



Systematic Theology

A study of the major doctrines of Scripture

TOPIC 6 – THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
LESSON 122 – ELEMENTS OF WORSHIP: OUR LITURGY
WRITTEN BY PHILLIP M WAY

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Elements of Worship

- ▶ Introduction: When it comes to worship and to ordering our worship services I have long believed that some churches just overdo it. Things are programmed to the point that people run on auto-pilot and the service becomes routine. I must note though that the Bible does instruct us to do things “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40).
- ▶ It is also true that as a Baptist I grew up thinking the word “liturgy” was a bad word! For doing things liturgically I was told was to leave the Holy Spirit out of the working of the church and do things by rote routine. Worship should be spontaneous, right?
- ▶ The truth is though that even a “spontaneous” worship service has a liturgy, for the term simply means the order in which we do things during the worship of God. The word “liturgy” in fact comes from the Greek word *leitourgia* which is defined as “service”, or a religious ritual of service to God. To worship God is to have a liturgy.

Elements of Worship

- ▶ In discussing worship, we must understand that the act of declaring the worthiness of our God is not to be spontaneous, disorganized, or disorderly at all. It is to be heart felt, no doubt, but the Scriptures are clear. Jesus Himself tells us that God desires us to worship Him in spirit and truth (John 4:24). I have dealt in depth with answering the question of what it means to worship in spirit and truth before in studying Seven Marks of a Healthy Church.
- ▶ In ordering our worship then what are we to use as our guide? What or who determines the order and content of our worship of God? Silly question, right? Not so silly when you begin to realize that too many congregations do not give this question a second thought at all. For you see, if our Confession of Faith is correct in instructing us about worship then we must find out how to worship from the Word of God.

Elements of Worship

- ▶ The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689
- ▶ Chapter 22 – Worship:
- ▶ The light of nature shows that there is a God Who has lordship and sovereignty over all, is just and good, and Who does good to all. Therefore He is to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart and all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God has been instituted by Himself, and therefore our method of worship is limited by His own revealed will. He may not be worshipped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan. He may not be worshipped by way of visible representations, or by any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures.

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- ▶ It is the Bible, the written Word of God, that instructs us clearly and abundantly on the topic of the worship of God. He tells us how to worship Him, from the First and Second of the Ten Commandments and throughout the Scriptures. God does not hide the form or content of worship from us.
- ▶ Exodus 20:1 And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 “You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

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- ▶ In our church then, we have gone to the Scriptures to establish our order of worship. What do we do? How do we do it? What is the content of our services as we gather to glorify God through corporate worship? Here are our answers from the Word of God for these questions:
- ▶ Elements of Worship – Acts 2:42; Eph. 5:19; 1 Thess. 5:16-22
- ▶ 1. Preaching (Apostles Doctrine, includes teaching/reading the Word)
- ▶ 2. Fellowship (friendship, discipleship, using our gifts to serve one another)
- ▶ 3. Prayer (and fasting on occasions)
- ▶ 4. Ordinances (Lord's Supper and Baptism)
- ▶ 5. Praise (singing Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs)
- ▶ 6. Thanksgiving (including Giving of Tithes and Offerings)

Elements of Worship

- ▶ Distinctives of our church include following a model for worship regulated by the Holy Scriptures. Following the example given to us in Acts 2:42 we teach the “apostles doctrine” by way of expository preaching and the public reading of the Word of God, we “fellowship” and prove our love for one another in the body as often as we have opportunity, we partake of the ordinances, the Lord’s Table by the “breaking of bread” observing the Lord’s Supper weekly and the Baptism of believers as necessary, and we are a church of “prayer.” We find further direction for corporate worship in Ephesians 5:18-21 in the singing of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” Other elements of our worship include occasions of individual and corporate fasting (Matthew 6:16-18) and the giving of thanks including freely and cheerfully giving our tithes and offerings to the Lord (1 Thess. 5:16-21; 2 Cor 9:6-8). In our worship and our lives we strive to be God focused, Christ exalting, Spirit filled, and Bible centered. Our aim is to glorify God in everything we do – making it a priority to live “by the Book.”

Elements of Worship

- ▶ I must mention here that I do owe a debt to Mark Dever and Paul Alexander and their book *The Deliberate Church* as when I read it I gained a more clear picture of how to incorporate these elements into the flow of a worship service. Before reading the book we had these elements present, but after this book we now have a more structured and deliberate use of these elements in the worship of God.
- ▶ In carrying out this vision for worship we do indeed have a deliberate format, it is a liturgy built upon the regulations of the Word of God for the worship of God. As Dever and Alexander describe it, worship is not only to be regulated by the Word of God, but it is to be saturated with the Word of God. This is accomplished as we spend time each week in our worship service doing the following:

Elements of Worship

- ▶ Worship Regulated by the Word of God
- ▶ 1. Read the Word
- ▶ 2. Preach the Word
- ▶ 3. Pray the Word
- ▶ 4. Sing the Word
- ▶ 5. See the Word (ordinances)
- ▶ 6. Live the Word (fellowship)

Elements of Worship

- ▶ Each Sunday we work to order the service in such a way that we obey the Word and fulfill the expectations and commands of God given to us therein. We approach Him with reverence, humility, and faith. And we depend upon the Holy Spirit to guide us through the Word so that we might not grieve or quench the Spirit, or otherwise interfere with His Work as He points us all to Christ.
- ▶ When it comes to public prayer I have often seen that this is done without much forethought. Someone is asked or appointed to pray at a certain time during the service and they just wing it. At times this is good and God is honored and the people blessed by the prayer. At other times there is a need for debriefing and damage control after some public prayers. Of course, Ravenhill, Tozer, and others have stated that the secret to powerful public prayer is a deep and flourishing private prayer life.

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- ▶ I do not prefer to write prayers out, but I am more and more convinced that conversations with God in a public setting need to be something for which we have planned and prepared. Some do write their prayers out. In fact, some of my heroes, including Peter Marshall, wrote their prayers out before hand. Charles Spurgeon wrote prayers out for the fathers in his church to pray during their times of family worship and even compiled these prayers and published them along with Bible readings, lessons, devotionals, and songs to sing to praise God. He gave this book to the families in his church with the expectation that they would use it daily.
- ▶ A helpful tool for remembering how to pray in public comes from remembering “ACTS”, meaning prayers of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication.

Elements of Worship

- ▶ Taking then the elements of worship as they are practiced and regulated by the Word of God, we have refined our liturgy, our order of service, so that we worship God very deliberately. Here then is the Order of Worship for our church. This is how we worship God “decently and in order” each time we meet, fulfilling the commands of the Word of God and offering worship that we pray and hope is acceptable to Him. We do not seek to please men or each other and we certainly do not seek to please the lost or those who are living in rebellion to God and His Word. In other words, our worship is God focused! We come to give, not get, and everything we do is based upon the Word of God.

Elements of Worship

- ▶ Prepare for Worship – see article: [“Does Your Worship Please God?”](#)
- ▶ Call to Worship (Sing the Word)
- ▶ Prayer of Adoration (Pray the Word)
- ▶ Old Testament Scripture Reading (Read the Word)
- ▶ Singing Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs (Sing the Word)
- ▶ New Testament Scripture Reading (Read the Word)
- ▶ Prayer of Supplication and Thanksgiving (Pray the Word)
- ▶ Expository Sermon (Preach and Hear the Word)
- ▶ Prayer of Confession (Pray the Word)
- ▶ The Lord's Supper (See the Word)
- ▶ Closing Hymn (Sing the Word)
- ▶ Benediction (Read the Word)

Elements of Worship

- ▶ Some have noted that in this printed order of worship there is no place for the collecting of tithes and offerings. We do strongly uphold the Biblical commands to give offerings to the Lord when we meet for worship on the first day of the week. And to do so we have chosen to utilize an offering box. The box is placed in the back of the room where we meet for worship and people are free to drop their tithes and offerings in at any point coming or going to the service. We do not see anything inherently wrong with passing a plate, but we have decided that it is best for us for a number of reasons to allow people an opportunity to give their gifts out of the public eye.

Elements of Worship

- ▶ I do hope this has helped explain why we do what we do when we meet for worship. And I hope it gives other congregations and pastors an opportunity to evaluate their liturgy by the expectations of Scripture. Again, we are not saying that this is the only order of service to acceptably worship God. We are however saying that the elements mentioned are necessary if we are to offer worship that is pleasing to God as regulated by His Word.
- ▶ That, after all, is the whole point, right? To exalt, magnify, and glorify our gracious God.
- ▶ Next Week: Hermeneutics – Biblical Interpretation – Lesson 123 - Preaching and Teaching: Exposition