

DISCUSSION GROUPS REGARDING WORSHIP

1. Upon what basis do you decide what is and what is not appropriate in worship? In other words, what is your criterion/are your criteria for your decisions about whether something is right for a worship service? Write down your conclusion.

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2. Using the basis for decision-making determined in question 1, how would you respond to the following requests which come to you in your first month in a new ministry position?

A. The daughter of an influential, charter member enjoys clowning. She has had extensive experience as well as training in many SBC conferences on clowning. She asks for an opportunity to give her testimony (in costume) during an upcoming morning worship service, and to do some of her routine for the children as part of her testimony.

B. An established “Christian comedian,” the son of your Deacon chairman, asks to give a testimony--comedian style--in an upcoming morning worship service.

C. In an upcoming musical presentation by the choir, the arrangement being used has a place for an optional “interpretive movement” to accompany one segment. One of the choir members is a young woman with several years of ballet lessons and other related experience in her recent background. She is very eager to serve the Lord but has never felt as though she found her “niche.” In a rehearsal the choir comes to the place in the book where the interpretive movement segment is found and this young woman quickly and openly volunteers to perform it. She assures you she will do it tastefully and appropriately for worship. She believes this is finally something she has found which would give her the greatest joy to do for the Lord. Most of the other choir members are enthusiastically supportive, including her wealthy parents who have previously expressed their fears to you that she was going to leave the church because of her seeming inability to fit in.

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP: THE NORMATIVE PRINCIPLE VS. THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

Much of the Reformation in the 1500s occurred as the Reformers applied *Sola Scriptura* (i.e., Scripture alone is our final authority in all matters of faith and practice) to local church beliefs and practices.

Martin Luther's application of *Sola Scriptura* to worship became known as the Normative Principle of Worship (NPW).

NORMATIVE PRINCIPLE—Any activity is appropriate in worship if we believe it honors God, edifies the people, and is done in the right spirit, as long as the Bible doesn't *forbid* it.

Half a generation later, John Calvin applied *Sola Scriptura* to the worship of God and the result became known as the Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW).

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE—God knows how He wants to be worshiped better than we know, and He has revealed in Scripture how He wants us to worship Him.

Therefore, we are limited in worship to that which God has revealed in Scripture by command, example, or principle. Any other activities in worship go beyond the bounds of Scripture.

Martin Luther NORMATIVE PRINCIPLE

- Anything is permissible in worship, if done rightly, unless Scripture forbids it.
- Theology of worship practiced by Lutherans, Anglicans, and Methodists.

John Calvin REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

- Only the activities revealed by God in Scripture are permissible in worship.
- Theology of worship practiced by Presbyterians, Reformed, Congregationalists, and Baptists.

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP: THE NORMATIVE PRINCIPLE VS. THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

From the 1644 Baptist Confession of Faith (a.k.a. the “First London Confession”)

VII. The rule of this knowledge, faith, and obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not man’s inventions, opinions, devices, laws, constitutions, or traditions unwritten whatsoever, but only the word of God contained in the Canonical Scriptures.

John 5:39; 2 Tim. 3:15-17; Col. 2:18, 23; Mt. 15:9

1689 Baptist Confession, 22.1

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.

1689 Baptist Confession, 1.6

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.

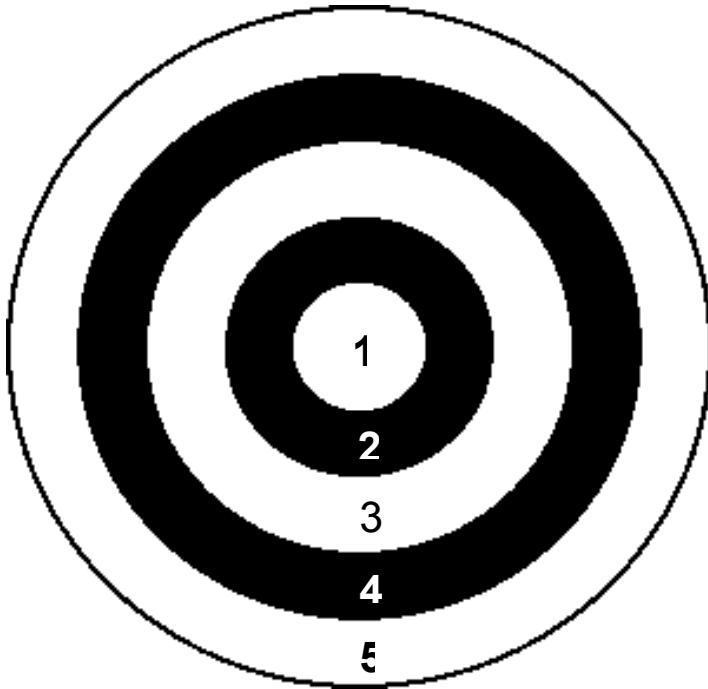
A Faith to Confess (Modern English 1689 Confession), 22.1

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.

A Faith to Confess (Modern English 1689 Confession), 1.6

We also accept that certain aspects of the worship of God and of church government, which are matters of common usage, are to be determined by the light of nature and Christian common sense, in line with the general rules of God’s Word from which there must be no departure.

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP: FIVE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO GUIDE WORSHIP



1. We may worship only in a way *commanded* for the *New Testament assembly*.

2. We may worship only in a way *commanded* for the *Old Testament and/or New Testament assemblies*.

3. We may worship only in a way *warranted or sanctioned* by the *New Testament*.

4. We may worship only in a way *warranted or sanctioned* by *Scripture (Old and New Testaments)*.

5. We may worship in any way *not prohibited* by *Scripture*.

Regulative Principle—numbers 1-4. Normative Principle—number 5

PRINCIPLES FOR ARRIVING AT POSITION 4

(“We may worship only in a way warranted or sanctioned by Scripture, i.e., by either the Old or New Testament”)

1. All Scripture is authoritative

2 Timothy 3:16, All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

- This is part of how we respond to objection, “That’s Old Testament!”
- We should utilize any worship expression in any part of the Bible unless we find a Biblical reason for not using it (as with the NT modifying an OT passage).

2. There is a priority of authority

A. New Testament commands on worship

B. Old Testament commands on worship

C. New Testament passages which provide warrant, sanction, or support

D. Old Testament passages which provide warrant, sanction, or support

3. The following Scriptures which teach that God has not left us to worship as we please, nor as we *think* will please Him, but that God has instructed us to worship as *He* pleases.

The first four commandments, Exodus 20:3-4, 7-8.

The details given by God in the construction of the furniture and garments of worship in Exodus 25-30, and the death penalty for misusing the anointing oil and incense in Exodus 30:33, 38.

The death of Nadab and Abihu, Leviticus 10:1-3 (see also Numbers 3:4).

The disobedience of Saul in offering the sacrifices Samuel was to have offered in 1 Samuel 10:8 and 13:8-13.

The death of Uzzah for touching the Ark of the Covenant, 2 Samuel 6:3-8.

The leprosy of King Uzziah for offering incense, 2 Chronicles 26:18-21.

The sin of wicked King Ahaz in 2 Kings 16:10-16 of replacing the altar of worship designed by God.

The rejection by Jesus in Mark 7:6-7 of the worship of the Pharisees as worship in vain because their doctrines related to worship were the precepts of men.

The command in Deuteronomy 12:30-32 to not get your ideas for worship from the world around you, but only from what God reveals.

So the worship of God is limited by God to those things which have explicit or implicit Biblical support.

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP: ELEMENTS, CIRCUMSTANCES & FORMS

The *elements* of worship are the parts or activities of worship.

- According to the RPW, the only elements of worship acceptable to God are those He has revealed in Scripture by command, example, or principle.

The *circumstances* of worship are the accompanying or environmental factors or details, such as the time, place, and length of worship, the amount of light and heat, the use of hymn books, the type of seating, etc. These aren't directly addressed by the RPW.

- “There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, . . . 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” (LCF 1.6).

While the RPW speaks primarily of the *elements* of worship, it also takes into account the *forms* in which the elements are expressed. The forms must be consistent with the elements.

REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP: THE “WHAT” OF WORSHIP VS. THE “HOW”

1. **We are to worship God in ways that edify our local church, 1 Corinthians 14:26.**
 - *What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

2. **We are to worship God in a proper and orderly manner, 1 Corinthians 14:40.**
 - *But let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.*
 - “Properly” means to do things fittingly for public presentation. It would imply doing your best, not being slovenly, and doing all things in worship with appropriate decorum.

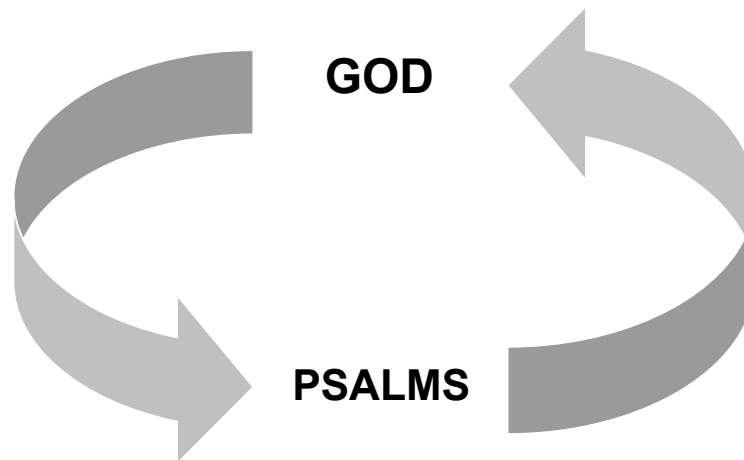
3. **We are to worship God in spirit, John 4:24.**
 - *God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*
 - The worshiper must be indwelt by the Spirit of God, without whose presence no one can worship (1 Cor. 12:3).
 - Worship in spirit is from the heart, and not merely external.

4. **We are to worship God in reverence, Hebrews 12:28-29.**
 - *Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with **reverence and awe**.*
 - Why worship God in reverence and awe? *For our God is a consuming fire (verse 29).*

5. **We are to worship God in awe, Hebrews 12:28-29.**
 - *Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and **awe**.*
 - Why? *For our God is a consuming fire (verse 29).*

THE USE OF PSALMS IN WORSHIP

In the Psalms, God reveals to us how He wants us to praise Him.



God inspired the Psalms for us so that we would sing the Psalms to Him.

In the New Testament, psalm singing continues to characterize the people of God.

Christians are commanded to *be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph 5:18b-19).*

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3:16).

Perhaps the predominant view is:

- “Psalms” refers to the Book of Psalms, and other inspired songs;
- “Hymns” describes uninspired songs (i.e., merely human compositions) to or about God;
- “Spiritual songs” is a term for songs about the spiritual, i.e., Christian life.

APPLAUSE IN WORSHIP?

PRO

- Applause can be an expression of gratitude
- Applause can express praise and gratitude to God
- Can encourage those who minister publicly
- Applause is a common expression in our culture and can help “liven things up”
- Clapping is mentioned in Psalms

CON

- Expectation is raised to applaud everyone out of obligation
- Difficult to discern applause to God from applause to man
- Applause can put the recipient in an awkward position
- Tends to call attention to the messenger
- Applause can foster an atmosphere of entertainment rather than ministry
- The Bible more often refers to use of “Amen”
- Spontaneous applause is sometimes appropriate

TEN WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CHURCH'S WORSHIP SERVICE

1. Focus on God in every element in worship.
2. Have clear Biblical support for every element in worship.
3. *"Offer to God an acceptable service [i.e., worship] in reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28).*
4. Preach expositionally.
5. *"Give attention to the public reading of Scripture" (1 Timothy 4:13).*
6. Pray!
7. Transition smoothly between elements of worship.
8. Do as much as possible congregationally.
9. Have congregational singing with musical accompaniment, not music with congregational accompaniment.
10. Evaluate your worship service each week with several leaders.

TEN MORE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CHURCH'S WORSHIP SERVICE

- 1. Plan worship only for people who *can* worship.**
- 2. Keep technology on a leash.**
- 3. Move the announcements, welcome, and time of greeting to the beginning or the end of the service.**
- 4. Prepare the congregation for worship.**
- 5. Construct a call to worship.**
- 6. Introduce new music wisely.**
- 7. Don't hide the ordinances.**
- 8. Use confessional material.**
- 9. Lead in the corporate confession of sins.**
- 10. Scripturalize routine prayers.**

A THIRD TEN WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR CHURCH'S WORSHIP SERVICE

- 1. Sing Psalms**
- 2. If you consider your church's worship style to be historic, make sure you sing hymns and spiritual songs.**
- 3. If you consider your church's worship style to be traditional, make sure you sing psalms and spiritual songs.**
- 4. If you consider your church's worship style to be contemporary or blended, make sure you sing psalms and hymns.**
- 5. Use slides, but don't lose your hymnal.**
- 6. Consider congregational prayer in the worship service.**
- 7. Don't have solo or choral music every Sunday.**
- 8. Use silence strategically.**
- 9. Allow applause only rarely and spontaneously, not routinely.**
- 10. Allow only believers to lead believers in worship.**