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**WHAT IS  
REFORMED WORSHIP?**

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# INTRODUCTION

- **There has been a noticeable “worship revolution” in the last few decades:**
  - The catchword is: “Get rid of the old! Bring in the new!”
  - “Traditional Services” are mocked and rejected
  - “Contemporary Services” have replaced them
- **Most want (and have) contemporary worship**
  - It caters to the likes and preferences of the people
  - It is entertaining and keeps people’s interest
  - It is innovative and thus lively and exciting
  - It gives members opportunity to do something

# INTRODUCTION

- **But, What does the Word of God say about this?**
  - What does God think about all this? What should we think about it?
  - How must we worship God so that we do so “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24)?
  - What is appropriate in worship so that our worship is acceptable to God (Psalm 19:14)?
  - What sort of worship does the following:
    - Honors God?
    - Edifies God's people?
- **WHAT IS REFORMED CORPORATE WORSHIP?**

# REFORMED CORPORATE WORSHIP

1. God Centered
2. “Regulative Principle”
3. Centrality of Preaching
4. Covenantal

# (1) GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

- **Worship must not be man-centered and man-honoring – but God-centered and God honoring. The main purpose of worship is not the worshipers.**
- **Many think worship is for man.**
  - They are quickly dissatisfied with a worship service. Why? “Because I didn’t get anything out of it!”
  - Their approach is: “Worship is for my benefit. For my enjoyment. To meet my needs.”
  - They have the idea that God exists for the happiness of man.

# (1) GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

- Worship must not be man-centered and man-honoring.
- Many think worship is for man.
- **The result of this approach is a form of worship that ...**
  - Makes everyone feel comfortable
  - Is performance oriented
  - Gives the message that Christianity is all about man

# (1) GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

- **The main purpose of worship is not man, but GOD!**
  - **Psalm 95:6** – *“Let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker.”*
  - **Psalm 115:1** – *“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory.”*
  - **Isaiah 43:21** – *“This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.”*

# (1) GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

- The main purpose of worship is not man, but GOD!
- **That's why Reformed worship services are solemn**
  - Not characterized by noise, chaos, people coming & going.
    - Solemn because we meet God. We stand on holy ground.
    - Characterized by Reverence, Respect, Awe, Quietness.
  - We are there to listen. We give God our undivided attention.  
**Ecclesiastes 5:1-2** – *“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”*



# (1) GOD-CENTERED WORSHIP

- The main purpose of worship is not man, but GOD!
- That's why Reformed worship services are solemn
- **Nothing is more important in all of life, and thus also in all worship, than the glory of God**
  - The question in worship is not, "What makes me feel good?"
  - But, "What gives God the honor & glory & praise He deserves?"
  - **Psalm 145:3** – *"Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised"*

# Reformed Worship:

(2) GOVERNED BY THE  
“REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE”  
OF WORSHIP

## (2) THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

### A. The question is, “HOW should we worship God?”

- Two possibilities. Which is correct?
  1. “What is not commanded in the Word of God is forbidden.”
  2. “What is not forbidden in the Word of God is permissible.”
- **Reformed answer is: “What is not commanded is forbidden!”**
  - The other is the Lutheran (and Anglican) approach to worship.
    - It leads to including many non-biblical practices in worship.
    - It is the approach that many today take with regard to worship.
  - The Reformed answer and approach is referred to as the “Regulative Principle” of worship.

## (2) THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

### B. What is the “Regulative Principle” of worship?

- We worship God as God Himself tells us to worship Him. We do what God commands – nothing more, and nothing less.
- God is sovereign – also in the matter/area of worship. He does not leave it up to man to decide how to worship Him.
- God has every right to tell us what to do, or not do, when we enter His presence in worship.
- We must worship God only as God commands us.
  - If God does not give us a specific command for a certain activity in worship, we may not include it.
  - Worship is not a matter of personal preference. It is simply a matter of obeying God.

## (2) THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

### C. The Basis and Support for the Regulative Principle

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment (Exodus 20:4)
  - 1<sup>st</sup> command tells us WHO we must worship (the object of worship).
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> command tells us HOW to worship Him (the manner of worship).
  - Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 35 – God forbids that we “*worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.*”
- Belgic Confession, Article 32 – “*We reject all human inventions and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever.*”
- Westminster Confession, Chapter 21 – “*But the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men ... or any other way not prescribed in Holy Scripture.*”

## (2) THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

**John Calvin** – In his commentaries on books of the Bible; In his treatise, “The Necessity of Reforming the Church”

- *“In religion and in the worship of God it is only to the voice of God that we ought to listen.” – “God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word.”*
- *“If we would have Him [God] to approve our worship, this rule ... must be carefully observed” ... that we follow “the injunction of Him Who alone is entitled to prescribe.”*
- *“It is in [God’s] power to determine how He ought to be worshiped; and when men claim this power to themselves, it is like ascending to the very throne of God.”*
- *“... the whole form of divine worship in general use in the present day is nothing but mere corruption. For men pay no regard to what God has commanded, or to what he approves, ... but assume to themselves a license of devising modes of worship, and afterwards, obtruding them upon Him as a substitute for obedience.”*

## (2) THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE

### D. This reveals the error of contemporary worship

- The approach is that man is free to determine and decide how to worship God
- But the “Regulative Principle” is rejected. As a result, churches are guilty of “will worship” (Colossians 2:23).
- Some will ask: “What’s wrong with having ... in worship?” This is the wrong question. We must ask, “Does God command it?”
- If someone wants to introduce something into worship, the burden rests on him to show from the Bible that God requires this.

## **(2) THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE**

### **E. The Elements of Worship the Regulative Principle directs us (God commands us) to have**

- Prayer – I Timothy 2:1-8
- Singing of Psalms – Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19-20
- Reading the Bible – I Thessalonians 5:27, I Timothy 4:13
- Preaching the Word – Romans 10:13-17, II Timothy 4:1-2
- Administering Sacraments – Matthew 28:19-20, I Corinthians 11:23-29
- Giving our Offerings – I Corinthians 9:11-14, I Corinthians 16:1-2
- Salutation and Blessing – Romans 1:7, I Corinthians 1:3



# Reformed Worship:

(3) PREACHING IS  
CENTRAL

# (3) CENTRALITY OF PREACHING

- **Preaching in Reformed Churches**

- Someone who attends a Reformed worship service for the first time often says: “The sermons are long!” That is how it should be. The sermon is the main thing.
- This should also be clear from what is seen on the platform, from what is in the front and center – the PULPIT

# (3) CENTRALITY OF PREACHING

- **Preaching is not prominent in many churches**
  - The pulpit is pushed aside
  - Sermons are very short, or non-existent
  - Preaching is absent that saves and comforts believers
  - Preaching is absent that condemns sin and calls to repentance
  - The warning of **Ecclesiastes 5:1-2** is not heeded – *“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let they words be few.”*

# (3) CENTRALITY OF PREACHING

- Proper worship has God's Word at its heart/center
  - God's Word is read
  - God's Word is sung
  - God's Word is prayed
  - God's Word is preached
  - God's Word is listened to
  - God's Word is signified and sealed in the sacraments
- Preaching is most important, for it is the power of God to save. Romans 1:16, 10:13-15, I Corinthians 1:21-25.
- Worshipers come, not to be entertained, but to hear the Word.

# Reformed Worship:

## (4) COVENANTAL

## (4) WORSHIP IS COVENANTAL

- Reformed worship services are sometimes **criticized** as regards participation of the members
  - “The believer’s role is too passive and too insignificant”
  - “Only the pastor (or elders) are actively worshiping”
  - “Members just sit there. They are not engaged/involved.”
- In light of this criticism it is crucial that we realize worship is **covenantal**

# (4) WORSHIP IS COVENANTAL

- **What is Covenantal Worship?**

- God's covenant is His relationship of friendship and fellowship with His people in Jesus Christ.
- This fellowship is enjoyed and experienced in worship, when God and His people meet and fellowship through speech.
- All members actively participate in this fellowship.
  - The church is not a gathering of individual worshipers
  - The congregation is a covenant people – the body of Christ
  - They worship as a body – minister, members, adults, children, ...
- The biblical words for worship show we are active
  - “Worship” is not only a noun, but also a verb
  - “Worship” is literally “to bow down,” “to serve,” “to praise,” etc.

## (4) WORSHIP IS COVENANTAL

- Members are not passive spectators, but active participants in worship
  - Actively singing
  - Actively praying
  - Actively listening
  - Actively giving gifts
- The members are especially active as they seek and strive (as we must) to worship God “in spirit and in truth” – i.e., sincerely, and from the heart



## **(4) WORSHIP IS COVENANTAL**

- Contemporary worship is not covenantal – it is very individualistic.
- Reformed worship is marked by the fact that all the members participate in every part of worship.

# CONCLUSION

- ▣ When we worship as God commands, then the worship will be a blessing – it will edify
- ▣ John Calvin: *“There is nothing more perilous to our salvation than a perverse worship of God.”*
- ▣ May this be an incentive to be faithful (in whatever church we are members) to worship God in the way that pleases Him