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How are we to worship God?

The Bible, which is the Word of God, not only prescribes what we are to believe about God but also how we are to worship Him. Therefore it is not man but God Himself who determines the way in which He is to be worshipped. This principle – that our worship of God must have clear Biblical warrant and be regulated by the Bible – is known as the ***regulative principle***.

The Lord Jesus Christ informs us that God is to be worshipped not only in spirit, but also in truth (see John 4:24), that is, God requires us to worship Him not only sincerely and heartily, but also by using the form of worship appointed by Himself in the Bible, the “word of truth”.

The fact that we are to worship God in the way He appoints is implied by the first recorded act of worship. In Genesis 4:1-7 we see that the way Cain worshipped God was very different from that of Abel. Cain offered to God the fruit of the earth whereas Abel offered a lamb; God rejected Cain’s sacrifice but accepted Abel’s. In Hebrew 11:4 we are told, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain”. One obvious reason for this was that Abel’s worship was what God stipulated – that is, the slaying of a lamb which represented the death of the coming Messiah for the sins of His people.

The rule that God is to be worshipped only in the manner He stipulates is repeatedly given in the Bible.

Examples abound. God says, "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32). Christ, the Head of the church and King of nations, repeats this rule. He directs His church to go to all nations, "teaching them," He says, "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (see Matthew 28:19-20).

Certain minor matters regarding the worship of God are not stipulated by the Word of God, such as the length of a sermon and the hour of worship on Sabbath. However, it is certain that purity of worship is repeatedly emphasised to worshippers in these New Testament times as surely as it was to those in the Old Testament age. To depart from God's requirements is very offensive to Him. To all such the Lord Jesus Christ says, "I have somewhat against thee" (see Revelation 2:4, 14, 20).

It is a sad fact that some parts of the Christian church ignore this principle totally and, like Cain, invent their own forms of worship. Other sections of the Church adopt the principle that they can add their own form of worship to that stipulated by God, provided the Bible does not explicitly condemn it. However, the Bible does not authorize us to either add to, or subtract from, what God has prescribed. To do so is to be faced with God's solemn and searching question, "Who hath required this at your hand?" (Isaiah 1:12).

People who worship God in ways devised by men are guilty of what the Bible condemns as "will

worship” (Colossians 2:23), that is, worship that is according to the will of men and not of God. They merit therefore the rebuke of Christ, “In vain do they worship God, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7).

At the Reformation a large part of the church returned to biblical doctrine, worship, government and practice. This was clearly and scripturally set forth in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, the *Catechisms* and the *Directory for Public Worship*. Consequently, that which was contrary to the Word of God was put out of the church, and the simple, plain biblical worship of the New Testament era returned to prominence. This divinely appointed worship consists mainly of the reading of the Scriptures, preaching, prayer, the singing of the Psalms unaccompanied by instrumental music, the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the observing of the Sabbath as the weekly day of worship. What a big step in the right direction it would be if churches throughout the nation turned to these good old ways which, in past generations, were accompanied by the rich blessing of the Most High!

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