

Appendix: The Regulative Principle



Issue:

- “What the Word Commands” OR “What the Word does not forbid”?



Key Terms

- Elements
- Circumstances
- Expression
- Scripture reading
- Preaching and Teaching
- Prayer
- Corporate “Amen”
- Giving gifts and offerings
- Singing Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs
- Lord’s Supper
- Benediction
- Baptism
- First day
- Professions of faith
- Ordination &
- Commissioning
- Fasting
- Public confession
- Public greetings
- Public rebukes
- Public reconciliation
- Foot washing



Lecture Objectives

- Identify issues involved in the discussions surrounding the Regulative Principle
- Develop a Biblically rooted position regarding the Regulative Principle



To Think About Before You Go On

- How would you describe the Regulative Principle and how would you apply in your church context?

Anglican & Lutheran understanding:

What the Word does not forbid.

Reformed understanding:

What the Word Commands - stricter and wider views are current.

Reformed theologians have recognized that there is a need to distinguish between 'elements', 'circumstances' and 'expressions'.

1. Elements are the forms, requirements and parts of public worship that are explicitly commanded by Scripture, or can by "good and necessary inference" be drawn from Scripture.
2. Circumstances are the ways in which the elements are expressed, such as time, place, arrangement, order, proportion, etc. These, according to the Confession, are to be ordered by the "light of nature and Christian prudence", and will vary from culture to culture.
3. Expressions refer to the forms, manner, phrasing, style, etc. of music, prayer, preaching, liturgical forms, rubrics, etc.

I would argue that at a deeper level there are Biblical principles of worship that are to govern all that we do in worship. (See class outline for these nine principles.)

A. Explicit New Testament Commands: We are governed by the specific commands of the New Testament: though this is not quite so clear or simple as it is sometimes argued.

*** Some preliminary questions include:**

- a). Should this be just the commands of the Epistles, and the practices recorded in the Epistles?
- b). Should this include the commands and practices recorded in Acts, during the time of transition from the synagogue to the church?
- c). Should this include the commands of Jesus in the Gospels, though these are given in the context of the synagogue?

- d). Should this include the practices recorded in the Gospels, though these come to us from the synagogue (for example - Jesus stood to read Scripture and sat to teach as was the custom (Luke 4:16-21); and the practices recorded in the Gospels which come clearly from the period of transition to the church (for example - the celebration of the Last Supper, the practice of Baptism, the Lord's Prayer).
- e). Should this include the practice of things commanded in the Old Testament? (For example - some sing only Psalms, on the basis of their interpretation of Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16-17. However, the Psalms command us to use musical instruments, to clap hands, to dance - as we praise God with our singing).
- f). This last issue raises for us much deeper questions of our understanding of the normative nature of Old Testament teaching about worship, for if we have a Reformed perspective on Scripture and on the relationship of the Old and New Testaments we cannot simply regard Old Testament worship as carnal, or for a time of infancy spiritually, or as having nothing to teach us. Rather, I think, we have to ask what are the abiding principles which come to us from the Old Testament, for clearly there are many practices which are not normative for us in our public worship.
- g). Another question arises here, and that is how normative for us is the practice of the synagogue? This is a particularly difficult issue, for we know so little about the origins of synagogue worship (we will study what is known later in this semester). We can trace some of synagogue practice to the influence of the temple worship, and some to the reform under Ezra; but the following points need to be taken into consideration in our reflection on the Regulative principle:
 - i). There are no explicit commands in the Old Testament as to the nature or pattern of synagogue worship, structure or architecture.
 - ii). By the time of the New Testament a clear pattern of synagogue worship, structure and architecture has emerged. It is this first century synagogue pattern that Jesus, the Son of God, enters into to worship, to participate, to teach, and blesses with his Father's approval by his presence.

- iii). It is very clear that the pattern of synagogue worship and structure (even perhaps architecture), influenced the development of worship in the New Testament church and beyond into the early centuries of the church's history.
- h). We should notice that there are many things not made explicit anywhere in the New Testament, for example: the time of meeting; length of service; order of service; frequency of service; who should lead worship (in the synagogue it was any of the men who could do this); exactly how often the Lord's Supper is to be held; how and even if baptisms are to be incorporated into public worship; worship architecture (our structures have some similarities to the temple and the synagogues, but other quite radical differences [see, e.g. the centrality, height and size of the pulpit in some Presbyterian churches, in comparison to what we know of synagogue structure and furniture placement]).
- i). We should notice that, even among those who hold a strict view, there are many things which seem explicit that are not often practiced, for example: fasting; the holy kiss; the 'agape'; congregational encouragement to bring prayers, hymns, words of comfort and edification; non-pastor preaching, teaching and praying.
- j). All churches have traditions for the way they do things which have no particular sanction from the New Testament, for example: the particular ways in which we serve the Lord's Supper, the restriction of benedictions to ordained pastors, the way we take up offerings. In making this point I am not suggesting that we need a particular sanction, simply asking us to acknowledge that the New Testament gives us a great deal of freedom.

So, what are we commanded to do by the Scriptures?

- 1). Reading Scripture of Old and New Testament (1 Timothy 4:13; Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27).
- 2). Preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 4:2-3).

- 3). Prayers, requests, intercessions, thanksgiving (1 Timothy 2:1-8; and many examples in the Book of Acts). Notice that this includes the explicit command to pray for those who rule over us (a command often ignored in all of our churches, whatever their view of the Regulative Principle). Use of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1-4).

- 4). The corporate "Amen" (2 Corinthians 1:20; 1 Corinthians 14:16); and teaching and prayers offered in Jesus' name (2 Corinthians 1:20; Hebrews 4:14-16; 7:24-25; 10:19-22; 13:15; 1 Peter 2:5; see also examples in the Book of Acts: e. g. 3:6; 4:18,30).
 - a). The "Amen" is taught as the expression of corporate agreement to prayers, praises and teaching presented.

 - b). Everything uttered in a public worship service needs to be understandable by, or accessible to all of those present, believer and unbeliever, so that they may be able to say: "Amen".

 - c). All our prayer, indeed every aspect of our worship is to be presented in Jesus' name. Sometimes this is to be formally expressed, but always it is to be the attitude of the heart of the worshippers.

- 5). Giving of gifts and offerings - private, regular, proportionate to income, cheerful, voluntary (not under compulsion), led by the Spirit (do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing), from the motive of love, generous and sacrificial (Matthew 6:1-4; 5:23-24; 1Corinthians 13:3; 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9).
 - a). We are commanded to give:
 - i. To support those who teach us the Word (1 Corinthians 9; Galatians 6:6).

 - ii. To support the further spread of the gospel (Philippians 4:14-19; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9).

 - iii. To help individuals who are in need (Acts 20:35; 1Timothy 6:17-19; Matthew 6: 2-4; James 1:27; 2:15-16).

- iv. To help other churches in need (Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:26; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:2).

- b). Is tithing a New Testament command for church members (here the issue of Old Testament authority in worship practice becomes very important), or are we to see proportional giving as the abiding principle?.

- c). Is there an exact or even adequate parallel between the support of the Levites by the tithe and support of the teaching ministry of the church today, or does the parallel stop at the level of principle?

- d). Is there a parallel between the way the poor, widow, orphan and alien were cared for in Israel, as a part of the tithing system, and the way in which the church is commanded to care for the poor, widow and orphan today? Or again is the parallel simply one of principle?

- e). Do the tithes, or all offerings have to go to the church for the leaders of the church to disburse; "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" (Malachi 3:10), or does the believer have to give both to their church (we are commanded to share with those who teach us) and to give elsewhere as the Lord leads the conscience of the individual? Freedom seems clear.

- f). Is it appropriate to regard the tithe as sufficient (in the Law it represents the recognition that everything we have is the Lord's), or does a tithe amount to truly generous or sacrificial giving? The sacrificial self-giving of Christ is the model and motive that Paul sets before us for our giving.

- 6). Singing of Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:15-17; examples from the Gospels and Acts [Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25]). Does this include only three divisions of Psalms; or does it include other Old Testament poetic sections as well; or does it include the New Testament canticles, and hymns as well from the Gospels, Epistles and Revelation; or does it also include new songs being written by believers (1 Corinthians 14:26)?

- 7). Celebration of the Lord's Supper (The Gospel accounts & 1 Corinthians 11:17-34).
- 8). Benediction (Acts 15:33; all the examples of benedictions in the epistles; the Old Testament example [Numbers 6:22-27]; the practice of the synagogue. Here, I think, we have no explicit command in the Epistles).
- 9). Baptism (1 Corinthians 1:13--16; 12:13; Ephesians 4:5; Romans 6:3-4; Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:41, etc. - though it is difficult to demonstrate from these passages that baptisms took place in Sunday worship).
- 10). Worship on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2; Revelation 1:7). Regular meeting for worship (Hebrews 10:25).
- 11). Professions of faith (see the Baptismal formulas, the passages in Colossians 1, the Pastorals, Revelation as well as many Old Testament examples, in particular the 'Shema').
- 12). Public laying on of hands for ordination and commissioning (Acts 13:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; Titus 1:5).
- 13). Fasting (Acts 13:1-3; 14:23; Matthew 6:16-18).
- 14). Prayer for healing with anointing and laying on of hands - this is not required to take place in public worship, though there are examples from the Gospels and Acts where it appears to take place in the context of worship (James 5:13-16).
- 15). Congregational involvement in worship (1 Corinthians 12-14: see especially the explicit instruction of 14:26; Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16-17; 1 Timothy 2:8; 1 Peter 4:11; Romans 12:3-8).
- 16). Public confession of sins (James 5:16; 1 John 1:5-2:2; and many Old Testament passages).
- 17). Public greetings from individuals and congregations (Hebrews 13:24; 1 Peter 5:13; 2 John 13; Philippians 4:21-22; 1 Corinthians 16:19-20; Romans 16:3-16; 21-23).

- 18). Greeting one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14).
- 19). No distinction between rich and poor, trained and untrained in seating or recognition in public worship (James 2:1-7; see also Jesus in Matthew 23:6).
- 20). The involvement of women in public participation (1 Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:26; 1 Timothy 2:8-9 [is prayer understood here?]; Acts 2:17-18; the example of Priscilla and the daughters of Philip. Do 1 Corinthians 14:33-35; 1 Timothy 2:11-12 forbid all speaking for edification, praise or prayer by women, and singing(?) [which is also for edification, encouragement, prayer, praise - Ephesians 5:19-20; Colossians 3:16-17]). Or do these two passages forbid the office of elder/teacher to women and, therefore the exercise of authoritative teaching in public worship? Consider also the Biblical examples of Mary, Hannah, et al. whose words we readily hear and are instructed by in public worship).
- 21). Who should do the preaching and teaching? Pastors/teaching elders only, or all gifted elders, or all gifted teachers (1 Timothy 3:3; 4:13; 5:17; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9; James 3:1 see also all the examples of Paul's traveling companions and the deacons who were involved in public teaching and preaching recorded for us in the Book of Acts. Diotrephes is the only New Testament example of a church with one teacher [3 John 9-10]).
- 22). The 'Agape' Feast as a context for the celebration of the Lord's Supper (See Jesus' celebration of the Last Supper; also Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Revelation 19:9; Luke 22:16,18).
- 23). Public rebuke for disciplinable sin, and for failure in leadership (Matthew 18:17; Galatians 2: 11-14; 1 Corinthians 5:4-5; 1 Timothy 1:20; 5:19-20).
- 24). Public reconciliation for personal sin and for ethnic/cultural divisions (2 Corinthians 2:5-11; Philippians 4:2; Matthew 5:23-24; Ephesians 2:14-20; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 2:11-16).

25). Foot washing ceremonies (John 13:1-17 - though it should be clear to us here, that Jesus asks us to love and serve one another in this readiness to do 'menial' tasks for one another, particularly by those in authority. However it is appropriate for us to consider what public expressions of such servanthood might be appropriate for our worship services).

26). The involvement of children in public worship (Ephesians 6:1-3). Also the question of whether children are to participate in the Lord's Supper. Are we to follow the pattern of the synagogue practice; are we to wait for an age of discernment (1 Corinthians 11:27-29); or are we to let the little children come to Christ who belong to his covenant people?

27). Celebrations and festivals. Does the Old Testament principle enable us to have Christian festivals, or are there to be no festivals and seasons?



- Go back and rethink the 'To think about before you go on' questions on page 1 of this lecture