

Lord's Day Worship: The Liturgy of Covenant Renewal – *Rom 12:1-2*

Introduction – Last Lord's Day we considered the question, "Why are we here" on Sunday mornings. By means of God's Spirit, we are brought into the heavens where we join with the throng of worshippers at God's throne (Heb 12:22-24). We do so without falling under judgment because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, our substitute. Our liturgy reflects that belief and ministers to us by providing a biblical and logical flow through a service of Covenant Renewal. By walking through our service of worship, I hope to inform and review why we do what we do and challenge us to make the most of this opportunity God gives. (Much thanks to Pastor Jeff Meyers and his book, "The Lord's Service").

Our Reasonable Liturgy (Rom 12:1-2) – Paul instructs us to "*therefore...present your bodies as a living sacrifice...which is your reasonable service...*" The word, "*service*" is where we get our word "*liturgy*." By using the term "*sacrifice*," Paul brings to mind the sacrificial liturgy of the Old Testament in telling New Testament believers how to approach God, something which can only be done "*by the mercies of God*." Because we are coming to the New Jerusalem, because we are new temple, and because we are brought covenantally before the presence of God, it makes sense that the OT sacrificial system informs us in how we draw near. What happens there? We are "*transformed by the renewing of our minds*."

Liturgical Flow (Lev 9) – Another way to look at this is that as we gather before the Lord, we are cleansed, consecrated by the Word, and then we commune with God as friends in peace. This was the flow of the OT sacrifices (Lev 9:1-4). The sin offering made the way to approach God, the ascension offering consecrated one's whole life to God and His work through us, and the peace offering provided a fellowship meal with God.

Liturgy: A Deacon for our Service of Worship – With these principles in mind, we can see how the order of service and the elements of the service ministers to us, helping us in drawing near to God. The liturgy is not magical, but it is helpful if entered into by faith with hearts that desire to draw near to God. CS Lewis likens liturgy to learning how to dance; not for the sake of the dance, but for the sake of dancing with the one you love. Consider the steps of our liturgy -

Call to Worship – The minister, on behalf of Jesus, summons and welcomes us to worship and we respond. We proceed into His courts with praise. Even then, we are joining with God in song (Psalm 22:22, Zech 3:17). *Do you consciously act as though we (and you as a part of the body) have been summoned? Did you think about preparing to come with this in mind?*

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. An 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 both individually and corporately. We often 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. *Do you understand the need to confess your sins (1 John 1:8-9)? Do you hear the absolution and receive its truth as from God? Do you let this pattern your approach to God throughout the week and whenever you are aware of your sins?*

Consecration (Ascension Offering) – God, by means of His Word and Spirit, cuts us open, rearranges us, sets us right, and welcomes us to do the same with the world. And so we offer up prayers and petitions (Phil 4:6-7, Matt 6:8-15) and then give ourselves to His work upon our hearts (Heb 4:12-13). This is not simply a time to receive the information of a lecture, and so we respond with our AMENs and with singing/praying. *With one eye on the text, do you actively submit yourself to the preached Word? Do you consider through the week what God spoke to you here and let that Word-work continue? Do you receive it in its repetition like good food (1 Pet 2:1-2, Phil 3:1)?*

Communion (Peace Offering) – Christ is not re-sacrificed in any way in the Lord's Supper and there is no veneration of the elements. But, by the Spirit, we really do partake of Christ's body and blood by faith and we do so in a meal of thanksgiving and peace with God. In Christ, we are also given over to the Father and so this is a table of union and communion. We surround this time as well with Word and with singing, welcoming all who have been baptized to come and partake of this time of celebration, peace, and communion with God. *It is not a time for morbid introspection; it is a time of gratitude and fellowship. Do you see it this way?*

Commissioning (Benediction) – In each one of these steps, God initiates and we respond. Even with the commissioning it is so. We respond to all He has done by lifting our hands and giving Him praise. He then sends us with His hands and blessing (Luke 24:50), assuring us that He has already prepared the good works for us to now go and do (Eph 2:10). *Do you leave with a sense of His hand of blessing upon all that is before you this week?*

Your Good Order (Col 2:5) – Having a well thought ought and ordered liturgy serves us well in other ways too. Like an army well prepared for battle, we "*order*" ourselves together around the Lord, preparing to do battle on the world, the flesh, and the devil, through faith in Christ. The liturgy helps us to do this together, trained and focused. By faith, you are summoned to come and join us in the worship of our God. Nothing light and breezy; but everything strong, hopeful, with victory in the wind.