

**Christian Worship**  
**Class 7: The Forms of Worship**  
October 15, 2023

**I. Recap from Weeks 1-6**

**Class 1**

- Worship is what we were made for
- The true object of worship is the Triune God
- Worship is formative

**Class 2: Which Worship?**

- This class is focused on Explicit Worship and Corporate Worship
- The Goals of Corporate Worship: The Glory of God and The Building Up of the Body of Christ

**Class 3: The Source of True Worship**

- Right Worship is determined by God and revealed to us in his Word—this is true of both the actions of worship and the motives of worship
- We can think of worship in terms of its content, elements, forms, and circumstances; and God's word directs us differently in each of those categories

**Class 4: The Transformation of Christian Worship**

- Jesus transforms worship by taking it from earth to heaven; corporate worship is a supernatural event that takes place in the very presence of God

**Classes 5 & 6: The Elements of Worship**

- God speaks to us in worship through the reading and especially preaching of his Word; we respond to him in prayer and singing

**II. Elements and Content**

- a. The Elements of Corporate Worship—Praying, Singing, Reading God's Word, Preaching God's Word, Sacraments, Giving of Gifts, Confessing the Faith, Taking of Vows**

**Acts 2:42**, And they devoted themselves to [the apostles' teaching](#) and [the fellowship](#), to [the breaking of bread](#) and [the prayers](#).

**Colossians 3:16-17**, Let [the word of Christ](#) dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, [singing](#) psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, [giving thanks](#) to God the Father through him.

*WLC Q. 154. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation?*

*A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially [the word](#), [sacraments](#), and [prayer](#); all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.*

## 5. Sacraments

i. Where Scripture Prescribes the Sacraments: Matt. 28:19, 1 Cor. 11:23-29, Acts 2:42

ii. Why are sacraments a part of worship?

- **The Lord's supper is not simply communion with God, but also with his people** (see 1 Cor. 11:17-34 and the repeated refrain "when you come together")
- **Baptism is not simply an individual decision or personal salvation, but a person is baptized into the church** (1 Cor. 12:12-13)
- **Additionally, the sacraments do not belong to individual Christians, but were given to the church corporate and are overseen by the elders of the church** (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 14:22-25; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; cf. Mt. 16:19; Jn. 20:21-23)

*WLC Q. 167. How is baptism to be improved by us?*

A. The needful but much neglected duty of improving our baptism, is to be performed by us all our life long, especially in the time of temptation, and when we are present at the administration of it to others; by serious and thankful consideration of the nature of it, and of the ends for which Christ instituted it, the privileges and benefits conferred and sealed thereby, and our solemn vow made therein; by being humbled for our sinful defilement, our falling short of, and walking contrary to, the grace of baptism, and our engagements; by growing up to assurance of pardon of sin, and of all other blessings sealed to us in that sacrament; by drawing strength from the death and resurrection of Christ, into whom we are baptized, for the mortifying of sin, and quickening of grace; and by endeavoring to live by faith, to have our conversation in holiness and righteousness, as those that have therein given up their names to Christ; and to walk in brotherly love, as being baptized by the same Spirit into one body.

*WLC Q. 171. How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it?*

A. They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ, of their sins and wants; of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance; love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong; of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience; and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer.

*WLC Q. 172. May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's supper?*

A. One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the sacrament of the Lord's supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because promises are made, and this sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) he is to bewail his unbelief, and labor to have his doubts resolved; and, so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's supper, that he may be further strengthened.

*WLC Q. 173. May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, be kept from it?*

A. Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church, until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.

*WLC Q. 174. What is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper in the time of the administration of it?*

A. It is required of them that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper, that, during the time of the administration of it, with all holy reverence and attention they wait upon God in that ordinance, diligently observe the sacramental elements and actions, heedfully discern the Lord's body, and affectionately meditate on his death and sufferings, and thereby stir up themselves to a vigorous exercise of their graces; in judging themselves, and sorrowing for sin; in earnest hungering and thirsting after Christ, feeding on him by faith, receiving of his fullness, trusting in his merits, rejoicing in his love, giving thanks for his grace; in renewing of their covenant with God, and love to all the saints.

*WLC Q. 175. What is the duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's supper?*

A. The duty of Christians, after they have received the sacrament of the Lord's supper, is seriously to consider how they have behaved themselves therein, and with what success; if they find quickening and comfort, to bless God for it, beg the continuance of it, watch against relapses, fulfill their vows, and encourage themselves to a frequent attendance on that ordinance: but if they find no present benefit, more exactly to review their preparation to, and carriage at, the sacrament; in both which, if they can approve themselves to God and their own consciences, they are to wait for the fruit of it in due time: but, if they see they have failed in either, they are to be humbled, and to attend upon it afterwards with more care and diligence.

## 6. Offering of Gifts

- i. Num. 18:26; Prov. 3:9-10; Mk. 12:41-44; Rom. 12:1, 13; 1 Cor. 16:1-2

## 7. Confessing the Faith

- i. Deut. 6:4-6, Rom. 10:9-10, 1 Cor. 8:6, 15:3-4, Phil. 2:6-11, Col. 1:12-20, 2:9-15, 1 Tim. 2:5-6

## 8. Taking of Oaths and Vows

- i. Deut. 6:13, Neh. 10:29, 2 Cor. 1:23, Ps. 116:14, Isa. 19:21, Eccl 5:4-5

### III. The Structure or Form of Worship (a.k.a. What Is Liturgy?)

#### a. Every worship has a form, or structure, or order. This is what the word “liturgy” refers to.

This is inevitable. Everyone has to choose what order they will do things in during worship. In some churches that is written down and everyone knows it; in others it is only known by the people leading. Some churches have the same order each week; others have a cycle that they go through in a batch of weeks (e.g., monthly or quarterly communion, a children’s sermon once per month). But there is no such thing as a church that doesn’t have a structure to their worship.

“Structures tell stories.” The question is: *What story is the structure of our worship telling? What is being communicated about God and how he relates to his people in the decisions we make about our forms?*

#### b. Where do we get our structure?

- i. Not by explicit command or example
- ii. Generally, we do see examples of this (Ex. 19-24, 2 Chron. 5-7; Rev. 1-22)
- iii. Biblical principles and Christian prudence (WCF 1.6)

#### c. Worship as Covenant Renewal between God and his People

The story of God and his people begins with a covenant. God stoops down to come near to us and makes promises that he will be our God and we will be his people. This covenant began with a simple structure before sin entered the world—call, response, meal.

“God’s call to worship within this covenant of life was expected to illicit in Adam a response of faith and obedience, love and devotion, with heart and mind and strength. Adam’s reward for such a response was to be a fellowship meal with God at the tree of life. Adam was commanded to fast from one tree in order that he might feast at another tree, and thus enjoy consummate union and communion with God—everlasting life.” – Jonathan Gibson, *Reformation Worship*, 4

After sin enters the world, God doesn't abandon his covenant with us. Instead he makes a new covenant. No longer a covenant dependent on our obedience, but instead a covenant dependent upon God's grace in the face of our sin. When God makes this covenant, it holds the same pattern as before, but it is complicated by the necessity of dealing with our sin. And so, this new pattern is calling, cleansing (sacrifice), mediated access to God (priests), response, meal (see Ex. 19-24; 2 Chron. 5-7). But this doesn't just happen one time. Instead, God institutes regular repetitions of this covenant ceremony to remind his people not just of his call, but also of his cleansing, and of the fellowship meal that awaits them when his covenant is fulfilled.

This pattern is continued and added to throughout the story of redemption. It includes consecration from God through his word, God sending us out as his ambassadors, and other elements of call and response. But the pattern continues, until it is finally fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The book of Hebrews hones in on the way the elements of the sacrifices and priesthood are fulfilled in Jesus, transforming our worship into a Christ-Centered worship.

But this tells us, more than anything so far, what worship is. It isn't a concert. It isn't a lecture. It isn't whatever I imagine might show the worth of God. It is **a covenant renewal ceremony** between God and his people. It is what was intended from the very beginning, and is continued even as sin is dealt with.

*"We gather each Lord's Day, not merely out of habit, social custom, or felt needs but because God has chosen this weekly festival as a foretaste of the everlasting Sabbath day that will be enjoyed fully at the marriage supper of the Lamb. God has called us out of the world and into his marvelous light: That is why we gather." – Michael Horton, [A Better Way](#), 24*

i. **This tells us who the participants or actors are in worship. It is the two parties of the covenant—the Triune God and his people**

This helps us better understand the two goals of worship—God's glory and the building up of his body. Both of those things are centered on God's covenant relationship with his people. And so, we don't choose randomly upbuilding/edifying things to include in our worship. We choose things that edify the church *in their understanding of and participation in their covenant with God*. This would include promises, persons, story, responsibilities, etc.

ii. **This shows us that worship primarily takes the form of a dialogue, a conversation, between those two participants—God speaks and we respond**

iii. **A quick word about "leading" and "participation"**

Worship is not a 'Spectator Sport'. The worshippers in attendance are not simply the people 'up front.' Worship enlists everyone together. In this way, everything we do in worship will seek to enlist participation. Because worship is a dialogue, with God speaking and his people responding, the two "locations" of

worship are not “the stage” and “the audience,” but rather, “heaven” and “earth” (see Heb. 12:22-29). Often, the person leading is speaking on behalf of God (e.g., call to worship, assurance of pardon, sermon, benediction). Even when one person or a small group of people lead the congregation in response (i.e., the prayer of intercession, a choir singing), the rest of the congregation is participating in that response. Some people do this intuitively by nodding their heads, mumbling “Mm-hm,” or saying “Amen.” Each element of our worship is corporate or congregational (see WLC 154-175).

iv. **A quick word about “inclusion” in worship (or “segregated” worship)**

This also helps us understand something we haven’t talked about yet, which is “Who should be included in worship?” The default position is, “All of God’s people in a given local church.” Then we begin to talk about exceptions that may exist—sickness, inability to attend, etc. This means that children (since they are members of God’s covenant people) ought to be included in corporate worship by default. We can acknowledge human wisdom—e.g., when the purpose of a sermon is to hear what is being said, a screaming child might begin to take away from the goal of edification. But we also recognize that “building up the body of Christ” should mean *the whole body*. We don’t bar anyone from inclusion in worship because they might make it hard for others in the covenant community to engage.

d. **What does our structure/liturgy look like?**

**Isaiah 6:1-9**, 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. <sup>2</sup> Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called to another and said:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;  
the whole earth is full of his glory!”

<sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. <sup>5</sup> And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

<sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

<sup>8</sup> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” <sup>9</sup> And he said, “Go, and say to this people...” (Giving of God’s word in v. 9-13)

**Five movements**

- **Entering God's Presence**
- **Committing to God's Kingdom**
- **Listening to God's Word**
- **Feasting at God's Table**
- **Going Out with God's Blessing**

**More Detail:**

**ENTERING GOD'S PRESENCE**

*Call to Worship*

*Prayer of Invocation*

*Hymn of Adoration*

*Confession of Sin*

*Silent Confession*

*Song of Confession*

*Assurance of Pardon and Comfort*

*Song of Renewal*

*The Greeting of Peace*

**COMMITTING TO GOD'S KINGDOM**

*Confession of Faith*

*Kingdom Reading*

*Kingdom Prayer*

*Kingdom Giving*

*Song of Meditation and Doxology*

**LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD**

*The Sermon*

**FEASTING AT GOD'S TABLE**

*Preparation for Holy Communion*

*The Great Thanksgiving*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

*Words of Institution*

*Holy Communion*

**GOING OUT WITH GOD'S BLESSING**

*Song of Sending*

*Sending*

*Benediction*

“The liturgies of the church through the ages and the consistent message of Scripture combine to reveal a pattern for corporate worship that is both historical and helpful for our time. Christian worship is a “re-presentation” of the gospel. By our worship we extol, embrace, and share the story of the progress of the gospel in our lives. We begin with adoration so that all will recognize the greatness and goodness of God. In the light of his glory, we also recognize our sin and confess our need of his grace. Assurance of his pardon produces thanksgiving. With sincere thanksgiving, we also become aware that all we have is from him and that we depend on his goodness for everything precious in our lives. Thus, we are compelled to seek him in prayer for our needs and his kingdom’s advance. His loving intercession makes us desire to walk with him and further his purposes, so our hearts are open to his instruction and long to commune with him and those he loves. This progress of the gospel in our lives is the cause of our worship and the natural course of it. We conclude a service of such worship with a Charge and Benediction because the progress of the gospel is God’s benediction on our lives.” – Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, 116

e. **What liturgy has looked like over time** (see handout)<sup>1</sup>

f. **How Should We “Hold” Our Liturgy?**

i. **The Importance of Liturgy**

Because of everything we’ve said about the story that our structures tell and the biblical pattern of following the shape of the gospel, we believe there are legitimate problems with “non-liturgical” worship services. They tend to take their pattern from somewhere else (Ted Talks, concerts, Second Great Awakening evangelistic meetings, the university lecture hall, therapeutic talk shows, etc.). They are either all about conveying information, or all about stirring up a certain kind of emotion, or they veil (or can even falsify) the connection between various elements—singing isn’t a warmup to hear God’s word, it is a response to who God is and what he has done; the Lord’s supper isn’t an optional after party, it is a pressing home of the gospel.

ii. **Humility in Liturgy**

We need to have proper humility about our liturgy. It is not prescribed in Scripture. It is not handed down infallibly by the church through the ages. It is the ordering and structure we have chosen in accordance with biblical wisdom.

We need to be careful calling a church unfaithful because their forms aren’t like our forms. We believe the elements and content are more fundamental to the church than the forms (e.g., the “marks” of the church).

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<sup>1</sup> You can also see Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*, where he explains the different stories more fully.



We also see that our worship is slightly different than many churches who hold similar theological positions and views on worship—both historically and today. We need to be careful that we don't degrade the worship of others in order to lift ourselves up.

### iii. **Priority in Liturgy**

We ought to be much more concerned with the content of our worship than we are with the forms/structure or with the circumstances. The structure is meant to be just that—a structure, not the worship itself. That comes from the content.

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## **Books**

### Basic:

- *Does God Care How We Worship?* by Ligon Duncan
- *What Happens When We Worship* by Jonathan Landry Cruse
- *The Westminster Directory of Public Worship*, discussed by Mark Dever and Sinclair Ferguson
- *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* by James K. A. Smith
- *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters* by Tim Keller

### More Specifically-Focused:

- *A Better Way: Rediscovering the Drama of Christ-Centered Worship* by Michael Horton
- *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* by D. G. Hart and John R. Muether
- *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* by Bryan Chapell
- *Reformation Worship: Liturgies from the Past for the Present* by Jonathan Gibson and Mark Earngey
- *The Presbyterian Liturgies: Historical Sketches* by Charles W. Baird
- *Worship: Reformed according to Scripture* by Hughes Oliphant Old
- *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* by G.K. Beale

## **Audio**

- Reformed Theological Seminary class, “Theology of Worship” taught by Ligon Duncan, [https://rts.edu/resources/?fwp\\_resources\\_series=theology-of-worship](https://rts.edu/resources/?fwp_resources_series=theology-of-worship) (you can also access this on the free Reformed Theological Seminary app)