

Frozen Chosen or Thawed by God?

An Examination of the Regulative Principle of Worship
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Soli Deo Gloria

Preface

What follows is a modification of a paper I wrote in seminary, back in Spring Semester 2000, with information used and presented for an adult Sunday School class in 2002. As I was teaching the class I realized the conclusion of my seminary paper was not what I wanted it to be. Friends, fellow students, and others who knew I had researched and written on the topic of the regulative principle of worship (RPW) asked for copies of the paper, which I would send with the caveat that they should ignore the conclusion and read the accompanying Sunday School class handouts instead. I have been wanting to revise the paper since then, and have finally been able to do so. Books, articles, blog posts and more continue to be written on the regulative principle. In 2000 I had read just about everything that I could at that time. I have not kept up with all the published material, but have a general idea of what has been published, have read some of it, and do not believe my fundamental analysis from 2000-2002 would change materially. I hope the following is edifying and helpful for those with an interest (and we all should have an interest) in how to worship God properly.

Common Abbreviations Used

(see Bibliography for full citations)

BAGD – Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Driver Greek-English Lexicon
BDB – Brown, Driver, Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon
Holladay – Concise Hebrew & Aramaic Lexicon
L-N – Louw-Nida, Greek-English Lexicon Based on Semantic Domains
LXX – The Septuagint
NASB – New American Standard Bible
NIDNTT – New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology
NIDOT – New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis
NIV – New International Version
NKJV – New King James Version
NT – New Testament
OT – Old Testament
RPW – Regulative Principle of Worship
WCF – Westminster Confession of Faith

Biblical Quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

Introduction

Few topics within the Reformed faith, and particularly within the Presbyterian branch of the Reformed faith, generate as much heated discussion and debate as that of worship. How we ought to worship is a major concern now, and has been since the first generation of Reformers in the 16th Century. Concern for how Christians ought to worship God is closely related to the Reformed doctrine of *sola scriptura*, that Scripture is our only infallible rule of faith and practice, and that it is our sufficient rule of faith and practice. Scripture is God's Word. In it He tells us, infallibly and sufficiently, what we need to know for the practice of our faith, including how we worship Him. Though there were other factors involved, it is essentially from this basic idea, coupled with interpretations of various Scripture passages related to worship, that the idea of the regulative principle of worship (RPW) was developed.

In its most common form, the regulative principle states that our worship of God should be determined either by specific commands in Scripture, or by principles that by good and necessary consequence can be derived from Scripture. Put even more simply, we can only worship God in ways that He commands. Whatever is not commanded is forbidden in worship. This principle for worship is often contrasted with a principle attributed to Lutheran and Roman Catholic worship practice: that whatever is not forbidden is allowed, known as the normative principle. In debates about the principles or rules that should govern our worship of God, the issue is often cast as a choice between these two options, and these two options only. To complicate the issue, though, those who affirm the Reformed RPW understand how that principle works in different ways.

In one camp are those who take a very **strict approach, whose interpretation of the RPW is essentially limited to explicit commands in Scripture.**¹ An example of how the principle is applied in this first camp are those who limit singing in worship to the Psalms only, typically without any instrumental accompaniment. In another camp are those who see various worship practices allowed either by example or from the derived teaching of Scripture. For example, this camp would view the various hymns in Scripture (by Moses and Miriam in Exodus, or by Zechariah and Mary in Luke, etc.) as examples teaching that the singing of songs other than the Psalms is allowed. These are the two main Reformed camps.² There are other points of view, however, such as those who approach worship from a covenantal perspective. They see worship as part of our covenantal obligation to God. **Therefore worship should be governed by the same principles as the rest of our covenantal relationship with God.**

¹ They will strongly deny this, but a careful examination of their rhetoric will show that when it comes to disputed matters of worship the strict camp will exclude certain worship practices precisely for lack of an explicit command in Scripture. For example, on the issue of whether or not to sing only the Psalms, the strict camp will argue that there is no explicit command in Scripture to sing "man-made" songs other than the Psalms. (See, for example, Williamson, "Scriptural Regulative Principle" and Reed, "Biblical Worship" in the Bibliography.) Attempts to show approved examples of something other than the Psalms in Scripture are "trumped" by this demand for an explicit command. If this isn't, "If it is not explicitly commanded it is forbidden," I don't know what is.

² For the purposes of this paper I will call them the "Stricter" view and the "Looser" view. Neither term is meant either pejoratively or favorably, but simply as a tool for presentation and discussion.

Or consider a series of articles written by a New York pastor, Rev. Steve Schlissel, in late 1999 and early 2000 that argue for an “Informed Principle of Worship.” That is, “whatever is not commanded *might* be allowed.”³ Schlissel makes a vigorous argument for his proposed principle, and himself claims he is arguing against the RPW, that it is invalid. In his enthusiasm, though, Schlissel overstates his case. What he really seems to be arguing against is the strict approach to the RPW, and what he proposes in its place appears rather like the looser camp above than a brand new principle. The covenant view also really seems to be more of a version of the second camp than a separate position.

Of course, all these approaches overlap somewhat, and there is a blurring of the lines between the basic positions. There are those in the “Stricter” camp who sing only Psalms, but allow instrumental accompaniment, and others who might allow the occasional hymn but only sing *a capella*. In the “Looser” camp are those whose worship would seem very traditional and restricted, and others who appear to stretch the idea of a good and necessary Scriptural basis for their worship practice beyond its reasonable limit.

One common trait is that all of these points of view claim to derive their teaching and practice from Scripture. In a broad sense, then, all of these views within the Reformed camp are regulated by Scripture – they are all regulated principles of worship. Or at least they claim to be. At the heart of the debate are several passages of Scripture that will be examined below. My hope had been to be able to do an in-depth exegesis of these passages (or a handful of the key passages), compared with and contrasted to the in-depth analyses done by both Stricter and Looser RPW advocates. To my disappointment, however, there has been little in-depth exegesis done by either party. That’s not to say that the Scriptures haven’t been analyzed or commented upon. But the kind of analysis one might expect from a thorough exegesis – word studies, textual variations, parallel passages, comparison of commentaries, etc. – is virtually nowhere to be found. My intent then, rather than in-depth exegesis, will be to compare, contrast and analyze at a summary level the various positions taken on the Scriptures that form the heart of the debate over the regulative principle of worship. As a result this study will have more breadth than depth, from an exegetical standpoint, but will nevertheless, Lord willing, be a thorough examination of the various positions.

The Scriptures to be analyzed are these:

- Genesis 4:2b-7 – The sacrifices of Cain and Abel
- Exodus 20:2-6 – The Second Commandment
- Exodus 31:2-11 & 1 Chronicles 28:11-18 – The Pattern of the Tabernacle and the Temple
- Leviticus 10:1-3 – Nadab and Abihu Offer Strange Fire
- Numbers 9:6-13 & 2 Chronicles 30:1-4, 15-20 – The “Second Chance” Passover
- Deuteronomy 4:1-2 & 12:32 – Do Not Add or Subtract from the Commands

³ Schlissel, Steve. “All I Really Need to Know about Worship (I Don’t Learn from the Regulative Principle),” Part IV, Internet article at www.chalcedon.edu/report/99jul/worshipIV.htm (italics in original).

- 1 Samuel 13:9-14 – Saul’s Disobedient Sacrifice
- 1 Samuel 21:4-6 & Matthew 12:1-8 – David Eating the Temple Showbread
- 2 Samuel 6:6-7 & 1 Chronicles 15:13-14 – Uzzah Touches the Ark
- 2 Chronicles 26:16-21 – Uzziah Offers Incense in the Temple
- 2 Chronicles 28:1-5a & Jeremiah 7:30-31 & 19:5 – Ahaz’s Unauthorized Sacrifices
- Zechariah 7:2-7 & 8:19 – Traditional Jewish Fasts
- John 10:22-30 & Hebrews 11:37-40 -- Jesus and the Feast of Chanukah
- Matthew 26:17-30 – Jesus Celebrating the Passover
- Mark 7:6-9 – Jesus Condemns the Traditions of Men
- Luke 4:16-21 – Jesus in the Synagogue
- John 4:22-26 – Worship in Spirit and in Truth
- Galatians 4:9-11 – Paul’s Warning about Special Days
- Colossians 2:20-23 – Paul’s Warning about Will Worship
- Hebrews – Old Testament Worship is a Shadow

In general the examination of the above verses will be in the order listed. Certain of these texts are more common in Stricter examinations of the regulative principle. Since they are more frequently used, they will be analyzed first. Then following that, other texts that bear on the question of the regulative principle will be examined.

As stated earlier, in my research I found little in the way of serious exegesis of the biblical passages involved in the debate. Sadly, my observation is that advocates on all sides of the issue appear to come to the RPW debate with their minds already made up. This leads to using the Scripture passages as mere proof texts to solidify their own positions. Or, a writer will only see the interpretation of a passage that agrees with his already adopted position, without doing justice to other possible interpretations. Leaps in logic and exegetical fallacies abound. What’s more, the debate is often carried out using language that does little to advance any serious study of the issue. Ardent advocates of the Stricter view accuse fellow Reformed believers whose understanding of the regulative principle is different of idolatry and near, if not outright, apostasy. Ardent defenders of a Looser view fire back that their more strict Reformed brothers are chauvinistic or pharisaical. In all of my research on this topic I never found such language helpful (as colorful as it might be). I confess that I am not without bias when it comes to the topic of worship, having attended churches virtually all my life that were hardly models of Puritan plainness, singing in church choirs and playing instruments to accompany worship.

I have made every effort, though, to understand the arguments of all sides from their point of view. My hope and prayer is that in the presentation of the different positions below that I have done justice to both sides. Two major difficulties for the Stricter view of the RPW (elements of worship must be explicitly commanded) are 1) that, even for their view of worship, explicit commands don’t exist in

Scripture for all worship elements,⁴ and 2) just one example of a worship element without explicit command or, even more serious, an example of worship that deviates from explicit Scriptural command undermines their position. The major problem for the Looser camp is figuring out where to draw the line as to what is and what isn't acceptable worship. But I believe this problem can be overcome, without slipping inevitably toward Rome and "papist" worship practices, as the Stricter side claims will happen. Ultimately the regulative principle of worship can stand well without resorting to an overly strict understanding of it, without re-defining it, without abandoning it.

⁴ I don't mean to imply here that those of the Stricter view are unaware of this difficulty. They vigorously argue that their understanding includes worship that is derived from Scripture, not explicitly commanded, and even give examples of such worship. As will be seen, though, they follow this approach inconsistently. Further, when confronted with examples of worship described or contained in Scripture, being practiced without any command or example, they often simply assert that the command must have existed, but was given and preserved orally, or simply just not written down in Scripture. From a group of men who would otherwise argue strongly against the Roman Catholic idea of Scripture along with Tradition side-by-side guiding the Church, this proposal of such a "tradition" related to worship is bizarre.

Prelude

Prior to this passage-by-passage examination of Scripture it is useful to briefly analyze the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated as the verb “worship” in English versions of the Bible. What many will find surprising is that Hebrew, apparently up until the time of at least the Exile, had no word for “worship.” Words that are commonly translated as “serve” or “bow down” are used to describe worship, and translated “worship” in English – when the translator thinks the writer means “worship.” In addition, though Greek had words meaning “worship,” the New Testament writers follow the Old Testament Hebrew model. Most often the Greek word behind our English word “worship” in the New Testament is also a word for “serve” or “bow down.” This word study data has some potentially interesting implications for our understanding of “worship” today, as the Bible defines it.

The Words and Their Meanings

An interesting aspect of the study of worship in the Bible is that, particularly in the original Old Testament Hebrew, there is no word that directly parallels our English word “worship.” In fact, the only words in the original Old Testament language that do have a simple meaning like “worship” are those borrowed from Aramaic, probably about the time of the exile of the Jews to Babylon and subsequent return under Ezra and Nehemiah. The Aramaic verb *sāgad* occurs several times in the Aramaic chapters of the book of Daniel (see Appendix). Another Aramaic verb, *pālah*, occurs twice in Daniel and in its related noun form, *polhan* in Ezra. Other than these occurrences, the Hebrew words typically translated “worship” in English Bibles have other meanings. The two verbs most often translated into “worship” in English are *‘abad* and *šāhâ*, meaning “to serve” and “to bow down/prostrate oneself” respectively.⁵

Similarly, in the original Greek New Testament, the two primary words translated as “worship” are verbs also used for serving and bowing down, *latreuō* and *proskuneō*, respectively.⁶ Not surprisingly, then, when Hebrew scholars translated the Old Testament into Greek (a text called the Septuagint, or LXX) they consistently used these two words as substitutes for their Hebrew counterparts. A third Greek word, *leitourgeō* (from which we get our English word “liturgy”), used to describe the “service” offered by priests in a temple, is also frequently used in the LXX translation of the Old Testament, often in places where *latreuō* might be expected.

Unlike Hebrew, though, Greek did offer words more closely related to our English word “worship.” Luke uses the word *sebō*, “to worship,” a handful of times in the book of Acts along with *latreuō* and *proskuneō*. Paul uses it once, in Romans 1:25, a verse in which he also uses *latreuō* to talk about worshipping and serving the creature instead of the creator (a related noun form of the word is used once by Paul in II Thessalonians 2:4).

⁵ See BDB for a fuller definition and other possible translations of the Hebrew and Aramaic words referenced.

All of this points to the fact that our English word “worship” and the meaning we associate with it, is not *necessarily* what the Biblical writers had in mind when they wrote. Often in sermons, Bible studies or Sunday School lessons we hear “worship” described as “worth-ship,” or giving to someone the respect or reverence they are owed, that they are “worth.” God being infinitely worthy, He deserves our devoted worship. This is probably a useful point to help us understand what “worship” means in English. But as can be seen by a quick comparison to the words used in Hebrew and Greek, the Bible apparently has something slightly different in mind. The words for service imply that our relationship with Him is one of servanthood, that we should serve Him with our lives. The words for bowing down imply that our relationship with Him is one of paying homage, of lowering ourselves (think of the imagery of bowing down!) so that He might be lifted up. Our English word “worship” has strong overtones relating to our attitude toward God – one of respect. Certainly that element is present in the ideas of serving and bowing down. But there is another important element present in the Hebrew and Greek words, the idea of activity.⁷ Serving and bowing down are things we do with our bodies, therefore it is not merely something we feel. A worshipful attitude is not merely worshipful emotions.

An additional consideration concerning worship is the relational aspect. This idea also goes beyond our attitude but is closely connected with it still. There is often a connotation with “worship” that we are the ones who need to get our attitude right about God, and that if we just work hard enough at it we will feel the right emotions about Him and give Him the respect He is due. The Hebrew and Greek ideas of serving and bowing down bring with them, though, the idea that by definition the one we are serving and bowing down to is greater than we are. We wouldn’t serve and bow down if He wasn’t! So, serving and bowing down clarify our relationship with God, and automatically put Him higher than ourselves. Simply acknowledging this ought to put us in a right frame of mind about our worship of God, and bring out the emotions of reverence, gratitude and love that go with it. We shouldn’t need to work hard or be manipulated to feel the right emotions about or have the right attitude toward God.

Finally, these words of serving and bowing down have overtones of lordship and kingship. They are often used for earthly lords and kings, or to describe the relationship between masters and slaves. When used of kings there is a strong connection to the idea of covenant. As Meredith Kline has shown,⁸ the covenant between God and Israel is very similar to the treaties between a king and his vassals used in the Ancient Near East in Old Testament times. Vassals owed certain duties of service to their overlord king. They were expected to bow down to him and pay homage. In return the king promised to protect his vassals. Failure to serve and pay homage brought the imposition of penalties: lack of protection, direct punishment, “woes” and “curses” pronounced in the name of the appropriate gods. There is a

⁶ See BAGD for a fuller definition and other possible translations of the Greek words referenced.

⁷ Fretheim writes in NIDOT, that the Hebrew word *šāḥā* “always refers to an action/attitude directed toward a human or divine figure who is recognized (appropriately or inappropriately) as being in a position of honor or authority.” Fretheim, Terence E. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Willem A. Van Gemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) Vol. 2, p. 43.

⁸ See Kline, Meredith. *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1989). Part II of that book is particularly relevant.

similar relationship in the covenants of the Old Testament. It is therefore no surprise that, of all the 427 uses of the verbs *‘ābad* (serve) and *šāḥâ* (bow down) in the Old Testament 153 of them – over one-third – are in the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, which is full of covenants and their obligations, blessings and curses.

What we get, then, from the words used to describe worship in the original Hebrew and Greek is worship that consists of the right emotions and attitudes, that is an active expression of our covenant relationship with God. When we worship all of these factors should be included. Worship that is biblical will be characterized by recognition that, above all else, we are in a close, covenantal relationship with God who is our Savior and Lord, our Protector and Redeemer. “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33) – even right worship.

Variations in Translation

The Appendix gives a table of occurrences of certain words related to worship in the Bible. All occurrences of the verbs *‘ābad*, *šāḥâ*, *latreuō* and *proskuneō* are listed, as well as all occurrences of “worship” or its verbal equivalent in four English translations: the ESV, the NIV, the NKJV, and the NASB. For comparison purposes, the last two columns show the occurrences of the Greek verbs in the LXX. Highlighted are all the verses in which “worship” or its equivalent is found in at least one English translation. Two facts jump out immediately from this table. One is that the words in the original language, especially from the Hebrew Old Testament, are definitely not always translated “worship.” This hints at the broad meaning of these words, beyond merely “worship.” The second is how little the English translations agree on how to translate a given Hebrew or Greek word. Of all the occurrences of “worship” in one or more translations, only 131 out of 276 are in complete agreement. This means that when translating a word as “worship,” the ESV, NIV, NKJV and NASB agree only 47.5% of the time. There are many occurrences where only one English translation uses “worship,” 97 out of 276 (the vast majority are in the NIV) or 35%. Where they differ, one translation might choose “worship,” another “serve,” “bow down,” “fear” or some other possible meaning of the Hebrew or Greek word. This demonstrates not only how difficult it is to translate, but also how difficult it is to study the topic of worship based on word searches alone.

New Testament usage in itself is also instructive, but for a different reason. Looking at the table in the Appendix, one can see that nearly every occurrence of “worship” in an English translation is based on one of the two Greek roots, *latreuō* (serve) or *proskuneō* (bow down). The NT writers did have other words they could have used instead of these two, which are closely associated with serving and bowing down as well as worship. In fact *latreuō* was not a common word outside of Greek NT usage.⁹ When

⁹ Hess, K. *latreuō* entry in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. Colin Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971) Vol. 3, 549-551.

secular Greeks wanted to talk about worship they were more likely to use the word *sebō*.¹⁰ Why then did the NT authors not make more use of *sebō* than they did? Hess writes, of the preference for *latreuō* over *sebō* that, “Its use throughout...is fixed by the OT.”¹¹ The NT writers, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were consciously following Old Testament practice in describing or talking about worship. This is further evidence that the biblical picture of worship is different from the connotation given by the English word “worship” – or its equivalent in Greek. Letting Scripture interpret Scripture is an important principle in biblical interpretation. In this case the data indicates that the NT is interpreting worship, at least in its active, verbal sense, with the word pictures of service and bowing down.

Consider an important passage for the topic of worship, the Second Commandment in Exodus 20:4-6 forbidding the making or “worshipping” of idols. Verse 5 in that passage contains both Hebrew root words, *‘ābad* and *šāḥā*. How should they be translated? Here is how the four English translations in the Appendix translate the key phrase in this verse:

ESV: “You shall not bow down to them or serve them...”

NIV: “You shall not bow down to them or worship them...”

NKJV: “You shall not bow down to them nor serve them...”

NASB: “You shall not worship them or serve them...”

Coming right on the heels of the First Commandment, that we should have no other gods than God, and given the surrounding content of the Second Commandment, that idols are forbidden and that God is jealous for Himself, it is easy to understand this passage to be saying something about worship. But which Hebrew word, if any, should be translated worship? The NIV picks *‘ābad*, the NASB picks *šāḥā*, while the ESV and NKJV pick neither. My purpose here is not to discuss or critique translation method, but to show how difficult it is to choose, especially in the context of worship. We want to put our English word in there. It emphasizes for us that the passage really is talking about worship. But are the ESV and NKJV any less clear that the passage is about worship? Not if the context of the passage is taken into account. And this is perhaps the most important lesson to learn from studying the process of translating the Hebrew and Greek words into English. Since the same words can be and are used to describe relationships with other men or false gods, it is the context of a passage that determines whether or not it is about the worship of God, not the mere presence of the English word “worship” itself.

To conclude this section, then, there are two main lessons. First is that the meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words give a broad picture of biblical worship. It is active. It is a key part of our covenant relationship with God. Second is that we can’t rely on English occurrences of the word “worship” alone to find Scriptures about worship. As the ESV and NKJV do with Exodus 20:5, important

¹⁰ Gunther, W. *sebō* entry in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (ed. Colin Brown; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971) Vol. 2, 91-95.

¹¹ Hess, K., NIDNTT, p. 551.

passages may legitimately use “bow down” or “serve” instead of “worship,” and lose none of their meaning or teaching value about worship. Context is the key, and will be important as the various passages about worship are analyzed below.

Etudes

The analysis of several biblical texts below is an attempt to examine the key passages that comment on how we should worship God. There are several texts that the Stricter camp uses to support their understanding of the regulative principle of worship. These texts will be analyzed first. For each text the Stricter interpretation of the text will be given first, followed by the Looser interpretation. Every attempt has been made to present the opposing views fairly and accurately. Once those views have been presented I will comment briefly on their interpretations, evaluating their respective strengths and weaknesses.

Not included in the texts that follow, or their analysis, are Scriptural passages or interpretations that are primarily concerned with applying them to specific worship practices. My primary concern here is not whether or not to sing only Psalms, what kind of decorations to have in our places of worship, whether or not to hang a cross on the wall, whether instruments should accompany singing or not, etc. These are all valid related questions, but not part of the central question. The central question is, "By what Scriptural principles is our worship governed?" or "How do we know how we are supposed to worship?" Once we know the principles or rules that tell us how to worship, then we can determine what to do in worship.

Also not included in this analysis, either here in the examination of the individual passages or elsewhere in this paper, is an evaluation of the historical development of the regulative principle or of the historical interpretations of the various Scripture texts. Again, this is a valid analysis, but is beyond the scope of the focused examination of the texts themselves and what they teach about how to worship.¹²

Deliberately left out of this paper, as well, is any comparison of the RPW view of worship with the Lutheran and broader Evangelical idea that whatever is not forbidden in Scripture is acceptable, the "normative principle." Nor does the paper address the view that the Church, informed by both Scripture and Tradition (a Roman Catholic and/or Eastern Orthodox approach) determines what is acceptable in public worship. While worthy of debate, these also are beyond the scope of this analysis.

Following the texts most often cited by the Stricter camp are a few texts that also are relevant but are seldom, if ever, analyzed in the literature discussing the RPW. Since there is little written on these passages, the analysis will not be able to rigorously present both sides of the issue, followed by my

¹² Gordon's statement in "Some Answers about the Regulative Principle" is well-taken: "If there is to be intelligent, ultimately fruitful discussion of the Reformed understanding of worship, such discussion must have sufficient respect for the Reformed tradition to engage the significant, published expressions of that tradition." (Gordon, T. David. "Some Answers about the Regulative Principle," originally access via Internet at www.fpcr.org, but link no longer valid. See also *WTJ*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Fall, 1993).) While this paper is not a thorough interaction with the historical, traditional Reformed view as presented by our forebears, it is hoped that the interaction with contemporary writers represents, through them, sufficient respect for the Reformed tradition.

commentary. To the extent possible the Stricter and Looser views will be presented. The emphasis will be on analyzing the implications of these texts for understanding the regulative principle.

OT Texts Used by the Stricter Camp to Defend Their Interpretation of the RPW

Genesis 4:2b - 7 – Cain's sacrifice vs. Abel's sacrifice

Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."

Stricter Interpretation: G. I. Williamson is the most thorough proponent of the Stricter interpretation of this passage.¹³ He writes, "It was not only the fact that something was wrong with the subjective attitude of Cain, as compared with the attitude of Abel. There was also a vital difference in the objective content of their worship."¹⁴ Williamson reasons that while Abel (and presumably Cain) may have had direct revelation from God about what kind of sacrifice to offer, the revelation of God up to that time – in effect the first three chapters of Genesis – were enough for Abel to deduce what kind of sacrifice he should offer. Of God's covering Adam and Eve with animal skins, Williamson believes that from the self-evident purpose of that covering

Abel could have deduced that his only hope of acceptance with God was by the sacrifice of a dying substitute. But even if we take the view that Abel just happened to hit on 'the right way of worship' by intuition, it still leads to the same conclusion. For as soon as God accepted Abel and his sacrifice – while rejecting Cain and his offering – by that very fact He made it perfectly clear that the acceptable way of worship was the way of Abel. But even though Cain knew this, he wasn't willing to worship God in that acceptable way.¹⁵

Thus, Cain showed he was unwilling to limit his worship to God's revealed, approved practice. Williamson references John Calvin's commentaries in a footnote, where Calvin argues that since the book of Hebrews attributes the acceptance of Abel's sacrifice to faith (Hebrews 11:4) this presumes that it was offered by the command of God. Also, according to Calvin, since it has always been true that obedience

¹³ Williamson, G. I. "The Scriptural Regulative Principle of Worship," series of three Internet articles at members.aol.com/RSICHURCH/reg1.html, members.aol.com/RSICHURCH/reg2.html and members.aol.com/RSICHURCH/reg3.html.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22) then Abel must have been taught what to do, and he obeyed.¹⁶ So Williamson concludes: “worship which is not sanctioned by God is forbidden.”¹⁷

Looser Interpretation: Advocates of a Looser view would argue that the existence of some sort of command from God regarding what kind of sacrifice to offer is at best a presumption, at worst, the elevation of oral tradition, or some sort of extra-Biblical tradition, alongside Scripture.¹⁸ The latter violates the principle of *sola scriptura*. Iain Duguid offers the following observations about the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel. First, the sacrifices are described, in the original Hebrew, as a *minhâ* or tribute offering which, “according to the law of Moses...would very often be a grain offering.”¹⁹ The *minhâ* is a grain offering, and is frequently translated that way (Leviticus 2), “because the precise focus of the *minhâ* is *not* seeking the forgiveness of sins, but rather submitting to a person as your overlord.”²⁰ Thus, the offerings presented by Cain and Abel were meant to demonstrate their recognition of God as their king. Abel brought his best offering -- “fat portions,” “firstborn”. Cain only brought “some of the fruits.” Duguid concludes: “The point the writer is making is that there was a difference in heart attitude between Cain and Abel: it wasn’t simply Abel’s sacrifice that God favored but *Abel*.”²¹ Because Abel acted in faith he offered the best he had. Cain, says Duguid, “was simply going through the motions of religion.”²² Alvin Smith²³ references Leviticus 2:1-3, arguing that Cain’s offering was similar to the offering after atonement, by the now innocent party. Scripture could be foreshadowing in this case that Cain, in offering the sacrifice of an innocent, didn’t recognize his own sin and guilt.

Analysis: The Stricter interpretation is attractive in that it fits in with the commonly held view that Abel’s sacrifice was accepted on the basis of it being a meat offering rather than a grain offering. It is commonly argued that since the only example that Cain and Abel had was the covering of their parents, this is the model they should have followed. This makes a lot of sense on the surface. However, the Stricter argument weakens by trying to turn the interpretation from Biblical example to Biblical mandate. It is true that obedience is better than sacrifice, but it does not necessarily follow, as Calvin argues, that in offering sacrifices Cain and Abel must have had a command to obey. Sacrifices are often offered in the OT as the thankful response to God’s saving act, for example Noah after the Flood. It is just as likely that Cain and Abel, for some reason not given in Scripture, felt compelled to offer sacrifices to God. Once the

¹⁶ Ibid., Footnote #5.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Mattson, Brian G. “A Reply to Rev. Brian Schwertley,” Internet article at messiahnyc.org/a_reply.htm.

¹⁹ Duguid, Iain. “Worship in the Old Testament,” lecture notes for course of the same name given at Westminster Seminary in California, 1999, p. 20.

²⁰ Ibid., Italics in original, p. 20.

²¹ Ibid., Italics in original, p. 21.

²² Ibid., p. 21.

Biblical *mandate* for a sacrifice (presumably one of a certain kind ordered by God) disappears, so does disobedience as a motive.

Williamson tries to maintain the necessity of a mandate by arguing that once God accepted Abel's sacrifice, that demonstrated to Cain what was acceptable and what wasn't. Cain knew this and was still unwilling to obey. This line of argument seems to assume that Cain offered his sacrifice after Abel's – how else could he know that Abel's was acceptable and then offer something else in disobedience? But there is nothing in the text to imply this sequence of events. For all we know their offerings were made simultaneously. If the text implies anything about order, though, it is that Cain offered his first, then Abel – this is the order they are given in verses 3 and 4 of Genesis 4. So again disobedience on the part of Cain disappears as a motive.

The Looser view recognizes the implications of the idea of a command of God not preserved in Scripture. In seeing this as a direct attack on *sola scriptura*, though, I think they go a bit too far. The doctrine of *sola scriptura* recognizes the fact that Scripture is our only infallible rule of faith and practice, and that Scripture is sufficient for what we need to know for faith and practice. The Reformers valued tradition but didn't place it on a par with Scripture – everything must be subject to the revelation of Scripture. Presbyterians today have rules of faith and practice; we call them the Westminster Standards and denominational Books of Church Order. **It is possible that commands from God existed for Cain and Abel that are not preserved in Scripture.** We do know from the accounts of Hezekiah's restoration of proper Temple worship **that he drew his reforms from commands of God given through David that are not preserved for us in Scripture today** (see II Chronicles 29:25 which references the commandment of the Lord by His prophets, presumably David and Gad who are mentioned earlier in the verse). To say that it is *possible* that Cain and Abel had specific commands from the Lord is a far cry from concluding that they *must* have had such commands.

Duguid's point about the use of language for grain offerings is well taken. On the surface it might seem a bit anachronistic, since the commands regulating such offerings weren't given until much, much later in redemptive history. Of course the conservative view is that **the writer of Genesis, Moses, is also the writer of the rest of the Pentateuch, and would have known all about the different kinds of sacrifices. It is, therefore, compelling that such language was used.** Also note that the idea of such an offering as an act of submission fits well with the Hebrew words used for worship, as discussed above.

Drawing too much from Genesis 4 about worship takes more from the text than what is there. At the least the passage is describing worship broadly, and **indicating that some worship is acceptable and other worship is not.** This is entirely consistent with a broader view of the RPW. Duguid and Smith are on the right track in concluding that Cain's attitude was most likely the reason his sacrifice was not accepted. It was not an offering of his best, in faith.

²³ Smith, Alvin W., Sr. "The Offerings of Cain and Abel: The Difference and What Made the Difference," *Biblical Doctrine of Worship* (eds. Philip W. Martin, John M. McMillan and Edward A. Robson; The

Exodus 20:2 - 6 – The Second Commandment

² *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

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 or 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 the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Stricter Interpretation: The Stricter camp observes that the Second Commandment tells us how God ought to be worshipped, in a negative sense, by forbidding the worship of idols.²⁴ They extend the application of this command to prohibiting any man-made devices or any man-made elements in worship. The Stricter interpretation follows after Calvin in linking this commandment ultimately to Deuteronomy 12:32 (see also 4:2), where **God instructs that nothing is to be added to or taken away from His commandments.** Stricter advocates interpret the pictures and decorations of both the Tabernacle and Temple as shadows in OT worship that serve to point forward to Christ. Therefore, since the shadow has passed away and the real come (see Hebrews), symbols are no longer needed and are, in fact, a violation of the Second Commandment. These prohibitions against idolatry are “grounded in God’s character as a jealous God.”²⁵

Looser Interpretation: Gore writes, in his analysis of the Second Commandment, that, “The one obvious exegetical fact is that the use of any idol, or image, of Jehovah or any creature for any purpose of worship is forbidden.”²⁶ Gore believes that a strict exegesis of the text does not require the conclusion that the Stricter camp arrives at, and further that the Stricter camp confuses exegesis with application. “It may be a legitimate application to infer that nothing is acceptable in worship which has not been explicitly commanded – provided there is no evidence to contradict such an application. Should such evidence be available, the inference would only be relative and not absolute in its application.”²⁷ Duguid adds that the Second Commandment clearly excludes “any representation of God in any shape or form, such as the Golden Calf, for example. Any representation of God, or of Christ, which is given ‘official status’ by being

Reformed Presbyterian Church in America, 1974), pp. 16-18.

²⁴ See Reed, Kevin, “Biblical Worship,” Internet article at www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLS/BibW_ch0.htm. See also Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle” and Sikkema, Henry. “Understanding the Scriptural Principle of Worship,” Internet article at members.xoom.com/_XOOM/sikkemah/understanding_spw.htm.

²⁵ Gordon, T. David. “Nine Lines of Argument in Favor of the Regulative Principle of Worship,” Internet article at www.nber.org/~vanvlack/reformed/articles/Regulative_Principle.html.

²⁶ Gore, R. J. “The Pursuit of Plainness: Rethinking the Puritan Regulative Principle of Worship,” diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1988, p. 248.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

in our churches will tend toward reductionism, reducing God to something less than he is.”²⁸ Nevertheless, the symbols in the Tabernacle and Temple were “specifically intended to point God’s people back to Eden and forward to the final consummation.”²⁹ Duguid is not convinced by Stricter interpretations of the symbols in the Tabernacle and Temple. “They therefore provide a model that we may follow, which would permit the use of symbols such as the cross (though not the crucifix) and the dove, and more abstract depictions of items such as the bread and the cup of the Lord’s Supper.”

Analysis: Quite simply, I believe Gore and Duguid are correct in concluding that the Stricter understanding of the Second Commandment extends farther than the text requires. While the commandment clearly forbids worshiping idols or worshiping God in the form of an image of any kind, it does not necessarily follow that symbols are idolatrous images of God. The example of the Tabernacle and Temple decorations is an important part of any interpretation. By limiting those symbols to shadows pointing to Christ, the Stricter camp makes its point by definition. The claim is made that this is the purpose of the decorations; the evidence is not convincing. The decorations were not worship elements. The book of Hebrews, to which the Stricter camp refers when arguing that the decorations were shadows, speaks of the worship elements as shadows: sacrifices, special days, etc. (This will be covered in more detail in the analysis of the book of Hebrews below.) The passing of the elements in worship with Christ’s coming does not necessarily infer that decorations must go as well. This is especially true if Duguid is correct in asserting that the decorations not only pointed to Christ but to Eden and eternity as well.

Exodus 25:40 & 1 Chronicles 28:11-18 – The Pattern of the Tabernacle & Temple

Exodus 25:40

And see that you make them after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.

1 Chronicles 28:11-19

¹¹ Then David gave Solomon his son the plan of the vestibule of the temple, and of its houses, its treasuries, its upper rooms, and its inner chambers, and of the room for the mercy seat; ¹² and the plan of all that he had in mind for the courts of the house of the LORD, all the surrounding chambers, the treasuries of the house of God, and the treasuries for dedicated gifts; ¹³ for the divisions of the priests and of the Levites, and all the work of the service in the house of the LORD; for all the vessels for the service in the house of the LORD, ¹⁴ the weight of gold for all golden vessels for each service, the weight of silver vessels for each service, ¹⁵ the weight of the golden lampstands and their lamps, the weight of gold for each lampstand and its lamps, the weight of silver for a lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each lampstand in the service, ¹⁶ the weight of gold for each table for the showbread, the silver for the silver tables, ¹⁷ and pure gold for the forks, the basins and the cups; for the golden bowls and the weight of each; for the silver bowls and the weight of each; ¹⁸ for the altar of incense made of refined gold, and its weight;

²⁸ Duguid, “Worship,” p. 180.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 180.

*also his plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim that spread their wings and covered the ark of the covenant of the LORD.*¹⁹ *“All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan.”*

Stricter Interpretation: Chapters 25 through 31 of Exodus contain an incredibly detailed set of instructions for how to build the tabernacle and all its furnishings. Williamson’s comment is appropriate: “It would be hard to think of a way to give greater weight to this regulative principle, than what we find in this account...It is no exaggeration to say that every aspect of the construction of the tabernacle was prescribed by God, and that nothing was left to man’s imagination.”³⁰ **God specifically instructs in Exodus 25:40 and 31:11 that everything is to be done according to His precise commands.** Williamson concludes:

Now why was this so important? Why did everything have to conform to a pattern revealed (first to Moses, and later to David)? We believe the reason is self-evident: God may not be worshipped in any way that He has not commanded. As Calvin once said: “I am not unaware how difficult it is to persuade the world that God rejects and even abominates everything relating to His worship that is devised by human reason.”³¹

Sikkema also points out that, “God used the talents and skills of men in Israel to do this building but left every aspect of its design to Himself, even to the patterns on the veil. There was no creative work on the part of anyone in the house of the Lord.”³²

Looser Interpretation: Gore³³ has an extended response to the Stricter interpretation. He makes three main points:

1. Moses had to make the Tabernacle to a precise plan, from which he could not deviate.
2. That there is no room for “novelty or creativity” in worship is not the only possible understanding of this passage. Another inference is simply that we are all obligated to follow God’s commands in worship, without disobeying them or changing them.
3. The Stricter camp interprets these texts in the most limited way possible. This approach negates any chance for development in worship approved by God.

Analysis: I agree with the Stricter camp that this example from Scripture is a strong argument in favor of their interpretation of the RPW. But I also agree with Gore that the narrowest interpretation of the text is not necessarily required. What is required is that **when God commands something, we are obligated to follow that command without deviation.** That is certainly what God is doing in His commands regarding the Tabernacle and Temple. But there are many other areas of worship for which the Israelites did not have such specific commands and some, see below, where it appears that divinely approved innovation did take place.

³⁰ Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

³¹ Ibid., quoting from Calvin: Selected Works, 1:34.

³² Sikkema, “Understanding.”

³³ Gore. “Pursuit,” pp. 251-252. Gore’s points that follow are all taken from these pages.

Leviticus 10:1-3 – Nadab & Abihu Offer Strange Fire

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. ² And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. ³ Then Moses said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD has said: ‘Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’” And Aaron held his peace.

Stricter Interpretation: There are three main points in the Stricter camp’s train of reasoning about Nadab and Abihu. This text is one of the most frequently cited proofs of the regulative principle, especially of a strict, narrow understanding of it. The Stricter camp argues that:

1. Nadab and Abihu suffer the ultimate penalty of death because they offered worship according to their own innovation: strange or unauthorized fire that was not of the perpetually burning flame God commanded to be used for burning incense.
2. The phrase “which he had not commanded” indicates God’s lack of command about offering other fires, not that God specifically prohibited using other fires.
3. Therefore, based on the above, other OT passages that forbid offering strange incense do not apply.

Points 2 and 3 may not make sense at first. The Stricter camp makes a distinction between the fire used for burning incense and the incense itself. In other words, one could use the proper fire to burn the wrong incense, or one could use the wrong fire to burn the proper (or improper) incense. All these actions are wrong. So, the text telling us that Nadab and Abihu offered strange or unauthorized fire makes the question of the kind of incense they burned irrelevant.

Point 2 about lack of a positive command is a critical one and regularly made in the Stricter camp. To uphold a strict view of the regulative principle (anything not specifically commanded is forbidden) they need to show Biblical examples where this principle is violated and punished. Nadab and Abihu’s sin offers a dramatic instance with which to drive home this point.

Schwertley, in his critique of Rev. Schlissel’s series of articles (see Introduction) asks, “To what does the phrase ‘which he commanded them not’ refer? The Holy Spirit says their sin was that they did something that was not commanded.”³⁴ In response to the argument that “which he commanded them not” is equivalent in meaning to “he forbade” Schwertley writes, “Schlissel would have us ignore the passage and pretend it says something very different...Wishful thinking and pretending are no substitute for true biblical exegesis.”³⁵ Reed echoes this: “Nadab and Abihu had not performed an act which was expressly forbidden.”³⁶ Williamson agrees: “It does not say this happened because they were not sincere – or because they lacked ‘good intentions;’ it doesn’t even say it happened because they did something

³⁴ Schwertley, Brian M. “A Brief Critique of Steven M. Schlissel’s Articles Against the Regulative Principle of Worship,” Internet article at www.iserv.net/~graceopc/pub/schwertley/schlissel.html.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Reed, “Biblical Worship.”

God had expressly forbidden.”³⁷ Bogue writes, “The key point is this: it was not commanded, and therefore it was wrong.”³⁸

Looser Interpretation: In his analysis of just what specifically was the sin of Nadab and Abihu, Gore concludes, “Either they offered the right thing in the wrong way, or they simply offered the wrong thing. Either way they were both involved in the clear transgression of a specific command.”³⁹ Schlissel argues that their sin was a violation of Exodus 30:9: “Nadab and Abihu did not *simply* do something not commanded, *they did something expressly forbidden.*”⁴⁰ Frame tackles the issue by asking the question:

Why, then, does the passage refer to the absence of a command rather than the violation of a command? Because, I think, this language better reinforces the thought that such a thing did not ‘enter my mind.’ The emphasis is that such activity is totally contrary to the holiness and righteousness of God. The question of how God revealed the hideousness of such behavior is not at issue in this verse.⁴¹

Duguid’s assessment is the most thorough, however. He points to the definitive book on Hebrew grammar by Paul Jouon which, in section 160, paragraph k states that “*not to command* may be used where we would say *to prohibit.*”⁴² Duguid then shows that Jeremiah 7:31, 19:5 and 32:35 contain the same phrase translated “which he had not commanded.” All these verses, though, are violations of the specific command in Leviticus 18:21 that prohibits offering children as burnt offerings. What this shows is that “the episode with Nadab and Abihu simply proves that we must be bound in our worship by what God has commanded; it does not address the issue of whether we may introduce into worship elements lacking ‘express command.’”⁴³

Duguid further comments on the context of this incident with Nadab and Abihu – the “rest of the story.” Note how God deals with the behavior of their cousins as the rest of Leviticus 10 unfolds:

There, after Nadab and Abihu have been struck dead, their cousins are summoned to drag their bodies outside the camp (10:4). A sin offering of a goat is made, reflecting the fact that they are leaders in the community (10:16; cf. 4:23), and its blood is applied to the outer altar (10:18). According to Leviticus 4, the remaining priests should have proceeded to eat the meat in the sanctuary area as Moses pointed out (10:18). But instead the goat was taken, presumably outside the camp, and burned (10:16). Since the sin had been committed inside the sanctuary itself, the impurity contracted by the purification offering was regarded as rendering it unsafe to eat on this occasion. Though the letter of the law had not been followed, its spirit had been upheld.⁴⁴

³⁷ Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

³⁸ Bogue, Carl W. “Scriptural Worship: An Introduction to the Regulative Principle of Worship,” Internet article at www.fpcr.org/blue_banner_articles/bogue.htm.

³⁹ Gore, “Pursuit,” p. 255.

⁴⁰ Schlissel, “All I Really Need,” Part I, italics in original.

⁴¹ Frame, John M. “Some Questions about the Regulative Principle,” Internet article at poconos.net/~reformed/misc/frame_regulative_principle.html.

⁴² Jouon, Paul. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1996), § 160 k, italics in original.

⁴³ Duguid, “Worship,” p. 70.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 98-99, footnote #239.

Aaron's question in Leviticus 10:19 and Moses' reaction in verse 20 indicate that God would not have been pleased if the sin offering had been eaten.

Analysis: There are two things that I believe decisively favor the Looser interpretation. First, the Stricter camp has misinterpreted the wording in Leviticus 10:1 that they see as such a clear definition of the RPW and their strict understanding of it. Nadab and Abihu clearly violated the commands of God; they did something contrary to God's commands, that He had forbidden. Second, the example of Eleazar and Ithamar in the rest of Leviticus 10 is **astounding in that it is such a clear example of two men expressly violating God's command and *not* being punished for it. It is no secondary command either, for it deals with the proper handling of a sin offering. Yet the language at the end of the chapter indicates that God would have been displeased if His command had been followed in this case.** That is a remarkable implication if my reading is correct. This passage concerning Nadab and Abihu is one for which some serious, in-depth exegesis would be invaluable. That only one author – in an unpublished set of lecture notes no less – has seen the implications of God's treatment of Eleazar and Ithamar is a good part of what leads me to believe that little serious exegetical work has been done at all on Scripture passages relating to the regulative principle.

Deuteronomy 4:1-2 & 12:32 – No Addition or Subtraction

Deut. 4:1-2

“And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you. ² You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.

Deut. 12:32

³² *“Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.*

Stricter Interpretation: The Stricter interpretation of these passages is simple and straightforward: clearly there are to be no additions to God's law concerning worship. Grossman writes, “The language of Deuteronomy 12:29-32 clearly speaks of worship in general and is not in any way limited to sacrifices, which are never mentioned in these verses.”⁴⁵ Reed ties this command into the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. Quoting Deuteronomy 4:2, he comments that, “The general sufficiency and authority of scripture are brought to bear on the content of our worship.”⁴⁶ Adding to or taking away from the commands of God, including the commands regarding worship, denies the sufficiency of Scripture, according to Reed. Bogue argues that worship must be in view in these passages in Deuteronomy,

⁴⁵ Grossman, Robert. “Letter to the Editor on the ‘Regulative Principle of Worship,’” Internet article at www.chalcedon.edu/report/2000jan/grossman_letter_regulative_principle.htm.

pointing out that verses 13-19 of chapter 4 warn against worshipping or serving the sun, moon, stars or host of heaven.⁴⁷

Looser Interpretation: Schlissel argues that these passages in Deuteronomy apply within the sacrificial worship of Israel, and that they refer in general to the covenant law given by God through Moses. Therefore, according to Schlissel, the principles should be applied only in a general, moral way as they pertain to God's law, and understood as only closely regulating the ceremonial worship of Israel.⁴⁸ Gore also observes that these commands are given within the context of covenant.⁴⁹ The passages deal "with a covenant formula and covenant sanctions, and with worship only as worship is specifically addressed within the stipulations of the covenant."⁵⁰ Gore does see a connection to regulating worship, but concludes:

Nevertheless, this falls short of a total prohibition of worship that is (1) voluntary, (2) consonant with the terms of the covenant, and (3) not in any way required or imposed as a basis of covenantal fidelity.⁵¹

Analysis: As with the precise commands for the building of the Tabernacle and Temple, these commands in Deuteronomy do form a strong basis for the regulative principle of worship. The central question is what has God commanded and where are those commands recorded for us? God's commands are, of course, in Scripture. But Scripture is not an endless list of do's and don'ts. The Bible contains stories, poems, songs, parables, letters – all sorts of literary styles. Often we infer God's will for us in what the texts teach about His relationship with us, or how they relate to the ultimate work that God would do for us in Christ on the cross. This means that, while we should not add or subtract from what God tells us to do, whether in worship or any other area of life, we also cannot expect to find detailed instructions in Scripture for every question of life. Therefore, the passages in Deuteronomy should be taken in a general sense. That is, we need not have specific commands to justify each element of worship, but we ought to have a solid Biblical basis for everything we do in worship. In Presbyterian tradition, the Biblical basis for worship includes examples of worship that Scripture approves of, and elements of worship that can be inferred from Biblical teaching.

The connection to the covenant is an important one, but Schlissel goes too far in insisting that the commands in Deuteronomy 4 and 12 only apply to Jewish ceremonial worship. His position leads to some inconsistencies that would be unacceptable, if true. God's moral law, the Ten Commandments, was also given as part of the covenant with Israel. That they are closely connected with God's

⁴⁶ Reed, "Biblical Worship."

⁴⁷ Bogue, "Scriptural Worship."

⁴⁸ Schlissel, "All I Really Need."

⁴⁹ Again, see Kline, "Structure of Biblical Authority" for a thorough demonstration that the Mosaic law should be understood in light of the king-vassal treaties of that day. Kline, in fact, shows that the book of Deuteronomy is a covenant treaty document that follows the outline of other ancient suzerainty treaties.

⁵⁰ Gore, "Pursuit," pp. 258-259, emphasis in original.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 259.

covenantal “treaty” with Israel is shown by the stone tablets they were written on being placed in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies.⁵² A central part of Reformed doctrine is that God’s moral law is still in force today. **If things that are part of the covenant between God and Israel aren’t for us today then neither are the Ten Commandments.**

An interesting textual note is that Deuteronomy 12:32 in our English Bibles is numbered as 13:1 in the original Hebrew text. Is the verse then a summary of what went before (which would imply it has broad interpretation), or is the verse an introduction to the detailed laws that follow? If the latter one could argue that the prohibition only applies to those specific commands God is about to give. I don’t think that position ultimately stands. The language of the verse is broad – “all” that is commanded, not “what is about to follow.”

Another interesting thing to note about these passages is that they allow no additions to God’s law, but they *also* allow no subtractions. Stricter and Looser interpretations fail to address this point. **The Stricter camp’s emphasis is on avoiding any illegitimate additions to what God has commanded. But in their zeal to limit worship, have they eliminated things that God has commanded, either explicitly or by inference? To do so would be just as serious as any additions.** Looser camp commentary is largely a reaction to Stricter camp arguments. But even for the Looser camp, the desire to avoid too much restriction of worship and to avoid making narrow rules for people to follow, may lead to ignoring worship practices that are commanded. This may seem like an unusual possibility, since the Looser camp is usually accused of adding to worship rather than subtracting from it. **But the possibility is real. For example, the Stricter camp typically argues for the exclusive use of Psalms in worship singing. The Looser camp argues that other hymns and songs may be sung in worship. In arguing for the inclusion of other hymns and songs have those in the Looser camp swung too far in the other direction, and ended up by not singing the Psalms? Arguably this has happened – the question would be how widespread is this omission?**

1 Samuel 13:9-14 – Saul’s Disobedient Sacrifice

⁹ So Saul said, “Bring the burnt offering here to me, and the peace offerings.” And he offered the burnt offering. ¹⁰ As soon as he had finished offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came. And Saul went out to meet him and greet him. ¹¹ Samuel said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, ¹² I said, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.’ So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering.” ¹³ And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. ¹⁴ But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded

⁵² Kline, “Structure of Biblical Authority,” points out that copies of ancient treaties were kept in the respective pagan temples of the king and his vassal.

him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”

Stricter Interpretation: Saul violated God’s commands for worship by taking upon himself a priestly function that was not his right. “According to the Mosaic law, only the priests were authorized to make such offerings, but king Saul performed the priestly task on his own.”⁵³ God’s disapproval of this unwarranted act of worship was so strong that Saul lost his kingdom as a result. What is seen here is God’s rejection of the sin of offering unauthorized worship. According to Williamson, “Samuel said Saul ‘acted foolishly’ because he did not limit himself to what God had commanded (v. 13).”⁵⁴ Related to this action is Saul’s disobedience recorded in I Samuel 15 where he kept the Amalekite king alive and kept the best animals, rather than killing them all. Samuel’s response to this is that “to obey is better than sacrifice.” Reed summarizes, “At no point had Saul professed the worship of another god; yet the king’s actions toward the Lord were unacceptable, because they deviated from God’s revealed word.”⁵⁵

Looser Interpretation: Saul’s disobedience is not of God’s commands concerning worship, but of God’s specific command, through Samuel the prophet, to wait. **Saul’s sin is therefore disobedience, not offering unauthorized worship.** “The command which Saul transgressed was not a general decree regarding the priesthood but rather a specific word of Samuel that Saul was to wait until he came in seven days time.”⁵⁶ Saul did not violate a worship command about priestly duties, argues Duguid, “for Samuel, who ought to have offered the sacrifice, is not a priest but a judge-prophet.”⁵⁷ To obey is better than sacrifice, but what needs obedience here is a specific command from a prophet, not commands about worship. Duguid concludes:

Saul’s basic sin is rebellion and arrogance, not transgressing into the priestly realm. In making himself his own master, he has ceased to be usable as king of God’s people. Since he has rejected God as his king, God has rejected him as king of his people.⁵⁸

Analysis: Saul’s disobedience is, to me, clearly related to the specific command given by Samuel. The Stricter camp would argue that verse 13 of the passage speaks of a command of the Lord, and since the function that Saul carried out was priestly in nature, the “command of the Lord” must be priestly. **Duguid’s point about Samuel’s office as judge and prophet shows that the command couldn’t have been priestly in nature. If it were then Samuel would be in violation of it as well.** Rather, the command in verse 13 is Samuel’s own command, but from God. When Samuel speaks as God’s prophet his commands – in this case the command to wait 7 days – are God’s commands. This is what the language of verse 13 is referring to, Samuel’s exercise of his prophetic office.

⁵³ Reed, “Biblical Worship.”

⁵⁴ Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

⁵⁵ Reed, “Biblical Worship.”

⁵⁶ Duguid, “Worship,” p. 149.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

2 Samuel 6:6-7 & 1 Chronicles 15:13-14 – Uzzah Touches the Ark

II Sam. 6:6-7

⁶ And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. ⁷ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.

I Chron. 15:13-14

¹³ Because you did not carry it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not seek him according to the rule.” ¹⁴ So the priests and the Levites consecrated themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD, the God of Israel.

Stricter Interpretation: The Stricter camp’s interpretation of this incident is quite simple: Uzzah participated in unlawful worship by reaching out to steady the ark while it was being improperly moved on a cart instead of on poles carried by Levites. As Williamson says, Uzzah died “because they failed to limit themselves to what God had expressly commanded.”⁵⁹ David’s first attempt at moving the ark, therefore, ended in failure, as David recognizes himself in I Chronicles 15:13. When they did things correctly, God blessed their efforts (15:26).

Looser Interpretation: I found nothing in the literature addressing this from their perspective.

Analysis: The incident with Uzzah is instructive, to be sure. The Stricter position fails to make its point, however, in that here again we have a clear violation of a command of God. Uzzah is not adding to God’s commands, he is a participant in the whole community’s disobedience. He also personally disobeys by reaching out to touch the ark, which would defile it.⁶⁰

2 Chronicles 26:16-21 – Uzziah Offers Incense

16 But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. 17 But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor, 18 and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, “It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God.” 19 Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar of

⁵⁹ Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

⁶⁰ There is nothing in the example of Uzzah that doesn’t fit in with the principle “if it isn’t forbidden it is allowed.”

incense. 20 And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead! And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out, because the LORD had struck him. 21 And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land.

Stricter Interpretation: King Uzziah took upon himself a priestly function. Though his motives may have been sincere, “such motivation was no excuse for going beyond the boundaries of worship prescribed by God.”⁶¹ Azariah and other priests courageously intervene, and though rebuffed by the king who continues in his rebellious act, they are “vindicated by the intervention of God, for the King was instantly smitten with leprosy, as a sign of God’s judgment. Again, it is clear that what is not commanded by God is an abomination to him.”⁶² So, here again, like Nadab and Abihu, we have a powerful picture of how serious God is about being worshipped as He commands.

Looser Interpretation: Again, on this issue I found nothing written by the Looser camp.

Analysis: Williamson’s conclusion quoted above overstates the case. **What is clear is that violating God’s commands for worship, as Uzziah clearly did, is forbidden. What is not clear or necessarily inferred from the text is any implication for worship that is neither expressly commanded nor forbidden.**

Perhaps, as in the case of Uzzah prior to this, the reason there are no Looser camp commentaries on these passages is that they clearly represent violations of God’s commands. The Looser camp, as I read them, does not disagree with the Stricter camp that we must obey God’s commands, nor should they be disobeyed. The examples of Uzzah and King Uzziah do nothing to advance the Stricter understanding of the regulative principle, since they are clear violations of what God commanded, rather than additions for which there is no command or approved example.

II Chronicles 28:1-5a & Jeremiah 7:30-31 (also 19:5) – Ahaz’s Unauthorized Sacrifices

II Chron. 28:1-5a

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. And he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done,² but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made metal images for the Baals,³ and he made offerings in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom and burned his sons as an offering, according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD drove out before the people of Israel.⁴ And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.⁵ Therefore the LORD his God gave him into the hand of the king of Syria, who defeated him and took captive a great number of his people and brought them to Damascus.

⁶¹ Reed, “Biblical Worship.”

⁶² Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

Jeremiah 7:30-31

³⁰ *“For the sons of Judah have done evil in my sight, declares the LORD. They have set their detestable things in the house that is called by my name, to defile it.*

³¹ *And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.*

Jeremiah 19:5

⁵ *and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind—*

Stricter Interpretation: In II Chronicles the account of Ahaz’ sinful offering of his sons as sacrifices is recorded. Jeremiah, in chapters 7 and 19, reveals the Lord’s condemnation of this detestable practice. The Stricter camp sees Jeremiah’s prophecy against Ahaz as not only the condemnation of sinful practices that God has forbidden – idol worship, altars to false gods, sacrifice of children – but as sinful innovation in worship. The latter interpretation is guided by the phrases “which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind” in chapter 7 and “which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind” in chapter 19. Williamson connects the primary reason for God’s condemnation to the phrase in chapter 7, concluding, “How could God make it any clearer? Worship which has not been commanded by God is therefore forbidden.”⁶³ Sikkema echoes this theme:

God does not condemn them for doing something against His commands (although it was against His commands) but that He did not command it and it did not even enter His mind. This shows that God is offended by the Judeans inventing their own worship and using their minds in devising worship rather than following the commands and Word of God to determine what pleases him.⁶⁴

Schwertley, responding to what he considers unfair presentation of the “regulativist”⁶⁵ interpretation of these passages by Schlissel, first points out that regulativists acknowledge that Ahaz was violating a clear command. He then asks:

If God in these passages is merely condemning violations of His law and is not also reminding the covenant people of God of the important principle that human innovations in worship are forbidden, then why is the phrase ‘which I commanded them not’ in these passages at all?⁶⁶

⁶³ Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

⁶⁴ Sikkema, “Understanding.”

⁶⁵ “Regulativist” and “non-regulativist” are terms found in contemporary literature on the RPW. I chose not to use them in this paper because I do not believe that those who oppose a strict understanding of the RPW deny the regulative principle as a whole. Rather, their understanding is broader in its application. It would therefore be inaccurate to call that camp “non-regulativist.”

⁶⁶ Schwertley, “Critique.”

Looser Interpretation: The Looser interpretation limits God's condemnation to that which was expressly forbidden: idol worship and sacrificing their sons in the fire. They interpret the "I did not command" phrases as referring to explicit prohibitions, e.g., the command not to offer children as burnt offerings in Leviticus 18:21.⁶⁷ As in the case of Nadab and Abihu (see above), Duguid points out that this phrase, per Jouon, is pointing to a specific prohibition.⁶⁸

Analysis: Like Nadab and Abihu, this situation boils down to an understanding of the language behind the condemnations in Jeremiah 7 and 19. If Jouon is correct, and the grammatical principle is being correctly applied, then this example is but another case of the Stricter camp trying to extend the interpretation beyond its core meaning.

The force of the Looser camp's argument is not quite as strong here as it is with Nadab and Abihu. In these passages we do indeed have the added words "nor did it come into my mind." This could be understood as opening up the interpretation the Stricter camp argues for. After all, if it didn't enter God's mind it must be something He didn't command. The problem is that the examples of Ahaz' sin are all things that God did give commands about, so they must have entered His mind in some way or another. So then we must ask Schwertley's question – why is this phrase in these passages at all? Frame offers one answer, referenced above, **that the language emphasizes the reality that these actions are "totally contrary to the holiness and righteousness of God."**⁶⁹ That is a reasonable possibility. Schwertley's is a question well worth investigating. It may or may not bolster the Stricter position. Even if it can be shown that the phrase "nor did it enter my mind" is referring to lack of commands from God, the force of the passage is still that Ahaz violated the direct commands of God. All that the Stricter camp would gain is the possibility that Ahaz was inventing worship, not the certitude that is expressed in their writings.

NT Texts Used by the Stricter Camp to Defend Their Interpretation of the RPW

Mark 7:1-9 & Matthew 15:1-9 – Jesus Condemns the Traditions of Men

Mark 7:1-9

Now when the Pharisees gathered to him, with some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem, ² they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands that were defiled, that is, unwashed. ³ (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they wash their hands properly, holding to the tradition of the elders, ⁴ and when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they wash. And there are many other traditions that they observe, such as the washing of cups and pots and copper vessels and dining couches.) ⁵ And the Pharisees and the scribes asked

⁶⁷ See both Schlissel, "All I Really Need" and Duguid, "Worship," p. 70.

⁶⁸ See footnotes 42 and 43.

⁶⁹ Frame, "Some Questions."

him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?"⁶ And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written,

"This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁷ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'

⁸ You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men."

⁹ And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition!

Matthew 15:1-9

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." 3 He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," 6 he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. 7 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

⁸ "This people honors me with their lips,
but their heart is far from me;
⁹ in vain do they worship me,
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

Stricter Interpretation: Reed provides a thorough interpretation of these passages:

The scribes and Pharisees held to the traditions of their fathers so zealously, that their traditional practices had, in many respects, superceded (sic) the precepts of the Old Testament...the Jews sought to supplement the biblical precepts with practices of their own devising. Jesus rebukes them for substituting man-made duties in the place of God-given responsibilities...their argument was merely a pretence (sic) for neglecting family duties prescribed in the law...[Christ's] rebuke [Matt. 15:8-9] clearly condemns the notion that mankind (or the church as an institution) has the right to institute new modes of worship and religious service.⁷⁰

Williamson gives two reasons why Jesus condemns the Pharisees: "First, there was a setting aside of what God had commanded, and second, there was a diligent observance of what God had not commanded at all, but was only from man-made tradition."⁷¹ Schwertley argues that this is an example of the application of the regulative principle outside of ceremonial worship (thus showing its applicability to all worship, contra Schlissel who attempts to restrict it to ceremonial worship). "Jesus condemned the Pharisees for adding ritualistic washings to the law that *occurred in the home and not the temple.*"⁷²

Looser Interpretation: Gore gives two slightly different reasons why Jesus condemns the Pharisees. "Clearly, the problem is twofold – (1) the Pharisees have elevated human commands above God's

⁷⁰ Reed, "Biblical Worship."

⁷¹ Williamson, "Scriptural Regulative Principle."

commands, and (2) they have hypocritically broken God's commands."⁷³ Thus, Gore believes the "two-fold message" of these passages is that the regulative principle should seek only "to limit the imposition of human commands, or subordinate them to God's commands."⁷⁴

Mattson, contra Schwertley and in support of Schlissel regarding Matthew 15, argues that, "A plain reading of the passage shows Jesus condemning the tradition of the elders of not *keeping God's fifth commandment* by executing rebellious children!"⁷⁵ The context of Matthew 15:13 shows, according to Mattson, that the problem was that the Pharisees were avoiding their obligation to their parents by appealing to a tradition that allowed them to give that gift to God instead.

Analysis: Both camps agree that the Pharisees are breaking God's command to honor their parents. The Stricter interpretation is that the second violation was the required observance of tradition that God had not commanded at all. The Looser interpretation is that **this wasn't just observance of a tradition not commanded, but elevating that observance to greater importance than obeying God's command.**

Part of the disagreement here may stem from the use of two parallel passages. The Mark passage seems to support the Stricter view, while the Matthew passage seems to support the Looser view. The language of the Matthew passage is an interesting reversal of the language earlier in Matthew in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. There Jesus indicates the primacy of His commands with the formula, "You have heard it said...but I say..." In Matthew 15 we see a similar formula, "God said...but you say..." This indicates that Jesus recognizes that the Pharisees are putting their own traditions above what God has said in Scripture. The language of Mark (letting go...holding on) is not as strong.

Historically in Reformed interpretation of Scripture, the clearer passages are allowed to interpret the less clear passages. To take another example from Mark and Matthew, in Mark 10:11 Jesus plainly prohibits divorce and remarriage. But in the parallel passage in Matthew 19:9 Jesus includes an exception to the rule, "except for marital unfaithfulness." If we apply the same interpretive technique to the passages under consideration here, the Matthew text should be allowed to interpret the Mark text. In that case, Gore's assessment of the situation is better. The Pharisees have elevated their own traditions above the commands of God. **This leaves open the possibility, as he points out, that human traditions that are subordinate to God's commands, or in harmony with them, are acceptable. That is, however, a possible interpretation, not a necessary conclusion.**

John 4:22-26 – Worship in Spirit & Truth

²² *You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.* ²³ *But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such*

⁷² Schwertley, "Critique."

⁷³ Gore, "Pursuit," p. 261.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 261, emphasis in original.

⁷⁵ Mattson, Brian G. "A Reply to Rev. Brian Schwertley," Internet article at messiahnyc.org/a_reply.htm.

people to worship him. ²⁴ *God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.* ²⁵ *The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things."* ²⁶ *Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."*

Stricter Interpretation: Reed relates this passage to the dispute between Samaritans and Jews over the proper place to worship, and then points out that "Jesus responds by placing the dispute within a larger context: the nature of true worship."⁷⁶ The essence of true worship embraces both piety and knowledge. True worshipers worship in spirit and in truth. "God's sovereignty in salvation extends not only to the manner in which elect are saved, but also to the purposes for which they are redeemed."⁷⁷ That purpose is to worship in spirit and truth. The use of the phrase "true worshipers" implies the existence of false worshipers. Reed concludes, "Therefore, we must examine our own worship, that we may discern to which class we belong."⁷⁸

Williamson quotes extensively from Calvin's Commentaries concluding with the observation that, "Those who want to worship the true God acceptably must do so in spirit and in truth – because that, and only that, is what He has commanded."⁷⁹ In a footnote to the preceding quote Williamson quotes John Murray's "The Worship of God in the Four Gospels:" "The sanction enunciated ('in spirit and truth') excludes all human invention and imagination and warns us against the offense and peril of offering strange fire unto the Lord."⁸⁰

Sikkema adds: "Our worship must be faithful to the nature of our God and so is to be done *in spirit and truth* (verse 24). Thus we are to seek Him in worship in His ways only and to find our rule for worship in the Bible alone."⁸¹

Looser Interpretation: On this passage I found no specific comments from the Looser view.

Analysis: The Looser camp's understanding of the RPW would agree with everything the representative Stricter writers say, except for John Murray's exclusion of "all human invention and imagination." Without quoting extensively from Williamson's citations of Calvin, it is sufficient to observe that the import of those citations is that Calvin stressed that we should obey God's commands in worship. Calvin is concerned that "men do nothing but err when they are guided by their own opinion with the word or command of God" and claims that "it is simply unbearable that the rule laid down by Christ should be violated." Certainly we are to be subject to God's commands. Once again that is not the debate between the Stricter and Looser camps.

⁷⁶ Reed, "Biblical Worship."

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Williamson, "Scriptural Regulative Principle."

⁸⁰ Ibid., footnote 17.

⁸¹ Sikkema, "Understanding," italics in original.

The crux of the debate in relation to this passage is the command that worship should be in spirit and truth. The Stricter camp heeds Calvin's warning and concludes, as per Murray, that there should be no human innovation in worship whatsoever. The propensity to err rules out the possibility that men can produce anything "in truth." But the Looser camp, I believe, would also heed Calvin's warning but come to a different conclusion. Believers are in a state of grace, and therefore have the ability to reason properly (because of the renewing of their minds) and derive true spiritual worship from proper Biblical examples and good and necessary inference. Because men tend toward error all innovations (if they can really be called that) must be subject to the Word of God. So, a man may compose a hymn, but the hymn must be judged according to Scripture. If it is in conformity with Scripture then it can be used. If not then it is to be rejected. It seems inconsistent with our doctrine of sanctification and renewal into the image of Christ to categorically rule out human innovation. We do, after all, allow men to compose prayers and sermons in their own words, always evaluating them in the light of Scripture. Such allowance should be possible with other elements of worship as well, deriving all things from Scriptural command, example or inference.

Galatians 4:9-11 – Paul's Warning about Special Days

⁸ Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? ¹⁰ You observe days and months and seasons and years! ¹¹ I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.

Stricter Interpretation: The Stricter interpretation that arises out of this passage is as follows: 1) special holy days are an invention of man, 2) Paul in this passage warns against them, therefore we should avoid them, 3) special holy days are not commanded in Scripture for believers, 4) those special days that are commanded in Scripture are OT shadows that have passed away in Christ, and 5) if those special days that were commanded have passed away and are not to be observed, how much more so should we not observe days for which we have no command?

Williamson illustrates the above conclusion in his analysis of Galatians 4. Observing that the Galatians were probably observing OT special days, he asks, "If that is the case, it only makes the force of the Apostle's objection all the stronger when applied to special days that God never commanded."⁸² Williamson notes that the Galatians' continued celebration of days that pointed forward to Christ implies that they were still waiting for Him – after He had already come! Williamson references Paul's instruction in Romans 14 in concluding that, in deference to weak believers, individuals should not be denied membership in the church because they observe special days. But in Galatia the church as a body "had

⁸² Williamson, "Scriptural Regulative Principle."

yielded to the demands of 'the weak' by observing" special days.⁸³ Paul reacts strongly to this. "It is one thing, in other words, to tolerate weakness in individual members. But it is something else again when this errant view is imposed on the whole congregation."⁸⁴

Looser Interpretation: Schlissel argues that Paul could not have been arguing against observing special days, since the Apostle himself had observed Jewish rituals in Jerusalem to put to rest certain concerns among the Jewish Christians there.⁸⁵ In fact, he argues, Jewish Christians were never told they shouldn't observe Jewish special days. "Rather, the problem was that some were teaching that Gentiles could not be saved unless they, too, observed all the Jewish ceremonial distinctives."⁸⁶ According to Schlissel, Paul is writing to Gentile Christians, warning them against adopting Jewish practices as a means of salvation. He concludes:

Therefore, Galatians 4:10 is seeking to keep the Gentiles – not from "day-observance," as if they'd offend God by honoring Christ's birth (for example), but rather – from being caught up in a system which could easily cause them to overlook the very core difference of the New administration: the gospel is now global, not local. You do not have to become a Jew to become a Christian. That's the issue. None other.⁸⁷

Duguid ties his understanding of special days for the Church to redemptive history:

However, it would seem to me that it is not inappropriate for Christians to agree together to focus in a special way at certain times of the year on certain aspects of *Christian redemptive-history*, such as the incarnation, the death and resurrection of Jesus, his ascension into heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit and the future return of the Lord. If, as the Puritans admitted, it is appropriate for the church (or the state!) to appoint special days of thanksgiving or fasting in response to the 'extraordinary dispositions of God's providence' in our day and generation, is it not also appropriate to set apart a day to celebrate God's ordinary means of providence (such as Thanksgiving) and God's great work of salvation in Christ (such as Christmas and Easter)?⁸⁸

Analysis: Paul's warning to the Galatian Christians in this text is well taken. Even if the letter is addressing Gentiles who are turning to Jewish ceremonial days as a means of salvation, there is application for us today. We, too, should avoid anything, whether observance of a day or some special ritual, that implies that our salvation is something to be earned. I agree here with Schlissel that this is the thrust of Paul's warning. Duguid's connection of this passage to redemptive history is instructive. In the light of the New Covenant and the teaching of Scripture we see the old feasts and celebrations of Israel as pointing forward to the redemptive work of Christ even as they pointed backward in commemoration of God's mighty acts in saving Israel. While it is certainly true that these feasts are a shadow that has passed away, they by example teach that regular commemoration of the saving acts of God is valid worship. Remembering Christ's birth, His First Coming, should also point us forward to His Second

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Schlissel, "All I Really Need."

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Coming. Remembering Christ's death and resurrection should also remind us to look forward to the final resurrection of the dead, of which Christ is the firstfruits.

Duguid, in a footnote on his discussion of special days, says that in light of Romans 14 he would not impose such celebrations as a required religious observance. This is a proper recognition of the liberty we have in Christ, something that the regulative principle was and is meant to protect.

Colossians 2:20-23 – Paul's Warning about Will Worship

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)— according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

Stricter Interpretation: In Colossians, Paul is warning against things that “have an appearance of wisdom” through “self-imposed worship.” His clear warning is not to be bound by them, since we have died with Christ to the things of this world. Therefore, man-made additions to worship, even if they appear wise, are a willful imposition of worship regulations that are forbidden for believers. Williamson concludes succinctly: “Here again, we have an application of the principle which says ‘what is not commanded is therefore forbidden.’”⁸⁹ Sikkema quotes from Calvin's Institutes, Book IV, Chapter 10, section 17: “The Lord cannot forget himself, and it is long since he declared that nothing is so offensive to him as to be worshipped by human inventions.”⁹⁰ He also quotes from Matthew Henry's commentary:

Subjection to ordinances or human appointments in the worship of God is highly blamable, and contrary to the freedom and liberty of the gospel. The imposition of the human ordinances is invading the authority of Christ, the head of the church, and introduces another law when Christ has abolished the old ones.⁹¹

Reed writes that “a key to understanding the root problem with these ordinances is in the expression ‘will worship’ (Col. 2:23), which is somewhat cryptic to modern readers.”⁹² “Will worship” refers to the idea that these seemingly wise ways of worshipping are “chosen by man (according to the will of man), not means chosen by God.”⁹³ Reed concludes:

This is the essence of corrupt worship, when men seek to establish their own forms of religious service. We might call it free-will worship, since the advocates of man-made worship are claiming that men possess the right (or freedom) to institute acceptable means to worship God.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Duguid, “Worship,” p. 136.

⁸⁹ Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

⁹⁰ Sikkema, “Understanding.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Reed, “Biblical Worship.” “Will worship” is translated as “self-imposed worship” in the NIV.

⁹³ Ibid.

Looser Interpretation: Gore also sees the Greek word (*ethelothrēskia*) translated as “will worship” as key to understanding this passage. The word is connected to the particular heresy of the Colossian church, particularly the nature of that heresy’s influence on worship. Gore lists worship of angels (v. 18), asceticism (vs. 21-22), and Judaizing elements (vs. 16-17) as the elements of incorrect Colossian worship. He concludes that “the reference to our concerns is clear, namely, that “true worship is continually challenged by man-exalting innovations.”⁹⁵ In this Colossian worship Gore sees both “positive teachings that add human elements to worship, and...man-made, prohibitions which censure things God has rendered clean.”⁹⁶ The positive teachings that add to worship would be the introduction of angel-worship and asceticism. The prohibitions of things God has rendered clean would be the Judaizing elements. Gore, then, believes this passage to be teaching “that any human innovation in worship that is contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture, either by forbidding that which is allowed or requiring that which is not commanded, is unacceptable.”⁹⁷

Analysis: Both interpretations understand “will worship” to be worship made up by men according to what they want. Both interpretations understand that this is at the heart of what Paul is condemning. The difference is that the Stricter camp views this worship as essentially “Christian” in nature, while the Looser view is that the worship is essentially pagan in nature. The Stricter view is basically an assumption, or must be since there is no real attempt to positively show that the worship being condemned is Christian. And this assumption leads logically to the conclusion that believers must not add anything of their own desire or invention to worship. Gore, however, delves into the context of the passage and does demonstrate well, in my opinion, that the worship being condemned is fundamentally pagan. To the extent that it has penetrated the Colossian church it is a Christian heresy. As such we would expect such worship to be condemned, even if it has an appearance of wisdom.

Therefore the value of this passage for the Stricter interpretation of the regulative principle is minimal, at best. As Christians we expect pagan worship to be condemned. Its very nature is to deny God and His commands. To conclude that what is not commanded is forbidden is, in this case, to state the obvious. Pagan worship is not only not commanded by God it is thoroughly forbidden in Scripture. Gore’s conclusion fits well with the heart of the problem and the broader message of Colossians, where Christ is exalted as firstborn of all creation, with all thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities created for Him. Outside pagan influence was being felt in the church, to the extent that it was being imposed. It forbade what should have been allowed and required what should have been avoided.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Gore, “Pursuit,” p. 263; quotes in original refer to footnote 124 of his thesis.

⁹⁶ Gore, “Pursuit,” p. 263.

⁹⁷ Gore, “Pursuit,” pp. 263-264.

Hebrews – OT Worship a Shadow

Stricter Interpretation: The Stricter camp’s approach is to interpret the book of Hebrews as a whole, deriving from the book’s major themes concepts that support a strict view of the RPW. The Stricter camp believes that Hebrews teaches that the OT Temple worship is a shadow that has passed away, being fulfilled in Christ. The character of OT worship was symbolic, pointing forward to Christ. Since Christ has come and fulfilled the types and shadows there is no need for symbolism. Embracing symbolism would be a return to shadows, embracing them when we already have the real with us – a step backward. Therefore there should be no new invented symbols in NT worship. Also, since OT symbols are obsolete they should not be used either.

Williamson calls the book of Hebrews, “among other things, an extended application of the regulative principle. It argues that the whole system of worship, commanded by God under the Mosaic administration of God’s covenant, is now obsolete (8:13).”⁹⁸ What we have in its place is the real thing. We don’t have copies of heavenly realities, but “the heavenly things themselves (9:23).”⁹⁹ Therefore the church should “live in the realm of heavenly realities, and not any longer in the realm of shadowy symbols.”¹⁰⁰ This means that “as believers under the New Covenant we are supposed to worship in the realm of ‘spirit and truth,’ not in the realm of the material and representational, as our Old Testament brothers and sisters did.”¹⁰¹ We are not at liberty to do as we please, but must rather shun innovations in worship. “If we dare to invent our own way of worship, when God has told us from heaven what He requires, our sin will be much greater than that of Israelites under the old covenant.”¹⁰²

Sikkema agrees with Williamson’s analysis, commenting that in Hebrews 12 believers are told “not to refuse Him who speaks,” and then quoting verse 28 of that chapter where “we are told to *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear* (or *offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe* [RSV]).”¹⁰³ Inventing our own worship incurs heavier punishment since this command from heaven tells us how to worship God. Verse 29 then warns that “our God is a consuming fire.” Sikkema concludes:

We must be sure that our worship is acceptable to God; we must be absolutely sure, beyond any doubt. When there is doubt, we must remove the element under doubt or use scripture to remove the doubt – or face God’s punishment.¹⁰⁴

Looser Interpretation: I found no Looser camp analysis of this question in the literature I surveyed.

⁹⁸ Williamson, “Scriptural Regulative Principle.”

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Sikkema, “Understanding,” italics in original.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Analysis: I am not convinced by the Stricter camp's interpretation of Hebrews. It is true that OT symbols pointed forward to Christ. But that they are fulfilled does not necessarily mean that they are done away with. Christ, after all is both the Lamb of God in OT sacrifices, and the Lamb of God in Revelation. The Temple itself was a figure of Christ, the place where the Holy God dwelt among His people, pointing to the time when Jesus, God With Us, would come and dwell with His people. But that symbolism doesn't completely disappear with Christ, but is transformed so that now the people of God, believers in Christ, are themselves His body and the Temple of the Lord. Christ is still with us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The OT symbols pointed forward to Christ's coming. But that Christ came once is not the end of His coming, for He has promised to come again. The consuming fire of judgment in the OT is the same consuming fire who will come in the day of final judgment.

I am particularly troubled by Williamson's assertion that the material and representational are not for our worship today. What of the sacraments? Christ gave us two physical symbols, one of water and the other of bread and wine, "material" signs that "represent" heavenly realities. If Williamson's argument is as narrow as he wants it to be that seems to imply an end to the sacraments.

Like some of the other texts that have no response in the literature I surveyed, I am tempted to believe that the reason the Stricter argument from Hebrews isn't addressed is that it overstates its case, and appears to do so quite clearly. Sikkema's quotes from Hebrews 12 fit comfortably with the less strict, Looser camp's approach to the regulative principle – that what is acceptable includes those worship elements that can be deduced by good and necessary inference from Scripture.

Other Texts for Consideration

Note: in this section I will generally give the Looser view first, since typically these examples are proposed by them as counter-examples to the Stricter camp's understanding of the regulative principle. The presentation will be less structured, since the written material is generally not as abundant as with the previous Biblical texts.

Matthew 26:17-30 – Jesus Celebrating the Passover

¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹ And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" ²³ He

answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me."²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you,²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Schlissel summarizes the Looser interpretation of Jesus' participation in the Passover well. He writes, "Jewish and Christian scholars alike recognize that, 'The Bible includes extensive discussions of Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread; however, these descriptions do not correspond with later observances of the holiday.'"¹⁰⁵ Strict application of the RPW would mean that nothing should have been added to God's precise commands for the Passover. "Yet that is exactly, and indisputably, what happened."¹⁰⁶ Schlissel observes that the NT era Passover included wine, despite no positive command for it in Scripture. Not only did it include wine, it mandated four separate cups of wine over the course of the entire meal.

Schlissel is concerned in his analysis with only the wine, but it may be observed also that there was no provision for reclining at the table (Matt. 26:20) – a violation of the command to eat with feet shod, standing with staff in hand.

Schwertley responds to Schlissel's argument by asserting that there is no evidence that Jesus and His disciples took part in a Jewish Seder. Drinking wine, according to Schwertley is a necessity.¹⁰⁷ However, Paul's use of the language of the Seder, calling the cup of the Lord's Supper the cup of thanksgiving in I Corinthians 10:16, is evidence that the Apostles and early church understood the connection of the Lord's Supper to elements of the Seder ritual. Further, we know that the rabbis took the prohibition of yeast during the Passover seriously. When the cups of wine were introduced, provision was made to kill the yeast. Mishna Pesahim 10:1 states that even the poorest in Israel must not have less than four cups of wine to drink, while Mishna Pesahim 7:13 mentions a "kettle, in which the water is warmed for mixing with the wine."¹⁰⁸ The warm water was mixed with the wine to kill any yeast that might remain in the wine after it fermented. Contrary to Schwertley's assertion, wine is not a necessity to satisfy thirst – water would suffice. But the wine was specifically instituted by the Jewish leadership, so the mention of wine along with the Passover in Matthew strongly suggests that Jesus and His disciples were,

¹⁰⁵ Schlissel, "All I Really Need," quoting Baruch M. Bokser's *The Origins of the Seder*.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Schwertley, "Critique."

¹⁰⁸ This information and the quotes from the various Mishna were provided to me via an Internet discussion group.

in fact, celebrating the Seder ritual, as does Jesus' use of the third cup of wine – the cup of thanksgiving – to institute the Lord's Supper.

The implications of this are very important for a proper understanding of the RPW. The Stricter view would not allow any innovations to the Passover celebration for such new rituals would be inherently sinful. But the evidence shows that Jesus did, in fact, celebrate a Passover meal that included the added rituals. This leaves only two possible conclusions. Either Jesus sinned by participating in unauthorized worship innovations or a strict interpretation of the RPW is wrong. The former is clearly out of the question. Therefore the strict understanding of the RPW cannot stand.

Luke 4:16-21 – Jesus in the Synagogue

¹⁶ *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.*

¹⁷ *And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,*

¹⁸ *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,*

¹⁹ *to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*

²⁰ *And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Schlissel argues that there are no explicit commands in Scripture regarding synagogue worship, even if the origin of the synagogue is traced back to Moses. He concludes that synagogue worship is an example, then, of unregulated worship. As with Passover above, Jesus' participation in synagogue worship “as was His custom” is either a sinful violation of the regulative principle, or the RPW must be modified.¹⁰⁹

Schwertley responds that there are plenty of Scripture passage that by good and necessary inference support synagogue worship and its elements. Schwertley argues further that Jesus' mere participation shows divine approval for synagogue worship, even if Scriptural support for such worship did not exist. (One wonders if Jesus had bowed down to Satan during His temptation whether that would constitute an approved example for worship.) Most startling of all, Schwertley claims “based on the analogy of Scripture (Scripture cannot contradict itself and is its own best interpreter) and the clear need of divine warrant, it is assumed that historical examples that are not accompanied by explicit commands are based on some prior revelation that did not make it into the canon.”¹¹⁰ This is truly a remarkable claim. On the one hand the Stricter camp requires clear commands from Scripture to justify a worship

¹⁰⁹ Schlissel, “All I Really Need.”

¹¹⁰ Schwertley, “Critique.”

practice; on the other they assume that examples without prior command are based on tradition. This is inconsistent – both positions cannot be true. The problem is that writers from the Stricter camp seem to choose which argument to use depending on the situation. Schwertley does a fine job in his paper of outlining the Scripture passages that by good and necessary inference support synagogue worship. But when the same type of reasoning is applied to a practice that the Stricter camp disagrees with the call goes out for an explicit command to justify the practice. Knowing that one can't be found, the Stricter camp wins by default. This lack of consistency is a frustrating aspect of reading defenses of a strict view of the RPW.

Here it is worth briefly mentioning a couple other traditions in Scripture: Purim and Chanukah. Purim was the feast established by the people of Israel themselves as a celebration of their salvation through Queen Esther. The establishment of Purim as a regular feast is recorded in the last half of Esther 9. Chanukah was a feast established during inter-testamental times, to celebrate the re-dedication of the Temple after it had been profaned by Antiochus Epiphanes. Like Purim, Chanukah is a feast that was established by the people, not by God.

Schlissel points to Purim as an example of human innovation in worship – and a major innovation at that -- that is not anywhere condemned or punished in Scripture. Opponents describe Purim as a national day of thanksgiving only, not worship, and therefore outside the bounds of the regulative principle. Schlissel finds this difficult to believe, since it suggests that the Israelites could remember and celebrate God's special deliverance of His people everywhere but in their places of worship to God.¹¹¹

John mentions Jesus' presence in Jerusalem at the time of the feast of Chanukah in chapter 10, verses 22 and following. Schlissel argues that in the same way that Jesus' presence at the wedding in Cana is an indication of his blessing on marriage, so also is His presence in Jerusalem during Chanukah an indication that He blesses that feast as well. This is a possible inference, but it is more likely that Jesus – without approving or disapproving the festival – used it as a springboard to teach about Himself.¹¹² In the end, Looser camp arguments pointing to Purim and Chanukah are not convincing.

Zechariah 7:2-7 & 8:19 – Traditional Jewish Fasts

Zech. 7:2-7

² Now the people of Bethel had sent Sharezer and Regem-melech and their men to entreat the favor of the LORD, ³ saying to the priests of the house of the LORD of hosts and the prophets, "Should I weep and abstain in the fifth month, as I have done for so many years?"

⁴ Then the word of the LORD of hosts came to me: ⁵ "Say to all the people of the land and the priests, When you fasted and mourned in the fifth month and in the seventh, for these seventy years, was it for me that you fasted? ⁶ And when you eat and when you drink, do you not eat for yourselves and drink for yourselves?"

⁷ Were not these the words that the LORD proclaimed by the former prophets, when

¹¹¹ Schlissel, "All I Really Need."

¹¹² Ibid.

Jerusalem was inhabited and prosperous, with her cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?”

Zech. 8:19

¹⁹ “Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.

Zechariah 7 and 8 mention four fasts that the Jews had established for themselves at regular times during the year – the 4th, 5th, 7th and 10th months. In Zechariah 7 the people inquire of God as to whether they should continue their fasting and mourning. God does not respond by condemning their innovation in worship. Instead, after calling on His people to act appropriately, in truth, He promises that a time will come when the four fasts, instead of being times of mourning will become “joyful and glad occasions and happy festivals for Judah.”¹¹³ If human innovation is always wrong, then these required annual fasts should have been punished, or condemned. Neither happened. God instead promises that they will be transformed from mourning to joy.

Numbers 9:6-13 and II Chronicles 30:1-4 & 15-20 – The “Second Chance” Passover

Numbers 9:6-13

⁶ And there were certain men who were unclean through touching a dead body, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day, and they came before Moses and Aaron on that day. ⁷ And those men said to him, “We are unclean through touching a dead body. Why are we kept from bringing the LORD's offering at its appointed time among the people of Israel?” ⁸ And Moses said to them, “Wait, that I may hear what the LORD will command concerning you.”

⁹ The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁰ “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If any one of you or of your descendants is unclean through touching a dead body, or is on a long journey, he shall still keep the Passover to the LORD. ¹¹ In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight they shall keep it. They shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. ¹² They shall leave none of it until the morning, nor break any of its bones; according to all the statute for the Passover they shall keep it. ¹³ But if anyone who is clean and is not on a journey fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the LORD's offering at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.

II Chron. 30:1-4, 15-20

Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem to keep the Passover to the LORD, the God of Israel. ² For the king and his princes and all the assembly in Jerusalem had taken counsel to keep the Passover in the second month – ³ for they could not keep it at that time because the priests had not

¹¹³ Ibid.

consecrated themselves in sufficient number, nor had the people assembled in Jerusalem – ⁴ and the plan seemed right to the king and all the assembly.

¹⁵ And they slaughtered the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month. And the priests and the Levites were ashamed, so that they consecrated themselves and brought burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. ¹⁶ They took their accustomed posts according to the Law of Moses the man of God. The priests threw the blood that they received from the hand of the Levites. ¹⁷ For there were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves. Therefore the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone who was not clean, to consecrate it to the LORD. ¹⁸ For a majority of the people, many of them from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than as prescribed. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, “May the good LORD pardon everyone ¹⁹ who sets his heart to seek God, the LORD, the God of his fathers, even though not according to the sanctuary’s rules of cleanness.” ²⁰ And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people.

Duguid presents these “second chance” Passovers as examples of God’s leniency in regard to His own regulations for worship:

The forms of worship are made for man and not man for the forms of worship. The Lord remains Lord, able to change the rules and permit exceptions as he chooses. Yet on the other hand God is the one who permits and defines exceptions. The people are not free to celebrate the Passover at any time they choose, only on the 14th day of the first or second month. And they are not free to miss the first Passover because they don’t feel in the mood; they must have a valid reason. But for those who do have a valid reason, who are not seeking to rebel against God’s authority or to ignore it, there are exceptions made, irregular ways of doing things.¹¹⁴

Duguid’s analysis of these “second chance” Passovers is an excellent example of a Looser understanding of the RPW. Rather than a strict view that would likely exclude any variation from or innovation to worship, the broader approach allows variation while still leaving God in control.

1 Samuel 21:4-6 and Matthew 12:1-8 – David and the Showbread

1 Samuel 21:4-6

⁴ And the priest answered David, “I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women.” ⁵ And David answered the priest, “Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?” ⁶ So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

¹¹⁴ Duguid, “Worship,” p. 123.

Matthew 12:1-8

At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry, and they began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. ² But when the Pharisees saw it, they said to him, "Look, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath."³ He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 Or have you not read in the Law how on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? 6 I tell you, something greater than the temple is here. 7 And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

Occasionally one will hear an appeal by the Looser camp to the case of David eating the showbread, which is for God only, and lawfully could only be eaten by the priests, as an example of a violation of the RPW. This is a possible interpretation but not likely the best one. Barrow points out that, besides being a "hard case" (and hard cases make bad law), David's eating of the bread is the lesser transgression compared to the transgression the priest would have committed had he not let David and his men eat.¹¹⁵ The former is ceremonial law, the latter moral law. The passage in Matthew seems to support this interpretation in Jesus' reference to the truth that God desires mercy more than sacrifice. So this is not a violation of the regulative principle, but rather a case study in moral priorities.

¹¹⁵ Barrow, Reg. "Doug Wilson's Five Questions on the Regulative Principle of Worship Answered," Internet article at www.swrb.com/newslett/actualInls/Doug5Qs.htm.

Intermezzo

Other Considerations

In this short section I want to briefly consider some other principles from Scripture that inform our understanding of the regulative principle. A full discussion of these other principles is beyond the scope of this paper, but they are important and deserve to be mentioned and briefly commented upon.

Sola Scriptura

Sola Scriptura, one of the fundamental affirmations of the Protestant Reformation, is the idea that Scripture alone is our only infallible source of faith and practice. Not only is it our only infallible source, but I Timothy 3:16 indicates that Scripture is fully sufficient for life and doctrine.

The Stricter camp interprets this principle's effect on the RPW as confirming the strict limitation on human innovation in worship. The argument is that any introduction of non-Scriptural innovations in worship is a denial of the sufficiency of Scripture. Therefore any worship element that is not commanded is prohibited.

The Looser camp would generally agree with the above reasoning, affirming *sola scriptura* and its relationship to the regulative principle. But here, as in other areas already examined, the RPW allows a broader understanding of what is allowed in worship. It is no denial of the sufficiency of Scripture to include worship practices that are derived from Scriptural example and proper inference from Biblical teaching.

Freedom of Conscience

This is an important concept in relation to the regulative principle. Historically the RPW was appealed to in reaction to the Church of England's attempts to dictate what kinds of worship should take place in its churches, and to strictly control that worship through highly regulated liturgies and rituals. The RPW claims that no rule can be made concerning worship without Scriptural support. Opponents of the Church of England's rules for worship saw the principle as a protection against the imposition of worship not authorized by Scripture, and as a guardian of the freedom of conscience belonging to each church to decide matters of worship within the bounds of Scripture.

This concept often is discussed today in relation to Paul's instruction about Christian liberty in Romans 14. Those in the Stricter camp claim that improper worship elements included in church services bind the conscience of those who disagree with those elements. Respecting the Christian liberty of each believer, then, means that only those elements of worship that can be conclusively demonstrated as Scriptural should be included in worship. Only Scripture can bind the conscience.

In general, the Looser camp would agree with this, though there is a variety of opinion. But the Looser view is that the Stricter approach is overly restrictive. There is the danger that in trying so hard not to offend, valid elements of worship could be excluded. **The warnings of Deuteronomy 4 and 12 apply here, too: nothing should be taken away from what is commanded. Also, we must not let ourselves be restricted in our worship by those whose consciences are overly sensitive. Potentially, anything could be banned from worship in that case.** How many consciences are offended by the clear preaching of the Gospel? Yet we do not eliminate preaching.

Covenant Relationship

Mention of the connection between God's covenants with Israel and Ancient Near Eastern treaties between kings and vassals has already been made. Scripture is clear that God's people are in a covenant relationship with Him. The coming of Christ inaugurates the promised and long awaited New Covenant. God is our God; we are His people. Christ mediates our relationship with the Father in His roles as prophet, priest and king.

This is a broad topic with many implications. The important one for immediate consideration here is that our worship ought to reflect this covenantal relationship with God. This means that He has the right to tell us how to worship Him, and we have the obligation to give Him that worship. Schlissel gives an outline of what this covenantal worship entails, provided to him by an Orthodox Christian Reformed pastor:

1. Covenant is relationship, and the relationship we are concerned with in worship is between the Covenant God (Triune) and His people. Worship, therefore, consists of communion between these two: God and His people.
2. As God initiates covenant, and covenant demands response, so worship basically consists of God speaking and His people responding.
3. Worship as a covenant body means every soul in the church (no ecclesiastical daycare centers for children) gathered as covenantal family units.
4. Worship in the New Covenant grows out of the Old and is characterized by immediacy because of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The vicarious character of Old order worship is removed, the congregation of the Lord not being dependent upon human mediators or priests.
5. The New Covenant brings the wonderful liberty of maturity.¹¹⁶

Covenant as applied to worship means, then, that we should be maturing in liberty. This doesn't mean that we can do what we please, but that as we mature and grow in Christ – a key promise of the New Covenant – we mature and grow in our understanding of worship. The renewal of our minds ought to make us able to rightly discern which elements of worship are Biblical and which are not.

One common theme in the Stricter camp's writings on the regulative principle is that if anything less than a strict view is held, if we allow men with their sinful reasoning prone to error and idolatry to

¹¹⁶ Schlissel, "All I Really Need."

introduce innovations in worship, then we are no better off than those still in allegiance to Rome, where innovation is the order of the day and worship is full of man-made ritual. Schlissel responds to this kind of thinking: "That such is our state by nature, we heartily agree. To think that such is our state by grace, however, turns grace into nothing."¹¹⁷

A counter-example might help illustrate. During the Reformation a common criticism by Rome of the doctrine of salvation by faith alone was that such a teaching would lead men to profess faith and then live any kind of ungodly life they chose. The Reformers properly responded to this accusation by pointing out that true faith inevitably produces good works. Just as salvation by faith alone is no slippery slope on the way to ungodly behavior, so also a broader understanding of the regulative principle is not a slippery slope on the way to ritualistic, superstitious worship practices. As Schlissel points out: "The solution that offset the fears of those alarmed over the proclamation of free grace was the proclamation of the whole counsel of God."¹¹⁸ Similarly the solution that offsets the fears of the strict Stricter camp over sliding into ritualistic, man-imposed worship is also the whole counsel of God.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Rondo

In this section I will attempt to examine the commonly practiced elements of worship in Presbyterian and Reformed churches to determine whether or not there is a Scriptural basis for such elements. The underlying guide is that of the regulative principle: either an explicit command or that which can reasonably be deduced from Scripture.

Greeting/Blessing

I could find no specific command in Scripture to include a Greeting or Blessing in the worship service (typically these are found at the beginning of the service).

Scriptural examples though, can be found in Paul's greetings to the churches at the open of his letters (see Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:3; II Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; Col. 1:2; I Thess. 1:1; II Thess. 1:2). Epistles from the other apostles follow this practice as well (see I & II Peter, II John, and Jude) as does John in Revelation 1:4-5. Such a greeting, then, seems appropriate as the people of God gather to worship and hear God's Word (as these letters were). Note also that the letters were read aloud in the churches (see Col. 4:16; I Thess. 5:27).

A particular feature of these greetings is the theme of "grace and mercy" being offered. Is this an echo of how God introduced Himself to the Israelites? – "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Invocation

Here again there is no specific command in Scripture to include an invocation as an element of worship, another item typically found at the beginning of the worship service.

Scriptural examples, however, can be found in Genesis 4:26 (where men began calling upon the name of the LORD), and in I Samuel 12:17 and I Kings 18:24, where the Samuel and Elijah, respectively, call upon the LORD in prayer. We are taught in Psalm 145:8 that God is near to those who call on Him. Calling upon the LORD is wise, particularly as one comes before Him in worship. And so the practice has been used in worship services as a prayer by the pastor on behalf of the people, inviting God to be present as they come before Him in worship.

Call to Worship

Also for the call to worship there is no specific command in Scripture for this element of worship. Our examples come from such texts as Psalms 95, 96 and 100 which contain clear calls to God's people to come and worship Him.

Singing

Scripture is full of commands to sing to God in worship (see especially Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Ps. 95; Ps. 96; Ps. 98; Ps. 100). There are also many Scriptural examples: Moses' and Miriam's songs in Exodus 15; David's song of thanks in I Chronicles 16; all of the Psalms; Mary's and Zechariah's songs in Luke 1; Simeon's song in Luke 2; a possible early Christian hymn in Philippians 2:6-11; and the songs contained in Revelation, chapters 4, 5 and 11.

This paper does not give ample room to discuss the entire debate, but I am in agreement with those who look at the Scriptural examples of songs and conclude that we may sing songs other than the Psalms in corporate worship. We should be sure that those songs reflect accurate biblical teaching. We also should be diligent to continue to sing the Psalms, regularly and often.

Scripture Readings

God's Word was to be read to the people (see Deut. 31:9-13; Neh. 8), and was a regular part of synagogue worship (see Luke 4:17-19; Acts 15:21). More pointedly, Paul instructed Timothy to publicly read Scripture (I Tim. 4:13).

Not only should Scripture reading be included as an element of worship, when God's people hear the Bible read, because it is God's Word, they should hear God speaking to them. In the public reading of Scripture God addresses and confronts His people directly, and His people are to respond to Him directly as well.

Confession of Faith

One of the ways by which God's people can respond to Him directly is by making a public profession of faith. That this is a proper element of worship can be found in the example of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple (see I Kings 8:33-35; II Chron. 6:24-26), where he mentions the people confessing the name of the LORD – i.e., confessing their faith in Him. Hebrews 13:15 calls upon the people of God to confess His name. Matthew 10:32-33 contain the words of Jesus affirming that whoever acknowledges Him before men, He will also acknowledge before His Father.

The confession can take many forms, and does in practice. The ancient Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed both contain essential truth that Christians in all times and places can – and should – affirm. In Presbyterian churches, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms are summaries of what we believe Scripture teaches, and are therefore also good for use in public confession.

Prayers

Both by command and example we have warrant for prayer in public worship. Paul gives Timothy instructions for including prayer in worship in I Timothy 2:1-8. An example of corporate prayer in the worship of the early church is found in Acts 2:42 (where it is tied to teaching, fellowship and the breaking of bread).

What kinds of prayers should we pray? Paul's list given to Timothy, "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings," is sufficiently broad to allow many kinds of prayers in our public worship.

Offerings

In I Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul instructs the church in Corinth to collect offerings on the first day of the week – the New Testament Sabbath day of worship. In Philippians 4:18 he connects these offerings to acts of worship, calling them "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God."

The story of the widow's offering in Mark 12:41-44 shows that giving offerings was part of Old Testament worship (see also Lev. 27; Num. 18; Deut 12; Deut 14; and others).

It is, therefore, entirely appropriate for God's people today, in public worship, to give offerings to God as an element of worship.

Sermon

Not only are the Scriptures valuable for instruction (see II Tim. 2:2, 3:16; Titus 1:9), but Paul specifically instructs Timothy to preach in both of his letters (see I Tim. 5:17; II Tim. 4:2). Examples of teaching/preaching as part of the worship of God's people can be found in Acts 2:42 (see above) and Acts 20:7 for the New Testament church, and as part of synagogue worship in Luke 4:20-22.

Preaching is a proclamation of God's Word – the pastor, in effect, speaking to God's people on God's behalf. It should be more exhortation than a bland, simple "message," or "teaching time." It is a vital part of worship, where God's people have an intimate encounter with their God who speaks to them.

Sacraments

Sacraments are given to us by Christ Himself, and He commands us to practice them. The instructions to baptize in, for example, Matthew 28:18-20 and for the Lord's Supper in Luke 22:19. The Lord gives further instruction on the Lord's Supper through Paul in I Corinthians 10:14-16 and 11:17-34. These latter indicate that Communion is a part of the public worship of God. Baptism is not tied specifically to public worship in Scripture, as it was done and can be done outside of public worship (see,

for example, the Ethiopian eunuch's baptism in Acts 8:36-39. It is appropriate, though, to baptize as part of the public worship of God, as baptism represents both a profession of faith (see above) and a vow (see below).

Benediction

A benediction or blessing is typically found at the end of the worship service, a way to offer or pronounce God's blessing on His people as they go out. There is no specific command to include a benediction in public worship, but like the greeting at the beginning of many of Paul's letters, can be found at the end of his letters (see Rom. 16:25-27; I Cor. 16:23; II Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:23-24; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; I Thess. 5:28; II Thess. 3:18). Hebrews, I Peter and Revelation all include final blessings as well. Here we have ample example for adopting the practice. Of course, there is also the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26, which is commanded to be practiced by Aaron and his sons, to put God's name on His people and to bless them.

Vows

There is no specific command in Scripture to include vows as part of worship. However, they are clearly illustrated as being part of worship in Psalm 22:25, Psalm 50:14, and Psalm 65:1.

Vows are promises before and to God, publicly made and witnessed by the people of God. In worship they occur in connection with baptisms, public professions of faith (new and renewed), ordinations, receiving new members, marriage services, etc.

Confession of Sin w/Assurance of Pardon (Absolution)

Confession of sin is typically accompanied by an assurance of pardon, or forgiveness in public worship. There is no specific command in Scripture to include these in worship. However, the confession can be understood as a kind of prayer for forgiveness, with the pardon being an appropriate word from the minister on God's behalf, reminding the believer of the forgiveness found through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. We may look for examples in both Psalm 51 and I John 1:9.

In Presbyterian churches, the confession and pardon are seen as preparatory for the Lord's Supper, giving opportunity for all of God's people to confess their sins to God, be reminded of His forgiveness in Christ, and come to the Table with a clear conscience (cf. Mark 11:25).

Church Discipline

Both Matthew 18:15-20 and I Corinthians 5:4-5 speak of disciplining members before the whole church. Jesus promises His own presence in this event (Matt. 18:20), where two or three are gathered in His name, and Paul makes it clear that discipline should take place before the whole assembly (I Cor. 5:4). So discipline, public discipline, as painful and difficult as it is, is a vital part of the public worship of God. It is crucial for bringing sinners to repentance and reconciliation with each other and with God Himself. Note also, that if taking vows before God is part of public worship, then dealing with those who break their vows is just as much an appropriate element of worship.

Votum, Introit, Collect, Sanctus, Sersum Corda

These various elements have no specific command, but look to Scriptural examples as validation for being included in the public worship of God.

- **Votum** – the Scriptural example is Psalm 124:8. The votum is used to thankfully acknowledge that all we have comes from God, and is typically used at the beginning of worship, either part of the call to worship or as the call to worship itself, to remind worshipers to be thankful before God as they come to worship Him.
- **Introit** – this is a type of song for which there is no specific command. In worship services where there is a formal procession or entry of the pastor and other worship leaders, the choir sometimes sings a short song, called an introit. Or in other situations the introit simply serves as a choral call to worship. See the above section on songs.
- **Collect** – this is a liturgical element with a long history. In essence it is a special type of prayer, often for a specific request, prayed together aloud by the whole congregation. See the above section on prayers.
- **Sanctus** – this is another very old liturgical element, mentioned in an old church documents dating to the early 2nd century. The Sanctus is typically sung, and is the words to Isaiah 6:3: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord...”
- **Sersum Corda** – another old liturgical element. It is typically a response on the part of the congregation. The pastor says, “Lift up your hearts to the Lord,” and the people respond, “We lift them up.” See Psalm 25:1, 86:4, and 143:8 for Scriptural examples. This is, in essence, a kind of call to worship – see above – or a call in the middle of the service to bring the people’s attention, once again, to God.

Other Considerations

There are other items that come up for debate and discussion besides the more common worship elements discussed above. Some of them are outlined below:

- Decorations and Symbols – Should the places we worship in be completely plain and bereft of any symbols or decorations? Or are there certain symbols and decorations acceptable? Please refer to the above discussion on the pattern given for the Tabernacle and Temple. If we accept the view that symbols not only look forward but also back to important biblical truths or events, then some symbols seem valid. (Do not forget, as well, that the sacraments include symbols: bread, wine, water). Some that are relatively easy to identify are the cross (see I Cor. 1:17; Gal 5:11, 6:12, 6:14), reminding us of Christ's sacrifice and His being raised from the dead; the dove (mentioned in all four gospels: Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; John 1:32), as a symbol of the Holy Spirit; the Lamb of God, as Jesus is identified in Scripture (first in John 1:29 & 36, and then repeatedly in Revelation, in chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19, 21, 22).
- Liturgical Year or Annual Cycle of Worship – How do we treat holidays like Christmas and Easter, or the observance of a liturgical calendar? Please see the discussions above on Jesus' participation and/or observance in synagogue worship and celebrations like Purim or Chanukah. If annual celebrations of the work of God for His people were appropriate in the Old Covenant, how much more are they appropriate in the New Covenant, a superior covenant to that of the Old?

I have written elsewhere on Esther and the institution of Purim, which I believe is not merely a civil celebration, but a new feast to be celebrated along with the feasts instituted by Moses. This is true for two reasons: 1) there are elements of shadow and substance pointing ahead to Christ in the book of Esther, which was arguably written and included in the Old Testament canon as a way to legitimize the celebration of Purim (see Appendix); 2) Purim, like the other Old Testament feasts, besides anticipating Christ looks back to the saving work of God on behalf of His people, clearly an important theme in Esther. If the people of God can, confirmed by inspired Scripture, institute a new feast to celebrate the work of God – and one whose context looks forward to Christ – then this is an example that allows the New Testament people of God to do the same.

- Posture – What should we do in worship: stand?, sit?, kneel?, bow down? Scripture describes God's people doing all these things in various situations. There are no specific commands for one or the other posture connected to one or another element of worship. Historically, Presbyterian and Reformed believers have rejected attempts by the Church to require certain postures at certain points in the worship service, as these were seen as idolatrous. A classic

example is kneeling before the elements of the Lord's Supper, as if worshiping them, not the One they represent. Which posture(s) we use in public are best considered a circumstance best determined locally, with care to avoid postures that appear to or may provoke idolatry.

- Testimonies – Some churches have included personal testimonies as parts of the worship service. There is no specific command in Scripture to do so, and examples appear to be non-existent as well. One possible justification for personal testimony in worship may be as a public profession of faith. However, the latter are typically seen as corporate rather than individual. Testimonies, as used in worship, tend to be overly individualistic, drawing attention to the person rather than to God. If used at all, extreme care should be exercised.
- Dance – Liturgical dance has become a popular element in many Evangelical worship services. Where do we find a Scriptural basis for doing this? The example appealed to in almost all cases is when David danced before the ark of the Lord as it was brought up to Jerusalem (II Sam. 6:14). However, this was a one-time event, not part of regularly scheduled public worship, not a part of any of God's commands related to the Temple, sacrifices, feasts, etc. To use this as justification for a regular element of public worship is to take the passage out of context and mis-apply it.
- Drama – Staged drama skits have also become a popular element in many Evangelical worship services. Here the typical appeal for justification is that it is just another method of teaching. Of course, there are many teaching methods – should they be used in public worship as well? There is no Scriptural justification for using drama in public worship.

Finale

To conclude, in light of all that precedes, a list of general principles to follow in applying the regulative principle of worship is provided.

General Principles

1. What we do in worship matters to God. Those who worship in ways not pleasing to God are punished, while those who worship in ways pleasing to God are commended.

See: Genesis 4:2b-7 (Cain/Abel); Leviticus 10 (Nadab/Abihu); 1 Samuel 13:9-14 (Saul); II Chronicles 26:16-21 (Uzziah); Mark 7:6-9 (Jesus condemns traditions of men); John 4:22-26 (Samaritan woman/worship in spirit and truth); Galatians 4:9-11 (warning about special days); Colossians 2:20-23 (warning about will worship)

2. We are to worship God the way He wants to be worshipped.

See: Exodus 20 & Deuteronomy 5 (1st/2nd Commandments); Deuteronomy 4:1-2 & 12:32 (do not add to or subtract from God's commands); John 4:22-26 (worship in spirit and truth); Exodus 31:2-11 & I Chronicles 28:11-18 (pattern in the Tabernacle and Temple according to God's explicit commands); Leviticus & Deuteronomy (various commands relating to Israel's worship)

3. God tells us how He wants to be worshipped in Scripture alone.

Sola Scriptura – Scripture is our only infallible rule of faith and practice; we have other rules, but they are fallible; only Scripture can bind our consciences.

4. Therefore, everything we do in worship should have Scriptural support, either by explicit command or by deriving our worship practice from Scriptural principles or examples. To worship in spirit and truth means both that we follow God's commands for worship and that we worship with the proper attitude of service and humility before Him.

Postlude

A Consideration of the Westminster Confession of Faith

Up until now I have deliberately not quoted the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) on the topic of worship. Too many discussions of worship in Presbyterian circles begin with the WCF and a particular interpretation of it. Once the relevant parts of the WCF have been quoted the author feels compelled to explain his understanding of them. This tends to paralyze objective analysis of Scripture since one is continually trying to prop up one's own understanding of what the WCF teaches by appealing to certain Scripture proofs, or by interpreting Scripture according to the WCF instead of the other way around. My desire in this paper has been to put the analysis of Scripture first and, Lord willing, do that analysis as objectively as possible. But since this is a discussion of Presbyterian worship, after all, the WCF deserves due consideration!

Chapter 21.1 of the Confession is the most direct statement about worship in the whole document and reads, in part:

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 Holy Scripture.¹¹⁹

Chapter 1 of the Confession concerns Scripture and its correct interpretation. Section 6 reads, in part:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture...and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and the government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.¹²⁰

Chapter 20 is concerned with Christian liberty. Section 2 takes up with a discussion of the conscience:

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are, in any thing, contrary to His Word; or beside it, in matters of faith, or worship.¹²¹

¹¹⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith, The: Together with The Larger Catechism and The Shorter Catechism with the Scripture Proofs* (Atlanta: Committee for Christian Education & Publications, PCA Bookstore, 1990).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Now the question is, *after* the lengthy examination of Scripture texts above, how do we understand what the WCF is saying about worship? I believe the Looser camp's broader understanding of the RPW is taught in these sections of the Confession. Chapter 21 gives the general rule, which is to be understood in light of the interpretive principles of Chapter 1.

The Stricter camp also claims that their view is taught in the Confession, even acknowledging the necessity of "good and necessary consequence." The problem with this acknowledgement is that it rarely surfaces in their interpretation of Scripture. Williamson's comment is not atypical: "I have never seen any exegetical proof that God wants us to produce our own hymns in order to sing them in worship instead of the inspired psalms He has provided."¹²² Isbell asks, "Why is it such a common feature of church life in our day that activities never required by God in the Scriptures are introduced into worship?"¹²³ Reed asserts that "the burden of proof rests upon the advocates of new hymnody to demonstrate that uninspired hymns are part of the divinely-revealed pattern for worship."¹²⁴ **Do these requirements – "proof," "required" and "burden of proof" – sound like "good and necessary consequence?"** Not to me.

One argument put forth in discussions about the Westminster Confession of Faith is that **Chapter 21 is referring to elements of worship – those things we are supposed to do in worship – and Chapter 1 is referring to circumstances of worship only** – those things that are involved in performing the elements, like what time the worship service should be, how many songs to sing, etc. Clearly Chapter 1 talks about circumstances of worship, but that doesn't limit the application of Chapter 1 to one part of worship whether elements, forms or circumstances,¹²⁵ since the relevant section starts off by referring to the "whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life." Worship is included in that "whole counsel," especially as a component of a believer's faith and life when he comes together with brothers and sisters for corporate, public worship on the Lord's Day. This means that elements of worship are in view in Chapter 1 of the WCF.

Final Thoughts

I believe that a broad understanding of the regulative principle has been shown to be supported by Scripture. The Westminster Confession of Faith also is consistent with a broader understanding. This broader understanding should not, and does not if properly applied, lead to the introduction of ritualistic, superstitious, or "Romish" worship practices. All of worship is governed by Scripture. We are guided by

¹²² Williamson, "Scriptural Regulative Principle."

¹²³ Isbell, Sherman. "Regulated Worship," Internet article at members.aol.com/RSISEBELL/worship.html.

¹²⁴ Reed, "Biblical Worship."

¹²⁵ See Pipa, Joseph. "Worship in Spirit and Truth," (review of John Frame's book of the same name), Internet article at pins.simplenet.com/articles/7/pipa.htm. Pipa quotes T. David Gordon: "Similarly, if we agree that prayers are to be offered (as elements), it is a 'circumstantial' consideration as to how many prayers we will have, and a 'formal' consideration as to which particular prayers to include (for instance, whether to pray 'The Lord's Prayer,' or not is a 'formal' consideration)."

specific Scriptural commands about worship, by examples of approved worship in Scripture, and by deduction from the whole counsel of God.

Presbyterians, because of our beliefs about election and predestination, and tied to our somewhat reserved, predictable worship services, have been given the tag, “the frozen chosen.” A part of this tag is also tied to an almost exclusive emphasis by those of a Stricter understanding of worship on what we cannot do in worship. A proper understanding of the regulative principle, though, including our obligations to obey Scripture and also our freedom within Scripture, not only teaches what we cannot do in worship, but also what God positively wants us to do in worship as well. An emphasis on the positive side and not just the negative would be helpful. If we can do that, in submission to Scripture and faithful to our Confession, then I believe that the “frozen chosen” can, and should, be “thawed by God.”

Coda

Appendices

1. Shadow and Substance in Esther

<u>Shadow</u>	<u>Substance</u>
1. Esther's three-day period of fasting began during the daylight hours of Nisan 14, the first day of Passover.	1. Jesus' three-day period of death began during the daylight hours of Nisan 14, the first day of Passover.
2. Fasting in general is identified with "humiliation" or "affliction." Esther's mourning and change into mourning clothes was also part of her fast, which may represent a temporary state of death.	2. Jesus' three-day period of physical death is identified as the period of His "humiliation" or "affliction." (See Phil. 2:8)
3. Esther's period of "affliction" ended on the third day, Nisan 16.	3. Jesus' period of "affliction" ended on the third day.
4. On concluding her fast (arising from her symbolic state of death), but before presenting herself to the king, Esther was clothed in royalty.	4. At the end of His three-day period of death, but before His self-presentation to the Father, Jesus was resurrected "in glory" (1 Cor. 15:20, 43).
5. Esther presented herself before the king, who accepted her into his presence.	5. Jesus, on the basis of His atoning sacrifice and death, entered into the Father's presence, and was accepted into His presence to sit at the right hand of God.
6. The result of Esther's acceptance by the king was the salvation of her people. The Gentiles also took part in this salvation (Esth. 8:17) through initiation (physical circumcision) into the community of faith.	6. The result of Jesus' acceptance by the Father is the salvation of His people, both the lost sheep of Israel, whose hearts are circumcised spiritually through faith in Him (Rom. 2:28-29), and the Gentiles through initiation (spiritual circumcision by faith, Col. 2:11) into the community of faith.

Taken from Michael Wechsler's article, "Shadow and Fulfillment in the Book of Esther" in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July-Sept., 1997.

2. "Worship" Word Study

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
Old Testament												
1	Gen. 2:5	X										
2	Gen. 2:15	X										
3	Gen. 3:23	X										
4	Gen. 4:2	X										
5	Gen. 4:12	X										
6	Gen. 14:4	X										
7	Gen. 15:13	X										
8	Gen. 15:14	X										
9	Gen. 18:2		X							X		
10	Gen. 19:1		X							X		
11	Gen. 22:5		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
12	Gen. 23:7		X							X		
13	Gen. 23:12		X							X		
14	Gen. 24:26		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
15	Gen. 24:48		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
16	Gen. 24:52		X				X			X	1	
17	Gen. 25:23	X										
18	Gen. 27:29	X	X							X		
19	Gen. 27:40	X										
20	Gen. 29:15	X										
21	Gen. 29:18	X										
22	Gen. 29:20	X										
23	Gen. 29:25	X										
24	Gen. 29:27	X										
25	Gen. 29:30	X										
26	Gen. 30:26	X										
27	Gen. 30:29	X										
28	Gen. 31:6	X										
29	Gen. 31:41	X										
30	Gen. 33:3		X							X		
31	Gen. 33:6		X							X		
32	Gen. 33:7		X							X		

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
33	Gen. 37:7	X								X		
34	Gen. 37:9	X								X		
35	Gen. 37:10	X								X		
36	Gen. 42:6	X								X		
37	Gen. 43:26	X								X		
38	Gen. 43:28	X								X		
39	Gen. 47:31	X				X		X		X	2	
40	Gen. 48:12	X								X		
41	Gen. 49:8	X								X		
42	Gen. 49:15	X										
43	Exod. 1:13	X										
44	Exod. 1:14	X										
45	Exod. 3:12	X				X		X	X		2	
46	Exod. 4:23	X				X			X		1	
47	Exod. 4:31		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
48	Exod. 5:18	X										
49	Exod. 6:5	X										
50	Exod. 7:16	X				X			X		1	
51	Exod. 8:1 (7:26)	X				X			X		1	
52	Exod. 8:20 (16)	X				X			X		1	
53	Exod. 9:1	X				X			X		1	
54	Exod. 9:13	X				X			X		1	
55	Exod. 10:3	X				X			X		1	
56	Exod. 10:7	X				X			X		1	
57	Exod. 10:8	X				X			X		1	
58	Exod. 10:11	X				X			X		1	
59	Exod. 10:24	X				X			X		1	
60	Exod. 10:26	X				X			X		1	
61	Exod. 11:8		X							X		
62	Exod. 12:27		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
63	Exod. 12:31	X				X		X	X		2	
64	Exod. 13:5	X										
65	Exod. 14:5	X										
66	Exod. 14:12	X										
67	Exod. 18:7		X							X		

	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
68	Exod. 20:5	X	X			X		X	X	X	2	
69	Exod. 20:9	X										
70	Exod. 21:2	X										
71	Exod. 21:6	X										
72	Exod. 23:24	X	X			X		X	X	X	2	
73	Exod. 23:25	X				X			X		1	
74	Exod. 23:33	X				X					1	
75	Exod. 24:1		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
76	Exod. 32:8		X		X		X	X		X	3	
77	Exod. 33:10		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
78	Exod. 34:8		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
79	Exod. 34:14		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
80	Exod. 34:21	X										
81	Lev. 18:21								X			
82	Lev. 25:39	X										
83	Lev. 25:40	X										
84	Lev. 25:46	X										
85	Lev. 26:1		X							X		
86	Num. 3:7	X										
87	Num. 3:8	X										
88	Num. 4:23	X										
89	Num. 4:24	X										
90	Num. 4:26	X										
91	Num. 4:30	X										
92	Num. 4:37	X										
93	Num. 4:41	X										
94	Num. 4:47	X										
95	Num. 7:5	X										
96	Num. 8:11	X										
97	Num. 8:15	X										
98	Num. 8:19	X										
99	Num. 8:22	X										
100	Num. 8:25	X										
101	Num. 8:26	X										
102	Num. 16:9	X							X			

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
103 Num. 18:6	X											
104 Num. 18:7	X											
105 Num. 18:21	X											
106 Num. 18:23	X											
107 Num. 22:31		X								X		
108 Num. 25:2		X								X		
109 Num. 25:3						X					1	Hebrew <i>tsamar</i> , to bind or join
110 Num. 25:5						X					1	Hebrew <i>tsamar</i> , to bind or join
111 Deut. 4:19	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	3	
112 Deut. 4:28	X					X			X		1	
113 Deut. 5:9	X	X				X		X	X	X	2	
114 Deut. 5:13	X											
115 Deut. 6:13	X							X	X		1	
116 Deut. 7:4	X								X			
117 Deut. 7:16	X								X			
118 Deut. 8:19	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
119 Deut. 10:12	X								X			
120 Deut. 10:20	X								X			
121 Deut. 11:13	X								X			
122 Deut. 11:16	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
123 Deut. 11:28									X			
124 Deut. 12:2	X					X			X		1	
125 Deut. 12:4					X	X	X				3	Hebrew <i>asah</i> , to make or do
126 Deut. 12:30	X											
127 Deut. 12:31					X	X	X				3	Hebrew <i>asah</i> , to make or do
128 Deut. 13:2 (3)	X					X			X		1	
129 Deut. 13:5	X											
130 Deut. 13:6 (7)	X					X			X		1	
131 Deut. 13:13 (14)	X					X			X		1	
132 Deut. 15:12	X											
133 Deut. 15:18	X											
134 Deut. 15:19	X											
135 Deut. 17:3	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
136 Deut. 20:11	X											
137 Deut. 20:18						X					1	Hebrew <i>asah</i> , to make or do

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
138 Deut. 21:3	X											
139 Deut. 21:4	X											
140 Deut. 26:10		X			X		X	X		X	3	
141 Deut. 28:14	X								X			
142 Deut. 28:36	X					X			X		1	
143 Deut. 28:39	X											
144 Deut. 28:47	X								X			
145 Deut. 28:48	X								X			
146 Deut. 28:64	X					X					1	
147 Deut. 29:18 (17)	X					X			X		1	
148 Deut. 29:26 (25)	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
149 Deut. 30:17	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
150 Deut. 31:20	X					X			X		1	
151 Deut. 32:43										X		
152 Jos. 5:14		X			X		X				2	
153 Jos. 16:10	X											
154 Jos. 22:5	X								X			
155 Jos. 22:25					X						1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear; LXX <i>sebo</i> , to worship
156 Jos. 22:27	X					X			X		1	
157 Jos. 23:7	X	X							X	X		
158 Jos. 23:16	X	X							X	X		
159 Jos. 24:2	X					X			X		1	
160 Jos. 24:14	X					X			X		1	
161 Jos. 24:15	X								X			
162 Jos. 24:16	X								X			
163 Jos. 24:18	X								X			
164 Jos. 24:19	X								X			
165 Jos. 24:20	X								X			
166 Jos. 24:21	X								X			
167 Jos. 24:22	X								X			
168 Jos. 24:24	X								X			
169 Jos. 24:29									X			
170 Jos. 24:31	X											
171 Jdg. 2:2										X		
172 Jdg. 2:7	X											

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
173	Jdg. 2:11	X							X			
174	Jdg. 2:12		X			X				X	1	
175	Jdg. 2:13	X							X			
176	Jdg. 2:17		X			X				X	1	
177	Jdg. 2:19	X	X			X			X	X	1	
178	Jdg. 3:6	X							X			
179	Jdg. 3:7	X							X			
180	Jdg. 3:8	X										
181	Jdg. 3:14	X										
182	Jdg. 6:10					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
183	Jdg. 7:15		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
184	Jdg. 8:27					X					1	Hebrew <i>zanah</i> , to be a prostitute or play a harlot
185	Jdg. 9:28	X										
186	Jdg. 9:38	X										
187	Jdg. 10:6	X										
188	Jdg. 10:10	X										
189	Jdg. 10:13	X										
190	Jdg. 10:16	X										
191	Ruth 2:10		X							X		
192	1 Sam. 1:3		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
193	1 Sam. 1:19		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
194	1 Sam. 1:28		X		X	X	X	X			4	
195	1 Sam. 2:36		X							X		
196	1 Sam. 4:9	X										
197	1 Sam. 7:3	X										
198	1 Sam. 7:4	X										
199	1 Sam. 8:8	X										
200	1 Sam. 11:1	X										
201	1 Sam. 12:10	X										
202	1 Sam. 12:14	X										
203	1 Sam. 12:20	X										
204	1 Sam. 12:24	X										
205	1 Sam. 15:25		X			X	X	X		X	3	
206	1 Sam. 15:30		X			X	X	X		X	3	
207	1 Sam. 15:31		X			X	X	X		X	3	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
208	1 Sam. 17:9	X										
209	1 Sam. 20:41		X							X		
210	1 Sam. 24:9		X							X		
211	1 Sam. 25:23		X							X		
212	1 Sam. 25:41		X							X		
213	1 Sam. 26:19	X										
214	1 Sam. 28:14		X							X		
215	2 Sam. 1:2		X							X		
216	2 Sam. 9:6		X							X		
217	2 Sam. 9:8		X							X		
218	2 Sam. 9:10	X										
219	2 Sam. 10:19	X										
220	2 Sam. 12:20		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
221	2 Sam. 14:4		X							X		
222	2 Sam. 14:22		X							X		
223	2 Sam. 14:33		X							X		
224	2 Sam. 15:5		X							X		
225	2 Sam. 15:8	X			X	X			X		2	
226	2 Sam. 15:32		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
227	2 Sam. 16:4		X							X		
228	2 Sam. 16:19	X										
229	2 Sam. 18:21		X							X		
230	2 Sam. 18:28		X							X		
231	2 Sam. 22:44	X										
232	2 Sam. 24:20		X							X		
233	1 Ki. 1:16		X							X		
234	1 Ki. 1:23		X							X		
235	1 Ki. 1:31		X							X		
236	1 Ki. 1:47		X			X				X		
237	1 Ki. 1:53		X							X		
238	1 Ki. 2:13									X		
239	1 Ki. 2:19		X									
240	1 Ki. 5:1	X										
241	1 Ki. 9:6	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
242	1 Ki. 9:9	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
243	1 Ki. 9:21	X										
244	1 Ki. 11:33		X		X	X	X	X			4	
245	1 Ki. 12:4	X										
246	1 Ki. 12:7	X										
247	1 Ki. 12:30					X	X	X			3	Implied in going before an altar
248	1 Ki. 16:31	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
249	1 Ki. 18:12					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
250	1 Ki. 19:18									X		
251	1 Ki. 22:53 (54)	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
252	2 Ki. 2:15		X							X		
253	2 Ki. 4:37		X							X		
254	2 Ki. 5:18		X		X		X	X		X	3	
255	2 Ki. 10:18	X										
256	2 Ki. 10:19	X										
257	2 Ki. 10:21	X										
258	2 Ki. 10:22	X										
259	2 Ki. 10:23	X										
260	2 Ki. 10:28					X					1	Implied in eradicating Baal
261	2 Ki. 10:29					X					1	Implied in sin of golden calves
262	2 Ki. 17:7					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
263	2 Ki. 17:12	X				X			X		1	
264	2 Ki. 17:16	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
265	2 Ki. 17:25					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
266	2 Ki. 17:28					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
267	2 Ki. 17:32					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
268	2 Ki. 17:33	X				X			X		1	
269	2 Ki. 17:34					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
270	2 Ki. 17:35	X	X			X			X	X	1	
271	2 Ki. 17:36		X			X	X			X	2	
272	2 Ki. 17:37					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
273	2 Ki. 17:38					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
274	2 Ki. 17:39					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
275	2 Ki. 17:41	X				X					1	
276	2 Ki. 18:7	X										
277	2 Ki. 18:22		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
278	2 Ki. 19:37		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
279	2 Ki. 21:3	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
280	2 Ki. 21:21	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
281	2 Ki. 25:24	X										
282	1 Chr. 16:29		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
283	1 Chr. 19:19	X										
284	1 Chr. 21:21		X							X		
285	1 Chr. 28:9	X										
286	1 Chr. 29:20		X							X		
287	2 Chr. 2:17	X										
288	2 Chr. 7:3		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
289	2 Chr. 7:19	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	4	
290	2 Chr. 7:22	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
291	2 Chr. 10:4	X										
292	2 Chr. 20:18		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
293	2 Chr. 24:17		X							X		
294	2 Chr. 24:18	X				X					1	
295	2 Chr. 25:14		X		X					X	1	
296	2 Chr. 28:2					X					1	Implied in images for the Baals
297	2 Chr. 29:28		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
298	2 Chr. 29:29		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
299	2 Chr. 29:30		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
300	2 Chr. 30:8	X										
301	2 Chr. 32:12		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
302	2 Chr. 33:3	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
303	2 Chr. 33:16	X										
304	2 Chr. 33:22	X				X					1	
305	2 Chr. 34:33	X										
306	2 Chr. 35:3	X										
307	Ezr. 4:2				X						1	Hebrew <i>darash</i> , seek; LXX <i>ekzeteo</i> , seek
308	Ezr. 6:21				X						1	Hebrew <i>darash</i> , seek; LXX <i>ekzeteo</i> , seek
309	Ezr. 7:19					X					1	Hebrew <i>polchan</i> , service or worship; only occurs here
310	Neh. 8:6		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
311	Neh. 9:3		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
312	Neh. 9:6		X			X	X	X		X	3	
313	Neh. 9:35	X										
314	Neh. 12:45							X			1	Hebrew <i>shamar</i> , to guard, keep or observe
315	Est. 3:2		X							X		
316	Est. 3:5		X							X		
317	Est. 4:17									X		
318	Est. 8:12									X		
319	Job 1:20		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
320	Job 21:15	X										
321	Job 36:11	X										
322	Job 39:9	X										
323	Ps. 2:11	X						X			1	
324	Ps. 5:7 (8)		X				X			X	1	
325	Ps. 18:44	X										
326	Ps. 22:27 (28)		X		X		X	X		X	3	
327	Ps. 22:29 (30)		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
328	Ps. 22:30 (31)	X										
329	Ps. 29:2		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
330	Ps. 45:11 (12)		X				X				1	
331	Ps. 45:12									X		
332	Ps. 66:4		X		X		X	X		X	3	
333	Ps. 72:11	X	X							X		
334	Ps. 74:8					X					1	Hebrew <i>moed</i> , appointed place
335	Ps. 81:9 (10)		X				X	X		X	2	
336	Ps. 86:9		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
337	Ps. 95:6		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
338	Ps. 96:9		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
339	Ps. 97:7	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
340	Ps. 99:5		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
341	Ps. 99:9		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
342	Ps. 100:2	X				X					1	
343	Ps. 102:22 (23)	X			X	X					2	
344	Ps. 106:19		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
345	Ps. 106:36	X				X					1	
346	Ps. 132:7		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
347 Ps. 138:2		X					X			X	1	
348 Prov. 12:11	X											
349 Prov. 28:19	X											
350 Eccl. 5:8	X											
351 Eccl. 5:11	X											
352 Isa. 2:8		X					X	X		X	2	
353 Isa. 2:20		X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
354 Isa. 14:3	X											
355 Isa. 19:9	X											
356 Isa. 19:21	X				X	X		X			3	
357 Isa. 19:23	X				X	X		X			3	
358 Isa. 27:13		X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
359 Isa. 28:21	X											
360 Isa. 29:13						X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
361 Isa. 30:24	X											
362 Isa. 36:7		X			X	X	X	X			4	
363 Isa. 37:38		X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
364 Isa. 43:23	X											
365 Isa. 43:24	X											
366 Isa. 44:15		X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
367 Isa. 44:17		X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
368 Isa. 44:19										X		
369 Isa. 45:14		X								X		
370 Isa. 46:6		X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
371 Isa. 49:7		X					X			X	1	
372 Isa. 49:23		X								X		
373 Isa. 56:6	(noun)					X					1	Hebrew <i>abad</i> , servant; in noun form
374 Isa. 60:12	X											
375 Isa. 60:14		X										
376 Isa. 66:3						X					1	Hebrew <i>barach</i> , to bless
377 Isa. 66:23		X			X		X			X	2	
378 Jer. 1:16		X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
379 Jer. 2:20	X											
380 Jer. 5:19	X											
381 Jer. 7:2		X			X	X	X	X			4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
382 Jer. 8:2	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
383 Jer. 11:10	X											
384 Jer. 13:10	X	X			X	X	X			X	3	
385 Jer. 16:11	X	X			X	X	X			X	3	
386 Jer. 16:13	X											
387 Jer. 17:4	X											
388 Jer. 22:9	X	X			X	X	X			X	3	
389 Jer. 22:13	X											
390 Jer. 23:27						X					1	Implied in forgetting God's name for Baal
391 Jer. 25:6	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	4	
392 Jer. 25:11	X											
393 Jer. 25:14	X											
394 Jer. 26:2		X			X	X	X	X			4	
395 Jer. 27:6	X											
396 Jer. 27:7	X											
397 Jer. 27:8	X											
398 Jer. 27:9	X											
399 Jer. 27:11	X											
400 Jer. 27:12	X											
401 Jer. 27:13	X											
402 Jer. 27:14	X											
403 Jer. 27:17	X											
404 Jer. 28:14	X											
405 Jer. 30:8	X											
406 Jer. 30:9	X											
407 Jer. 33:2										X		
408 Jer. 34:9	X											
409 Jer. 34:10	X											
410 Jer. 34:14	X											
411 Jer. 35:15	X							X			1	
412 Jer. 40:9	X											
413 Jer. 44:3	X					X					1	
414 Jer. 44:19							X				1	Implied in making cakes in the image of a goddess
415 Ezek. 8:16		X			X		X			X	2	
416 Ezek. 20:32					X				X		1	Hebrew <i>sharath</i> , to minister or serve

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
417	Ezek. 20:39	X										
418	Ezek. 20:40	X										
419	Ezek. 23:49							X			1	Implied in idolatrous sins
420	Ezek. 29:18	X										
421	Ezek. 29:20	X										
422	Ezek. 34:27	X										
423	Ezek. 36:9	X										
424	Ezek. 36:34	X										
425	Ezek. 46:2		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
426	Ezek. 46:3		X			X	X	X		X	3	
427	Ezek. 46:9		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
428	Ezek. 48:18	X										
429	Ezek. 48:19	X										
430	Dan. 2:46									X		
431	Dan. 3:5				X	X	X	X		X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
432	Dan. 3:6				X	X	X	X		X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
433	Dan. 3:7				X	X	X	X		X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
434	Dan. 3:10				X	X	X	X		X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
435	Dan. 3:11				X	X	X	X		X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
436	Dan. 3:12				X	X	X	X	X	X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
437	Dan. 3:14				X	X	X	X	X	X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
438	Dan. 3:15				X	X	X	X		X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
439	Dan. 3:18				X	X	X	X	X	X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
440	Dan. 3:28 (95 in LXX)				X	X	X	X	X	X	4	Aramaic <i>sagad</i> , to worship
441	Dan. 4:37								X			
442	Dan. 6:17								X			
443	Dan. 6:21								X			
444	Dan. 6:27								X	X		
445	Dan. 6:28									X		
446	Dan. 7:14					X			X		1	Aramaic <i>palach</i> , to serve or worship
447	Dan. 7:27					X					1	Aramaic <i>palach</i> , to serve or worship
448	Hos. 12:12 (13)	X										
449	Hos. 13:1					X	X				2	Implied in being "guilty of Baal"
450	Jon. 1:9					X					1	Hebrew <i>yara</i> , to fear
451	Mic. 5:13 (12)		X				X			X	1	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
452	Zeph. 1:5	X				X	X			X	2	
453	Zeph. 2:11		X			X	X			X	2	
454	Zeph. 3:9	X										
455	Zech. 13:5	X										
456	Zech. 14:16		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
457	Zech. 14:17		X		X	X	X	X		X	4	
458	Mal. 3:14	X										
459	Mal. 3:17	X										
460	Mal. 3:18	X										
New Testament												
461	Matt. 2:2			X	X	X	X	X			4	
462	Matt. 2:8			X	X	X	X	X			4	
463	Matt. 2:11			X	X	X	X	X			4	
464	Matt. 4:9			X	X	X	X	X			4	
465	Matt. 4:10		X	X	X	X	X	X			4	
466	Matt. 8:2			X			X				1	
467	Matt. 9:18			X			X				1	
468	Matt. 14:33			X	X	X	X	X			4	
469	Matt. 15:9				X	X	X	X			4	
470	Matt. 15:25			X			X				1	
471	Matt. 18:26			X								
472	Matt. 20:20			X								
473	Matt. 28:9			X	X	X	X	X			4	
474	Matt. 28:17			X	X	X	X	X			4	
475	Mk. 5:6			X			X				1	
476	Mk. 7:7				X	X	X	X			4	
477	Mk. 15:19			X			X				1	
478	Lk. 1:74		X									
479	Lk. 2:37		X		X	X					2	
480	Lk. 4:7			X	X	X	X	X			4	
481	Lk. 4:8		X	X	X	X	X	X			4	
482	Lk. 24:52			X	X	X	X	X			4	
483	Jn. 4:20			X	X	X	X	X			4	
484	Jn. 4:21			X	X	X	X	X			4	
485	Jn. 4:22			X	X	X	X	X			4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
486	Jn. 4:23			X	X	X	X	X			4	
487	Jn. 4:24			X	X	X	X	X			4	
488	Jn. 9:38			X	X	X	X	X			4	
489	Jn. 12:20			X	X	X	X	X			4	
490	Acts 7:7		X		X	X					2	
491	Acts 7:42		X		X	X	X				3	
492	Acts 7:43			X	X	X	X	X			4	
493	Acts 8:27			X	X	X	X	X			4	
494	Acts 10:25			X	X		X	X			3	
495	Acts 13:2				X	X					2	Greek <i>leitourgew</i> , to serve or worship
496	Acts 13:16					X					1	Greek <i>phobew</i> , to fear
497	Acts 16:14						X				1	Greek <i>sebw</i> , to worship
498	Acts 17:23				X	X	X	X			4	Greek <i>eusebw</i> , to worship
499	Acts 17:25						X				1	Greek <i>therapeuw</i> , to heal
500	Acts 18:7						X				1	Greek <i>sebw</i> , to worship
501	Acts 18:13				X	X	X	X			4	Greek <i>sebw</i> , to worship
502	Acts 19:27				X	X	X	X			4	Greek <i>sebw</i> , to worship
503	Acts 24:11			X	X	X	X	X			4	
504	Acts 24:14		X		X	X	X				3	
505	Acts 26:7		X									
506	Acts 27:23		X									
507	Rom. 1:9		X									
508	Rom. 1:25		X		X	X	X	X			4	Greek <i>sebw</i> , to worship
509	Rom. 9:4		(noun)		X	X					2	Greek <i>latreia</i> , service or worship; in noun form
510	Rom. 12:1		(noun)		X	X		X			3	Greek <i>latreia</i> , service or worship; in noun form
511	1 Cor. 14:25			X	X	X	X	X			4	
512	Phil. 3:3		X		X	X	X	X			4	
513	Col. 2:18				X	X	X	X			4	Greek <i>threskeia</i> , religion or worship of angels; in noun form
514	Col. 2:23					X					1	Greek <i>ethelothreskia</i> , will worship; noun form
515	2 Thess. 2:4				X	X	X	X			4	Greek <i>sebasma</i> , object or place of worship; noun form
516	1 Tim. 2:10					X					1	Greek <i>theosebeia</i> , religion or piety; noun form
517	2 Tim. 1:3		X									
518	Heb. 1:6			X	X	X	X	X			4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
519 Heb. 8:5			X									
520 Heb. 9:1			(noun)		X	X		X			3	Greek <i>latreia</i> , service or worship; in noun form
521 Heb. 9:6			(noun)					X			1	Greek <i>latreia</i> , service or worship; in noun form
522 Heb. 9:9			X									
523 Heb. 9:14			X									
524 Heb. 9:21					X				(rel noun)		1	Greek <i>leitourgia</i> , service or worship; in noun form
525 Heb. 10:1						X					1	Greek <i>teleiow</i> , to make perfect
526 Heb. 10:2			X (ptc.)									Participle form of verb, used as a noun for worshipper
527 Heb. 11:21				X	X	X	X	X			4	
528 Heb. 12:28			X		X	X					2	
529 Heb. 13:10			X									
530 Rev. 3:9				X			X				1	
531 Rev. 4:10				X	X	X	X	X			4	
532 Rev. 5:14				X	X	X	X	X			4	
533 Rev. 7:11				X	X	X	X	X			4	
534 Rev. 7:15			X									
535 Rev. 9:20				X	X	X	X	X			4	
536 Rev. 11:1				X	X		X	X			3	
537 Rev. 11:16				X	X	X	X	X			4	
538 Rev. 13:4				X	X	X	X	X			4	
539 Rev. 13:8				X	X	X	X	X			4	
540 Rev. 13:12				X	X	X	X	X			4	
541 Rev. 13:15				X	X	X	X	X			4	
542 Rev. 14:7				X	X	X	X	X			4	
543 Rev. 14:9				X	X	X	X	X			4	
544 Rev. 14:11				X		X	X	X			3	
545 Rev. 15:4				X	X	X	X	X			4	
546 Rev. 16:2				X	X	X	X	X			4	
547 Rev. 19:4				X	X	X	X	X			4	
548 Rev. 19:10				X	X	X	X	X			4	
549 Rev. 19:20				X	X	X	X	X			4	
550 Rev. 20:4				X	X	X	X	X			4	
551 Rev. 22:3			X		X						1	
552 Rev. 22:8				X	X	X	X	X			4	

Verse	Hebrew Root <i>abad</i>	Hebrew Root <i>shachah</i>	Greek Root <i>latreuw</i>	Greek Root <i>proskunew</i>	ESV <i>worship</i>	NIV <i>worship</i>	NKJV <i>worship</i>	NASB <i>worship</i>	LXX <i>latreuw</i>	LXX <i>proskunew</i>	At least once in English	Comments
553 Rev. 22:9				X	X	X	X	X			4	
Occurrences	263	164	25	54	167	236	178	163	82	177		

276 "Worship" in at least one English translation
131 All four English translations agree
97 Only one Eng. translation translates as "worship"

Notes:

1. Verse numbers in parentheses indicate Hebrew numbering.
2. Septuagint numbering has been converted to English numbering.
3. Verse lists for Hebrew and Greek roots reflect verb forms only.
4. Verse lists for English translations reflect occurrences of "worship," "worships," "worshiped," "worshipping."
5. Lines that are shaded in indicate occurrences of English "worship" based on the Hebrew or Greek roots. For example, on line 546 all three English versions translate the Greek *proskunew* (Rev. 20:4) with "worship." On line 547, none of the English versions translate the Greek *latreuw* (Rev. 22:3) as "worship."
6. Comments in the right hand column indicate occurrences of English "worship" based on Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek roots other than *abad*, *shachah*, *latreuw* or *proskunew*.
7. Hebrew and Greek words are expressed in my own "phonetic" spelling as MS Excel does not accommodate the proper symbols or fonts.

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