

# Keep Calm and Carry On Pt 3 – Restore the Law

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We've titled this present series that's kind of tying us back into the context of this book as "Keep Calm and Carry On." That's the title of the message today, keep calm and carry on. I borrowed that title from a slogan that was popularized during the early days of World War II when the Germans were trying to take over Britain. They were bombing Britain relentlessly from September of 1940 to May of 1941. Hitler was hoping to enact Operation Sea Lion, his name for the invasion strategy of England. And so they were bombing it and they called that the Blitz and during that time they would wake up each morning, well, they spent a lot of time, every night being bombed relentlessly night after night after night, going into the bomb shelters, then coming out, going to bed, waking up in the morning to see what really had happened, digging through the rubble and the ruins of buildings and the rubble of their lives with that slogan, "Keep calm and carry on."

Interesting, the word "blitz," they took that from Hitler's term or the German's term for their approach they used in World War II that was new and novel and really gave them great success, and the larger term is blitzkrieg, the German term for, the word means "lightning war." Lightning war. And the focus of this lightning war, the way that it was carried out was that they tried to concentrate rather than fight across a broad front which is how they had done it in World War I, the Germans and the British and the French, Americans had fought across a broad front. The Germans came up with this new idea of concentrating all of their focus on one area and hurling everything at that area. So they would hurl, you know, just wave after wave of dive-bombers. So air attack and then coordinate with that their armored divisions, their tanks and sending scores of tanks right after and along with, coordinated with the air assault, and then mechanized infantry. And so the hope was by being fast and furious in this one area, to just hurl such force at the enemy that they create a sense of shock and awe. It's kind of a psychological ploy to produce confusion, despondency, despair on the part of the defending army, and it was tremendously effective. They did it in Poland and wiped Poland out in weeks. They did it when it came to the West. They did it in Holland and Belgium and then in France, and they defeated those armies along with the British expeditionary force in record time, that it was a blitzkrieg, lightning war, concentrated assaults from all these different parts of the military apparatus aimed at one spot to produce this kind of psychological discouragement and terror, leaving the defenders dazed, disoriented, discouraged.

Do you sometimes feel like that when it comes to the culture war in our day, that it feels like we're under a cultural blitzkrieg? That so many different powerful forces are being brought to bear on particular areas of our culture with such speed, such fury and intensity that things, the lines are being broken and the advancement is happening with such rapidity that we're left kind of dazed, disoriented, confused? So many things in our culture, I mean, the assault has happened with increasing rapidity if you think about it, but the paradigms are changing faster and faster and faster. The sexual revolution of the '60s and '70s became the homosexual revolution of the '80s and '90s, became the gender revolution of the 2010s, the teens. We hear our beliefs, biblical truth, being assaulted again and again and again with increasing brazenness, with increasing intensity and force, and so we can feel like we're being hurled backward in the same way that the British expeditionary force was hurled backward toward the sea and the question is how do you live in the midst of that, and that's the answer that the Bible gives I think is encapsulated in that phrase, "Keep calm and carry on." Keep battling the spiritual warfare the way we're supposed to but the first thing is keep calm and carry on.

So we've been looking at that these last Sundays. Two weeks ago we focused on the "keep calm" part of that. We saw that this is normal, that it's normal for the church to be in hostile territory. That's actually the norm throughout all biblical history and all history, church history. Just in the same way that the people of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jews in Ezra, Nehemiah's day, God's people were under the dominion and the oppression of a hostile foreign power, the Persians, who ruled over them right after the Babylonians had ruled over them, and the Persians would be followed after them by the Greeks who would oppress them, who would be followed by the Romans, and then the early church birthed under the Roman Empire, persecuted at times with intensity, and in general even when there wasn't, you know, active persecution and arresting of Christians, there was a cultural hostility to the gospel, and that's been true throughout the centuries.

So this is normal. That's part of keeping calm. This is normal, remember this is normal. America was an aberration. The West was an aberration. But also God is sovereign. We saw this, again, two weeks ago. Keep calm is basically this is normal and God is sovereign. He's reigning and ruling. So that's, if you understand those things, you can keep calm. Now but that's not all that you're supposed to do, you're to carry on. You're to continue doing what you're supposed to do. So really the question what are we to do is in that phrase "carry on," well, what does it mean to carry on? That's what we're looking at last Sunday, this Sunday and, Lord willing, next Sunday.

Ezra/Nehemiah basically gives us three things that we're to be doing. This is the larger outline of the book Ezra/Nehemiah gives three basic things that the people of God are to be about in the midst of a hostile culture, in the midst of confusing days, in the midst of dark times, and what are these three things? Well, we've noted, now I remind you that the book of Ezra/Nehemiah is essentially built around three main events that are really one event, that is, it's three returns from Babylon to Jerusalem. The return of God's people who had been exiled by the Lord because of their sins, he had allowed the Babylonians to come and take them into captivity. They had carried them roughly 1,000 miles from Judah, Jerusalem to Babylon and then into Persia. And then in the restoration of God's

people to the land, though, happened in three installments. The first in 538 BC under Zerubbabel, the Jewish leader. The second 80 years later under Ezra in 458 BC. And the third 13 years after that under Nehemiah in 445 BC. These three installments, why God did that. I talked about this last Sunday, I encourage you to look at that, it helps to think through that, but basically it serves to illustrate that these three distinct parts of one big picture. It kind of spotlights each one by doing it three times, three returns, because each return had a different specific particular purpose. The first return, the purpose was to rebuild the temple and that happened under Zerubbabel in 538 BC. They began the process. The second return under Ezra, the purpose was to restore the law, to bring the law of God, the word of God to its rightful place. And the third return under Nehemiah was to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And all three of these points actually serve as beautiful guides to us as to what we're to do.

What does it mean to carry on in the midst of a hostile and dark world? What are we to do? Dazed and confused when you look at the lines around you being blurred and being hurled back, the Christian knows what he's supposed to do, the one who's thinking biblically and this book lays it out for us in those three points. We mentioned last time, we focused on this last time, the first return under Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple, and what we said was that that means that we are to put worship at the very center of our lives, that what we need to do no matter what's going on around us, is we need to make worship the ultimate, the ultimate priority in our lives, worshiping God. In fact, what we see as we continue to look through the scriptures is not just the ultimate priority, it's the continual activity of the people of God, that we are to be continually worshiping God, not just on Sundays, all the time. And we looked, remember, last week at Romans 12:1. We saw that Paul tells the Roman Christians that, listen, to be a Christian, to have been born again, to have been united to Christ, washed in regeneration, you now have been set apart, now you are a priest. You are to see yourself as a priest, and essentially that means the priest, the Old Testament priest typified what now we're supposed to live like and we talked about this last week, that is from waking up until going to bed the priest's one duty was to worship God and to help others worship God. That was it. That's the task. That's what you are called to do as a Christian, worship God continually, worship God as the ultimate priority. That's what that first return means. So keep calm and carry on means be about worship. You can worship God no matter where you are, no matter what's happening around you. In fact, this is wonderful because no matter what the world does, it cannot take away our work, our purpose. They can't stop it.

Now we look at the second thing today. This is the theme of today's message now, is the second return under Ezra to restore the law. So you might subtitle this "Restore the Law," restore the word of God. And this is complementary. I mentioned it's three different distinct things but it's really three parts of one whole. In the same way it was three returns, it's really, you know, under Zerubbabel, the second under Ezra, under Nehemiah, it's all the people of God getting back to the land, one thing. Well, this is really about what we're supposed to do, and so the first thing is we're supposed to see all of our lives as worship, but how do you do that? How do you really live your life in continual worship of Jesus Christ? What this is going to tell us today and what Ezra's return was about was the only way that you can live a life of continual worship is continually having

the word of God guide you, direct you, regulate your life. The word of God must be continually being brought to bear in our lives. That's what Ezra was charged to do.

We're going to read from Ezra 7:11-28. This is the decree that the Persian king who is not a believer, who doesn't care about the God of the Bible, he just cares about himself. You'll kind of hear that in this as you listen carefully. He's got self-interest. He wants Ezra to do what he needs to do so that he won't have any trouble, the king. But still it's amazing that God sovereignly works in this man's heart to get this kind of command to Ezra and to the people of Israel. Essentially it's like, you know, the president or the king of a country or the prime minister saying, "Listen, I'm not a Christian, I don't care about that, but I want the churches to be faithfully preaching the Bible." This is the kind of thing, like what's this godless president doesn't care about that. This godless prime minister doesn't care about that. Well, God's made this godless emperor care about it enough to issue this decree.

Ezra 7:11.

11 Now this is the copy of the decree which King Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, learned in the words of the commandments of the LORD and His statutes to Israel: 12 "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace. And now 13 I have issued a decree that any of the people of Israel and their priests and the Levites in my kingdom who are willing to go to Jerusalem, may go with you. 14 Forasmuch as you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand,

You're to go and inquire and see how things are going according to the book. Look at the book, look at what's happening, that's the standard. Ezra, do that. That's your assignment. Verse 15,

15 and to bring [you're also charged, you're being sent to bring] the silver and gold, which the king and his counselors have freely offered to the God of Israel, whose dwelling is in Jerusalem, 16 with all the silver and gold which you find in the whole province of Babylon, along with the freewill offering of the people and of the priests, who offered willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; 17 with this money, therefore, you shall diligently buy bulls, rams and lambs, with their grain offerings and their drink offerings and offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. 18 Whatever seems good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and gold, you may do according to the will of your God. 19 Also the utensils which are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver in full before the God of Jerusalem. 20 The rest of the needs for the house of your God, for which you may have occasion to provide, provide for it from the royal treasury [blank check]. 21 I, even I, King Artaxerxes, issue a decree to all the

treasurers who are in the provinces beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, may require of you, it shall be done diligently, 22 even up to 100 talents of silver, 100 kors of wheat, 100 baths of wine, 100 baths of oil, and salt as needed. 23 Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done with zeal for the house of the God of heaven, so that there will not be wrath against the kingdom of the king and his sons.

That's the self-interest we're talking about. But praise God. He goes on to say,

24 "We also inform you that it is not allowed to impose tax, tribute or toll on any of the priests, Levites, singers, doorkeepers, Nethinim or servants of this house of God. 25 You, Ezra, according to the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people who are in the province beyond the River, even all those who know the laws of your God; and you may teach anyone who is ignorant of them. 26 Whoever will not observe the law of your God and the law of the king, let judgment be executed upon him strictly, whether for death or for banishment or for confiscation of goods or for imprisonment."

That's the end of the decree and then Ezra then replies, praises God as he recounts this.

27 Blessed be the LORD, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to adorn the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem, 28 and has extended lovingkindness to me before the king and his counselors and before all the king's mighty princes. Thus I was strengthened according to the hand of the LORD my God upon me, and I gathered leading men from Israel to go up with me.

Let's pray.

*Father, we ask that You might bless Your word, apply it to our hearts, create in us more true worship. Call to Yourself today true worshipers who worship in spirit and in truth. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

So Ezra is sent with the law but he's sent to fix the temple. You saw there was so much repetition about the "house of your God." He was sent to take priests and Levites because Ezra had told the king that there are only certain people who can function in the temple. In that time, in that particular moment in redemptive history, God had ordained that certain people from the tribe of Levi only could minister in the temple, and the priest had to be from within the tribe of Levi, of the clan of Aaron. This was prescribed by scripture and so he's told him that and so you hear the reference to the priests and the Levites, you hear the utensils for the house of God, all of the offerings for the house of God. He's basically saying, "Get it right. Get the house of God in order. Get worship in order," you see, "by using the book which is in your hand." That's basically the theme of this second

mission. Ezra is restoring the law of the Lord so that the people of the Lord might truly worship God as they're called to. So for you and I, that's how we have to have the word of God.

Now I want to look at this in our remaining time under two points. How do we carry on? How do we restore the word of God to its rightful place so that we become true worshipers and we become more faithful worshipers? Two points. The first is: bring your corporate worship into conformity with the word of God. Bring corporate worship into conformity with the word of God. This is a very important principle that we don't talk probably enough about. How do we do worship? Why do we do certain things in worship? We're talking about Sunday morning now. We're going to talk about our, the second point is going to talk about our lives of worship, but the first part of really having lives of worship is getting this part right, the corporate gathering where the people of God come together to worship God and God wants this done his way. I'm going to show you that it is emphatically clear in scripture.

But it brings up a question, you know, how do we know what to do in worship? Why is it that we don't have drama presentations in worship? Why is it that we don't have, I can't think of another good example except you may have seen interpretive dance in worship. If we had that, you would probably leave and you would be right to do so, but there are churches who say do that. I was reading about a church when they baptized children, after the baptism they shoot confetti out over the congregation. Now it's to celebrate and you can understand their heart. There's more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 who had no need of repentance, but the question is, is that right? Is that what we should do? I mean, right off the bat you kind of think it seems a little irreverent, doesn't it?

But the question is how do you determine what we do in worship? There's three basic principles of how people approach this. One is the most common today is the pragmatic principle and that is that whatever works to as we see define works is acceptable in worship. If it seems to really be beneficial to shoot the confetti, people seem to really be encouraged by that, if people seem to be encouraged by a dramatic presentation during worship service on a Sunday morning, then that means it's okay. God seems to have blessed it. That's the pragmatic principle. The normative principle is that whatever is not forbidden, this is a more conservative principle than the first, tries to look at the Bible. The normative principle is this: whatever is not forbidden by scripture is permitted. Whatever is not expressly forbidden is allowable. Some Christian traditions like the Lutheran tradition, Episcopalian, Roman Catholic would use this approach, the normative principle. We believe the Bible teaches the regulative principle, the third approach. The regulative principle, and that is essentially the opposite of the normative in a way, it's whatever is not prescribed by the Bible is forbidden. Do you see that? It's not whatever is not allowed is okay, it's whatever is not prescribed, no, that's forbidden, so you only actually do the things that are prescribed. The only acceptable worship, another way to say this, the regulative principle: the only acceptable worship is that which is explicitly prescribed in scripture, that is through direct statement or through good and necessary inference. But the Bible teaches it.

Well, I'm going to show you, I think in the Bible, you read your Bible, the whole Bible carefully, it's clear the regulative principle is the right way to go, okay? It's so clear. I'm going to show you this right now. When man falls into sin in Genesis 3, God, remember man covers himself, their nakedness with fig leaves. What does God do about that? After he talked to them and pronounces judgment upon their sin, Genesis 3:21 says, "The Lord clothed them with animal skins." Now what that means is God killed animals and made clothes for them out of the animal skins. It wasn't a cotton shirt that he put on them. Nothing wrong with cotton shirts but something's going on here. The Lord's telling us that you don't cover sin or the effects of sin with anything except blood, shed blood, and you know that's true because the Lord makes it real clear the very next chapter, it tells you this, the story of Cain and Abel.

Turn to Genesis 4:3,

3 So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 "If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

Cain, I think Cain came with enthusiasm, I think he came with sincerity. This is one of the ways that people say, "Hey, if it's done," and listen, true worship has to be done from the heart. The Bible makes that clear. You can have the right form if you don't have a heart that nauseates God. But it doesn't mean that the heart is all that matters. That's an inappropriate inference. The heart is the main thing that God's concerned about but he's also concerned about the form and you see it in Genesis 4 and in this situation. Cain, he wants to worship God and so he brings some of the crops that he's worked so hard to produce. He brings them and he puts them as an offering to the Lord. Abel kills the animal and offers it, the fat and the meat on the fire, and God has regard for Abel's offering but for Cain's he doesn't. What's happened? Abel has worshiped God, has approached God the way God prescribed for man to approach him. Essentially the issue is this: you and I don't set the terms for how we approach God, God does, and he is quite emphatic about that. Now he was very kind and gracious. If you look at this biblically, he was so gracious to go and talk to Cain about it, "Cain, just do the right thing. Do what your brother did. Don't you know? Did your parents not tell you? Have you not watched your dad making offerings to Me?" It's implicit Adam would have been offering. That's how Abel learned.

But then you go on and you read the rest of your Bible and I was doing this recently, reading Exodus and after God brings them out of Egypt and he gives them the law in Exodus 20, one of the interesting things is he gives great detail about how they're to meet

him. He describes tabernacle worship. The tabernacle was where they worshiped before there was a temple. It was the first place. It was the tent of meeting. It was a portable temple, a tent. And you read Exodus 25-30, you know, if you're reading your Bible and one of the great things we should do as Christians is read the whole of scripture, read through your Bible, get the flow. Well, one of the things that you're going to experience as you read through Exodus if you've not done it before, is you're going to have some déjà vu. Major déjà vu because Exodus 25-30 describes in great detail, in absolute amazing specificity what they're to do in building the various implements that will be used in worship at that moment in history. It starts off with the ark of the covenant, and then he gives great detail. It's to be made like this. This is to be so many cubits high, so many cubits deep, so many cubits wide. It's to be overlaid with gold. You're to do this on one side, you do that on one side, and it describes it with great detail. Okay, so then it talks about the table that is going to be outside of the veil. And then it talks about the lampstand and with great detail. I mean, exactly how long, exactly how wide, exactly how tall. How many candles are going to be there. What's the candelabra, the lampstand supposed to look like.

I say you get déjà vu because Exodus 25-30 he describes all this detail and in Exodus 36-40, you basically have this kind of thing said, "Then," he'll give a name of the guy who was making it and he'll say, "he built the ark so many cubits wide, so many cubits tall, so many cubits deep. He overlaid it with gold. He put..." And exactly the same wording. I mean, if you're trying to write a novel that you want people to read and enjoy, you wouldn't do that unless you had a really good reason. I mean, and it's implement after implement after implement. It's the curtains, the veil. It's the curtains. It's the priests' clothing. It's the high priest, all of his outfit that he's to wear when he goes behind the veil. Every bit of it. It's the incense. It's the precise recipe for the anointing oil, the precise recipe for the incense to be burned. And you have that laid out and then you have them do it and he tells you again they did it exactly and you'll find this refrain throughout the last chapters of Exodus, "They did just as the Lord commanded. Just as the Lord commanded." But they could have just said that, though, couldn't they? Couldn't they have just simply cut a bunch of chapters out and said, "Hey, everything that he talked about in Exodus 25-30, they did just as the Lord commanded."

You know, a lot of times if you're writing and you're learning how to write, you're always trying to make things more compact. That's good writing. Did God not know what good writing is? Of course he does. Why does he belabor the point? Why does he belabor all of those precise and specific details? One reason. He's saying, "I am the One who determines everything about how you approach Me. Everything. I reserve that right. I'm not looking for creativity from you. I am looking for sincerity but not sincerity with creativity. I'm looking for sincerity with submission. You come My way."

This is made emphatically clear if you turn to Leviticus 10. After all that detail in Exodus, they get it all done, in fact, let me just show you. Right before Leviticus, the end of Exodus, Leviticus comes right after Exodus, if you look for a moment, look at Exodus 39. Let me just show you this. Exodus 39:1, "Moreover, from the blue and purple and scarlet material, they made finely woven garments for ministering in the holy place as

well as the holy garments which were for Aaron, just as the LORD had commanded Moses." Then he says, "He made the ephod of gold," in verse 2, and I'll skip on down to verse 5 when he finishes this part. It's the last words in verse 5, "just as the LORD commanded Moses." Then verse 6 and 7, he talks about the onyx stones and the breastplate. The end of verse 7, the last words of verse 7, "just as the LORD commanded Moses." Then skip on down to verse 21, the breast piece now. The end of verse 21, "just as the LORD commanded Moses." Verse 26, the end of it, "just as the LORD commanded Moses." Verse 29, "just as the LORD commanded Moses." The last words of verse 32, "the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did." Verse 42 and 43, "the sons of Israel did all the work according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses. And Moses examined all the work and behold, they had done it; just as the LORD had commanded, this they had done. So Moses blessed them."

Chapter 40, you have some more of the refrain of "just as the LORD commanded, just as the LORD commanded, just as the LORD commanded," and then finally it ends up in verse 32 and 33, "When they entered the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed," even down to the washing, all of those things precisely prescribed. They approached the altar, they washed, this is 40, verse 32, "just as the LORD had commanded Moses. He erected the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the veil for the gateway of the court. Thus Moses finished the work." Look at verse 34, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle." After all the work was done and they approached God the way he said, then God in his glory came. That's the meaning of the book of Exodus, this part.

Now then to underscore and highlight and circle that, the Lord in his providence allowed Aaron's sons to do something very foolish. In Leviticus 10, they're going to offer some incense that they cooked up on their own. They did not do the precisely prescribed recipe that's recorded in Exodus and look how God dealt with that. Leviticus 10:1, "Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD." This was something that there was no warning about this. I mean, God had already made it real clear. He didn't need to warn them but it wasn't like first offense, you're going to get off. No. Normally God does that, normally God does not act this way, but in this moment he acts this way because he's underscoring, "I determine what kind of incense you offer Me. I determine the anointing oil. I determine everything about the sacrificial system. I determine everything about the way you approach Me. I am the Lord."

Look what he says in verse 3, "Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the LORD spoke, saying,'" this is what God had told Moses. Moses says this to Aaron. Aaron just lost his two sons and Moses is saying, "Listen, Aaron, it's what the Lord spoke saying, 'By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.' So Aaron, therefore, kept silent." God is God. We are not.

This continues throughout the whole of Scripture. The story of Uzza, I'm going to make a note of 1 Chronicles 13:6-14, and then 1 Chronicles 15:1-15. You will find the story of a man named Uzza. This was a time where David's bringing the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem, they're all excited about it because this is symbolizing God's presence. They're now building, going to build a temple, they're preparing to make the tabernacle permanent and they're going to do it according to the way the Lord's commanded but they don't bring the ark back the way the Lord commanded. When you read those verses in Exodus and he says it twice, how they did it and then once they did it, exactly that they did it. They were to carry the ark on poles that were made and overlaid with gold specifically for the purpose. The priests carry the ark. Well, they hadn't been reading their Bibles and so they put the ark on an oxcart and they're bringing it along and the ark begins to fall off the oxcart and there's a man there named Uzza who's, the group is worshipping the Lord, this is like a mountaintop experience. Everybody is praising God. It's such a wonderful time. Their hearts are filled with joy. Sincerity abounds. Uzza reaches up to steady the ark, to keep it from falling off the cart, and the anger of the Lord burns against Uzza and he struck him dead. Now you read that, our initial reaction because we're sinners, we're like, "Why did God do that?" Because we think according to our own ways of understanding. Uzza believed it was better for him to touch the ark than for the ark to touch the ground. God apparently said it's better for the ark to touch the ground than for it to be touched by a sinner. That's why nobody touches the ark, it's carried on poles. David is distraught. He's discouraged. He's afraid of the Lord. He's angry that God did this and so he leaves the ark, he's not going to bring it back to Jerusalem and then sometimes between chapter 13 and chapter 15, he reads his Bible, he reads that the scripture said it was very clear you never carry the ark any other way than on the poles, and so he gets it right in 1 Chronicles 15.

I'll just mention quickly, you see this in 1 Kings 12:26-33 where Jeroboam decides he wants to make some other temples for his people to worship in the northern kingdom and he thinks it's a great idea, and if you read the verses, those verses, 1 Kings 12:26-33, it says things like this, "So Jeroboam determined according to that which was in his heart that he would do it this way. And he did that which was in his heart. And he did that which was in his heart." And the rest of the book of 1 & 2 Kings, God keeps saying things about Jeroboam like this, he said, "Ahab was so evil, he walked in the sins of Jeroboam. He was as bad and wicked as his father Jeroboam." God hated what Jeroboam did because God had said, "There's one place to meet Me, it's Jerusalem. One temple."

Do you see how clear it is? God determines how we come to him. This means that we have to know that what we're doing in our corporate worship is according to God's will. I mean, he was doing that to show us in his grace, in his mercy. What is he doing with that? He's showing us that, "You approach Me the way that I, there's only one way to be made right with Me and I'm going to show you what that is and you come that way." And it's essentially fulfilled in this, when Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father but by Me." Your sincerity is not enough. You need to sincerely go to the meeting place God has ordained, the means of salvation as he defines it. It's looking to Christ. It's repenting and believing and submitting to Jesus. You come his way, then he welcomes you and you become his child. He delights in you. All of the

wonderful promises, the father has compassion upon his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. He remembers our frame. He's mindful that we're dust but he just wants submission because, listen, in his loving fatherly heart, he knows that Satan's going to be trying to deceive everybody into believing there's all kinds of other ways to heaven. Just sincerity is all that matters. You make it up on your own. You approach God however you do and you make it authentic. God says, "No, you come my way."

This principle of, the regulative principle is so important and I want to share with you a quotation from Michael Scott Horton. He says this, he writes about how most American Christians are far from the biblical view and practice of worship. He said, "Evangelicalism is characterized by a," listen to this term, "a greasy familiarity." He says that's what characterizes modern evangelical worship. "This greasy familiarity, this greasy familiarity is based on the belief," and this is what he says, "the belief that we have direct and immediate access to God whenever and however we want." This is the belief, whenever sincere people gather in a building to worship according to their personal tastes and opinions, God is impressed that they took the time, that they cared enough to worship. It was real. They were vulnerable. They got honest before God. Horton writes, "I call this greasy familiarity."

It's just not biblical. It's not up to us to make up how we worship. There's one way to God and it's through Jesus Christ and he's ordained the means and we see in the scriptures that we're supposed to worship through singing praises to God, offering prayers to God, reading the scriptures publicly with the people of God, the preaching of the word of God. What we need to hear, we need to hear from God. That's what we need. We need to see God as he is. The Bible makes that known. That's why we spend so much time in preaching in our services because we know that's what God calls us to do and that does tend to trample on our case. It tramples on our sensitivities but God basically reserves the right to do that on all of us, and it's good that he does because my taste, if it were up to me, I'd mess it up and you would too.

So we need to bring our corporate worship into conformity with the word of God and that's what Ezra was doing. He was bringing priests and Levites back because they didn't have the right... There were people that were functioning in the temple that weren't from God's prescribed tribe, and even though now that's passed away because the Lord has finished that purpose and now it's we're in the new age of the New Testament, what Christ has done, the new kingdom, yet what he was doing at that point in history was so important that you do it according to his plan. It was typifying something, again, that one way that God's sovereign and in charge.

The second point is to bring your continual worship into conformity to the word of God. Not just bring your corporate worship into conformity with the word of God but bring your continual worship into conformity with the word of God, and what Ezra is doing after in chapter 8 and 9 and 10 particularly, is he's helping them to bring their lives into conformity with the word of God. It's not just Sunday morning, and for them it would have been Saturday, but for us it's not just Sunday morning that needs to be brought into

conformity, it's our whole lives are called to worship. The word of God must direct our lives. That's the only way we can worship God on a daily basis. We need to be actively and intentionally bringing every area of life in conformity with the word of God by Christ's power, by the power of the Holy Spirit, by the accomplishment of Jesus Christ, all of his work, we're trusting in him, we're depending upon him, we're prayerfully doing it. We can't work it out ourselves but we are by his word and looking at his word and submitting to his word, prayerfully trying to obey his word by his power, that's how we worship him.

And I want to turn to Romans 12 again like we did last week because I think this is a, these three points from Ezra are right here in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans in the first two verses. Paul basically calls the Roman Christians to be focused on the same three things that the book of Ezra is doing, those three big points, remember? Rebuild the temple, put worship at the center. Second, restore the law, do it according to the word of God. Third, rebuild the walls, holiness, separation. It's there in Romans 12:1-2, "Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship." That is, see all of life as worship, and how do you do that? "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." To bring our worship, our continual worship, that is, our day to day, moment by moment worship into conformity with the word of God means that we must be resisting the conforming power of the world. Don't be conformed to this world.

The word translated "do not be conformed" is a Greek present tense verb which means, implies continuous ongoing action. So it's basically when you put an imperative like this, a negative imperative that says do not, the force is stop being conformed to this world. You could translate this slightly different and say, "Do not go on being conformed." The idea is it's happening, stop it, and the implication is that conformity to the world even for the believer is inevitable in some sense. I mean, it's not inevitable, ultimately God won't allow us to keep doing it but what it's saying is the force is continually there, that if you're not actively resisting it, you are being conformed. The power of the world, the flesh, the devil, and the world here pictures the values, the concepts, the beliefs about life and the purpose of man, the purpose of the things that we do. The world has a system of values and concepts it operates on and it exerts constant and continual pressure from the outside on every single believer. It shapes the contours of your thinking. It shapes the context of your values. It shapes the content of your actions. It does that. It starts with your thinking, continues on to your values and then your actions. You start looking more and more like the world unless, how do you stop doing it? Well, he gives us the answer, "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The way you stop the conforming process is by being transformed from the inside out. The conforming process from the outside in, the transforming process from the inside out. You're transformed by the renewing of your mind. You're transformed as you bring the word of God to bear and you change your thinking and you meditate on the scriptures and it changes your values, your desires. And you change your thinking, you change your desires, you change your actions and you work at changing those actions. You try to

bring God's word to bear in every area so that you're not conformed to be like the world in any area of your life.

This is what we're called to do, we're called to make every single area of our life, every single activity, to bring it into conformity to Christ. Whatever your job is, to do the job like Jesus would do it if he were there. And think about this in a practical sense. An example. How do you offer continual worship to God as a wife? I mean, think about the world and all that's going on about marriage relationships and the conforming power of the world today. I mean, it's always been, you know, in my whole life, the world's always against the things of God. So that's, again, this is normal. But the intensity has gotten a little more, you know, just a lot greater, and now think about the world says things like resist patriarchy, oppose gender binary thinking. I mean, resist misogyny. All of those things are to be applied to you if you're trying to be a Christian godly wife, the world is saying, "Hey, patriarchy is oppressive. It's an invention of men so that they can exert power. This whole system is built with white males trying to preserve power. It's all about power. Resist that." These confusing messages coming. Then the people around you may not buy into all of that but they're sinners and how are they living with their husbands? What do you see on TV even among the healthy relationships on TV? You don't see what God's word calls a husband and wife to do. God's word says, "Wives, submit to your husbands as unto the Lord."

That's radical but God is the one who created us. He created the marriage relationship. He created man male and female. He created the gender binary and so he says this is the way to live. "Wives, submit to your husbands as unto the Lord." That is, offer your perspective, offer your gifts because the Bible says that the wife is the helper suitable, the perfect counterpart to the man. They make a great team and you're supposed to draw on, as husbands we should value the counsel of our wives more than anyone else in our life. Draw on their counsel. But wives are supposed to, once they've given their perspective when those times, occasional times where you have disagreements that persist, the Bible says, "Women, follow the lead of your husband and do it joyfully as if you were submitting to Jesus who just told you to do something."

But then it also says to husbands, men, we need to make sure we listen to this, "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church." How did Christ love the church? He gave himself for her. He laid down his life. So that's how you're to lead and I'm to lead. We're to lead as if we're dying for those that we are leading. Dying to self. Jesus said he who would be first among you, must become servant of all. So that's how you lead. You serve. That's how husbands need to live.

And so that's different than the world and God is calling us to that, and so you have to labor at that. You've got to let the word of God continually come and reprogram your mind, reprogram your values, and reprogram your actions, and as you do that, as you work on respecting your husband, as husbands, you work on treasuring your wives, and as that passage says, to nurture them, to cherish them, and you work on that and you cultivate that, if you're thinking rightly you're worshiping Christ as you do it and you're becoming like him as you do it, and the kingdom of God is going forth mightily as you

do it in the midst of this crooked and perverse generation. The power of God is being unleashed in little acts of obedience. When you submit to the word of God, trusting in who you are in Christ, by the power of all he's done for you, and you obey him in a heart that worships him according to his word, nothing can stand against that. That's the power of God going forth. The gospel which is the power of God unto salvation, it's going forth.

Keep calm and carry on. God is in control. This is normal. Live lives of worship. Bring the word to bear. And we're to help each other with that and as we do that, God is going to do above and beyond all we ask or even imagine. And he lets us be in dark times so that we can see the glory of his light. You know how amazing it is to get away from the city and the suburbs and see the stars? It's almost like you've never seen them before when you see them. You know, you're used to just going out and seeing the stars at night and then suddenly you're way out, there's no ground light coming up, in that darkness you see them with a brilliance and beauty and glory and so that's part of what we're supposed to do. As the world gets darker there's more opportunities to shine more brightly and people around us will see Jesus, how beautiful he is.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank You for Your grace and Your love. We thank You for the calling that You've given to us as people who belong to You. Help us be faithful. We pray for those that are here that have not yet trusted Christ, not yet been born again. Grant them saving faith. Grant them true repentance. Help them to surrender to Christ. Lord, be exalted in our lives, be exalted among Your people. Make us fervent worshipers who our business is to exalt and glorify and praise You in every circumstance and in every area of our lives. Do this so that Jesus can be magnified. And we pray this in His name. Amen.*