

THE PSALMS IN WORSHIP

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Chapter 4, THE SCRIPTURAL LAW OF WORSHIP

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SPIRITUAL service rendered to God by a sentient being is worship. For such service from man God has made ample provision in that He has endowed him with a reasonable soul and furnished him with matter and means for worship. That God, Who alone is worthy of worship, should give to man, from whom a worthy worship is due, a law of worship is an antecedent probability. That this law should be found in the Scriptures, which purport to be the Word of God, His will become concrete and audible, addressed to man whose worship God claims and calls for, is not a matter of conjecture, but of certitude. "The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him."

Law which emanates from the nature of God is moral-natural law, inflexible and unchanging as the nature of God Himself, Who has said, "I change not." This is the law which binds us to the worship of God, because of what God is, and because of what we are. It is stated thus by the Holy Ghost, "He is thy Lord ; and worship thou Him." Moral-positive law takes its rise in the will of God. Its binding force is subject to His will. It is by this law that the matter and means, the method and manner, of acceptable worship are determined. This is the law of worship which lies within the scope of our enquiry, with respect to which there can be but one source of authority, viz., the revealed will of God, and but one rule of action, viz., a divine warrant.

With respect therefore to the Scriptural law of worship, I submit the following proposition, viz.: I. Whatsoever is not commanded in the Scriptures is forbidden. II. The Bible Psalter alone is commanded to be used in the praise service in the worship of God. III. Therefore all matter of praise besides the Bible Psalter is by the Scriptural law of worship forbidden to be used in the praise service in the worship of God.

MAJOR PREMISE

Whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden.

God's commands are either explicit, clearly stated, or they are implicit, implied as a logical, necessary inference from authoritative example, such as that of Christ or His Apostles. The Westminster divines exempt from the operation of this law "some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence." Concerning this deliverance let us note, 1st: These "circumstances" are neither in, nor are they a part of, the worship of God, but only "concern" the worship of God. 2nd: They are such as "are common to human actions and societies," that is, the time and place of meeting, how

often and how long, whether in a house or tent or barn or forest or street, whether morning, noon, or night, etc. These are "circumstances concerning the worship of God such as are common to human actions and societies." 3rd: "The circumstances concerning the worship of God to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence" are to be ordered "according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap, i., Sec. 6).

That God may be worshiped in any way not forbidden in the Scriptures is the doctrine held by Romanists and Prelatists, and in the Scriptures they include the Apocrypha. Excepting the Apocrypha, this is the doctrine likewise of the Lutherans, the Protestant Episcopalians, and certain of their Presbyterian imitators. In her 20th Article the Church of England claims the right "to decree rites and ceremonies," with this limitation only, that "it is not lawful for the Church to order anything that is contrary to God's written Word"; that is, anything is legitimate in the worship of God which is not expressly forbidden in the Scriptures. What larger license can rationalism and ritualism in religion ask than this?

Positive divine prescription was accepted as the only warrant in matters of faith and worship by John Knox, John Owen, John Calvin, the Free Kirk of Scotland, the Puritan martyrs, and the Westminster divines. "Discretionary powers exercised by the Church in the assumption that whatsoever is not forbidden is permitted," says Dr. Girardeau, "was the chief fountain from which flowed the gradually increasing tide of corruptions which swept the Latin Church into apostasy from the gospel of God's grace." "So sure as cause produces effect, and history repeats itself in obedience to this law, any Protestant Church which embodies that principle in its creed is destined sooner or later to experience a similar fate." These are the words, likewise, of Dr. John Owen, that prince of English divines: "The principle that the Church has power to institute anything belonging to the worship of God, either as to matter or manner, beyond the circumstances which necessarily attend such ordinances as Christ Himself hath instituted, lies at the bottom of all the horrible superstitions and idolatry, of all the confusion, persecution, blood and war, which have spread themselves over the Christian world." These are the opinions of two great and devout students of the Word of God and of history.

In our endeavor to find an answer to our query, "What is the Scriptural law of worship", we are not shut up to the opinions of men, mighty and majestic as they may be. The crucial test of all teachers and tenets is this, viz.: "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isaiah viii. 20).

1st: "To the law and to the testimony." What saith Jehovah in His Word with respect to His own worship? (a) Deut. iv. i, 2. "Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add

unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you." (b) Deut. xii. 32. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." (c) Ex. xxv. 40. Concerning the construction of the tabernacle, the tent of meeting, and its furniture, Jehovah charged Moses, saying: "Look that thou make them after their pattern, which was showed thee in the mount." (d) Matt, xxviii. 20. "Teaching them (said Jesus to His disciples) to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." cf. Rev. xxii. 16-19.

2nd: What is God's own interpretation of the Scriptural law of worship as found in His enforcement of that law, examples of which are recorded in the Scriptures? (a) Gen. iv. 3-5. Cain fell under the ban of that law, in that with respect to the matter and the manner of God's worship he set his own will in the stead of God's will. Cain stands forth as the first among rationalists in religion, and as a warning to his race, (b) Lev. x. 1-3. The offering of incense to God with fire "which He commanded them not" was the sin for which Nadab and Abihu were struck dead, (c) Numb. xvi. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were overtaken by the swift indignation of Jehovah simply for using discretionary powers in matters of worship. They usurped functions which belonged only to a certain class, the descendants of Levi through Aaron. Korah was a Levite, but not a son of Aaron, (d) Numb. xx. Moses was excluded from the promised land because he went beyond the command with respect to the rock and water at Kadesh. (e) Other Old Testament examples may be found in 1 Sam. xiii. ; 1 Kings xii. 32, 33; 1 Chron. xiii. 7-10; 1 Chron. xv. n-15; 2 Chron. xxvi. 16-21; 2 Chron. xxviii. 3-5. (f) Acts vii. 37-53 The rejection of Christ and of His Word as the sole and supreme authority in matters of worship is designated as "resisting the Holy Ghost," the sin on account of which the Jewish Church, state, and national polity were demolished. The Scriptural law of worship, as written in the Scriptures, and as enforced by examples recorded in the Scriptures, is this, viz.: "Whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden."

MINOR PREMISE

The Bible Psalter alone is commanded to be used in the praise service in the worship of God.

The proofs of this proposition we may be permitted simply to point out, since it takes us into the territory assigned to others. (a) A strong presumptive proof of this proposition is found in the fact that the Bible Psalter was prepared and placed in the Canon of Scripture, among whose Books it has neither a peer nor a rival. Its position is altogether unique, (b) The name by which the Holy Ghost designates the Bible Psalter goes a long ways in establishing our proposition: "Sepher Tehillim," "Book of Praises," "Book of Psalms," "Book of Hymns," designed not simply to be read as other Books of the Bible, but to be sung, (c) That the foregoing is a fair inference is established by the fact that over and over again we have the command in Scripture " to sing Psalms." A few examples: I Chron. xvi. 9; Ps. xcv. 2; Ps. cxlix. 1; Ps. cv. 2; Col. iii. 16; Eph. v. 19; James v.

13. (d) The title given by the Holy Ghost to David, the author of the major part of the Psalms, viz., "The sweet Psalmist of Israel," as descriptive of his office. He was "the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel." (e) That God appointed the Bible Psalter to be used in the Old Testament Church none perhaps will deny. That God has anywhere or at any time revoked that appointment none can affirm. Therefore if the example of Christ and of His Apostles and of the Post-Apostolic Church can be adduced as sanctioning the use of the Psalms in the worship of the New Testament Church, then we are forced to the conclusion that it is the will of God that the Bible Psalter be used in the praise service of the New Testament Church. The Jews sing the Psalms unto this day. The "hymn" sung by our Lord and His Apostles at the close of the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the night it was instituted, was beyond the possibility of a doubt a portion of the Hallel, Psalms cxiii.-cxviii. (Matt. xxvi. 30; Mark xiv. 26). In the Gospels and the Acts the "Book of Psalms" is recognized as the praise book of the Church.

THE CONCLUSION

*Therefore, in the praise service, in the worship of God,
all matter of praise besides the Bible Psalter
is forbidden by the Scriptural law of worship.*

According to this law a lyric, to be eligible to the praise service in the worship of God, must have these two requisites and qualifications, viz., divine authorization and divine inspiration. Paraphrases and poems from other Books of the Bible are excluded by the Scriptural law of worship from the praise service in God's worship for reasons such as these: 1. Other parts of Scripture are equally inspired with the Psalter, but they have no seal of divine appointment for purposes of praise. 2. The song service in the worship of God is designed to praise God, His attributes, His modes of subsistence, and His prerogatives. To sing the gospel as such is not to praise God, for the reason that the gospel is addressed to men, and not to God. All merely human compositions are by the law of worship forbidden to be used in the praise service in the worship of God for the reason that they are neither authorized nor inspired. "The Second Commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images or any other way not appointed in His Word" (Shorter Catechism, Ques. 51). God may not be worshiped in any way "not prescribed in the holy Scriptures" (Confession of Faith, Chap. xxi., Sec. 1). The words of Him "Who is the Head over all things unto the Church" are these: "In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Who is he who can say that the testimony of the United Presbyterian Church is not in accord with the Scriptural law of worship when it says: "We declare that it is the will of God that the songs contained in the Book of Psalms be sung in His worship, both public and private, to the end of the world; and in singing God's praise these songs should be employed to the exclusion of the devotional compositions of uninspired men"?

"Whatsoever is not commanded is forbidden." This, the Scriptural law of worship, is the acropolis of the Church's liberties, the palladium of her purity, and her God-given moorage. Let the Protestant Church, in creed or conduct, in profession or practice, depart from this divine principle, and she has weighed her sheet-anchor only to find its flukes sundered and herself adrift on the high seas, a craft without compass or chart or polestar, in the midnight darkness of rationalism and ritualism, with her prow pointing to "Rome" as her probable landing-place.