

The Regulative Principle of Christian Worship - Part 1

WCF 21.1 (Of Religious Worship and the Sabbath Day): 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 all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. **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 imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.

1. The Priority of Proper Worship; 2. Two Great Errors in Worship: A. Doing What God Forbids - Exodus 32:1-11; B. Doing What God Has Not Expressly Commanded - Leviticus 10:1-7

1. The Priority of Proper Worship

Romans 1:20-25 [20] For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, [21] because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. [22] Professing to be wise, they became fools, [23] and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man--and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. [24] Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, [25] who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

John Calvin in the Institutes of the Christian Religion I.11.8 said: "... man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."

In all evangelism - the goal is not just to save people's souls - but to see worshippers of the true and living God cover the earth. False worship and idolatry are *replaced* with authentic, Biblical worship when genuine conversion takes place and local churches are established.

Jesus taught the Samaritan woman at the well that God the Father was seeking out such worshippers: John 4:23-24 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. [24] God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

One of the greatest of human sins is *idolatry*. Consider the wording of the first two commandments from Exodus:

Exodus 20:1-6 And God spoke all these words, saying: [2] "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. [3] You shall have no other gods before Me. [4] "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; [5] you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, [6] but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

⇒ Notice that part of the commandment - “those who hate Me...” Idolaters are not really trying to do the right thing but are just lost and confused. God says that they idolatrous worship is a demonstration of the fact that they, in God’s own words here, “hate Me.”

The Sunday morning gathering of God’s people who are members of a local church is our act of corporate love to God. Why do we come here? We love God - we are His worshippers - we *desire* to express that love to God by singing His praises and listening to His Word, the Bible.

Jonathan Edwards, in *Sinners in the hands of an Angry God* made this comment to his congregation: “There is no other reason to be given why you have not gone to hell, since you have sat here in the house of God, provoking his pure eyes by your sinful wicked manner of attending his solemn worship.” *Worship is serious business - and is the highest calling and duty and obligation as God’s creatures covenanted to Him.* We are called upon to Love YHWH our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength - that is to day, we are to *worship* Him.

The foundation of repentance from idolatrous worship - This was Paul’s *primary* emphasis when he preached to the Athenians in Acts 17:

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw that the city was given over to idols.

Acts 17:24-25 God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. [25] Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

Acts 17:29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

The first commandment requires that we worship the right God.

The second commandment requires that we worship the right God *in the right way*.

Many in our day say that as long as you are sincerely worshipping the right God through Jesus Christ, that God doesn’t care how we worship Him. In these two texts before us we’re going to see that it does matter *what we do in our formal worship of God*.

2. Two Great Errors in Worship:

A. Doing What God Forbids - Exodus 32:1-11

Exodus 32:1-5 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him." [2] And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." [3] So all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. [4] And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" [5] So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD [YHWH]."

Point: Calvin comments: "And this end awaits all those who do not dare ingenuously and firmly to maintain what is right, but who bargain, as it were, and descend to compromises; for, after they have vacillated for a while, they at length succumb altogether, so as to shrink from nothing, however unworthy and disgraceful. He seems, indeed, by his proclamation to uplift their minds to

the worship of the true God; but, when he is violating the law just given, it is a wretched excuse to shield their offensive and degenerate worship under God's sacred name."

Point 2: Aaron seems to have wanted to quiet his own conscience about making an image by being able to say: "But we were worshipping the right God... at least!"

[6] Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. [7] And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. [8] They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!' " [9] And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!

Point: God's command is that all people everywhere worship Him and love him - and that we worship Him and love Him *as He commands*. The fact is, we *become like what we worship*.

Psalm 115:3-8 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases. [4] Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands. [5] They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; [6] They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; [7] They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat. [8] **Those who make them are like them**; So is everyone who trusts in them.

Application: Exodus 32:9, God's rebuke: "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!" **Question:** Why does God call them "stiff-necked?" They had become like the calf *themselves* - unwilling to submit to the yoke of their master.

We take on the attributes of whoever or whatever we worship. "Those who make them are like them." If we love, adore, worship, and value Christ supremely, *we will become more and more like Him*. If we love, adore, worship, and value ourselves, *we will just become more and more self-centered and self-focused*.

Consider pagans who worshipped bloodthirsty deities like Moloch, Baal-Hamun, Tanit, and the Asherim - people who worship bloodthirsty deities tend to become bloodthirsty themselves.

Application 2: So provoked was God by this act of rebellion that the text continues:

Exodus 32:10-11 ***Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.*** [11] ***Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?***

Question/Application: Why is God so dreadfully provoked by this incident that He would actually suggest destroying the entire nation - his entire inheritance whom He just delivered from Egypt and gave the 10 commandments to? *Because they worshipped Him in a way He had forbidden them to.*

B. Doing What God Has Not Expressly Commanded - Leviticus 10:1-

The book of Leviticus - It's purpose is to convey God's guidelines for Israel's worship, social and legal life, and aspects of everyday living. It is 27 chapters long. The first seven chapters detail the various offerings that God commanded his people offer in various situations. Then chapters 8 through 10 are the rules for the priests regarding how God is to be worshipped.

A key phrase to notice in Leviticus 10:1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, **which He had not commanded them.**

I'd like to now read in this section from ch 8-10 on rules for priests worshipping God... notice the phrase that is repeated:

Leviticus 8:5 And Moses said to the congregation, "This is what the Lord commanded to be done."

Leviticus 8:9 And he put the turban on his head. Also on the turban, on its front, he put the golden plate, the holy crown, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:17 But the bull, its hide, its flesh, and its offal, he burned with fire outside the camp, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:21 Then he washed the entrails and the legs in water. And Moses burned the whole ram on the altar. It was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the Lord, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:29 And Moses took the breast and waved it as a wave offering before the Lord. It was Moses' part of the ram of consecration, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Leviticus 8:34-36 As he has done this day, so the Lord has commanded to do, to make atonement for you. [35] Therefore you shall stay at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the charge of the Lord, so that you may not die; for so I have been commanded." [36] So Aaron and his sons did all the things that the Lord had commanded by the hand of Moses.

Leviticus 9:6 Then Moses said, "This is the thing which the Lord commanded you to do, and the glory of the Lord will appear to you."

Leviticus 9:7 And Moses said to Aaron, "Go to the altar, offer your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people. Offer the offering of the people, and make atonement for them, as the Lord commanded."

Leviticus 9:10 But the fat, the kidneys, and the fatty lobe from the liver of the sin offering he burned on the altar, as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Leviticus 9:21 but the breasts and the right thigh Aaron waved as a wave offering before the Lord, as Moses had commanded.

Leviticus 10:7 You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the Lord is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

Leviticus 10:13 You shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, of the sacrifices made by fire to the Lord; for so I have been commanded.

Leviticus 10:15 The thigh of the heave offering and the breast of the wave offering they shall bring with the offerings of fat made by fire, to offer as a wave offering before the Lord. And it shall be yours and your sons' with you, by a statute forever, as the Lord has commanded."

Leviticus 10:18 See! Its blood was not brought inside the holy place; indeed you should have eaten it in a holy place, as I commanded."

14 times in chapters 8 thru 10: As the Lord commanded... Thus, Leviticus 10:1's negation of that phrase stands out in bold relief:

Leviticus 10:1 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them.

Illustration: God had a way of ruining parties. Listen to the last 3 verses of Leviticus 9:

Leviticus 9:22-24 Then Aaron lifted his hand toward the people, blessed them, and came down from offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and peace offerings. [23] And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people, [24] and fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. ***When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.***

Application: In the midst of all of this, Nadab and Abihu have a “creative” moment and decide to offer fire which the LORD had not commanded, and both are killed “by fire...”

Joe Morecraft wrote about this passage: “Leviticus 5:17 contains a phrase that will clarify the meaning of Leviticus 10:1: ‘Now if a person sins and does any of the things which the LORD has commanded not to be done, though he was unaware, still he is guilty and shall bear his punishment.’ Sinning against God by doing things that the Lord has commanded not to be done is a different thing than sinning against God by doing that which He had not commanded. In Leviticus 5:17 the sin is in doing what God has expressly forbidden in His law. Leviticus 10:1 does not say that Nadab and Abihu were punished for transgressing an express prohibition *but because they were adding to the worship services by doing something for which there was no divine warrant.* Therefore, we have before us three forms of sin that people commit against God in worship: (1) when they do not do what God has commanded, (2) when they do what He has expressly prohibited, and (3) when they do what He has not commanded.”

And so we see that the OT way of worship of very precisely regulated and guarded. Although the OT way of worship expired with the coming of Christ, and our NT way of worship is different and much simpler - we must always remember that *Commandments #1 & #2* are just as binding to us today as they have always been.

1. The Priority of Proper Worship (idolatry - false worship - is that from which we have been delivered by the grace of God);

2. Two Great Errors in Worship:

A. Doing What God Forbids - Exodus 32:1-11;

B. Doing What God Has Not Expressly Commanded - Leviticus 10:1-7