

Lesson 26: 2LCF Chapter 22: Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day (Part 1)

*Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land.
Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!
For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

Psalm 95:1-7

As we enter into the study of “Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day”, we arrive at the chief activity and purpose of the church (and all of humanity) on the earth—namely the worship of Almighty God. As has been pointed out by many believers through the ages, the predominant aim of the church, whether in its evangelistic and discipleship efforts²⁷⁹ or its corporate assembly, is the worship and exaltation of the Triune God.

As it has been succinctly put in the Westminster Shorter:

Q. What is the chief end of man?
A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever.
1 Cor. 10:31; Rom. 11:36; Ps. 73:25-28²⁸⁰

Whenever the church is assembled—whether the Bible is read, or prayers are raised to God, or hymns are sung, or the ordinances are practiced, or the Word is preached—the church’s mandate is one of worship.

Charles Spurgeon captures this in one of his playful and yet pressing quotes:

Some go to church to take a walk; some go there to laugh and talk.
Some go there to meet a friend; some go there their time to spend.
Some go there to meet a lover; some go there a fault to cover.
Some go there for speculation; some go there for observation.
Some go there to doze and nod; the wise go there to worship God.²⁸¹

In this lesson, we will consider how it is that we can live wisely by worshipping God rightly. After all, God does not allow us to worship in any way that we choose. Nor can we elect to worship God as other so-called ‘gods’ are worshipped in other religions. To the contrary, because the worship of God

²⁷⁹ Consider John Piper’s well-known quote “Missions exists because worship doesn’t!” His explanation of this concept can be found in this sermon on the Desiring God website: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/missions-exists-because-worship-doesnt-a-bethlehem-legacy-inherited-and-bequeathed>

²⁸⁰ Edwin Hall, *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly*, with Analysis and Scripture Proofs (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Publication Committee, 1859), 5.

²⁸¹ Charles Spurgeon, *The Salt Cellars* (ed. 2015).

exists for the glory of God, He alone reserves the right to dictate the manner in which He is to be worshipped.

The following outlines of Chapter 22 has been offered:

Concise Outline:

- I. Its Regulative Principle (Paragraph 1)
- II. Its Restricted Presentation (Paragraph 2)
- III. Its Constituent Elements (Paragraphs 3-5)
- IV. Its Appropriate Locale (Paragraph 6)
- V. Its Appointed Day (Paragraph 7-8)

Expanded Outline:

Paragraph 1

I. Its Regulative Principle

- A. The general duty of worship revealed by nature
- B. The specific regulation of worship revealed by Scripture

Paragraph 2

II. Its Restricted Presentation

- A. In regard to its object
- B. In regard to its mediation

Paragraphs 3-5

III. Its Constituent Elements

- A. Its ordinary elements (Paragraphs 3-5a)
 - 1. The element of prayer (Paragraphs 3-4)
 - 2. Other elements (Paragraph 5a)
- B. Its occasional elements (Paragraph 5b)
 - 1. Solemn humiliation with fasting
 - 2. Special occasions of thanksgiving

Paragraph 6

IV. Its appropriate locale

- A. Described negatively
- B. Described positively

Paragraphs 7-8

V. Its appointed day

- A. Its institution (Paragraph 7)
- B. Its sanctification (Paragraph 8)

Paragraph 1.

The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all; is just, good and does good to all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all the might. But 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 imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures. Jer. 10:7; Mark 12:33; Deut. 12:32; Exod. 20:4-6

Exposition:

Paragraph one outlines what has been called the “Regulative Principle of Worship”, which stipulates that God is only to be worshipped in the manner in which he has commanded in Scripture.

This principle is seen more clearly seen when contrasted with an opposing view known as the "Normative Principle of Worship". The Normative Principle dictates that God may be worshipped in any manner which is not forbidden in Scripture. While this is an issue that predates the Reformation, the debate reached its boiling-point in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century.

In 1571, the Church of England published a revised edition of their Thirty-Nine Articles, which served as the foundational doctrinal statements for the church of England. In the Article 20, the article stated: *"The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies and authority in the controversies of the Faith. And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain anything contrary to God's Word written."*

In this article, the church of England took it upon itself to decree any form of worship not contrary to God's Word. This is further explained in James Bannerman's quote on the subject:

In the case of the Church of England, its doctrine in regard to Church power in the worship of God is, that it has a right to decree everything, except what is forbidden in the Word of God. In the case of our own Church, its doctrine in reference to Church power in the worship of God is, that it has a right to decree nothing, except what expressly or by implication is enjoined by the Word of God.²⁸²

Meanwhile, the Puritans maintained that view that true worship of God could only be offered according to what God has expressly commanded.

G.I. Williamson has provided a helpful diagram to view the differences:

PURITAN VIEW	
True Worship Only what is commanded	False Worship Anything outside that which is commanded
ANGLICAN VIEW	
True Worship What is Command + Anything not expressly forbidden	False Worship Only what is expressly condemned or forbidden by God

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²⁸² James Bannerman, vol. 1, 339, 340.

²⁸³ G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, 160.

At first glance, these two positions may not look all that different; however, the implications of these two views take the worshipper to vastly different places. This is seen in a helpful illustration by Samuel Waldron:

The difference between Puritans and Anglicans may be helpfully illustrated by means of two builders on building the temple of God. Mr. Anglican must use the materials of the Word of God, but has no blueprint and may use other materials. Mr. Puritan must use only materials of the Word of God and has a blueprint. It takes no special genius to discern that the two completed buildings will differ drastically or to discern which will be more pleasing to God.²⁸⁴

This is further demonstrated when we consider many of the worship practices in the world that are not expressly forbidden in Scripture. Can God be worshipped through tradition indigenous practices that are not expressly forbidden, such as smudging? What about plays and drama performances in lieu of a sermon? Or, as has been observed in one youth group, a dirt-bike riding performance by the youth pastor? When we consider the possible conclusions, it is easy to see that the Normative Principle falls far short from the biblical norm.

Sam Waldron has provided the following helpful arguments in support of the Regulative Principle of Worship:

1. It is the prerogative of God alone to determine the terms on which sinners may approach him in worship.

On this point, he quotes James Bannerman:

The fundamental principle that lies at the basis of the whole argument is this, that in regard to the ordinance of public worship it is the province of God, and not the province of man, to determine both the terms and the manner of such worship. The path of approach to God was shut and barred in consequence of man's sin: it was impossible for man himself to renew the intercourse which had been so solemnly closed by the judicial sentence which excluded him from the presence and favour of his God. Could that path ever again be opened up, and the communion of God with man and of man with God ever again be renewed? This was a question for God alone to determine. If it could, on what terms was the renewal of intercourse to take place, and in what manner was fellowship of the creature with his Creator again to be maintained? This, too, was a question...for God alone to resolve.²⁸⁵

This is clearly seen in several examples in Scripture:

Genesis 4:1

1 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD." 2 And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. 3 In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell.

²⁸⁴ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 316-17.

²⁸⁵ James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ*, vol. 1, 340-41.

Exodus 20:4-6

4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

2. The introduction of extra-biblical practices into worship inevitably tends to nullify and undermine God's appointed worship.**Matthew 15:3-9**

He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," 6 he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. 7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

8 "This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
9 in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "

Also: 2 Kings 16:10-18

3. The wisdom of Christ and the sufficiency of the Scriptures is called into question by the addition of unappointed elements.

Here he quotes John Owen:

Three things are usually pleaded in the justification...of such rites and ceremonies in the worship of God: First, That they tend unto the furtherance of the devotion of the worshippers; secondly, That they render the worship itself comely and beautiful; thirdly, that they are the preservers of order in the celebration thereof. And therefore on these accounts they may be instituted or appointed by some, and observed by all.²⁸⁶

But Waldron is right to note that such reasoning "impugns the wisdom of Christ" by suggesting that men are better able to create manners of worship that are more effective, beautiful, orderly.²⁸⁷

4. The Bible explicitly condemns all worship that is not commanded by God.

This is clearly seen in all of the following passages:

Deuteronomy 4:2

You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

Joshua 1:6-7

Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the

²⁸⁶ John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. XV (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 467.

²⁸⁷ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 318.

law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.

Joshua 23:6-8

6 Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, turning aside from it neither to the right hand nor to the left, 7 that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or serve them or bow down to them, 8 but you shall cling to the LORD your God just as you have done to this day.

Leviticus 10:1-3

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. 2 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. 3 Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD has said: 'Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.' " And Aaron held his peace.

On this point, Waldron notes that it is not "fire" which God has forbidden. Rather, he has commanded fire. Yet, he has commanded that only a certain type of fire be offered. Waldron adds: "The Hebrew clearly and literally reads that it was fire which he had not commanded them? The mere fact that they dared to bring unauthorized fire brought fiery death upon them."²⁸⁸

Deuteronomy 12:29-32

29 "When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, 30 take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do the same.' 31 You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

32 "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.

Colossians 2:20-23

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

It has been pointed out that while Colossians 2:20 condemns submitting to the decrees or regulations of men in the worship of God, verse 23 also condemns what can be translated literally as. "will-worship". Bible Commentator Herbert Carlson describes this as: "a form of worship which a man devises for himself."²⁸⁹

Waldron concludes his argument with these words:

With this ample biblical support, why are men so lenient in their worship? It is because the God of modern men is not a God to be feared. Of all that is not appointed by God in His worship, we must hear Jesus saying, 'Take these things hence!' The child of God will not

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 319.

²⁸⁹ Herbert Carson, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1976), 79.

respond to the regulative principle as if it were an intolerable strait-jacket! He will pray, rather, "O Lord, teach me to worship you acceptably."²⁹⁰

The logical next step is to ask, how are we commanded to worship God? Thankfully, the Confession summarizes this in the remaining paragraphs of chapter 22. These paragraphs can be read and readily understood with minimal commentary.

Paragraph 2.

Religious worship is to be given to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to him alone; not to angels, saints, or any other creatures; and since the fall, not without a mediator, nor in the mediation of any other but Christ alone.

Matt. 4:9,10; John 6:23; Matt. 28:19; Rom. 1:25; Col. 2:18; Rev. 19:10; John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5

Paragraph 3.

Prayer, with thanksgiving, being one part of natural worship, is by God required of all men. But that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of the Spirit, according to his will; with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and when with others, in a known tongue.

Ps. 95:1-7, 65:2; John 14:13,14; Rom. 8:26; 1 John 5:14; 1 Cor. 14:16,17

Paragraph 4.

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, nor for those of whom it may be known that they have sinned the sin unto death. 1 Tim. 2:1,2; 2 Sam. 7:29; 2 Sam. 12:21-23; 1 John 5:16

Paragraph 5.

The reading of the Scriptures, preaching, and hearing the Word of God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord; as also the administration of baptism, and the Lord's supper, are all parts of religious worship of God, to be performed in obedience to him, with understanding, faith, reverence, and godly fear; moreover, solemn humiliation, with fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, ought to be used in an holy and religious manner.

1 Tim. 4:13; 2 Tim. 4:2; Luke 8:18; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19; Matt. 28:19,20; 1 Cor. 11:26; Esther 4:16; Joel 2:12; Exod. 15:1-19, Ps. 107

Paragraph 6.

Neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship, is now under the gospel, tied unto, or made more acceptable by any place in which it is performed, or towards which it is directed; but God is to be worshipped everywhere in spirit and in truth; as in private families daily, and in secret each one by himself; so more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly nor wilfully to be neglected or forsaken, when God by his word or providence calls thereunto.

John 4:21; Mal. 1:11; 1 Tim. 2:8; Acts 10:2; Matt. 6:11; Ps. 55:17; Matt. 6:6; Heb. 10:25;

George Swinnock

Worship comprehends all that respect which man oweth and giveth to his Maker... It is the tribute which we pay to the King of Kings, whereby we acknowledge his sovereignty over us, and our dependence on him... All that inward reverence and respect, and all that outward obedience and service to God, which the Word enjoineth, is included in this one word worship.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰ Samuel E. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, 319.

²⁹¹ George Swinnock, *Works*, (Edinburgh: James Nichols, 1868), I:31.