

A Holy Church and the Authority of Scripture

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[0 : 00] So, we are continuing to study the subject of worship, specifically corporate worship in the church. Does God care how we worship? Does He regulate how we worship? How do we determine how we should worship?

! And so far, we've pretty well established that God does, in fact, care how we worship. We've also seen that He does regulate our worship of Him. We saw both of these things in the story of Cain and Abel, which, of course, came before tabernacle worship, before the ceremonial law was in force.

And we certainly see these things throughout the era of tabernacle worship. God gave many strict instructions regarding how people should worship Him. And in the notable case of Nadab and Abihu, we saw what happens when people choose to worship Him their own way, apart from what He has commanded.

And we saw through Christ and the Apostle Paul that He continues to care how we worship, even under the New Covenant. Christ accused the Pharisees of worshiping in vain because they had added to the commandments of God, and Paul warned against self-made religion.

Instead, he says we should submit to the head of the church, that is, Jesus Christ. Christ. Now, if you'll remember, there are two competing views regarding worship.

[1 : 29] I think the vast majority of Christians accept one of these two views. There aren't too many who would claim that God doesn't regulate worship at all. But the question comes down to where we draw the line as to what is permissible in the church, in our worship.

So, first of all, we have the regulative principle, which says the church is only permitted to do what God commands.

The normative principle, on the other hand, says the church is permitted to do anything except what God forbids. And if I had to guess, I would say you would probably find more churches that lean toward the normative principle rather than the regulative principle today.

And there's a part of me that can understand why. I mean, the name regulative alone can conjure up mental images of strict legalists arguing that you shouldn't even have hymnals in the church because there's no commandment in the Bible that says, thou shalt use hymnals.

In fact, I've heard people make that very claim. Of course, I can't help but note the hint of hypocrisy as they make this claim while sitting in a church building as though there is a commandment in Scripture that says, thou shalt have a dedicated building for worship.

[2 : 53] There's no commandment for that either. And maybe some of these very things have been going through your mind as we've been talking about worship, and if so, we will come to that.

But for now, we've seen in both the Old and New Testaments that God only permits what He reveals. Nothing should be added, nothing should be taken away from it, and that is, by definition, the regulative principle of worship.

The normative principle says you can add, if not take away, as long as the Bible doesn't forbid it. The regulative principle says you only do what God reveals you should do, nothing more, nothing less.

So, we've seen teachings and examples of this in the Bible, but what I want to do now is focus on two underlying principles that form the foundation for the regulative principle of worship.

And they are, number one, a holy church, and number two, the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. In other words, we believe and practice the regulative principle because we believe in a holy church and in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

[4 : 12] So, let's begin with a holy church. What do I mean by that? Well, going all the way back to the early 4th century, the Nicene Creed recognized the church as one holy Catholic and apostolic

church.

By one, they meant there is only one body under Christ, and by Catholic they were referring to the universal church or the church across geography and time.

But for our purposes, notice how they identify the church as holy. What did they mean by that?

Clearly, this is a very old understanding of the church by the church.

This is not an idea that formed much later. This is not an idea that formed through the Protestant Reformation even. It is as old as the church itself. But what does it mean? Well, in the most simple terms, to be holy is to be set apart by God for God, or we might say to God.

So, throughout the Old Testament, we see this quite often. We read of holy ground, a holy city, holy mountain, holy temple, holy offerings, holy people, and so on.

[5 : 32] So, for example, consider the fourth commandment. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

On it you shall not do any work. So here was a day that was designated as holy or set apart from the rest of the week.

There were six days of work, but this one day was set apart and distinguished by the command, in part, not to work. It was unique. It was different. It was set apart from the rest of the week for a distinct purpose given by God Himself.

Of course, we see a lot of this within tabernacle worship. For example, Exodus 30 says, with it, that is the anointing oil, you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony and the table and all its utensils and the lampstand and its utensils and the altar of incense and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils and the basin and its stand.

You shall consecrate them, that is, appoint them or dedicate them that they may be most holy. Now, when most people hear that word holy, they immediately think of moral purity or even sinlessness, perhaps.

[7 : 02] And sometimes the word does carry that meaning, but do you think that's what's meant when the Sabbath day is called holy or when the utensils in the tabernacle were dedicated as holy?

Well, is Saturday a morally pure day? The items in the tabernacle, they're not more righteous than, say, the items in your house, but they were set apart by God for God's own purpose.

The Sabbath day was meant to be different than the other six days of the week. The lampstand in the tabernacle was not meant to be taken home and used as a reading light. The altar was not meant to be used to cook your family dinner.

God had a distinct purpose for these things in Israel's worship of Him, so they were set apart from what we might call common items, right? Do you remember how Peter, in Acts chapter 10, was given a vision of all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air?

And the Lord said to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. Well, under the dietary laws of the Old Covenant, Peter knew he was not allowed to eat these particular animals, so he responds, By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

[8 : 27] Well, by common, he doesn't necessarily mean inherently evil. If that were the case, then you and I would be committing sin every time we eat pork. So while God did prohibit eating pork under the Old Covenant, what Peter means by common is that it wasn't designated for them to eat.

It was unhallowed, if you will. It was outside the bounds of what God gave his sanctified or set-apart people to eat.

So when God says something or someone is holy, that thing or that person is set apart by him for a distinct purpose. It's now different from everything else that might be called common, right?

And this is how the church is described throughout the New Testament. There's a lot of words that are used, but they all point to the same idea. The church is holy.

The church is sanctified. The church is made up of saints, which comes from the same root word as the word holy. Peter refers to the church as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession.

[9 : 46] 1 Peter 2.9 That last phrase emphasizes that the church is made up of people who belong uniquely to God and are set apart from everyone else.

They are a special people. Same language is used throughout the Old Testament to describe Israel. Exodus 19.5 You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples.

And it's very obvious throughout the Old Testament that Israel was set apart from every other nation very uniquely, very distinctly. God used them in a unique way and He required them to live and behave in distinct ways from every other nation, every other people group.

I mean, this was true down to circumcision. Everything about them was different according to God's purpose. They were thoroughly set apart, you see.

Well, that's precisely what we read in the New Testament concerning the church. I read from 1 Peter already. 1 Corinthians 1.2 says, To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those whom in every place call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[11:07] Listen to how Paul describes the church in Ephesians 5. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing that she might be holy and without blemish.

And descriptions of the church, just like these, go on and on. The church is sanctified. The church is holy. The church is made up of saints. Put another way, the church is set apart by God for God.

Of course, when we talk about sanctification, there are different aspects of it. And Hebrews 10 provides us with a good example of that. In verse 10, we read, We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

This was a one-time setting apart of God's people through the atoning work of Christ. Then, verse 14 says, For by a single offering, He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. sanctified. So there is also an ongoing sanctification or an ongoing setting apart of those who were once for all sanctified through Christ on the cross.

[12:40] Then, of course, there will come a day when we are utterly sanctified as God's people because we move into eternal life while everyone else faces eternal death.

There will be an ultimate setting apart or separation between us. So everything about the identity of the church is meant to be distinct from the rest of the world.

Now, what does that have to do with how we worship? Well, first of all, we need to understand that worship is the most important thing we do as the church.

Worshiping and praising God is the very heartbeat of the church. Going back to 1 Peter 2, let me read the entirety of verse 9. Peter says, you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

There's our mission statement. In Ephesians 1, as Paul describes how God has chosen and redeemed us, he repeatedly says, it is for the praise of God, to the praise of his glorious grace, to the praise of his glory, to the praise of his glory.

[14:07] Hebrews 13, 15 says, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. in John 4 again, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman, the hour is coming, it is now here when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

And let's not forget what the book of Revelation shows us that the people of God are doing in heaven and will for all eternity, they are singing God's praises worthy are you, our Lord and God to receive honor and power and glory.

And Paul tells us that the culmination of human history will be when at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. What is the chief end of man according to the Westminster Catechism? man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

And this is clearly the pattern of the church in the New Testament. From the beginning we're told going to Acts chapter 2 they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship to the breaking of bread and the prayers and all who believed were together together and had all things in common and day by day attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes they received their food with glad and generous hearts praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved and notice that last line what happened when people were saved they joined themselves to the church they separated themselves from the world and became members of the sanctified body and what was this sanctified body doing corporate worship gathered together to worship they devoted themselves to all of the various elements of worship they attended the temple together they praised

[16 : 29] God together and they were doing this consistently daily even day by day we're told they were attending the temple together and when they weren't in the temple they were evidently gathering in their homes so God sets a people apart for the distinct purpose of glorifying him and just as it was in the old testament our corporate worship of him under the new covenant is the primary means by which we do glorify him and we really need to understand this point because we live in a time when so many professing Christians don't believe they need to be a part of the corporate church I've heard it said many times I can worship God alone at home I can worship him on my fishing boat I can worship him anywhere I don't need to go and be a part of the church on Sunday morning and while I believe we can worship God apart from the church body the consistent teaching an example of scripture is that corporate worship is of supreme importance and should never ever be neglected

Hebrews 10 do not neglect to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day approaching perhaps one of the most telling things is the fact that so much of the New Testament was written to local church bodies who were meeting together regularly for corporate worship in Matthew 18 we have one of our favorite verses to take out of context that's where Jesus says where two or three are gathered in my name there am I among them now the context of that verse is not really corporate worship the context is church discipline and yet there is a very relevant principle being conveyed to us Jesus says that when his sanctified people are gathered in his name that is for his purpose he is with that body of believers in a special way of course that's not to say he's absent from us when we're by ourselves but he appears to be emphasizing the fact that he is certainly with his people when they are gathered together even in the most challenging of circumstances now let me go to one more place that will serve as a bridge between these two underlying principles a holy church and the authority of scripture and that is 1st Timothy 3 15 1st Timothy 3 15 this is Paul writing to the young minister Timothy who is serving the church in Ephesus and let's keep in mind that Ephesus was an extremely pagan idolatrous city I can only imagine how challenging that environment was plus think about all of the internal temptations within the church you remember John had to remind them little children keep yourselves from idols I'm sure there were some temptations to bring into the church beliefs and practices from their days of paganism well starting with verse 14 Paul says I hope to come to you soon but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God which is the church of the living God a pillar and buttress of the truth so notice these designations for the church and this is the gathered church first we are the household of

God now that might sound somewhat informal but Paul is using really the same language that was used for the tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament so rather than think of the household of God as your household you know the place where you relax and you put your feet up at the end of a long day and you pretty much do whatever you want to do!

! They could create to create a God however they wanted and they could worship that God however they wanted there were no rules they make the rules for themselves but not so with a living God our God is real and our God determines how we should worship him and lastly the church is a pillar and buttress of the truth that is the truth of God according to Romans 118 everyone else in the world suppresses the truth of God only the church only God's set apart people are here to defend and propagate the truth there's no one else and I'll remind you of something I said previously!

[22 : 06] when our behavior in the church specifically in our worship is according to what God has revealed it should be we are reflecting the character of God himself if we don't we obscure the character of God we obscure the truth but as Paul says we should be the pillar and buttress of the truth of our living God in this world which means what we do!

should reflect! So we are a holy church set apart by God we have a unique identity we are set apart for God so we have a unique purpose next let's consider that second underlying principle which is the authority and sufficiency of scripture and we see this principle here as well in 1 Timothy 3 15 again Paul writes if I delay you may know how one ought to behave in the house of God well that's pretty explicit isn't it as God's set apart people come together for God's set apart purpose God has a specific standard for us to follow and I love that word ought it means necessary it is necessary that we behave in the way God directs and this makes perfect sense when you think about it if we are set apart by

God for God then it stands to reason that he would show us how to fulfill our designated purpose I mean he always has we clearly see that in the Old Testament we see important aspects of it even in the Ten Commandments and as we considered last time we see this in the New Testament as well so the church under the new covenant does in fact have regulations regarding corporate worship there is a right way and a wrong way to behave in the household of God and you'll notice the emphasis here is not on how the gathered church behaves and I love this verse because it brings these two underlying principles together because the church is holy they must behave as God directs and because the church behaves as God directs they will be holy they will be set apart they will be the pillar and buttress of the truth in this world so again the second underlying principle is the authority of scripture scripture of course is how we know what

God requires of us as the first paragraph of the 1689 confession says the holy scriptures are the only sufficient certain and infallible standard of all saving knowledge faith and obedience goes on to say to preserve and propagate the truth better and to establish and comfort the church with greater certainty against the corruption of the flesh and the malice of satan and the world the Lord put this revelation completely in writing therefore the holy scriptures are absolutely necessary because God's former ways of revealing his will to his people have now ceased!

And the confession goes on to say the supreme judge for deciding all religious controversies and for evaluating all decrees of counsels! opinions of ancient writers human teachings and individual interpretations and in whose judgment we are to rest is nothing but the holy scripture delivered by the spirit in this scripture our faith finds its final word so if we believe the Bible is God's word then we must treat it as authoritative and if it is authoritative then we should rely on it to govern our worship not our own opinions not our own ideas furthermore if we believe the Bible is sufficient we don't need to add anything to it because God has revealed everything we need all scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching for reproof for correction for training in righteousness that the man of

[26 : 39] God may be complete equipped for every good work the Bible is from God so it's authoritative and it is sufficient equipping us for every good work of course this was the central issue of the Protestant Reformation at the heart of the Reformation was a debate regarding the authority of scripture over specifically our worship of God you see the church in Rome had long elevated church tradition to the same level of authority as the word of God in their minds tradition and the Bible they were equally authoritative but the reformers they said no tradition must always be subject to the Bible the Bible is our only authority so at the heart of the Reformation was a debate really between the regulative principle of worship and the normative principle of worship again the regulative principle says the church should include in its worship only what

God commands in scripture and the normative principle says the church may include in its worship anything that scripture does not forbid so the catholic church essentially defended the normative principle with its traditions and human innovations while the reformers they defended the regulative principle insisting that the church as a holy people set apart by God for a holy purpose believing that God's word is authoritative and sufficient should only worship in the ways God explicitly prescribes listen to what John Calvin said about this the rule which distinguishes between pure and valid 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 therefore if we would have him to approve our worship this rule which he everywhere enforces with the utmost strictness must be carefully observed for there is a twofold reason why the

Lord in condemning and prohibiting all fictitious worship requires us to give obedience only to his own voice first it tends greatly to establish his authority that we do not follow our own pleasure but depend entirely on his sovereignty and secondly such is our folly that when we are left at liberty all we are able to do is go astray and then once we have turned aside from the right path there is no end to our wanderings until we get buried under a multitude of superstitions justly therefore does the Lord in order to assert full right of dominion strictly enjoin that he wishes us to do and at once reject all human devices which are at variance with his command justly too does he in express terms define our limits that we may not by fabricating perverse modes of worship provoke his anger against us

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 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! sacrifice in vain do they worship me teaching for doctrine the commandments of men every addition to his word especially in this matter is a lie mere will worship is vanity this is the decision and when once the judge has decided it is no longer time to debate so to summarize his argument he said God approves only the worship he commands in scripture human inventions and worship even when motivated by zeal he says undermines God's authority so true worship requires strict obedience to God's revealed will rather than human creativity and he makes a really good point when he says when we are left at liberty we are able to all we are able to do is go astray and then once we have turned aside from the right path there is no end to our wanderings in other words the normative principle of worship doesn't merely lead to a slippery slope it is the slippery!

[32 : 15] in perhaps subtle ways it rejects both the holiness of the church and the authority and sufficiency of scripture first it treats the worship of God's sanctified people as common incorporating whatever they choose to incorporate and second it rejects that God has prescribed everything we need for what is the most important function of the sanctified church church now this inevitably leads some people to push back and say wait a minute there are many things we do that God does not explicitly!

I mean let's be honest if we had to live by the regulative principle for all of life we would essentially be crippled there's no command in scripture that tells me to set my alarm in the morning there's no command that tells me to take a shower or to check the weather forecast or get in my car and drive to work I mean there are countless things we do every single day that the Bible does not specifically tell us to do and some people will use that fact to argue how can we possibly hold to the regulative principle in fact Pastor Mark Driscoll once made this very argument here's what he said what I don't understand is why we would treat one hour a week by a certain set of rules and the other 167 hours of the week by a different set of rules!

You don't wake up in the morning acting like a regulativist you don't wake up in the morning and say okay I need to brush my teeth where is that in the Bible it's not in there golly I was hoping I could brush my teeth but I can't well I guess I'll have breakfast well the Bible doesn't say breakfast it says to eat but it doesn't!

when is it okay to eat in the morning I better pray about this okay I gotta put on pants uh-oh pants aren't in the Bible oh no this is going to be a bad day why is it that we live by the normative green light principle until we get to church and then we have to live by the regulative red light principle just for an hour a week as if there's not a blur in between the lines we also have other church gatherings meetings wednesday night classes community groups do they count red light green light the whole thing gets very confusing I think we live our whole life by the same principles whether we're scattered or gathered for worship it's green light we're free until we see something that is sinful and forbidden!

then it's red light and now unfortunately we're getting close to the end of our time so we'll pick this up next week but do you see the mistake Driscoll makes for many people this is a very compelling argument it seems to make sense there are so many things we do and must do that we don't have a command of God for so why then when the church gathers for corporate worship do we insist on this regulative principle well the answer is number one a holy church and number two the authority and sufficiency of scripture there is a vital distinction to be made between the sanctified people of God meeting together for corporate worship our highest calling if you will and the rest of life in other words

[36 : 17] God regulates our worship in a way that he doesn't regulate all of life again think back to the tabernacle in the Old Testament God does not regulate how one uses a lamp stand in his own home does he but he does regulate how it's used in the tabernacle why because God himself makes a distinction between worship and everyday use some things are common and some things are sanctified in short worship is regulated by the regulative principle because it is special it's distinct it's sanctified while the rest of life is regulated perhaps by the normative principle it's not the same thing it's a different category and it's a great mistake to blur the line between the two and that's why there are different rules let's stop right there let's close with prayer

Father we thank you for the truth of your word we thank you for the time we've had to consider it together we thank you that you have not left your church to wonder according to our own ideas but

you've given us clear instructions for how we ought to live and worship as your people help us to take these things seriously remembering that we are a people set apart for your glory give give us wisdom to honor you in all that we do and give us a deeper desire to worship you according to your truth and we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord Amen