

Q49: Which is the second commandment?

A49: The second commandment is. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them...*

Q50: What is required in the second commandment?

A50: The second commandment requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his Word.

Q51: What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A51: The second commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his Word.

Q52: What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?

A52: The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.

Why do we do what we do in our public worship of God at Memorial?

Why do we include certain things and exclude other things from our public worship services?

Why is our public worship of God organized in the way that it is?

First, Biblical worship is GOD-CENTERED.

The church gathers together collectively to meet with our triune God according to His promise. It is a *holy convocation* with God (Leviticus 23:3), a *drawing near* to God (Hebrews 10:19-25), a *response* to God as He has revealed Himself to us and done great things on our behalf (i.e. Psalm 100). Hence we do not worship God in order to influence or persuade Him. Rather, we come because of who He is, because of what He has done for us, and because He promises to meet with us and inhabit our praises (Psalm 22:3). It follows that all right worship must be to the glory of almighty God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At the same time we must remember that God's glory is not opposed to our good. As we focus upon God the Father, though God the Son, in the power of God the Spirit, He has promised to communicate His grace to us through His appointed means. Therefore, God-centered worship always results in the building up of God's people.

Furthermore, since we are confronted with the living God in our worship of Him we must not forget that this has an evangelistic effect as well. For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God as it is faithfully preached (Romans 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 14:25). Consider the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 89:

Q89: How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

A89: The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Second, the Scriptures set forth all acceptable ELEMENTS to be included in our worship.

These elements are not to be added to or taken away from. God alone has instituted how He is to be worshipped (Matt. 15:9; Deut. 12:31-32). It is the responsibility of the Session of the Church to be clear on what elements constitute this Biblical worship from the Scriptures. The Westminster Confession of Faith 21.3-5 contains an apt summary of the Bible's teaching here.

We can distinguish between that which is *ordinary* and that which is *occasional* in our worship, and in fact the WCF does just this.

Ordinary: WCF 21.3 - "**Prayer**, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, according to his will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue." WCF 21.5 - "**The reading of the Scriptures** with godly fear, the sound **preaching** and conscionable **hearing**

of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, **singing of psalms** with grace in the heart; as also, the due **administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments** instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God..." We could also include the giving of **monetary offerings** as part of the ordinary public worship of God (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Occasional: WCF 21.5 "...beside religious **oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings** upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner." By definition **baptism** is also occasional. The Scriptures would also include the exercise of **public Church discipline** as another occasional element in public worship (1 Corinthians 5 and 1 Timothy 5:20).

Third, Christ has indwelt the Session with His Holy Spirit to prudently determine and order the CIRCUMSTANCES surrounding the worship of God in each particular congregation.

This distinction between elements and circumstances is taken for granted in the Scriptures and is acknowledged by the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1.6, "...there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed." These circumstances include answering such questions as: What time? What place? When to stand, sit, kneel? Do we use a microphone? What tune do we sing to? etc.

Fourth, God has appointed SPECIAL OFFICE in His church to lead the assembled congregation in worship.

The Old Testament required the office of the Aaronic priesthood to lead in worship. By good and necessary consequence the New Testament requires the office of Minister (or Elder) to lead in worship.

Fifth, God has NOT PRESCRIBED A RIGID ORDER of worship for His New Testament church - there is therefore some liberty with respect to how the prescribed elements of worship are arranged.

Engage with the following as you take into account the above five propositions.

1. Worship should be entertaining.
2. Dramatic skits in worship (or video/movie clips in worship) are allowable because God does not forbid them anywhere.
3. Liturgical dance is legitimate in worship because David danced before the Lord.
4. Liturgical painting in worship (very popular in emergent church movement)
5. Liturgical "stations" in worship (very popular in emergent church movement)
6. Is a choir an element or circumstance of worship? What about special music?
7. We should sing three songs at the beginning of worship to "tune our hearts aright" for the entire service.
8. We should not collect offerings during the worship service.
9. There is not enough congregational participation in Reformed worship.
10. Contemporary worship is not a permissible form of worship.
11. Lyrical content of our singing. (All that we sing in worship must be in conformity to the doctrinal content of the Word of God. It follows that we should be able to write "chapter and verse" alongside of every stanza that we sing. It also follows that we should have a high regard for the singing of the Psalms (though I do not believe that the Bible demands exclusive Psalmody).)

With the above principles we can evaluate our typical order of worship here at Memorial.

First, Identify the Elements which God has prescribed.

Second, Identify and Engage with the Circumstantial aspects of the service.

1. Are they "according to the general rules of the Word"?
2. Are they helpful? Do they hinder?
3. How much weight should be given to ideas such as:
 - Worship is a dialog between God and His people?
 - The drama of redemption should be evident in the order of the service?

God Calls Us to Draw Near Unto Him

The Silent Prayer
The Call to Worship and the Greeting
The Prayer of Invocation
The Hymn or Psalm of Praise
The Law of God
The Hymn or Psalm of Penitence
The Congregational Prayer

God Proclaims to Us His Word

The Old Testament Reading
The Hymn or Psalm of Preparation
The New Testament Reading
The Sermon
The Prayer of Application
[The Observance of the Lord's Supper - currently observed 1x/month]

God Calls Us to Respond to His Word

The Giving of Tithes and Offerings
The Dedication of Offerings through Song
The Hymn or Psalm of Application

God Sends Us Forth With His Blessing

The Benediction