




# ONE WAY

Biblical Reasons for having the  
same Worship and Church Order

**GEORGE GILLESPIE**



“I will give them one heart,  
and one way that they may  
fear me for ever”

JEREMIAH 32:39

# Biblical Uniformity for the Church

## Introduction

The following is an updated extract from an essay by George Gillespie (1613-1648). Gillespie was one of the leading figures in the Scottish Church during a time of renewal and reformation. He was a powerful and eloquent preacher but is best known as a clear and logical writer.

A formidable debater, he defended biblical principles at the Westminster Assembly. The Assembly laid foundations for thorough biblical reformation. There was to be one form of doctrine, worship and government for the whole British Isles. This was the fruit of the Solemn League and Covenant (1643).

Gillespie was a passionate advocate of such unity. He shows in the following extract that Scripture requires it. He was expressing the mind of the Scottish Church at this time of revival and reformation.

The Church of Scotland called uniformity “the chiefest of our desires, prayers and cares”. Their desire was that as “the Lord is one, so his name may be

one amongst us; and mercy and truth, righteousness and peace meeting together and kissing one another, may dwell in this land”.

Uniformity could only be based upon reformation. These things were so difficult in themselves “that the hand of the Most High God, which is now begun to be stretched out in this land, must bring it to pass”.

Today diversity is frequently championed in worship and practice. Having only one way in common in such matters is considered unnecessary, unattainable and divisive.

True uniformity flows from the Scriptural principle of worship. Nothing is to be instituted in the worship of God except what God Himself has authorised. Uniformity which follows this principle brings believers closer to Christ as King and Head of the Church.

Uniformity is unifying. We are to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judg-

ment” (1 Corinthians 1:10). This comes from walking by “the same rule” and minding “the same thing” (Philippians 3:16).

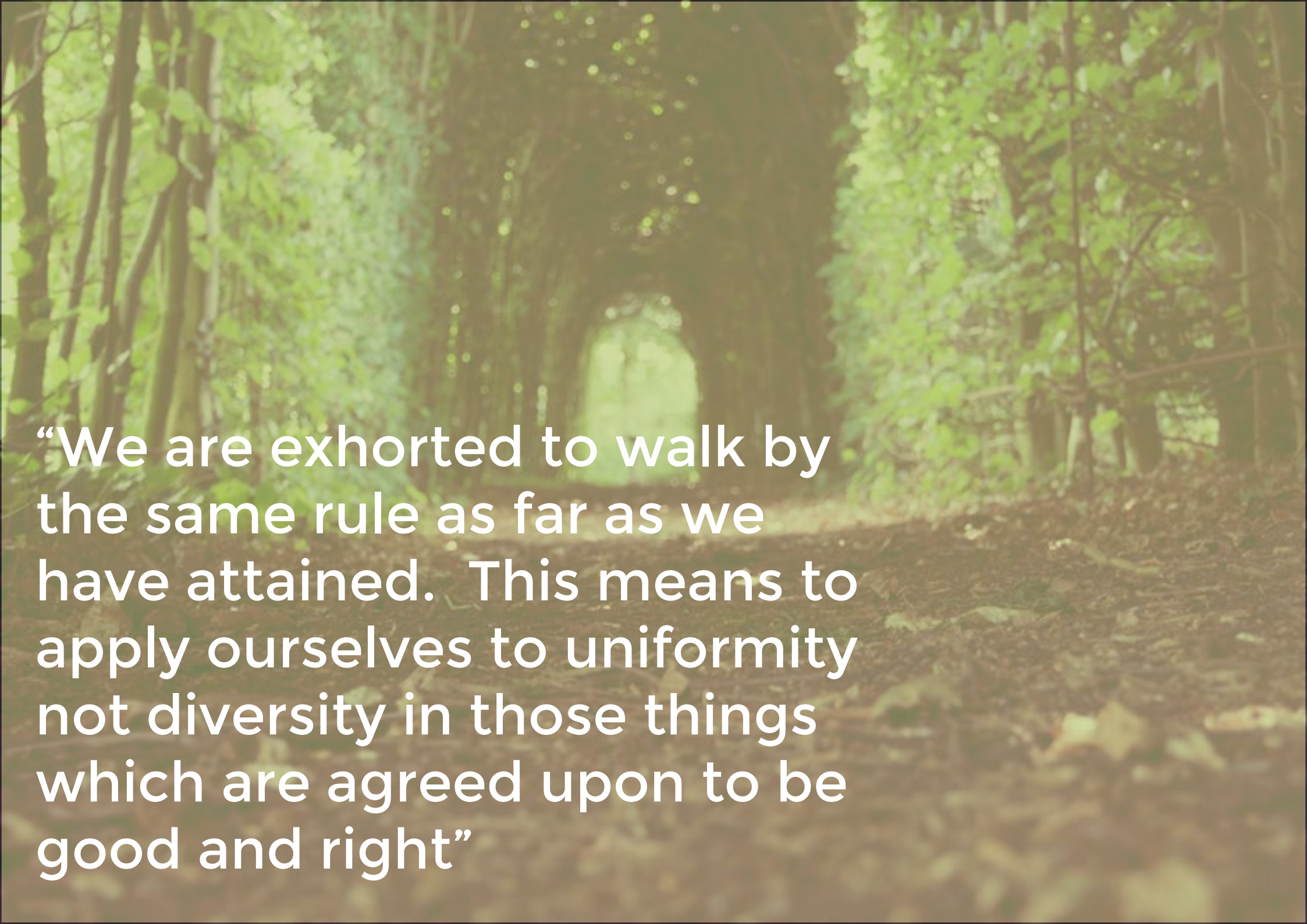
Gillespie maintained that any uniformity must be in things that are “either expressly grounded upon and warranted by the Word of God, or by necessary consequence drawn from it”.

He rejects conforming to what is either against the Word of God or not required by it in matters of conscience. In Gillespie’s time, this kind of conformity was imposed by episcopalians. They freely admitted that what they imposed were human inventions.

George Gillespie asserted that a Church is either “true or hypocritical” in direct relation to whether it does or does not mix “human inventions with God’s holy worship”.

In 1648 Gillespie became Minister of the High Kirk of St. Giles in Edinburgh and Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. He died of tuberculosis in December of the same year.

He described his ministry of ten years as “but a moment”. As he lay dying, he refused to be commended for his labours. He said: “all that I have done cannot abide the touchstone of His justice; they are all but abominations, and as an unclean thing, when they are reckoned between God and me. Christ is all things, and I am nothing.”

A photograph of a forest path leading to a stone archway, overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The text is centered on the left side of the image.

“We are exhorted to walk by the same rule as far as we have attained. This means to apply ourselves to uniformity not diversity in those things which are agreed upon to be good and right”

# Uniformity in Scripture

## Uniformity in the Old Testament

The Old Testament shows significant uniformity to an amazing extent. This was the case in both in the content and forms of the worship and service of God.

- 1. Passover.** “Ye shall keep it in his appointed season: according to all the rites of it, and according to all the ceremonies thereof, shall ye keep it” (Numbers. 9:3). “One law shall be to him that is home-born, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among you” (Exodus 12:49).
- 2. Sacrifices.** See the rules for these in the first seven chapters of Leviticus.
- 3. Scripture reading.** “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath-day” (Acts 15:21).
- 4. The courses and services of the priests and Levites** (1 Chronicles 23:26; Luke 1:8,9).

There are similar examples that could be given in other instances.

## Uniformity in the New Testament

It was prophesied of the church of the New Testament that God would give them one way as well as one heart, (Jeremiah 32:39). There would not only be one Lord but his name would be one in the New Testament period (Zechariah 14:9). We are exhorted to walk by the same rule as far as we have attained. This means to apply ourselves to uniformity not diversity in those things which are agreed upon to be good and right (Philippians 3:16).

### Uniformity in New Testament worship

Does the Apostle Paul not clearly affirm and commend uniformity in the worship of God? “If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret;” (1 Corinthians 14:27). “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints;” (verse 33) “Let all things be done decently, and in order” (verse 40). He limits the prophets to two or three in the same way as he limits those that had the gift of tongues (verse 29).

Was it not significant uniformity that he instructed every man who prayed or prophesied to have his head uncovered and every woman to be covered

(1 Corinthians 11:1-16)?

### Uniformity in New Testament order

Does not the same Apostle give various rules apart from teaching about faith and the practical duties of the Christian life? Rules are given to be followed in ordaining and admitting elders and deacons to office. There are also other rules in the epistles to Timothy and Titus. These are about widows, accusations against elders, church discipline by admonition and censure and other things belonging to church government.

Paul even requires uniformity between the churches of Galatia and Corinth in the exact day for charitable giving. “Now, concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store” (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

“Does the Apostle Paul not clearly affirm and commend uniformity in the worship of God?”



“episcopalian conformity and presbyterian uniformity are as opposite to one another as darkness and light, black and white, bitter and sweet, bad and good”

# Unbiblical Conformity

The word uniformity has become loathsome to various people who argue for liberty and toleration. It is as loathsome as the word conformity was in the times of episcopacy.

I confess that my love and desire for uniformity has not made me abandon my former opposition to episcopalian conformity in any way. Episcopalian conformity constrained men's consciences to practice certain rites. Although these were either unlawful or indifferent this was commanded under threat of punishment.

The Solemn League and Covenant obliges us to work to bring the Churches of God in the three kingdoms to the closest unity and uniformity. This is to be achieved by agreeing on one confession of faith, one form of worship, one form of Church government and catechism.

The following differences between episcopalian conformity and presbyterian uniformity, should be noted carefully.

## Invented Worship

Episcopalians followed the example of heathen religions and Roman Catholicism. They invented ceremonies and a pompous external splendour and respectability. They made the kingdom of God come with observation.

We wish to keep only the ancient apostolic simplicity. The fewer ceremonies the better. People's minds are easily drawn away and distracted from spiritual and inward duties.

## Unlawful things

Episcopalian conformity consisted in many things that were unlawful and contrary to the Scriptures. Show us anything similar in any part of our uniformity, then let that thing never be heard of again. Requiring uniformity in unlawful things only increases the guilt of the sin.

## Conformity to Romanism

Episcopalians conformed to Roman Catholicism. We conform to the example of the best reformed Churches. This differs as much from episcopalian practice as a modestly dressed woman differs from someone dressed like a prostitute.

## Superstitious

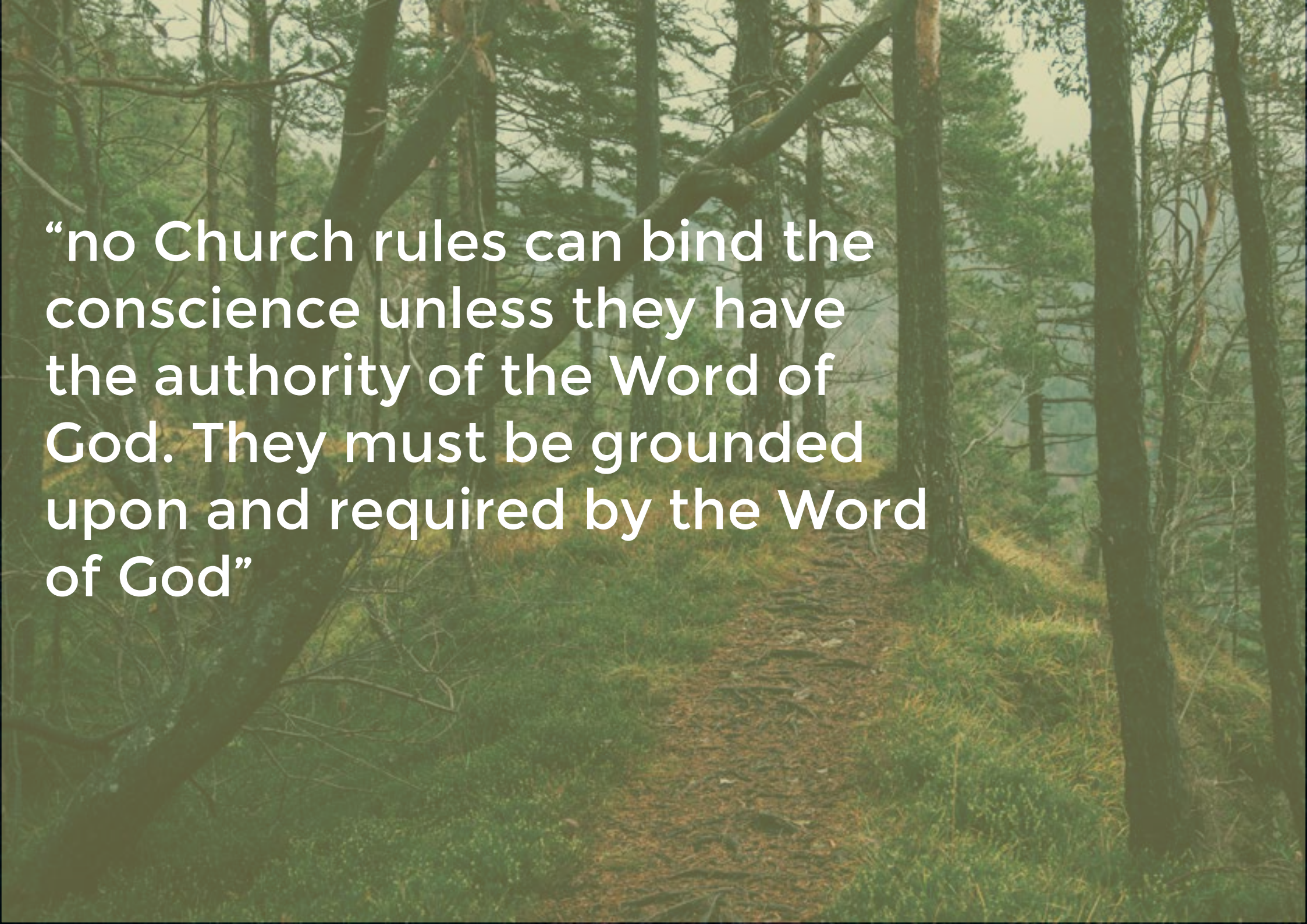
The sacred ceremonies of which episcopalian conformity was mostly made up were either idolatrous or superstitious. Since these things were not necessary they should not have been continued but abolished. Hezekiah has to do this with the brazen serpent. There is nothing like this in presbyterian uniformity. No one can point to a sacred religious rite or thing which is not from Scripture or necessary. There is nothing idolatrous or superstitious.

If anything like this can be found I will confess that it should not be continued.

## Offensive

Episcopalians imposed and practised ceremonies which they acknowledged were not merely indifferent but offensive. Many thousands of godly people considered them unlawful and contrary to the Scriptures. They were offended by them. Our principle is that things which are indifferent should not be practised if they are a scandal and offence to the godly.

**“Episcopalian conformity consisted in many things that were unlawful and contrary to the Scriptures. Show us anything similar in any part of our uniformity, then let that thing never be heard of again”**

A photograph of a forest path with a quote overlay. The path is made of dirt and pine needles, leading through tall pine trees. The quote is in white text on a semi-transparent dark background.

“no Church rules can bind the conscience unless they have the authority of the Word of God. They must be grounded upon and required by the Word of God”



# Liberty of Conscience

## Imposed on the Conscience

Episcopalian practice was destructive to true Christian liberty. It destroyed liberty of conscience and practice. Men well compelled in practice and conscience by the will and authority of the law makers alone. “Obey them that have the rule over you” was their great argument to persuade consciences. “Thus I will, thus I command, my pleasure stands for a reason”.

We say that no Church rules can bind the conscience unless they have the authority of the Word of God. They must be grounded upon and required by the Word of God. This may be something that is required by the general rules of the Word or fairly deduced from it. Rules about indifferent things cannot be binding if such things can be neglected without giving scandal or showing any contempt of Church authority.

## Commandments of Men

Episcopalian ordinances were “after the commandments and doctrines of men” (Colossians 2:22). “But in vain do they worship me, teaching, for doctrines, the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). This refers to the ceremonies taught by the Pharisees such as washing hands, cups, tables, etc. to teach and signify holiness.

We condemn all ceremonies of religious significance devised by men. These add to the word of God. Adding to it is no less forbidden than taking from it. Let many of those who object against our uniformity examine whether their own practice includes ceremonies of human invention without biblical authority.

We maintain that the Church has no power to specify or command anything belonging to religion. There are circumstances belonging to the order and decency required in all human societies and actions. These things are so many and various according to times and places that they could not be specified in Scripture. The Church can only order these in harmony with the general rules of the Word.

Apart from such circumstances, there is not any substantial part of the covenanted uniformity which is not either expressly commanded by the word of God or drawn from it by necessary consequence. Such things are therefore not the commandment of men but of God.

I could add other differences but these are more than enough. They show that episcopalian conformity and presbyterian uniformity are as opposite to one another as darkness and light, black and white, bitter and sweet, bad and good.

## Note on circumstances in worship

Circumstances are distinguished from the elements of worship. Elements are those things that are commanded in the worship of God. Elements include preaching, praise, Scripture reading and the sacraments etc. The distinction is made by the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1:6.

Circumstances are things that are not expressly commanded but without which worship cannot take place, such as lighting or an agreed place and time. These matters are governed by the general principles of doing all things decently and in order and to edification. Such things must not have religious significance in themselves.

## Note on necessary consequence

Necessary consequence is part of the right interpretation of Scripture. It is also referred to in Westminster Confession 1:6. This is simply drawing out or inferring the intended meaning of Scripture.

Such conclusions must not contradict the rest of Scripture. They are as much the Word of God as express statements within Scripture.

**“to promote the restoration of the Christian Church in Scotland, by informing, educating and promoting understanding of the attainments of the Second Reformation in Scotland”**

# Reformation Scotland Trust



**The Second Reformation was a period of radical reformation and rediscovery of Biblical truth in the Church of Scotland. It was also the period of greatest revival throughout the whole nation that Scotland has ever experienced.**

**We aim to promote the biblical understanding attained at that time.**



The attainments of this period were covenanted uniformity in doctrine, worship and church government.

This includes the biblical standards for faith and worship produced by the Westminster Assembly. Amongst these is the Westminster Confession of Faith, which remains the doctrinal standard of the Scottish Presbyterian Church.



We are convinced that the Christian Church needs to re-engage with these teachings once more. The Biblical truths reclaimed in the Second Reformation are the only safe foundation for the future of the Scottish Church.

Our aim is therefore to promote the restoration of the Christian Church in Scotland, by informing, educating and promoting understanding of the attainments of the Second Reformation in Scotland.

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