

**I. Key Terms<sup>1</sup>**

1. **The Regulative Principle of Worship (RPW)**: *Whatever is not commanded by Scripture in the worship of God is forbidden. Anything that the church does in worship must (1) have warrant from an explicit command of God, (2) be deduced by good and necessary consequence, or (3) be derived from approved historical example. [Worship = Any public, private, or domestic acts of direct worship offered to God.]*
2. **Ordinances**: *Worship ordinances are those things and activities received from divine revelation. Every worship ordinance is appointed by God. Anything connected to worship that has a religious and moral significance has to be based on divine command (explicit or implicit) or approved historical example. The church receives all worship ordinances from God as revealed in the Bible. The church must obey all of God's ordinances. The church does not have the authority to add to or detract from those things God has appointed.*
3. **Circumstances**: *The circumstances of worship refer not to worship content and ceremony but to those things “common to human actions and societies.” Unlike the ordinances of worship, the circumstances of worship are not necessarily dependent on clear Biblical warrant. Although some circumstances (such as not ascending the altar via steps, Ex. 20:26; or, as some would argue, female headcoverings in 1 Cor. 11) are specifically determined by Scripture, most depend solely upon general revelation and sanctified common sense (i.e. “Christian prudence”). Believers and unbelievers alike know that shelter and heat are useful to conduct a meeting in January, in Minnesota. They understand the desirability of chairs, lighting, clothing, and so on. It is understood that a time must be chosen in advance in order to conduct a meeting. There are many things common to both religious and civil (or secular) meetings that are not dependent on specific biblical instructions. These things, which contain no direct religious or moral symbolism or significance, are the circumstances, or incidentals, of worship. [Cf. Table on p. 4].*

**II. Key Texts**

1. **Cain's Offering (Gen. 3:21; 4:3-7; Heb. 11:4)**
2. **Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6; Deut. 5:8-10)**
3. **Second Commandment Expounded (Deut. 12:28-32)**
4. **The Golden Calf (Ex. 32:1-8; Neh. 9:18)**
5. **Strange Fire (Lev. 10:1-4)**
6. **Saul's Transgressions (1 Sam. 13:5-14; 15:10-26)**

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions excerpted (with a few additions and alterations) from: *The Regulative Principle of Worship and Christmas* by Brian M. Schwertley. Cf. Confession of Faith 1.6; Shorter Catechism 50-51; Larger Catechism 108-110.

7. **The Ark on a Cart (Ex. 25:10-16; 2 Sam. 6:1-13; 1 Chron. 15:1-3; 11-16)**
  
8. **Jeroboam's Innovations (1 Kings 12:25-33)**
  
9. **Child Sacrifice (Jer. 7:21-32; 19:4-6)**
  
10. **The High Places (Deut. 12:2, 5-6, 8-9; 1 Kings 15:11-14; 2 Kings 10:28-29; 2 Chron. 33:11-17)**
  
11. **Ahaz's Altar (2 Kings 16:10-16)**
  
12. **Spirit and Truth (Jn. 4:19-24)**
  
13. **Religious Hand-Washing (Matt. 15:1-9; Mk. 7:5-13)**
  
14. **The Temple Cleansing (Mk. 11:15-17)**
  
15. **Will Worship (Col. 2:18-23)**
  
16. **Scripture's Sufficiency (2 Tim. 3:14-17)**
  
17. **God's Unchanging Nature (Heb. 12:28-29)**
  
18. **John's Warning (1 Jn. 5:20-21)**

### **III. Common Objections**

1. **The RPW was limited to tabernacle/temple ceremonies and is now abolished.**
  
2. **Elisha approved of Naaman's violation of the RPW (2 Kings 5:18-19).**

- 3. Jesus violated the RPW by attending the synagogue and celebrating Hannukah and Purim.**
- 4. The RPW never is (and never can be) applied consistently.**
- 5. The RPW is a cloak for controlling, mean-spirited, dogmatic ideologues to have their way.**
- 6. The RPW is simply an overreaction to Roman Catholicism.**
- 7. The RPW leads to Pharisaical formalism in the church.**
- 8. The RPW implies that our worship is better than other people's worship.**
- 9. The RPW implies that we are more righteous than other people.**
- 10. The RPW implies that other Christians are sinning (and therefore unacceptable to God) in worship.**
- 11. The RPW is a distraction that divides Christians over non-essential issues.**
- 12. The RPW will shrink the church and greatly reduce its evangelistic success.**
- 13. The RPW will force me to give up familiar and enjoyable practices.**
- 14. The RPW just takes the wind out of my sails in corporate worship.**
- 15. The RPW is dominated by the letter, not the Spirit.**

*Theological Foundations Afternoon (Lessons 6-7) – The Regulative Principle of Worship*

<b>Ordinances</b>		<b>Circumstances</b>	
Preaching from the Bible	Matt. 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Acts 9:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:8, 17:10; 1 Cor. 14:28	Structure in which the church meets	Acts 20:8, 17:10; 1 Cor. 14:28
Reading the Word of God	Mk. 4:16-20; Acts 13:15; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:13; Acts 1:13, 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:20	Location at which the church meets	Acts 1:13, 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:20
Meeting on the Lord's day	Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18	Time at which the church meets	Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18
Administration of sacraments	Matt. 28:19; Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:24-25	Clothing worn to worship	1 Cor. 11:13-15; Deut. 22:5
Hearing the Word of God	Lu. 2:46; Acts 8:31; Rom. 10:41; Jas. 1:22; Lu. 4:20; Acts 20:9	Type of seating provided	Luke 4:20; Acts 20:9
Prayer to God	Matt. 6:9; 1 Thess. 5:17; Heb. 13:18; Phil. 4:6; Jas. 1:5; 1 Cor. 11:13-15; Deut. 22:5		
The singing of Psalms	1 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 95:1-2; Ps. 105:2; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16		

Table excerpted from *The Regulative Principle of Worship and Christmas*, by Brian M. Schwertley. Available online at: <http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/christmas.htm#C2>