

15. Worship, sabbath, oaths and vows

WCF chapters 21-22 *Modern Language version – 1993 – OPC*

21.1. The light of nature shows that there is a God who has lordship and sovereignty over all, that he is good and does good to all, and that he ought therefore to be feared, loved, praised, prayed to, trusted in, and served with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God has been instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations or devisings of men, or the suggestions of Satan, or under any visible representation, or any other way not commanded in Holy Scripture.

2. Religious worship is to be given to God alone—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is not to be given to angels, saints, or any other creature. And since the Fall, worship is not to be given except through a mediator, nor is it to be given through any mediator other than Christ.

3. Prayer with thanksgiving is a special part of religious worship and is required by God of all men. In order that prayer may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, and according to his will. Prayer is to be offered with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance. If vocal, it must be offered in a language that is understood.

4. Prayer is to be made for things that are lawful and for all kinds of men now alive or who will live at a later time. But it is wrong to pray for the dead or for those known to have committed the sin unto death.

5. The various elements of the ordinary religious worship of God are the reading of the Scriptures with reverence; the sound preaching and conscientious hearing of the Word in obedience to God, with understanding, faith, and reverence; the singing of psalms with grace in the heart; and the proper administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ. Also, on special occasions and at appropriate times, there are other elements of worship, namely, religious oaths, vows, solemn fasts, and thanksgivings. These are to be used in a holy and devout manner.

6. Under the gospel, neither prayer nor any other part of religious worship is now limited to—or made more acceptable by—any particular place where it is performed or toward which it is directed. On the contrary, God is to be worshiped everywhere in spirit and truth. He should be worshiped daily in families, and privately by individuals, and with greater solemnity in public worship services. Such worship services are not to be carelessly or willfully neglected or forsaken when God by his Word or his providence calls people to them.

Everyone knows we must worship God

God's "god-ness" is imprinted on his creation...
but we suppress the truth, Romans 1:18-20

The only acceptable way of worshipping is God's way

Deut. 12:32, "Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it."

God limits... and reveals... how we worship.
- Danger: human doctrines, Matt. 15:9
- Danger: images to limit & control God, Ex. 20

Trinitarian worship... through Christ... alone

No other god, John 5:23
Only draw near through the Mediator, Eph. 2:18

Prayer

What and how?
Phil. 4:6, Eccles. 5:1-2, Matt. 6:12-15

Scripture: reading, preaching, hearing

Reading – Acts 15:21, Rev. 1:3, 1 Tim. 4:13
Preaching – 2 Tim. 4:2
And *hearing* – James 1:22, Matt. 13:19

Singing

Col. 3:16, Eph. 5:19, James 5:13

Sacraments: the Lord's Supper & Baptism

Due administration... and worthy receiving
1 Cor. 10-11

Other elements

Everywhere... and everywhen...

No holy places, John 4:21
Daily...
In families, Deut 6:6-7
Privately, Matt. 6:6
Don't neglect meeting, Hebrews 10:25

7. As it is the law of nature that, in general, a proper proportion of time ought to be set apart for the worship of God, so God in his Word—by a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages—has specifically appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy to him. From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, the appointed Sabbath was the last day of the week. Beginning with the resurrection of Christ, the Sabbath was changed to the first day of the week, which in Scripture is called the Lord's day, a day to be continued until the end of the age as the Christian Sabbath.

8. This Sabbath is then kept holy to the Lord when men, after due preparation of their hearts and arranging of their common affairs beforehand, not only observe a holy rest, all the day, from their own works, words, and thoughts concerning their everyday occupations and recreations, but also devote the whole time to the public and private exercises of God's worship and to the duties of necessity and mercy.

22.1. A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, in which—on an appropriate occasion—the person taking the oath solemnly calls upon God to witness what he asserts or promises and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he swears.

2. The name of God is the only name by which men should swear, and they should do so with all holy fear and reverence. Therefore, to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and fearful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful and to be abhorred. Yet since, in matters of weight and great importance, an oath is warranted by the Word of God under the new testament as well as under the old, therefore, a lawful oath ought to be taken when imposed in such matters by lawful authority.

3. Whoever takes an oath ought to consider seriously the great importance of such a solemn act, and in doing so should affirm nothing but what he himself is fully convinced is the truth. A person may bind himself by oath only to what is good and just, what he believes to be such, and what he is able and resolved to perform.

4. The oath is to be taken in the plain and usual sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation. It cannot oblige a person to sin, but when it is taken in matters which are not sinful, it obligates performance of the oath even though it may hurt. The oath is not to be violated even though it is made to heretics or unbelievers.

5. A vow is similar in nature to a promissory oath and ought to be made with the same religious care & be performed with the same faithfulness.

6. A vow is to be made only to God and not to any created being. In order for it to be acceptable, it is to be made voluntarily, out of faith and conviction of duty, either from thankfulness for mercy or from the desire to obtain what we lack. By taking a vow we bind ourselves more strictly to necessary duties, or to other things to the extent that they contribute to the performance of these duties.

7. No one may vow to do anything forbidden in the Word of God or anything which would hinder the performance of any duty it commands. No one may vow to do anything for which he has no ability & for which he has no promise of ability from God. With respect to these things, Roman Catholic monastic vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, & regular obedience—far from being steps to higher perfection—are in fact superstitious & sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.

...And especially on the Sabbath

Pattern of 1-in-7 is woven into the fabric of the world... from creation

OT:

= "sabbaths" climaxing in Sabbath year
(e.g. Lev. 23, Col. 2:16)

= the last-day Sabbath, Exodus 20

NT:

= first-day... resurrection day... "Lord's Day",
(1 Cor. 16:1-2, Acts 20:7, Rev. 1:10)

How do Christians keep it holy?

- plan (get work and play done in 6 days)
- trust God with our time: give up work... and "fun..." are we "missing out"?

And in practice?

"worship... necessity... mercy", Matt. 12:1-13
= church, the unavoidable, love & hospitality

Avoid being overly prescriptive

An encouragement – Isaiah 58:13-14

"If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

WCF ch22 – Oaths and vows?!?!

Seems strange... but often called to make oaths/vows/promises: sometimes in worship, or in marriage, or court, or in business

The propriety of oaths/vows:

Hebrews 6:16, 2 Cor. 1:23

In God's name... in weighty matters... or not at all
Deut. 6:13, Matt. 5:37, James 5:12

What is good and just... what you are able to do... truthfully... even if keeping your vow costs you dear.

Personal response: for what should we give thanks... confess... pray?