

worship, this rule, which He everywhere enforces with the utmost strictness, must be carefully observed . . . God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word” (*The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, John Calvin, p. 17-18). Calvin supported the regulative principle with many biblical texts including I Sam. 15:22, “To obey is better than sacrifice and to harken than the fat of rams.” And Matthew 15:9, “In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

THE REQUIREMENTS OF OUR WORSHIP

In John 4:23, Jesus spoke of a future time in which, “True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” We are living in that time. Jerusalem and the outward symbols of Old Testament worship are gone (John 4:21) and the body of the believer is the holy place of the Spirit of God (I Cor. 6:17). Church saints are to be involved in an all-the-time, individual practice of worship (I Cor. 10:31). We are not, however, to be, “Forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (Heb. 10: 25).

The church gathers on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2) which is called, “The Lord’s Day” (Rev. 1:10) in recognition of the Lord’s resurrection (Mk. 16:9). As believers gather, their activities are to be regulated by Scripture rather than by personal preference. The New Testament guides the gatherings of the church by examples and the expressions that it contains.

There are five ingredients found in the worship DNA of the New Testament Church. The New Testament church is a gathering of disciples (believers) involved in the worship of God through:

1. Scripture-Saturated, Savior-Centered Preaching (Acts 20:7; I Tim. 4:13).
2. Soul-Stirring Singing that Glorifies God and Edifies Believers (Col. 3:16).
3. Supplication before the Throne of Grace (Matt. 21:13).
4. Sacrificial Giving (I Cor. 16:2).
5. Sharing Communion (I Cor. 11:24).

It can be demonstrated practically, that every ingredient of the corporate worship practices revealed in the New Testament is under attack in the contemporary, evangelical church in America. “When the church comes together on the Lord’s Day, it is no time to entertain the lost, amuse the brethren, or otherwise cater to the ‘felt needs’ of those in attendance. This is when we should bow before our God as a congregation and honor Him with our worship” (*Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, John MacArthur, p. 39).

Let us have grace, whereby we may serve (worship) God acceptably with reverence and fear: for our God is a consuming fire.
Heb. 12:28-29



CONNECTING TO COLONIAL'S CORE - 2

PASTOR PHELPS

WHAT SHOULD REGULATE OUR WORSHIP?

George Barna, the founder of The Barna Group, a market research firm specializing in studying the religious beliefs and behavior of Americans says, “The rapidly swelling numbers of unchurched people may be forcing existing churches to reinvent their core spiritual practices while holding tightly to their core spiritual beliefs. It will take radically new settings and experiences to effectively introduce unchurched individuals to biblical principles and practices” (*This Little Church Stayed Home*, Gary Gilley, p. 12). Barna, a pragmatic church marketing specialist, continues to advocate changing the church’s core practices while simultaneously releasing studies which demonstrate that American church attendance is rapidly declining as ecclesiastical innovation increases. In an email dated May 4, 2004, The Barna Group declares that since 1991 there has been a 92% increase in the number of adults in America who do not attend church (from 39 million to 75 million). In its April 19, 2004 issue, *U.S. News and World Report* agreed with Barna indicating that, “Surveys confirm that the percentage of Americans attending a weekly worship service fell appreciably during the past four decades. From roughly 40 percent in the 1960’s, it today hovers at about a quarter.” Is it possible that the spiritual decline in America is tied to religious pragmatism which has veered from biblical principle?

CONNECTING

THE RISKS OF WRONG WORSHIP

“It often surprises people to learn that God is not always pleased when people worship Him. We might be inclined to think that God should be thankful for any attention we give Him out of our busy schedules. But worship is not about God thanking us; it is about our thanking Him. And God is not pleased with just anything we do in His presence” (*Worship In Spirit and In Truth*, John Frame, p. 37). It follows that when the one who promises to “build the church,” will cease construction on that which no longer pleases Him. Much of the Old Testament is filled with guidelines for worshipping God. Yet, sadly, the history of Israel demonstrates that man’s worship often fails to please God. God consistently rejects those who worship Him without regard for His instructions showing us that there are dangers involved in deviant worship. Gary Reimers, in his book, *The Glory Due His Name*, points out the following:

1. God does not desire worship that is based on imagination (Ex. 32:4-6). While following the leadership of Aaron during the absence of Moses at Sinai, the children of Israel imagined that fashioning idols would enhance their worship experience (v. 1). Aaron complied with their wishes introducing them to the golden calf (not calves) in order to represent the right God in the wrong way (v. 4). Aaron even promised a feast of celebration (v. 5) unto Yahweh (Jehovah – the right God) in front of the golden calf. The golden calf, or ox, represented a God of convenience. After all, the ox was strong, beneficial and out of sight until it was needed. Man’s imagination consistently devises a God of convenience not a God desiring commitment.

This characteristic of displeasing worship is displayed by many who “profess” to know Christ but find little time to “practice” their religion. Their God has become a golden calf to be brought out in times of need and forgotten in times of plenty.

2. God does not desire worship based upon innovation (Lev. 10:1-3). The details of worship in the Old Testament Tabernacle are precise. Even the ingredients used in the incense are specific and special (Ex. 30:34, 37). Apparently, the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, thought it was a good idea to tamper with the accoutrements of worship by offering “strange fire.” God’s displeasure with their innovation is immediately apparent! While we may expect more toleration, God is interested in worship based upon truth not innovation.

The “market-driven” church movement is fueled by innovation. “There seems to be no limit to how far some churches will go to be ‘relevant’ and ‘contemporary’ in their worship services. Nothing, it seems, is too profane or too outrageous to be fused with Christian lingo and labeled ‘worship’ (*Worship: The Ultimate Priority*, John MacArthur, p. 27).

3. God does not desire worship based on imitation (Dt. 12:29-32). The rituals of the pagans will never please God. In Dt. 12:31, God

identifies a particularly disgusting element of pagan worship, child sacrifice, in order to provoke agreement among His people that pagan ritual must be categorically rejected. While it seems unimaginable, nevertheless it is true, the ways of the world will often creep into the worship of the true God (Jer. 32:35).

“Until the 1970s there was a clear distinction between the world and God’s people on the issue of rock music. Rock musicians unashamedly identified the purpose of their music: they wanted to communicate their own devotion to sexual immorality, drug and alcohol abuse, and rebellion against authority . . . everything about their music . . . they deliberately designed to promote their sinful lifestyle choices . . . Some Christians, noting the widespread popularity of rock music, wondered if it would be possible to incorporate some aspects of rock into Christian music . . .

This was the birth of Contemporary Christian Music (CCM), which has dominated church worship in recent decades” (Reimers, p. 79-80).

4. God does not desire worship that is strategically designed for convenience (I Kings 12:26-31). With the division of the kingdom under Jeroboam, new sacred places are introduced in Bethel and Dan. Rather than travel far and climb the rocks to the city of Jerusalem, the children of Israel could conveniently worship in much the same way but closer to home. Such strategic convenience brought the inconvenience of national captivity and forfeited the protection of Jehovah.

Contemporary church in America is designed for those who like to “come as they are.” Convenience drives the machinery. Saturday services, drive-in services, and café-table gatherings clustered around a hot-pot of Starbucks is now the norm. Ecclesiastes 5:1-3 shows that preparation for worship is nothing less than essential to worship. Remember, it’s not about what pleases the worshipper – it’s about what pleases God (Ps. 96:7-8).

THE REGULATION OF RIGHT WORSHIP

What should regulate our worship? “To all Christians, the basic answer is Scripture! God rules all our human life through His Word, and He thus rules worship by Scripture” (Frame, p. 38). The question then comes, how do we use Scripture to regulate worship? Some believe that we may do anything except that which Scripture forbids. Others believe that whatever Scripture does not command is forbidden. This is called *The Regulative Principle*.

Can any sinful man be trusted, apart from Scriptural guidelines, to design worship that pleases God (Is. 29:13)? Our commission is to worship God “in (according to) truth” (John 4:24). We are to be regulated by Scripture not by public opinion polls (II Tim. 3:16-17). The Scriptures alone are sufficient to guide our worship of God (Ps. 19:7-10). “We may not adopt any device [in our worship] which seems to fit to ourselves, but look to the injunctions of Him who alone is entitled to prescribe. Therefore, if we would have Him approve our