

**Christian Worship**  
**Class 8: The Forms of Worship (Pt. 2)**  
October 22, 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

**Class 7: The Forms of Worship**

- Every worship service has a structure, and those structures tell stories. The question is whether our structure is communicating the story of the gospel.

**I. 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 at Trinity?**

**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>**

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

## 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).

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.

## II. What about Over Time? Is there an overall structure or liturgy of our worship services?

Yes. Just like an individual service, every church has a structure to their services over time. Whether every service is exactly the same, or there is no way to tell how one service fits with the one before or after, those structures also tell stories.

Our services have structure in two primary ways—and expository, sequential preaching and the church calendar.

## a. Exegetical, Expository, Sequential preaching

### i. Exegetical Preaching

Exegesis is explanation and interpretation of a given text, paying attention to the vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and context. It comes from the Greek work meaning “to draw out.” So, exegetical preaching seeks to draw out the meaning of a given text.

### ii. Expository Preaching

“The main idea of an expository sermon the topic, the divisions of that idea, main points, and the development of those divisions, all come from truths the text itself contains. No significant portions of the text are ignored. In other words, expositors willingly stay within the boundaries of the text and do not leave until they have surveyed its entirety with its hearers.” – Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*

### iii. Sequential Preaching

Exegetical and expositional preaching through whole books of the Bible.

### iv. Topical Preaching

Preaching on a given subject found in Scripture (e.g., humility, prayer, the death of Christ, justification, the resurrection).

Is it wrong to preach topically? No. God’s people need to know what all of God’s word says about \_\_\_\_\_. But we don’t believe it should be the bread and butter of the church’s diet.

## b. The Church Calendar

Another way our liturgy is shaped over time is by the historic church calendar. The church calendar organizes the year around the major events in the life of Christ—Advent, Christmas, Epiphany (Christ’s manifestation), Lent, Easter, and Pentecost.

We believe that the only holy days commanded in Scripture are the Christian Sabbath (Sunday). So, we don’t believe the church calendar is commanded in Scripture. But as a form, or structure to our worship, we do believe it is wise and displays the story of the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

“By observing the Christian year, the church aligns its life and worship to the living, dying, rising, and coming of Christ.” – *Book of Common Worship*, 591

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<sup>2</sup> For a helpful historical argument for the use of the church calendar from a Reformed perspective, see Daniel Hyde’s article, “Not Holy But Helpful: A Case for the ‘Evangelical Feast Days’ in the Reformed Tradition” *MAJT* 26 (2015): 131-149

### c. Variety and Repetition (songs, creeds, prayers, etc.)

In order to worship according to “the whole counsel of God” we must have some variety week to week. We cannot encapsulate the whole teaching of Scripture in five songs, six prayers, a creed, and a sermon. However, the goal is not to satisfy our curiosity, or keep our attention. We are not trying to construct a worship service that is interesting to us, but is in accordance with God’s word. And the goals are to glorify God and to build up the body of Christ.

We are trying to create Christian disciples in whom the word of Christ dwells richly. We are not simply trying to present an idea, but are trying to hide God’s word and his truth in our heart, that we may meditate upon him in the watches of the night, always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and that we might not sin against him.

“Pastors, parents, worship leaders: Are you teaching any songs that can be sung a cappella around a hospital bed in 50 years?” – Kevin DeYoung

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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)