

The Perfect Worshipper and Perfect Worship

- ¹ Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven,
- ² a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man.
- ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer.
- ⁴ Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law.
- ⁵ They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain."

Hebrews 8:1-5

The Perfection of Jesus

PERFECT OBEDIENCE. We understand that the Bible teaches us that Jesus was perfect in every way, including that he never sinned. We also know that this is the exact opposite of everyone else who has ever lived. Thank God, because without it, we could not be saved. Salvation requires obedience to God's law. Obedience requires perfection. This is how Hebrews 7 concluded. "For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever" (Heb 7:28).

When thinking about perfection according to the law, our minds go to the Ten Commandments by default. This is not wrong or bad. When we think about obedience to God, this is the first thing that *should* come to our minds. Certainly, Jesus' perfection includes keeping the Ten Commandments without fault.

However, when Hebrews talks about Christ's perfection, at least in our present passage, the law he has in mind isn't the Ten Commandments *per se*. Rather, it is what our Confession calls "ceremonial law." **Ceremonial law** is all

those laws that pertain to the priesthood and to the tabernacle that they were to serve and to guard. Thus, we might say that what is in mind here is not *merely* perfect obedience. It is **perfect worship**. Perfect worship implies perfect obedience, but does so by taking us to a place we do not usually think of when it comes to that. **Jesus is the perfect worshipper**.

Today, we have come here to worship God and so this is particularly relevant for a Lord's Day meeting. Do not think it strange that Jesus, who is God, would worship. One of the temptations of Satan was to get Jesus to worship him (**Matt 4:9**). Instead, Jesus said "**Worship the Lord your God**" (quoting from **Deut 6:3**). That is who Jesus will worship, not sin or Satan. In fact, sin is a form of self-worship, and so Jesus' perfect life is itself an act of true God-worship. The Son glorifies the Father (**John 14:13**) and does all things the Father sends him to do (**John 5:19**), even while the Father glorifies the Son (**John 8:54**). To give glory to another is also a kind of worship. This is what the Persons of the Godhead do with each other. We might say that **the chief end of God is to glorify and enjoy himself forever**.

But Jesus, who is the Son of God, is also the son of man. As such, he offers worship as one of us. This morning, we want to take a look at exactly what he did, why he did it (according to the passage), and how this matters for us today. We can say without question that this is what Hebrews wants us to do, as it begins our passage—trying to summarize one of the most difficult sections of the entire NT with all of the “meat” in it—by saying, “**Now the point of what we are saying is this...**” (**Heb 8:1**).

The Perfect Priest now in Exaltation

We have seen for several chapters that **Jesus is our high priest**. Now, a priest is someone who offers things in a temple on behalf of others. The priest is a human mediator between God and man. We’ve seen that this particular Mediator had to die, and what is in view in **Hebrews 8:1** is his exaltation because he died. “**We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven.**” There is nothing particularly new here as far as Hebrews is concerned. Nevertheless, it would be wise to consider what it is talking about.

Three things are mentioned. Jesus is at the right hand. The right hand is by the throne. The throne is that of the Majesty in heaven. All three have been mentioned previously. These themes are the very way the letter began, and thus take us back to all that we learned there about the Son being greater than angels. “After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). “Of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’” (1:8). So we can see that he has never really left his original point.

The “right hand” is a phrase of military power. He is the guy who kept the king safe and who lead the armies of the king. Even today we talk about the “right hand man.” David says that Yahweh is his Right Hand warrior (Ps 16:8; cf. Acts 2:25). In the NT, the phrase is often used of Jesus new relation as the God-man to the heavenly beings. “Who has gone into heaven and it at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him” (1Pe 3:22; cf. Eph 1:20-21; Col 3:1; etc.).

As we are talking about heaven, we should also remember that there are many thrones there. While some of these have humans sitting on them (i.e. the 12 tribes and 12

apostles; **Rev 4:4**), others do not as **Daniel 7:9**; **Col 1:16**; **Rev 20:4** and others explain. Therefore, when we are to know a **specific throne** in view, it tells us. This is the throne “of the Majesty” in heaven. Other places parallel this with different words. Jesus sits “at the right hand of Power” (**Matt 26:64**). More common is the “right hand of God” (**Acts 2:35**; **Rom 8:34**; **Heb 10:12**). The point is, Jesus sits at on the throne at the right hand of the highest throne of heaven. He has been exalted (ascended) to this highest position by his victorious death and resurrection.

But there is still one more way that the right hand language is used. It is used of **our salvation**. It is priestly language. “God has exalted him at his right hand as Leader (*archegos*; Prince or Ruler) and Savior” (**Acts 5:31**). “Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised— who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (**Rom 8:34**). “When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God” (**Heb 10:12**). Given the context, all of this is in view now. Jesus became a high priest and because of something that he did at his death, he has been elevated to the highest seat of heaven as the God-man, above the 24 elders, above

the sons of God, above the thrones and principalities, to the seat of Majesty itself. This is truly a divine claim being made. No other has ever sat here. Let's look more at what it says specifically that Christ did to get here.

The Perfect Temple

The way Hebrews now begins to talk now is different from what it has said before. Jesus has become “**a minister in holy places**” (8:2). We have seen this. That is what the priest is—a minister. That is where the priest ministers—in holy places. But suddenly, we may be **caught a little off guard**. We get a new reason why he was exalted to heaven. His ministry was not merely on earth, but in heaven. This is an amazing thing to think about, because no other earthly priest has done this, and it has far reaching implications for his worship as well as our own.

Hebrews speaks about “**the true tent that the Lord set up, not man**” (Heb 8:2). The word “**tent**” is a reference to the OT **tabernacle**.¹ But the “True tent” is not the

¹ **Going Deeper.** Someone asked me last week if the Tabernacle is the same as the “Tent of Meeting.” The short answer is no, they are different. Here is Heiser’s answer. “Before the tabernacle was constructed (Exod 35–40), Moses would meet with Yahweh in a small tent called

tabernacle. What is it? We can say without question that it is a “copy and a shadow of heavenly things” (Heb 8:5). Copy and shadow is the language of **typology**. And so, like Melchizedek, Hebrews is employing the idea of typology to help us understand what Jesus did.

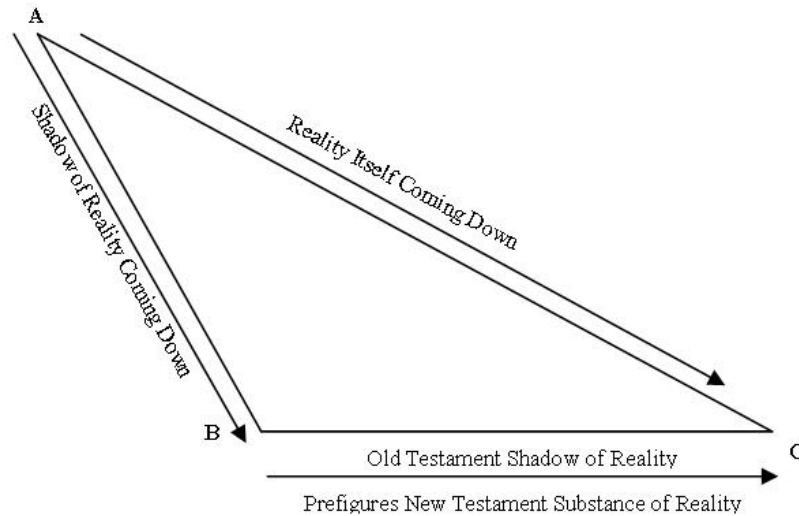
Ordinarily, we think of a type as coming prior to the antitype. The antitype is the full reality of what the type pointed to in a shadowy way, and thus the antitype comes after the type. Peter uses baptism and Noah’s Flood this way. “Baptism, which corresponds (*antitupos*) to this [the Flood], now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh [that

“the tent of meeting.” Though some scholars take the tent of meeting and the tabernacle as the same structure, Exod 33:7–11 has the tent of meeting in existence prior to the tabernacle. The issue is actually complicated, as the phrase “tent of meeting” is at times clearly used with respect to the tabernacle (e.g., Exod 27:21; 28:43; 30:26) and at other times clearly not. Passages such as Exod 33:7–11 provide several indications that the tent of meeting was distinct from the tabernacle: (1) The passage itself appears in Exodus before the construction of the tabernacle; (2) one man (Moses) could construct the tent, unlike the much larger tabernacle, which took scores of workers to tear down, erect, and transport; (3) the tent of meeting was outside the camp, unlike the tabernacle, which was in the middle of the camp; (4) the tent of meeting was guarded and maintained by a single person; (5) there is no indication that the tent of meeting was a place of sacrifice, or that the ark of the covenant was kept in it. The solution is apparently that, prior to the tabernacle, there was a “tent of meeting” where Yahweh “lived” and would meet Moses. Either that tent structure was moved inside the tabernacle as the holy of holies or (more coherently) the tented holy of holies became a new “tent of meeting” after the tabernacle’s construction. However, certain passages in the historical books inform us that there was a “tent of meeting” after the tabernacle was in existence (1 Sam 2:22; 2 Chr 1:3; 1 Kgs 8:4). Whether these passages describe a still-extant “original” tent of meeting or a tent structure that housed holy objects during the chaos of the period of the judges and the separation of the ark of the covenant from the tabernacle is a matter of debate.” (Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition. [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015], 173, n. 8).

is what the type does], but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” (1Pe 3:21). So Noah’s flood is a type and Christian baptism is the antitype, even while Christian baptism itself seems to be a type of salvation, and not salvation itself (which is why Peter says that baptisms remove dirt from the flesh).

But the truly amazing thing that Hebrews is saying is that the type, which is the tabernacle, actually comes *second*. The tabernacle comes after something else was already there. The implications of this for our own worship, as we will see at the end, are profound. With many types, such as types of Jesus (i.e. Adam or Noah), covenants, or in our case a place of worship, there is a heavenly reality that exists prior to the OT types that God puts here to teach us of something greater that is coming in our own future. We can picture it like this:²

² **Going Deeper:** My obtuse triangle (the large angle is greater than 90°) is a modification of Vos’ classic drawing of this which is an isosceles or equilateral triangle, as I am trying to capture the time line of this and he wasn’t interested in that) has points A, B, and C. We can label A as the Archetype. The Archetype IS the heavenly reality that exists prior to creation. This could be the Son of God, the Covenant of Redemption, or the Heavenly Temple. We can label B as the “type.” Types would be Adam, the covenants of the OT, or the tabernacle built by Moses/temple built by Solomon. We can label C as the Antitype. Antitypes would be Jesus Christ, the covenant of grace, or the Temples of the NT: Jesus’ body and his Church. For more, see my *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism*, 25-29.



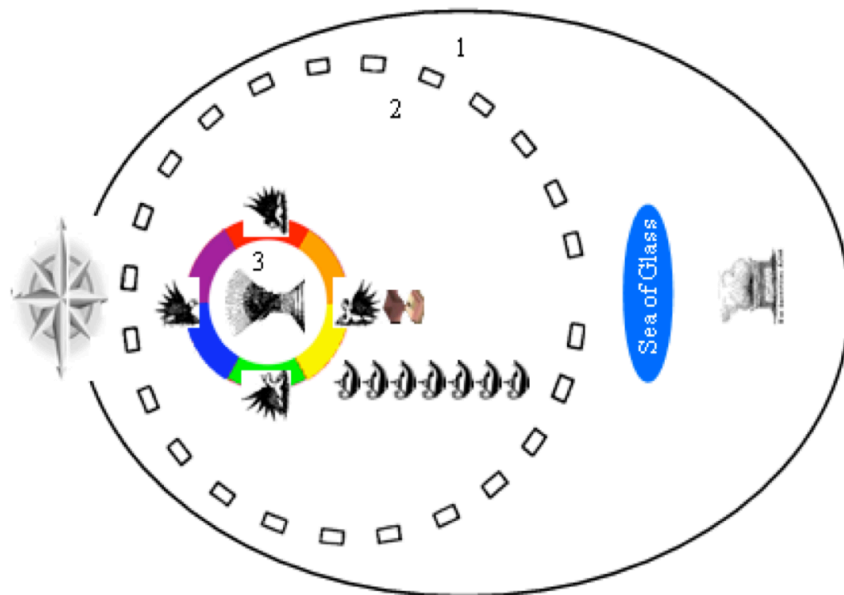
Types do not arise out of the clear blue sky. Nor do many of them *only* point forward. They are actually patterned on things that are in heaven and that have existed prior to Genesis 1:1. Why does this matter? Because God is actually programing redemptive history on earth so that it is a pattern of heaven itself. “As in heaven, so on earth.” When Jesus told us to pray this, he wasn’t kidding. One of the things that sin has done is sever this link between the two realms. The history of the Bible is about God putting them back together as one through Christ who is reconciling “all things” to himself (Col 1:20). Reconciliation does not just include man, but the new heavens and the new earth. Jesus is the link between the two places.

Another thing that this helps us understand is that types are not arbitrary, culturally bound conventions. **When we come to our own worship as an example at the end, we will see how important this point is.** It has its roots in this: There is **a heavenly temple.** Isaiah 6 begins, “**In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple**” (**Isa 6:1**). What temple is he seeing? Certainly not the one there in Jerusalem. How do I know? In the next verse he sees seraphim with wings! Curiously, when you read this or many texts in Revelation for example, you see quickly that there are heavenly beings that are positioned around heaven’s altar and they seem to do some kind of service here. So not only is there a temple, but heavenly beings are doing some kind of priest-like service in it. That’s what it means to gather around a temple-altar. Now, the Bible does not call them priests, but it is clear that priestly activity is not something God made up willy-nilly with Moses. There is a higher order at work here.

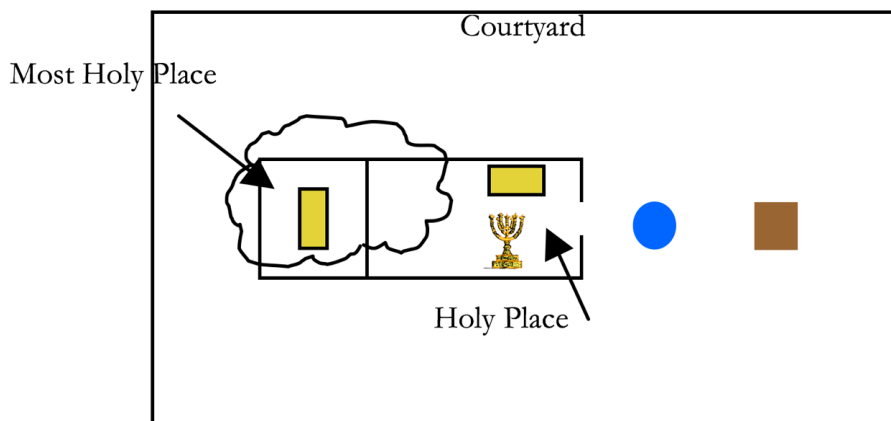
Revelation gives some description of this place. It has three tiers or layers to it. The outer tier has myriads of angels (**Rev 5:11**), and **every creature** in heaven and on earth and

under the earth and in the sea (5:13). There they “sing praises” around the throne. In this space there is a sea of glass (4:6) and a sacrificial altar (6:9). As you move closer to the throne you find that 24 elders create a kind of wall as they surround the throne (4:4). Here we find “seven blazing lamps” (4:5) and a golden altar of incense (8:3). As you come into the Majestic Presence, you see four living creatures (4:6) and an emerald rainbow that encircles a throne (4:3). Here there is lightning and thunder (4:5) around a jasper and carnelian throne (4:3) where the Lord sits (4:2). This is the archetypal sanctuary. It is the heavenly temple.

Archetypal Sanctuary



Amazingly, but not surprisingly, **the tabernacle that Moses built** forms the same basic pattern (as do all temples in the Bible).³ In the corresponding place to where the myriads of creatures go, this is where the people were allowed to walk. It is called the **courtyard**. Here, they would offer sacrifices on a bronze **altar** and washing ceremonies would take place at the bronze **laver**. As you move west, you come to the **holy place**. Inside here we have the golden **lampstand**, the table for showbread, and the **altar** of incense, which created a kind of cloud that hid something inside. Inside was the **Most Holy Place** and here God set his law which was placed inside the ark of the covenant. On top of the ark was something called the mercy **seat**. It was the place where **God** was said to sit as king over Israel.



³ See *Waters of Creation*.

The point is, **the tabernacle was a copy of the temple of heaven**. This is why it was so very important that Moses, when he was about to erect the tent, was “**instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain’**” (**Heb 8:5**). Moses wasn’t just making some cool place. He was literally bringing heaven down to earth. The tabernacle was going to be the place where heaven and earth would collide, literally. For this is where God would meet with the people and where sins would be dealt with. It was a gateway to heaven itself.

So Hebrews tells us that this tabernacle was a copy of the temple in heaven. The priests down here were doing stuff that paralleled things up there. And yet, I’m not entirely certain that even the heavenly temple is exactly what is on Hebrew’s mind. Yes, there is a heavenly temple, but even that temple seems to be but a reflection of invisible realities that exist in the Godhead alone. In God’s mind and according to his nature there exists this layout, if you will, for how even the angels must approach him, and for what to do if sin enters into the Most Holy Place of heaven itself

(think about when Satan goes before the heavenly council as an example).

It says that Jesus was a minister in the holy places, **in the true tent** that the Lord set up, not man (**Heb 8:2**). This could refer to this heavenly place, since men did not build it. But I think it refers to something even greater still. **John 1:14** tells us that the **Word became flesh as “dwelt” among us**. The word “dwelt” is the word *skenoō*. The noun form is used in the OT to translate the Tabernacle, when it is called a “tent.” Hebrews uses the same word in **Heb 8:2**. Literally John says that the Word “**pitched his tent.**” This was predicted in the OT. “**Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live (kataskenoso) among you**” (**Zech 2:10**; cf. **Joel 3:17**; **Ezek 37:27-28**).⁴ John is saying that God has chosen the place where the Word would meet with people on earth. You want to meet with God, you go here, in this NT “tabernacle.”

In the next chapter, John refers to **Jesus’ body** as the “**temple.**” Jesus predicted that he would rebuilt the temple in three days. The Pharisees laughed and said, “It took 46

⁴ See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 130.

years to build this thing, and you will raise it in three days?” They were thinking physically. But it says, “**But he was speaking about the temple of his body**” (John 2:21). Truly, Jesus is a greater temple than even the one that exists in heaven, though we have to understand that the heavenly temple and the earthly copies teach us absolutely true things about worship, things that are transcendent, things that are objective, things that are eternal, things that do not change with cultures or religions. Jesus is the key to it all.

The Perfect Gift

From here, Hebrews begins to discuss **gifts and sacrifices**. “**For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer**” (Heb 8:3). It makes sense to move from priest to temple/tabernacle/tent. And since this is the place where sacrifices are offered, it makes sense to move more specifically to gifts and sacrifices.

The point it is making is that priests could not come to the tabernacle empty handed. This wasn't a gym where they went to play basketball. It wasn't a concert hall where they

went to see the latest CCM band. It was the holiest place on planet earth, the stairway between earth and heaven. This is where God was. Therefore, sinful priests had to bring offerings. “So the LORD said to Aaron, ‘You and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear iniquity connected with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear iniquity connected with your priesthood’” (Num 18:1). “Moses said to Aaron, ‘Draw near to the altar and offer your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and for the people, and bring the offering of the people and make atonement for them, as the LORD has commanded’” (Lev 9:7). So the priests had to, by decree of God through Moses, make offerings in the tent.

Hebrews uses two words: “gifts” and “sacrifices.” Both words can describe offerings given for sin, but they can also describe other things such as the “sacrifice of praise.” Hebrews 9 will start to tease out more of the nature of Christ’s offering in terms of what it does. The point for now is that you do not come empty handed when you meet with God. It is “necessary” to have something to offer. If that was true for a Jewish priest, it is also true for our Great High

Priest. If history shows us that this is the way you approach kings and princes on earth, how much more God? And as David teaches us, these offerings must cost you something (2Sa 24:24).

So what offering did Jesus give? The last verse of Hebrews 7 told us. “He offered up himself” (7:27). This makes my thought about vs. 2 all the more interesting. He offers up himself in the temple which is his body. Do you see how Jesus is the intersection between heaven and earth here in the idea of dealing with sin? It is why he is called both the temple and the lamb by John.

But Jesus’ offering is not done on earth. “Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all” (Heb 8:4). This refers both to his present ministry in heaven as our living intercessor, but also to his past work at his death when he made his offering. He entered into heaven itself and made the offering of himself and did so by his own priestly work through himself. Truly, if you understand even the smallest fraction of what life was like under priests in the world before Christ, this statement would shock you to the core. It is absolutely incredible. All of it is Christ Jesus.

Now, something else arises here in Hebrews discussion. Jesus does what the priests do, because no priest can come empty handed before God. Yet, the priests did it according to law and Jesus does. It puts the paradox like this. On one hand, “It is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer” (8:3). This seems to make Jesus’ offering legal. Yet on the other, “If he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law” (8:4). This seems to imply that Jesus is not offering according to Law. Jesus’ offering is for some other reason. Both things coincide with his perfection.

The Perfect Law

Without question, vv. 4-5 both deal with the law. “... priests who offer gifts according to the law” (4). “Moses ... was instructed by God” with a commandment, “See that you make everything according to the pattern...” (Heb 8:5). These laws reflect the unchangeable nature of God in his holy perfection. God gave laws to OT priests in order that they might have a place and a service to perform that would ensure that God could dwell in their midst. If they

disobeyed, God's wrath would come, and he would separate himself from them.

God's priestly laws were gracious to Israel in the sense that they, typologically through the tabernacle and animal sacrifices, kept God from consuming them. Thus, these laws reflect something of the perfection of God as applied to salvation. In the sense that Jesus' offering in accordance with all of the things required by the law, Jesus was obeying OT Law.

And yet, Jesus' offering was not a literal animal, but himself; not in a physical building of wood and metal, but in his body; not the type, but the antitype. As antitype, it is [the perfect offering](#). Praise God! As the antitype, it is the perfect temple. The OT law couldn't possibly have commanded the OT priests to offer something like this, and so Jesus' offering transcends Levitical law. And thus, we enter back to Melchizedke's priesthood. Jesus is doing the very things the earthly priests did, but he is doing them better, through a better priesthood, a better temple, and a better sacrifice. Therefore, it both is and is not according to law. Jesus transcends these things, because he is God.

Jesus' offering was not obligatory in the sense that he had to obey the actual Torah in this sense, because even if he had done that, his sacrifice would not have been perfect—as we will see later in Hebrews, because animal sacrifices do not take away sins. Instead, he offered himself up freely to God, not according to law, but according to grace. He did this that you and I might have salvation through him. He did this so that the Father might be glorified. He did this so that he might be glorified (not doing it selfishly, but that the Father might glorify him) as the one seated at the Right Hand of Majesty. He did this that the Spirit might be glorified in his coming work in Christ's at Pentecost. This is the free activity of God to reconcile all things to himself in Christ that he might be shown Preeminent in all things. Christ's work as this perfect priest in this perfect temple with this perfect gift through the perfect law is *sola deo Gloria*—To God Alone be the Glory.

Our Acceptable Worship

As we think about what this means for us today, a couple of things come to mind. **First**, people just don't seem to

understand that **God is not like us**. He is utterly holy. He is absolutely perfect in righteousness, goodness, and truth. This does not change in God. Ever. But we are the opposite of this. We are filthy, wicked, liars. All of us. In order for a Consuming Fire not to burn us to ash, we have to be made like him, incorruptible and non-consumable. We have to have our sins atoned for. We have to have someone go before us to make an offering that will appease God, and more, that will allow us to be considered as righteous. We have to be justified. We have to be glorified. Chaff does not stand a chance in a forest fire.

It is all the rage to say that there are many ways to God. But this is not only not true, **it blasphemes Jesus'** in his death to say so. There is only one way to God, even as there is only one way into the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle. This is because of sin that all people have committed. That one way is through the offering that appeases God and takes away sin. There is only one offering that does this: a perfect offering. There is only one who has offered this offering—the Lord Jesus Christ. God only dwells in on a throne of grace in one place. This is in his heavenly temple. But there is only one who has gone before us into that temple and been accepted.

This is the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one Temple that is holy and pure and utterly undefiled. This is the temple of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one priest who has been accepted in his priestly work to be able to offer a sacrifice not for himself—but only for others. This is the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so it is blasphemous to say that there are many ways and many religions, because none of those religions have a perfect mediator that has gone into a perfect temple and offered a perfect sacrifice for sin save the Christian religion and the God-man the Lord Jesus Christ. And therefore, you can only come to God through him. Today, God freely offers Christ to you, friend. He offers him in grace as the one who has died in your place. He offers you salvation, if you will trust that this Jesus alone has done these things on your behalf, and give up trusting in any other thing to bring you to heaven. Any other thing is an idol, and it—along with you—will fall on the day of judgment if you do not turn from your sins to Christ. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and confess him before men, and you will be saved.

The **second thing** that comes to my mind is **our own worship**. Jesus' worship was pleasing to God because it was

perfect. Our worship will be pleasing to God as perfect, if it comes to God through the Lord Jesus Christ who mediates your worship in heaven, and through the Holy Spirit who mediates your worship on earth. This is because **God has made you his temple** by extension and by union with Christ. This is a great mystery as the Apostle calls it, but you are his body and his body is the Temple of God. Therefore, if you are in Christ, your worship will be acceptable in his sight.

However, there is more. Many people leave their own worship here and leave it at that, failing to consider the eternal, objective nature of worship itself. Heaven does things a certain way and no other way. Some Christians think that if you are merely sincere and in Christ (non Christians drop the “in Christ”) that God will accept your worship. This is short-sighted thinking. Christians want to obey God. Christians understand that the way of worship since Cain and Abel onward has been not only about sincerity but obedience.

“See that you do all things according to the pattern given to you on the mountain.” Do you think that this idea has fallen by the wayside because Jesus has come? No, it has not fallen away. It has been fulfilled in Christ, and therefore

changed in application to you. But it has not “gone away” any more than the heavenly temple has vanished. Divine worship is not open to cultural relativism.

We Reformed Christians have something called **the Regulative Principle of Worship**. This was a principle that the Reformed churches developed many centuries ago to help guide them as they thought about how they should worship God publicly and corporately in the midst of Roman errors and abuses (and what they felt were practices that the Lutherans did not stop to think clearly enough to change). Corrupt corporate worship is a danger to the eternal soul of the worshiper, because it syncretizes Christianity and paganism or secularism, and leads one astray from trusting in the Lord Jesus alone.

Our church’s Confession of Faith flows from the stream of this Reformed and Presbyterian tradition on worship and states the principle this way. “The acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy

Scriptures” (LBC 22.1). Put more simply, in corporate worship, you need a positive command in order to practice something.⁵ Basically, this is *sola scriptura* applied to worship. This principle is different from the Roman principle which teaches that you can do anything you want so long as God hasn’t forbidden it. This obviously means that you can have a whole lot of things in worship that distract from, become as important as, or even replace the necessary elements of worship commanded in God’s word.

At any rate, my point here is not to get into a discussion of the application of the Regulative Principle of Worship. It is, however, to say that the basic idea of the principle comes from the Scripture itself. When reading biblical proof-texts for this principle, books on this subject have plenty of them

⁵ **Going Deeper:** The Confession distinguishes between the “means” of worship and the “circumstance” of worship. Circumstances are things that are common to all people whenever they meet together. This can include things like time, place, etc. It gets more difficult because there are disagreements over whether things like furnishings or instruments are circumstances or means. Some want four white walls with no furnishings, which others see furnishings as means we can use to make the space more conducive to worship. Some see instruments are something common to all music, while others see them as means which need a positive command. The purpose here is not to argue these points, but merely to show that the Regulative Prince is not designed to say that every single thing needs a positive command. It lists the “means” (or “elements”) as prayer, singing, preaching, reading the Scripture, and the sacraments. These things are necessary and mandatory for true worship. When things like crossing yourself, holy water, Hail Marys, or anxious benches, and altar calls and the like come into worship, they often take the place of the means of worship. The Regulative Principle was designed to curtail these things.

from both Old and New Testaments.⁶ One of the key passages is this: “You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the LORD hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it” (Deut 12:31-32).

This has striking similarities to Hebrews 8:5 (which I have noticed is often left out in discussions of this topic). Moses was commanded to do everything exactly as God told him. And Moses obeyed. Now, there are different applications of things between OT and NT worship. But the basic principle of only doing what you are commanded is very important. Why? Because the way of worship is heavenly, transcendent, and eternal.

This is what we have seen today with one way of offering a gift, one temple to offer it in, one mediator to make that offering, and so on. Yes, Jesus has fulfilled the legal requirements of OT ceremonial law in such a way that we no longer practice things that point forward. NT

⁶ See for example Kevin Reed, *Biblical Worship*, http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualNLs/BibW_ch0.htm.

worship does not stay in the shadows of Christ, but comes to him incarnated. But fulfillment does not mean done away with. Instead, it means just what it says. And thus, the elements of worship commanded in the NT are there because they lead us to the True Temple of Christ via his body—the Church. They lead us there because they point to him, they teach us about him, and they are given by him.

God alone knows how he wants to be worshipped, and God alone knows what is best for our own souls when we do worship. We do not know this. We think we do, but our thoughts are always crooked on this matter. We think that our modern measures of worship draw us near to God, but He knows that our clever inventions actually pull us away from the wonders of the Gospel by replacing it with the wonders of our own imaginations. Colossians calls it “will-worship” (Col 2:23 KJV), and Jesus calls it the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt 15:9). And friends, God loves us and wants to keep us from harming ourselves eternally.

If I can get anything across from our passage today, it is to help you understand that worship is not a cultural invention of man. It is an other-worldly participation of heaven on earth. We get to meet with the living God via his

living Son who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High through the Holy Spirit whom he has sent to our hearts and who leads us in worship. Participation in the glories of heaven itself makes the excitements of this world and its self-imposed worship fall away into nothingness. If the church could once more capture what is really happening when we gather together, these distractions that are paralyzing the modern church would fade into oblivion. Have you come to understand these things? Have you seen the wonders of the Perfect Christ and his Divine Worship?