

Musical Instruments in the Public Worship of God

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Introduction

God, who is infinite and eternal, who created the heavens and the earth, can only be approached on His own terms. This is true of salvation as well as worship. God has redeemed a people out of fallen humanity to serve, worship and glorify Himself. God has taken the initiative and saved a people dead in trespasses and sins through the sacrificial death and sinless life of Jesus Christ. Professing Christians acknowledge that the only way to be saved is by Jesus Christ.¹ They reject the notion that there are many paths that lead to God. But when it comes to worshiping God, most professing Christians believe that man can do almost anything he pleases as long as it is not blatantly sinful. The purpose of this book is to prove from Scripture that God has set forth a principle regarding worship that completely eliminates human autonomy from worship. God has not left worship to the caprice of man. God, who is the object of worship, tells His people how to worship. Once the regulative principle of worship has been established from Scripture, we will turn our attention to the use of musical instruments in public worship.

The Regulative Principle of Worship

Before we examine the chaos of current worship practices and God's regulative principle of worship², we must first define worship. "Religious worship is that whereby we address ourselves to God, as a God of infinite perfection; profess an entire subjection and devotedness to him as our God; put our trust in him for a supply of all our wants; and ascribe to him that praise and glory which is his due, as our chief good, most bountiful benefactor, and only portion and happiness."³ God is to be worshiped because of who He is: a God of infinite perfections and

¹ "Worship is the natural outgrowth of salvation, the inevitable and necessary response of the sinner to the grace of God. But if we have nothing to add to the salvation sovereignly bestowed upon us by God, is it likely that we should have anything to add to the worship prescribed for us in Scripture? An admixture of human effort to salvation is salvation by works (Eph. 2:8-10; Rom. 11:6). An admixture of human prescription of the worship of God is 'will-worship' (Col. 2:20-23). Both are condemned by God in the strongest of terms, and yet the history of mankind could not be better characterized than as one of inordinate zeal for these very things" (Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion: The Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody* [Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 1977], p. 120).

² The first section of this book is expanded from the author's *The Regulative Principle of Worship and Christmas* (Southfield, MI: Reformed Witness, 1995).

³ Thomas Ridgely, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993 [1855]), Vol. 2, p. 329. "By worship, is understood some tribute paid by the reasonable creature to God as the Great and Sovereign Lord Creator, whether it is immediately and directly paid and performed to Him, as prayer and praise, or for Him and at His command and for His honor, as preaching, hearing, and receiving of sacraments, which are worship when rightly gone about. In a word, we call that worship, more strictly and properly, which is a duty of the first table, and comes in as commanded in it for the honor of God, and not for our own or another's external profit, which though commanded in the second table, cannot be so properly called worship, much less immediate worship. Thus, teaching others the duties of piety may be worship when teaching the duties of any other ordinary calling is not" (James Durham, *The Fourth Commandment* (Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press, 1989 [1653]), p. 10).

holiness, etc. and for what God has done for His people through Jesus Christ. True worship can only be directed to the true God through Jesus Christ the Mediator, in and by God the Holy Spirit. True worship must be done with a sincere heart “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Christians are to sing the Holy Spirit’s divinely inspired songs to God through Christ. “Worship is the highest activity of man, for it is the response of the human soul to God. True and, therefore, acceptable worship is not something which man naturally renders. It owes its origin to God Himself, who gives to men the desire and the power to worship Him.”⁴ Worship in the broader sense involves all worship ordinances established by God in His word. This includes singing praises, prayer, reading the word of God, the sacraments, the preaching of the word, the tithe, etc.

The Chaos of Present-Day Worship

If a person visited several professing Christian churches on the Lord’s day and observed all the different ways in which these churches conducted their worship, he would probably conclude that Christian worship was an arbitrary affair—that it was something determined by man, based primarily on custom and tradition. In one church he might see people burning incense, lighting candles and praying to statues. At another church he might see people chanting and kissing icons (i.e., pictures of the saints). At another people might be shouting and clapping as the rock group jams and struts on the stage. At another church he might see a drama group, and at another, Bo-Bo the clown giving a sermonette to the children.

Many evangelical churches reject the empty ritualism and paganism of Roman Catholicism. They recognize that Romanism has perverted Christian worship by mixing it with Greek and Roman paganism. But what evangelicals do not realize is that the worship conducted in most Bible-believing churches today is a mixture of Christian worship with American pagan culture—the culture that worships self, success, entertainment and leisure.

The modern evangelical church has departed from the scriptural law of worship, which says that only God determines how He is to be worshiped.⁵ “Whatever I command you, be

⁴ M. C. Ramsay, *Purity of Worship* (Church Principles Committee, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, 1968), p. 7. Also: “Many believe that they naturally have the will and the power to worship God acceptably. This is a delusion. God alone implants the spirit of worship. Therefore worship owes its origin to the sovereign activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul of men. Indeed every movement of the human soul Godward, whether in penitence, petition or praise is divinely produced. The [total] disinclination of man, if left to himself, to seek God, is due to the ravages of sin in human hearts, and is one of the penal consequences of the transgression of Adam, as set forth in the Book of Genesis and confirmed throughout the Old and New Testaments.”

⁵ This declension and perversion of worship is not new for evangelicals. In 1881 United Presbyterian Pastor P. W. Collins wrote: “Secular music is being cultivated in this age with immense enthusiasm. Whatever be the motive, the Church has caught the spirit, and is, at least in some measure, seeking to keep pace with the world. The theory is, that if we can introduce into the ritual of the church that which in itself is innocent, as an attraction, it will be a means of saving our children to the Church, and bringing sinners within the sound of the Gospel; and when we set out upon this theory, there is no limit to those resources upon which we may lay our hands—innocent in themselves, and capable of being made immensely attractive in the Church. This theory is one great element of the system by which the Romish Church holds her sway over the masses of her followers. But it is the very opposite of the principle which Christ has engraved upon the humble worship of His Church” (*Musical Instruments in Divine Worship Condemned by The Word of God*, [Pittsburgh: The Press of Stevenson and Foster, 1881], p. 88). In the history of the Christian Church there is almost always a direct correlation between the purity of worship and the purity of the gospel. Since the scriptural attainments of the Reformation there has been a steady decline in the doctrines of sovereign grace and exclusive Psalmody. Pragmatism drives out spiritual gospel worship in every age.

careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deut. 12:29-32).⁶ Churches have been seduced by our entertainment-oriented, man-centered culture. Thus, their worship paradigm increasingly has been taken from Las Vegas and Hollywood. Therefore, the modern evangelical worship service is more and more a show for man, directed to man, with man-pleasing songs and lots of entertainment: music soloists, rock groups, “gospel” groups, skits, plays, videos, singers, performance choirs, liturgical dancing, comedians, celebrity guest speakers, and so on. In most of these churches people even clap after a performance as though they were at a rock concert or a Broadway play.⁷ Churches today are designed for entertainment with a stage, intricate theatrical lighting, and sophisticated sound systems. Most preaching today is also entertainment-oriented, with pop-psychology, props, jokes, and other gimmicks. Preaching today is often long on storytelling and humor but short on theology, biblical exposition and exegesis.

Who sets the parameters on what is permissible in worship, God or man? Most Christians would argue that man chooses.⁸ Thus, most churches have a man-centered *pragmatic* view of worship: “What makes *me* feel good in worship? What will bring more people into church? What can we do to have an exciting, emotional experience? What songs can be performed that will entertain the congregation? What kind of band should we have to attract young people to our services? What kind of music and sermon will make the unchurched comfortable in our church?” Baby boomers are accustomed to having everything tailored to their wants and perceived needs. If the church wants to grow, shouldn’t it adapt itself to our culture? Most professing Christians have neglected to ask a few very important questions. What kind of worship pleases and glorifies God? What does the Bible say about this? These questions cannot be answered by pollsters, sociologists, psychologists, or church growth experts, but only by God Himself as He speaks to us in His infallible word.

The problem with most churches today is that they simply have ignored what the Bible says about worship. Everyone has his own theology and rules regarding the worship of God. The only major difference between biblical and unbiblical worship is the fact that some Christians derive their rules of worship from the Bible *plus* human opinion and pragmatic considerations

⁶ All Scripture *New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), unless otherwise noted.

⁷ Writing about “Christian” television, secular author Neil Postman concurs, “On television, religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away; there is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence. On these shows, the preacher is tops. God comes out as second banana” (*Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, [New York: Penguin Books, 1985], pp. 116-117). This is the generation of the church growth movement, parachurch fads, unbiblical ecumenism (which says doctrine must be ignored), and pop-psychology. To see how things have degenerated, look at how things have changed in the last few centuries. The Puritans preached the law of God and justification by faith in order to add to the church. D. L. Moody tried to love people in and the modern church attempts to entertain them in.

⁸ Discussing the degeneration that has occurred in most Presbyterian and Reformed churches, Michael Bushell writes, “Each generation, it seems, inherits the liturgical mutations of those who went before and without much reflection adds a few of its own. Considered individually, each generation’s changes may not seem all that significant, but the cumulative effect is one of substantial, if not drastic, change. The end product of such a process is a church whose worship practice has drifted far from its Biblical moorings but whose people are largely unaware of the changes that have taken place. The ignorance and apathy that feed this process are two of the Church’s greatest weaknesses just as they are without doubt two of Satan’s most potent weapons, and they must be confronted head-on if present trends are to be affected materially.... A church that is unconsciously in sin is still in sin. One can only hope that apathy towards the truth is not as widespread as the ignorance of it” (*The Songs of Zion*, pp. 4-5).

while others follow *only* the strict parameters laid out in God's word.⁹ The Roman Catholic Church, for example, openly denies the final, definitive authority of Scripture and thus allows *men* to formulate autonomous doctrine and worship. Everyone with knowledge of church history knows that this led to gross idolatry, superstition and paganism in worship practice during the Middle Ages.

Martin Luther and the Lutheran churches believed that the Bible alone (and not human opinion) was the only infallible rule of faith and life. Thus, they rejected the authority of church tradition. *Sola scriptura* or Scripture alone, is one of the pillars of Protestantism (i.e., biblical Christianity). But unfortunately, the Lutherans were inconsistent in their application of *sola scriptura* to worship practice. They basically eliminated some of the grosser abuses of Romanism but retained much that was of human and not scriptural origin. They argued that what is not forbidden by Scripture is permitted. Therefore, they retained many ceremonies and ecclesiastical rites that were not derived from the Bible. "With such a view of the discretionary power of the church in matters of worship practice, it is not at all surprising that the Lutheran Church retained a large portion of the ceremonial, ritualistic and governmental structures of the Catholic Church, the root causes of the corruption in the church against which Luther had rebelled in the first place."¹⁰ The Anglican or Episcopal Church also gave the church the power to determine (i.e., make up) ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies not derived from Scripture. Thus, Lutheran and Anglican churches have denied the absolute authority of Scripture in the area of worship. Therefore, although in many ways these churches were a vast improvement over Rome (e.g., justification by faith), in the area of worship and church government they were still fundamentally Romish with minor window-dressing reforms.

The Calvinist wing of the Reformation (Puritans, Presbyterians, Huguenots, Dutch Reformed, etc.) was fully consistent with *sola scriptura* and, in obedience to the Scriptures, argued that whatever is not commanded by Scripture in the worship of God is forbidden. That is, anything that the church does in worship must be proven from the Bible. This proof can be attained by an explicit command of God (e.g., "Do this in remembrance of Me," Lk. 22:19); or by logical inference from Scripture (i.e., there may not be an explicit command but when several passages are compared they teach or infer a scriptural practice)¹¹; or by biblical historical

⁹ "The regulative principle when applied provides objectivity in worship. By objectivity in this connection is meant simply conformity to the law of God as opposed to subjectivity or rather subjectivism in worship. There is no doubt a good sense of subjectivity in worship, the sincere, reverent attitude of the true worshiper. This desirable subjectivity, however, will tend invariably to that worship which is agreeable to the Will and Word of God. Opposed to this is subjectivism in worship, worship arising not from the revealed Will of the Lord, but from the desires, inclination, imagination and decision of men. Subjectivism is precisely what the Reformers and Puritans termed will-worship" (Dr. William Young, *The Puritan Principle of Worship* [Vienna, VA: The Publications Committee of the Presbyterian Reformed Church], pp. 16-17).

¹⁰ Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 110.

¹¹ "There is a course of careful distinction to be made between the Word of God and inferences drawn from the Word of God. We may challenge the validity of inferences drawn from Scripture and attempt to determine whether they are indeed scriptural, but we may never in the same way challenge the validity of the explicit statements of Scripture. The words and statements of Scripture are absolutely authoritative. Their authority is underived and indisputable. The authority of valid inferences from Scripture on the other hand, is derivative in nature, but one cannot argue that such inferences are therefore less authoritative than the express declarations of Scripture. They simply make explicit what is already expressed implicitly in Scripture" (Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 124). Some of the most important and foundational doctrines of Christianity are drawn from inferences of Scripture, such as the hypostatic union of the two natures in Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. That the use of "good and

example (e.g., the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week for corporate public worship).¹² The scriptural law of worship is very simple: “The Holy Scripture prescribes the whole content of worship. By this is meant that all elements or parts of worship are prescribed by God Himself in His word. This principle has universal reference to worship performed by men since the fall. In other words, it has equal application to the Old and the New Testaments. It is also universal in that it is regulative of all types of worship, whether public, family, or private.”¹³

God says regarding the worship of Himself: “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it” (Deut. 12:32). The worship of God is such a serious matter that God *alone* makes the rules. No man is permitted to add anything to or detract anything from what God has prescribed. The church’s job is *not* to innovate and create new worship styles, forms, or ordinances but simply to see what God has declared in His word and obey it. “The power of the church is purely ministerial and declarative. She is only to hold forth the doctrine, enforce the laws, and execute the government which Christ has given to her. She is to add nothing of her own to, and to subtract nothing from, what her Lord has established. Discretionary power she does not possess.”¹⁴

Most professing Christians would be outraged if someone added his own poetry or writings to the Bible. Isn’t that what cults do? Most evangelicals would think a person a dangerous heretic who decided to make up new doctrines based solely on his own imagination. Isn’t that what the Papal church has done? Yet, when it comes to that very important activity of worshiping God, many professing Christians think virtually anything goes. What would most believers think of a church that decided to eliminate the Lord’s supper, or baptism, or the preaching of God’s word? They would probably classify such a church as a cult. Yet, the same command that forbids us from *eliminating* any of the worship ordinances commanded in God’s word also forbids us from *adding* to what God has commanded. “We say that the command to add nothing is an organic part of the whole law, as law, and therefore, that every human addition to the worship of God, even if it be not contrary to any particular command, is yet contrary to the general command that nothing be added.”¹⁵

The vast majority of “Bible believing” churches today are totally ignorant of God’s scriptural law of worship (i.e., the regulative principle). Many Christians, when confronted with

necessary consequence” or logical inference from Scripture to formulate doctrine is biblical can be seen in the following passages: Luke 20:37ff, Matt. 22:31ff, Mark 12:26, Matt. 19:4-6, 1 Cor. 11:8-10.

¹² An instance of historical example is Lord’s day public worship. There is no explicit command or divine imperative changing public worship from the seventh day (Saturday) to the first day (Sunday) of the week, recorded in Scripture. Yet in the New Testament, the change from the seventh day to the first day is recorded as an accomplished fact (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, Rev. 1:10). Not every divine command or prophetic word has been inscripturated (i.e. included in the Bible). The universal practice of the apostolic church, such as Lord’s day public worship, is binding because of the unique authority given to the apostles, i.e., direct revelation. When the apostles died, direct revelation ceased and the canon was closed; now our doctrine, worship, and all historical examples are limited to the Bible, the Word of God. Those who appeal to church traditions, invented after the closing of the canon, for authority in establishing worship ordinances are, in principle, no better than Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (1 Kings 12:26-33).

¹³ William Young, “The Second Commandment” in *Worship in the Presence of God*, Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds. (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992), p. 75.

¹⁴ James H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1872), 2:163. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* says that “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 the holy Scripture” (Chap. XXI, sec. 1).

¹⁵ Thomas E. Peck, *Miscellanies* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895), 1:82.

this doctrine, argue that such a doctrine is an Old Testament teaching. They say that God in the New Testament economy has liberated us from such strictness. But an examination of the New Testament teaching on worship reveals that God's regulative principle of worship has not been abrogated but remains in full force. Furthermore, the regulative principle of worship gives man true liberty, for it frees man from the arbitrary opinions, imaginations, and gimmicks of other men.¹⁶

The regulative principle of worship is taught throughout the Bible. What follows is an examination of the many passages in Scripture that *prove* that "whatever is not commanded in Scripture in the worship of God is forbidden." Worship ordinances must be based specifically on what God says and not on human opinion or tradition.

The Regulative Principle in the Old Testament

1. The Unacceptable Offering

And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell (Gen. 4:3-5).

What was it regarding Cain's offering that made it unacceptable before God? The preference for Abel's offering and the rejection of Cain's was not arbitrary, but based on past revelation given to Adam and his family. Evidently, God revealed this information to Adam when He killed animals to make coverings for Adam and his wife (cf. Gen. 2:21). Generations later, Noah knew that God would only accept clean animals and birds as burnt offerings to the Lord (cf. Gen. 8:20). Cain, unlike his brother Abel, decided, apart from God's Word, that an offering of the fruit of the ground would be acceptable before the Lord. But God rejected Cain's offering because it was a creation of his mind. God did not command it. Therefore, even if Cain were sincere in his desire to please God, God still would have rejected his offering.

A common objection to the interpretation given above is that there are no previously recorded divine imperatives regarding blood sacrifice in the book of Genesis. Therefore, it is often asserted that the idea that Cain violated the regulative principle is a case of assuming what one is setting out to prove. This argument is refuted by the inspired comments of the author of Hebrews who wrote: "by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Heb. 11:4). Biblical faith presupposes a trust in divine revelation. Throughout Hebrews 11 true faith is spoken of as a belief in God's word that results in obedience to God's revealed will. Obviously then, Abel's offering was not based on human reason or an educated guess. It was rooted in Jehovah's command. John Brown concurs,

¹⁶ "The Christian is free from the commandments of men in matters of worship because God is the only lawgiver and His will is the perfect rule of all righteousness and holiness. Consequently, human constitutions [or ordinances] are contrary to the word of the Lord, if they are devised as part of the worship of God and their observance is bound upon the conscience as of necessary obligation. Calvin points out that in Colossians, Paul 'maintains that the doctrine of true worship is not to be sought from men, because the Lord has faithfully and fully taught as in what way He is to be worshiped (Inst. IV, X, 8)'" (Dr. William Young, *The Puritan Principle of Worship*, p. 7).

Though we have no particular account of the institution of sacrifice, the theory of its originating in express divine appointment is the only tenable one. The idea of expressing religious feelings, or of expiating sin, by shedding the blood of animals, could never have entered into the mind of man. We read that God clothed our first parents with the skin of animals, and by far the most probable account of this matter is, that these were the skins of animals which He had commanded them to offer in sacrifice. We have already seen, in our illustrations of the ninth chapter, ver. 16, that all divine covenants, all merciful arrangements in reference to fallen man, have been ratified by sacrifice. The declaration of mercy contained in the first promise seems to have been accompanied with the institution of expiatory sacrifice. And expiatory sacrifice, when offered from a faith in the divine revelation in reference to it, was acceptable to God, both as the appointed expression of conscious guilt and ill desert, and of the hope of mercy, and as an act of obedience to the divine will. It would appear that this revelation was not believed by Cain, that he did not see and feel the need for expiatory sacrifice, and that his religion consisted merely in an acknowledgment of the Deity as the author of the benefits which he enjoyed. Abel, on the other hand, did believe the revelation. He readily acknowledges himself a sinner, and expresses his penitence and his hope of forgiveness in the way of God's appointment. Believing what God has said, he did what God had enjoined.¹⁷

The Hebrews 11:4 passage offers indisputable biblical proof that acceptable worship cannot be based on a human tradition that involves not a faith in God and his infallible Word, but a faith in man's wisdom and imagination. Acceptable worship can only be based on faith in divine revelation. John Knox writes, "It is not enough that man invent ceremony, and then give it a signification, according to his pleasure.... But if that anything proceed from faith, it must have the word of God for the assurance; for ye are not ignorant, 'That faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' Now, if ye will prove that your ceremonies proceed from faith, and do please God, ye must prove God in expressed words has commanded them: Or else shall ye never prove, that they proceed from faith, nor yet that they please God; but that they are sin, and do displease him, according to the words of the apostle, 'Whatsoever is not of faith is sin'"¹⁸

God expects faith and obedience to His Word. If God's people can worship the Lord according to their own will, as long as the man-made ordinances are not expressly forbidden, then could not Cain, Noah, or the Levites offer God a fruit salad or a bucket of turnips, for it is nowhere forbidden? And if God wanted a strict regulation of His worship apart from the regulative principle, would it not require hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of volumes telling us what is forbidden? But God, in His infinite wisdom, says, "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deut. 12:32).

2. *The Second Commandment*

You shall not make for yourself any 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; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them (Ex. 20:4-5).

The Puritans and early Presbyterians recognized that the Ten Commandments were a summary of all of God's moral precepts. Thus, the second commandment summarized how God

¹⁷John Brown, *Hebrews* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1963 [1862]), 493-494.

¹⁸William Croft Dickenson, ed., *John Knox's History of the Reformation in Scotland* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 1:87.

is to be worshiped. While the command expressly forbids the making and worshiping of any representation of false gods and the making and worshiping of any representation of God Himself, it also forbids the use of all man-made devices and ordinances in the worship of God. It condemns “all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever.”¹⁹ Thomas Ridgely writes, “We further break this commandment, when we invent ordinances which God has nowhere in His Word commanded; or think to recommend ourselves to him by gestures, or modes of worship, which we have no precedent or example for in the New Testament. This is what is generally called superstition and will-worship.”²⁰ When discussing the second commandment Michael Bushell writes, “It [image worship] is the archetype of all of man’s attempts to worship God through the work of his own hands. Idolatry and the introduction of unwarranted practices into services of worship are the illegitimate children of the same father. The latter is but a more ‘sophisticated’ version of the former. They both proceed on the assumption that the means of worship that God has seen fit to institute are inadequate.”²¹ James Durham adds: “It is a sin not only to worship false gods, but to worship the true God in a false way.”²² Zachary Ursinus concurs, “*The other species of idolatry* is more subtle and refined, as when the true God is supposed to be worshiped, whilst the kind of worship which is paid unto him is false, which is the case when any one imagines that he is worshiping or honoring God by the performance of any work not prescribed by the divine law. This species of idolatry is more

¹⁹The *Westminster Larger Catechism*, from the answer to question 109. Puritan Pastor Thomas Boston writes, “The matter of this command is the worship of God and his ordinances; and it says to every man, Thou shalt not make any thing whereby thou wilt worship God. And as the seventh command meets him that defiles his neighbour’s wife, saying, Thou shalt not commit adultery; so this meets the church of Rome, and says, Thou shalt not make any graven image &c. But as the seventh says also to the fornicator, Thou shalt not commit uncleanness; so this says also to the church of England [i.e., the Anglican or Episcopal Church], thou shalt not make crossing in baptism, kneeling, bowing to the altar, festival days, &c.—And to every sort of people, and to every particular person, it says, thou shalt not meddle to make anything of divine worship and ordinances out of thy own head. All holy ordinances and parts of worship God has reserved to himself the making of them for us, saying, with respect to these, Thou shalt not make them to thyself. Men are said, in Scripture, to make a thing to themselves, when they make it out of their own head, without the word of God for it. But when they make anything according to God’s Word, God is said to do it, Matt. xix.6. If there be not then a divine law for what is brought into the worship and ordinance of God, it is an idol of men’s making, a device of their own. And so Popery, Prelacy, ceremonies and whatsoever is without the word, brought in God’s matters, is overturned at once by his word. Thou shalt not make, be thou Pope, King, Parliament, minister, private person, synod, or council” (*Commentary on the Shorter Catechism*, (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993 [1853]), Vol. 2, pp. 138-139).

²⁰Thomas Ridgely, *Commentary on the Larger Catechism* (Edmonton, AB, Canada: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993, [1855]), Vol. 2, p. 331. “Will-worship” is an excellent phrase to remember, for that is what it is—worship of one’s own will. Man tries to become God and decides what is worship. It is a form of idolatry, whether in the restricted area of worship, or the broader area, as is prevalent today under the name of humanism, i.e., man as the measure of all things. In such cases, man worships the creature rather than the Creator; and God condemns it. God commands how He will be worshiped. We are not to add to or take away” (Carl W. Bogue, *The Scriptural Law of Worship* [Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage Publications], 1988, p. 10).

²¹Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion*, p. 145.

²²James Durham, *The Law Unsealed: Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* (Edmonton, Canada: Still Water Revival, n. d. [1802, 1675]), p. 65.

properly condemned in the second commandment, and is termed superstition, because it adds to the commandments of God the inventions of men.”²³

For those who think that the Puritans were making too much of the second commandment, we must keep in mind that Christ argued that the sixth commandment applied to name calling and hatred; and the seventh commandment applied even to inward lust. If the seventh commandment forbids even impure thoughts, then surely the second commandment forbids devising our own forms of worship from our own minds.

3. *Strange Fire*

And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which *he commanded them not*. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev. 10:1-2).

“*What was their sin?* Their sin was offering of strange fire, so the text saith that they offered *strange fire*, which God commanded them not.... But had God even forbidden it? Where do we find that ever God had forbidden them to offer strange fire, or appointed that they should offer only one kind of fire? There is no text of Scripture that you can find from the beginning of Genesis to this place, where God hath said in terminis, in so many words expressly, *You shall offer no fire but one kind of fire*. And yet here they are consumed by fire from God, for offering ‘strange fire.’”²⁴ The Hebrew word translated “strange” (*zar*) as in “*strange fire*” could also be translated, “unauthorized.” Nadab and Abihu offered “unauthorized fire.” Leviticus 16:12 says that when a priest is to burn incense he must do so using coals taken directly from the altar. Nadab and Abihu used coals from an unauthorized source. The important thing to note is that what they did *was not commanded*. “The whole narrative from 8:1 has led us to expect God’s ministers to obey the law promptly and exactly. Suddenly we meet Aaron’s sons doing something that had not been commanded.”²⁵

Those who reject God’s regulative principle of worship have a real problem explaining this text. Some argue that Nadab and Abihu were condemned because they offered strange incense, for offering strange incense is expressly condemned in Exodus 30:9. But the text does not say strange incense, it says *strange fire*. Others argue that they must have been insincere or drunk. But what does the Holy Spirit give us as the reason for their judgment? They offered *strange fire*, “which he commanded them not.” Carl W. Bogue writes,

You see the point emerging: the *regulative principle*! It was not that God had specifically forbidden other fires to be used. The issue is his appointment of a particular fire, and the conclusion is that whatever is not commanded is therefore forbidden. Many professing Christians would no doubt be offended at such a restriction. After all, all they did was worship God in a way not commanded, not in a way He had explicitly forbidden. Why should it matter where the

²³Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n. d. [from the 1852 edition]), p. 518.

²⁴Jeremiah Burroughs, *Gospel_Worship* (London: Peter Cole, 1650), pp. 2-3.

²⁵G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 155.

fire came from? So they used fire of their own making! It would probably burn as brightly and consume the incense just as well. No doubt many would say, “It is just as good.”²⁶

But, although from a human standpoint the worship of Nadab and Abihu appears to be sincere and pious, it is sinful and was an act of rebellion because it was not commanded. It was a form of idolatry. They placed their human autonomy over God’s expressed will. Therefore, God consumed them by fire for intruding human ideas into the worship of the LORD.

4. Avoiding False Worship

A passage of Scripture that tells Israel how to avoid the corruption of biblical worship and syncretism with pagan worship practices is Deuteronomy 12:28-32:

Observe and obey all these words which I command you, that it may go well with you and your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God. When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.

Verse 32 is an explicit statement of God’s regulative principle of worship.²⁷ It is interesting to note that whenever Israel and the church have ignored God’s scriptural law of worship, they in fact did adopt pagan worship—corrupting it. The Roman Catholic Church as a conscious practice mixed paganism into their rites and ceremonies to attract the heathen. Likewise, modern evangelical churches are mixing American pop-culture into their worship practices to attract new people. Because of our sinful natures and the allure of the surrounding pagan cultures in which we live, God has given us His regulative principle of worship to protect us from ourselves, from sinful human autonomy in worship. To ignore God’s explicit command is to invite heathenism, declension, and disaster into the church.

²⁶Carl W. Bogue, *The Scriptural Law of Worship*, pp. 16-17.

²⁷The regulative principle of worship is seen in practice in the construction of the tabernacle and the temple. Moses was told by God: “And see to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown on the mountain” (Ex. 25:40). God prescribed the building of the tabernacle and temple down to smallest detail. Man was not permitted to improvise at all in the construction of either dwelling. This fact should teach God’s people that whatever is not commanded is forbidden. God’s people are not to turn aside to the right hand or to the left. This point is further illustrated in God’s command to make altars of unhewn stone: “And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it” (Ex. 20:25). Before the establishment of the ceremonial law that appointed fashioned altars, God required that only unhewn stones were to be used. The use of man’s tools are said to profane the altar; the likely reason is that man contributes nothing of his own to salvation and thus should add nothing of his own to the appointed means of worship.

5. David and His Men's Error

So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark.... And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God (2 Sam. 6:3-4, 6-7).

David and the men involved in moving the ark were, without question, sincere in their desire to please God by moving the ark to Jerusalem. Yet, the result of this *sincere effort* was the judgment of God. Uzzah put out his hand to protect the ark from falling, because he loved God and cared about God's ark. Yet, despite all the sincerity and good intentions, God's anger was aroused and He killed Uzzah. Why? Because the whole affair was highly offensive to God. Uzzah's touching the ark was the capstone of the day's offenses.

Those who object to the regulative principle make much of the fact that Uzzah was killed for something clearly forbidden in God's law (i.e., touching the ark). Yes, it is true that Uzzah died violating an explicit prohibition of the law (cf. Num. 4:15). But, king David's analysis of what went wrong that day includes everyone involved, not just Uzzah. "For because you did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, *because we did not consult Him about the proper order.*' So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, *as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD*" (1 Chron. 15:13-15).

When God gives a command that the Levites are to carry the ark with poles (cf. Num. 4), it is not necessary for God to forbid the men of Judah from using an ox cart. King David and his men should have consulted the law of Moses and obeyed it. Instead, they acted pragmatically. They imitated the Philistines, who used a new cart when they sent the ark back to Bethshemesh. When it comes to the worship of God, we are not permitted to improvise, even if our intentions are good. Sincerity is important, but sincerity must be in accord with divine revelation. Even in religious matters, that may seem small or trivial to us, God commands that we act in accordance with His revealed will and not innovate according to our will. "The great lesson for all time is to beware of following our own devices in the worship of God when we have clear instructions in His Word how we are to worship Him."²⁸ "Moreover we must gather from it that none of our devotions will be accepted by God unless they conform to His will. This rule ruins all the man-made inventions in the papacy's so-called worship of God, which has so much pomp and foolishness. All of that is nothing but sheer trash before God, and is in fact an abomination to Him. Hence, let us hold this unmistakable rule, that if we want to worship God in accordance with our own ideas, it will simply be abuse and corruption. And so, on the contrary, we must have the testimony of His will in order to follow what He commands us, and to submit to it. Now that is how the worship which we render to God will be approved."²⁹

²⁸William G. Blaikie, *Commentary on Second Samuel* (New York: A.C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), p. 88.

²⁹John Calvin, *Sermons on 2 Samuel* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p. 246.

6. *Autonomous Worship Condemned*

And they have built the high places of Tophet, 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 heart* (Jer. 7:31; cf. Jer. 19:5).

“How clearly does this passage show that God does not view sin as does man? Man would revolt at the unnatural and inhuman cruelty of the burning of the fruit of one’s own body before an idol. But in God’s mind this is but secondary, the essential evil being that it is worship which He does not command, neither came it into His heart.”³⁰ Idolatry, murder, and child sacrifice are explicitly condemned in the Law and the Prophets. Yet, Jeremiah cuts to the essence of idolatrous worship. Judah was worshiping in a manner that did not originate from God’s heart. Judah’s worship was not founded upon God’s command. Rather than worshiping God according to His command, they “walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” (Jer. 7:24). If the people of Judah had consulted the Word of God and obeyed it, they would have been spared God’s fury. “We have to do with a God who is very jealous; who will be worshiped as He wills, or not at all. Nor can we complain. If God be such a Being as we are taught in the Holy Scriptures, it must be His inalienable right to determine and prescribe how He will be served.”³¹ John Calvin, in his commentary on this passage, writes, God here cuts off from men every occasion for making evasions, since he condemns by this one phrase, ‘I have not commanded them,’ whatever the Jews devised. There is then no other argument needed to condemn superstitions, than that they are not commanded by God: for when men allow themselves to worship God according to their own fancies, and attend not to His commands, they pervert true religion. And if this principle was adopted by the Papists, all those fictitious modes of worship, in which they absurdly exercise themselves, would fall to the ground... Were they to admit this principle, that we cannot rightly worship God except by obeying His Word, they would be delivered from their deep abyss of error. The Prophet’s words then are very important when he says that God had *commanded* no such thing and that it never came to His mind; as though He had said, that men assume too much wisdom, when they devise what He never required, nay, what He never knew.³²

Likewise, if modern Reformed, evangelical, and fundamentalist churches adopted and observed God’s regulative principle, the syncretism with our pagan culture (e.g., Hollywood), the entertainment (e.g., music soloists, drama, rock groups) and other gimmicks would cease.

7. *The Sinful Pragmatism of King Saul*

The biblical account of King Saul’s autonomy in worship and subsequent downfall reveals God’s attitude toward a man-centered, pragmatic view of worship.³³ In 1 Samuel 10:8,

³⁰William Young, “The Second Commandment,” in Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds. *Worship in the Presence of God*, p. 85.

³¹Samuel H. Kellogg, *The Book of Leviticus* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, N.D.), p. 240.

³²John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Prophet Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), Vol. 1, pp. 413-414.

³³Another king who ignored God’s regulative principle of worship to his own peril was king Uzziah. Carl Bogue writes, “King Uzziah entered the temple to burn incense before the Lord. That he was king was now irrelevant. The priests were horrified, and eighty of them rushed in after him and opposed him, saying, ‘It is not for you, Uzziah, to

the prophet Samuel instructs King Saul (according to the word of the LORD) to go to Gilgal, and to wait seven days. Then Samuel (who also was a priest) would return, “to offer burnt offerings and make sacrifices of peace offerings.” King Saul went to Gilgal and waited for seven days for Samuel to arrive. On the seventh day many hours had gone by and Samuel still had not arrived. Saul’s troops were starting to disperse. The situation was tense, with the Philistines ready to attack. Therefore, Saul took matters in his own hands and offered a sacrifice before Samuel arrived. When confronted by Samuel (who arrived soon after Saul’s sacrifice) Saul offered the following excuses: “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and the Philistines gathered at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD. Therefore, I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering’” (1 Sam. 11-12).

Saul did not base his decision on Scripture or direct revelation from a prophet but upon the perceived need of the moment. From a human standpoint Saul’s pragmatic argument makes sense, for “Samuel had not yet come. The people were scattered from him. The Philistines were concentrating at Michmash, and might have come down and fallen upon him at Gilgal.”³⁴ Saul even argues that his act was pious: “He would be thought very devout, and in great care not to engage the Philistines till he had by prayer and sacrifice engaged God on his side...What! Go to war before I said my prayers!”³⁵ If anyone had a legitimate excuse to do something in worship not prescribed by God it was King Saul. But Samuel said to Saul: “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you” (1 Sam. 13:13). Saul was instructed to wait for Samuel. Samuel was supposed to make the offering at God’s appointed time. Saul’s pragmatism in which he improvised to meet the perceived need of the moment showed a lack of trust in God. When it comes to worshiping God we are to do what He asks: no more and no less. Everything else is rebellion.

The story of Saul’s improvising in worship and God’s displeasure at such an act is important because almost all the innovations that are occurring in our day in worship, evangelism, church government, etc., are based solely upon pragmatic considerations. When people say, “But look at the number of people that are being saved; look at how marriages are being helped; look at the wonderful church growth we’re achieving,” we must respond by asking for scriptural warrant. In biblical Christianity the end *never* justifies using unauthorized means to that end.³⁶

burn incense to the LORD but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the LORD God’ (2 Chronicles 26:18). The king was offended to think his worship was not acceptable to God. Enraged, he persisted, and sacred Scripture tells how that God caused a leprosy to appear on his forehead. ‘They thrust him out that place. Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him’ (verse 20). The king was a leper to the day of his death. For anyone, even the king, to intrude into the temple, and thus add to God’s command, was an offense to God; and God showed His displeasure” (*The Scriptural Law of Worship*, p. 10).

³⁴W. G. Blaikie, “The First Book of Samuel,” in W. Robertson Nicoll, ed., *The Expositors’ Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943), Vol. 2, p. 57.

³⁵Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, N.D.), Vol. 2, p. 347.

³⁶“Saul’s foolishness did not end with this first incident. A short time later, he led the Israelites in battle to destroy the Amalekites, and their livestock as well, taking no booty. Instead, ‘Saul and the people spared Agag,’ King of the Amalekites, ‘and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs.’ His subsequent explanation was that these choice animals would make an excellent sacrifice unto the LORD. From a human perspective this decision might sound reasonable. After all, when they considered the best of the livestock, it

8. The Apostasy of King Jeroboam

In 937 B.C., God divided the people of Israel into two separate nations and placed Jeroboam upon the throne over the northern tribes. Earlier, God had promised Jeroboam that if he walked according to His statutes and commandments that He would give Jeroboam an enduring house as He had for David (1 Kings 11:38). But Jeroboam did not trust in the LORD and His promise. He believed that the path to power and prosperity was only to be found in pragmatic political and religious maneuvering. He believed that the only way his kingdom would endure was to set up an alternative religious system to the one that God had set up in Jerusalem. He believed that because he was the king he had the power to set up new ordinances in ecclesiastical matters.

King Jeroboam was guilty of adding four major innovations to the religious system that Jehovah had instituted: First, he set up two new worship centers to replace God's chosen city, Jerusalem. Jeroboam chose the cities of Dan and Bethel for their strategic location at both ends of his kingdom and because these sites had a special religious significance to the Israelites: "In the extreme south was Beth-el—'the house of God and the gate of heaven'—consecrated by the twofold appearance of God to Jacob; set apart by the patriarch himself (Gen. xxviii. 11-19; xxxv. 1, 7, 9-15); and where Samuel had held solemn assemblies (1 Sam. vii. 16). Similarly, in the extreme north Dan was 'a consecrated' place, where 'strange worship' may have lingered from the days of Micah (Judges xviii. 30, 31)."³⁷

Second, King Jeroboam instituted a new method of worship. At Dan and Bethel he set up golden calves. Were the people of the north already so corrupt that they immediately would be attracted to the rank idolatry of worshiping cows? Probably not. The evidence shows that although Jeroboam was power hungry and a pragmatist, he considered himself to be a worshiper of Jehovah. He even named his son and destined successor Abijah, which means "Jehovah is my father." Therefore, Jeroboam and the people viewed the calves as representatives of the true God or as signs of Jehovah's presence. They may have viewed the calves as similar to the cherubim in the tabernacle and temple from which Jehovah spoke (Num. 7:8-9) and where the special Shekinah presence dwelt. One of the most prominent features in the courts of the temple was the molten sea on the back of the twelve bulls.

Perhaps Jeroboam and his advisors took their cue from the brazen bulls or they reinterpreted Aaron's golden calf in a positive light. "[H]is contention would probably be, that he had not abolished the ancient religion of the people, only given it a form better suited to present circumstances—one, moreover, derived from primitive national use, and sanctioned by no less an

probably seemed like a terrible waste simply to destroy them. Wouldn't it be better to retain them as an offering unto God? If the motive was sincere, how could such a generous act of worship be tainted? Samuel's response was blunt: 'Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.' The lesson of this incident is simple. No motive or action in worship is acceptable, if it runs contrary to God's revealed word. 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. Therefore, Saul's deeds are likened to the very opposite of true worship—to *witchcraft* and *idolatry*." (Kevin Reed, *Biblical Worship* [Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage Publications, 1995], pp. 14-15).

³⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *Old Testament Bible History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982 [1890]), Vol. 2, p. 138.

authority than that of Aaron, the first High Priest.”³⁸ Jeroboam not only violated the second commandment by using images in the worship of Jehovah but he also had shrines built for offerings on the high places. These high places were ancient sacred sites to the heathen. Therefore, Jeroboam’s adding his own elements to the worship of God led immediately to syncretism with paganism. Adding to God’s worship ordinances does not occur in a vacuum. When people add, they add what pleases man. In the north the people were already becoming attached to the local ‘sacred’ sites. Jeroboam merely accommodated their corrupt religious desires.

Jeroboam’s third innovation was to make “priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi” (1 Kings 12:31). “This opening up of the office to all was calculated to please the people and to destroy the Levitical priestly office. Furthermore, Jeroboam could enrich ‘himself’ by taking the cities that belonged to the priests and Levites, which they were obliged to leave, and from whence he drove them.”³⁹ “For the Levites left their common lands and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem, for Jeroboam and his sons had rejected them from serving as priests to the LORD. Then he appointed for himself priests for the high places, for the demons, and for the calf idols which he had made” (2 Chron. 11:14-15).

Jeroboam’s fourth innovation was to set *his own time* for one of God’s holy days, “on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in the month which he had devised in his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33). Jeroboam apparently took a feast of God’s appointing (the Feast of Tabernacles) and merely changed the keeping of it from the fifteenth day of the *seventh* month to the fifteenth day of the *eighth* month. God does not tell us why Jeroboam changed the month. But, the fact that the change originated in Jeroboam’s heart and not from God’s Word is emphasized by the Holy Spirit and shows God’s approbation of any human autonomy in worship.

What Jeroboam did through his innovations in worship led the whole northern kingdom into rank idolatry. Jeroboam’s perversion of true worship is set forth throughout the book of Kings as the paradigm of idolatry. Whenever an idolater king is described in the northern kingdom, the Bible says, “he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat” (cf. 1 Kings 15:26, 34; 16:19, 26, 31; 22:52; 2 Kings 3:3; 10:29; 13:2, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 29; 17:21-22).

Although God in His Word has continually warned His people of the need to follow strictly only what He has commanded in worship (not to *add* to it or *detract* from it), and has repeatedly set forth Jeroboam the son of Nebat as an example of God’s hatred of human innovations in worship and their disastrous effect upon God’s people, most professing Christians in our day act as though God has been silent in this area. For example, Jeroboam was condemned for using images (the golden calves) as aids in the worship of Jehovah. Yet today, pictures of Jesus Christ are common in evangelical and Reformed circles. Although it is claimed that these pictures of Christ are merely educational and not worshiped, the Bible says that Jesus is fully God and fully man in *one* person. Therefore, pictures of Christ are automatically religious and devotional in nature. Therefore, their use needs divine warrant (there is none), and they violate the second commandment by depicting the second person of the Trinity. Pictures of Christ are made from the imagination of man.⁴⁰ This practice is will-worship.

³⁸*Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 137.

³⁹John Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1810]), Vol. 2, p. 731.

⁴⁰“And although the Son was, and is man, having taken on him that nature, and united it to his Godhead, yet he is not a mere man; therefore, that image, which only holds forth one nature, and looks like any man in the world, cannot be

Jeroboam was condemned for devising the *time* of a holy day without warrant from God's Word. Yet professing Christians today devise many holy days and their times without scriptural warrant. There is the almost universally celebrated holy day of Christmas—a holy day not commanded, the *time* of which was taken from rank heathen sun worship. One can search the whole Bible very carefully and one will not find a shred of biblical warrant for Christmas, Easter, Whitsunday, All Hallow's Eve, etc.⁴¹ If God regarded the setting of even the time of a holy day (appointed by Himself) by a king as sinful, then surely all the holy days set up by popes, bishops, or anyone are likewise sinful. It can be said that many professing Christians today are following in the ways of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat.

Jeroboam was condemned for setting up a priesthood not authorized by God's Word. Yet most professing Christians today regard the method of governing Christ's Church as something primarily devised by man. But the New Testament sets forth a Presbyterian system of government (e.g., government by a plurality of elders). Furthermore, parachurch organizations that function independently of the church's authority are unscriptural, for they are not authorized by God's Word. If God condemned the innovations in worship, holy days and church government made by a king, then He condemns these same innovations today. Be forewarned "that the first step on the path of idolatry is taken when men presume to worship the LORD through means and measures not ordained in the word of God."⁴²

What about the Regulative Principle in the New Testament?

For those in love with their human traditions (that they have *added* to God's ordained worship), an obvious way to circumvent the clear meaning of the Old Testament passages discussed would be to assert that the regulative principle was meant *only* for an immature old covenant church. It is asserted that because the old covenant people of God did not have the Spirit of God in the same manner or fullness as new covenant believers, God had to prescribe all

the representation of that person which is God and Man. And, if it be said, man's soul cannot be painted, but his body may, and yet that picture represents a man: I answer, it does so because he has but one nature; and what represents that, represents the person: But it is not so with Christ; his Godhead is not a distinct part of the human nature, as the soul of man is (which is necessarily supposed in every living man) but a distinct nature, only united with the manhood in that one person, Christ, who has no fellow: Therefore what represents him, must not represent a man only, but must represent Christ, *Immanuel, God-man*, otherwise it is not his image. Besides, there is no warrant for representing him in his Manhood; nor any colourable possibility of it, but as men fancy: and, shall that be called Christ's portraiture? Would that be called any other man's portraiture, which were drawn at men's pleasure, without regard to the pattern? Again, there is no use of it: for, either that image behooved to have but common estimation with other images, and that would wrong Christ; or a peculiar respect and reverence, and so sins against this commandment [the second] that forbids all religious reverence to images: But he being God, and so the Object of worship, we must either divide his natures, or say that image or picture does not represent Christ" (James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments* [Thomas Lumisden and John Robertson Printing House, M.DCC.XXXV], p. 54).

⁴¹The idea of dividing up Christ's life into events and pieces and then attaching festival days or distinct holy days to each event was brought into church practice in imitation of Roman Emperor worship. The New Testament teaches that the church of Christ is to celebrate the *whole* work of redemption every LORD's day. Thus, God has ordained 52 days each year as special days for restful concentrated worship. "There is no day commanded in the Scripture to be kept under the gospel but the LORD's day, which is the Christian Sabbath. Festival days, vulgarly [commonly] called holy-days, having no warrant in the word of God, are not to be continued" (*An Appendix, Touching Days and Places for Public Worship*, as annexed to the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God [1645]).

⁴²Kevin Reed, *Biblical Worship*, 1995), p. 21.

their worship ordinances in minute detail. But with the outpouring of God's Spirit at Pentecost: "The Church, it may be said, has passed from childhood to years of maturity where it can exercise discretion and liberty in determining its own worship."⁴³ This argument (although common) is fallacious—for the New Testament teaches the exact same principle of worship as the Old Testament. Christ held strictly to the regulative principle before and after His resurrection and the Apostle Paul adhered strictly to the regulative principle many years after Pentecost.

1. Jesus and the Regulative Principle

Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition" (Matt. 15:1-3)?

The Pharisees were the respected religious leaders of the Jewish people. They believed that they had the liberty to add to the commandments of God. The law of God did contain various ceremonial washings to signify the unclean becoming clean. The Pharisees simply added other washings to emphasize and "perfect" the law of Moses. There is no express commandment forbidding these ceremonial additions except the regulative principle (e.g., Deut. 4:2; 12:31). These additions, however, have no warrant from the Word of God.

For this reason our Lord strongly rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for adding to God's law. What happens when sinful men add rules and regulations to God's law? Eventually manmade tradition replaces or sets aside God's law. "Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition" (Matt. 15:6). The ancient Christian church added its own rules and ceremonies to the worship of God and degenerated into the pagan and idolatrous Roman Catholic Church. If we do not draw the line regarding worship where God draws the line, then, as history proves, the church will eventually degenerate into little better than a bizarre pagan cult. Christ's rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees applies today to virtually every (so called) branch of the Christian church. "These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. *And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men*" (Matt. 15:8-9).

It is not an accident that the Holy Spirit chose a very "innocuous" looking addition. Obviously, God does not view human additions as a light thing, as something that people should ignore. After all, if human additions are permissible in the religious sphere, what could be any more innocent, pragmatic or practical than a simple hand washing? Yet our Lord not only refused to submit to this man-made religious rite but also strongly rebuked the Pharisees for adding a human rule to God's word. "Washing of the hands is a thing proper enough; one could wish it were oftener practiced; but to exalt it into a religious rite is a folly and a sin."⁴⁴ The disciples of Christ were well trained, for they knew that any human tradition, no matter how good and innocent, must not be complied with when it is given a religious significance and status by man without divine warrant. "Note, illegal impositions will be laid to the charge of those who support and maintain them [human traditions in worship], and keep them up, as well as those who first

⁴³William Young, *Worship in the Presence of God*, p. 86.

⁴⁴Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1987), 201.

invented and enjoined them.”⁴⁵ “Antiquity and Fathers without Scripture is the old charter of superstitious formalists.... Hence learn: That God in wisdom brings men’s ceremonies to a dispute and so to be refuted and condemned....”⁴⁶

Jesus is a champion of the regulative principle. He rejects the most innocuous of religious traditions and also shows us how human traditions and laws drive out and thus set aside what God has condemned. Rutherford writes,

And when the Pharisees saw some of the disciples eat bread with unwashed hands, they found fault. The challenge was for an external omission of an outward observance which may be seen with the eyes. Ergo, these traditions are not condemned by Christ because they were contrary to God’s word, or impious, but in this, that they were contrary because not commanded. For in the external religious act of washing hands, there was no impiety of a wicked opinion objected to Christ’s disciples, about the piety of these traditions, nor about any inward opinion. Nor is there any question between the Pharisees and the Lord’s disciples, whether the traditions of the elders should be esteemed the marrow and sum of all religions, as Vasquez saith; but only anent external conformity with walking in the traditions of the elders, or not walking, as is most clear in the text. It is true, Christ objected they accounted more of the traditions of men, nor of God’s commandments, as papists and formalists do; but that was not the state of the question between the disciples of Christ and the Pharisees. 2. Christ rejecteth these traditions, by an argument taken from the want of lawful Author, while he calls them precepts of men, opposed to the commandments of God.⁴⁷

People who oppose the regulative principle often attempt to circumvent the obvious import of these passages by appealing to the context. They argue that the example set forth by Christ in verses 4 and 5 (of the person who follows a human tradition in order not to provide for his parents in old age) informs us that Christ only had negative traditions in mind, that is, traditions which nullified, set apart or contradicted God’s word. The problem with this interpretation is that it completely ignores verse 2 or the original confrontation that elicited Jesus’ response in verses 3 to 9. Jesus gives an example of why adding human requirements to God’s word is wrong. Human requirements eventually displace God’s word. (Anyone with knowledge of Judaism or the history of the Christian church knows that our Lord’s teaching is true.) The fact that Christ gives such an example does not detract at all from verse 2 where the most innocent and apparently harmless of human traditions (hand washing) is regarded as totally inappropriate. How does washing one’s hands contradict, violate or set apart God’s word? Jesus condemns the Pharisees for assuming (contrary to Scripture) that religious leaders have legislative authority in the church. When church leaders give themselves authority to invent out of their own imaginations doctrines or commandments, the eventual result is declension and even apostasy. Note once again, that in verse 9 Jesus unequivocally condemns all human doctrines and commandments in religion. “And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mt. 15:9; cf. Isa. 29:13)

Further, the parallel passage in Mark 7 settles the matter once and for all, because in the Markian account Jesus *explicitly* identifies the traditions that he condemns as including religious

⁴⁵Matthew Henry, *Commentary* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 5:210-211.

⁴⁶David Dickson, *Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987 [1647]), 207.

⁴⁷Samuel Rutherford, *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (London: John Field, 1647), 138.

washings.⁴⁸ “He answered and 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. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.” For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’ He said to them, ‘All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition’” (vs. 6-9). “It is just as easy to destroy the authority of God’s Word by addition as by subtraction, by burying it under human inventions as by denying its truth. The whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, must be our rule of faith—nothing added and nothing taken away.”⁴⁹ Our Lord does not just condemn negative, bad or contradictory human traditions but all of them without exception. Spurgeon writes,

Religion based on human authority is worthless; we must *worship* the true God in the way of his own appointing, or we do not worship him at all. Doctrines and ordinances are only to be accepted when the divine Word supports them, and they are to be accepted for that reason only. The most punctilious form of devotion is *vain worship*, if it is regulated by man’s ordinance apart from the Lord’s own command.⁵⁰

After briefly examining Christ’s teaching in context one can only conclude that the argument that our Lord is only condemning certain bad religious traditions rather than any and all human traditions is eisegesis of the worst sort.

Attempts at circumventing passages such as Matthew 15:2-9 which prove the regulative principle are not new but are (in general matters) restatements of old popish and prelatical arguments long ago rejected by the Reformed churches. Note the words of Zacharias Ursinus (written in the 1570s and first published in the 1580s):

There are some who object to what we have here said, and affirm in support of will-worship, that those passages which we have cited as condemning it, speak only in reference to the ceremonies instituted by Moses, and of the unlawful commandments of men, such as constitute no part of the

⁴⁸The second half of verse 8 beginning with “the washing of” is not included in modern critical editions of the Greek New Testament (e.g., United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament [third edition]; the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament [26th edition]). Most modern translations (ASV, RSV, NASB, NEB, JB, NIV) reflect modern textual criticism by leaving out the second half of verse 8. The expanded reading of verse 8 is found in the *Textus Receptus* (or the Received Text) and the Majority Text (or the Byzantine/Traditional Text). The KJV and NKJV are based on the *Textus Receptus*. In short, the critical editions of the Greek New Testament (that virtually all modern translations are based upon) depend primarily on a few older manuscripts that were discovered chiefly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g., *Codex Vaticanus* and *Codex Sinaiticus*). The majority texts are not as old as those used in the critical editions; however, they are far greater in number and were used by Christ’s church since at least as early as the fifth century. Modern scholarship regarding the majority texts (i.e., archeology, verification of various readings by older papyri, ancient versions and quotations from the early church fathers [e.g., the disputed ending of Mark was accepted as canonical by the second century A.D.]), serious problems with the presuppositions and methodology of the early critical scholars such as Wescott and Hort, and great variations between the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus manuscripts have pointed many Christians back to the Majority Text as superior to the modern critical text. This author accepts the KJV or NKJV reading of Mark 7:8 as reflecting the actual words of Jesus Christ. Accepting the regulative principle, however, is not dependant upon accepting the Majority Text reading of Mark 7:8.

⁴⁹J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: Mark* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 101-102. Ryle (1816-1900) was an Anglican minister and bishop (of Liverpool) and therefore did not adhere to the regulative principle. Nevertheless, his remarks on Mark cited above are true.

⁵⁰Spurgeon, *Matthew*, 203.

worship of God; and not of those precepts which have been sanctioned by the church and bishops, and which command nothing contrary to the Word of God. But that this argument is false, may be proven by certain declarations connected with those passages of Scripture to which we have referred, which likewise reject those human laws, which, upon their own authority, prescribe anything in reference to divine worship which God has not commanded, although the thing itself is neither sinful nor forbidden by God. So Christ rejects the tradition which the Jews had in regard to washing their hands, because they associated with it the idea of divine worship, although it was not sinful in itself, saying, “Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man, but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.” “Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites; for ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within ye are full of extortion and excess.” (Matthew 15:11; 23, 25). The same thing may be said of celibacy and of the distinction of meats and days, of which he calls “doctrines of devils,” although in themselves they are lawful to the godly, as he in other places teaches. Wherefore, those things are also which are in themselves indifferent, that is neither commanded nor prohibited by God, if they are prescribed and done as the worship of God, or if it is supposed that God is honored by our performing them, and dishonored by neglecting them, it is plainly manifest that the Scriptures in these and similar places condemn them.⁵¹

Calvin says, “Christ has faithfully and accurately given the meaning, that *in vain is God worshiped*, when the will of men is substituted in the room of doctrine. By these words, all kinds of *will-worship* (*ethelogescheia*), as Paul calls it (Col. 2:23), are plainly condemned. For, as we have said, since God chooses to be worshiped in no other way than according to his own appointment, he cannot endure new modes of worship to be devised. As soon as men allow themselves to wander beyond the limits of the Word of God, the more labour and anxiety they display in worshiping him, the heavier is the condemnation which they draw down upon themselves; for by such inventions religion is dishonored.”⁵²

2. The Great Commission

After Jesus Christ’s resurrection, and immediately before His ascension, Christ gave orders to His church to disciple all nations: “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Note that Jesus Christ gives the church a very limited authority. Only those things taught in the Word of God are to be taught to the nations. Therefore, whatever the church teaches by way of doctrine, church government, and worship must come from the Bible alone. The church does not have the authority to make up its own doctrine, or worship, or government. William Young writes, “The charter of the New Testament Church at this point is expressed in identical terms as those of the Mosaic economy which we have seen so expressly to exclude the inventions of men from the worship of God. No addition to or subtraction from Christ's commands may be allowed in the New Testament any more than with respect to the commands given on Mount Sinai in the Old.... We have no more right to alter that divinely instituted pattern of ordinances for the New Testament Church than Nadab and Abihu, Saul,

⁵¹Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d. [from the 1852 edition]), 518-519.

⁵²John Calvin, *Commentary on A Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), Vol. 2, pp. 253-254.

Jeroboam, or any others in the Old.... The will of God, not the will of man, is the rule of the worship of the New Testament Church.”⁵³

“The apostles obeyed Christ and taught the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). One can search carefully in the Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation for divine authorization for many of today’s church practices (e.g., holy days such as Christmas, the liturgical calendar, the use of musical instruments in worship, the use of uninspired human songs in worship, music soloists, choirs, etc.), but there is no biblical warrant at all. Most pastors and teachers are not just teaching what Christ commanded but are also teaching many human traditions. Christians who want to honor Christ as the only King and head of the church must *refuse* to observe these man-made additions to what our Lord commanded.”⁵⁴

3. *Worship in Spirit and in Truth*

One of our Lord’s most profound comments regarding worship is found in His interaction with a Samaritan woman:

The woman said to Him, “Sir, I perceive that You are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.” Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (Jn. 4:19-24).

Although Evangelicals commonly interpret the phrase “worship in spirit” as worship that takes place in man’s spirit, the term “spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is the source of true worship. This point is proved by the following considerations.

(1) The context of the passage favors such an interpretation. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that her religion and worship is ignorant and false. The true knowledge of God and true worship (i.e., worship authorized by Scripture) resides with the Jewish people. Christ’s comments are directed at the Samaritan religion that was guilty of a rejection of *sola scriptura* (i.e., They detracted from Scripture by accepting *only* the five books of Moses and they added to the word by instituting worship in a an unauthorized place with an unauthorized priesthood and temple, etc.). Note also, that earlier in the same discourse our Lord contrasted true water and false water. The Savior gives the true water (the Holy Spirit), which is the source of eternal life. This same Spirit is the source of true worship. True worship must have as its source the holy Scriptures which are breathed out by the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of truth (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16; Jn. 16:13; 17:17).

(2) This interpretation is supported by John’s repeated pattern of conjoining the terms Spirit (or Holy Spirit) with truth in his gospel and epistles (e.g., Jn. 14:17; 15:16; 16:13; 1 Jn. 4:6; 5:7). “One preposition joins the two nouns and thus makes of the two one idea.”⁵⁵ While the joining of the Holy Spirit with truth makes perfect sense exegetically and theologically, the

⁵³William Young, *Worship in the Presence of God*, pp. 87-88.

⁵⁴G. I. Williamson, *On the Observance of Sacred Days* (Havertown, ND: New Covenant Publication Society), pp. 9-10.

⁵⁵R. C. H. Lenski, *The Introduction of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1961 [1946]), p. 322.

joining of the human spirit with truth doesn't comport nearly as well with the context. The Samaritans' greatest problem was not that they were insincere, or, that the worship was merely external. Their central problem was that they did not follow the Holy Spirit's revealed will in Scripture. They had perverted the Torah⁵⁶ and set aside most of the Old Testament to prop up their non-authorized, man-made system of worship.

(3) The Holy Spirit view comports much better with the reason given for "spirit and truth" worship in verse 24: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." The Samaritans had abandoned divine revelation in order to support their human traditions. Their rejection of *sola scriptura* and their practice of corrupt worship are connected by our Lord to a complete ignorance of the true God. Thus, when Jesus speaks against false worship, He connects the true character of God with the true manner of worshiping Him. Since God's nature is essentially spirit, the worship brought to Him must be determined and initiated by the Spirit of God. Worship must conform itself to the divine nature. Biblical worship is totally dependent upon the truth that God has revealed unto us. Christ is emphatic regarding this important matter. "Notice the 'must.' Jesus is not speaking merely of a desirable element in worship. He is speaking of something that is absolutely necessary."⁵⁷

Calvin's comments on the nature of God and worship are instructive. He writes,

God is Spirit. This is a confirmation drawn from the very nature of God. Since men are flesh, we ought not to wonder, if they take delight in those things which correspond to their own disposition. Hence it arises, that they contrive many things in the worship of God which are full of display, but have no solidity. But they ought first of all to consider that they have to do with God, who can no more agree with the flesh than fire with water. This single consideration, when the inquiry relates to the worship of God, ought to be sufficient for restraining the wantonness of our mind, that God is so far from being like us, that those things which please us most are the objects of his loathing and abhorrence. An if hypocrites are so blinded by their own pride, that they are not afraid to subject God their opinion, or rather to their unlawful desires, let us know that this modesty does not hold the lowest place in the true worship of God, to regard with suspicion whatever is gratifying according to the flesh. Besides, as we cannot ascend to the height of God, let us remember that we ought to seek from His word the rule by which we are governed.⁵⁸

(4) The Holy Spirit view is supported in the epistles. Paul identifies true worshipers as "the circumcision who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence

⁵⁶The false worship of the Samaritans had a direct effect on their theology, corrupting it in a number of ways. All worship practices rest upon some source of authority whether human, divine or a combination of the two. The Samaritans' love of human innovations forces them to abandon the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. They did this by corrupting the text of Scripture to support their choice of Gerizim as the sacred site—the site of the central sanctuary. The crucial text of this matter is found in Deuteronomy 12:56. In this passage the Israelites are instructed to seek out the place that God would choose among the tribes to place His name. This site would be the place of sacrifice for the nation (Dt. 12:6, 13-14). This section of Scripture does not specify this location, but rather assumes that the details will be taken care of by further revelation. The Jews who accepted the full canon of Scripture knew that Jerusalem was the one and only place (e.g., see 2 Chron. 6:6; 7:12; Ps. 78:68, etc.). The Samaritans corrupted the text of Scripture to make it appear that God's choice was already made (Mount Gerizim). Thus, according to the Samaritans, further reluctance was no longer needed. Their corrupt worship shifted their authority of worship from the Bible to their religious leaders.

⁵⁷Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), p. 272.

⁵⁸John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), p. 164.

in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). The apostle contrasts worship in the Spirit with confidence in the flesh. Confidence in the flesh refers to a reliance on human rules, regulation and achievements. Worship in the Spirit is the very opposite of will worship. One is guided solely by faith in the Spirit’s revelation, while the other is guided by faith in man’s wisdom. One boasts in Christ Jesus and the loving direction He has provided, while the other boasts in human attainments (cf. Rom. 8:1, 4-5, 13; 1 Cor. 14:2. In the Corinthian passage “Spirit” [in the Greek text] without the article refers explicitly to the Holy Spirit). Hutcheson writes, “It is the Lord’s will and appointment alone that can give a being to true worship, and to this must all our reasons about this matter be subject.”⁵⁹

If believers are to offer worship that is agreeable to God’s nature, then they must submit themselves to the teaching of the Holy Spirit found only in the Bible. That is, every thing in the worship of God (except the circumstances of worship) must have divine warrant in order to please the Father. Jehovah earnestly seeks such worshipers (cf. Jn. 4:23).

4. Paul Condemns Will Worship

Paul in his epistle to the Colossians concurs with both the Old Testament and Christ’s teaching on worship. Paul condemns those who seek to impose Judaical food laws and holy days upon the church (Col. 2:16). (Because the ceremonial laws were *shadows* that pointed to the *substance*—Jesus Christ—they are done away with.) They are no longer authorized and therefore forbidden. Paul’s warning regarding human philosophy is the backdrop of his condemnation of false worship and manmade laws (legalism) in the same chapter. “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, *according to the tradition of men*, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). Paul condemns manmade doctrines and commandments:

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why as though living in the world do you subject yourself to regulations—Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle which all concern things which perish with the using *according to the commandments and doctrines of men*? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in *self-imposed religion, false humility*, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:20-23).

Paul says that any addition to what God has commanded is self-imposed religion, or as the old King James Version says, “will worship.” The Greek word used by Paul (*ethelothreskeia*) signifies worship that originates from man’s own will. “This is worship not enjoyed by God, but springing out of man’s own ingenuity—unauthorized devotion.... The worship referred to is unsolicited and unaccepted. It is superstition....”⁶⁰ “The gist is that these ordinances are forms of worship or religious service chosen by man (according to the will of man), not means chosen by God. 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

⁵⁹George Hutcheson, *The Gospel of John* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1972 [1657]), p. 65.

⁶⁰John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979 [1884]), Vol. 4, pp. 199-200.

are claiming that men possess the right (or freedom) to institute acceptable means to worship God.”⁶¹

Paul says that adding to God’s Word is a show of false humility. Can man improve upon the worship and service that God has instituted? It is the height of arrogance and stupidity to think that sinful man can improve upon God’s ordinances. “It is provoking God, because it reflects much upon His honor, as if He were not wise enough to appoint the manner of His own worship. He hates all strange fire to be offered in His temple. Lev. x 11. A ceremony may in time lead to a crucifix. Those who contend for the cross in baptism, why not have the oil, salt and cream as well?” As Paul says, man-made rules and regulations are “of no value” to the believer (Col. 2:23).⁶²

Opponents of the regulative principle attempt to circumvent the teaching of Colossians in a similar fashion to the Matthew 15:2ff passage. They argue that Paul is not condemning all human traditions but is merely concerned with suppressing certain types of asceticism. In other words, it is wrong to make rules that forbid the eating of meats and other foods, but it is entirely acceptable to invent worship practices, holy days and rites.

There are a number of reasons why Paul’s condemnation of human requirements cannot be limited to certain ascetic eating practices.

First, the broad context of the passage indicates that Paul emphatically rejects all human traditions in the religious sphere and not merely ascetic dietary laws. The likely problem at the Colossian church was the influence of an early form of ascetic Gnosticism. Paul does condemn Gnostic legalism in chapter 2. However, in his condemnation of this particular philosophy and the false ethical system that flows from it Paul condemns all forms of non-Christian philosophy and all worship and ethics that are founded upon human philosophy and the tradition of men. In this epistle Paul first points the Colossians to Jesus Christ. The Colossian believers need to be reminded that Christ is pre-eminent (1:18); that in Christ, who is the head of all, they are complete (2:10); that some have not been holding fast the Head (2:19); that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3). Christ alone is the king and head of the church. He alone is our sanctification. Through Christ alone and his law-word come right doctrine, meaning and ethics. Thus Paul writes, “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col. 2:8). Calvin writes,

According to the tradition of men. He points out more precisely what kind of *philosophy* he reproves, and at the same time convicts it of vanity on a twofold account—because it is not *according to Christ*, but according to the inclinations of men; and because it consists in the *elements of the world*. Observe, however, that he places Christ in opposition to the *elements of the world*, equally as to the *tradition of men*, by which he intimates, that whatever is hatched in man’s brain is not in accordance with Christ, who has been appointed us by the Father as our sole Teacher; that he might retain us in the simplicity of his gospel. Now, that is corrupted by even a small portion of the leaven of *human traditions*. He intimates also, that all doctrines are foreign to Christ that make the worship of God, which we know to be spiritual, according to Christ’s rule, to consist in the *elements of the world*, and also such as fetter the minds of men by such trifles and frivolities, while Christ calls us directly to himself.⁶³

⁶¹Kevin Reed, *Biblical Worship*, p. 56.

⁶²Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986 [1692]), 63.

⁶³John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 181.

Paul's condemnation of philosophy that is according to the tradition of men is universal. One cannot argue that Paul in this passage condemns only ascetic Gnosticism yet does not also condemn the philosophies of Kant, Hegel, Schliermacher, Marx and Dewey. For Paul there is no such thing as philosophical or ethical neutrality. A doctrine or practice is either according to Christ or it is not. And if it is not, then it comes from man's autonomous devising and is (according to Paul) a tradition of men. Therefore, when Paul condemns human regulations in 2:20-23, he uses the same universal language. In verse 20 Paul asks those in error at Colossae the question (to paraphrase): "Why do you act like unsaved people who are still living in accordance with a pagan worldview and thus subject yourself to human regulations?" Then in verse 21 Paul gives specific examples. Are the man-made regulations mentioned in verse 21 the only human traditions that Paul forbids? No. Given the universal condemnation of human philosophy and tradition that both precedes and follows verse 21, the human requirements of verse 21 must be viewed as a few examples taken from the universal category of human philosophy and traditions. There is no way that Paul's statement in verse 22, "according to the commandments and doctrines of men," can be restricted to the regulations of ascetic Gnosticism anymore than the condemnation of human philosophy in verse 8 can be restricted to one Greek sect. Further, the statement in verse 22, "according to the commandments and doctrines of men," mirrors the condemnation of Jewish traditions in doctrines and ethics found in Isaiah 19:13 and Matthew 15:2-9. The Bible condemns human additions and requirements, whether these man-made traditions in doctrines, ethics or worship are Jewish, Greek, Persian, Roman, German, English or American.

Second, the interpretation that says that Paul forbids the addition of some human philosophies and traditions into the doctrines, ethics and worship of the church, yet permits other human traditions, violates standard orthodox Protestant methods of interpretation. A study of both the Old and New Testaments proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that God forbids additions or subtractions to the doctrine, ethics and worship set forth in divine revelation (Dt. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Gen 4:3-5; Lev. 10:1-2; 2 Sam. 6:3-7; 1 Chr. 15:13-15; Jer. 7:24, 31, 19:5; Isa. 29:13; Num. 15:39-40; Mt. 15:2-9; Jn. 4:24; Rev. 2:18, 19; etc.). This assertion is simply the Reformed confessional understanding of the regulative principle that has been discussed in earlier portions of this study. The attempt to make Paul a good Episcopalian, Lutheran or Romanist on the issue of human tradition involves a willful ignorance of the overall teaching of Scripture. The human heart is so incredibly deceitful that through self-deception and the subtleties of human reason it develops loopholes for human autonomy where none exist. Therefore, our only hope for maintaining purity in doctrine, ethics and worship is to strictly adhere to and obey God's commands without departing to the right or to the left.

God has given His church a Psalm book and a holy day (the Lord's day). Can man improve upon the worship and service that God has instituted? Of course not. It is the height of arrogance and stupidity to think that sinful men can improve upon God's ordinances. "It is provoking God, because it reflects much upon His honor, as if He were not wise enough to appoint the manner of His own worship. He hates all strange fire to be offered in His temple (Lev. 10:11). A ceremony may in time lead to a crucifix. Those who contend for the cross in baptism, why not have the oil, salt and cream as well."⁶⁴

⁶⁴Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, [1692] 1881), p. 267.

5. The Circumstances of Worship

Another common objection to the regulative principle of worship that is based on a misunderstanding of the principle is as follows: “Where in the Bible are we commanded to sit in chairs in church?” or “Where are we commanded to use a building and lights?” or, “Where are we commanded to meet at 11:00 a.m.?” These objections are easily answered, once we understand the biblical difference between worship ordinances and the circumstances, or incidentals, of worship.⁶⁵

Worship ordinances are those things and activities received from divine revelation. Every worship ordinance is appointed by God. Anything connected to worship that has a religious and moral significance has to be based on divine command (explicit or implicit) or historical example. The church receives all worship ordinances from God as revealed in the Bible. She must obey all of God’s ordinances. She does not have the authority to add to or detract from those things that God has appointed.

The circumstances of worship refer not to worship content and ceremony, but to those things “common to human actions and societies.” The only way someone can learn a worship ordinance is to study the Bible and see what God commands. But the circumstances of worship are *not* dependent on the explicit instructions of the Bible; they only depend on general revelation and common sense (“Christian prudence”). Kevin Reed writes, “In arranging these incidental matters, the elders are governed by ‘Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word.’ Hence, they will refrain from renting a room from the local abortion clinic. Further, they will not schedule an outdoor service adjacent to a park that permits nude sunbathing. If the congregation has its own building, with pews, this strictly an incidental matter.”⁶⁶ Believers and unbelievers alike know that a building and heater are necessary to conduct a meeting in January in Minnesota. Both understand the need for chairs, lighting, clothing, and so on. Everyone understands that a time must be chosen in advance in order to conduct a meeting. There are many things common to both religious and civil, or secular, meetings that are not dependent on specific biblical instructions. These things are the circumstances, or incidentals, of worship.

⁶⁵ Most attacks against what is called the strict view of the regulative principle are accomplished by misrepresenting the regulative principle (either knowingly or by ignorance) in order to make it look absurd. For example, theonomist pastor and author Steven Schlissel argued (cf. *Chalcedon Report*) that Jesus Christ did not believe in the regulative principle for He attended and even preached in the Jewish synagogue even though there is no explicit command in the Old Testament requiring synagogue attendance. Schlissel’s argument is based on a false understanding of the scriptural law of worship for he restricts it only to explicit divine imperatives when it also includes approved historical example and deduction by good and necessary consequence. Schlissel argues against a position that was *never* held by the Puritans or early Presbyterians. There is no explicit command in the Bible to baptize infants. The Calvinist divines of the 16th and 17th centuries who held to the strict view of the regulative principle argued that the practice was based on “good and necessary consequence.” Likewise, there is no explicit command changing the Sabbath to the first day of the week. Presbyterian and Puritan Lord’s day sabbatarianism is based on the historical example of the apostolic church and good and necessary consequence. It is true, that there is no explicit command to attend synagogue worship in the Old Testament. But the simple fact that the Bible recognizes it as an acceptable practice is warrant enough. The original command (like that of Lord’s day worship) was never inscripturated; but approved historical example is sufficient.

⁶⁶ Kevin Reed, *The Canterbury Tales: An Extended Review and Commentary Based upon The Geneva Papers* (Dallas, TX: Presbyterian Heritage, 1989), p. 4.

Worship Ordinances⁶⁷ vs. Worship Circumstances

Ordinances		Circumstances	
Preaching from the Bible	Matt. 26:13; Mk. 16:15; Acts 9:20; 2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:8, 17:10; 1 Cor. 14:28	Structure in which the church meets	Acts 20:8, 17:10; 1 Cor. 14:28
Reading the word of God	Mk. 4:16-20; Acts 13:15; 1 Tim. 4:13; Rev. 1:13; Acts 1:13, 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:20	Location at which the church meets	Acts 1:13, 16:13; 1 Cor. 11:20
Meeting on the Lord's day	Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18	Time at which the church meets	Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18
Administration of sacraments	Matt. 28:19; Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:24-25	Clothing worn to worship	1 Cor. 11:13-15; Deut. 22:5
Hearing the word of God	Lk. 2:46; Acts 8:31; Rom. 10:41; Jas. 1:22; Lk. 4:20; Acts 20:9	Type of seating provided	Luke 4:20; Acts 20:9

⁶⁷ “The first idea contained in them, is that they are religious duties, prescribed by God, as an instituted method in which he will be worshiped by his creatures.... Now the ordinances as thus described must be engaged in according to a divine appointment. No creature has a warrant to enjoin any modes of worship, pretending that these will be acceptable or well-pleasing to God; since God alone, who is the object of worship, has a right to prescribe the way in which he will be worshiped. For a creature to institute modes of worship would be an instance of profaneness and bold presumption; and the worship performed would be ‘in vain’; as our Saviour says concerning that which has no higher sanction than ‘the commandments of men’” (Thomas Ridgely, *A Body of Divinity* [New York: 1855], 2:433).

Ordinances		Circumstances	
Prayer to God	Matt. 6:9; 1 Thess. 5:17; Heb. 13:18; Phil. 4:6; Jas. 1:5; 1 Cor. 11:13- 15; Deut. 22:5		
The singing of Psalms	1 Chron. 16:9; Ps. 95:1-2; Ps. 105:2; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16		

Note that everything in the left column must be learned from the word of God. Everything in the right column is a function common to everyone who lives in God’s universe. Worship ordinances are limited in number by divine revelation. Worship circumstances are virtually infinite in number, being based on the common agreement of men guided by “Christian prudence.”⁶⁸ Because man is created in the image of God, and because man must live and function in God’s created reality (the universe), he must live and function in accordance with that reality. People do not need explicit instruction from the Bible to put a jacket on when it is -5F outside. But men do need clear instructions from the Bible on how to approach the infinitely holy God.

Some men in Reformed denominations have attempted to blur the distinction between the circumstances of worship and worship ordinances in order to add their own human innovations to what God has commanded. But, such clever subterfuges of God’s scriptural law of worship are easily discovered by considering that God has given worship ordinances in His word and also delineated their proper use. For example, Christians are told to pray. Yet believers are permitted to make up the content of prayer as long as they carefully follow the pattern or example set forth by Christ in the Lord’s prayer. Christians also are told to praise God in song in public worship. Yet in the singing of praise they are only to sing from God’s inspired hymnbook, the Psalter. In one ordinance (prayer) God says, “follow this pattern.” In another ordinance (singing praise) God requires the singing of God-written songs (the Psalter) alone. We must be careful to examine God’s word to determine what the worship ordinances are, as well as their proper use.

⁶⁸ The authors of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647) clearly make a distinction between those things taken directly from Scripture and circumstances “common to human actions and societies.” “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: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men—and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and 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” (chap. 1, sec. 6).

6. Why the Regulative Principle is Necessary

Church history has shown that God's covenant people have often been drawn away from the simplicity of pure gospel worship into all manner of manmade innovations. Because of man's fallen nature and proclivity to sin it was inevitable that human autonomy in worship would pervert and then force out true worship. "And you shall have the tassel, that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of the LORD and do them, and *that you may not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined*, and that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy for your God" (Num. 15:39-40).

Many argue that God's regulative principle is too strict. They argue that it confines the human spirit and that it stifles human creativity. They teach that it is an overreaction to the abuses of Roman Catholicism. But let us look at the logical implications of allowing anything into God's worship as long as it is not forbidden in the word of God.

The first thing is that the simplicity and transcultural nature of pure gospel worship is replaced by a virtually infinite variety of manmade innovations. *Since God no longer draws the line for worship content and ceremony, man will draw and redraw the line as he pleases.* A church that does not obey God's regulative principle finds it impossible to stop newfangled ideas and innovations in worship. The Presbyterian and Reformed denominations that abandoned the "regulative principle" in the late 19th and early 20th centuries prove this point. The pattern of perversion goes something like this: First, manmade hymns (not commanded) are sung alongside of God's inspired Psalms (commanded). Then, within a generation or two, the Psalms are completely replaced by hymns and grossly paraphrased Psalms. The old-fashioned hymns after a while are replaced by charismatic, slap-happy campfire songs. Previously, the Reformed churches would sing the Psalms without musical accompaniment because musical instruments were used only in association with God's temple, and therefore, ceased as aspects of the ceremonial law. Many Reformed churches abandoned *a cappella* Psalm singing and brought in organs. Then, within a generation or two, churches were using folk guitars, orchestras, and even rock groups. The innovations just described are only the tip of the iceberg. You can find the following in so-called "Presbyterian and Reformed" churches: celebration of holy days (Christmas, Easter, etc.), choirs, intricate liturgies, liturgical dance, rock groups, drama groups, rock videos, the church calendar, pictures of Christ, and crosses.

If you give sinful man the autonomy of choosing how he will worship, the historical pattern is clear. Man will choose man-centered worship. Sinful man is drawn to entertainment (thus the popularity of the clap-your-hands, stamp-your-feet, charismatic-style worship, rock groups, drama groups, choirs, music soloists, pop and country singers, etc.), and sinful man is drawn to ritual and pompousness (cathedrals, incense, candles, bells, holy days, popish vestments, liturgy, etc.). When will manmade innovations stop? They won't until the church obeys God's regulative principle of worship. God has given a command which man is not to ignore. "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 in any way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture."⁶⁹

False worship originates in the mind of man according to his imagination. True worship originates in the mind of God and is revealed to us in the Bible. "But this is what I commanded

⁶⁹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (1647), chap. XXI, sec. 1. Emphasis added.

them, saying, ‘Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.’ Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in the counsels and the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward” (Jer. 7:23-24).

True Worship vs. False Worship

True Worship	False Worship
Only what God commands in His word is allowed.	Whatever is not expressly condemned in the Bible is allowable.
God-centered worship.	Leads to man-centered worship.
Worship content is the objective word of God.	Worship becomes more and more subjective or mystical.
Worship remains pure, simple and unadulterated.	Worship changes and evolves and becomes adulterated with manmade traditions.
Worship based on God’s word has limited parameters.	Public worship forms and content theoretically are infinite.
Thoroughly biblical.	Basically pragmatic: whatever seems to work, and whatever pleases man, will be used.
Pure Gospel worship is transcultural. Besides language barriers, people from churches that are faithful to the regulative principle could visit a like-minded church anywhere in the world and immediately fit right in and feel at home. In the seventeenth century, an English or American Puritan, a Scottish or Irish Presbyterian and a Reformed Dutchman both had very similar worship services. This was not the	False worship caters to man’s sinful autonomy. Therefore false worship is a mixture of paganism and Christianity. Because false worship has a theoretically infinite number of worship options, a person would have to adapt, learn and adjust to each cultural and denominational worship option. The high church liturgical Episcopalian would probably feel uncomfortable at... a black gospel jamfest. There are thousands of different

True Worship	False Worship
<p>result of some act of conformity but because they all believed in and obeyed the regulative principle. In the future, as pure doctrine and pure worship are revived and as whole nations are converted and covenant with God, the transcultural nature of pure Gospel worship will be very useful and important to travelers and business people.</p>	<p>hymnals, hundreds of different liturgies. There are rock groups, drama groups, orchestras, poetry readings, videos, Bo-Bo the clown, comedians, entertainers, Johnny Carson style interviews, liturgical dance, organ recitals; there are several different holy days and church calendars, etc. False worship fragments the church.</p>
<p>Historically kept the Reformed and Presbyterian churches' worship pure, until abandoned or redefined so as to be rendered meaningless.</p>	<p>Historically has led the church into declension, heresy and idolatry. The apostolic church eventually degenerated into papalism.</p>
<p>Biblical worship focuses on God and His word</p>	<p>Man-centered worship focuses on man and his senses. Therefore it either degenerates into entertainment or pompous ritual and ceremony (smells, bells, gator hats, cathedrals, intricate liturgies, etc.)</p>
<p>Men have liberty under God's word.</p>	<p>Men lose their liberty under man's changing and arbitrary standard.</p>
<p>Pure Gospel worship fosters biblical ecumenicity and community.</p>	<p>False worship divides the church into a thousand splinters. As worship content and style "evolve" and change, the old are even divided from the young.</p>

Conclusion

The regulative principle of worship is clearly set forth in Scripture. There are many plain statements of it in all parts of the Bible (e.g., the law, the writings, the prophets, the gospels, and

epistles), and there are a number of historical examples given in the Bible of God's indignation with those who violate it. There is nothing complicated or esoteric regarding God's scriptural law of worship. Its genius and practicality lies in its simplicity: "that a divine warrant is required for everything in the faith and practice of the Church, that whatsoever is not in the Scriptures commanded, either explicitly or by good and necessary consequence, is forbidden."⁷⁰ The testimony of Scripture and history is very clear that human innovations in worship are a fountain of heresy and idolatry. God regards adding or subtracting from what He has commanded as sinful—will-worship.

That so many churches ignore and even ridicule such an important and clear teaching of God's word shows the widespread declension and apostasy in our day. The worshiping of God is a serious matter. The contrast between modern evangelicalism's comedy, skits, and entertainment with what God has commanded should make Christians tremble with fear. Girardeau writes,

God is seen manifesting a most vehement jealousy in protecting the purity of his worship. Any attempt to assert the judgment, the will, the taste of man apart from the express warrant of his Word, and to introduce in his worship human inventions, devices, and methods was overtaken by immediate retribution and rebuked by the thunderbolts of his wrath. Nor need we wonder at this; for the service which the creature professes to render to God reaches its highest and most formal expression in the worship which is offered him. In this act the majesty of the Most High is directly confronted. The worshiper presents himself face to face with the infinite Sovereign of heaven and earth, and assumes to lay at his feet the sincerest homage of the heart. In the performance of such an act to violate divine appointments or transcend divine prescription, to affirm the reason of a sinful creature against the authority of God, is deliberately to flaunt an insult in his face, and to hurl an indignity against his throne. What else could follow but the flash of divine indignation? It is true that in the New Testament dispensation the same swift and visible arrest of this sin is not the ordinary rule. But the patience and forbearance of God can constitute no justification of its commission. Its punishment, if it be not repented of, is only deferred.⁷¹

Let us return to the liberty of Christ's law, to the purity of the inspired apostolic doctrine and the simplicity of pure gospel worship. A true reformation and revival will only occur when churches return to the doctrines of sovereign grace *and* the scriptural law of worship.

The Regulative Principle and Musical Instruments in Public Worship

Now that the scriptural foundation of the regulative principle of worship has been clearly established, let us examine a worship practice common today and see if it has biblical authorization. Remember, it is not enough that a practice is not forbidden by Scripture. There must be a divine warrant (i.e., biblical proof) for *every* worship practice in the church.

The use of musical instruments in public worship today is almost universal. Pianos and organs have been used for generations to set the "proper" mood during the service and have been used to accompany the singing of hymns. Today many churches have adopted the use of full-fledged bands with electric guitars, electric bass, keyboard, horns, and drums. Rock, pop, and

⁷⁰ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Havertown, PA.: New Covenant Publication Society, 1983 [1888]), p. 22.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

country style bands are used as tools of church growth. Church growth materials argue that having a good band with upbeat music and worship songs will attract visitors and keep people coming back. Although musical instruments are powerful tools in the arsenal of emotional manipulation, does God's word authorize their use in public worship in the new covenant era? A study of the use of musical instruments in the Bible reveals that the use of musical instruments in worship is connected to the sacrificial system and is an aspect of the ceremonial law. A brief survey of the use of musical instruments in the Bible will prove this assertion.

1. The Invention of Music

Adam and Eve, who worshiped God before the fall, used only their voices in the praise of Jehovah. This assertion is proven by the fact that musical instruments were not invented for another eight generations. "And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of all those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and the flute" (Gen. 4:20-21). "Jubal was the 'father' of all who play the harp and flute. It goes without saying that these instruments were still very primitive. Although these were greatly refined in later times, Jubal was the first to employ musical instruments for the purpose of making music."⁷² God records that the ungodly line of Cain took the initiative in the development of culture: Jabal: husbandry; Jubal: music; Tubal-Cain: metallurgy.⁷³

2. Personal Pleasure

There are a number of instances in the Bible of musical instruments being used for the purpose of personal pleasure or entertainment. After Laban caught up with Jacob, who had slipped away at night, he said, "Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp?" (Gen. 31:27). Job refers to the use of music for family entertainment purposes: "They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They sing to the tambourine and harp, and rejoice to the sound of the flute" (Job 21:11-12). Music also was used to accompany drunken feasts and parties, much like today. "The harp and the strings, the tambourine and flute, and wine are in their feasts" (Isa. 5:12; cf. 24:8-9; Amos 6:5-6). These instances obviously do not refer to public worship.

3. Victory Celebrations

Musical instruments are also used for victory celebrations. After God's deliverance of the people of Israel from the armies of Egypt, the people celebrated and sang the song of Moses. "Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the

⁷² G. C. Aalers, *Bible Students' Commentary: Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), Vol. 1, p. 131.

⁷³ The fact that these developments were made by the ungodly line should not in any way reflect negatively upon these cultural developments. Unbelievers often excel in the development of culture (the arts, medicine, technology, etc.). As a postmillennialist, the author believes that Christians will inherit the achievements of the heathen and then use them to God's glory.

women went out after her with timbrels⁷⁴ and with dances. And Miriam answered them: Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!” (Ex. 15:20-21). It was the common practice of Israel to celebrate great victories with women dancing, singing, and playing musical instruments. “Now it had happened as they were coming home, when David was returning from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women had come out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with joy, and with musical instruments. So the women sang as they danced” (1 Sam. 18:6-7). After the Lord delivered the people of Ammon into Jephthah’s hands it says, “When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing” (Jud. 11:34). The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the resettlement of the Israelites in their own land in terms of great joy and celebration: “Again I will build you, and shall be rebuilt, a virgin of Israel! You shall again be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who rejoice” (Jer. 31:4).

These passages have a number of things in common. First, only the women played the instruments and danced. They are segregated from the men. Second, the use of instruments is *always* used in conjunction with dancing; the two are *never* separated. Third, in each instance there is a procession or forward movement. Fourth, each occasion is a direct response to a great national or local victory; that is, these are extraordinary celebrations and not set times of worship (however, there was annual dancing among the unmarried daughters of Shiloh, cf. Judges 21:19-23). Fifth, these celebrations were outdoor events; that is, they never occurred in the tabernacle, temple, or synagogue.

Do these national and local victory celebrations with women dancing, singing, and playing taborets justify the use of musical instruments in public worship? No, not at all. Although these celebrations by God’s people were done to the glory of God, there are a number of reasons why they should not be classed as formal public worship assemblies. First, although we repeatedly encounter (in the biblical record) groups of women dancing, singing, and playing instruments at outdoor celebrations, we *never* encounter women dancing and playing instruments in the tabernacle, temple, or synagogue. Second, the Bible says that everything required for God’s worship in the wilderness was shown to Moses on the mountain (Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5). Yet there are no instructions in Scripture giving women the authorization to dance and play instruments in the tabernacle. Third, in the biblical account Miriam leads a group of women in song, dance, and taboret playing. Yet the tabernacle service that was prescribed by God was led and conducted only by *male* Levites. The use of musical instruments in the temple (as noted below) also was reserved for the Levitical priesthood, all of whom were males. Fourth, these passages are really useless for those who are seeking a divine warrant for the use of pianos and organs in new covenant public worship; for even if they could be applied to new covenant formal worship they would prove that: only *women* could play musical instruments, *only* in conjunction with female dancing. Such a practice may be acceptable at a modern charismatic rock and roll jam-fest, but is simply unacceptable to most conservative Presbyterians. The author does not know any Bible-believing Presbyterian pastors or elders who allow women to dance, leap, and

⁷⁴ “The Hebrew name of this musical instrument is *toph*. The timbrel, tymanum, or tambourine, was used chiefly by women, and was employed in choral dances, or occasions of religious or festal processions. The principle [character] of the *toph*, or timbrel, was that of a prepared skin stretched upon a hoop or frame” (James Anderson, *Calvin’s Commentary on the Psalms*, Vol. 5, p. 310, footnote 3). The timbrel was very similar to the modern tambourine. It was struck with the hand, small batons or with a knotty whip with many thongs.

play tambourines in the aisles of the church during the worship service. “The dance was an essential ingredient in the service in which instruments were used and cannot by any course of reasoning, or any evidence yet obtained, be excluded. If instrumentation on this occasion furnished a warrant for the use of instruments in the worship of the present dispensation, and that instrumentation was for the purpose of leading the dance, there is no escape from the conclusion that the dance has at least as emphatic a warrant in New Testament worship as has the instrumentation.”⁷⁵

4. *The Trumpets of Announcement*

In Numbers 10:1-10, God commanded the making and use of two silver trumpets. The use of these trumpets was carefully prescribed by God. The only persons authorized to blow these trumpets were “the sons of Aaron, the priests” (v. 8). When both trumpets were blown, the whole assembly of people was to gather at the door of the tabernacle of meeting (v. 3). When only one trumpet was blown, only the leaders were to gather (vs.4). The trumpets were used to “sound the call” for the Israelites to begin their journeys (vv.5-7) and were blown to “sound an alarm” to go to war. The trumpets were also blown “over” or during the sacrifices of the tabernacle.

Since the trumpets were not played during congregational or Levitical singing, and since their purpose throughout chapter 10 was to announce something or to sound an alarm, it is likely that the trumpets’ purpose during the sacrifice was to *announce* to the people the precise moment that the sacrifices were occurring. This, no doubt, would emphasize the solemnity and importance of the sacrifice. “But even if someone would insist that these trumpets were used, in some sense, as instruments of music in worship, it would still be true that this became true only when—and because—a divine command was then given. If this be the beginning of the use of instruments in worship, in other words, then it is noteworthy that it was a commanded beginning.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, it should also be noted that *only* priests (the sons of Aaron) were permitted by God to play the trumpets; and their use (during the religious assembly) occurred *only* during the sacrifice. Thus, they were directly associated with the ceremonial rituals.⁷⁷ The ceremonial playing of these trumpets during the sacrifice in the tabernacle could be considered the bud that would expand and flower during the more grand ceremonial order instituted by David for the temple. Instead of two solitary trumpets during the sacrifice in the tabernacle, the temple also had a Levitical choir, cymbals, harps and lyres playing all at once. Both were Levitical and ceremonial and both occurred only during the sacrifice.

⁷⁵ D. W. Collins, *Musical Instruments in Divine Worship Condemned by the Word of God* (Pittsburgh: Stevenson and Foster, 1881), p. 38.

⁷⁶ G. I. Williamson, *Instrumental Music in the Worship of God: Commanded or Not Commanded?*, p. 5.

⁷⁷ “No psalmody was employed when the trumpets were first introduced, but when a psalmody was prepared and formally introduced into the temple service by David, the trumpets were employed conjointly with the voice and the instruments as employed by the Levites. The connexion of the three—the trumpets, the voice and the instruments—was so essential that in every instance in which the voice and the instruments are noted as being employed in the psalmody of the temple, the use of trumpets is specified also. It is specially noted on the occasion of the dedication of the temple that the four thousand singers and players on the instruments of the Levites, together with the one hundred and twenty trumpeters of the priests, were *as to make one sound*. The great feature of this one sound was that of the trumpets which, in the hands of the priests, was ceremonial. So in 1 Chron., XXV, 5, it is said ‘All these were the sons of Heman, the king’s seer in the words of God *to lift up the horn*.’ The horn is the trumpet, and the Levites are here represented clearly as acting in that ceremonial relation to the priests designated by their original consecration” (D. W. Collins, pp. 60-61).

5. *Musical Instruments and the Early Prophets*

There are two instances of the use of musical instruments by prophets. The first instance is the company of prophets in 1 Samuel 10:5: “After that you shall come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison is. And it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying.” The second instance is Elisha’s prophecy against Moab: “‘But now bring me a musician.’ And it happened, when the musician played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him. And he said, ‘Thus says the LORD: Make this valley full of ditches’” (2 Kings 3:15-16). In these two instances the use of musical instruments was intimately connected with prophesying.

Do these passages justify the use of musical instruments in public worship? No, for these examples were not public worship. In the instance regarding Elisha it is clear that he was not singing praise to God but *speaking* the word of the LORD. In the example of the prophets coming down the hill there is no way that one can tell if they were singing or not. Even if they were singing, this instance would not be an example of a public worship service but of a festal procession. If this rather unusual instance in 1 Samuel 10 did justify the use of musical instruments in public worship, it would only authorize their use in accordance with prophecy or direct revelation. Since the prophetic office ceased with the close of the New Testament canon, this passage is not applicable to the new covenant church. Furthermore, given the fact that musical instruments were only used by priests and Levites during the temple service and were *not* used in the Jewish synagogues until A.D. 1810 in Germany, one can safely conclude that the Jews themselves did not regard this instance in 1 Samuel 10 as a justification for musical instruments in public worship.

What purpose did music serve in these examples? Many commentators mistakenly argue that instruments were used to induce a state of ecstasy or to produce a certain mindset suitable to receiving divine revelation. However, the Bible teaches that the prophets spoke because the Holy Spirit moved them (2 Pet. 1:21). Furthermore, the majority of prophets prophesied without music. Therefore, the ecstatic inducement theory should be rejected. Music may have been an outward sign of the Spirit’s working. Whatever the purpose of musical accompaniment to prophecy was, it certainly does not provide a foundation for the use of musical instruments in public worship today.

6. *The Introduction of Music into Public Worship*

Besides the trumpets of silver introduced by God into the tabernacle service under Moses, God appointed additional instruments toward the end of King David’s reign.⁷⁸ These instruments were likely introduced in anticipation of the completion of the temple under Solomon. A careful study of the use of musical instruments in worship in the old covenant reveals that musical instruments were *only* played by certain authorized classes of Levites. Non-Levites never used

⁷⁸ “David stands as the central figure between Moses and Christ, and the very epoch for the introduction of the grand ceremonial order, which he gave to the worship of God, was significant of the greater perfection and glory of the New Testament Church. For it was the millennium of the Jewish Church and the height of the glory of the Nation” (D. W. Collins, p. 66).

musical instruments in public worship. The musical instruments that were used were not chosen arbitrarily by man but were designed by King David under divine inspiration. Also, musical instruments were *only* used in conjunction with animal sacrifices. During the temple service, musical instruments were *only* played during the sacrifice. An objective study of instrumental music in public worship in the old covenant proves that the use of musical instruments in public worship was ceremonial. This argument is considerably strengthened by the historical fact that musical instruments were *not* used in synagogue worship or the apostolic church.

The first recorded instance of musical instruments being used in public worship occurred during the festivities and ceremonies when the ark of God was moved to Jerusalem. “Then David and all Israel played music before God with all their might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets” (1 Chron. 13:8). This attempt to bring the ark of God to Jerusalem failed because the people involved did not follow the “proper order” (15:13). The people did not do what God had commanded.⁷⁹ In other words, they violated the regulative principle. “God smote Uzzah, not merely as a judgement upon him for his rash and unlawful act in taking hold of the ark, but as a rebuke to David, the priests, the Levites and all the people; and as an admonition to all future generations to take heed to the divine command in all the affairs of divine worship. In this act he gave single proof that the whole proceeding was wrong. Had the offence consisted simply in placing the ark upon the cart, and Uzzah’s taking hold of it, the remedy was at hand. The priest and Levites were present with the multitude, and could have been immediately directed to take charge of the ark, but the whole service was rejected by God as dishonoring to Him. David afterwards frankly acknowledges the disorder of the whole proceeding.”⁸⁰ “For because you [the Levites] did not do it the first time, the LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order” (1 Chron. 15:13).

The second and successful moving of the ark to Jerusalem gives more details regarding the use of instruments at that time. “So the priests and the Levites sanctified themselves to bring up the ark of the LORD God of Israel. And the children of the Levites bore the ark of God on their shoulders, by its poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the LORD. Then David spoke to the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be the singers accompanied by instruments of music, stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals, by raising the voice with resounding joy. So the Levites appointed the singers Heman, Asaph, and Ethan, [who] were to sound the cymbals of bronze. Obed-Edom, Jeiel, and Azariah, to direct with harps on the Sheminith; a Chenaniah leader of the Levites, was an instructor in charge of the music, because

⁷⁹ “David proceeded irregularly, because he was without scriptural authority. Thus, instead of consulting the priests and Levites to whose custody the ark belonged, he ‘consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and every leader’ [1 Chron. 13:1]; that is, with political and military advisors. This, in modern times, would be regarded as an Erastian interference of the magistrate *in sacris*. The result in David’s case implies a permanent inhibition of introducing any religious observance without divine authority. If David could not do this, how can it, without sinful responsibility, be done by men in the nineteenth century? Instead of allowing the ark to be borne by Levites, he had it placed on a cart—which he doubtless thought was done ‘decently and in order.’ This, however, was not appointed, and therefore he erred in doing it” (James Glasgow, *Heart and Voice: Instrumental Music in Christian Worship Not Divinely Authorized*. C. Aitchison; J. Cleeland, Belfast, Northern Ireland, no date, p. 48.). Furthermore, if the people in general played upon musical instruments (1 Chron. 13:8) and not the Levites alone, this also would have been a violation of Scripture. During the second and successful attempt at moving the ark, it is carefully noted that only the Levites played upon musical instruments (1 Chron. 15:16-24).

⁸⁰ D. W. Collins, *Musical Instruments in Divine Worship*, pp. 51-52.

he was skillful. Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eleazar the priests were to blow the trumpets before the ark of God” (1 Chron. 15:14-17, 19, 21-22, 24).

Note that only the Levites were appointed to play the musical instruments. In fact, the use of specific musical instruments was restricted to certain groups of Levites. Later revelation reveals that these appointments were not arbitrary but based upon the commandment of God (2 Chron. 29:25). By divine appointment, Levitical priests used musical instruments in connection with the ark of the covenant. The events were also accompanied by sacrifices and offerings. Since at this time in Israel’s history there was no functioning tabernacle or temple, the ark alone was the place of God’s special presence and thus the central place of sacrifice and burnt offering.⁸¹ Thus, the Levitical use of musical instruments was an aspect of ceremonial worship.

The Bible teaches that the introduction of musical instruments into the public worship of God was by divine appointment. “Then he stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad, the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by His prophets” (2 Chron. 29:25). Note, that the regulative principle of worship was strictly followed. Musical instruments were not used until God commanded their use. No one, not even kings, had the authority to introduce an innovation in worship without instructions from God to do so.

King David himself was a prophet and received detailed plans from God concerning the pattern of the temple and its worship:

Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat; and the plans for all that he had, he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the LORD, of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and of the treasuries for the dedicated things, also for the division of the priests and Levites, for all the work of the service of the house of the LORD. “All this,” said David, “the LORD made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans” (1 Chron. 28:11-13, 19).

The Holy Scripture emphasizes that David received the plans, divisions, and assignments relating to the temple by divine inspiration.⁸² Nothing relating to the temple and its worship originated in man’s imagination.

Whenever new worship practices were introduced, God made it very clear that He--not man--was the source of the new additions. Thus, when additions were made under the administration of Moses, we are explicitly told that these additions came by way of divine inspiration (Ex. 25:9, 40; 27:8). The additions that came under the reign of King David also came

⁸¹ “The first acceptable use of instruments in the praise service of the church was in the initiation of the temple worship by David, and it was exclusively employed in that worship. We have not another instance on record to the close of the canon of Scripture of its being used apart from the peculiar form given to it in its inauguration by David” (D. W. Collins, p. 55).

⁸² As Moses received the pattern of the tabernacle and its vessels by divine inspiration (Ex. 25:9, 40; 27:8), so the chronicler, while giving David the credit for preparing the plans for the Temple, declares that Yahweh was the source of David’s knowledge. “The hand of Yahweh upon” is a frequent expression for divine inspiration (cf. 2 Kings 3:15; Ex. 1:3; 3:14, etc.). (Edward Lewis Curtis and Albert Alonzo Madsen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Chronicles* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976 (1910)], p. 229).

by way of divine revelation.⁸³ The system of temple worship set up by God during David's reign receives no additions or alternatives until the death of Jesus Christ. The fact that new revelation was needed for the introduction of musical instruments into public worship is further proof that for thousands of years, from Adam to the latter part of David's reign, true and acceptable worship was offered to God *without* the accompaniment of musical instruments.

In the old covenant musical instruments in public worship were *always* a function of the Levitical priesthood. Why? Because their use was intimately connected with the animal sacrifices. In fact, during the temple service the instruments of music were *only* played during the sacrifice. When the sacrifice was not in progress, they sang praise *without* the accompaniment of the musical instruments. "Then he [King Hezekiah] stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad, the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets. The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel. So all the congregation worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished" (2 Chron. 29:25-28). When the sacrifice began, the use of musical instruments by the Levites began. When the offering was completed, the use of musical instruments also ceased.

Is it not obvious to the unbiased interpreter that the instrumental music served a ceremonial function?⁸⁴ That it typified something regarding the perfect sacrifice to come?⁸⁵ The

⁸³ "This way of praising God by musical instruments had not hitherto been in use. But David, being a prophet, instituted it by divine direction, and added it to the other carnal ordinances of that dispensation, as the apostle calls them (cf. Heb. 9:10). The New Testament keeps up singing of psalms, but has not appointed church music" (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* [T&T Clark], Vol. 2, p. 875).

⁸⁴ "The Levites, under the law, were justified in making use of instrumental music in the worship of God; it having been his will to train his people, while they were yet tender and like children, by such rudiments, until the coming of Christ. But now when the clear light of the gospel has dissipated the shadows of the law, and taught us that God is to be served in a simpler form, it would be a foolish and mistaken part to imitate that which the prophet enjoined only upon those of his own time. From this, it is apparent that the Papists have shown themselves to be very apes in transferring this to themselves" (John Calvin, *Commentary on The Book of Psalms*, (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1981) Vol. 2, p. 312).

⁸⁵ Determining exactly what the ceremonial use of instruments in public worship typified is not easy. Southern Presbyterian theologian John L. Girardeau writes, "The instrumental music of temple-worship was typical of the joy and triumph of God's believing people to result from the plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost in New Testament times.... [It] pleased God to typify the spiritual joy to spring from a richer possession of the Holy Spirit through the sensuous rapture engendered by the passionate melody of stringed instruments and the clash of cymbals, by the blare of trumpets and the ringing of harps. It was the instruction of his children in a lower school, preparing them for a higher" (*Instrumental Music in The Public Worship of the Church*, pp. 60-63). Girardeau's view was held by a number of the older Reformed writers. Given the fact that under normal circumstances the instruments were only played during the sacrifice, another possibility is that their use prophesied the dramatic supernatural events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. The moment Christ died: "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened" (Matt. 27:51-52). Luke writes, "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. Then the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was torn in two" (Luke 23:44-45). The cacophony of sound *during* the sacrifice in the central sanctuary was dramatic and awe inspiring. The supernatural events surrounding the sacrifice of Christ were awesome and terrifying. "Now when the centurion and those with him, who were guarding Jesus, saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matt. 27:54).

ceremonial worship of the temple through audible and visible representations taught the people of God various things regarding the perfect redemption of their future Messiah. Thus the Holy Scripture says that the Levities were set apart to “prophesy with harps, stringed instruments, and cymbals” (1 Chron. 25:1). G. I. Williamson writes,

The whole system of ceremonial worship served as a “*shadow of heavenly things*” (Heb. 8:5). It was “*a figure for the time then present*” (9:9), but a figure of something better in the future. In plain words, here the drama of the redemption was enacted symbolically. We use the word ‘drama’ because this Old Testament ceremonial worship was only a representation of the real redemption which was to be accomplished, not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with the precious blood of Christ. That is why this impressive assembly of musicians was needed. In a similar way, a motion picture is a pale thing in comparison with the reality depicted. That is why sound effects, and a musical background are so important! It helps His Old Testament people (as children under age, Galatians 4) sense something more in these animal sacrifices than was actually there. So, as the sacrifice was offered, the emotions of God’s people were stirred by this great cacophony of music.⁸⁶

Since the New Testament teaches that all the ceremonial aspects of temple worship have been abolished, the passages that speak of the use of musical instruments in public worship, under the old covenant, do *not* provide biblical warrant for the use of musical instruments in public worship today. Jesus Christ rendered the whole ceremonial Levitical system obsolete with the perfect sacrifice of Himself on the cross (cf. Heb. 7:27, 9:28). The inferior (Heb. 9:11-15), the shadow (Heb. 10:1; 8:4-5), the obsolete (Heb. 8:13), the symbolic (Heb. 9:9), and the ineffectual (Heb. 10:4) have been replaced by Jesus Christ and His work. Christians have no more business using musical instruments in public worship than using priestly vestments, candles, incense, altars, and a sacerdotal priesthood.⁸⁷ Roman Catholics are simply being consistent when they incorporate all the abrogated ‘shadows’ into their system of worship. Girardeau writes, “Those who have most urgently insisted upon it [musical instruments in public worship] have acted with logical consistency in importing priests into the New Testament

⁸⁶ G. I. Williamson, *Instrumental Music in the Worship of God: Commanded or Not Commanded?*, pp. 7-8. “Let it be understood in the outset, that if we fail to show to the satisfaction of the instrumentalists the particular *thing* typified by instrumental music, the argument for the ceremonial feature of it by no mean fails. For we affirm that the definite meaning of many ceremonial rites and things has never been satisfactorily determined, either by modern Jewish, or Christian learning. Typology is a system of prophecy. Types ‘prefigure, while prophets foretell,’ the same things, and if the definite meaning of many prophecies cannot be ascertained, much less can that of many of the types” (D.W. Collins, pp. 57-58). Fairbairn writes, “We are far from pretending to master every difficulty connected with the practical management of the subject, and reducing it all too clear and undoubtful certainty. No one will expect this who rightly understands its nature and considers either the vastness of the field over which it stretches, or the peculiar character of the ground which it embraces” (cited by Collins, p. 58).

⁸⁷ John Calvin concurs, “I have no doubt that playing upon cymbals, touching the harp and the viol, and all that kind of music, which is so frequently mentioned in the Psalms, was a part of the education; that is to say, the puerile [i.e., immature] instruction of the law: I speak of the stated service of the temple. For even now, if believers choose to cheer themselves with musical instruments, they should, I think, make it their object not to dissever their cheerfulness from the praises of God. But when they frequent their sacred assemblies, musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to him” (*Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 1, p. 539).

church; and as priests suppose sacrifices, lo, the sacrifice of the Mass! Instrumental music may not seem to stand upon the same foot with that monstrous corruption, but the principle which underlies both is the same; and *that* whether we are content with a single instrument, the cornet, the bass-viol, the organ, or go on by a natural development to the orchestral art, the cathedral pomps, and all the spectacular magnificence of Rome. We are Christians, and we are untrue to Christ and to the Spirit of grace when we resort to the abrogated and forbidden ritual of the Jewish temple.”⁸⁸

Reformed Christians should note that even if these Old Testament passages did authorize the use of musical instruments in the new covenant era they would only authorize certain instruments and no others. Silver trumpets were specifically authorized by God in the days of Moses (Num. 10:1, 2, 10); and stringed instruments, harps, and cymbals (the instruments of David, 2 Chron. 29:26) were authorized for use under King David (1 Chron. 15:16; 23:5; 28:13, 19; 2 Chron. 29:25-27, etc.). Some scholars (based on passages such as 2 Samuel 6:5 and Psalm 150) also include the pipe or flute. The Bible indicates that the choice of these instruments and even their design was not arbitrary. The Levites had to use only those instruments chosen by God. Nowhere in the Bible can one find authorization for pianos, organs, violins, bass guitars, six-string guitars, drum sets, and so on. If one wants to infer from the Levitical use of stringed instruments that guitars, banjos, violins, and bass guitars are permitted in public worship, then he has a major problem. Why? Because the two stringed instruments that God authorized for public worship (the *kinnôr* and the *nêbel*) had ten (cf. Ps. 33:2; 92:3; 144:9) eight (according to the titles to Psalm 6 and 12), and possibly 12 (according to Josephus) strings, not four or six. Furthermore, modern basses and guitars bear no resemblance to these ancient instruments. If (as noted above) the instruments of David were introduced and designed under divine inspiration, then churches that claim to adhere to the regulative principle (that point to the Levitical use as justification for the use of instruments today) should make a serious attempt to reproduce these ancient instruments.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, p. 79.

⁸⁹ The two types of stringed instruments used in public worship by the Levites were the *kinnôr* and the *nêbel*. The names of musical instruments in the Bible are the torment of translators. The word *kinnôr* is translated various as: “lyre” (RSV, NIV); “harp” (KJV, NKJV, NEB) and “psaltery” (KJV, NKJV). *Nêbel* is translated as “harp” (NIV, RSV), “Lute” (RSV, NEB, KJV, NKJV), “psaltery” (KJV) and “viol” (KJV). “According to Josephus the *kinnôr* had ten strings and was played with a plectrum [i.e., a small piece of metal, ivory or horn which a musician uses to strike the strings of an instrument] but David played his lyre ‘with his hand’ when comforting Saul (1 Samuel 16:23) which suggests that the *kinnôr* was also plucked in order to produce a softer, more soothing sound. The pictorial remains show lyre players with and without plectra, and the Greek *kithera* was played both ways. The *nêbel* is virtually always mentioned together with the *kinnôr*-lyre, and must have had a similar or at least complementary character. Comparing the two, the Mishna states that the strings of the *nêbel* were made of a sheep’s large intestine, those of the *kinnôr* of its small intestine (Kinnim iii. 6). Having thicker strings, the instrument’s register was therefore presumably lower and its sound possibly louder than that of the *kinnôr*.... According to Josephus...the *nêbel* had twelve tones and was played with the finger.□Sukkah 5:6 states merely that the *nêbel* had more strings than the *kinnôr*.... The term *asôr*, lit. ‘ten’, appears only in Psalms, twice describing the *nêbel* (33:2; 144:9)” (D. A. Foxvog and A. D. Kilmer in “General Education,” Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986 [1915]), Vol.3 pp. 441-442). Given the scriptural and historical evidence there may have been two versions of the *kinnôr* (eight- and ten-string) and two versions of the *nêbel* (ten- and twelve-string). Or there may have been three versions of the *nêbel* (eight-, ten-, and twelve-string). If the strings of the *kinnôr* were struck with a piece of ivory or metal, it would more resemble the modern harpsichord than a guitar.

All Old Testament Examples of the Use of Musical Instruments in Public Worship are Ceremonial

Those seeking a divine warrant for the use of musical instruments in public worship certainly cannot appeal to their Levitical, priestly, ceremonial use in the temple during the sacrifice as a justification for their use today. But, are there not instances of the use of musical instruments in public worship outside of the temple? Yes. A careful examination of the Old Testament reveals only *five* recorded instances of the lawful use of musical instruments in public worship outside of the temple:

1. The moving of the ark of God to Jerusalem (1 Chron. 15:14-28).
2. The dedication ceremony held at the completion of Solomon's temple (2 Chron. 5:11-14).
3. The dedication ceremony held at the completion of the foundation of the second temple (Ezra 3:10-11).
4. The dedication ceremony held at the completion of the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 12:27-43).
5. The triumphal procession to Jerusalem and the temple after the Lord's miraculous defeat of the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir (2 Chron. 20:27-28).

These instances are the *only* hope for those who seek a scriptural warrant for musical instruments from the Old Testament.⁹⁰ Can one find a non-ceremonial, non-Levitical use of musical instruments in these instances? No. There are a number of reasons why the use of musical instruments in these instances must be considered ceremonial. First, note that in each instance only the Levites were permitted to play the instruments (1 Chron. 15:16-24; 2 Chron. 5:12-13; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:35-36).⁹¹ Second, the priests and Levites only played instruments that were authorized by God: the silver trumpets of Moses and the instruments of David (1 Chron. 15:16, 28; 2 Chron. 5:12; 20:28; Ezra 3:10; Neh. 12:27, 36). Third, each instance was either connected with the ark, the temple, or the wall protecting the central sanctuary. The victory procession recorded in 2 Chronicles 20 ended at the temple (v. 28). The dedication ceremonies with the

⁹⁰ The author has not included the crowning of Joash: "Now when Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people in the temple of the LORD. And when she looked, there was the king standing by his pillar at the entrance; and the leaders and the trumpeters were by the king. There were all the people of the land, rejoicing and blowing trumpets, also the singers with instruments of music and those who led in praise. So Athaliah tore her clothes and said, 'Treason! Treason!'" (2 Chron. 23:12-13). Although this event occurred at the temple and the Levites played musical instruments and sang, this event does not appear to be a worship service but a public coronation of some sort. Furthermore, it is not clear if the people were just praising the new king, or praising the king and then praising Jehovah. What is clear is that the thesis of this book is supported by 2 Chronicles 23:18, "Also Jehoiada appointed the oversight of the house of the LORD to the hand of the priests, the Levites, whom David had assigned in the house of the LORD, to offer the burnt offerings of the LORD, as it is written in the Law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, as it was established by David." Those Old Covenant saints (unlike most modern Presbyterian denominations and seminary professors) held to a rigid, strict, uncompromising view of the regulative principle of worship.

⁹¹ The only exception is that of King David who dressed in the linen ephod and robe of the priest (1 Chron. 15:27), played music (15:29), and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings with the priests (1 Chron. 16:1-2). David (in a more unique manner than other Old Testament kings who offered sacrifice) became a priest for the occasion. "David seemed to be the leader in the service, and, therefore, put on the garb of a priest, perhaps indicating that he had the divine commission to introduce the new ingredients into the temple service, of which this was a part, as Moses introduced the original service of the tabernacle" (D. W. Collins p. 29).

Levitical use of instruments never occurred outside of Jerusalem, the site of the temple—the central place of sacrifice. Fourth, the dedication services involved sacrifices and burnt offerings (1 Chron. 16:1-2; 2 Chron. 7:1, 5-6; Neh. 12:43). In fact, the burnt offerings and peace offerings were the climaxes of these services. Furthermore all of these instances occurred in unique historical circumstances. They were extraordinary services involving the civil magistrate, the Levitical priesthood, the whole nation, and were all intimately tied to the temple cultus. These instances of the use of musical instruments in public worship are obviously ceremonial,⁹² and thus are of no use to those seeking warrant for pianos, organs and guitars.

The account of the use of musical instruments in the book of Ezra proves that godly Jews followed the regulative principle of worship. “When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, to praise the LORD, according to the ordinance of David king of Israel” (Ezra 3:10). Note that over 400 years after the death of King David the Spirit-inspired instructions that he gave regarding worship are still in force and strictly followed. Not only were the Levites using the same instruments ordered by God under David, but the Levitical family of Asaph was still in charge of using the cymbals (cf. 1 Chron. 15:19). Fensham writes,

In these verses the celebrations are described after the foundation had been laid. The leading role was played by the priests and Levites. The priests were clad in their typical vestments (cf. Ex. 28; 2 Chron. 5:12; 20:21) and they blew the trumpets. The Levites played on the cymbals (cf. Ps. 150:5), which consisted of two metal plates with which they gave the beat (cf. 2 Chron. 15:16, 19; 16:5; 25:1-6; 2 Chron. 7:6). According to the author this was done as David prescribed. He was at this stage regarded as the most important figure who initiated music in the cult.⁹³

The account in Ezra is indisputable proof that the civil and religious leaders of the Jewish nation regarded the introduction of musical instruments into public worship as commanded by God and a permanent aspect of the temple system.

⁹² Of all the instances cited, 2 Chronicles 20:28 is the best hope for those seeking a non-Levitical use of instruments for we are not specifically told who played the instruments. The passage does not even specifically say that the instruments were played. However, the context clearly implies that the instruments were played by the Levites. In chapter 20 Judah faced a grave crisis, for a great multitude from these nations was coming to attack Judah (vv.1-2). The king and all Judah gathered at the temple to fast, pray and seek the LORD (vv. 3-13). The Lord answered through Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph (v. 14 ff.). The Lord’s instructions were very specific (v. 16 ff.). After the LORD spoke through Jahaziel, the king and people bowed before the LORD and the Levitical singers (the Kohathites and Korahites, the sons of Korah, who was a grandson of Kohath [cf. 1 Chron.6:7, 22; 20:37f.]) stood and praised the LORD. The next day the people arose early and proceeded from Jerusalem and the LORD Himself defeats the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir. What is interesting is that the Levites go before the army singing praise (v. 21). After the LORD kills all their enemies, they return to Jerusalem and the temple “with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets.” The whole chapter reads as though the temple worship continues before the army, leaves Jerusalem and then after the battle returns to the temple. It is as though God leaves His holy house crushes Judah’s enemies, and then returns to His house. Those who don’t think that the singers were Levites should note that verse 21 says the king appointed “those who should sing praise to the LORD.” This is an obvious reference to the guild of Levitical singers. Furthermore, verse 28, which implies the proceedings ended at the temple, names only those instruments appointed by David for use by the Levites and priests for the temple worship. This is not coincidence. Whatever one’s interpretation of chapter 20 is, these unusual events are clearly not normative for our New Covenant congregational singing anyway.

⁹³ F. Charles Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], p. 64.

Synagogue Worship

If one wants to find a non-Levitical, non-ceremonial use of musical instruments in public worship, the most logical place to look would be the worship conducted in the synagogue. Why? Because unlike the temple worship, which contained much that was ceremonial, typical, and temporary, the worship of the synagogue was *non*-typical or symbolic. “The reading and exposition of the divine Word, *hortatory*, addresses the singing of psalms and the contribution of alms as elements of worship which cannot be regarded as types foreshadowing substantial realities to come. They belong to the class: essential and permanent.”⁹⁴ “The worship of the synagogue was very different from that of the Temple, in that it had no sacerdotal rituals and supported no sacrosanct priesthood.”⁹⁵ Since synagogue worship did not involve any of the ceremonial rituals of the temple, and since a study of the use of musical instruments in public worship in the old covenant shows that their use was ceremonial and Levitical, one would expect that synagogue worship would be practiced *without* the use of musical instruments. Indeed, that is exactly the case!⁹⁶ The Jews did *not* use instruments in public worship but sang psalms *a cappella* because they regarded instrumental music in worship as belonging to the temple. “In his great work *On the Ancient Synagogue*, Vitringa shows that there were only two instruments of sound used in connection with the synagogue, and that these were employed, not in worship or along with it as an accompaniment, but as *publishing signals*—first, for proclaiming the new year; secondly, for announcing the beginning of the Sabbath; thirdly, for publishing the sentence of excommunication; and fourthly, for heralding fasts. These were their sole uses. There were no sacrifices over which they were to be blown, as in the tabernacle and temple. And from the nature of the instruments it is plain that they could not have accompanied the voice in singing. They were only of two kinds—trumpets (*tubae*), and rams’ horns or cornets (*buccinae*). It had but one note, and was so easy to blow that a child could sound it. Further, they were, for the most part, used not even in connection with the synagogue buildings, but were blown from the roofs of houses, so as to be heard at a distance.”⁹⁷

Instrumental music was not introduced in synagogue worship until the nineteenth century.⁹⁸ The argument used to introduce music into synagogue worship by the Jews supports

⁹⁴ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, p.48.

⁹⁵ W. White, Jr., in Merrill C. Tenney, gen. ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), Vol. 5, p.556.

⁹⁶ M. C. Ramsay writes, “Those who maintain that Jewish worship had associated with it instruments of music fail to appreciate the facts; and some of the facts are as follows: The ordinary worship of the Jew was that of the synagogue, and it was *always* unembellished. The men of Israel were commanded to attend the temple worship only thrice annually. Throughout the remainder of the year, Sabbath by Sabbath, they met for worship in their synagogues. Their wives and children attended regularly the synagogue where the services were marked by simplicity. In the synagogue where there was congregational singing, there was no musical instrument” (*Purity of Worship*, Presbyterian Church of East Australia, 1968, p.11).

⁹⁷ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, pp.39-40.

⁹⁸ “Some Christians direct attention to the fact that in many Jewish synagogues in these days, instrumental music accompanies the congregational singing. In this connection the following statements of Rabbi R. Brasch of Sydney should prove helpful. ‘There are no definite records as to the actual introduction of instrumental music into the synagogue until 1810, when Reform Temples in Germany did so for the first time.... In the present-day world, orthodox synagogues still abstain from instrumental music...but every Liberal and Reform Temple accompany the congregational singing and the choir on an organ.’ It is both interesting and informative to notice that the instruments

the position that the use of music in public worship in the Bible is ceremonial. The Jews who introduced music in synagogue worship argued that music was played during the sacrifice in the temple. But since the temple has been destroyed (A.D. 70), God accepts the prayers of His people as a sacrifice, as atonement. Thus, in their minds, music should be in the house of prayer just as it accompanied the animal sacrifices. Although this argument is unscriptural and is based on human merit as a replacement for blood atonement, it at least recognizes the connection between instrumental music and the sacrificial cultus. The more strict Jews (the Orthodox) still do not use musical instruments in their worship because they recognize that it was restricted to the Levitical-temple system of worship.

The fact that the temple used musical instruments while the synagogues did not is significant, for the first Christian churches were closely patterned after the synagogue. “The most important legacy of the first century synagogue was the form and organization of the apostolic Church.”⁹⁹ In fact, with the large numbers of Jews who were saved and baptized in Jerusalem in the early days of the church, it is likely that some synagogues became Christian churches.¹⁰⁰ “Thus, it comes as no surprise to find no musical instruments in the worship of the early Christian church. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the witness to this ‘rejection of all musical instruments is consistent among the Fathers.’”¹⁰¹ “The early Christians followed the example of the synagogue. When they celebrated the praise of God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, their melody was the fruit of their lips.”¹⁰²

Musical Instruments and the Psalms

Most people who argue for the use of musical instruments in public worship today do not use the passages from the Chronicles for justification of their practice, but instead quote the references to musical instruments from the book of Psalms.¹⁰³ The problem with this approach is

of music were first used in synagogues at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that is, about the same time as they began to be introduced into Protestant [i.e., Presbyterian] churches” (M.C. Ramsay, *Purity of Worship*, p 12).

⁹⁹ W. White, Jr., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, p. 556. “The term ‘synagogue’ is used in the gospels over thirty times while an even greater frequency appears in Acts. It is assumed in both the Talmudic literature and the N.T. that this was the valid leadership and execution of Judaism, no matter whether it was in Jerusalem or in Corinth” (*ibid.*). Although the beginning of synagogue worship is shrouded in mystery, the fact that Jesus Christ and the apostles worshiped in various synagogues and even expounded the word in them proves that God recognized their legitimacy (i.e., they had divine warrant).

¹⁰⁰ According to the Talmud there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem at the time of the destruction of the second temple (A.D. 70). If women and children are factored in, there were probably over 15,000 converts in Jerusalem within a few weeks after Pentecost. However, most of the converts in Jerusalem would soon be dispersed by a severe Jewish persecution of Christians.

¹⁰¹ G. I. Williamson, *Instrumental Worship in the Worship of God: Commanded or Not Commanded?*, p. 11.

¹⁰² Robert B. McCracken, *What About Musical Instruments in Worship?* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, n.d.), tract.

¹⁰³ For example Gordon H. Clark writes, “On one occasion I attended a Covenanter church for several Sundays. The auditorium was filled to capacity. The singing was vigorous. The preaching was superb. At the end of the service the congregation burst forth with Psalm 150. It was all new to me, and I could hardly refrain from laughing. Read Psalm 150 and compare, or contrast, what the Psalm commands and what the Covenanters did not do. Not that I wish to ridicule the Covenanters: I wish other denominations were half so good” (*Ephesians* [Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1985], pp. 181-182). Clark’s statement reveals that he is not really familiar with the biblical arguments against the use of musical instruments in public worship. The fact that Gordon H. Clark, a conservative Presbyterian, an ordained minister and excellent scholar, did not know the arguments regarding instrumental music in worship

that the Psalms often speak of the worship of Jehovah using ceremonial types. The Psalms speak of offering sacrifice (Ps. 20:3; 54:6; 107:22; 118:27), burnt offerings (Ps. 20:3; 50:8; 51:19; 66:13, 15), the altar (Ps. 26:6; 43:4; 51:19; 118:27), God's house—the temple (Ps. 101:2; 122:1). The Psalms speak of walking within God's house (Ps. 101:2), of going into the house of Jehovah (Ps. 122:1), of worshiping toward God's holy temple (Ps. 5:7; 138:8), and of inquiring in God's temple (Ps. 27:4). Orthodox Christians do not use the passages in the psalms that speak of sacrifices and burnt offerings as proof texts for offering sacrifices in church because they know from other portions of Scripture that these duties belonged to the Levitical priesthood and were part of the ceremonial temple system that has been fulfilled and superseded by Christ. Likewise, the clear historical passages of Scripture that discuss the use of musical instruments in public worship teach that their use was ceremonial.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, the Psalm passages that speak of music in public worship do not justify their use today. For if they did, the passages that speak of burnt offerings could be used to introduce animal sacrifices into today's worship. Their "argument from the Psalms proves too much and is therefore worthless."¹⁰⁵ Girardeau writes, "If, now, the argument holds good, which is derived from the Psalms in support of the use of instruments in the public worship of the Christian church, it equally holds in justification of the offering of bloody sacrifices in that worship. The absurdity of the consequence completely refutes the argument."¹⁰⁶ Their only hope would be to prove from the synagogue worship that instruments also had a non-ceremonial worship function or to find warrant for musical instruments in public worship in the New Testament. The synagogue worship (as noted above) did not involve any musical instruments at all. The New Testament does not authorize the use of musical instruments in Christian public worship.¹⁰⁷ G. I. Williamson writes, "The

shows the declension of modern conservative Presbyterianism in the area of biblical worship. Furthermore (as noted above), the denominations that use pianos, guitars, and organs are certainly not obeying Psalm 150, even if it did apply to today for these modern instruments are not mentioned in the Psalms.

¹⁰⁴ "We may go further, and not only admit, but affirm, that the terms 'sing' and 'song' are terms which, as used by the Jews, and especially by David in introducing the praise service for temple use, included the whole service of the trumpets, harps, cymbals, psalteries, and the voice. It is the language describing the one sound—the lifting up of the horn, as clearly the symbolical expression of praise as the incense was the symbolical expression of prayer. When the Psalmist says, 'I will sing with a psaltery,' he no more means the literal and personal use of the psaltery, apart from its ceremonial character, than when saying, 'I will sacrifice,' he means that he would offer sacrifices apart from their ceremonial use, or than that he himself would burn incense when he says, 'I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings with incense.' We repeat, that the whole system of ceremonial allusions, including their lyrical feature, was necessarily interwoven with the Psalms, and imbedded in them, as the result of their having been ceremonially employed" (D. W. Collins, p.65).

¹⁰⁵ John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p.78.

¹⁰⁷ John Calvin also argues that the discussion of musical instruments in the psalms refers to a ceremonial use. His commentary on Psalm 71:22 says, "In speaking of employing *the psaltery* and *the harp* in this exercise, he alludes to the generally prevailing custom of that time. To sing the praises of God upon the harp and psaltery unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law, and of the services of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving" (Vol. 3, p.98). Regarding Psalm 92:3, Calvin says, "In the [third] verse, he more immediately addresses the Levites, who were appointed to the office of singers, and calls upon them to employ their instruments of music—not as if this in itself was necessary, only it was useful as an elementary aid to the people of God in these ancient times. A difference is to be observed in this respect between his people under the Old and under the New Testament; for now that Christ has appeared, and the Church has reached full age, it were only to bury the light of the Gospel, should we introduce the shadows of a departed dispensation" (Vol. 3, pp. 494-495). His comments on Psalm 149:3 concur: "The musical instruments he mentions were peculiar to this infancy

fundamentalists speak of rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, and thus take seriously the fact that this Old Testament worship was commanded by God. If we are going to revive ceremonial worship, in other words, then let us at least be careful to restore it exactly as it was commanded. Let us not pick and choose as we will. That the fundamentalist is mistaken, however, in expecting a restoration of that which is passed away is perfectly plain.”¹⁰⁸

The section of Scripture most often alluded to as a justification for the use of instruments in new covenant public worship is Psalm 150: “Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; praise Him with the lute and harp! Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; praise Him with stringed instrument and flutes! Praise Him with loud cymbals; praise Him with high sounding cymbals!” (vs. 2-5). People who appeal to Psalm 150 as a justification for the use of musical instruments in new covenant worship violate a number of standard interpretive procedures. First, what did this Psalm mean to the original old covenant Jewish audience? Did the Jews use this Psalm and other such Psalms as a justification for the introduction of musical instruments in their synagogue worship? No. They most certainly did not. Jewish synagogues did not use musical instruments in praise until 1810.

Second, this scripture can only be used as a justification for new covenant worship if it is isolated from the rest of the Bible. Scripture must be used to interpret Scripture. The broad context of Scripture teaches that: dancing and taboret playing were performed outdoors during festive occasions by women (Ex. 15:20; Jud. 11:34; 21:21; 1 Sam. 18:6; 22:11; 29:5; Jer. 31:4); only priests were authorized to play trumpets in worship (Nu. 10:8,10; 2 Chron. 5:11-14; 29:26; Ezra 3:10; and, harps, lyres and cymbals were only authorized to be played by Levites (1 Chron. 15:14-24, 23:5, 28:11-13, 19; 2 Chron. 5:11-14; 20:27-28; 29 :25-27; Neh. 12:27, etc.).¹⁰⁹ To completely ignore the Old Testament teaching regarding the use of instruments in worship when referring to Psalm 150 as a proof text for new covenant praise is sloppy exegesis and an illegitimate method of using a proof text.

Third, people who use this passage as authorization for musical instruments also ignore the immediate context. Is this passage meant to be taken literally? Or is it a poetic way of speaking of God’s people offering dedicated, fervent praise throughout the earth? If one takes this passage literally, then not only does it blatantly contradict the rest of the Old Testament’s teaching regarding musical instruments in worship, but it also teaches that every believer should play musical instruments during worship (an absurd notion). Furthermore, it would teach that the heathen and brute creatures also are to praise Jehovah. Regarding Psalm 150:3, Calvin writes, “I do not insist upon the words in Hebrew signifying the musical instrument [in other words they

of the Church, nor should we foolishly imitate a practice which was intended only for God’s ancient people” (Vol. 5, p. 312).

¹⁰⁸ G. I. Williamson, *Instrumental Worship: Commanded or Not Commanded?*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁰⁹ It should be noted that the Old Testament does use ceremonial types to prophetically describe the non-ceremonial-spiritual worship in the new covenant era: “for from the rising of the sun, even to the going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations.” (Mal. 1:11). “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Isa. 2:2-3). These passages are mentioned to dispel the notion of some that Psalm 150 is prophetic of the “celebrative” worship that will be worldwide in the new covenant era.

may just be poetic metaphors exhorting believers to great praise]; only let the reader remember that sundry different kinds are here mentioned, which were in use under the legal economy, the more forcibly to teach the children of God that they cannot apply themselves too diligently to the praises of God.”¹¹⁰

Given the fact that Psalm 150 incorporates the instrumentation of the temple, the taboret playing and dancing of victory celebrations as well as instruments only used upon secular occasions (e.g., v. 4: “stringed instruments” [*minnim*] and “flutes” [*ugabh*]); coupled with the exhortation for everything that breathes to praise Jehovah it should be rather obvious that this Psalm was not meant to be used as a literal instruction guide for public worship. Psalm 150 is an exhortation expressed in poetic language, teaching that everyone in heaven and on earth should praise Jehovah with every fiber of his being. (Furthermore, as noted above, the Jews of the old dispensation did not regard Psalm 150 as authorizing the use of instruments in public worship outside of the Temple.)

Those who seek authorization for musical instruments in Psalm 150 should also take note of the word sanctuary in verse one: “Praise God in His sanctuary.” If one is going to use Psalm 150 as proof for the use of musical instruments in new covenant public worship, then one has an obligation to use all the specific instruments commanded and one must also use liturgical dance. Presbyterian pastors who appeal to this Psalm as authorization cannot (according to their own use of it) forbid taboret (tambourine) playing and dancing in the aisles during their worship services.

A biblical view of Psalm 150 is more readily found in the older Presbyterian and Reformed commentators. The Covenanter David Dickson writes of verse 3 through 5: “Here are other six exhortations, teaching the manner of praising God under the shadow of typical music, appointed in the ceremonial law. Whence learn. 1. Albeit the typical ceremonies of musical instruments in God’s public worship, belonging to the pedagogy of the church, in her minority before Christ, be now abolished with the rest of the ceremonies; yet the moral duties shadowed forth by them, are still to be studied, because this duty of praising God, and praising him with all our mind, strength, and soul, is moral, whereunto we are perpetually obliged.”¹¹¹ Matthew Henry writes,

In what manner this tribute must be paid, with all the kinds of musical instruments that were then used in the temple-service, v. 3-5.... Our concern is to know...that, various instruments being used in praising God, it should be done with exact and perfect harmony; they must not hinder, but help one another. The New Testament concern, instead of this, is with one mind and one mouth to glorify God, Rom xv.6.... He began with a call to those who had a place in his sanctuary and were employed in the temple-service; but he concludes with a call to all the children of men, in prospect of the time when the Gentiles should be taken into the church, and in every place, as acceptably as at Jerusalem, this incense should be offered, Mal. i.2.”¹¹²

The Reformed Baptist scholar John Gill writes, “Praise him with the psaltery; to which songs were sung. And harps which were instruments, both were used in divine worship under the former dispensation; and in which David was well skilled and delighted and appointed proper persons to praise with them, 1 Chron. xv. 20,21. They were typical of the spiritual melody made

¹¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 5:320.

¹¹¹ David Dickson, *The Psalms* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959 [1653-5]) 2:536.

¹¹² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, N.D. [1710]) 3:788-789.

in the hearts of God's people, while they were praising him in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, under the Gospel, Ephes. v.19.”¹¹³

The New Testament and Musical Instruments

Thus far it has been noted that the use of musical instruments in Old Covenant public worship was Levitical and ceremonial. It was intimately connected with the tabernacle and temple. It was also noted that the public worship that occurred weekly in the Jewish synagogue occurred *without* musical accompaniment. The Jews until modern times considered the use of musical instruments to belong solely to the worship of the temple. Since the Bible explicitly teaches that every element of worship must have divine warrant, those who use musical instruments in public worship must find warrant in the New Testament. Does the New Testament authorize instrumental music in public worship? No. There is not a shred of evidence in the New Testament for the use of musical instruments.¹¹⁴ Their use is not commanded nor is there even one historical example of their use in the apostolic church. This should come as no surprise, given the fact that the new covenant church was closely patterned after the synagogue, which did not use musical instruments, and the overwhelming Old Testament evidence that musical instruments served as ceremonial types.

Although the New Testament does not authorize the use of musical instruments in public worship, it is not silent regarding the worship of God. The author of Hebrews says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name” (13:15). “Animal sacrifices had been rendered forever obsolete by the sacrifice of Christ, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving might still be offered to God, and indeed should be offered to Him by all who appreciated the perfect sacrifice of Christ. No longer in association with animal sacrifices, but through Jesus. The sacrifice of praise was acceptable to God.”¹¹⁵ Since Christians praise God through Christ and His perfect sacrifice and not with ceremonial types (e.g., incense, candles, musical instruments), they are to speak “to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *singing and making melody in your hearts to the LORD*” (Eph. 5:19). “The Greek word for ‘make music’ is *psallo*, which means originally ‘to pluck the strings of an instrument.’ This gives a beautiful picture of what true and acceptable praise of God really is. Since the word *psallo* cannot be separated from the word ‘heart,’ it literally means ‘plucking the strings of your heart to the LORD.’ When the music of the heart is expressed through lips that confess the LORD’s name, there is no need for supporting instruments.”¹¹⁶ “The

¹¹³ John Gill, *Exposition of the Old Testament* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1979 [1910] 4:327.

¹¹⁴ “To account for the silence of the New Testament respecting the use of instruments in worship, we think it clear that they were appointed for the temple, and as a companion to the sacrifice; that with these they were connected, and with these they ceased; in fact, that when ‘the tabernacle of David’ fell [Amos 9:11; Isa. 16:5; Acts 15:15-17, etc], the Davidic appointment of Levites fell with it. In reply, attempts are made to show that this instrumental service has a place in the synagogue. But this involves an immense difficulty—that as the synagogue furnished the general platform of ecclesiastical order in the Christian Church, if instruments belonged to the former, they should have had their place in the latter. But this is not accordant with the fact that the apostolic Church did not use them, nor the post-apostolic Church for several centuries. For the use of musical instruments in the synagogue the evidence is very evanescent—is indeed nothing. It is certain that the New Testament supplies none” (James Glasgow, *Heart and Voices: Instrumental Music in Christian Worship Not Divinely Authorized*, [Belfast: C. Aithchison; J. Cleeland, N.D.], p.12).

¹¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p 405.

¹¹⁶ Robert B. McCracken, *What About Musical Instruments in Worship?*.

Levitical rites required God's earthly people to provide material offerings: but the Christian's 'sacrifices' are entirely spiritual in their character."¹¹⁷ D. W. Collins writes,

It may be proper to remind the reader that the Apostle has shown the Hebrews that their ceremonial system has passed away, and that he incidentally refers in the ninth verse to the sacrifices offered at the altar, and affirms in the tenth verse that we have an altar in the present dispensation of which they have no right to partake, who cling to the ceremonial dispensation. As the bodies of beasts whose blood was used in the sanctuary or temple were burned without the camp, so Christ suffered without the gate—turned His back upon the ceremonial service, as no longer profitable. The Hebrews are, therefore, exhorted to follow Him by forsaking the literal Jerusalem, with all its ceremonial associations—going forth without the camp, bearing His reproach. No doubt this reproach, in the experience of a Hebrew, would be his forsaking the ritual, which was the pride of the Jews, and accepting the simple service of the gospel, which distinguished the followers of Jesus.¹¹⁸

All the types of the temple (the continual burning of incense, the sacrificing of animals, the playing of musical instruments during the sacrifice, etc.) have been put away by the reality--Christ. Therefore, Christians pray and praise without the incense and musical instruments but with the lips alone.

The glory of the temple with its visible display and audible grandeur no doubt stimulated the senses and inspired awe, but now that Christ has come and instituted New Testament ordinances our focus is to be wholly upon Him—the reality. The simple unadorned worship of the gospel era brings us into the presence of the greater temple—Jesus Christ—as we sing divine songs, hear the word of God, listen to the preaching, and feast spiritually upon Christ's body. Putting shadows, incense, musical instruments, vestments, altars, etc., into new covenant worship merely serves to hide Christ and His glory under obsolete externalities. "To do so would be a grievous dishonour to the Lord Jesus, for it would indicate a greater appreciation of the type than of the glorious archetype, the Savior Himself."¹¹⁹

Some believers have attempted to find divine warrant for the use of musical instruments from the book of Revelation. The book does mention the use of harps (Rev. 5:8; 14:2; 15:2) in heaven. The problem with this approach is that Revelation frequently uses Old Testament types and symbols to dramatically portray new covenant realities. John continually refers to Jesus Christ as "the lamb" (Rev. 5:6, 8, 12- 13; 6:1, 16; 7:9- 10, 14; 12:11; 13:8; 14:1, 4, 10, etc.). He refers to the Church as "the temple" (3:12; 11:1-2) and the "New Jerusalem" (3:12; 21:2, 10). John mentions the "ark of His covenant" (11:19) and even describes an altar (6:9; 8:3, 5; 9:13; 11:1; 14:18; 16:7). Is John speaking of a literal altar? No. Philip Hughes writes, "Furthermore, when he says that he saw them *under the altar* [v. 9], this should not be taken to mean that there is a literal altar in the heavenly realm. The altar of sacrifice in the Mosaic system with its priesthood and offerings, pointed forward typologically to the altar of the cross, where Christ, both High Priest and Victim, offered Himself up for us sinners."¹²⁰ The book of Revelation mentions incense (8:4), but John specifically says that the incense is *symbolic* of the prayers of the saints. John refers to the use of trumpets (1:10; 4:1; 8:13; 9:14), but in each instance the

¹¹⁷ Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), p. 1217.

¹¹⁸ D. W. Collins, *Musical Instruments in Divine Worship*, p. 77.

¹¹⁹ M. C. Ramsay, *Purity of Worship*, p. 13.

¹²⁰ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Book of the Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 88.

trumpets symbolize voices or announcements of judgment. “John did not hear a literal trumpet, but the sound of a voice likened to the sound of a trumpet (4:1). Similarly, the music that John heard (14:2, Greek text) was not the sound of harps. It was the sound of human voices likened to harpers harping with their harps.”¹²¹ As incense represented the prayers of God’s people, the harps represented the praise of the saints. “The very employment of these ceremonial symbols—taken, as they are, from an abrogated system—further confirms the fact that they are not any part of New Testament worship.”¹²² Therefore, the book of Revelation no more authorizes the use of musical instruments in public worship than it does incense, altars, trumpets, or sacrificial temples. One cannot arbitrarily accept one without accepting the others also. Popery is at least consistent in accepting all the types.

Conclusion

An examination of God’s scriptural law of worship and the use of musical instruments in public worship in the Bible can lead to only one conclusion. The use of musical instruments in the public worship of God in the new covenant era is without biblical authorization and is unscriptural. The biblical evidence that the use of musical instruments in public worship was Levitical, ceremonial, and typical is crystal clear and overwhelming. It is a tragedy that many Christians think they are worshiping God acceptably when they are engaging in worship practices that are not of divine appointment, which therefore cannot please Jehovah. “[T]here is nothing which God, in His blessed word, defends with more exquisite jealousy than his worship; as there is nothing that he rebukes with more severity than the impertinent assumption of man to determine forms of worship for himself.”¹²³

This conclusion will not be acceptable to many in Reformed circles today. To such people we ask: please produce divine authorization for the use of musical instruments in public worship; show us even one command or historical example that is not ceremonial and typical. We are not prejudiced against musical instruments and their use at appropriate times; we simply cannot find a shred of biblical evidence that they are to be used in new covenant public worship.

Some will simply wrench a few references to musical instruments from the Psalms out of their biblical and historical context as a pretext, but most will attack the scriptural law of worship itself. They will either openly abandon it by relegating it to a former dispensation,¹²⁴ or they

¹²¹G. I. Williamson, *Instrumental Music in the Worship of God*, p. 10.

¹²² Ibid, p. 10.

¹²³ Thomas E. Peek, *Miscellanies* (Richmond, VA: The Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1895), Vol. 1, pp. 68-69.

¹²⁴ Douglas Wilson (in *Credenda/Agenda*) has argued that the regulative principle applied only to the temple and thus has no bearing whatsoever on Christian worship. Such an argument however, completely ignores the scriptural testimony regarding both old and new covenant worship. The clearest statement in Scripture of the regulative principle (Deut. 12:32) is a very broad command and is not in any way restricted to the tabernacle. Furthermore, it is obvious from the many passages discussed in this book that the regulative principle was applied to situations that had nothing to do with the tabernacle or temple (e.g., Gen. 4:3-5; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; 1 Kings 12:26-33; Matt. 15:1-3; Col. 2:20-33). Jesus applied the regulative principle to the Pharisees for adding ritual washings to God’s law that took place in the home and had nothing to do with the temple (Matt. 15:1-3). The apostle Paul believed in the abiding validity of God’s regulative principle and even applied it explicitly to the Colossian church (Col. 2:20-33). The Jews who returned from Babylon believed that the regulative principle was to be applied beyond temple worship for they applied it specifically to the synagogue worship. They did not use musical instruments in the synagogue because they recognized that they were only authorized for the temple worship. Pastors and scholars who advocate musical

simply redefine it, rendering it virtually useless to hold back human autonomy and innovations in worship. This attack is wicked Scripture twisting, but logical for those in love with human traditions. Why? Because the regulative principle (biblically understood) is the foundation of true Reformed and Presbyterian worship. Abandon it, or redefine it, and declension is inevitable. Why? Because all men, even regenerate men, are sinners, who if left to themselves will eventually pollute and corrupt the worship of God. The history of Israel and the Christian church prove this point. “The great lesson taught by the history of image-worship and the reverencing of relics is the importance of adhering to the Word of God as the only rule of our faith and practice, receiving nothing as true religion but what the Bible teaches, and admitting nothing into divine worship which the Scriptures do not either sanction or enjoin.”¹²⁵

Others who object to the thesis of this book will claim that the use of musical instruments in public worship is a discretionary matter—that is, it is just a mere “circumstance of worship common to human actions and societies.”¹²⁶ Such an assertion must ignore the whole Old Testament where it is clearly established that the use of instruments in worship was by divine authority. The use of musical instruments, their very design, and the various Levitical families who played them all were appointed by express commandment. This point is unquestionable. But, it is argued, could not the use of instruments be of divine appointment for the temple and be discretionary for the public worship in the synagogue and the Christian assemblies? No. The regulative principle was never limited to the temple (cf. footnote 124). Furthermore, something incidental to worship *by nature* is incidental or discretionary in all circumstances. The fact that the Jews in biblical times (indeed until 1810) regarded musical instruments as needing divine warrant for the synagogue should dispel the music-as-circumstance argument. “If, as some imagine, the apostles employed instruments of music in public worship, their instruments must have been buried along with them. They had a considerably protracted entombment, for they had no resurrection until at least seven or eight centuries afterwards. They did not reappear in Christian worship until the dark ages of Popery when, by unauthorized additions to the worship of the Church, men had greatly marred the divine beauty and simplicity of pure New Testament worship.”¹²⁷

Sadly, the bottom line is that we are living in a time of serious declension regarding worship and doctrine. Many people are not interested in reform. Too many church leaders are content to defend the status quo. (But, a non-reforming church is a deforming one.) When confronted with the biblical evidence regarding the use of musical instruments in the public worship (also, unauthorized holy days and exclusive psalmody) the response usually is: “*I don’t*

instruments in public worship, extra-biblical holy days (e.g., Christmas) and uninspired hymnody find themselves in the precarious position of having to defend what is scripturally indefensible. The result is brilliant scholars engaging in sloppy exegesis, fallacious reasoning and appeals to sentimentality.

¹²⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), Vol.3, p.3. “The question occurs: How does this want of spiritual life manifest itself in reference to the worship of God? History inspired and uninspired furnishes but one answer—by *discontent* and *restiveness* under the simplicity of divine appointments in that worship” (D. W. Collins, p. 93).

¹²⁶ Many argue that musical instruments are a practical necessity such as lighting, chairs, church buildings, and so on. This argument ignores the fact that Jewish synagogues did fine without musical instruments for more than two thousand years. Christian congregations did not use them for the first seven centuries. Presbyterian churches did fine without them for over 250 years. There are still a number of small Presbyterian bodies that do not use them. Furthermore, if instruments were just a matter of practical necessity, their use in worship would not have had to wait for divine authorization.

¹²⁷ James Glasgow, *Heart and Voice*, p. 9.

want to hear it. Who cares? That's interesting but I love the sound of musical instruments in worship. This issue could be divisive, so just drop it". These answers reveal an unscriptural, anti-reformed attitude. "Is it not evident—painfully evident—that they are really arrogant words? 'Who cares what God wants,' such people say in effect: 'So long as I have what I want! I am the important one!' This is the very antithesis of true religion."¹²⁸ Human traditions have the ability to pull the heartstrings. That is why they are so dangerous to the purity of gospel worship. Our hope and prayer is that the Holy Spirit would bring revival to His church and destroy these innovations, root and branch. It is not a time to be arrogant but to be humble, to pray, and to work for reformation. Let us return to the simple, unadorned worship of the apostolic church and our Calvinistic forefathers. May God have mercy on His Church and return it to the landmarks of the Reformation.

Appendix A The Historical Evidence

The word of God is the only authority and infallible standard for determining the doctrine, government and worship of the church. If one strictly adheres to the regulative principle of worship, the biblical case against the use of musical instruments in public worship is irrefutable (no warrant, no practice). Although the study of church history obviously does not carry the same weight as Scripture, it can be helpful nevertheless. The testimony from church history in support of the biblical evidence against the use of musical instruments in new covenant worship is incredibly strong. The great theologians and apologists (of both the eastern and western branches of Christendom) for at least five centuries regarded the use of musical instruments in public worship as things that belonged *solely* to the old covenant dispensation. If the apostolic churches had used musical instruments in their worship, the attitude toward instrumental music in public worship by the church fathers would be extremely difficult to explain. For those who read this book who come from a Reformed or Presbyterian perspective, note carefully that the non-use of musical instruments in public worship was the position of all the great reformers and theologians from the Calvinist wing of the Reformation. Most Presbyterians did not abandon the non-use position until the latter half of the 19th century. Sadly, there is only a small remnant of Presbyterians today that still follows the biblical practice. The one instrument of peace, the Word alone by which we honour God, is what we employ. We no longer employ the ancient psaltery, and trumpet, and timbrel, and flute.
—*Clement* (church father, Alexandria, A.D. 153-217).¹²⁹

The *kithara* is the active soul being moved by the commandments of God, the *psalterion* is the pure mind being moved by spiritual knowledge. The musical instruments of the Old Covenant understood spiritually are applicable to us. The organ is the church of God composed of contemplative and active souls. The pleasant sounding cymbal is the active soul captured by the desire for Christ. —*Origen* (church father, Alexandria), *Commentaries on the Psalms* (3rd century).

¹²⁸ G. I. Williamson, *Instrumental Music in the Worship of God*, p. 15.

¹²⁹ Some books and tracts attribute the following quote to Justin Martyr (A.D. 166): "Plain singing is not childish, but only the singing with lifeless organs, with dancing and cymbals. Whence the use of such instruments and other things fit for children are laid aside, and plain singing only retained." This is actually a quote from Theodoret (5th century) that was mistakenly attributed to Justin Martyr.

Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshiping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the *psalterion* and *kithara* and to do this on Sabbath days (breaking the rest and transgressing the law concerning the Sabbath). But we in an inward manner keep the part of the Jew, according to the saying of the apostle (Romans 2:28f.). We render our hymn with a living *psalterion* and a living *kithara*, with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly in all the churches of God, united in soul and attitude, with one mind and in agreement of faith and piety, we send up a unison melody in the words of the Psalms.—**Eusebius** (church historian/bishop, Palestine), *Commentary on Psalm 91* (4th century).

It was only permitted to the Jews as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn off from idols; but now, instead of organs, we may use our own bodies to praise him withal. Instruments appertain not to Christians. —**John Chrysostom** (church father, Eastern/Greek), *Homily on Psalm 149* (4th century).

If God allowed bloody sacrifices on account of the childhood of men, why do you marvel if also the music of the *kithara* and *psalterion* was played? —**Isidore** (abbot of Pelusium), *Epistles* (4th century).

You [God's saints] are “trumpet, psaltery, harp, timbrel, choir, strings, and organ, cymbals of jubilation sounding well,” because sounding in harmony. All these are you: let not that which is vile, not that which is transitory, not that which is ludicrous, be thought of here. —**Augustine** (bishop, North Africa), *Commentary on Psalm 150* (A.D. 354-430).

It is time to turn to the New Testament to confirm what is said in the Old, and, particularly, to point out that the office of psalmody is not to be considered abolished merely because many other observances of the Old Law have fallen into desuetude. Only the corporal institutions have been rejected, like circumcision, the sabbaths, sacrifices, discrimination in foods. So, too, the trumpets, harps, cymbals and timbrels. For the sound of these we now have a better substitute in the music of the mouths of men. The daily ablutions, the new-moon observances, the careful inspection of leprosy are completely past and gone, along with whatever else was necessary only for a time—as it were, for children. Of course, what was spiritual in the Old Testament, for example, faith, piety, prayer, fasting, patience, chastity, psalm-singing—all this has been increased in the New Testament rather than diminished.—**Nicea** (bishop, Remesia), *On the Utility of Hymn Singing* (5th century).

Simply singing is not agreeable to children, but singing with lifeless instruments and with dancing and clapping; on which account the use of this kind of instruments and of others agreeable to children is removed from the songs in the churches, and there is left remaining simply singing.—**Theodoret** (bishop, Syria), *Questions and Answers to the Orthodox* (5th century).

So it was not in any need of victims or craving odors that God commanded them to sacrifice, but that he might heal the sufferings of those who were sick. So he also allowed the use of instrumental music, not that he delighted in the harmony, but that he might little by little end the deception of idols. For if he had offered them perfect laws immediately after their deliverance from Egypt, they would have been rebellious and thrust away from the bridle, and would have hastened back to their former ruin. —**Theodoret** (bishop, Syria), *On the Healing of Greek Afflictions* (5th century).

But our Church does not make use of musical instruments such as harps and psalteries, in the divine praises, for fear of seeming to Judaize. As the Philosopher says (*Polit.* viii, 6), “Teaching should not be accompanied with a flute or any artificial instrument such as the harp or anything else of this kind: but only with such things as make good hearers.” For such like musical instruments move the soul to pleasure rather than create a good disposition within it. In the Old Testament instruments of this description were employed, both because the people were more coarse and carnal—so that they needed to be aroused by such instruments as also by earthly promises—and because these material instruments were figures of something else. —**Thomas Aquinas** (philosopher and doctor of theology, Roman Catholic Church), *Summa Theologica* (13th century).

It is not the least part of Religion, that consisteth in the pompe of ceremonies, in cloathes, in vessell, candles, bells, organs, concerts, odours, sacrifices, gestures, pictures, in the choise of meates, & fasts & such other things that are in singular admiration & adoration of the unlearned people, who receive and take heed only to such things as are before their eyes. —**Cornelius Agrippa** (doctor of laws, member of the Roman Catholic Church, counselor to Emperor Charles V), *De Vanitate Scientiarum & Artium* (1510).

We have brought into our churches a certain operose and theatrical music; such a confused, disorderly chattering of some words, as I hardly think was ever heard in any of the Grecian or Roman theatres. The church rings with the noise of trumpets, pipes and dulcimers; and human voices strive to bear their part with them. Men run to church as to a theatre, to have their ears tickled. And for this end organ-makers are hired with great salaries, and a company of boys, who waste all their time in learning these whining tones. —**Erasmus** (classical scholar and humanist), *In Novum Testamentum Anno-tationes* (1522).

But the promise made, that “Wheresoever two or three be gathered together in my name, there shall I be in the midst of them,” condemneth all such as condemneth the congregation gathered in his name. But mark well the word “gathered;” I mean not to hear piping, singing, or playing; nor to patter upon beads, or books whereof they have no understanding; not to commit idolatry, honoring that for God which is no God indeed. For with such will I neither join myself in common prayer, nor in receiving external sacraments; for in so doing I should affirm their superstition and abominable idolatry, which I, by God’s grace, never will do, neither counsel others to do, to the end. —**John Knox** (Reformer, Scotland), *A Declaration of the True Nature and Object of Prayer* (1554).

It would be nothing but mimicry if we followed David today in singing with cymbals, flutes, tambourines and psalteries. In fact, the papists were seriously deceived in their desire to worship God with their pompous inclusion of organs, trumpets, oboes and similar instruments. That has only served to amuse the people in their vanity, and to turn them away from the true institution which God has ordained. In a word, the musical instruments were in the same class as sacrifices, candelabra, lamps and similar things. Those who take this approach are reverting to a sort of Jewishness, as if they wanted to mingle the Law and the Gospel, and thus bury our Lord Jesus Christ. When we are told that David sang with a musical instrument, let us carefully remember that we are not to make a rule of it. Rather, we are to recognise today that we must sing the praises of God in simplicity, since the shadows of the Law are past, and since in our Lord Jesus Christ we have the truth and embodiment of all these things which were given to the ancient fathers in the time of their ignorance or smallness of faith. —**John Calvin** (Reformer, Geneva), *Sermons on Second Samuel* (1562).

VI. That the use of organs be removed [i.e., discarded].—From the list of demands presented by the English Puritans to the Convocation of 1563.

That they would endeavor to obtain of the magistrate the laying aside of organs, and the singing with them in the churches, even out of the time of worship, either before or after sermons. —**The Synod of Holland and Zealand** (1594).

Exhorting the people only to rejoice in praising God, he maketh mention of those instruments which by Gods commandment were appointed in the old Law, but under Christ the use thereof is abolished in the Church. —**Marginal Notes on Psalm 150 in the Geneva Bible** [compiled by various Reformed/Puritan contributors; the notes went through several revisions] (1599).

The eleventh fault they finde, is, for that wee use no Organs in our Churches. [C]ommonly we doe therefore not use them: whilst we finde more hindrance to proceed thereof then profit, by the worship of God: and also in this case we desire to remaine by the simplicity of the Apostolicall Churches, which neither had nor used any such things in their congregations. —**A Full Declaration of the Faith and Ceremonies Professed in the Dominions of the Most Illustrious and Noble Prince Fredericke, V. Prince Elector Palatine** (1614).

In the Christian church the mind must be incited to spiritual joy, not by pipes and trumpets and timbrels, with which God formerly indulged his ancient people on account of the hardness of their hearts, but by psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. —**David Paraeus** (professor/theologian, University of Heidelberg), *Commentary on I Corinthians* (1618).

The PASTOR loveth no music in the house of God but such as edifieth, and stoppeth his ears at instrumental music, as serving for the pedagogy of the untoward Jews under the law, and being figurative of that spiritual joy whereunto our hearts should be opened under the gospel.

The PRELATE loveth carnal and curious singing to the ear, more than the spiritual melody of the gospel, and therefore would have antiphony and organs in the cathedral kirks, upon no greater reason than other shadows of the law of Moses; or lesser instruments, as lutes, citherns, or pipes, might be used in other kirks. —**David Calderwood** (minister and church historian, Church of Scotland), *The Pastor and the Prelate or Reformation and Conformity Shortly Compared* (1628).

The first question was, If the Primitive Church had such chaunting Idol-service, as is in our Cathedrall Churches? The Rejoynder after some words spent about *singing*, (about which he bringeth not the least resemblance of that in question, untill the fourth age after Christ) excepteth first, that *Organall musicke was gods ordinance in the old Testament, and that not significant, or typicall; and therefore is sinfully called Idol-service. 2. That all men whose hearts are not averse, by distraction, stupidity, or prejudice, feele such musicke to worke much upon their affections.* To this I say 1. That his denying of Organall musicke to have beene *significant or typicall*, is without reason, and against the current of our Divines; taken (as it may seeme) out of *Bellarmino (de missa. Lib. 2. Cap. 15.)* who useth this evasion against those words of *P. Martyr: Musicall organs perteyne to the Jewish Ceremonie, and agree no more to us, than Circumcision.* So that we may neglect it, and take him as saying, that nothing which was ordained in the old Testament (no not sacrificing beasts) is now an Idol-service. 2. For that, and the other, both together, it is fit the Rejoynder should be put in minde how many, and what kinde of men, he accuseth of *distraction, stupidity or prejudice!* —**William Ames** (English Puritan), *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God's Worship* (1633).

[C]ertainly the singing of Davids psalmes was an acceptable worship of God, not only in his owne, but in succeeding times. As in Solomon's time *2 Chron. 5.13.* in Jehosaphats time *2 Chron. 20.21.* in Ezra his time *Ezra 3.10,11.* And the text is evident in Hezekiahs time they are commanded to sing praise in the words of David and Asaph, *2 Chron. 29.30* which one place may serve to reesolve two of the questions (the first and the last) at once, for this commandement was it ceremoniall or morall? Some things in it indeed were ceremoniall, as their musicall instruments &c but what ceremony was there in singing praise with the words of David and Asaph? What if David was a type of Christ, was Asaph also? Was everything of David typicall? Are his words (which are morall, universall, and perpetuall authority in all nations and ages) are they typicall? What type can be imagined in making use of his songs to praise the Lord? If they were typicall because the ceremony of musicall instruments was joined with them, then their prayers were also typicall, because they had that ceremony of incense admixt with them: but we know that prayer then was a morall duty, notwithstanding the incense; and soe singing those psalmes notwithstanding their musicall instruments. —**Richard Mather** (New England Puritan), Preface to *The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre [i.e. the Bay Psalm Book]* (1640).

The Jewish Church, not as it was a church but as it was Jewish, had an High Priest, typifying our great High Priest, Jesus Christ. As it was Jewish, it had musicians to play upon harps, psalteries, cymbals and other musical instruments in the temple. —**George Gillespie** (minister, Church of Scotland; Westminster divine), *Assertion of the Government of the Church of Scotland* (1641).

[W]e cannot but admire the good hand of GOD in the great things done here already, particularly; That the Covenant (the Foundation of the whole Work) is taken; Prelacie and the whole train thereof, extirpated; The Service-Book in many places forsaken, plain and powerful preaching set up; Many Colledges in *Cambridge* provided with such Ministers, as are most zealous of the best Reformation; Altars removed; The Communion in some places given at the Table sitting; The great Organs at *Pauls* and of *Peters* in *Westminster* taken down; Images and many other

monuments of Idolatry defaced and abolished. —**John Maitland, Alexander Henderson, Samuel Rutherford, Robert Baillie and George Gillespie** (the Scottish delegates to the Westminster Assembly), *The Letter from the Commissioners at London to the General Assembly* (1644).

We were greatly refreshed to hear by Letters from our Commissioners there with you of the great good things the Lord hath wrought among you and for you many corruptions, as Altars, Images, and other Monuments of Idolatry and Superstition removed the great Organs at *Pauls* and *Peters* taken down. —**General Assembly of the Church of Scotland** (in an official letter to the Church of England), *The General Assemblies Answer to the right Reverend the Assembly of Divines in the Kirk of England* (1644).

But it hath been often said, *Take away the Common Prayer Book, take away our Religion*. Nay, our Religion is in the Bible, there is our God, and our Christ, and our Faith, and our Creed in all points. The whole Bible was Paul's belief; there are the Psalms of David, and his Prayers, and the Lord's Prayer, and other prayers, by which we may learn to pray. We have still the Lord's Songs, the Songs of Zion, sung by many with grace in their hearts, *making melody to the Lord*, though without organs. There we have all the commandments. —**Samuel Gibson** (minister, Church of England; Westminster divine), *The Ruin of the Authors and Fomentors of Civil Wars* (1645).

God's spirit worketh not with Ceremonies, and so they are as the offering of Swine's blood, and the slaying of a man; and so Abomination to God, Isa. 66:1,2. The holy spirit is merited to us by Christ, Joh. 16:14. He shall receive of mine, and shew unto you: But who can say that the grace of joy in the holy Ghost, wrought by the droning of Organs, and the holinesse taught by the Surplice, is a work of the spirit merited by Christ as our High Priest? □ Now Altars, Organs, Jewish Ephods, or Surplice, Masse-cloaths, and Romish Crossing, bowing to Altars, Images, are badges of Jewish and Popish Religion. —**Samuel Rutherford** (minister and professor, Church of Scotland; Westminster divine), *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication* (1646).

Singing with Instruments was typical, and so a ceremonial worship and therefore is ceased. —**John Cotton** (minister, New England Puritan), *Singing of Psalmes a Gospel-Ordinance* (1647).

Albeit the typical ceremonies of musical instruments in God's public worship, belonging to the pedagogy of the church, in her minority before Christ, be now abolished with the rest of the ceremonies; yet the moral duties shadowed forth by them, are still to be studied, because this duty of praising God, and praising him with all our mind, strength, and soul, is moral, whereunto we are perpetually obliged. —**David Dickson** (minister, Church of Scotland), *Explications of the Psalms* (1655).

He tells us next, that *there is no warrant in the New Covenant for Organs* (which I plead not for, nor for any such instrument). —**John Brown**, of Wamphray (minister, Church of Scotland/exiled to Rotterdam during the Restoration), *Quakerisme: The Path-way to Paganisme* (1678).

The praisers, who were of the sons of men, are described (1.) as having harps; (2.) golden vials: in allusion to the Levitical service in the temple, where they had musical instruments, and incense in bowls or vials, which, Zech. 14:20, are called “the bowls of the altar.” Not that musical instruments are to be in the worship of God now, neither incense; which, as it was the type of prayer and praises, Ps. 141:2, “Let my prayer come up before thee as incense;” so those harps were of that “spiritual melody,” as the Apostle calls it, which we make in our hearts to God, even of “spiritual songs,” Eph. 5:19. —**Thomas Goodwin** (minister, Independent Puritan; president Magdalen College, Oxford; Westminster divine), *An Exposition of the Revelation* (1683).

As for church music, for organs, and the like, those primitive ages were wholly ignorant of them; for it cannot rationally be conceived, that in those days of continual persecution or violence, they could either use or preserve them; all that they looked after was, to sing in “rhyme, metre, tune, and concert,” to offer up unto God the praises of their voices, lips, and mouths, which Clemens Alexandrinus thinks was emblemized or shadowed forth by those musical instruments mentioned in Psalm 150, where, saith he, “we are commanded to praise God on the psaltery, that is, on the tongue, because the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord; and to praise him on the harp, by which we must understand the mouth; and to praise him on the loud sounding cymbals, by which the tongue is to be understood, which sounds or speaks through the knocking or coition of the lips.” —**Peter King** (Lord High Chancellor of England; member, Church of England), *An Inquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity, and Worship, of the Primitive Church* (1691).

I. The instrumental musick used in the old church of Israel was an institution of God: it was (2 Chron. 29:25) the commandment of the Lord “by the prophets.” And the instruments are called “God’s instruments,” (1 Chron. 16:42), and “instruments of the Lord,” (2 Chron. 7:6). Now, there is not one word of institution in the *New Testament* for instrumental musick in the worship of God. And because the holy God rejects all He does not command in His worship, He now therefore in effect says unto us, “I will not hear the melody of thy Organs.” But on the other side, the rule given doth abundantly intimate that no *voice* is now to be heard in the church, but what is significant and edifying, by signification; which the voice of *instruments* is not.

II. Tho’ instrumental musick were admitted and appointed in the worship of God under the *Old Testament*, yet we do not find it practised in the *synagogue* of the Jews, but only in the *temple*. It thence appears to have been a part of the ceremonial pedagogy, which is now abolished; nor can any say it was a part of *moral* worship. And whereas the common usage hath now confined instrumental musick to *cathedrals*, it seems therein too much to *Judaize*; which to do is a part of the Anti-Christian apostacy, as well as to *Paganize*.

III. In our asserting a matter of the *Old Testament* to have been *typical*, ’tis not needful that we be always able to particularize any *future mysteries* of the *New Testament* therein referred unto; *truths* which were then of a *present* consideration, were sometimes represented in the types then used among the people of God, which helps to understand the case of instrumental musick.

IV. Instrumental musick in the worship of God is but a very late invention and corruption in the church of the *New Testament*. The writings that go under the name of Justin Martyr deny it and decry it. Chrysostom speaks meanly of it. Even Aquinas himself, about 400 years ago, determines against it, as *Jewish* and *carnal*. Bellarmine himself confesses that it was but late received in the church.

V. If we admit instrumental musick in the worship of God, how can we resist the imposition of all the *instruments* used among the ancient Jews?—yea, *dancing* as well as *playing*, and several other Judaic actions? or, how can we decline a whole *rabble* of church-officers, necessary to be introduced for instrumental musick, whereof our Lord Jesus Christ hath left us no manner of direction? —**Cotton Mather** (minister, New England Puritan), *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702).

[C]ertainly a man must be blind, who does not see, that trumpets, harps, and such like musical instruments, belonged to the pomp and ceremony of the *Jewish* worship. Now all these things are abrogated, together with the law that appointed the worship; unless any of them appear afresh enjoined by some particular command. —**James Peirce** (minister, English nonconformist/Presbyterian), *A Vindication of the Dissenters* (1718).

It is objected that those arguments which have been taken from the practice of the Old Testament church, to prove singing an ordinance, may, with equal justice, be alleged to prove the use of instrumental music in religious worship; since we very often read of their praising God with ‘the sound of the trumpet, psaltery, harp, organ,’ and other musical instruments. This is the principle argument brought for the use of musical instruments by those who defend it and conclude it an help to devotion. But, though we often read of music being used in singing the praises of God under the Old Testament; yet if what has been said concerning its being a type of that spiritual joy which attends our praising God for the privilege of that redemption which Christ has purchased, the objection will appear to have no weight, the type being now abolished, together with the ceremonial law. Besides, though we read of the use of music in the temple-service, yet it does not sufficiently appear that it was ever used in the Jewish synagogues; the mode of worship observed in which more resembled that which is at present performed by us in our public assemblies. But what may sufficiently determine this matter, is that we have no precept nor precedent for it in the New Testament, either from the practice of Christ, or his apostles. Some, indeed, allege that the absence of any such precept or precedent overthrows the ordinance of singing, and pretend that this ought to be no more used by us than the harp, organ, or other musical instruments. But it might as well be objected that, because incense, which was used under the ceremonial law, together with prayer in the temple, is not now to be offered by us, prayer ought to be laid aside; which is, as all own, a duty founded on the moral law. —**Thomas Ridgeley** (minister, English nonconformist), *A Body of Divinity: Wherein the Doctrines of the Christian Religion are Explained and Defended, Being the Substance of Several Lectures Upon the Assembly’s Larger Catechism* (1731-32).

No such things in Christ’s service, by his appointment, as liturgies, litanies, church music, organs, flutes, violins, singing of prayers, anthems, or collects; no burning incense, odours, tapers, and candles upon altars; no cringings, crossings, kneelings at altars, bowing to the east; but praying in the spirit, and praising in the spirit, receiving the Lord’s supper, the bread and the wine, according to his institution, without any of their pagan and papal inventions and superstitions. —**Thomas DeLaune** (English nonconformist/Baptist), *A Plea for the Non-Conformists* (1733).

Q. Is there any other sin forbidden in the second command, besides idolatry, or the worshipping of God by images?

A. Yes; namely the sin of superstition or will-worship.

Q. What do you mean by that?

A. Men's presuming to worship God by means of their own devising, adding human inventions to God's institutions, or contriving other ways to serve and worship God than what he hath appointed or warranted in his word.

Q. Who are guilty of this sin?

A. All these who add new sacraments to the two of Christ's institution, or these who add the sign of the cross to baptism, the posture of kneeling to the Lord's supper, the keeping of holy-days to the Lord's day, playing with organs to the singing of the voice, reading of a book to prayer; or who erect altars, pictures or crosses in places of worship, and bow unto them, or bow to the east, and at the name of Jesus, and the like. All these are superstitious inventions in God's worship, and human additions to God's institutions, without any warrant in his word, and therefore against the second command. —**John Willison** (minister, Church of Scotland), *An Example of Plain Catechising, Upon the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1737).

Q. May we not use harps, organs, and other musical instruments in praising God? A. No, for these, though used in the temple services, were not used in the Jewish synagogues, nor in the New-Testament worship, nor are suited to the spiritual nature of it, John 4:23,24. —**John Brown**, of Haddington (minister and professor, Associate [Burgher] Church of Scotland), *A Help for the Ignorant; or An Essay, Towards an Easy, Plain, Practical, and Extensive Explication of the Assembly's Shorter Catechism* (1758).

No suitable endeavours are used to prevent the growth of atheism, idolatry and superstition: and though prelacy, as well as popery, is growing apace in the lands, and organs publicly used in that superstitious worship; yet no testimony is given against them, but new modes introduced into the worship of God, for carnal ends, as a gradual advance toward that superstition. —**The Reformed Presbytery** (Old Dissenters/Cameronians/Covenanters), *Act, Declaration, and Testimony, for the Whole of our Covenanted Reformation, as Attained to, and Established in, Britain and Ireland, Particularly Betwixt the Years 1638 and 1649, Inclusive* (1761).

We find no footsteps of using musical *instruments* in singing God's praise, in the New Testament. The use of musical instruments in the worship of God is but a modern invention. Their warmest advocates cannot pretend to find them in the Christian church before the year 660. —**Archibald Hall** (minister, Associate [Anti-Burgher] Church of Scotland), *Gospel-Worship. Being an Attempt to Exhibit a Scriptural View of the Nature, Obligations, Manner, and Ordinances, of the Worship of God, in the New Testament* (1770).

The simplicity and spirituality of gospel-worship is further depraved, by what is called *antiphonal singing*; by chanting of prayers, and instrumental music. —**Adam Gib** (minister, Associate [Anti-Burgher] Church of Scotland), *The Present Truth: A Display of the Secession Testimony* (1774).

We wish not to be rigorous or uncandid: but when we see Christians deceived through the subtleties and devices of satan, turned aside from their duty, and cheated out of their privileges; why should we be silent? The use of the organ and other instruments of music in the Jewish church, was agreeable enough to a worldly sanctuary, and the pomp of ceremonial worship; but does not accord so well with the spiritual nature of the New Testament. —**Associate Reformed Synod** (merger of some Associate Presbyterians and Reformed Presbyterians, in 1782), *A Draught of an Overture, Prepared and Published by a Committee of the Associate Reformed Synod, for the Purpose of Illustrating and Defending the Doctrines of the Westminster Confession of Faith, According to an Appointment of Said Synod* (1787).

As the use of musical instruments, in public worship, has no sanction in the New Testament, nor in the practice of the Christian church for several hundred years after its erection, it shall not be introduced, under any form, into any of the churches. —**The Associate Reformed Synod**, *The Government, Discipline, and Worship, of the Associate Reformed Church in North America*. (1799).

[The Church of England] makes it imperative for her ministers to conduct worship of God in fantastic garments (one of which, the *surplice*, was originally worn by the *Pagan* priests, and introduced into the Church of Rome by Pope Adrian, in 796) and within consecrated walls—she has even encumbered the ordinance of marriage with absurd rites—employs instrumental music in the worship of God—uses vain repetitions and unmeaning responses in some of her most solemn devotional exercises—and, not farther to enumerate, she has appointed upwards of one hundred and fifty *holidays* to be annually observed.

Such is the specimen of the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, and we object to them *in toto*, as superstitious and unscriptural, as wantonly violating Christian liberty, and as involving the observers of them in the guilt of symbolizing with idolaters. —**Thomas Neilson** (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Scotland), “Evils, Constitutional and Practical, of the Prelatic Establishment of the British Empire,” in *Lectures on the Principles of the Second Reformation* (1841).

The opinions expressed above, on the subject of instrumental music, are adverse, as is well known, to those which have prevailed, and continue to prevail in the Presbyterian church. As a calm and guarded vindication of the practice which we would by no means be understood to recommend, we have given place to expressions from which our readers, no less than ourselves, may choose to dissent. —**Charles Hodge** (professor, Princeton Theological Seminary; editor *Biblical Repertory* [later *Princeton Review*]), footnote to an article entitled “Church Music” by Francis A. Ewing which appeared in the *Biblical Repertory* (1843).

So to those who have no real devotion or spirituality in them, and whose animal nature flags under the oppression of church services, I think with Mr. G— that instrumental music would be not only a desideratum, but an essential prerequisite to fire up their souls to even animal devotion. But I presume, to all spiritual-minded Christians, such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert. —**Alexander Campbell** (minister and co-founder of the Christian Church [*i.e.* Campbellites]), in *The Millennial Harbinger* (1851).

But the grand objection to the use of instrumental music, in the manner herein objected to, is that it is contrary to the express will of God, as shown by his positive institutions for his own praise. [A]bove all instruments the organ is liable to this great objection, to wit, that it has been, more than all others united, the great engine in corrupting the public praise of God, and has been, for centuries together, one of the peculiar devices of the Papists to seduce mankind into attendance upon their superstitious and idolatrous worship. [F]or many years I have refused even to be present, much less to preach in any Presbyterian church, where musical instruments were used—except they were silenced when I officiated.—**Robert J. Breckinridge** (minister, Presbyterian Church, US [Southern]/professor, Danville Theological Seminary), “Protest Against the Use of Instrumental Music in the Stated Worship of God on the Lord’s Day,” in *The Presbyterian Herald* (1851).

While many who employ [the organ] consider themselves the very champions of Protestantism, it will be long, long indeed, before they uproot Popery by this regulator of choirs; and while nothing has ever proved more annoying to Papists than the singing of Psalms in a congregational manner, the playing of all the heretical organs in Christendom causes to them comparatively little sorrow.

On the contrary, the cross surmounting a Protestant meeting house, and the swelling tones of the organ within, give to her sons the hope that “holy mother” may yet receive these errorists, who are, at least, so far rejoicing under her shadow, and becoming familiar with her “image and superscription.” —**Alexander Blaikie** (minister, Associate Reformed Church/later United Presbyterian Church), *The Philosophy of Sectarianism* (1854).

The outward forms of religion became gradually more and more imposing. From the ancient temples the incense and many ancient customs of heathenism were transferred to the churches. By the use of tapers and perpetual lamps, the solemnity of nocturnal festivals was combined with the light of day. Soon after, in face of continual opposition to all instrumental music, the organ, was brought to Italy from Greece. —**Karl Hase** (professor of theology, Jena, Germany), *A History of the Christian Church* (1855).

Let the Papists, who believe in temples, priests and sacrifices, stick to their organs; let not the freemen of the Lord, who have boldness to enter into the holiest of all through the blood of the Son of God, who has passed into the heavens, borrow their pitiful machinery. We prefer the synagogue to the temple. —**Thomas E. Peck** (minister, Presbyterian Church, US [Southern]/professor, Union Theological Seminary), “General Principles Touching the Worship of God,” in *The Presbyterian Critic* (1855).

As the use of musical instruments in the worship of the New Testament Church has no sanction in the Bible, they shall not be introduced, in any form, in any of our congregations. —**United Presbyterian Church of North America**, from “Singing of Praise” in *The Directory for Worship* (1858).

Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon have tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries, and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them, and their successors in church management, with nothing like the jars and difficulties

which arose of old concerning the bass viol and smaller instruments of music. —**David Benedict** (historian, Baptist), *Fifty Years Among the Baptists* (1859).

In the church, as well as in the synagogue, the whole congregation joined in the singing; but instrumental music was never brought into requisition. The early Christians believed that the organs of the human voice are the most appropriate vehicles for giving utterance to the feelings of devotion; and viewing the lute and the harp as the carnal ordinances of a superannuated dispensation, they rejected their aid in the service of the sanctuary. Long after this period one of the most eminent of the ancient fathers describes the music of flutes, sackbuts, and psalteries of the temple worship as only befitting the childhood of the Church. —**W. D. Killen** (minister, Irish Presbyterian Church), *The Ancient Church: Its History, Doctrine, Worship, and Constitution, Traced for the First Three Hundred Years* (1859).¹³⁰

Lowell Mason [noted 19th-century hymn writer and worship leader in Alexander's congregation for four years] said to me t'other day: "I have been an organist all my life; yet if a congregation should say to me, 'Shall we have an organ?' I should scarcely dare to reply 'Yes.'" —**James W. Alexander** (minister, Presbyterian Church, USA), "Letter to John Hall, dated New York, May, 1854," in *Forty Years' Familiar Letters of James W. Alexander, D.D.* (1860).

It is notorious that the Reformed Church of Scotland rejected the use of *Instrumental music* in its worship; and if some encroachments were made upon this principle during the Episcopal period, they were clearly the result of compulsion, and contrary to the preferences of the body of the people. [David] Calderwood connects the first introduction of organs into Scotland with the reign of King James I. During the period of about 130 years which preceded the Reformation it is not likely, considering the poverty of the country and the turbulent course of the national history, that these instruments had ever been very generally diffused; and this may assist in explaining the fact that the Reformers seem to have experienced little difficulty in setting them aside. In adopting this course they were doubtless moved, partly by the conviction that it was in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament and the spirit of the Christian dispensation, and partly by the revulsion arising from the glaring abuses prevalent in Popish worship. Similar views were entertained by a large party in England. As early as 1536 a protestation to the king, by the clergy of the Lower House, in the province of Canterbury, styles "the playing at the Organes a foolish vanitie." Several subsequent attempts to effect their removal are recorded, one of which failed in

¹³⁰ Killen also wrote, "Singing in which none but the Levites were permitted to unite, and which was accompanied by instrumental music, constituted a prominent part of the temple service. The singers occupied an elevated platform adjoining the court of the priests; and it is somewhat doubtful whether, in that position, they were distinctly heard by the majority of the worshipers within the sacred precincts. As the sacrifices, offerings and other observation of the temple, as well as the priests, the vestments, and even the building itself, had an emblematic meaning, it would appear that the singing, intermingled with the music of various instruments of sound, was also typical and ceremonial. It seems to have indicated that the tongue of man cannot sufficiently express the praise of the King Eternal, and that all things, animate and inanimate, owe Him a revenue of glory. The worship of the synagogue was more simple. Its officers had, indeed, trumpets and cornets, with which they published their sentences of excommunications, and announced the new year, the fasts and the Sabbath, but they did not introduce instruments into their congregational services. The early Christians followed the example of the synagogue; and when they celebrated the praise of God "in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs," their melody was "the fruit of the lips." For many centuries after this period, the use of instrumental music was unknown in the Church" (pp. 216-217).

the Lower House of Convocation only by a single vote. And so late as 1586 a pamphlet, representing the sentiments of the puritans, proposes, “that all Cathedral Churches may be put down where the service of God is grievously abused by piping with organs, singing, ringing, and trowling of psalms from one side of the choir to another, imitating the fashion and manner of Antichrist the Pope, that man of sin,” &c. —**Neil Livingston** (minister, Free Church of Scotland), *The Scottish Metrical Psalter of A.D. 1635* (1864).

Our modern advocates for instrumental music in God’s worship, to be consistent, must associate with the “harps,” the “incense-cups” and the “golden altar:” for all belonged alike to the service of the temple. —**David Steele** (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Covenanted), *Notes on the Apocalypse* (1870).

In the same name and by the same authority, that of the Lord Christ, I debar ministerially all impenitent violators of the second commandment; all who, while they professedly worship the true God, do not recognize and act upon the principle that God alone has the right to prescribe the institutes of his own worship...who worship God by proxy, with choirs¹³¹ and organs. All so sinning and not repenting, are forbidden to approach the table of the Lord. —**S. Bowden** (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America), “Debarring and Inviting Service,” in *Memorial Volume. Covenant Renovation by the Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. Published by Order of the Synod* (1872).

The Judaizers of old, it is true, insisted on circumcision and keeping the law of Moses, as necessary to salvation. The Instrumentalists do not profess to regard the use of an instrument as possessed of such stupendous importance. We certainly owe them no thanks for that. But, short of this, and so far as there is any analogy in the case, it is all the other way from what they appear to conceive. It is they, not we, that are in the place of the Judaizers; and we have the apostle on our side, not they. We are far from regarding the agitation on behalf of instruments in worship of small significance, were it for nothing else than as a sign of the times, an index to the proclivities of the age in which we live. —**Robert Nevin** (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland), *Instrumental Music in Christian Worship* (1873).

Instrumental music is contrary to the spirit and teachings of the New Testament. “God is a spirit.” They that worship him must do so in spirit and in truth. Paul says, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.” An instrument has no spirit; it has no understanding. The human voice has conjoined with it both spirit and understanding. God has drawn the line for us when he says, “I will sing with the spirit,” not with the organ. If we may sing with an instrument,

¹³¹ A study of God’s word reveals that the only choirs (i.e., people set apart to sing during the worship service) that existed in the Bible were composed of Levites (cf. 1 Chron. 9:33; 15:16; 2 Chron. 5:11-13; 29:28-30; 33:15). “Prepare yourselves according to your fathers’ houses, according to your divisions, following the written instruction of David King of Israel and the written instruction of Solomon his son. And stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the fathers’ houses of your brethren the lay people, and according to the division the father’s house of the Levites. And the singers, the sons of Asaph, were in their places, according to the command of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, the king’s seer” (2 Chron. 35:4-5, 15). Since the use of choirs, like musical instruments, was restricted by God to the Levitical temple worship, their use is clearly inappropriate and unscriptural in Christian worship services. Their use (like that of musical instruments) arose as an aspect of the Judaizing Papal mass with its priestly garments and unauthorized rituals.

then we may pray with an instrument; and those who make the cross and count the beads for prayer are right. If it is right to sing with an instrument, then it is right to pray with an instrument, it is right to preach with an instrument, right to hear and worship God with an instrument, or by proxy. If we commence using machines in the worship of God, we may go forward with our inventive genius, until the whole of worship of God's house is automatic. And if we insist upon an organ as a help in devotion, we ought not to object to other helps. We ought to follow our argument out to its legitimate conclusion, and have our places of devotion adorned with paintings and drawings of persons and scenes calculated to awaken devotional feelings. We object to the use of instruments in the devotional exercises of God's house, because it is evidently *will-worship*, which is condemned in the word of God. (Col. 2:23). Any invention or practice, in the worship of God, beyond what he has declared as acceptable to him, is denominated WILL-WORSHIP. Having no foundation in the word of God, it must be based in the will of man, and is, properly, not divine worship, but mere will-worship, for which God does not thank any man. It will be well if we observe what he has *commanded*. —**John V. Potts** (minister, United Brethren Church), *Christian Co-operation in Actual Life; or, "United Brethren in Christ"* (1874).

In the Greek Church the organ never came into use. But after the eighth century it became more and more common in the Latin Church; not, however, without opposition from the side of the monks. Its misuse, however, raised so great an opposition to it that, but for the Emperor Ferdinand, it would probably have been abolished by the Council of Trent. The Reformed Church discarded it; and though the Church of Basel very early reintroduced it, it was in other places admitted only sparingly, and after long hesitation.

—**Albert Hauck** (professor of theology, Erlangen, Germany), "Organ" in *A Religious Encyclopaedia: or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology* [i.e., Schaff-Herzog] (1883).

In regard to the musical part of divine worship, this synod [Synod of Drenthe], as also those of 1578 [Dordrecht] and 1581 [Middelburg], inveighed in very strong language against the playing of organs before, during and after service. It was said to minister to superstition, and it was denounced as a Jewish, a heathenish, and a Papistical custom. In 1589, this question gave occasion for a bitter dispute between the ministers and the magistrates of Arnheim. —**Maurice G. Hansen** (minister and historian, Reformed Church in America [Dutch]), *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands. Traced from A.D. 1340 to A.D. 1840* (1884).

The use of organs is ascribed to Pope Vitalian (657-672). Constantine Copronymos sent an organ with other presents to King Pepin of France in 767. The attitude of the churches towards the organ varies. It shared to some extent the fate of images, except that it never was an object of worship. The Greek church disapproves the use of organs. The Latin church introduced it pretty generally, but not without the protest of eminent men, so that even in the Council of Trent a motion was made, though not carried, to prohibit the organ at least in the mass. The Lutheran church retained, the Calvinistic churches rejected it, especially in Switzerland and Scotland; but in recent times the opposition has largely ceased. —**Philip Schaff** (professor, Union Theological Seminary, New York; Presbyterian Church, USA), *History of the Christian Church* (1885).

It is heresy in the sphere of worship.

It is almost inconceivable that the majority of the officers and members of the Presbyterian Church can have abandoned the consecrated principle that a divine warrant is needed for every element which enters into the worship of God's house. Were that so, open apostasy in the department of worship would be acknowledged. But of what avail is a professed acceptance of the principle, if its application be refused? How it happens that this principle, which was construed by the Presbyterian reformers and the framers of the Westminster standards as excluding instrumental music from public worship, and was so applied by the Presbyterian Church almost universally for centuries after the Reformation, is now interpreted in such a way as to admit this Popish innovation into the once simple and evangelical services of that church, defies comprehension except upon one supposition. It is, that the Presbyterian Church is slackening her grasp upon her ancient testimonies, broadening her practice in conformity with the demands of worldly taste, and is therefore more and more treading the path of defection from the scriptural principles which she professes.

The ministers who are opposed to the unscriptural movement are, many of them at least, indisposed to throw themselves into opposition to its onward rush. They are unwilling to make an issue with their people upon this question. They are reluctant to characterize the employment of instrumental music in public worship as a sin. But a sin it is, if there be any force in the argument which opposes it. The people ought to be taught that in using it they rebel against the law of Christ, their King. —**John L. Girardeau** (minister, Presbyterian Church, US [Southern]/professor, Columbia Theological Seminary), *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (1888).

That a denomination, professing like ours to be anti-prelatic and anti-ritualistic, should throw down the bulwarks of their argument against these errors by this recent innovation appears little short of lunacy. Prelatists undertake every step of the argument which these Presbyterians use for their organs, and advance them in a parallel manner to defend the re-introduction of the Passover or Easter, of Whitsuntide, of human priests and priestly vestments, and of chrism, into the gospel church. —**Robert L. Dabney** (minister, Presbyterian Church, US [Southern]/professor, Union Theological Seminary, Virginia), "Review of Girardeau's 'Instrumental Music in Public Worship,'" in *The Presbyterian Quarterly* (1888).

Its use in the worship of God is not opposed on the ground that there is no taste for the music itself. The bewitching strains of the organ, piano, violin, etc., are equally as pleasing and attractive to many of its opponents as they are to any who advocate its use. Why, then, oppose it? Simply because God has not appointed it in His worship, but has appointed music of another kind. God has no more plainly said, eat bread on the Lord's table than He has said use vocal music in the worship. In Eph. 5:19, Paul says, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"; and Col. 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God"; and Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn at the institution of the Lord's Supper, Matt. 26:30. Hence, by both precept and example, vocal music is appointed in the worship of God. But it is claimed that the Lord has not forbidden instrumental music. Neither has He forbidden meat on the Lord's table, except by telling us to eat something else; and in the same way He has forbidden

instrumental music by telling us to use another kind. —**M. C. Kurfees** (minister and professor, Church of Christ), *Walk by Faith: Origin of Instrumental Music in Christian Worship* (1894).

With the temple service the use of instruments seems to have ceased. We think of Christ and His disciples as singing without instruments in the upper-room at Jerusalem. We think of Paul and Silas as praising God with unaided voices in the inner prison. The revival of their use in the primitive Church, it could easily be shown, was coincident with the general decline in spirituality, and an exaltation of the human in matters pertaining to religion. —**S. G. Shaw** (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), “The Praise-Service of the Church,” in *First International Convention of Reformed Presbyterian Churches* (1896).

John 4:24: “God [is] a Spirit; and they that worship him, must worship [him] in spirit and in truth.” See also Phil. 3:3; Gal. 3:3,9; Col. 2:8,20-23. This is the great rubric given by the Lord Himself. Worship acceptable to Almighty God is to be rendered solely in a genuine *spiritual manner*. With these Scriptures before us, it might be well to enquire where we can find Scriptural use for organs, choirs, anthems, and the various decorations so much in vogue at the present time. Instrumental music is *nowhere alluded to* in the New Testament as any help whatever to public worship, neither is it mentioned as being used in the first three centuries of the Christian era. —**William Sykes** (Vicar, Church of England; first president of the Sovereign Grace Union), *The Salt of the Covenant* (1908).

Gradually he [Simon Sulzer] introduced more and more of Lutheranism into Basle. Thus he introduced lay-baptism, a distinctively Lutheran custom and not at all Reformed. He also introduced communion of the sick, which many of the Reformed, especially in Switzerland, opposed at that time. On Palm Sunday, 1558, he introduced four-part music in the cathedral at Passion week and had the organ played, assisted by flute and kettle-drum. All this was regarded with suspicion by the Reformed. For, although Basle, had kept up singing since the reformation, four-part music instead of singing in one part was an innovation, as was the use of the organ, which had been closed up to that time. —**James I. Good** (minister and professor, Reformed Church [German], US), *History of the Swiss Reformed Church Since the Reformation* (1913).

The question of instrumental music had little impact during [John] Wesley’s life. In the open air meetings the great volume of sound would have drowned out any accompaniment, as it often drowned out the voices of those sent to break up the meetings. And in none of the chapels were the circumstances of the people such as to make likely any proposal to install an organ. The bass-viol seems to have been first introduced, as a support to the leader’s voice. The clarionet and other instruments followed, as was the custom in the parish churches also. Not more than three chapels introduced the organ while Wesley lived. The Minutes of 1796 prohibit organs until proposed by the Conference. The Minutes of 1808 show that some had already been introduced, but consent is refused to the erection of any more. The introduction of an organ in Brunswick Chapel, Leeds, produced bitter controversy and a secession of “Protestant Methodists,” whose protest was against instrumental music. —**Louis F. Benson** (hymn-writer and historian of hymnody; member, Presbyterian Church, USA), *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (1915).

The use of instrumental music is a corruption of the spiritual worship of the New Testament. It is not enough to say that it is out of harmony with it. It is a positive hindrance, and destroys its purity. —**R. J. George** (minister and professor, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), *Lectures in Pastoral Theology: The Covenanter Vision* (1917).

The introduction of the organ and other musical instruments have been attended with agitation and often much opposition. —**Willis S. McNeas** (minister and stated clerk, Presbytery of Butler, Presbyterian Church, USA), *History of Butler Presbytery* (1923).

My contention is, based upon God's declaration, that we are to sing, and accompany that with an instrument, but the instrument is mentioned in the Bible. Paul says, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns," singing and "psalming" in the heart, or with the heart, and thereby mentions the definite, precise, and specific instrument that shall accompany the same. Let us not only sing by vocal expression, but let us accompany that, not, as did the heathen, upon mechanical instruments, but let us accompany that singing with melody, striking the strings—metaphorically, if you please—of the heart. That is the idea, as taught in the book of God. —**N. B. Hardeman** (minister, Church of Christ), *Boswell-Hardeman Discussion on Instrumental Music in the Worship* (1924).

The Free Presbyterian Church rejects also the use of instrumental music in divine worship. — **Committee of the Synod of the Free Presbyterian Church** (separated from the Free Church of Scotland, in 1893), *History of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland (1893-1933)* (1933).

With the whole Eastern Church barring the church organ, the Church of Rome officially reflecting on its abuse, Luther only lukewarm to it, Calvin objecting to it and many good Anglican dignitaries doing the same, it will be seen that at this period the instrument was under a cloud. —**Percy A. Scholes** (scholar and author), *The Puritans and Music* (1934).

We are commanded to use the Psalms in worship, but we have no command to use instruments of music in the New Testament Church. Instruments of music formed a part of the typical and ceremonial worship of the temple, which was fulfilled and abolished by the coming of Christ. — **Walter McCarroll** (minister, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), *What We Believe* (1942).

The New Testament does not command the use of instruments in worship. It does command the use of the voice. "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." Heb. 13:15. It would seem that the Apostle thought it was necessary to define what he meant by "the sacrifice of praise to God," for he said, by way of explanation, "that is, the fruit of our lips."

The New Testament Church was patterned after the Synagogue, not after the Temple. Instrumental music was not used in the synagogue services. To this day Orthodox Jews do not use instruments of music in their worship.

—**J. Boyd Tweed** (minister and professor; Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America), *The Communicants' Class* (1942).

Distaste for organs, distaste for hymns, and distaste for part-singing were the typical marks of Calvinist church music. —**Robert M. Stevenson** (professor, University of California), *Patterns of Protestant Church Music* (1953).

We believe in and accept the standards of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America as being in agreement with and founded upon the Scriptures. In particular we believe in the Reformed faith, emphasizing the sovereignty of Christ, the Presbyterian form of church government, and the New Testament pattern of worship, with its exclusive use of the Psalms, sung a cappella. —**Synod and members of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America**, “Covenant of 1954” in *Synod’s Memorial Volume of the Covenant of 1954* (1954).

Instrumental music is a hindrance to pure spiritual worship, as its object is to afford a refined sensual enjoyment, pleasure and entertainment. Listening to the skill of the musician and appreciating the creative genius of a composer is certainly not conducive to spiritual worship, as it excites emotions that conflict with the sensitiveness of spiritual mindedness, and is therefore inconsistent with the nature of pure spiritual worship. The ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies of Israel were dispensed with as unsuited to the nature of spiritual worship. —**Arthur Allen** (minister, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia), *Writings and Addresses* (1964).

[T]here is no place in the New Testament which clearly states that the Church had any set order of service, and very little information is supplied to us about the outward forms which were in use. The use of musical instruments is a case in point. While there are allusions made to certain instruments (for example, the harp or lyre, the pipe, the cymbal, the trumpet—and possibly the ‘noisy gong’ of 1 Corinthians 13:1), there is no certainty that any of these were actually used. The balance of probability is against such use. —**Ralph P. Martin** (professor, Fuller Theological Seminary; Baptist), *Worship in the Early Church* (1964).

Musical instruments were appointed not for the ordinary worship of the Jew, but for the figurative worship of the temple, where the Levitical orchestras accompanied priestly singing. The ordinary worship of the Jew was that of the synagogue, and it was *always* unembellished. In the synagogue where there was congregational singing, there was no musical instrument. Nevertheless, there is a very degraded form of Christianity which has an order of sacrificing priests, altars, incense, elaborate services of music, other features of the temple worship and, as an anomaly, bloodless sacrifices. —**M. C. Ramsay** (minister, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia), *Purity of Worship* (1968).

The priority of the words and the form of rendition ensured that the singing was done without instrumental accompaniment. Indeed, an instrument had no function in these simple chants with their emphasis on the content of praise. There is no certain evidence of the use of instruments in the Christian liturgy until the later Middle Ages. Because of the associations of musical instruments with immorality in the pagan world, the church fathers took a very dim view of them in any setting and allegorized the Old Testament references to instruments in worship. —**Everett Ferguson** (professor, Abilene Christian College), *Early Christians Speak: Faith and Life in the First Three Centuries* (1971).

God has not commanded us to use musical instruments in New Testament worship. We have seen that God did not authorize (command) the use of musical instruments until the time of Moses (even if we consider the trumpets used in the Tabernacle to be instruments of music). When they were authorized (commanded) they were clearly a part of the shadowy ceremonial system. And even in the Old Testament period, worship (except that which was performed by the priests and Levites at the Temple in Jerusalem) was commonly offered without musical instruments. Worship in the ancient synagogue was always devoid of such. So was the worship of the early Church. Never in the New Testament do we find mention of their use. What we do find is an abundance of teaching to the effect that the whole system of Tabernacle and Temple worship (shadowy and typical in nature) has been abolished. It follows, therefore, that the use of musical instruments is not authorized in the worship of the Church today. —**G. I. Williamson** (minister, Orthodox Presbyterian Church), “Instrumental Music in Worship: Commanded or Not Commanded?,” in *The Biblical Doctrine of Worship* (1974).

The logical skeleton of the case which is raised against the practice of instrumental music can be stated briefly, as follows:

- (1) Instrumental music considered as an element in religious worship was:
 - (a) instituted by divine commandment;
 - (b) practiced as a branch of Levitical service in tabernacle and temple;
 - (c) performed by the Levitical order exclusively.
- (2) But the distinctive features of the Levitical system, the type giving place in Gospel times to the correlative anti-type, have been abolished.
- (3) Instrumental music, being strictly a part of the self-same system of worship, has also, therefore, now been abolished.
- (4) No New Testament prescription, effectively restoring instrumental music again to the church’s worship, can be distinguished.
- (5) The practice has no legitimate place, accordingly, in the worship of the Christian Church.
—**Hector Cameron** (minister, Free Church of Scotland), “Purity of Worship,” in *Hold Fast Your Confession: Studies in Church Principles* (1978).

The Psalms are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, which are not part of the New Testament pattern of worship. Musical instruments were commanded for use with the offering of sacrifices in the Old Testament temple worship. The death of Christ being the perfect and final sacrifice brought an end to this way of worship. There is neither command for nor example of the use of musical instruments in the words or practice of Christ and the apostles. The command of the New Testament is to offer the sacrifice of praise—the fruit of our lips. —**Synod of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America** (Chapter 21; section 6), *The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America* (1980).

There is no warrant for instrumental accompaniment to the singing in New Testament worship. In Hebrews 13:15, Christians are called upon to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.” It seems clear that the constitution and form of worship of the New Testament Church were patterned after the Synagogue which did not have instrumental music and not after the Temple, which did as part of its sacrificial ritual (2 Chron. 29:27-30). If we are to follow the pattern of worship of the New Testament Church,

which is our standard, our praise in worship will consist of psalms sung without instrumental accompaniment. —*Reformed Presbyterian Synod (of Ireland), Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (1990).

Appendix B Presbyterian Worship: Old and New

A Review and Commentary by Kevin Reed¹³² upon *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, (John Frame [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996]).

John Frame's *Worship in Spirit and Truth* is a Sunday School manual purporting to summarize biblical principles and practices of worship. Yet it really constitutes an abandonment of both scriptural and confessional views on worship.

Reviewing a book like this is a frustrating exercise in several respects.

First, there is the matter of definitions. Frame claims to embrace the regulative principle, the *Westminster Confession*, and other historic formulations of reformed worship. Yet, upon close examination, the reader will find that Frame has actually departed from the historic parameters of Reformed worship

Second, Frame's methods of establishing his own practices of worship are cursory at best. Numerous proof texts are parenthetically scattered throughout the pages of his book; yet, he does not provide a careful exegesis of these scripture references to demonstrate how they support his more controversial conclusions. Perhaps we cannot expect a detailed exposition of the Bible in a slim Sunday school manual. Nevertheless, readers should ponder the scriptures carefully, instead of assuming that the parenthetical texts actually provide support for the propositions adjacent to them.

Third, Frame raises so many issues with respect to both the doctrine and practices of worship, that it would take a book-length response to sort through all his aberrations and reply to them thoroughly.

Since we are called to be judicious stewards of our resources, we shall not waste precious time chasing Frame down every rabbit trail. Yet, because of the misconceptions created by Frame's remarks on the regulative principle and the *Westminster Confession*, we will review the historical development of the regulative principle of worship. We will then address some of the troubling implications of Mr. Frame's position, especially as it undermines the teaching of the *Westminster Confession*.

Readers interested in the *biblical* foundation for the regulative principle should study the Reformation documents and writings referenced in the following discussion; examine the accompanying proof-texts in the original sources (especially in a complete edition of the *Westminster Standards*), to see the scriptural basis for the reformed view of worship. Also, since the present reviewer has already written a brief summary of his own understanding of the scriptural teaching on worship,¹³³ we will not rehearse that same discussion here.

¹³² Used by permission.

¹³³ See *Biblical Worship* by Kevin Reed (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1995).

The Regulative Principle in Reformation Theology

The regulative principle did not burst forth *ex nihilo* during the Puritan era; its ultimate foundation comes from scripture. The Protestant Reformers defended both the authority and sufficiency of scripture, and they sought to apply the *sola scriptura* rule to the subject of worship.

The Preface to the French *Confession* of 1559 illustrates the connection between the regulative authority of scripture and the proper worship of God:

We owe such respect and reverence to the word of God as shall prevent us from adding to it anything of our own, but shall make us conform entirely to the rules it prescribes. And inasmuch as the Roman Church, forsaking the use and customs of the primitive church, has introduced new commandments and a new form of worship of God, we esteem it but reasonable to prefer the commandments of God, who is himself truth, to the commandments of men, who by their nature are inclined to deceit and vanity.¹³⁴

Article 5 of this confession stresses the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Article 24 rejects a variety of Popish practices, especially:

purgatory, monastic vows, pilgrimages, the prohibition of marriage, and of eating meat, the ceremonial observance of days, auricular confession, indulgences, and all such things by which they hope to merit forgiveness and salvation. These things we reject, not only for the false idea of merit which is attached to them, but also because they are human inventions, imposing a yoke on the conscience.¹³⁵

Similar testimony will be found in a confession drafted by John Calvin for the Reformed churches of France (1562). The *Confession* states:

Now on our part, in accordance with his declaration, that obedience is better than sacrifice (1 Sam. 15:22), and with his uniform injunction to listen to what he commands, if we would render a well regulated and acceptable sacrifice, we hold that it is not for us to invent what to us seems good, or to follow what may have been devised in the brain of other men, but to confine ourselves simply to the purity of scripture. Wherefore we believe that anything which is

¹³⁴ English translation is published in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (1931 [6th edition]; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 3:357. Likewise, the Scottish First Book of Discipline (1560) draws a direct connection between the authority of scripture and ecclesiastical ordinances related to worship. In an explanation to the first heading of doctrine in the Book, the Scottish church declares: "We affirm that, *All scripture inspired of God is profitable to instruct, to reprove, and to exhort*. In which books of Old and New Testaments we affirm that all things necessary for the instruction of the kirk, and to make the man of God perfect, are contained and sufficiently expressed. By the contrary doctrine, we understand whatsoever men, by laws, councils, or constitutions have imposed upon the consciences of men, without the expressed commandment of God's word: such as be vows of chastity, forswearing of marriage, binding of men and women to several and disguised apparels, to the superstitious observation of fasting days, difference of meat for conscience sake, prayer for the dead; and keeping of holy days of certain saints commanded by man, such as be all those that the Papists have invented, as the feasts (as they term them) of apostles, martyrs, virgins, of Christmas, Circumcision, Epiphany, Purification, and other fond feasts of our lady. Which things, because in God's Scriptures they neither have commandment nor assurance, we judge them utterly to be abolished from this realm; affirming further, that the obstinate maintainers and teachers of such abominations ought not to escape the punishment of the civil magistrate." *The First and Second Books of Discipline* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1993), pp. 25-26.

¹³⁵ Article 24; as published in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:373-74, emphasis added.

not derived from it, but has only been commanded by the authority of men, ought not to be regarded as the service of God.¹³⁶

The Confession continues with a specific application of the regulative authority of Scripture with respect to practices of worship:

Since men have turned aside from pure and holy obedience to God, they have discovered that good intention was sufficient to approve everything. This was to open the door to all superstitions. It has been the origin of the worship of images, the purchase of masses, the filling of churches with pomp and parade, the running about on pilgrimages, the making of vows by each at his own hand. But the abyss here is so profound that it is enough for us to have touched on some examples. So far is it from being permitted to honour God by human inventions, that there would be no firmness nor certainty, neither bottom nor shore in religion: everything would go to wreck, and Christianity differ in nothing from the idolatries of the heathen.¹³⁷

The Geneva Bible (1560) contains marginal notes reflecting a Reformed understanding of worship. For example, a note on Matthew 15:9 says, “God will not be honoured according to man’s fantasy, but detesteth all good intentions which are not grounded on his word.”

Therefore, we see that at the heart of Reformed worship is the concept that God may not be worshiped by means of human devising, even upon the pretense of good intent; rather, genuine worship must be offered by the means which God has enjoined in his word.

To illustrate how the regulative principle provides the basis for practices of corporate worship, we turn to the Genevan Order—a directory for worship which was adopted by the congregation of English exiles living in Geneva at the time of Calvin.¹³⁸

In the Preface to the Order, a connection is drawn between the sufficiency of Scripture, and the worship of the church:

We, therefore, not as the greatest clerks of all, but as the least able of many, do present unto you which desire the increase of God’s glory, and the pure simplicity of his word, a form and order of a reformed church, limited within the compass of God’s word, which our Saviour has left unto us as only [alone] sufficient to govern all our actions by; so that whatsoever is added to this word by man’s device, seem it never so good, holy, or beautiful, yet before our God, who is jealous and cannot admit any companion or counsellor, it is evil, wicked, and abominable.¹³⁹

Therefore, the worship practices of the church, here styled “ceremonies,” are restricted to those modes enjoined by Scripture:

¹³⁶ *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters* (1844; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), vol. 2, p. 147.

¹³⁷ *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 2, pp. 148-49.

¹³⁸ *The Genevan Book of Order: The Form of Prayers and Ministration of the Sacraments, etc., Used in the English Congregation at Geneva (1556; rpt. Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1993)*. The congregation was pastored by John Knox. It is important to stress that this order is not a liturgy. The Scottish historian, C. G. M’Crie notes: ‘The expression “Liturgy” applied to the Form of Prayers was both unfortunate and infelicitous. For whether the term be taken in the more restricted technical sense in which it is applied to the Communion service at the altar, or in the wider and more popular acceptance according to which it describes prescribed and obligatory forms or offices of worship, it is altogether inapplicable to any Presbyterian service-book, which never aims at being more than a directory, with forms for optional use.’ C.G. M’Crie, *The Public Worship of Presbyterian Scotland* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1892), p. 106.

¹³⁹ *The Genevan Book of Order*, page 25.

For as ceremonies grounded upon God's word, and approved in the New Testament, are commendable (as the circumstance thereof does support), so those that man has invented (though he had never so good occasion thereunto), if they are once abused, import a necessity, hinder God's word, or be drawn into a superstition, without respect ought to be abolished.¹⁴⁰

Having stated these general principles, the Genevan Order goes on to summarize the basic practices of worship which will be found in Christian worship:

We have contented ourselves with that wisdom which we have learned in God's book, where we are taught to preach the word of God purely, minister the sacraments sincerely, and use prayers and other orders thereby approved, to the increase of God's glory, and edification of his holy people. As touching preaching, forasmuch as it is allowed of all godly men, we may at this time leave the probation [proof] thereof. And also for the ministration of the two sacraments, our book gives sufficient proof.¹⁴¹

Following this statement, there is a brief defense of congregational psalm-singing, which was a practice recently restored among Protestant congregations.

The contents of Genevan Order reflect the principles outlined in the Preface. The order allows only such elements of worship as may be established by God's word. The weekly service on the Lord's day is composed of the following items: (1) a congregational prayer for confession of sin; (2) congregational singing of a psalm, followed by (3) a prayer before the sermon; (4) the sermon (coupled with the reading of scripture); after the sermon, (5) a prayer for the whole estate of Christ's Church; (6) congregational singing of another psalm; (7) the minister pronouncing a blessing (taken from scripture) upon the congregation. Forms are also provided for the more occasional aspects of public service, such as baptisms and the administration of the Lord's Supper.

Although the Order contains a number of prayers and admonitions for worship, it includes an explanatory note making it clear that ministers are not bound in a slavish adherence to the book:

It shall not be necessary for the minister daily to repeat all these things before mentioned, but beginning with some manner of confession, to proceed to the Sermon; which ended, he either uses the prayer for all estates before mentioned, or else prays, as the Spirit of God shall move his heart, framing the same according to the time and matter which he hath entreated of.¹⁴²

Elsewhere in Reformed creeds, readers will find ample testimony to the regulative principle. The *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) states it in a nutshell:

Question 96. What does God require in the second commandment?

Answer. That we in no wise make any image of God, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word.

¹⁴⁰ *The Genevan Book of Order*, page 27.

¹⁴¹ *The Genevan Book of Order*, page 30.

¹⁴² *The Genevan Book of Order*, page 63.

So far, we have restricted our citations to public formularies and documents drawn from the era of the Reformation. These quotations are representative of many other public testimonies, as well as the opinions of individual Reformers.

Calvin considered the subject of worship to be foundational to the Christian faith. In his tract *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church*, the Genevan reformer states that the entire substance of Christianity may be comprised under two principal heads: “first, of the mode in which God is truly worshipped, and secondly, of the source from which salvation is obtained.”¹⁴³ Elsewhere, he writes, “to debate about the mode in which men obtain salvation, and say nothing of the mode in which God may be duly worshipped, is too absurd.”¹⁴⁴

Calvin says that “the rule which distinguishes between pure and vitiated worship is of universal application, in order that we may not adopt any device which seems fit to ourselves, but look to the injunctions of him who alone is entitled to prescribe.” The reformer continues:

I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word. The opposite persuasion which cleaves to them, being seated, as it were, in their very bones and marrow, is, that whatever they do has in itself a sufficient sanction, provided it exhibits some kind of zeal for the honor of God. But since God not only regards as fruitless, but also plainly abominates, whatever we undertake from zeal to his worship, if at variance with his command, what do we gain by a contrary course? The words of God are clear and distinct, “Obedience is better than sacrifice.” “In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,” (1 Sam. 15:22; Matt. 15:9). Every addition to his word, especially in this matter, is a lie. Mere “will worship” (*ethelothreeskeia*) is vanity [Col. 2:23]. This is the decision, and when once the judge has decided, it is no longer time to debate.¹⁴⁵

Among the reformers, none was so forceful as John Knox. Speaking plainly on the subject, Knox said: “All worshipping, honouring, or service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment, is idolatry.”¹⁴⁶ Knox’s views led him to oppose both the worship of Rome, and many elements of the Anglican liturgy.

In another succinct statement, the Scottish reformer said: “I feared not to affirm, that of necessity it is, that such as hope for life everlasting avoid all superstition, vain religion, and

¹⁴³ *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church* (1544; rpt. Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995), p.15; or, as published in *The Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters* (1844; rpt. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), vol. 1, p. 126.

¹⁴⁴ The True Method of Giving Peace to Christendom and Reforming the Church (1548) in *Selected Works: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 3, p. 260.

¹⁴⁵ *On the Necessity of Reforming the Church*, p. 18; or, as published in *Selected Works of John Calvin: Tracts and Letters*, vol. 1, pp. 128-29. Cf. *Necessity*, pp. 23-24, 47-50, 96-97; in *Selected Works: Tracts*, vol. 1, pp. 132-33, 151-53, 189-90. Also, see the forthcoming book, *Come Out From Among Them: ‘Anti-Nicodemite’ Writings of John Calvin* (Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press). Also note: Calvin’s *Commentary* on Deuteronomy 12:29-31; Calvin’s letters, to Somerset (22 Oct. 1548; *Letters*, vol. 2), to King Edward (Jan. 1551; *Letters*, vol. 2), to the Frankfurt church (*Letters*, vol. 3, pp. 117-19), to Richard Cox (as reprinted in *Knox’s Works*, vol. 4, pp. 58-60).

¹⁴⁶ *A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry* (1550); in *Works*, vol. 3, p. 34; *Selected Writings* (Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1995), vol. 1, p. 23. Readers interested in Knox’s teaching about worship should obtain the *Selected Writings of John Knox*, and give special attention to the first 100 pages of the volume. See also the essay on “The Biblical Law of Worship,” in the volume, *John Knox: The Forgotten Reformer* by Kevin Reed (Presbyterian Heritage, forthcoming).

idolatry. Vain religion and idolatry I call whatsoever is done in God's service or honour, without the express commandment of his own word."¹⁴⁷

It should now be clear that the regulative principle, although not called by that term, was a concept already widely understood among Protestants; it was not a latter-day invention of the Puritans.¹⁴⁸

Note specifically that the Reformation documents clearly show that the regulative principle grows out of the *sola scriptura* rule of Protestant theology. The central idea is that the church must restrict its worship to the means enjoined by Scripture, and may not worship God "in any other way than he has commanded in his word" (to borrow the words of the *Heidelberg Catechism*). It is further noted that good intention is not a sufficient basis for adopting methods of worship which are human innovations.

The Westminster Standards

Having traced the regulative principle within earlier Protestant formularies, we now come to a brief consideration of the Westminster Standards. The Westminster Standards were produced amidst a convulsive period in English history. By the mid-1600s, matters of worship had been brought to the forefront of theological controversy in England. Thus, the doctrine of the Westminster Standards is quite exact and discriminating when touching the subject of worship.

Following Reformation theology, the Westminster divines begin with an assertion about the authority and sufficiency of scripture. The Confession illustrates the connection between the *sola scriptura* principle and the proper worship of God.

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: unto which nothing at any time is to be added (1:6).

More specifically touching the subject of worship, the Confession states:

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. (21:1, emphasis added).

Note that the crucial word in that last sentence is the term prescribed. The text does not say that men are free to utilize any mode of worship unless it is prohibited in Scripture; but it expressly says that worship is limited to ways prescribed in Scripture. This marks an essential difference between the Reformed regulative principle, and the looser notions of Anglicans and Lutherans.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Appellation from the Sentence Pronounced by the Bishops and Clergy: Addressed to the Nobility and Estates of Scotland (1558), in *Works*, vol. 4, p. 468; *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, p.474.

¹⁴⁸ Two forthcoming publications will amply demonstrate the opinions of the preeminent Reformers: *Come Out From Among Them: 'Anti-Nicodemite' Writings of John Calvin* (with an introductory essay tracing Calvin's concern for worship throughout his tracts and treatises); *John Knox: The Forgotten Reformer* (by Kevin Reed), chapter 2, "The Biblical Law of Worship."

¹⁴⁹ *The Shorter Catechism* states the matter succinctly: "The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word" (Answer 51).

The Confession then describes various “parts” of worship which are enjoined by Scripture:

prayer, with thanksgiving the reading of the scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence; singing of psalms with grace in the heart; as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ; all are parts of the ordinary religious worship of God: beside religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings, upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in a holy and religious manner (21:3-5).¹⁵⁰

When speaking more particularly of the sacraments (in relation to the covenant of grace), the Confession notes certain distinctions between the Old Testament ordinances and worship in New Testament. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory; yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles (7:6).

Thus, even a cursory glance at the Westminster Standards reveals the scope of the regulative principle of worship. The proper exercises of worship are restricted to those “parts” of worship specifically enjoined in Scripture. Later writers sometimes refer to the parts of worship as “elements,” just as earlier writers sometimes spoke of “ways” or “modes” of worship. Regardless of the specific terminology used, the concept is clear enough: the only proper means of worship are those which God has established in the scriptures for our present use.

Men are not free to invent new methods of worship for themselves, nor to impose such innovations on others. “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, if matters of faith or worship” (WCF 20:2).¹⁵¹

For the sake of clarification, the Westminster divines added the following statement, which is often abused:

There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and 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” (1:7).

This statement actually constitutes another restriction: that is, it serves as a reminder that even in circumstantial matters not expressly covered in Scripture, the church is still to be governed by the “general rules of the Word.” Nevertheless, some modern authors try to use this

¹⁵⁰ See the parallel teaching of the *Larger Catechism*, questions 108-109. For a clearer idea of what the Westminster divines mean by “special occasions” and the extraordinary parts of worship, see the “Appendix” to the *Directory for Public Worship*.

¹⁵¹ This is the correct wording of this section of the *Confession*, as published in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* by S. W. Carruthers (Manchester: R. Aikman, 1937). Cf. *The Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), vol. 3, pp. 291-95).

statement as an escape clause, by claiming that numerous aspects of worship are merely circumstantial matters left to the broad discretion of the church.

Other writers have covered this subject thoroughly,¹⁵² so we will not provide a lengthy discussion of the topic here. But we pause to note that “circumstances” described in this statement are matters “common to human actions and societies”: meaning that they pertain to the corporate organization of any society, whether secular or sacred.

For example, to convene its assemblies, every society must have a method of establishing a time and place for meeting. Thus, the church, in order to fulfill its duty for corporate worship (Heb. 10:25), must establish an hour and location for its services. Scripture does not mandate a specific time or place; this is clearly a “circumstance,” to be governed by the general rules of Scripture. Therefore, the elders, as the biblical officers of the church, will establish a time and place conducive to the edification of the congregation.

Summary of Reformed Doctrine

The collective testimony of the Reformed creeds and writers proclaims the following principle: Each part of worship must be enjoined by scripture, if it is to be admitted as valid form of service to God. (Regardless of the terms used to designate the *parts* of worship—terms such as *modes, elements, means, forms, ways*—the Reformed creeds and authors were speaking of the same basic concept.)

We are now prepared to examine Mr. Frame’s paradigm for worship and the regulative principle. We shall see that he departs from Reformed doctrine of worship; and he specifically repudiates the teaching of the *Westminster Confession*.

Rewriting the Regulative Principle

John Frame claims to believe in the regulative principle and the Westminster Confession. In chapter 4 of his book, he opens a discussion of the regulative principle, rightly noting the deficiencies of Rome, Canterbury, and Lutheranism. He quotes WCF 21:1, noting that the operative word is “prescribed” (p. 39). So far, so good.

He then moves to a section of applications, asking, “Is there, then, no role for human thought, planning, or decisions, in the worship of God?” (p. 40). He provides a negative assessment of some (unnamed) Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians who supposedly drew a sharp distinction between secular and sacred matters. Yet, the Puritans or Scots did not claim that decisions on circumstances were purely secular; rather, circumstances may be considered indifferent matters considered abstractly, but they obtain a sacred significance when implemented in some way for the service of God.

Because circumstances are restricted to actions “common to human actions and societies,” Frame concludes that matters such as specific words in prayer are not covered by the confessional doctrine of circumstances; and thus, the church is endowed with wide latitude in applications pertaining to prayer. Here he is setting up the reader for later deviations from the confessional paradigm.

¹⁵² See John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Columbia, 1888), chapter 4, especially p.135ff.

Frame claims that his formulation “does not contradict the confession, but goes beyond it” (p. 43). But is this so?

Moreover, Frame caricatures the Puritan position, by accusing it of drawing a sharp distinction between formal services and other meetings at which worship takes place (such as family worship). Certainly some modern churches have drawn that distinction, but we challenge Frame to find this as a general teaching of either Puritans or Scottish Presbyterians. To Puritans and Scots alike, the elements of worship used in corporate worship were the same elements employed in the home, except for the public ordinances (the sacraments). (See the Westminster Directory for Family Worship.)¹⁵³

Frame now carries his “application” further, treating the *content* of singing in church on the level with minor discretionary matters. “Different churches legitimately apply God’s commands in different ways. God commands us to sing; some churches may apply that command by singing three hymns during their services, others four. Some may sing primarily traditional hymns, others contemporary songs” (p. 45). Notice how Frame encompasses in his view of application, not only the *number* of songs used, but the *content* of the singing as well. With the wave of his hand he has just dismissed one of the most serious controversies in Presbyterian history, by putting the *content* of song in worship on a level with the decision to sing a particular *number* of songs. Incredible!

In chapter 5, Frame sets the focus on public worship. He opens by disclaiming a paradigm composed of “elements” of worship:

The Puritans developed the doctrine of “elements” or “parts” of worship. Worship, they believed, is made up of certain clearly distinguishable elements: prayer, the reading of scripture, preaching, and so on. The regulative principle, they held, requires us to find biblical warrant for each of these elements.

But there are serious problems with this approach. The most serious problem is that there is no scriptural warrant for it! Scripture nowhere divides worship into a series of independent “elements,” each requiring independent scriptural justification” (pp. 52-53).

Now this is a very crafty description. Frame speaks of the “Puritan” view, and then goes on to describe a paradigm which parallels the *Westminster Confession*. Strictly speaking, this is not wholly inaccurate, since the *Westminster Confession* was written by Puritans. Yet, it might have been more shocking to his Presbyterian readers if Mr. Frame simply had come out and said

¹⁵³ I dare say that Frame’s own church is more likely to draw a false dichotomy between “formal” worship and other Christian meetings. For example, his book is designed to be used for Sunday schools. When those Sunday schools convene, and instruction is undertaken in the setting of a church meeting, Frame encourages open discussion (p. xiv). Need we ask: Are the women present for these discussions to be regulated by the apostolic injunction which governs the “public worship” services? “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church” (1 Cor. 14:34-35).

The usual answer given is that since a Sunday school is not a “worship” service, then women may freely participate with comments and inquiry, an outlook which Frame seems to share (cf. p. 75, note 6). The division between “formal” worship services and other “informal” public meetings for instruction is not a Puritan, Scottish, or confessional distinction at all. It is a modern accommodation to feminism in churches which are soft on biblical authority. So we ask Mr. Frame not to blame the Puritans for the errors of our times; for they are not the origin of such sophistries.

directly, “I oppose the teaching of the *Westminster Confession* in its description of the parts of worship.”

It is important to realize that, in rejecting the idea of elements (or parts) of worship, Frame has undermined sections 3-6 of chapter 21 of the *Westminster Confession*. The *Confession* specifically uses the term “part” or “parts” three times within these sections, in its description of worship. Therefore, to reject the concept of parts to worship, is to reject the teaching of the *Confession*.

Moreover, as we have seen, the concept of *parts* of worship is much older than the Puritans. It is interwoven within numerous Reformed creeds and advocated by writers from the outset of the Reformation. Thus, Mr. Frame has not only dismissed the Puritans, and the *Confession*; in his self-proclaimed wisdom, he has also cast off the teachings of the Reformers.

Further still, Frame resorts to exaggeration when he characterizes the Puritans as holding to rigidly “independent” elements, since Reformed writers do not deny the interrelationship and overlapping nature of various parts of worship. The key to the Reformed view is its demand for all means of worship to have clear scriptural warrant, not whether each part is rigidly independent of others.

Frame speaks against the “technical sense of Puritan theology,” and “the elaborate Puritan methodology” (p. 54) which he decries as insufficient. He has now moved from damning the Puritans with faint praise, to unveiled opposition. And let it be remembered that, by opposing the Puritans, he is in some respects heaping more scorn upon the confessional standards, since they were written by the Puritans.

If Mr. Frame clearly demonstrated where the Puritans were wrong, with firm exegesis from Scripture, we would take his arguments more seriously. But the professor is given to general assertions which he does not prove, either from scripture or history. Are we supposed to accept matters as Mr. Frame characterizes (and caricatures them), simply because he says so?

Mr. Frame cannot wholly escape a dilemma created by his own denial of the confessional description of elements of worship. He still has to find some nomenclature in the English language to describe the various “parts” of worship. Thus, Frame speaks of “aspects” of worship. He then formulates his own list of the parts—okay—“aspects”—of worship. These fit under a heading entitled, “My List,” which in itself reveals the direction of his reasoning. Since Frame has rejected the Reformed/confessional/Puritan idea of biblically-mandated parts of worship, he does not provide us with a divine pattern for worship. Instead, we discover Frame’s tidy list of “things to do in worship” (p. 55). (Perhaps with the acumen of the medieval schoolmen, Mr. Frame can explain to us the subtle differences between “things,” “aspects,” and “parts” in worship.)

Frame uses the assumptions he has introduced (against the parts of worship) to raise controverted issues in which he has an interest. Obviously if he can dispense with the confessional paradigm on worship, it leaves him with greater latitude to inject numerous “aspects” which do not fit within the confessional paradigm of worship.

Throughout the course of the book, Frame makes allowance for uninspired hymnody, instrumental music, ecclesiastical festival days, choral anthems, drama, and sacred dance in worship. He defends the idea of children’s church and, in a footnote, he leaves the door open for paedo-communion. Is it any wonder Frame is uncomfortable with the confessional paradigm for worship, since it would exclude such extravagant claims?

In arguing his case, Frame adopts a dubious method of hermeneutics. For example, consider his section on drama in worship (pp. 92-94). Frame does not produce a scriptural command to employ drama in worship. Instead, the symbolic actions of prophets, the typological character of OT feasts, and Christ's use of parables within scriptural narratives, are produced as sufficient grounds to justify drama in worship. Frame has now stretched his construction of the regulative principle beyond any form which would be recognized in historic reformed paradigms of worship. Make no mistake about it: we can adhere to reformed and confessional views, or we can adopt Frame's position; but there is no way to have them both. The disparity is too great.

Now this fact raises a troubling issue about the author's integrity. In the Preface to the book, Frame claims, "In my view, the Westminster Confession is entirely right in its regulative principle—that true worship is limited to what God commands" (p. xiii). (Including drama, right?) Turning the page, we are assured, "My own theological commitment is Presbyterian; I subscribe enthusiastically to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and I trust that that commitment will be quite evident in this book" (pp. xiv-xv). Unfortunately, Frame's commitment to confessional Presbyterianism is precisely what is *not* apparent in the book.

Indeed, what Frame professes to give with one hand, he takes away with the other. In the Preface, he shows his true colors:

Presbyterian worship—based on the biblical "regulative principle," which I describe in these pages—was in its early days very restrictive, austere, and "minimalist."¹⁵⁴ It excluded organs, choirs, hymn texts other than the Psalms, symbolism in the worship area, and religious holidays except for the Sabbath.¹⁵⁵ Presbyterians in the "Covenanter" tradition, such as those in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America and a few other denominations, still worship this way, but they are in that respect a small minority of conservative Presbyterians today.

Nevertheless, the Puritan theology of worship that produced this minimalism is still taught in theologically conservative Presbyterian churches and seminaries as the authentic Presbyterian and Reformed view of worship. This is partly because that theology is reflected in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and Catechisms, to which these churches subscribe. But the Westminster standards actually contain very little of the Puritan theology of worship. The Puritan and Scottish divines who wrote the Westminster standards were wise enough not to include in them all of their ideas on worship.

The result has been that although few conservative Presbyterian churches actually worship in the Puritan way, the Puritan theology of worship remains the standard of orthodoxy among them. This discrepancy sometimes leads to guilty consciences. I have talked to pastors, for instance, who are unwilling to go back to exclusive use of the Psalms in congregational singing, yet feel awkward about singing hymns. They almost seem to think that they ought to worship as the Puritans did, even though they have no intention of doing so. They worry that this

¹⁵⁴ Frame is here adopting the language used by James Jordan, another heterodox writer. Mr. Jordan has a history of publishing speculative views on worship. For a brief appraisal of Jordan's views, see *The Canterbury Tales: An Extended Review and Commentary based upon the Geneva Papers* by Kevin Reed (reprinted article; Dallas: Presbyterian Heritage, 1984, 1996).

¹⁵⁵ It should be noted that Reformers and Puritans opposed some of these practices upon additional considerations beyond a bare statement of the regulative principle. They often invoked scriptural prohibitions which directly condemn superstitions and imitations of pagan worship (such as Deut. 12:1-4, 29-32). The application of biblical injunctions against superstitions and imitations are not a focal point of this review, and Frame does not deal with such prohibitions in any significant manner. Nevertheless, readers should realize that the Reformed doctrine of worship is broader in scope than might be apparent from the present discussion about the regulative principle.

wavering amounts to an inconsistency in their commitment to the Reformed faith and to Presbyterian orthodoxy.

These remarks contain a startling admission. Frame rightly notes a discrepancy between what Presbyterians *profess* in their doctrine and what they *practice* in worship. Rather than demand conformity in practice to confessional doctrine, Frame is encouraging Presbyterians to abandon the doctrine. In doing so, Frame speaks out of both sides of his mouth. As noted, he wants to assure readers of his commitment to the Westminster Standards. Yet, in the same breath, he acknowledges that he is constructing a new paradigm for worship:

The result of our rethinking, I hope, will be a somewhat revised paradigm for Presbyterian worship: one thoroughly Reformed in its assumptions, affirming the regulative principle and the statements of the *Westminster Confession* and Catechisms, but allowing greater flexibility than the Puritans did in applying God's commands for worship.

Here again, Frame has tried to cast the Puritans in a negative role, and get readers to accept his distorted portrayal of the Westminster Standards. It's a bold play on Frame's part—similar to a straight-faced press conference given by a political spin doctor.

Can he really expect readers to believe that, “the Westminster standards actually contain very little of the Puritan theology of worship”? Has he seriously studied the *Confession* (chapters 1, 20-22, 27-29), the *Larger Catechism* (#104-121), and the *Shorter Catechism* (#45-62)? Further, we have not even considered the Westminster Directory for Public Worship, as well as the *Directory for Family Worship*. Now, we know that Frame does not adhere to these documents, because they do not have constitutional status in his denomination (cf. Frame, p. 17, note 2). Nevertheless, it is certain that the Westminster Assembly would not divorce these documents from the rest of the Standards; and thus the divines would not accept Frame's characterization that “the Westminster Standards actually contain very little of the Puritan theology of worship.” And how would they react to Frame's patronizing nonsense that they “were wise enough not to include in them all of their ideas on worship”? Certainly the Westminster Standards contain enough Puritan theology to refute Mr. Frame's ideas about worship.¹⁵⁶

We applaud Mr. Frame's pastoral desire to help his fellow Presbyterians who are suffering from “guilty consciences.” Might we suggest that the true remedy for their “wavering” and “inconsistency” is repentance, and a return to the biblical teaching and practices of the Reformed faith and Presbyterian orthodoxy?

The larger tragedy is that Mr. Frame's book is in itself a testimony to the low spiritual condition of “conservative” Presbyterian churches in America. Frame has openly admitted the discrepancy between confessional doctrine and ordinary practice within Presbyterian denominations. Consider further, that Mr. Frame teaches at a Presbyterian seminary; he is also a Presbyterian pastor (PCA); his book is published by a Presbyterian publisher; the blurb printed

¹⁵⁶ We encourage serious readers to make an experiment. Compare Mr. Frame's doctrine with any standard Puritan (or Reformed) exposition of the second commandment, or old-line Presbyterian explanation of the Westminster Standards. Ask yourself: “Which discussion takes scripture more seriously? Which one is really attending to the details of the biblical text?” Compare the *Westminster Directory for Public Worship* with Mr. Frame's description of his own worship services in chapter 13. Which service tends most to the honor and glory of God?

on the back cover of his book includes endorsements by four other seminary instructors who teach at institutions which profess to be Presbyterian and Reformed.

These facts raise distressing implications regarding the disingenuous nature of confessional subscription within both the churches and the seminaries. There are also troubling ramifications concerning the doctrine of Scripture, since the regulative principle rests upon the foundation of the sufficiency of Scripture, with respect to worship. Frame's book furnishes patent evidence that ecclesiastical discipline is lacking in the churches, and that seminary professors can teach heterodox views with impunity. If Presbyterians took their creed seriously, Mr. Frame would be removed from both the seminary and the pastorate, and not allowed to teach. But in the current situation, the majority of pastors, seminarians, and the people are partners in the crimes of corrupt worship and confessional laxity. "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:30-31).

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