

2nd.4. The Second Commandment and the Regulative Principle

Goal: that we each improve our appreciation and practice of singing in some way.

1) What is the regulative principle in the history of reformed theology?

In general, the regulative principle of worship means “that for all the modes and elements of worship there must be authorization from the Word of God” (Murray, *Collected Writings*, I, 168). In particular, Murray says, “The Reformed principle is that the acceptable way of worshipping God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his revealed will that he may not be worshipped in any other way than that prescribed in the Holy Scripture, that what is not commanded is forbidden. This is in contrast to the view that what is not forbidden is permitted” (Ibid.; so Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary*, p.288).

Q: Why is it that the regulative principle is not susceptible to *absurdum* arguments like this: if it were true then it would mean that we cannot drive cars because Scripture does not command us to drive cars”? [*Because RP applies to worship for which God is jealous; He must tell us how to worship Him for us to know what pleases Him.*]

Q: How does RP relate to private worship or to the six days vs. worship with the family on the seventh? [*There is much overlap because we need God’s word on how to worship Him properly. We can work within this model: in the six days we work as worship (we do our work as worship unto the Lord; if we play tennis, we do so for the glory of God because He tells us that whatever we do, eat or drink, we are to glorify Him in it. On the seventh day Sunday Sabbath, our work is worship and we have God’s commands regarding how to approach Him in a corporate and public way: pray, read Scripture, preach and listen to preaching, and so forth.)*]

2) Where do we find the regulative principle in the Westminster Standards?

It is in chapters I.5, XX.2, and XXI of the WCF and in 108-109 of WLC and 50-51 of the WSC. The central statement is in XXI: “Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath-day.”

In the WFC: ... the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the holy Scripture...

The catechisms: The WLC says: “The duties required in the second commandments are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word” (108) and WSC says: “The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word” (50). Both move to a principle of exclusion: “The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, or any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself,” (109) and “The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word” (51).

Pure and right worship is that which God appoints: if He does not appoint it, then it is false worship.

3) What are the elements of worship according to the Confession and in the following paragraphs which element is missing? What is the biblical support for each element with respect to the gathered church?

III. Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required ... IV. Prayer is to be made for things lawful; and for all sorts of men living, or that shall live hereafter: but not for the dead... V. The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths,

vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner.

[5: prayer, reading of Scripture, sound preaching, singing of psalms, sacraments giving is not on this list- 1 Cor. 16.2; 1 Tim. 5.17-18; reading – 1 Tim 4.13; preaching – 2 Tim. 4.2; singing – Col. 3.16; Eph. 5.19; sacraments – Mat. 28; 1 Cor. 11]

4) Why and how does “good and necessary consequence” enter this discussion? See WCF.1.6
[It is part of the reformed doctrine of sola Scriptura]

5) Why is “Christian liberty” or liberty of conscience part of this picture? See WCF.20.2
[Because if you do not have regulation by God but the commandments of men, you are under bondage; true freedom involves being a slave to Jesus Christ the risen sovereign]

6) What do you think is meant by the distinction between the elements and the circumstances of worship (the circumstances giving exceptions of some kind): see WCF. 1.6? Why is this important, see 20.2?

[There are things that we do in worship that are “common to human action and societies” to be “ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word”]