

“Baptism for Disciples Only”, Session # 5 in the series – “What is it to be Reformed?”, Presented in the Adult Sunday School class on August 10th, 2014.

There are 3 differing principles which men of various denominations and spiritual backgrounds have contended for in relation to worship. They are – The Inventive, the Normative, and the Regulative principles of worship.

The following is taken from the ARBCA position paper on the Regulative Principle of Worship –

1) The Inventive principle of worship. This is the view of Rome. It says that the church is free to establish the parameters of worship, hence the inventiveness of certain elements, like the mass, etc. The church may invent or create as it pleases. Authority resides in the church. Because Roman Catholicism recognizes the church and church tradition as an equal authority with the Bible, it is impossible to say that this is only careless wording or ignorance. It is most certainly a position that has been established with careful thought. This view cannot coexist with the regulative principle. It is antithetical to the regulative principle.

2) The Normative principle. This view, held most notably by Lutheranism and Anglicanism states that you may have in worship whatever God has expressly commanded plus whatever is not expressly forbidden. Included under this view of worship would be many of the elements of worship found in higher church liturgy, the charismatic movement, modern day contemporary worship, seeker-sensitive worship, etc. Such elements would consist of liturgical ceremonies, drama, dance, performance-oriented music, etc. The statement “God doesn’t prohibit this practice,” justifies many of these practices. That statement is a key to the normative principle. Those churches that hold to such practices in worship often de-emphasize the role of the Word of God in worship. It is not uncommon in such services to hear very little reading of the Word of God and little, if any, exposition of the Scripture. Many of the sermons, rather than being expositions of the Scripture, are topical sermons directed toward “felt needs” of the individual. While one could in charity assume that there are those who have not studied this issue carefully and thus adopt the normative principle, or are inconsistent in their application of this principle, the key would be the response of those individuals when the clear teaching of Scripture is presented as it pertains to the regulative principle. Do they accept the teaching of Scripture in spite of established patterns or preferences or do they reject it? Unfortunately, because of emotional attachment to various worship forms and because of theological error, there are many who consciously reject the regulative principle in favor of the normative principle. Regardless of the reason for the adoption of the normative principle of worship, it is clearly not in agreement with the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 and thus to hold that position would endanger the confessional position.

3) The Regulative principle of worship. The regulative principle emphasizes the instituted elements of worship as the priority. Scripture reading, significant exposition of Scripture, prayers, congregational singing, the sacraments, etc., mark the priority of worship according to the regulative principle. Worship according to the regulative principle examines the order, elements, priorities, and musical selections from a regulated biblical perspective. It does not reject an old hymn simply because it is old nor does it reject new hymns and songs simply because they are new. Reformed hymnology was “new” when it was instituted. Worship according to the regulative principle does not jump on the bandwagon of high church liturgy, exclusive Psalmody, contemporary music, or normative additions of any kind from the motive of

personal tastes. It examines the order, elements, priorities, and musical selections from a regulated biblical perspective. God regulates his worship. Worship is prescribed and commanded, and the elements of his worship are revealed. (End of ARBCA material)

Going one step further in the Reformation -

One of the instituted elements of worship is the baptism of those who have become disciples of Christ by faith in the gospel. Mark 16: 15 and 16

Believing in the gospel is a matter of obedience. But it is the obedience of faith. Romans 10: 14-16 and Romans 6: 17 and 18.

Reformed Baptists believe that the ordinance of baptism is for disciples only.

One of the things that came far too slowly to the minds of Protestant believers during the reformation is the truth that baptism in the Scriptures is commanded only of believers and disciples, and not of infants. Often, churches try to say that baptism of infants places them in covenant with God, or infuses or conveys grace in some way that gives them salvation, or leads to salvation. People are wrongly taught to believe that receiving the outward sign of water baptism will save them, or their children from sin, without having the inward reality of faith in the gospel, and without experiencing the New Birth, or being born again.(1) But, the Bible consistently teaches that it is not the act of water baptism itself which saves us from our sins, but God Himself by His Spirit who convinces us of our need to receive Christ as the only Savior from sin.(2) Water baptism is our public declaration of what we believe Christ has done for us. It pictures and shows forth the believer's union with Jesus Christ, by faith in His death, burial, and resurrection.(3) The believer has died to sin and is raised to newness of life. Being lowered under the water pictures the fact that by faith all of our sins have been buried with Christ. Being raised out of the water pictures the believer as having been raised with Christ to live a life of righteousness by His power. The original sin of infants is better cared for by God Himself applying the benefits of Christ's death to them, rather than the church, which has no command to do so. What the Church is commanded to do is to baptize disciples as it says in Matthew 28: 19, 20. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

There are 5 steps in the conversion and subsequent obedience of every Christian which honor God and which are regulated by His Word, and which lead every sincere believer to desire to be baptized and to join the local church which is honoring God's Word:

(1) Coming to know the Inward Reality of Faith, because the gospel has been believed. John 3: 3-8 1st Peter 3: 18-22 1 Corinthians 12: 12-14

(2) Our Reception of Christ as our Savior by Faith – gives power to obey His Word. Christ has changed and is changing our life, and we now want to join the church and publicly be recognized as Christ's disciple.

John 1: 12 and 13 Acts 9: 26, 27

(3) Our understanding the Meaning of Baptism, gives us assurance. We are united together with Christ in the Likeness of His death, burial, and resurrection.

Romans 6: 1-11

(4) The Public Declaration of our Faith before the Church and other witnesses – This sets the stage for our being formally brought into the church which we can identify with theologically and practically.

Acts 2: 40-42