

system fell away with the coming of Christ (Hebrews 9:1-10). Psalm singing clearly continued. But that divinely appointed Levitical orchestra was not renewed. God put an 'expiration date' on many forms of worship of the Old Testament. That date was the resurrection. New Testament worship was to be much simpler, and yet much fuller and more glorious, now that the Messiah had come. The types and shadows fell away, for their Meaning was finally revealed (Col. 2:16-17)!

### *For Further Consideration*

This has only scratched the surface. We encourage you to learn more by a series of sermons that our minister, Pr. Michael Ives, preached on the distinctives of our denomination, the Presbyterian Reformed Church. In them, we delve much deeper into these and other issues in our historic Presbyterian and Puritan identity. You can access them here:



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Why  
do we  
worship  
this way?

## *Out of the Ordinary*

Our worship practice is certainly a very different experience for many who visit us. We are certainly *not* your conventional evangelical church; and in many ways, we may stand out from even other modern Reformed and Presbyterian churches. To some, this worship is unique, even quaint; to others it may seem strange, overly solemn, and even off-putting.

One thing is for sure: we don't worship this way to conform to trends, much less to attract those who already know what they want in a church. While our practice is very historic—this once was, after all, the universal practice among Reformed churches in Puritan New England, and other Reformed Churches in continental Europe—that's not the reason either. The church, after all, is the house of God, not a museum! And just because something is ancient does not make it biblical.

Nor is our worship our 'preference.' While we all have come to love a *cappella* exclusive psalm-singing, we all have our own music tastes and styles in our private lives. Taste is not the issue. The reason is because the Bible gives us a very special rule, a rule that does not apply to all of life, but specifically to the worship of God—especially when we are gathered in public worship.

## *The Regulative Principle*

That rule is often called the "regulative principle of worship" (RPW). Most all Christian churches these days follow the principle for worship that says, "If the Bible doesn't forbid it, it is permitted." Lutherans and Anglicans have historically accepted this position. But the Reformed churches said, "No. Instead, if it is *not commanded* in the Bible, it is forbidden." The burden of proof is always on the person who wants to *introduce* anything new into worship. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32; cf. vv. 28-31, Matt. 15:9, Acts 17:25, Col. 2:23. See also *Westminster Confession of Faith* 21.1.)

## *Exclusive Psalm-Singing*

God has given His Church a manual of praise in the Book of Psalms. They were written not only to be read, but to be sung (Psa. 95:2, 105:2). Psalm singing was not only the practice of the Old Testament Church, it was also the practice of Jesus, His apostles, and the early Christians (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16). "Is any merry? Let him sing psalms" (Jas. 5:13). The Protestant Reformation saw the revival of congregational psalm singing, and the Puritans brought it to the New World. In fact, the first book ever printed in the American colonies was the *Bay Psalm Book* (1640). The supreme value of the Psalter is that it testifies to Jesus (Lu. 24:44). We sing psalms precisely because God told us so. In fact, God placed His hymnal for us right in the Bible—at its very center!

Further, we sing the psalms exclusively. Now, that's not because any Bible verse says "you shall *only* sing psalms," but because there are none that definitely tell us to sing more than psalms. Praise songs or hymns composed by men, however well-motivated and well-written, must not be included in the public worship of God. Why? Again, it's not because they are explicitly forbidden, but because they have *not been clearly commanded*. We rejoice that other Christians are rediscovering the RPW. But we respectfully point out that their inconsistencies in application leave them open to the criticism that they are simply preferring their older, 'traditional' styles of worship to more contemporary ones. The issue is not *our* preference, but God's. Does God call us to sing psalms in worship? Yes! Does he *clearly command* other modes of praise? That is far from obvious. We must be fully confident to say about any of our worship, "What I received of the Lord I have delivered to you" (1 Cor. 11:23)

## *A Cappella Praise*

Then, why no instruments? Doesn't Psalm 150 clearly command God's people to use instruments in worship? The short answer is, yes! The Old Testament Church had a very elaborate liturgy with the temple, the priests, and the sacrifices at its very center, and that included a full orchestra. But all worship tethered to the sacrificial