptable and you're a papist pig."

1. This has been demonstrated beyond refutation by several scholars; perhaps the best and pithiest work is T. F. Glasson's *Moses in the Fourth Gospel* (Alec R. Allenson, Naperville, IL, 1963).
2. "The three gifts" are found together in Nehemiah 9:19, 20, and recounted also in Psalm 105:39-41. Compare Psalm 78:14-25.
3. p. 48, but see all of chapter 7. For a fuller description of the water-drawing and other ceremonies, see Edersheim's chapter on Tabernacles in *The Temple: Its Ministry and Service as they were at the Time of Jesus Christ*; available on the web at <http://www.mv.com/ipusers/butterfly/temple14.htm#special>.
4. *Types, Psalms and Prophecies*, 66 (1907; reprint by Klock & Klock, Minneapolis, MN, 1981).
5. Our old friend, John Wesley, got v. 37 exactly right: "On the last, the great day of the feast-On this day there was the greatest concourse of people, and they were then went to fetch water from the fountain of Siloam, which the priests poured out on the great altar, singing one to another, With joy shall ye draw water from the wells of salvation. On this day likewise they commemorated God's miraculously giving water out of the rock, and offered up solemn prayers for seasonable rains."
6. Cited by Edersheim. In my 1881 edition, it is on 243.
7. Baron is relying on Edersheim here.
8. The astute reader will realize that the architecture of the Temple had been modified without benefit of recorded divine command. Where did God command a Court of the Women or a Court of the Gentiles? Tradition is everywhere in Scripture, not all of it evil. Here's a note from Nelson's *Bible Dictionary* (Nelson, 1986), which reveals that an act of religious worship took place in the Court of the Women: "The inner area of Herod's Temple contained three courts. The

easternmost court was the Court of Women, and it contained the Temple treasury where people donated their money (Mk. 12:41-44).

9. English translation, 1886, cited by Glasson.

10. Cited by Glasson, 61.

11. The first lamented the breaching of the wall (2 Kings 25:3-4), the second the burning of the Temple (vv. 8-10), the third Gedaliah's murder (vv. 22-25), and the fourth (the fast of the tenth month) mourned the beginning of Nebuchadnezzar's siege (2 Kings 25:1; Ezekiel 24:1, 2).

## **10. Part 10**

When I was recently instructed to take the Nassau Expressway to get my Rebecca to a certification course, I thought, "Where is the Nassau Expressway? It sounds familiar but I just can't place it."

It turns out that it was the first road listed on a sign near Kennedy Airport, a sign which I had passed thousands of times. But because I had never needed to take that particular thoroughfare, I had never paid any attention to the first line.

Our ability not to see what is right in front of us for want of really looking is a well-known fact of experience. In this series on worship we have been attempting to point out that there are a great many things in Scripture which, it seems, regulativists have overlooked, things which negate the proposition that the Regulative Principle of Worship is an adequate principle to govern worship in the New Order ushered in by Christ's completed work. We have been pleading with those who tenaciously hold to the RPW - if it is not commanded, expressly or by good and necessary consequence, it is forbidden - to consider if they may have missed lines on the sign, lines which would redirect them in their search for the actual will of God on this matter.

We began by expressing our sympathy for the RPW. Like other extreme remedies, it offered a sort of relief. The teetotaler is preferred to the drunk, the prig to the strumpet. But these are not

our only choices when we consider all that the Scripture says. Temperate use of alcohol is permitted by God, no matter how much it might be abused by the weak and/or foolish. Adornment is permitted to women regardless of how many brazen trollops give make-up a bad name. The wrong use of a thing does not disprove the propriety of its moderate, fit use.

So also, the Scriptures, taken in sum, simply do not teach that unless God has commanded a thing, it may not be done in worship. The RPW may be an effective shortcut to a desirable sort of worship service, but when it pretends to be God's own definitive word on the matter it must be reined in. And there is no better way to rein in errant theologies than to look at the whole Word of God. For it seems my regulativist brethren were looking only at the lines on the sign that they thought pertained to them. They ignored, to a greater or lesser degree, the rest. And we have merely been seeking to point out some of "the rest" in this series.

The first thing we did was pull the camera back from their favorite texts. We discovered that their so-called proof texts were consistently isolated from meaning-impacting contexts.

Next we explained how the real RPW governed only centralized Temple worship in the Old Testament and was never the rule - before or after Sinai - for decentralized sacred assemblies. Similarly, in the New Order, it is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that is strictly regulated, not sacred assemblies.

We demonstrated that regulativists fail to account fairly for an abundance of so-called "man-made" worship elements found in Scripture which God regarded as benign or fine.

And we looked at some of the failures of regulativism which would, if applied consistently, leave the New Order churches songless and with other pitiable maladies.

In short, we sought to measure the Regulative Principle against the standard of God's Word. It was measured and found wanting. In what might be considered a corroborating proof of our thesis, no cogent, coherent refutation of this evidence has been offered. Of course, this does not mean that one could not be offered, but we have not seen it. Instead, we have been treated to tomes which tell us how terrible Steve Schlissel is. But we thought that was an incontrovertible fact. Otherwise, we could have proven that proposition to your satisfaction and proven it sooner, more fully, and with abundant examples and illustrations. We just didn't think that was the issue under discussion.

When You Assume. . .

The issue under discussion has been the Regulative Principle of Worship - if it is not commanded, it is forbidden. And, as we've said before, our colleagues on the other side of the aisle seem unable to argue for it without first assuming it and dismissing any and all of the abundant Biblical or historical evidence which goes against it. They are like the trawlermen who, after boasting that their net caught all kinds of fish, were shown several varieties their net had missed. "Oh, those ain't really fish!" they replied.

Regulativists 1) assume the RPW in Bible history even when it isn't found, 2) assume it in the Westminster Confession when it isn't uniformly applied in the appended Directory of Worship, 3) assume it in the Law when it's not what the Law says, and 4) assume it in all Reformed churches when it isn't what all Reformed churches have held. As the famous preacher, Jerry Lee Lewis, once (sort of) said, "There's a whole lot of assumin' goin' on."

Our first example of this assuming behavior: In our treatment of the question, we considered the glaring fact that there are no commands in the Bible concerning the elements of worship to be employed in the synagogue, an institution recognized by most as providing the organizational foundation of the Christian churches. (1) If, as the regulativists claim, sacred assemblies may do only what God has commanded to be done, and if there are no discernible inscripturated commands telling Israel what they may do in sacred assemblies, then Israel (if RPW-compliant) was permitted, in fact, to do nothing in the synagogues.

Feeling the weight (if not the power) of this argument, regulativists, unable to find inscripturated commands governing the elements of synagogue worship, resort to assumptions. Their response has been uniform: Since we cannot find where God has commanded what was to take place in sacred assemblies, but since the RPW must be true no matter what, therefore God must have told some prophet how to organize the worship in the synagogue.

Now just hold on to their assertion a moment and add to it another. Regulativists have argued that "the regulative principle grows out of the sola scriptura rule of Protestant theology." Never mind that they run around in a circle here, assuming that the RPW is God's mind revealed in Scripture on the matter (while it most certainly is not). I wish only to draw your attention to their claim that the RPW and sola scriptura are organically linked.

Those who hold to the Informed Principle of Worship - if it is not commanded, it might be permitted: it depends - account for the synagogue without resorting to sleight of hand. IPW-ists find no command, other than one which requires synagogues, or decentralized sacred assemblies, to exist (Lev. 23:3). The elements employed therein would and did develop within the bounds of revealed scriptural principles as understood by the covenant community. No explicit command was required. *Sola scriptura* stands firm.

But how do regulativists imagine themselves as supporting the doctrine of *sola scriptura* when they argue that the synagogue elements must have been revealed in some non-inscripturated source? In fact, what they very clearly do here is negate the doctrine of "Scripture alone" by making their system dependent upon an uninscripturated word. They postulate a word which was supposedly given to govern the synagogue service, a word we know nothing about, a word that is merely assumed to have been. And clearly the only reason they insist that it must have been given is because, as always, they start out with their principle, not the Bible, as the unchallengeable given and then seek to force the Bible to conform to it. If it's not in the Bible, they'll invent an authoritative tradition that surely must have said what they think should have been said in the Bible.

This whole line of reasoning is hauntingly familiar to me. Let me tell you where I've heard it: In the Jewish "proofs" for the necessity of the Oral Law. Listen carefully to those a bit more self-conscious in their denial of *sola scriptura*:

At Exodus 35:3 - "You shall not kindle fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day" - the Stone Edition of the Torah contains this note: "The Torah can be understood only as it is interpreted by the Oral Law, which God taught to Moses, and which he transmitted to the nation. The Oral Law makes clear that only the creation of a fire and such use of it as cooking and baking are forbidden, but there is no prohibition against enjoying its light and heat." A shot is then taken at Jews who have suggested that the Bible, as given, is sufficient: "Deviant sects that deny the teaching of the Sages [i.e., the Oral Law - sms] misinterpreted this passage ... they sat in spiritual darkness all their lives."

Meyer Waxman, in *The History of Jewish Literature*, argues that the traditions of the Scribes as recorded in the Oral Law were not "new additions, but merely an unfolding of the contents of the

Law." He believes, like the regulativists, that the Law itself implicitly requires the positing of an Oral Law. Waxman says:

As an illustration of the insufficiency of the Written Law, if taken literally, and that if it was practiced, it must necessarily have been supplemented... we will cite [the following example]. The injunction that one who desecrates the Sabbath is [to be] punished by death is repeated several times, but nowhere is there a definition given as to what is meant by the term, work. Only three kinds of labor are specified, kindling of fire (Ex. 35:3), walking beyond a certain limit (Ex. 16:29), and cording or hewing of wood (Numb. 15:32-36). But, it is self-evident that there are hundreds of forms of labor which fall under the term work. How then could the Sabbath be observed without any supplementary instruction as to what constitutes work and what not? Undoubtedly, such instructions and supplements have existed from the very time of the giving of the Law, and they were included in the Mosaic Oral Law.

It seems never to have occurred to those who hold this Jewish view that God's mind might, in deed and in fact, have been adequately revealed in the very generality of the prohibitions and that He has neither requested nor required such detailed supplementation.

Now You See It, Now You Don't

So too, the regulativists. The idea that God had not given inspired, explicit instructions concerning what was to be done in the synagogue is simply unimaginable to them. But while both the orthodox Jews and the regulativists treat the Word of God as insufficient, only the Jews admit it. (2) The regulativists introduce the idea of uninscriptured commands as a *deus ex machina*. But by so doing, they undermine their own principles while they beg their own questions. And, instead of supporting *sola scriptura*, they lead us to ask if what we have now might best be regarded as a Vestigial Bible, those former revelations having somehow fallen away.

At this point, perhaps we can begin to see how easily regulativism can become yet another body for the spirit of the Pharisees (3) to inhabit. Dr. J. Douma's analysis of the Sabbath controversy between the Pharisees and our Lord (4) provides to-the-point insight. The Pharisees were dissatisfied with God's general command forbidding work. Ultimately, the Mishna would provide 39 discrete categories of forbidden labor. This desire for exhaustive control of the covenant people has its mirror in the RPW which (ostensibly) forbids anything not commanded.

"Without a doubt," says Dr. Douma - whom I will quote freely in this section - "underlying the extensive work of the scribes was a deep-seated respect for the Sabbath." So also, underlying the intentions of regulativists is a deep-seated respect for the corporate worship of the Triune God. Would that all God's people would yearn after God-centered, God-glorifying worship! The danger, of course, is when, in the pursuit of a noble end, one displaces or distorts, according to the dictates of man, Scripture's actual words. As in the case of the RPW, so in the case of the Pharisaical Sabbath, "Not Scripture, but the tradition of the 'ancients,' functioned authoritatively." Here we need to listen carefully to Dr. Douma:

Within a detailed casuistry, it is no longer possible to quiet one's hunger on the Sabbath by plucking heads of grain in a grain field. For whoever picks a head of grain is busy harvesting [one of the 39 forbidden categories of labor], and whoever rubs that head of grain between his fingers is busy threshing [another forbidden category]. Someone who healed a man on the Sabbath, as Jesus did, was performing work that could have waited until the following day. Someone who picked up his mattress and walked away with it, after he had been healed, was making himself guilty of Sabbath desecration because he was carrying a burden on the Sabbath from one place to another.

So, too, the regulativist sifts through his artificial grid any element of worship for which he can find no authorizing command. "No 'man-made' hymns!" he cries, suggesting that the corporate singing of "All Glory Be to Thee, Most High" is unmitigated effrontery. "No musical instruments!" he demands, calling their employment in any form indulgent sensuality and carnality. "No this, no that, no the other. God approves only what we say He approves, no matter what He might say to the contrary!"

". . . But Not For Me"

As Douma noted:

Jesus condemned this casuistry [regarding the Sabbath]. Although it can be dressed in clothes of piety, it can nonetheless be a form of hypocrisy. What people withhold from others (permission to work, for example) they grant to themselves.

As we have seen, regulativists grant to themselves the right to sing in worship when such can be easily controverted on their principles. But beyond that, the RPW, despite its apparent simplicity,

is ultimately like the Mishna: arbitrary in what it permits or forbids. For good and necessary consequence is, in the end, a measure which exists mainly in the mind of the beholder.

Even in the vaunted Directory for the Publick Worship of God of the Westminster Assembly - a perfectly lovely order of worship, on our principles - we discover numerous requirements which can claim justification neither by express command nor by necessary consequence. (5) One can account for this anomaly by suggesting that the Westminster Divines did not intend to teach the Regulative Principle, or that they found it inconvenient or impossible to apply. In any case, there is certainly "room" for those who subscribe to the Westminster Standards to challenge the proposition that subscription requires strict adherence to the rule: if it is not commanded to be performed in worship, it is forbidden.

For in the preface to the Directory for Publick Worship, the divines use the language of the Informed Principle, stating that their "care hath been to hold forth such things as are of divine institution in every ordinance; and other things we have endeavoured to set forth according to the rules of Christian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the word of God."

Consider what my Presbyterian friend, Chris Coldwell, has to say about the Directory's authority: "The Directory was approved by 'Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland'... The Government of Scotland approved and established the Directory three days later. Thus the Directory for Worship was actually more widely authorized than the Confession of Faith, or Larger Catechism, which never received the assent of the English Parliament. It represents the approved views regarding worship of not only the Assembly, but of the governments of England and Scotland, as well as the Church of Scotland."

Fine. Let me cite two areas in the Directory - the first a bit lengthy (dealing with Christian baptism), the second quite brief (dealing with Scripture reading) - where the Westminster divines forsake the standard which requires command (RPW) and embrace the standard of agreement with the general rules of the Word (IPW). Some have recently said that "all Protestants hold to the Regulative Principle." I disagree. Many, no doubt, hold to it pro forma, but in practice it is another matter. The Directory for Worship suggests that, behind the rhetoric, all Reformed people actually hold to the IPW. Witness:

First, the administration of Christian baptism is saddled in the Directory with requirements neither commanded in Scripture nor the result of good and necessary consequence. We'll focus

on two requirements (man-made impositions?) which we find particularly noteworthy, especially for their being found in the Directory for Worship of the supposedly strictest of the RPW-leaning confessions.

The Directory's rule is that baptism must be performed by a minister. Yet this does not comport with Scripture. Thus its origin is in man, i.e., in a human tradition. (6) The Old Testament antecedent, circumcision, did not require the rite to be performed by someone specially called. Zipporah's circumcision of her and Moses' son was valid. God Himself approved of it and accepted it (Ex. 4:25, 26).

The same unconcern with administrators is true in the New Testament. Kistemaker, commenting on the baptism of Cornelius's household in Acts 10:48, is unafraid to accept the obvious: "Peter, as the Greek text implies, orders the . . . Jewish Christians to baptize the Gentile converts." These Jewish Christians were simply "some of the brothers" (Ac. 10:23) - the common term - not "some other ministers." The apostle apparently regarded these ordinary, male Jewish Christians as covenantally competent to perform the rite of baptism. "The apostles, then, place the emphasis not on themselves but on the name of Jesus." Barnes agrees, explaining that "it seems not to have been the practice of the apostles themselves to baptize very extensively." J. A. Alexander is forceful on this point: "It can scarcely be a mere fortuitous coincidence, that Peter, Paul, and Christ himself, should all have left this rite to be administered by others. 'Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples' (Jn. 4:2). 'I thank God that I baptized none of you, save Crispus, etc.' (1 Cor. 1:14). 'Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel' (ib. v. 17)."

Baptisms were performed under the apostles' supervision, but not necessarily by their hands. Such was obviously good enough for Peter and Paul, but not for the Westminster Assembly.

Perhaps the stalwarts of the Faith who composed the Standards really were, in the last analysis, practitioners of the Informed - not the Regulative - Principle of Worship. "If it is not commanded, it might be permitted: It depends!" The idea is plausible.

For the Directory further requires that baptism be performed as part of Christian worship services. It insists that baptism is not "to be administered in private places, or privately, but in the places of publick worship, and in the face of the congregation . . ." Here, contrary to their alleged principle, they add an element to worship. Where is it commanded in Scripture that baptism is to

be performed during a public worship service? Nowhere. Then perhaps we can find examples of such which would constitute "good and necessary consequence"?

Alas, no. In the case of circumcision, the antecedent of Christian baptism, there is not a trace of evidence that God required it to be performed either in the Temple or in the synagogue. And as for baptism itself, in the instances found in the New Testament, none is performed in what we would call or recognize as a worship service.

The three thousand on the Day of Pentecost were baptized in conjunction with, at most, an evangelistic meeting, not a worship service. The same is true of the Samaritans in Acts 8. Saul was not baptized at a worship service but at the house of Judas on Straight Street by Ananias (a "mere" disciple, by the way - Acts 9:10 - not a "minister"). Cornelius's family was baptized in his house without benefit of its being part of a "worship service." The Philippian jailer was certainly not baptized in a worship service. Lydia was baptized after hearing the message at a prayer meeting. (Such prayer meetings were substitutes for worship services, Jewish tradition requiring that worship services not be performed with less than ten men.) Crispus (Ac. 18:8) was baptized after a worship service.

Baptism tied to evangelistic meetings? Perhaps. Prayer meetings? Maybe. Homes? Sure. Church worship services? No. One might even reasonably conclude from the Scripture's evidence that one had to be baptized outside the church service in order to gain the right to enter. Yet the Directory forbids baptism from occurring any place except a church service! Hardly very RPW-ish. After all, there was no need for such an "intrusion upon the consciences of God's people." There was a ready work-around available.

For just as regulativists believe all Christian children ought to be catechized, yet don't require (or allow!) that catechizing to be done in worship services, so they could have easily demanded that all Christian children (and other fit candidates) be baptized in public but without adding the requirement that it be done in public worship. In fact, on their principle they ought to forbid that it be brought into a worship service since it is lacking in Divine command. (7) Most regulativists allow hymn-singing and instruments in private worship, (8) excluding them from corporate worship only because these elements, they say, are not commanded to be enjoyed therein. They should do the same with baptism, if they believed their principle. Now in my mind's ear I can hear my regulativist brothers groaning, "That's ridiculous!" Why is it any more ridiculous to

exclude baptism than to exclude hymns if the basis for inclusion is express warrant or approved example?

Already we can begin to see that, while many at that great Assembly may well have held in principle to the RPW, in practice they - like a very great number of Reformed churches since the Reformation - were clearly governed by the covenantal freedom expressed in the Informed Principle of Worship. (9) Perhaps it's time to let the cat out of the bag: there are no "strict regulativists" in practice. And the 57 varieties of those who claim to be such only prove that it is, at bottom, a subjective principle.

Regulate as We Say, Not as We Do

Second, the Directory dictates, "It is requisite [required, necessary, indispensable - sms] that all the canonical books be read over and in order . . . and, ordinarily, where the reading in either Testament endeth on one Lord's day, it is to begin the next." No one should deny that this, like baptizing during worship, is a fine practice - if a church so chooses it. But where in Scripture has God commanded this? From what might this "requirement" be deduced as necessary? How does this differ from the use of, say, Scripture songs (non-Psalms) being made requisite in worship, a practice condemned by "strict" RPW-ites?

The sons of Westminster who insist on a strict RPW must be forced to admit that such a strict principle was not in their foundational documents taken as a whole. The Directory, after all, required that the main prayer occur before the sermon, a requirement for which there can be found no command in Scripture.

But it seems that even strict regulativists allow to themselves what they deny to others: freedom to employ covenantal good sense. As Douma said, "And what else can you expect? Legalism always lives in tension with the normal development of life and sooner or later will shipwreck on the realistic and wholesome demands of practicality."

What the Pharisees did to the Sabbath, regulativists often do to worship. "The attitude [of the Pharisees] robbed the Sabbath of its characteristic gratitude for liberation. Gratitude had to make way for precisionist obedience, freedom was replaced with a new bondage." If you have any doubt how accommodating the RPW-flesh is to the Pharisee-spirit, it will be dispelled when you read its most consistent advocates.

## Ignorance of the Law Is No Excuse

Several regulativist brethren have sought to teach me that the critical point in this debate is the Second Commandment. "The Second Commandment," they claim, "is where the Regulative Principle is not only taught, but carved in stone as an eternal rule for the worship of the church."

Okay. Let's look at the Second Commandment. "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."

Where is the RPW here? I do not see it. The commandment forbids making images. It seems to me that discovering the RPW here is at best a bit ticklish. First, the RPW claims to govern corporate worship. Would the regulativist suggest that this command's scope is limited to corporate worship, that it is okay to make idols for use outside of corporate worship? Of course not.

But would the regulativist then ask that this command be applied exhaustively so as to exclude the making of any image whatsoever for use in any area of life? Would the regulativist suggest that all sculpture, all painting, all photography, all image-containing adornment, is excluded by this command? Of course not. God Himself commanded various "images" and representations to be made, even for use in Tabernacle/Temple worship (Ex. 26:1; 28:33; 37:7ff.; etc.)!

In the first case, the regulativist concedes that the command is not limited to corporate worship. In the second, he concedes that it does not absolutely prohibit images. Sounds IPW-ish so far. How then does this command support the Regulative Principle of Worship? Perhaps he is thinking of the exposition of the Second Commandment in the Heidelberg Catechism? There we read:

Q. 96. What does God require in the Second Commandment?

A. 96. That we in no way make any image of God, nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded us in His Word.

So far so good. The question then becomes, "Just how has God commanded in His Word that He be worshipped?" I answer, "He has forbidden certain things, as this commandment, among other texts, proves. He has also commanded that He be approached only through His own provided atonement. He has also given us many principles which serve as borders within which we may freely employ faithful, covenantal sense, taking into consideration always the general rules of the Word." That is how He has commanded that He be worshipped.

The regulativist, however, answers by saying, "God's will is that if He has not commanded a thing, it is forbidden." But where does he find that in the Second Commandment? He does not. He has obviously first assumed it and then imposed it.

In fact, what the Second Command does - and this might be a shock to some - is to forbid idolatry and the use of images as representations of God or as objects of worship. Most humble readers of the Bible would conclude this without help.

Indeed, this simple truth has not been lost in our Reformed tradition. Dr. Nelson Kloosterman has brought to my attention "G. Voetius' two-volume treatment (compendium, really) on the Heidelberg Catechism. In his five-page question-and-answer exposition of Heidelberg #96, Voetius nowhere discusses 'the RPW,' but rather focuses on why and for what purpose God forbade images of Himself as worship aids. In Voetius, we find page after page about the idolatry of Papists, Jews, and Mohammedans, page after page about the superstitious ceremonies and rituals of Romanists, but no exposition about 'what is not commanded is forbidden.' (You'll notice the same lacuna with regard to 'the RPW' in Herman Hoeksema's Triple Knowledge.)"

I might add that you'll find it, too, in Dr. Douma's treatment of the Second Commandment and, indeed, in most places where the RPW has not first been assumed.

### Flip-Floppin' Away

Moreover, the regulativist has not generally proven himself faithful to the flip-side of his principle. Many examples could be given, but let's be brief. If God forbids in worship all that He has not commanded, may we not rightly assume, following regulativist-style reasoning, that He requires in worship all He has commanded? If it is God's will that only Psalms be used in worship, does He require that we sing all the Psalms? If so, during what period of time should they be completed? Once in every service? Month? Year? Never?

This is not as ridiculous a question as one might suppose. Many Jews, for example, do indeed typically recite the entire Psalter (very often performed by heart, I might add) at least once, and in some cases thirteen or more times, in any given year. It seems that the Jews, by this practice, trump the regulativists who well may sing only Psalms but not all the Psalms, at least not each year.

And what about men being commanded to "lift up holy hands" in prayer? This, of course, they reduce to a "circumstance" that does not have to be obeyed. And what about greeting one another with a holy kiss? Here we find a command issued four times over to the churches of Christ. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. (Rom.16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thes. 5:26.) Do regulativists obey it? Their principle becomes very flexible when it causes them social discomfort, it seems. Or else their principle is extremely arbitrary, wouldn't you say? Meticulously excluding what they can't find commanded, while excluding much that is commanded.

And we haven't even mentioned the explicit command not to forbid speaking in tongues. I've yet to hear tongues employed in an RPW church (a fact which should move us all to rejoice). (10) No, the RPW is profoundly inadequate if advanced as the rule to govern worship in the churches. The point is they want to invert the Second Commandment (saying it forbids what is not commanded when all it says is that what is forbidden may not be done) but they won't flip their own principle (by saying that what is commanded must be done).

Allow me just one more flip-flop illustration, please. In Answer 99 (part 4) of the Westminster Larger Catechism, we read as a rule for interpreting the commandments, "where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded." Now let's apply that to the Second Commandment. We are forbidden to bow down to idols. Is it not then commanded that we do bow down to the Lord? But regulativists do not bow down in their worship services. I remind you that such an omission is perfectly acceptable if we are governed by the IPW, but I cannot understand its absence in RPW churches. What is the excuse? That the architecture and layout of the churches make it inconvenient? Then change the architecture. Islamic worship, you surely know, requires bowing down and their worship centers are built to accommodate their practice. RPW advocates should do the same. Is it just a

circumstance of worship, a (convenient) category which provides latitude in compliance? Then why not do the same for instruments or hymns? Where is the list in Scripture which tells us which things are flexible "circumstances" and which are fixed "elements"? The word "humbug" comes to mind. Thus, when we peek inside RPW churches we see therein not only the supposed exclusion of things not commanded, we find the actual exclusion of things certainly commanded.

I trust you are able to see just how impossible it is to accept the proposition that the Regulative Principle of Worship - if it is not commanded, explicitly or by good and necessary consequence, it is forbidden in worship - is an adequate rule reflecting Scripture's actual teaching. And understand this, I beg you: If the RPW is presented as anything but a stand-alone, fully adequate rule, it is not the RPW you are looking at. For once a man says there are other considerations besides what is stated in the RPW, he has embraced the IPW: If it is not commanded, it might be permitted. It depends. (See 1 Cor. 10:23.) This is an important point because many, legion, are they who want to continue using the title "regulativist," but who, in fact, do not believe the Regulative Principle as historically received. Such posturing is not helpful. Well could Rev. John van Popta (of the Canadian Reformed Churches) complain to a "strict" regulativist:

What do you understand to be the practical working out of "what is not commanded is forbidden"? What has been commanded? Is silent prayer in the worship service commanded? If not, is it forbidden? May there be a call to worship? Is the vatum commanded? The salutation? The blessing? Or are these only because of good and proper inference? The (infamous) handshake (of many Reformed churches), has it been commanded? And if not should I tell my elders that we must cease and desist forthwith for we are engaged in self-styled worship? Are liturgical forms for baptism, and the Lord's Supper commanded? Should office-bearers be ordained in a worship service? Where are the commands for this? The list could go on. I think that the RPW "strictly applied" is a wraith and a phantom that has no reality in history.

Voetnoot

1. Some have suggested that what the synagogue did/offered was not properly called "worship" at all, thus thrusting us back to the Temple as our only legitimate model for "worship." I would

ask those entertaining such a notion: Is your church ruled by priests or by elders? Are these assisted by Levites or by deacons? Is the order of service built around recurring sacrifices and ceremonial washings or around the reading/preaching/hearing of the Word of God? Is there an altar or a pulpit? Is there an area into which no one ordinarily may enter? Is there a separate section for women? A separate section for those outside the covenant? What's that you say? You have elder-supervised, deacon-aided, Word-centered, family-oriented, and inviting worship? Well, welcome to synagogue "worship" - or whatever you care to call it. For in the last analysis, suggesting that the synagogue and Reformed church services are not "worship" leads to little more than word-wrangling. On that, see 2 Timothy 2:14. It is also worth noting that Scripture reading itself was not part of the Temple service at all before the Babylonian period, and is not commanded to be an element of Temple service in Scripture, as far as I know. Note further that prayer was, at best, a very minor part of the Temple service, and what was commanded was given in the form of rote, liturgical - not spontaneous - prayer. The Temple doesn't really help in the quest for a stand-alone Biblical worship model for the church.

2. One difference: the regulativists invent these missing texts only here and only to escape this one dilemma. Another difference: the Jews claim to be able to show us the "texts" as (now written) Oral Law. Regulativists make no such claim.

3. Let me quickly add two notes. a) The Pharisees were by no means all bad, and b) I am not merely hurling epithets here but rather seeking to make a valid comparison. I hope this will become evident.

4. In his *The Ten Commandments: A Manual for the Christian Life* (Translated by Dr. Nelson Kloosterman). A must-own volume, available from Westminster Discount Books, (914) 472-2237.

5. Since we have seen our views (no doubt inadvertently) misrepresented before, let us be careful to say here that we hold the Westminster Standards in very high esteem. We have taught the Shorter Catechism to our children and the Confession of Faith to adults in our various ministries. We do not, however, receive them as perfect. Nor do we judge them to be as excellent as the Three Forms of Unity. The latter we regard to be superior in approach and style, if not in content (at certain points). We luxuriate, though, in being blessed to have access and recourse to both sets of documents. In a few instances, if truth be told, the Westminster Standards do seem to

attempt to say more than they should. One place this overstepping is evident is in their pleading the RPW in the Confession. When they go on to employ the IPW in the Directory, their border violation becomes evident.

6. Remember that the IPW allows for certain human traditions if they are in agreement with the general rules of the Word.

7. For the record, the Informed Principle of Worship offers no objection to ministers performing baptisms in regular worship services.

8. Some will not. When I asked this question on a forum I received this reply: "Yes, I do believe that a strict regulativist believes that the same rules apply to corporate, family, and private worship. Therefore I do only sing Psalms in corporate and family and private worship without instruments." Those who hold this view must regard Hannah (Hannah's Song) and Mary (the Magnificat) as sinful will-worshippers. Interesting.

9. I ought to mention that I preferred calling it The Reformed Principle of Worship, but passed on it for two reasons. One, while the IPW certainly is indicative of the principle employed by many Reformed, as opposed to Presbyterian, churches, it would plainly be untrue to say that the IPW is identical to the Reformed philosophy of worship. There is more than one Reformed version of worship, in my judgment. I have no wish to even breathe the suggestion that my brothers who disagree with me are not Reformed. Second, the initials would be the same, making shorthand difficult.

10. Of course there are good theological/historical reasons to exclude tongues. But the use of such reasoning comports well with the Informed Principle, not the RPW. For RPW-ites reject good theological/historical reasons to sing non-Psalms, citing only the alleged absence of a command for justification. With each instance of arbitrariness, their principle can be seen to decrease in value.

**11.**