

Where I stand on the Regulative Principle.

Christian Adjemian, April 2002

1. The regulative principle exists because the Scriptures exist.

If we did not have the Scriptures, we would not be discussing the regulative principle of worship. Apart from the word of God, man can be a seeker, but cannot know God to worship him in truth (Acts 17:23). Apart from the word of God, man will see only as far as the boundaries of the created world and will speculate unsuccessfully beyond that (Ecc 3:11). He will worship within the bounds of the created world and through created means: he is an idolater (Rom 1:22-23). God gave man his word to direct him to himself and to the eternal realm in which he reigns (Isa 45:22-23; Isa 66:1-2; Jn 14:23). With faith, man responds to God in obedience (Jn 8:31; Psalm 119:133) and thereby learns to worship the true God in truth (Ps 5:8; Ps 138:2). Worship is regulated by God's word from the beginning because worship expresses the most intimate aspect of the spiritual relationship which God has instituted with his rational creatures.

2. The regulative principle is centered on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the ARXHGOS and TELEIWTHS of our faith (Heb 12:2). Since he originates and perfects our faith, all of worship is directed to him and through him. He is the Alpha and the Omega; those who do his commandments may enter through his city's gates (Rev 22:13-14). Jesus defines true worship, and his commands govern the worship of his church. True worship is worship in spirit and truth (Jn 4:24). It is apart from Jewish rituals or the commandments of men (Phil 3:3; Col 2:8). It is pure worship (Heb 10:22), it is confident worship (Heb 10:19), and it is heavenly worship (Heb 12:22-24). The church on earth joins with the church in glory on Mount Zion and in the heavenly Jerusalem. Christian worship aims to glorify God with reverence and awe (Heb 12:28). "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, And to be held in reverence by all those around Him." (Ps 89:7).

3. The worship of the church on earth is regulated through Christ's apostles by precept and example.

The worship of the church is a means of continuing communion with the risen Lord and with one another (Acts 1:14). In our worship, we are to be devoted to four things: apostolic doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, prayers (Acts 2:42; 20:7).

Paul writes the commandments of the Lord (1 Corinthians 14:37), which govern a number of the details of the worship assembly. Worship is structured, thoughtful and orderly. In the church assembly, the glory of man is covered and the glory of God revealed (1Cor 11:3, 4, 6, 13; Ps 115:1). At the Lord's table, a man must examine himself (1Cor 11:28), believers must wait for one another (11:23). Especially in worship, there must be no schism in the body (1Cor 12:25); all must be done for edification (14:12 & 26), with the understanding (14:15), with interpretation if not in a known language (14:28); those who speak must speak in turn (14:31); all is to be done without disorder (14:33), with no authoritative teaching from the women (14:34), all decently and in order (14:40). The elders of the church have a responsibility to lead the church in decent and orderly worship in obedience to the word of Christ.

4. Christian worship is an act of love and performed with love.

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love" (1Corinthians 13:12-13). Our Directory for Worship states: "Christian worship is the expression

of the soul's love for God, dependence on God and joy in God.” Then the Directory adds “The worship of God is the highest act of the human soul.” The Directory conceives of worship as the finest spiritual act of love. The church in worship is a holy assembly celebrating and praising the gracious, mighty works of our Lord, reviewing and renewing the terms of God’s covenant of grace, and being built up in hope. The context for this worship is the bond of love in which the Lord has embraced his church (Eph 5:23, 32). In her worship, the Bride of Christ enters into the palace of the king. There, she affirms her love to her Lord and in turn receives a confirmation of the love of God through his appointed means of grace. The church and her Lord are bound together in a gracious covenant which he initiated and sealed with his blood. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.” The Lord reminds his bride of his love, and he feeds her: “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.” “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.” The church receives “grace for grace.”

5. The church recalls and proclaims the works of God.

Christian worship looks back to the days of creation and looks forward to the coming of the Lord and the redemption of the whole world. Both the first Sabbath and the consummation are present in the Lord’s Day (Rev 4:4:11; Ps 104:30-31; Ps 96:11-13). Christian worship expresses thanks and wonder at God’s creative works, and even more at his renewal of the creation through Christ (Rom 8:21). Weekly, on the Lord’s Day, the church prays, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.” The New Testament directs our praise to Christ, who is himself the focal point of the creation and its Redeemer (Col 1:16). Christ is the “Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God” (Rev 3:14). Through Christ, the forms of Old Covenant worship have been fulfilled. The fading glory is past, the full radiance of God’s glory has been revealed to the world. Eternal life is “knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom God sent into the world” (Jn 17:3). Knowing God and contemplating his glory are joys that stir up the soul’s love for God. “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.” (Jn 17:24). Christians in worship celebrate their union with God through Jesus Christ (Jn 17:23). Christian worship is the highest expression of that union, both now and in eternity (Rev 4:10).

6. The church has a priestly ministry to glorify God on earth.

Praise and prayer, both solemn and joyful, characterize the worship of the church (Ps 149:1-2; Ps 65:1-2; Mt 6:9-13). In worship, the church sings the word of Christ, the divine poet and song writer (Col 3:16; 2Sam 23:1-2). His words are Spirit and they are life. They are a true means of grace, which distinguishes his songs from all other songs the church might sing. His songs serve to sanctify us; no others can (Jn 17:17). They are also prayers of the Spirit, and so the church is led to pray to the glory of God.

The people of God are his priests on earth (Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6). In worship we come into his presence. We come in knowledge, in obedience, with awe, through Christ’s sacrifice of atonement, to offer up prayers and praises to God (1Peter 2:5, 9) and to receive his teaching and

blessings. In Christ, we enter through the very gate of heaven (Heb 9:24) to God's throne room. When we worship as a church, in the Spirit, we join an assembly that spans the earth and the generations, and which is united with a yet greater assembly in heaven. Assembled on the Lord's Day, the church is the salt of the earth, the light of the world. The regulative principle guards us from losing our saltiness, and ensures that the light that shines is the light of Christ, which is revealed in the Scriptures.