

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH  
XXI. OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP & THE SABBATH

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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# I. BIBLICAL WORSHIP

The light of nature showeth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with a ll the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped 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 Scriptures.

# I. BIBLICAL WORSHIP

- **God is sufficiently revealed in nature that all persons owe him worship**

“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:20).

- As creatures, we all have an obligation to worship the Creator; what we know about God from creation mandates that we worship him earnestly and reverently.

- **Who Decides How Christians worship?**

- God decides what is acceptable worship and stipulates it in his Word.
- God may not be worshiped according to human inventions.

“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. And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev. 10:1-2).

Aaron: “You know the people...” (Ex. 32:22).

“First, it tends greatly to establish [God’s] authority that we do not follow our own pleasure, but depend entirely on his sovereignty; and secondly, such is our folly, that when we are left at liberty, all we are able to do is to go astray. And then when once we have turned aside from the right path, there is no end to our wanderings, until we get buried under a multitude of superstitions.” (John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*).

- The difference between “the imaginations and devices of men” and “the suggestions of Satan?” Hard to tell!

# I. BIBLICAL WORSHIP

## The Regulative Principle of Worship

- **Good (and proper) worship is biblical worship.**

“The regulative principle simply states that whatever we do in worship must have support from the Bible. This is not to say that we have a proof text for everything we do in worship. Scripture gives the church no exact order of worship. But by good and necessary consequence we may deduce from God’s Word the necessary “parts of the ordinary religious worship of God” (WCF 21.5). (D.G. Hart and John Muether, *With Reverence and Awe*, 79).”

“The regulative principle helps assure that our corporate worship is Bible-filled and Bible-directed, that the substance and structure are biblical, that the content and order are biblical.” (J. Ligon Duncan, *Give Praise to God*, 65).

- **Concerns *elements, forms, and circumstances*.**

- Biblically mandated worship elements:

“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 part of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious aothers, 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” (WCF. 21:5).

- **“Read the Bible, preach the Bible, pray the Bible, sing the Bible, and see the Bible”**

## II. THE PROPER OBJECTS OF WORSHIP

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

- **Only God in his 3 persons is worthy to be worshiped.**

“You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (Mt. 4:10).

“Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God” (Rev. 19:10).

- Precludes saints days, veneration of angels, worship of Mary.
- Whenever any member of the Trinity is worshiped, the other members are worshiped with him.

- **Worship is to be offered via a Mediator, i.e., Jesus Christ**

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn. 14:6).

“Here I am and the children God has given me” (Heb. 2:13).

## III & IV. PRAYER AS WORSHIP

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

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.

## III & IV. PRAYER AS WORSHIP

- **Prayer is the Duty of All**

- God commands and deserve prayer from everyone

“O you who hear prayer, to you shall all flesh come” (Ps. 65:2).

“Let the people praise you, O God; let all the people praise you” (Ps. 67:3).

- **Prayer may be accepted by God only through Jesus Christ**

- Man is alienated from God by sin and the way to God is barred by his justice.

- God sent his Son to open the way to God, including prayer.

“For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5).

“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph. 2:18).

- We pray, therefore, “in Jesus’ name.”
- Excludes praying to Mary, saints, or other dead Christians.

# III & IV. PRAYER AS WORSHIP

- **How do we pray?**

- With understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance.

- We pray intelligently, being aware of God's high majesty and our own humility as creatures and sinners, fervently entreating the Lord in faith, expressing our love for him and with expectation of his blessing.

"I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you" (Lk. 11:9).

- In prayer, we talk to God in normal speech, with no need for special techniques or formulas.
- ACTS acrostic: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication

- **For who and what do we pray?**

- For all things according to God's will.

"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (Jn. 15:7).

"if we ask anything according to his will he hears us" (1 Jn. 5:14).

- "In God's will" offers a wide range of topics for prayer, but especially for the things of the Holy Spirit.
- For all kinds and all people.

"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high position, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, dignified in every way" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

- **Christians should work at praying**

"Prayer is an appointed means of grace which all men ought to improve. Though it is not for our prayer, yet it is in the way of prayer, as God's instituted order, that we may expect any blessing from him (Mt. 7:7)." (Shaw).

"You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:2).



## VI. EVERYWHERE, EVERY DAY

Neither prayer, nor any other part of religious worship, is now, under the gospel, either 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 worshiped everywhere, in spirit and truth: as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so, more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by his Word or providence, calleth thereunto.

- OT saints prayed towards Jerusalem, because the temple represented Christ. Christ now is in heaven and has sanctified every place for worship in his name.

“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling” (1 Tim. 2:8).

- God is to be worshiped privately and in families.
- The public worship of God on the Lord’s Day is not willfully to be neglected.

“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (Heb. 10:25).

## VII. THE SABBATH

As it is the law of nature, that, in general, a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God; so, in his Word, by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment in binding all men in all ages, kept holy unto him: which, from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, was the last day of the week; and, from the resurrection of Christ, was changed into the first day of the week, which, in Scripture, is called the Lord's Day, and is to be continued to the end of the world, as the Christian Sabbath.

## IV. CIVIL & ECCLESIASTICAL OBEDIENCE

And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another, they who, upon pretense of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God. And, for the publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity (whether concerning faith, worship, or conversion), or to the power of godliness; or, such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church, they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against, by the censures of the church.