

## **Worshiping God as He Commands: The Regulative Principle of Worship**

John Calvin, *Sermons on Genesis: Chapters 1:1-11:4*, trans. Rob Roy McGregor (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, 2009), pp. 699-702, 705.

In his sermon from Genesis 8:20-22, preached December 25, 1559, John Calvin explains the meaning of the Biblical regulative principle of worship. God calls us to worship Him as He has prescribed or commanded in His Word:

“So let us learn today so to regulate the services we render to God that we add nothing of our own, and let us make distinctions according to what he commands, and let our sacrifices be purified in this way. It is certain that everything men bring of their own to God is only filth. Even though their works possess the finest possible appearance of virtue, they will all be corrupt if men mingle with them their shopping list of preferences. We must, then, possess the **simplicity** of mind to follow what God ordains.

That is what we have to remember as the Scripture relates to us, for we do not sacrifice animals today. That has been abolished, and those shadows ceased with the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we have said. . . .

. . . when it is said that Noah offered only clean animals, it means he had the choice and discretion to offer nothing to God that was not approved. In that way, we are shown we do not legitimately worship God by doing what is suggested by our imaginations or by worshipping him as we think fit. That is how the Papacy corrupted everything sacred in the worship of God as they followed the proverb that they could not fail by following their good intention.

That good intention was an infernal [diabolical] gulf to pervert everything. So let us learn, as I have said, to remain soberminded. Let God have the pre-eminence over us, that is, let us give him the authority to command us, and let us receive what he opens up to us, and let us not deviate from it to the left or the right. . . .

. . . In other words, let us give God the obedience he is due, interjecting nothing from our own brains, but being led by him and his will alone. And then, let us place Jesus Christ before us so we may have access to the heavenly Father and so all of our sacrifices will be purified, for they would otherwise be profane, for we will always be unclean until he cleanses us. That, then, is how our sacrifices will be received even today, since it was said that fire for the whole burnt offerings was to be taken only from God’s altar (cf. Exod. 29; Lev. 1, 2, 3; Lev. 16:12; Num. 16:46) and that the sacrifices were to be seasoned with salt (cf. Lev. 2:13).

And what is the meaning of all that if not to show that no one is to create procedures for himself and to his own liking, as men always give themselves license to do? But the sacrifices were to be burned with fire, which was appropriate to the temple, and that no one was to bring them from his house, that is, no one was to include anything of his own.

And then there was always salt, that is, no one did anything by chance, for people will always find what they have come up with to be in rather good taste, but it will be tasteless before God, without savor, because he did not approve it and because there was no concern for obeying him.

Consequently, even though we do not have today the figures Noah had, we must, when worshipping God, still follow the regulation he has given us, by which the Holy Spirit also wanted to instruct us in how to worship God.

In other words, everything is to conform to his will, and our conformity is to be the expression of the fullness of our wisdom. And let us not make distinctions in accordance with what seems good to us, but let God provide for us, and let the witness of his approval or rejection be enough for us.”

In the Great Commission, Jesus called His church to teach His disciples to observe or obey “all the things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20). Jesus is God. Christians are called to obey God’s Word, nothing more and nothing less.