

## **CHAPTER 22 - RELIGIOUS WORSHIP, AND THE LORD'S DAY**

### **Regulative Principle of Worship**

1. *The light of nature shows that there is a God who has dominion and sovereignty over all. He is just and good, and He does good to all. He is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, invoked, trusted and served by men with all their heart and soul and strength. But the only acceptable way of worshipping the true God is appointed by Himself, in accordance with His own will. Consequently He may not be worshipped in ways of mere human contrivance, or proceeding from Satan's suggestions. Visible symbols of God, and all other forms of worship not prescribed in the Holy Scripture, are expressly forbidden.*

Concerning worship, the great question is, "How do we know what worship is acceptable to God?" The Catholics had added so many ceremonies in worship that they defend on the basis of the authority of the Church. Even the Anglicans, in their 39 Articles of the Faith state, "The Church has power to decree rites or ceremonies..." (Article 20). So there arose a group in the Anglican Church who wanted to purify the Church from these man-made ceremonies, who became known as "Puritans". Examples of the things they objected to, things that were commanded as having religious significance: (1) priestly vestments, (2) kneeling at the Lord's Supper as signifying veneration of the sacrament, (3) insistence on using the prayer book. It is against the background of this controversy that this section is written.

(a) **The general duty of worship revealed by nature** (lines 1-3). The infinite greatness of God is revealed in creation, so that He is an object of worship being so much greater than ourselves (Psalm 19:1-4, Jeremiah 10:6-7,12, Romans 1:19-20).

(b) **The specific regulation of worship is revealed by Scripture** (lines 4-8). Exactly *how* is this great God to be worshipped? The Confession states that it is limited "in accordance with His own will". They take the Puritan position that even ceremonies not forbidden by Scripture (for example, candles) are unacceptable to God. It must be remembered that we come to God in worship not as equals, and not deserving of anything but His judgment. By nature we are rebels so that only God in His grace can determine the terms by which we may approach Him. Note the following passages of Scripture:

1. Genesis 4:1-5. Abel brought "the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions". Cain did not bring of the firstfruits, so although he worshipped it was not acceptable. Only Abel had faith to do what was commanded (Hebrews 11:4).
2. Exodus 20:4-6. God has clearly revealed in this second commandment how He is to be worshipped, without the use of any visible representation. What about pictures of Jesus?
3. Leviticus 10:1-3. Aaron's sons offered incense that "He had not commanded them" (see Exodus 30:34-38).
4. Deuteronomy 12:29-32. The commandment and prohibition "to do" and "not add to take from" follows immediately commands concerning worship.
5. 1 Chronicles 15:13. The first time David tried to bring the ark up to Jerusalem he used oxen and a cart (13:7ff.). God's judgment fell upon Uzzah because it was not done "in the way that is ordained".

6. Matthew 15:1-9. When men introduce their own traditions and ceremonies it *always* has the effect of making void the Word of God. God's Word is sufficient in order to serve and glorify Him in every area of life. To add anything will therefore always result in changing God's Word.

Conclusion - So the Bible always condemns all worship not actually commanded by God.

Question - There are many things concerning worship that the Bible does not reveal, for example, the time in the day of worship, how many services, the exact place. These are called the 'accidents' of worship and we are free to do what is most convenient to the whole Church as long as no *spiritual significance* is given to what we decide – we may decide to have a service at 6 a.m. but it would be wrong to say that God is more pleased with this than any other time.

## **The Object and Mediator of Worship**

2. *Religious worship is to be given to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to Him alone. It is not to be given to angels, saints, or any other creatures. Since man's fall into sin, worship cannot be rendered without a mediator; and the only accepted mediation is that of Christ.*

### **(a) Worship is to be given to the triune God alone.**

Read Matthew 4:10 quoting Deuteronomy 6:13, and Revelation 22:8,9. This is in opposition to Roman Catholicism that gives true religious worship to the Virgin Mary, saints and angels according to their respective ranks. Even if the worship given to these others is 'less' than that given to God, it is still totally wrong to worship them as they are all only created beings. Only the uncreated, and sovereign God is worthy of worship. The worship of other gods (Exodus 20:3-5), angels (Colossians 2:18) and men who are supposedly 'gods' (Acts 14:14-15), is explicitly forbidden. Nor is the true God to be worshipped using any images – the golden calves were meant to represent Jehovah (Exodus 32:5, 1 Kings 12:27-28).

### **(b) Only Christ is the mediator between God and men.**

Once again, this is against the teaching of Roman Catholicism which puts great emphasis on the mediation of Mary (the Mediatrix), and the saints. In reply, the Bible so clearly teaches that *only* Christ is the mediator (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus Himself claims that He is the *only* way to the Father (see also Ephesians 2:18, Hebrews 10:19). The Old Testament system of worship began with the shedding of blood for the forgiveness of sins – the altar was positioned at the entrance so that no worshipper was acceptable and no priest could do his work without such a sacrifice having been offered. Only one who is both man AND God can be the mediator. Are the saints and angels omnipresent and omniscient like God so that they can hear our prayers and give us the help we need?

## The Elements of Worship - Prayer

3. *God requires all men to pray to Him, and to give thanks, this being one part of natural worship. But to render such prayer acceptable, several things are requisite: it must be made in the name of God's Son, it must be Spirit-aided, and it must accord with the will of God. It must also be reverent, humble, fervent and persevering, and linked with faith, love and understanding. United prayer, when offered, must always be in a known language.*

4. *Prayer is to be made for things lawful, and for men of all sorts now living or as yet unborn. But prayer is not to be made for the dead, nor for those who are known to be guilty of 'the sin unto death'.*

Not all prayer is acceptable to God (see Proverbs 28:9, Luke 18:11-12). This section of the Confession makes it very clear what is necessary for our prayers to be acceptable (in the sense of communion with God all worship is prayer).

(a) **Prayer must be Trinitarian.** We pray “to the Father”, “through Him (Christ)” and “in one Spirit” (Ephesians 2:18).

1. It must be “in the Name of God's Son” (John 14:13-14, 16:23-24). This is not a formula that is just to be added on at the end of our prayers, but a confession from the heart that the only way we can come to God as sinners is through Christ and Him crucified.
2. It must be “Spirit-aided” (Romans 8:26-27, Ephesians 6:18, Jude 20). If the Lord is our advocate in heaven then the Spirit is our advocate in our hearts. We must confess our inability to pray. “We know not how to pray as we ought”. We should pray with a conscious dependence upon the guidance and strength that the Spirit gives. These verses have nothing to do with tongues.

(b) **Prayer must be according to the will of God.** This is the clear teaching of 1 John 5:14. It is the way Jesus Himself prayed (Matthew 26:39), and how He taught us to pray (Matthew 6:10). Surely, as Christians, the one thing we want above everything else is the will of God to be done. It is quite right to pray with submissiveness, “Thy will be done”, or “If it is your will”. Prayer is not forcing God to do my will – that emphasis on my own will is characteristic of the non-Christian life-style (Isaiah 53:6). To pray like this we must know the Scriptures and make use of them in prayer. Read about Daniel after he had finished reading Jeremiah (Daniel 9).

(c) **Prayer must be with the proper attitudes of heart.**

1. “Reverent” because of the greatness of the God to whom we pray (Genesis 18:27, Hebrews 12:28,29).
2. “Humble” because we are totally unworthy because of our sins (Luke 8:9,13).
3. “Fervent” because God will not hear the prayer that is half-hearted (James 1:5-6). Prayer must not only be with the lips but from the depths of our hearts, with feeling (James 5:16b-18). We must do more than just ‘say’ our prayers.
4. “Persevering” because if we really believe in what we are praying we will not be satisfied until God has answered us (Luke 11:5-8. 18:1-8).
5. “With faith” (Mark 11:22-24) because faith shows that we are resting in dependence upon His Word.
6. With “love” because if we have any attitude of anger or lack of forgiveness God will not show love to us (Matthew 6:14-15, 1 Timothy 2:8).

7. With “understanding” because we must consider the seriousness of what we are doing when we approach the eternal God in prayer (Ecclesiastes 5:1-2).

(d) **Public prayer must be in a known language.** Read 1 Corinthians 14:14-17. You cannot say “Amen” to a prayer that you have not understood.

(e) **The content of prayer.** Many things ought to be prayed for, and some things must not be prayed for.

1. Positively – Whatever is “lawful” = whatever the Word of God encourages us to pray for. We must learn to use the prayers of the Bible as examples for the very content of our prayers. Specifically we must pray for “all sorts of men” (1 Timothy 2:1-3) including people in authority over us; and those “unborn” who will become believers (2 Samuel 7:29, John 17:20).
2. Negatively - There are two specific restrictions.
  - “Not...for the dead” (2 Samuel 12:21-23). Remember that the eternal destination of the dead is fixed at the moment of their death (Luke 16:22,23, 23:43, Philippians 1:23). There is no such place as Purgatory, midway between earth and heaven, for the cleansing of sin. Our prayers cannot change God’s decision, and it is wicked to try to do so.
  - Not “for those...guilty of ‘the sin unto death’” (1 John 5:16). This takes up the distinction between sins committed ‘unwittingly’ or with ‘a high hand’ (Numbers 15:27-31). For the latter there was no forgiveness promised. It is like the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3:28-30). As with the Pharisees who had said that Jesus had an unclean spirit, so this sin is deliberate, repeated, against knowledge, calling God’s work the work of Satan. Such people have travelled too far down the road of sin.

## The Content of Public Worship

5. *The reading of Scripture, the preaching and hearing of the Word of God, the instructing and admonishing of one another by means of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with heartfelt thankfulness to the Lord, the observance of baptism and the Lord's supper – these are all parts of divine worship to be performed obediently, intelligently, faithfully, reverently, and with godly fear. Moreover, on special occasions, solemn humiliation, fastings, and thanksgivings ought to be observed in a holy and reverential manner.*

(a) **The reading of Scripture.** Nehemiah 8:1-8, Luke 4:16-19, 1 Timothy 4:13. Even in these days when we all have access to a personal Bible, public reading of Scripture must be part of our public worship.

(b) **The preaching and hearing of the Word.** 1 Timothy 4:13, 5:17, 2 Timothy 4:2. Certain Christians have been gifted to preach, and should be set aside for the office of pastor/elder/bishop (Ephesians 4:11-14, 1 Timothy 3:2). As with the apostles, God's people should be gathered when they teach (Acts 2:42).

(c) **Singing.** Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16. Note that we not only sing to God, but also 'instruct' and 'admonish' each other. "Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim" is an example of a hymn we sing to each other. It must also be done with "heartfelt thankfulness to the Lord", with emphasis on the words being sung.

(d) **Sacraments.** There are just two: baptism (Matthew 28:19) and the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). They are dealt with in detail in chapters 28-30 of this Confession.

(e) **The manner of worship.**

1. "Obediently" – exactly according to the Word of God (Matthew 15:8,9).
2. "Intelligently" – we must understand what we are doing and not, just utter vain repetitions.
3. "Faithfully" – time after time, without weariness, this must be our habit.
4. "Reverently" – giving the honour to God that is due to His holy Name.
5. "Godly fear" – being careful how we conduct ourselves in worship not wanting to offend Him (Ecclesiastes 5:1,2, Hebrews 12:29,30).

(f) **Special occasions of worship.** Holy days such as Easter and Christmas have no warrant from the Word of God. However when there are special providences calling for prayer or thanksgiving then time may be set apart for the Church, even with fasting. There are many examples of this – 2 Chronicles 20:3,4, Esther 4:16, 9:20-22, Joel 2:12-17. Such things are no longer seriously done by us. In what situations would we call for special times of worship?

## The Place for Worship

6. *In present gospel days neither prayer nor any other aspect of religious worship depends for its efficacy on the place where it is performed or towards which it is directed, for God is everywhere to be worshipped in spirit and in truth; as, for instance, in the daily worship carried on in private families, in the worship in which individual Christians engage in secret, and in the worship of the public assemblies. Such assemblies are convened in accordance with God's Word and providence, and believers must neither carelessly neglect them nor wilfully forsake them.*

(a) Under the new covenant **acceptable worship is not dependent upon a specific place**. In the Old Testament Jerusalem was the place that God chose (Deuteronomy 12:5-6). The Samaritan sect chose another place on which to build their temple for worship – Mt. Gerizim. In talking with the Samaritan woman Jesus makes it quite clear that from that time the *place* of worship was no longer a matter of importance (John 4:20-24). It is quite wrong to make church buildings holy places like the temple in the Old Testament – the words ‘church’ and ‘temple’ are used in the Bible for the people, not the building (Ephesians 2:21, 1 Timothy 3:15). God seeks those who worship Him in “spirit and truth”; in “spirit” = spiritually, with dependence on the Spirit of God (Ephesians 6:18), from the heart and not just with the outward body (Matthew 15:8), and so sincerely; in “truth” = according to God’s revelation about worship in the Bible, especially that it must be through Christ as Mediator.

(b) **Different places where God may be worshipped.**

1. *Family worship* – Worship in the home was something for which Abraham was commended by God (Genesis 18:19). Note also the examples of Joshua (24:15), Job (1:5) and David (2 Samuel 6:20). Seek to set aside a time daily to worship with singing, prayer and reading of the Word in your family.
2. *Secret worship* – This may be in your home, or any secret place outside (Matthew 6:6). In such personal devotions there is the example of our Lord Himself (Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35). Note also the examples of Daniel (6:10) and many from the Psalms (55:17, 63:6). Whether or not we pray in secret is one of the clearest indications of our true spiritual state. Note that when Paul was converted he was immediately found praying (Acts 9:11).
3. *Public worship* – This may be in a ‘church’ building, a house, a school room, or even in the open. The really important thing is to be found with other Christians in the worship of the Lord (Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:25). Just as the men of Israel were commanded to gather in Jerusalem three times a year (Exodus 23:14), so all Christians should gather together at least weekly for worship (see next section).

## **The Time of Worship**

7. *As it is a law of nature, applicable to all, that a proportion of time, determined by God, should be allocated for the worship of God, so, by His Word, He has particularly appointed one day in seven to be kept as a holy sabbath to Himself. The commandment to this effect is positive, moral and of perpetual obligation. It is binding upon all men in all ages. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ the sabbath was the last day of the week, but when Christ’s resurrection took place it was changed to the first day of the week, which is called the Lord’s day. It is to be continued to the world’s end as the Christian sabbath, the observance of the seventh day being abolished.*

8. *Men keep the sabbath day holy to the Lord when, having duly prepared their hearts and settled their mundane affairs beforehand, for the sake of the Lord’s command they set aside all works, words and thoughts that pertain to their worldly employment and recreations, and devote the whole of the Lord’s day to the public and private exercises of God’s worship, and to duties of necessity and mercy.*

(a) **Nature teaches that “a proportion of time...be set apart for the worship of God”**. The God who made the world must be worshipped by men publicly and together (Romans 1:20-21).

To do this they must agree on when and for how long? This question is only answered acceptably by God.

(b) **God's Word reveals the exact proportion of time to be set apart for the worship of God.** God has "appointed one day in seven" (Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15). While it is most fully revealed in the 10 commandments, it was God's command from creation (Genesis 2:3, Mark 2:27-28), and there is evidence that a seven-day weekly cycle was observed (for example, Genesis 8:10,12, and note Exodus 16:22-30). *Note* that the word "sabbath" does not mean seventh day, but 'rest'. The Confession says three things about this commandment:

1. *Positive* – It is in addition to the law of nature and general revelation. It is known by us only because God has revealed it by special revelation.
2. *Moral* – It is not a commandment just for the Jews under the old covenant (as, for example, the laws about uncleanness). It is as binding upon all men as the other nine commandments. As a creation ordinance (commandment) it continues as long as creation continues, as also the marriage and work ordinances (Genesis 2:15,24). The Ten Commandments are marked out as special by the facts that they alone were spoken by God (Exodus 19:9, 20:18,19); they alone were written on stone by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18); they alone were placed in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:16). The fourth commandment must be kept as God's standard of righteousness.
3. *Perpetual* – The new covenant in Christ has not abolished the sabbath. Consider at least the following arguments:
  - \* As a creation ordinance it existed before the old covenant under Moses was instituted, and so is not done away with the cancelling of the old covenant (Hebrews 8:13).
  - \* Jesus did not abolish the 10 commandments (Matthew 5:17), but came to explain their true meaning (Matthew 5:21ff.). He often appealed to them (e.g. Matthew 15:6).
  - \* Our Lord was involved in many controversies over the sabbath, but never once suggested that He was abolishing it. Rather, as the Lord of the sabbath (Mark 2:28), He gave its true interpretation (Mark 2:23-3:6).
  - \* It is precisely the 10 commandments, once written on stone, that are now written on the hearts of all God's people under the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Hebrews 8:6-13). The sabbath commandment is thus written on our hearts as the guarantee that we shall obey it.
  - \* It is very probable that Hebrews 4:9 refers to the sabbath that we are now to keep (see Chantry, *Call the Sabbath a Delight*, pp.86-96).
4. *Problem passages* – There are three passages in the letters of Paul that seem to say that the sabbath is abolished: Romans 14:5, Galatians 4:10, Colossians 2:16. It must be remembered that there were many other sabbaths (= period of rest) under the old covenant – the day of atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31, 23:26-32), the seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-7), the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25:8-17). It is specifically to these other Jewish festivals that these verses are referring as the context is about disputes between Jews and Gentiles.

**(c) The sabbath day has been changed from the seventh to the first day of the week.**

1. Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (John 20:1), and specifically appeared to His disciples on the first day of the week (John 20:19,26). The day is therefore marked out as special, the day on which Christ triumphed over death, the completion of our salvation. It is interesting that the reason given in Deuteronomy 5:15 for obedience to the sabbath is also redemption.
2. The practice of the early church was to meet as Christians on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2), which became known as the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10). This practice is well known from a study of early church history.

**(d) How the Christian sabbath is to be kept.** Consider the teaching of Exodus 20:8-10.

1. *"Remember the sabbath day"* – It is easy to forget the sabbath day so that we are not prepared for it. We should complete all our ordinary affairs on Saturday, such as school work, housework, shopping, so that they do not interfere with the sabbath. It means going to bed at a reasonable hour so that we are not tired for the duties of the sabbath.
2. *"To keep it holy"* – As a 'holy' day it belongs to God in a special way and we are to set it apart for Him in a special way (see Isaiah 58:13-14). It is designed by God for us to engage in spiritual duties for which there is limited time for most people during the other six days: public worship with God's people, private worship in Bible study and prayer. In this way the sabbath is for our great spiritual benefit (remember Mark 2:28). The whole day is so to be set aside, not just a part of it; it is to include our words and thoughts as well as our works. Our Lord did, and thus permitted, works of mercy and necessity to be done on the sabbath. Works of 'mercy' are those done out of compassion to our fellows (e.g. Mark 3:1-6, John 5:1-18). Works of 'necessity' are those that could not have been done on Saturday and cannot be delayed until Monday (Matthew 12:11-12), such as caring for the needs of children; essential services such as medical, police, power; feeding and protecting livestock; dealing with a danger such as from fire or water.
3. *"Six days you shall labour and do all your work...the seventh day is the sabbath...in it you shall do no work"* - On the sabbath we must refrain from those employments that have occupied us the previous six days, whether in the office, factory, home, school or business. This is for our spiritual welfare, because to neglect the gathering together of the saints is harmful (Hebrews 10:25). Neither let such worldly things come into your life on the sabbath through the radio and TV. The fourth commandment specifically states that this applies to all members in our house, even the animals! It ought to be a day of rest for your maid in your home and for anyone under your employment. Do not make your children work, especially put away their school work, and make the day a special one for them. Time ought to be given to our children, to be with them, to teach them from the Bible, and to read books of spiritual value to them. Let not all these things be a burden to you, for they are for your spiritual good.
4. *Problems.* What if your job requires you to work on Sundays? If the sabbath is the Lord's command, then surely it is more important to obey Him. What if I lose my job? Many have lost jobs because they determined to be faithful to the Lord. The Lord will not put to shame those who follow His Word. Trust that He is able to provide for you. Are you not prepared to lose all for the sake of the Lord? If you can disobey one command of the Lord, then why not others also?