

The Major Themes of the Bible Applied to Everyday Life: Worship

The Regulative Principle (Calvin, Reformed, Presbyterian)

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. (WCF 21.1)

In describing the second commandment, the Heidelberg Catechism says: *That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.*

1. According to the Confessions above, what should worship be restricted to?
2. First of all, what is the *regulative principle*?

“To worship God truly, is to worship him in the manner which he himself has prescribed.” (GI Williamson)

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized¹ 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. (Leviticus 10:1-3)

3. What were the consequences for Nadab and Abihu offering unauthorized worship? Implications?
4. What parts of worship are prescribed in the Bible?
5. Does the Bible lay out each part of worship specifically?

Elements: the “what” of worship, the fixed, unchanging parts of the worship service.

Circumstances: the “how” of worship, the conditions that are most conducive to worship that is decent and orderly.

Normative Principle (Lutheran, Anglican)

Normative Principle: Whatever Scripture does not forbid is permissible.

6. What does this sentence mean?

7. How would a “normative” worship service look comparatively?

The Regulative Principle is Based on Scripture

8. What was the most tightly regulated area of life in the OT?

“Worship was more tightly regulated by Old Testament Law than were many other areas of life. This gives credibility to the belief that we should be more concerned with specific scriptural teachings regarding worship than we should about its statements on other areas of life such as car mechanics, grocery shopping, etc. Thus the motivation behind the regulative principle is correct.”

(Richard Pratt)

9. Many say that the regulative principle is an Old Covenant idea, and thus is fulfilled in Christ. Is there New Testament evidence for the regulative principle?

10. What if the worship is sincere? Does that make it acceptable?

11. The Regulative Principle is a natural outflow of the doctrine of total depravity. How?

12. The Reformed view takes very seriously the notion of guarding the conscience and protecting Christian liberty. How does the regulative principle do this?

The Heidelberg Catechism tells us that “We should not be wiser than God” (Q.98). We should worship God in the way he has chosen. He alone has an understanding of all His attributes. He alone can know the proper way to worship him. We can easily fall into believing we are wiser than God.