

Conversational Liturgy – Rom 12:1-2

“Why we do what we do in our worship service”

Introduction – Some of you have come from various different worship traditions. Others have grown up most of your life (at least as a Christian) in this church. And in either case, you may have watched us make liturgical changes in the service or wondered why we do what we do when we do it and not something else. This morning, let's pause and remember why we do what we do in our worship service. Our goal would be to enter into this time of worship with greater understanding, greater expectation, greater participation, looking for greater blessing.

Liturgy (Rom 12:1) – For some, liturgy is a bad word, meaning boring traditionalism. Paul uses the term *latreia* in Rom 12:1 from which we get our word liturgy – service. Our *“reasonable liturgy,”* Paul writes is to *“present our bodies a living sacrifice.”* In calling the corporate church to this, Paul invokes the imagery of the Old Covenant sacrificial system (Heb 9:6). Jesus did not come to abolish the law, but rather to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17f). Therefore, while there is no need for a blood/substitutionary sacrifice, the sacrificial system and order teach us how we are to approach God as His people.

Renewal (Rom 12:2) – Paul notes that God's intentions as we obey His call to *present our bodies a living sacrifice* in liturgy are to transform us. In other words, as we go through the elements of worship in a particular order, God cleanses us, builds us up, communes with us, and sends us out. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. This also parallels the way God always renewed covenant with His people, both in the weekly Sabbath-keeping, in particular high feast days He established, and in special events (i.e. the Exodus) in which He led His people into renewal and transformation. The Old Covenant saint was required during three high days to come to Jerusalem to offer His sacrifice and praise. We are told that we are coming to the New Jerusalem, that we are the new temple, and that we are brought covenantally into the presence of Jesus, all the saints that have come before us, and the angels of God who are worshipping Him at His throne in heaven (Heb 12:18-24). This is why Lord's Day worship is our highest privilege on this earth.

Our Service of Worship (Liturgy) – With these two principles in mind (liturgy and renewal), we can consider the elements and order of our service. Overall, we are always responding to the summons, call, and offering of the Lord to us first. We are entering into a conversational liturgy. Another way to think of it is as Christ's bride corporately, we are responding to the Bridegroom's lead in a dance of glory.

Call to Worship – The meditation offers us a moment to prepare ourselves with creative beauty of sounds and words. Then, on behalf of Jesus, the minister calls us to worship. Standing we hear the greeting from the angel of the church on behalf of the Triune God and respond in like greeting. We proceed to the entrance of His courts with prayer and praise. Whenever we sing, we are both singing to God and calling/teaching/admonishing one another. Even when we sing, we are responding to God's singing over us (Zeph 3:17). As we sing, we should be aware that the saints of God are singing to each of us, and they are singing the sounds of God's delight over us.

Confession of Sins (Purification/Sin Offering) – As we are ushered into the presence of God, we are made painfully aware of our own sinfulness and the sinfulness of our people (Isaiah 6:5, Ezek 1:28, Rev 1:17). This is the right response as we experience the holiness of God. Immeasurable holiness and abject humility are coming together. And so the exhortation is given to remind us in a variety of ways where we are coming, why we are gathering, Who it is that has called us, and what we need to do. God then summons us to confess our sins and sinfulness and even to do so as the priesthood of this world. It is appropriate then to sing a psalm or hymn reflecting our need for God to deliver us. God then assures us of His gracious pardon and cleansing, we respond with words of the thanks and faith (the Apostles' Creed), and then with singing and rejoicing.

Consecration (Ascension Offering) – We enter into the time where our whole-lives are lifted up and laid bare before our God and Judge; the work of His Word by His Spirit will cut us open and before God we are both consumed by Him and transformed by Him (Heb 4:12-13). We begin this process by offering up prayers as He has told us to do (Phil 4:6-7, Matt 6:8-15). Our corporate AMENs are another response that we make as the congregation, placing our agreement, involvement, and seal upon the words prayed and sung. We sing before Him as He begins this work and then we hear His Word read and preached to us; by faith we are to consider this a part of His examining, pruning, nourishing, and rebuilding of us and not simply as a time to receive information. And so we respond again with singing/praying.

Communion (Peace Offering) – In the Presence of Christ, we partake of the Sacrifice which was made once for all in a meal of peace with God Himself. There is far more here to examine than we have time now, but suffice it to say that God partakes of us in Christ at this meal and we partake of Christ by faith as God's Spirit feeds us at this Table of the Lord. Union and Communion. Again, we surround this time with the Word and with singing – it is a time of celebration and peace and victory. It is not a time to be glum or morbid. Life is given, and we partake with great thanksgiving.

Commissioning (Benediction) – All of this is amazing, and with hands lifted high as the scriptures direct us, we burst out a final praise to the Triune God. Now, He sends us with His hands and words of blessing (Luke 24:50). While we are departing, at the same time He always will be with us; He will never leave us nor forsake us.

Why Does This Matter? – Some will think we have too much “liturgy,” and others will think we have far too little. There is no one perfect way, at least not yet. The important thing is that you come prepared and having prepared your family. The important thing is that you enter into the conversation, the dance, with faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is important that you give yourself with vigor and zeal to the acts of worship – we are offering up ourselves as living sacrifices, and so it should be lively. Your presence and participation matter to God and blesses your brothers and sisters. It is critical that you come expecting to be transformed, renewed, built up, and sent out by name and in the name of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus. The church and the world are being shaken up in His presence and we should leave looking for the effects of this earthquake in our own lives and in the world around. Another blow has been made against the gates of Hades, and Jesus has promised they will not prevail.