

**THE WORSHIP GOD REQUIRES OF US**  
**Kalamazoo Reformed Church**  
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**I. Introduction: The Proper Starting Point.**

Where to begin in our understanding and practice of worship? Many churches begin with man, rooting their practice in human or man-made tradition, doing what has always been done, or at least, what they think has always been done. Worship is carefully ordered and performed according to ecclesiastical rules and tables, and formulated down to the very words that must be “read, said, or sung.” Ritual and form take precedence over content and intent.

Other churches begin with the perceived needs, interests, and tastes of their members. Human psychology is consulted, human invention or creativity is enlisted, and every effort is made to provide pleasing, emotionally satisfying, and even entertaining services. Such churches design their buildings as theaters and performance halls, with wide stages, theatrical lighting, and elaborate sound systems. Emotional impact takes precedence over intellectual content.

For the Reformers and churches that cherish the Reformed faith, the proper starting point for true worship is God, and “the whole manner of worship which God requires of us” in His written Word (Belgic Confession, Article 7). Fallen man cannot be trusted to think or act rightly with regard to worship. The history of sinful, man-made worship is summarized in Romans 1:18-23. The Reformed starting point for all true worship is encapsulated in the *Votum* (Psalm 124:8), the text John Calvin chose for the opening sentence of public worship in the Reformed Church of Geneva.

**II. The Law of True Worship: The Second Commandment (Exodus 20:4-6).**

All four commandments in the “first table” of the law have direct bearing on public worship. This fact underscores the supreme importance or value our “jealous God” places on the worship of His church. The Second Commandment, however, lies at the very heart of the matter. This commandment, in both its expressed prohibitions and its implied duties, accounts for all that is distinctive about Reformed worship.

Historically, there has been a great debate between Lutherans and Calvinists over the Second Commandment. Luther took that position that we are free to do whatever is not forbidden in this commandment. Calvin held that every negative in the law implies a positive; that when something is forbidden, a positive duty is implied. We must observe both the negative (what is forbidden) and the implied positive (what is commanded), in order fully and faithfully to obey this commandment.

Is there a third category of “things indifferent,” that is, things neither commanded nor forbidden? Yes, but a better way to think about such things is, these matters are not specifically addressed or prescribed in Scripture. Such matters must be regulated according to the “general rules” of Scripture, such as I Cor. 10:31 (“Do all to the glory of God”); I Cor. 14:26 (“Let all things be done unto edifying”); I Cor. 14:40 (“Let all things be done decently and in order”); etc. As a result some things in Reformed worship have been introduced for the greater glory of God and the edifying of His

people, such as the reading of the Law and the Apostles' Creed, or the use of the sacramental Forms.

The best summation of the Second Commandment is found in the Heidelberg Catechism. Q. 96: "What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way that He has commanded in His Word." In other words, we must have the sanction or warrant of Holy Scripture for all the worship that we offer to our God.

## II. Second Commandment Practice: A Brief Case for Exclusive Psalmody.

Why is our "diet of praise" confined to the 150 songs contained in the canonical Book of Psalms? We shall leave the question of the three NT Canticles (*geloofzangen*) and the many versions of the ancient hymn known as the *Gloria Patri* ("Spiritual Songs and Doxologies") for another time. The short answer is, this collection is the only "Book of Hymns" (Hebrew title) that is authorized in the written Word of God for use in the church of God, and by the highest authority, the Lord's Anointed, the King and only Head of the church.

The history of Psalmody as a stated part of public worship is recorded in the Bible. David was four things at once: the Lord's Anointed King in Zion, a prophet who spoke as he was moved by the Holy Spirit, a poet of the highest order, and a very able musician. He composed many Psalms, recruited a corps of priestly musicians to sing them, and appointed their use in the worship of the tabernacle (I Chronicles 16), when the ark of the covenant was brought up to Jerusalem. So far as we know, every song in our present-day Book of Psalms was composed by men accredited as seers and prophets of God, or men who labored under their inspection. Those who edited the collection knew that there were other songs in Scripture, but saw fit to incorporate only some, by no means all, in the Hebrew Psalter.

Ultimately, the author of this Psalter is God the Holy Ghost, "who spake by the prophets," as the Nicene Creed affirms; see also Heb. 3:7. See David's own testimony in II Samuel 23:1, 2; and Christ's commendation of the Psalms in Luke 24:44. The Psalms were the hymns our Lord loved and sang; He quotes from the Psalms more often in His teaching and preaching than from any other book of the Bible.

Because these 150 songs were "given by inspiration of God" (II Tim. 3:16), they are full of truth, life, and power, undiminished over time. They are not old songs, but ever new. Because they are deeply Christological in content, and because they address the entire divine plan of salvation, and every aspect of Christian experience, they served the early Christian church as its ready-made book of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 4:19). For many generations, no other songs were desired or permitted in the church. They were held to be as fitting for the worship of the church under the gospel as ever they were before that time.

In addition, the singing of metrical versions of the Psalms is one practice that has set apart the worship of Reformed churches from all others, from earliest days down to present time. John Calvin wanted to restore the voice of the congregation in public worship, taking worship song out of the hands of professional musicians and putting it within reach of the people in the pews. He noticed that among the French there was a new trend, French language translations of the Hebrew Psalms into the forms of French poetry, and sung to popular tunes of the day.

Calvin made a beginning, but soon handed over the task of producing these metrical versions and composing tunes for them to others better qualified for it. Completed by Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, the French Psalter of Geneva was quickly followed by metrical versions of the Psalms in German, Dutch, English, and many other languages of Europe. From that time on, Calvinists were known to friend and foe alike as "Psalm-singers."

#### QUESTIONS YOU HAVE ASKED:

1. What is the scriptural basis for each element in the Reformed liturgy and how does each glorify God or signify our worship of Him? (e.g., the way we open, singing, reading of scripture/creed/confession, tithes/offerings, sacraments, prayer, benediction, etc.)
2. What are the differences today between the worship of the major branches of Protestantism (Reformed, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Pentecostal, etc.), and why do these differences exist? If this is too broad, maybe just discuss differences between Reformed, Presbyterian, and Lutheran?
3. What aspects of public worship should we make sure to include in our private and family worship and why?
4. Why do we worship on Sunday instead of Saturday?
5. Why do we only sing Psalms at worship services?
6. Why such an emphasis on the sermon in our liturgy? Also provide some historical perspective on the length of the sermon (this seems to have fluctuated in both directions from Reformation times to the Puritans to the 19th century to today).
7. What is open for creativity and what is "set" by what God prescribes and proscribes?
8. How does or should the Reformed church treat the mixed group of saved/unsaved while worshiping as one body?
9. Please define Reformed worship, that is, the worship of churches that are the heirs of the Reformation, in particular, the heirs of the great Reformer, John Calvin.