



WORSHIP AT CROSSROADS

**An Introduction and Commentary
on the Liturgy of Crossroads Presbyterian Fellowship**

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Introduction

The welcome and introduction in our worship bulletin each week begins: "Corporate worship at Crossroads Presbyterian Fellowship is the central event in our church's life together that restores and shapes our whole lives in the pattern of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Is this true? What happens in corporate worship that makes it so important and powerful? And how should we participate in corporate worship in order to reap these benefits more fully in our lives?

To find the answer to these questions, we must seek a deeper understanding of the church's worship. Worship is something that must be learned. We do not automatically know what corporate worship is or how to participate in it simply because we are humans made in God's image or even because we are Christians who trust and follow Jesus Christ. That is why God has given us such careful instruction about it in the Bible and why Christians have devoted such careful attention to developing biblically sound and substantive liturgies throughout the history of the church.

This booklet will provide you with an introduction and orientation to the liturgy of Crossroads Presbyterian Fellowship. **If you want quick answers to questions about specific aspects of our corporate worship at Crossroads, you should turn immediately to Chapter 4, which provides a step-by-step explanation of each component in the worship service that we follow each Sunday. Chapters 1-3 provide the basic biblical and historical foundations for the order of service in Crossroads' liturgy.**

My prayer is that you will gain a firm confidence that our liturgy at Crossroads has solid support in Scripture and in ancient church traditions that apply the Scriptures wisely. I also hope that a deeper understanding of the meaning of our liturgy will lead you to participate more actively and enthusiastically in the worship of our great God.

(But first, a note about terminology: For many people, the term "liturgy" has connotations of a formal, scripted worship that is dry, mechanical, spiritually lifeless, and mindlessly mumbled by rote. Rest assured that that is NOT what I mean by this term! I simply use the word "liturgy" in its most general sense to refer to the content and order of a service of corporate worship. In this sense, every church that has an order of service has a liturgy, whether that liturgy is formal or informal, written down or performed in "spontaneous" fashion, "high church" or "low church.")

CHAPTER 1

Old Testament Foundations for Corporate Worship

At Crossroads, our liturgy each Sunday follows a regular pattern that has deep roots in the Bible and in ancient and widespread practices of worship throughout the history of the Christian church. This first chapter provides a brief overview of the roots of our corporate worship in the Old Testament.

Garden of Eden

From the beginning of creation, God has set aside special times and places to meet with his people in a very direct way. The garden of Eden was the first sanctuary where God revealed his presence in a particularly clear and powerful fashion. There he made himself uniquely accessible to Adam and Eve so that he could draw them near and so that they could come to know him personally as Father, King, and Friend. Adam and Eve walked and talked with God in a direct, face-to-face manner and they received the Tree of Life for food in that garden sanctuary. Thus, their relationship with God was conducted by hearing the word of God spoken and explained to them (i.e., a ministry of the **word of God**), talking with God in response to his word (i.e., the response of **prayer**), and eating special symbolic food that communicated life with God (i.e., a **sacrament**), all of which instructed and strengthened them for working and ruling over the rest of creation (Gen 1:26-28).

Altars & Sacrifices

After our first parents sinned and were cast out of the garden, sinful human beings continued to know and worship God, but they could only do so by means of sacrifice. Noah (Gen 8:20), Abraham (Gen 12:8; 13:4; 13:18), Isaac (Gen 26:25) and Jacob (Gen 33:20; 35:1-7) built altars to burn animals as the means by which they drew near to God. The story in Genesis 22 clarifies the meaning of these animals: a ram was killed in the place of Abraham's son Isaac, which teaches us that the sacrificial animals were representatives for people. The animals died and ascended to God as substitutes through whom sinful people could approach God and know him.

Thus, God continued to conduct his relationship with his people according to the same fundamental pattern of worship established at the beginning of creation, even though the form had changed to overcome the barriers created by human sin and separation from God. Altars became places where people heard God speak (word of God) and called upon the name of the Lord (prayer), and sacrifices became the tangible means through which God forgave the sins of his people and received them into special communion with him (sacrament).

Tabernacle and Temple

When God delivered the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from slavery in Egypt and established them as the nation of Israel, he created a more elaborate system of

corporate worship for them. The center of this system was a house for God. God built his own house in Israel to show his people that had come to dwell in their midst and to draw them near in unprecedented ways. God's first house was the **Tabernacle**, a portable tent suitable for traveling with his people in the wilderness en route to the promised land of Canaan. When Israel had settled in Canaan and become a true kingdom, God replaced the Tabernacle with the **Temple**, a greater and more permanent house in the capital city of Jerusalem. Although God certainly cannot be contained in a physical structure (1 Kgs 8:27), nevertheless the Tabernacle and Temple were places where God made his presence known more clearly and powerfully than anywhere else and where God made himself more accessible for direct relational encounter than anywhere else.

The Tabernacle and Temple were carefully constructed with expensive materials and fine artistry according to very precise plans (e.g., Exod 25–31, 1 Kgs 6–7). The Bible devotes such detailed attention to the structure of the building because its makeup contains multiple layers of theological meaning. First, the Tabernacle and Temple were the **palace** of Yahweh, the Great King of Israel and Lord of heaven and earth. At its center was a room (the Most Holy Place) containing the ark of the covenant that was throne room of God (Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Isa 6:1–5, Ps 11:4; 80:1; 99:1). Second, the dazzling materials (gold, silver, jewels) and the many images of angels throughout the structure made it a symbol of **heaven on earth**. Thus, the book of Hebrews describes the tabernacle as an earthly copy of heaven (Heb 8:1–5). Third, the images of plants and trees in its decorations and furnishings and the descriptions of its function as a holy place to meet with God parallel the account of the **garden** of Eden. Also, several features made the Tabernacle and Temple a symbolic **Mt. Sinai**: the altar at the entrance, the division of the structure into zones with restricted access, and the presence of the ark of the covenant with the Ten Commandments inside (cf. Ps 68:17).¹

This theological symbolism built into the very structure of the Tabernacle and Temple communicated the deep cosmic and historical significance of corporate worship that occurred there. This was the place where the people of God were to gather regularly to experience the presence and power of heaven revealed in their midst. When Israelites gathered at the Tabernacle or Temple, they drew near to the special presence and glory of the Great King of all heaven and earth. There they had an audience before his heavenly throne in order to receive his wisdom, life, and power for living as his royal people and blessing all nations by sharing their knowledge of the one true Creator God. As a new garden sanctuary, the Tabernacle and Temple were part of the new creation that God was restoring in the world through Israel. In their worship at God's house, they received a (partially) restored access to the special presence of God that Adam and Eve had known in the beginning and from which they had been banished when they sinned. Finally, Israel could return continually to their symbolic Mt. Sinai to encounter the same revelation of God's presence and glory that had occurred on the mountain in order for God to continually renew and maintain the covenant relationship that He had established with Israel there.

Liturgy of Sacrifices

God not only drew near to Israel by building his house in their midst, he also established a liturgy of different sacrifices to provide a way for the people of God to approach him and know him. Contrary to popular misconceptions, sacrifices are not human gifts given to God to appease and manipulate him by supplying something he lacks or desires. The God of the Bible is the Creator and King of heaven and earth who lacks nothing and supplies human beings with every good thing including life itself. Indeed, he mocked Israel's attempts to control him with sacrifices when they lived the rest of their lives in high rebellion against him (see e.g., Ps 50; Amos 5; Isa 1).

In Israel's worship, animal sacrifices were to be God's gracious means for drawing his people near to himself. The primary Hebrew term used to describe the various offerings is *qorban* which means "that which is brought near" (e.g. Lev 1:2). Thus, the ultimate purpose of sacrifice was not merely to grant atonement and forgiveness for sins. The final goal was to be a way of grace through which God drew his people into his special presence to enjoy communion with him in a dynamic and deeply personal relationship of life and love. In other words, sacrifices were the way that God renewed and sustained the bond of the covenant with his people (Ps 50:5).

Bloody sacrifices were necessary because sinful people cannot approach the holy Creator God without a way to overcome the alienation that results from sin. However, God graciously supplied a remedy by means of representatives through whom God accepted and loved those who came to him with faith. In Israel's worship, the animals played this mediatorial role. The liturgy of sacrifice stressed this when the worshiper identified himself and his sins with the animal by placing his hands on the animal and then killing it (e.g., Lev 1:4-5; 3:2; 4:4, etc.). By receiving the animal, God covered the sins of the worshiper with mercy by accepting the death of the animal as his substitute, and he then drew the worshiper near to himself as his friend and companion.

God spelled out the particular way he drew his people near by establishing a specific order of worship with a consistent sequence of different kinds of sacrifices. When Israel gathered for worship at the Tabernacle or Temple, the sequence of the sacrificial liturgy was always the following:²

1. Sin/Purification offering
2. Ascension offering
3. Tribute offering
4. Peace offering

(For examples of the full sequence, see Lev 8-9; 2 Chron 29).

While each sacrifice began with the death of an animal, the subsequent actions with the animals differed in order to accomplish the various effects described by their distinctive names (see Lev 1-7 for details about each sacrifice). In the **Sin/Purification** offering, the display of blood on the altar was the most prominent feature of the ritual. This was to signify the forgiveness and purification of the worshiper by the death of the animal. The **Ascension** offering³ symbolized (1) his complete (re)commitment to God by cutting up and burning the

entire animal, and (2) his complete transformation and ascent to the heavenly presence of God as the animal turned into smoke that ascended to heaven and became a pleasing aroma to God (Lev 1). The Ascension offering was followed immediately by a **Tribute** offering consisting of bread and incense placed on top of the burning animal. These symbols represent the self-offering of the worshipper through the tangible gifts of the fruit of his labor and prayer (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4). The conclusion to this liturgy of sacrifices was the **Peace** offering, which was a meal shared by God (represented by the priest) and the worshippers. The choice meat of this sacrifice was eaten as a joyful celebration of peace and friendship with God at his altar-table.

This sequence of sacrifices mirrors the sequence of events by which God made his covenant relationship with Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exod 24). After Moses received God's word on Mt. Sinai, he led the people of Israel in covenant-making worship ceremony. The ceremony began as Moses splashed blood upon the altar at the mountain, which was an act that always signified cleansing and purification. Moses then read to the whole assembly the entire word of God that he had received when he ascended to the summit of Mt. Sinai. In response to God's word, Israel offered themselves to God with a solemn oath of faith, loyalty, and commitment to God and the obligations of the covenant. The covenant relationship was then sealed with a special meal eaten by Moses, Aaron and his sons, and some elders of Israel in the special presence of God on the mountain. This order of events at Sinai parallels the sequence of sacrifices in the Tabernacle/Temple liturgy and also clarifies the function of those sacrifices as a means of renewing and strengthening the covenant relationship:

1. Cleansing/Purification (24:6): Purification offering
2. Ascension & consecration via God's word (24:7): Ascension offering
3. Oath of commitment in response to God's word (24:7-8): Tribute offering
4. Meal with God in His presence (24:9-11): Peace offering

At the Tabernacle, this basic four-fold core of the liturgy began with a call to worship and finished with a blessing or benediction (see e.g., Lev. 9). Thus, the full sequence of sacrifices presented in the Old Testament follows this order:

1. **Call to worship:** God summons his people to corporate worship.
2. **Purification:** God cleanses his people and forgives their sins.
3. **Consecration/Ascension:** God enables his people to "ascend" into his special presence to participate in the worship of heaven. God consecrates the worshipers, setting them apart to a renewed commitment to him and the mission of his kingdom.
4. **Offering:** Worshipers respond with renewed love and loyalty to God and his kingdom with material gifts and prayer.
5. **Communion:** God serves the worshipers a sacred meal at his table and eats with them to celebrate peace and friendship with them.
6. **Blessing:** God sends his people out to serve him with his blessing.

Thus, the Bible does present a basic liturgy or order of corporate worship. This consistent ritual sequence is the way of grace by which God renewed and maintained his covenant relationship with Israel and drew them into his special presence.

CHAPTER 2

Old Testament Worship Fulfilled in Jesus and the Church

But what does all of this discussion about worship in the Old Testament have to do with Christian worship? What possible instruction and guidance about Christian worship can we get from the worship of the Tabernacle and Temple?

At first glance, the answer to those questions might seem to be, “Not much.” The accounts of early Christian worship in the New Testament are in many ways quite different from the Old. There is no explicitly prescribed Christian liturgy or order of worship in the New Testament, and there are no detailed instructions for corporate worship like God gave to Israel in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy. Christian practices also appear to have changed. Christians did not build a physical temple to replace or rival the Temple in Jerusalem, and they no longer burned animals on altars to worship God. The New Testament emphatically declares that the history of the people of God that began in the Old Testament is completed in Jesus and the Christian church. Therefore, Jesus and the apostles declared the old Jewish system of worship described in the Old Testament to be obsolete because it had been fulfilled and transformed by Jesus.

The New Testament contains only some brief references to the corporate worship practices of the early church as well as some commands to engage in particular acts of corporate worship. The day for corporate worship shifted from the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday (called the Lord’s Day) to commemorate Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10). The main elements of worship were the following:

- Ministry of the **word** of God in the reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13) and the preaching/teaching of Scripture to explain and apply its meaning (Acts 2:42; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1–5)
- Responding to God’s word in **prayer** (Acts 2:42; 4:23–31; 1 Cor 11; 14; 1 Tim 2:1–8), which includes singing songs of praise and thanks to God (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19; 1 Cor 14:26)
- The **sacrament** of the Lord’s Supper (Matt 26:26–28/Mark 14:22–25/Luke 22:14–23; Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Cor 10:16–18; 11:17–34)

Some Christians have concluded that this is all that the Bible has to teach us about the form of Christian worship. They interpret the relative brevity of the New Testament teaching on matters of liturgy to mean that the order and manner of corporate worship is unimportant. On this view, after the coming of Jesus God is no longer concerned with the form and structure of corporate worship; all that is important now is the attitude of the heart.

A closer analysis, however, reveals that the New Testament explains the theological meaning of the church and of Christian acts of worship by referring to the very Old Testament system of worship that many Christians believe to be irrelevant. Jesus’ fulfillment of worship in the Old Testament does not completely abolish it or make it irrelevant for Christians. The Old Testament remains part of the Christian Bible because it is Christian revelation that speaks of Christ and the church. Israel’s sacrificial worship was a preparatory stage in God’s plan to teach them how God would ultimately deal with human sin and restore us to communion with God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Jesus did indeed radically transform the form of worship for a new era in God's plan. Nevertheless, Christian worship incorporates many principles and patterns found in the sacrificial worship of the Tabernacle and Temple because the Old Testament forms were always already an anticipation and foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

Thus, the fundamental patterns of the Old Testament continue to be relevant even as the concrete forms of worship change, and we know this because the New Testament itself repeatedly uses categories and metaphors from Old Testament worship to explain the work of Jesus Christ. It is the New Testament itself that points Christians back to the forms of Old Testament worship for further details to explain and guide our worship in Christ. The following sections explain how reading the New Testament in light of the Old yields a biblical framework and order for Christian worship.

New Tabernacle/Temple

While the Tabernacle and Jerusalem Temple were destroyed and those structures and places no longer have any special significance or role in Christian worship (Matt 24:1-2; John 4:16-26), Jesus declared that he himself is the new temple (John 1:14; 2:19-22). The ultimate revelation of God's presence and glory is no longer found in a building but rather in a human person. In the person of Jesus, God has taken on a human nature to dwell among us in flesh and blood that the world might know him more fully and clearly than ever before.

The New Testament also describes the church of Jesus Christ as the new temple because Jesus' presence, life, and power are found in the community of his followers, which is the very body of Christ in the world (1 Cor 12:12-27). The Christian church is God's new house, the temple of the Holy Spirit where God dwells with his people (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph; 2:19-22; Heb; 8:1-2; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 21:3).

This means that the same cosmic and historical significance of worship at the old Tabernacle and Temple in the Old Testament now continues in an even greater and more glorious way in the church of Christ. When Christians gather in corporate worship as God's earthly church-temple, we participate in the worship of **heaven** at the true heavenly tabernacle/temple (Heb 8:2; 9:12, 24; 10:19-24; 12:18-29; cf. Rev 15:5-6) where Jesus leads us as the new high priest (Heb 2:17; 4:14-5:10; 8:1; 9:11). In the church, Christians come to the heavenly Jerusalem where we worship together with "innumerable angels in festal gathering" and the "assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb 12:22-23; cf. Rev 1:10-18; 4:1-5:14; 7:9-17; 15:1-6). The heavenly Jerusalem is a **garden**-city with a Tree of Life at its center for the healing of the nations (Rev. 21:9; 22:1-3), and Christians are the new humanity of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17) formed in the image of God found in Jesus, the Second Adam (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:45-49). Thus, it is in the church where the fellowship with God lost in the garden of Eden is fully restored. Whereas the Tabernacle and Temple sanctuary (on Mt. Zion in Jerusalem) had been a symbolic Mt. Sinai (Ps 68:17), the church is now the new Israel and the new **Mt. Zion** where God reveals himself even more spectacularly than at Mt. Sinai (Heb 12:18-29).

Thus, the spiritual reality of God's presence that Israel encountered at Tabernacle and Temple is now found in the assembly of the Christian church. In the worship of the church, God continues to grant his people a special audience at his heavenly throne to draw us near

so that we might receive his wisdom, life, and power for living as his royal people and participating with him in his mission to rescue his whole creation from slavery to sin, Satan, and death.

New Sacrifices by New Priests

With a new temple comes new sacrifices offered by a new priesthood. The New Testament not only identifies Jesus and the church as the new place where God's presence is known, it also presents Jesus and the worship of the Christian church as the new system of sacrifice and priesthood by which the people of God enter and enjoy God's presence.

Jesus himself fulfills all of Israel's sacrifices in the pattern of his life. Jesus' narrative follows the same basic sequence of the Old Testament liturgy of sacrifices in order to establish the new covenant with the new Israel, the church:

1. **Purification:** Jesus lived as the unblemished Lamb of God (John 1:29) and died as a substitute for sinners (Heb 9-10). Romans 8:3 explicitly identifies Jesus' death as a sin/purification offering. As our priest, Jesus also displays his own blood before the Father (Heb 9:11-28).
2. **Consecration/Ascension:** Jesus rose from the dead with an immortal body of new glory and power transformed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 15). He ascended to the Father to serve in His presence as our substitute and high priest (Luke 24; Acts 1-2; Heb 7-10).
3. **Communion:** The ascended Christ poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church in order to be with us in this present age (Acts 2; John 14:15-31), and he will return to consummate his communion with us in the wedding supper of the Lamb (Rev 19), an event already anticipated in the present in the Lord's Supper through which we eat and drink with Christ and receive the very life of his body and blood in the communion meal (1 Cor 10:16-17).

Thus, the entire work of Jesus follows the sacrificial sequence of the Old Testament liturgy from his death to resurrection and ascension to sending the Holy Spirit to seal his communion with his body, the church.

The church also worships as a priesthood engaged in sacrifice. Just like the priests in the Old Testament, the whole church is a priesthood (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1:6, 5:10) that passes through the torn veil of the Temple to enter into the inner sanctuary of the heavenly tabernacle (Heb 10:19-25). As a church of priests, we draw near to God confident of his gracious reception as we plead only the blood shed on our behalf, the sacrifice of Jesus the Lamb of God (Eph 5:2; Heb 9:26; 10:12).

Furthermore, the coming of Christ does not mean that sacrificial worship has ceased in the church. Rather, as a priesthood the church offers herself to God in Christ as a "living sacrifice" (Rom 12:1). Not only is Christian service to God described as an offering of sacrifices (Phil 2:17; 4:18), but also concrete acts of worship in the liturgical assembly are acts of sacrifice. Indeed, all the major elements of corporate worship (the word of God, responses

of prayer and offering of gifts, and sacramental meals) receive a sacrificial description and interpretation in the New Testament.

First, the New Testament repeatedly images the ministry of the **word** with a sword (e.g., Eph 6:17; Rev 1:16; 2:12) that splits the “joints and marrow” of believers’ hearts as they submit to its active and searching scrutiny (Heb 4:12) just as sacrificial animals underwent a similar cutting of a knife. Second, acts of **prayer**, praise, and thanksgiving are called sacrifices (Rev 8:3–5; Heb 13:14–15; 1 Pet 2:5, 9). Third, **material gifts** given for the service of God are described as sacrifices acceptable and pleasing to God (Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16). Finally, the **sacrament** of the Lord’s Supper is portrayed as a sacrificial act (specifically, as the new covenant form of Passover and of the peace offerings in general, of which Passover was one particular type). The symbolism of body and blood offered, separated, blood poured out, and body eaten clearly recapitulates the procedures employed in animal sacrifices (Lev 1–7). And just as the Old Testament liturgy of sacrifices culminated in a sacred meal at God’s table, the Lord’s Supper functions in the same way. The apostle Paul draws a direct parallel between the Lord’s Supper and the peace offerings that Israel ate at God’s altar (1 Cor 10:16–18).⁴

So what? How is this relevant or helpful for Christian worship? This New Testament use of the Old Testament categories of temple, priesthood, and sacrifice implies that we need the whole Bible to develop a fully biblical theology and practice of Christian worship. Specifically, it means that Christians have good biblical reasons to use the Old Testament as a source for deriving liturgical principles and patterns for Christian worship, even when those principles and patterns are not explicitly repeated in the New Testament itself. We have solid biblical grounds to read the Old Testament as a Christian book that provides norms for life in covenant relationship with God, including liturgical norms that govern the way God renews and maintains his covenant bond with the church in worship.⁵

Some major aspects of worship that the Old Testament helps us understand are the purpose/goal of corporate worship and the proper order or sequence for Christian worship services. We have already observed that the Old Testament consistently sets forth a definite sequence of worship in the liturgy of sacrifices celebrated at the Tabernacle and Temple. Since the Old Testament sacrificial system reveals the way that God established his covenant in Jesus Christ and draws us near to himself through the sacrifice and priestly ministry of Christ, this order remains an indispensable guide for arranging the sequence of the elements of Christian worship into the fullest and most coherent biblical pattern of covenant renewal. Even though we now do different things than ancient Israel did, those actions have the same meaning as the actions in the Old Testament ceremonies. Therefore, the sequence of sacrifices in the Old Testament provides a framework for the order of Christian liturgy.

The theological symbolism of that sequence must be translated in light of the work of Christ into forms suitable for Christian worship. When we translate that pattern into Christian acts of worship that have the same theological meaning and effect as the different sacrifices in the Old Testament, the following liturgy emerges:

1. **Call to Worship:** God summons us to the assembly to worship.
2. **Purification:** We confess our sins and God cleanses us in Christ by forgiving our sins on the basis of Jesus’ death as our substitute.

3. **Consecration/Ascension:** God enables us to “ascend” to heaven through the Spirit and having a special audience with the ascended Lord Jesus where we lift up our hearts with joyful praise to join the worship of heaven around his heavenly throne (Eph 2:6; Col 3:1–3; Heb 12:18–24; Rev 1; 4–5). In that context, God speaks to us in the reading and preaching of his word in Scripture, which transforms us and re-consecrates our lives by calling us afresh to embrace our new life and identity in Christ and to live in a way that is consistent with that identity (Heb 4:12).
4. **Offering:** We respond to the ministry of the word of God by offering ourselves to God in prayer, by confessing our renewed faith, love, and loyalty to God, and by giving material gifts of money and goods to serve the mission of Jesus’ kingdom.
5. **Communion:** We eat at God’s table where God celebrates peace and friendship with us by serving us nothing less than his own life in the person of Jesus Christ. In this sacred meal, Jesus is both the host who presides and the food which we receive through bread and wine.
6. **Blessing:** God sends us out into the world to serve him with his blessing.

This is the framework for the liturgy of Crossroads Presbyterian Fellowship. The content and order of our services of corporate worship have their most fundamental foundations in the deep structures of God’s covenant with his people throughout the whole Bible. As we follow this six-fold liturgical sequence each week, we become participants in the ancient liturgical pattern by which God has renewed his covenant in Tabernacle, Temple, and church.

Christian worship is not a mere repetition of Old Testament patterns, however. Jesus’ fulfillment of Israel’s worship in his own person brings about a startling new transformation and depth to that Old Testament system so that the contrast of Old and New is like the difference between shadow and reality. Jesus is the divine Son of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, who took on a human nature. Therefore, he is fully God and fully man. As God, he is the one we worship (together with the Father and the Holy Spirit). As man, he is also the one who leads us in worship offering to God a perfect human response of faith and love. Indeed, Jesus is the Second Adam, the most fully and truly human person who ever lived. He loves, worships, and obeys the Father perfectly, restoring a perfect, sinless relationship between God and man and bringing that relationship to its full maturity and glory.

Jesus is also the true Israel who fulfills but yet reconfigures Israel’s system of worship in new ways. As God, he is the true temple, the ultimate revelation and embodiment of the presence of God in the world. As man, he is both priest and sacrifice in one person. Therefore, he not only deserves and demands our worship (because he is God) but he has also offered perfect worship to God as our representative (as our high priest and sacrifice). He has done for us what we could not do for ourselves, and thus he is the one true mediator between God and man. As James Torrance writes, “There is only one true Priest through whom we and with whom we draw near to God our Father....There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours....There is only one who can lead us into the presence of the Father by his sacrifice on the cross.”⁶ The perfect God-human relationship of worship now exists in the relationships between God the Father, God the Holy Spirit and the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Our participation in worship, therefore, is always a response and a sharing in what Jesus has already done for us in his death and resurrection and continues to do for us in heaven. He bore the full weight of our sin on the cross, and he continues to bear our sorrows and joys, failures and triumphs in his priestly prayers before the Father. Our death is swallowed up and undone by the immortality of his resurrected life. Our flawed, broken lives and unworthy worship are cleansed by Christ so that the Father receives us with joy. He completes and perfects our prayer and praise, and he makes his prayers our prayers. In him, we are loved and accepted as true children and heirs of God.

The offering of our lives to God in worship is only possible because we are united to Christ by the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit dwells within us, Jesus Christ lives in us, and we in him, and thus we share in Christ's life and worship before God the Father. Our praise, thanksgiving, and prayers are the fruit of Christ's own faith, love, and hope produced in us by the Holy Spirit as a gift of God's unmerited favor toward us.

Therefore, our worship is nothing less than our participation in the very life and relationships of the Holy Trinity! In the liturgy, we receive "the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father."⁷ The eternal life and communion of mutual loving, mutual self-giving, mutual honoring and glorifying between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is now open to embrace humanity and the whole creation through the God-man, Jesus Christ. In worship, God raises us up by word and sacrament to draw us near so that we can participate in his triune life and mission to the world! This union and communion with the Holy Trinity, which we experience in the liturgy and in the life and ministry of the church in general, is the source and summit of God's covenant with us and the goal of all creation.

CHAPTER 3

Historical Development of Christian Worship

The biblical framework for Christian liturgy described in chapters 1–2 became the classic shape of Christian worship. The most ancient, enduring, and widespread pattern of Christian liturgy in the history of the Christian faith is the sequence of word, prayer, and sacrament that forms the heart of the biblical liturgy of covenant renewal.

The chart on the following page demonstrates this profound historical continuity by listing the order of worship found in three different sources and traditions spanning the first 1600 years of the church's history. I have added the headings (in all capital letters) to break down each liturgy into its components and to highlight the common structure of each order of service.

Justin Martyr was a Christian philosopher who lived in Rome during the mid-second century A.D. In his *First Apology*, Justin wrote to the Roman emperor to explain Christian beliefs and practices and defend them from wild rumors and false accusations of various non-Christian critics. At the end of this work, he provided a two-paragraph summary of the order of corporate worship in the Roman churches, which is the earliest extant description of a complete Christian liturgy. Even in this brief account, the core of the biblical liturgical sequence is clearly discernible as the service moves from the reading and preaching of Scripture to prayers of intercession to its conclusion in the Lord's Supper.

As Christian worship developed over time, the liturgy became more elaborate in detail and ceremony, but the core actions remained the same. The middle column of the chart shows the basic liturgical framework that emerged in the Latin-speaking western half of the Roman empire and in western Europe during the medieval period. As Christian worship matured, the full biblical order of covenant renewal appeared more explicitly in the entrance rituals, a confession of sin and plea for God's forgiveness, and a concluding blessing added to the core sequence of word, prayer, and sacrament.

Most of the major traditions of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century continued to affirm and practice the basic pattern of Christian worship inherited from the early and medieval church. Although Lutheran, Anglican, and Reformed/Presbyterian churches differed in matters of music and ceremonial details, they generally shared a common commitment to the classical shape of Christian worship in confession, word, prayer, and Lord's Supper.

Justin Martyr (2nd Century)	Western Liturgy (4th-16th Centuries)	John Calvin (1542)
<p>ENTRANCE (CALL TO WORSHIP) Gathering</p>	<p>ENTRANCE (CALL TO WORSHIP) Procession & Introit (psalm) Opening dialogue</p>	<p>ENTRANCE (CALL TO WORSHIP) Opening dialogue</p>
	<p>PURIFICATION Confession of Sin Declaration of Forgiveness <i>Kyrie eleison</i></p>	<p>PURIFICATION Confession of Sin Declaration of Forgiveness</p>
<p>CONSECRATION/ ASCENSION</p> <p>Scripture Reading (OT and/or NT)</p> <p>Sermon</p>	<p>CONSECRATION/ ASCENSION <i>Gloria in excelsis</i> (sung) Collect prayer Scripture Reading (OT, Psalm [sung], NT Epistle, NT Gospel) Sermon</p>	<p>CONSECRATION/ ASCENSION Decalogue or Psalm (sung) Prayer for illumination Scripture Reading</p> <p>Sermon</p>
<p>OFFERING Prayers of Intercession Kiss of Peace</p>	<p>OFFERING Nicene Creed (Prayers of Intercession)</p>	<p>OFFERING Offering for poor Prayers of Intercession (+ Lord's Prayer) Apostles' Creed (sung)</p>
<p>COMMUNION Offerings of bread and wine Communion Prayer</p> <p>Communion Giving of offerings/ gifts</p>	<p>COMMUNION Procession with offerings of bread and wine Communion Prayer (+ Prayers of Intercession + Lord's Prayer) Kiss of peace Communion</p> <p>Prayer of thanksgiving</p>	<p>COMMUNION Words of Institution & Warning Communion Prayer</p> <p>Communion</p> <p>Prayer of thanksgiving</p>
	<p>BLESSING Benediction</p>	<p>BLESSING Benediction</p>

The third column of the chart shows the order of worship established by French Reformed pastor and theologian John Calvin in the city of Geneva, Switzerland. Calvin was perhaps the most influential founder of the Reformed/Presbyterian tradition, and his Genevan liturgy had a substantial impact on Reformed/Presbyterian worship. Although Calvin was critical of many aspects of worship in the Middle Ages, he clearly maintained the ancient shape of Christian worship from the pre-Reformation traditions. A comparison with the liturgy of Crossroads reveals that Crossroads' order of worship has its roots not only in biblical and ancient Christian patterns but also in the fundamental sources of our own Reformed/Presbyterian tradition.

The form of Crossroads' liturgy is an expression of our commitment to the primary liturgical ideals of the Reformation. Those ideals included the following:

1. Biblical and Classical Christian Worship: Many early Reformed leaders were trained in the ideals and methods of Renaissance humanism. A central feature of Renaissance scholarship was a devotion to ancient sources pre-dating the later medieval era. Thus, Christian humanist scholars edited and published new editions of texts of the Bible, the early church fathers, and other classical Greek and Roman literature in their original languages. Drawing upon these resources, the Reformers came to believe that some developments in theology, liturgy, and piety during the medieval period had obscured and distorted the purity of the gospel. Thus, they sought to renew the church by removing the excesses and errors that had accumulated in the church's thought and practice by recovering models of church life from an earlier period that followed God's word with greater fidelity and purity. This meant a new focus on:

- **The Bible:** Reformed leaders sought to reform worship by stripping away everything that did not have firm biblical foundations. They restored a central role to the reading and preaching of Scripture in worship. At Crossroads, we stand in this tradition by following the order of biblical patterns of liturgy, by giving a prominent place to the reading and preaching of Scripture in the service, and by a copious use Scripture in the prayers and praise of the church.
- **Early Church Traditions:** The Reformers were not revolutionaries who jettisoned church tradition altogether. Rather, they sought to reform the liturgical traditions they inherited from the early church while maintaining continuity with the best of that tradition. Indeed, the Reformers appealed to the early church and sought to model their liturgies on ancient Christian sources because they believed that these earlier models preserved the purity of biblical worship established by Jesus and the apostles. At Crossroads, we demonstrate our historical roots in the ancient heritage of the Christian faith by the ancient structure of our service as well as our use of ancient creeds and prayers.

2. Grace-centered and Christ-centered Worship: Reformed ministers stressed the sovereignty and glory of God and the church's access to God through Christ. Their Christ-centered focus resulted in the following emphases:

- **Word & Sacrament:** John Calvin, Martin Bucer, and other early Reformed leaders stressed the importance and intrinsic connection and complementarity between the

ministry of both the word of God and sacrament of the Lord's Supper as concrete means through which we encounter the risen Christ and receive Christ by faith. Thus, Calvin was an ardent advocate of **weekly communion**, and Crossroads practices that early Reformed ideal in our weekly services.

- **Liturgical Calendar:** Early Reformed churches celebrated the major festivals of the annual liturgical calendar (Advent & Christmas, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost), which helped keep the church centered on Christ. At Crossroads, we also celebrate these festivals (and others, too) with special prayers, songs, banners, and colors.

3. **Active, Intelligent Participation in the Liturgy by the Whole Church:** The Reformers sought to restore the biblical and early church model of corporate worship as the privilege and responsibility of the whole people of God. Thus, they overturned several medieval developments and promoted the active, intelligent participation of the congregation in a variety of ways:

- **Spoken or Sung Responses for the Whole Congregation:** At Crossroads, we strive to make every congregational response a truly corporate one so that everyone participates and the liturgy expresses the unity of the whole church as we speak and sing together with one voice.

- **Liturgies with Fixed Structures:** Protestants pioneered the production of liturgical service books with fixed liturgical texts for use by both the minister and the congregation. They did this so that worship could be well-planned and theologically substantive, and also so that it could be a truly corporate event in which the whole people of God could participate actively and intelligently in every part of the service. At Crossroads, our liturgy follows a set, structured format with an order and several elements that do not change. This provides the stability and consistency that promotes active involvement by facilitating familiarity and memorization (which allows even small children to participate).

In all these ways, Crossroads' liturgy is biblical, catholic (in the sense of "universal"), and Reformed. While our primary authority and commitment is to the Bible's teaching about worship, nevertheless we find that historic Christian patterns of liturgy (particularly from the early church and the Reformation eras) provide valuable models that embody biblical theology and practices in a way that continues to provide rich guidance for the church today. Because we are committed to a biblical view of the church, we know that we are closely united with those who have gone before us, and we desire to honor the heritage we have received from our fathers and mothers in the faith by expressing our unity with them in tangible ways as much as possible.

CHAPTER 4

A Commentary on the Liturgy at Crossroads

Chapters 1-3 explained the biblical and historical foundations for the general framework of corporate worship at Crossroads. Chapter 4 will provide a closer examination of the individual elements in Crossroads' liturgy. Here you will find the biblical, historical, and practical reasons for every component of Crossroads' weekly order of worship in a step-by-step commentary in Q & A format.

Our service each Sunday follows the sequence listed below. It might be helpful to look at a bulletin to see how each specific element in the list below looks in the context of an actual written liturgy used to guide our corporate worship. The five major headings (underlined below) are the five major movements in the service of covenant renewal found in the biblical patterns of sacrificial worship and in many ancient traditions of classic Christian worship in the history of the church (the "Consecration" section includes the response labeled "Offering" in the six-fold outlines in the preceding chapters).

(1) ORDER OF WORSHIP AT CROSSROADS

God Calls Us to Worship

God Calls Us to Worship
 We Praise God (Opening Song)
 We Pray for God to Help Us Worship

God Cleanses Us

God Calls Us to Confession
 We Confession Our Sin Together
 God Declares Our Forgiveness
 We Praise God (Songs of Praise and Thanks)

God Consecrates Us By His Word

We Pray for the Reading and Preaching of God's Word
 Scripture Reading(s)
 Corporate Response to Reading
 Sermon
 We Offer Ourselves to God (Offering with Offertory Song)
 We Confess Our Faith in God
 We Offer Our Prayers for the Church and the World

God Feeds Us at His Table

Invitation to Communion
 Communion in the Lord's Body (with Song)
 Communion in the Lord's Blood (with Song)

God Blesses Us and Sends Us Out

Prayers of Praise/Thanks and Mission

Doxology

We Receive God's Blessing

(2) COMMENTARY ON CROSSROADS'S ORDER OF WORSHIP**God Calls Us to Worship****God Calls Us to Worship****We Praise God (Opening Song)****We Pray for God to Help Us Worship**

Q: Why do we have a call to worship at the beginning of the service in which "God Calls Us to Worship"?

A: When the church gathers for corporate worship, we do not call God to come to be with us. Rather, we gather because God summons us to come to him so that he can renew his covenant relationship with us (e.g. Lev 9:1-6; Ps 95:1-3; 98:1-4; 100:1-4). God's initiative in the liturgy reflects the consistent pattern of God's actions in history: God always takes the initiative to pursue sinful and broken people and to save us by establishing and renewing his covenant relationship with us. Therefore, the first major action in the liturgy is God's call for us to come and to respond to the uniquely powerful and clear way that God reveals himself to us and gives himself to us in the liturgy which is what we mean by experiencing God's "special presence." When we hear the call to worship, we ought to be attentive and respond with faith, love, and joy because it is God himself who summons us to come to receive him and his gifts of grace.

Q: Why do we sing songs following the call to worship as we enter God's special presence in response to his summons?

A: In the Old Testament, when God's people gathered at the temple to draw near to God in corporate worship, they entered into God's special presence with singing. For example, Psalms 120-134 were psalms of "ascent," which the people sang as they went up to worship God on Mount Zion, the mountain where the temple stood (see also Ps 95:1-2, and Isa 35:10). It is fitting that Christians continue to enter his presence with vigorous songs of praise and thanksgiving (Ps 100:2, 4) because the Christian church is now God's temple, the place where God's special presence, grace, and glory are revealed and experienced by His people (see e.g., 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:19-22; 1 Pet 2:5; see also Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16 for commands to sing together). The opening songs/hymns are usually general hymns of praise and thanksgiving that focus upon God's greatness, beauty, and glory of his character as revealed in his mighty works of creating the world and delivering the world from sin and death. Our songs are God-centered in this way because his works of creation and salvation are the foundation of the church's covenant relationship with him and thus the very reason that we gather for corporate worship.

Q: After the opening songs of praise and thanksgiving, why do we pray for God to help us worship?

A: In this prayer, we are not calling upon God to be present with us because he has already called us. Rather, this prayer acknowledges that we can only respond to God from the depths of our heart and soul if he is present within and among us to give us the desire and the power to do so. Therefore, it is fitting at the beginning of the worship service to ask the Lord to give us the ability to respond to him by the supernatural power of his Holy Spirit with faith, hope, and love and with all our mind and strength (John 14-17; Rom 8:1-11; Gal 5:16-26; 1 Cor 2:1-16; Eph 1:13-21). When we realize the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us to worship God as we were created to do, we understand that in corporate worship we participate in the very life and communion of the Trinity: we worship God the Father only through God the Son (Jesus) by the power of God the Holy Spirit in us, who brings us into a living union and relationship with Christ our High Priest as he leads us in worship before the heavenly throne of God (Heb 4:14-16; 7:1-10:25).

God Cleanses Us

God Calls Us to Confession

We Confession Our Sin Together

God Declares Our Forgiveness

We Praise God (Songs of Praise and Thanks)

Q: Why does God call us to confess our sins?

A: Since God's primary purpose in the worship service is to renew his covenant relationship with the church, it makes sense that the main part of the service begins by clearing away the barriers to relationship created by our sins. When the pastor or other worship leader calls us to confess our sins, it is God who is taking the initiative to pursue us with grace and to deal with the obstacles of guilt, alienation, and shame, which inhibit us from knowing and responding to God. He wants to forgive us, and he knows that we need assurance of his love and willingness to forgive in order to come to him freely with our confession. Therefore, the biblical texts through which God invites us to confession (e.g., 1 John 1:8-9; Ps 51:17; Isa 55:6-7; Prov 28:13) not only command us to confess our sins and repent but also promise God's forgiveness to all who acknowledge their sins and turn away from them to seek God's mercy.

Q: Why do we confess our sins together, and how does confessing our sins result in God's cleansing?

A: Whenever God renews his special relationship with his people (his covenant), he begins by restoring them to a state of favor with him by forgiving their sins. In the Old Testament, when God renewed his covenant with Israel in worship at the temple, the main part of the service began with a purification or sin offering, a sacrifice that was both a confession of sin and also a cleansing and purification of sin by the death of animals that represented the worshippers (Lev 9; 2 Chron 29). This practice taught that the way to be restored to right relationship with God was through the sacrifice of a substitute who receives the penalty of sin's guilt in our place. This practice is fulfilled in the death of Jesus on the cross, which was the ultimate and final sin offering (Rom 8:3) to cleanse us from sin (1 Pet 2:24). Since the church is God's new temple (Eph 2:20-22; 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16) and since Jesus is both

our sacrifice and our new high priest leading us in worship, we still follow the pattern established in the Old Testament but in a new way: we begin the main part of the service by confessing our sins to God in order to receive anew his forgiveness on the basis of Christ's atoning death for us (1 John 1:7-9).

Q: *How do we confess our sins?*

A: Following the examples in Scripture (e.g., Ps 32; 51; 130; Ezra 9-10; Neh 9), we confess our sins together in unison as an expression of our unity as one people before God. Because our confessions are public and corporate prayers, they address more general types/categories of sins common to us all (more specific, individual sins are confessed silently). These categories often relate directly to the particular themes of the Scripture reading(s) and sermon for that day. The prayers also encompass all aspects of our sinfulness by mentioning both specific sinful actions and the deeper brokenness and distortion of our motives and character that result from the corruption of original sin. This is followed by an appeal for forgiveness and new ability to love and obey the Lord by the Spirit's power. In order to express humility, we lower ourselves by sitting to pray.

Q: *Why does God's declaration of forgiveness follow our confession of sins?*

A: God promises to forgive the sins of all who turn away from their sins (repent) and confess them to God seeking his mercy (e.g. Ps 32:5; 103:8, 10-12; 130:1-4; 1 John 1:8-9). Therefore, after our confession, the worship leader now speaks to declare God's forgiveness of sins to all who repent and trust in Christ (Matt 16:17-20; 18:18; John 20:22-23). We change our posture at this point from sitting in humility before God to standing and looking up to receive the Lord's merciful answer to our prayer with confident hope. This shift in posture helps us recognize that the worship leader's declaration is not the conclusion of our prayer of confession to God but rather God's own response to our confession in which he grants us fresh forgiveness and cleansing and raises us up to join in the worship of all heaven and earth before his throne with a clear conscience (Heb 4:14-16; 10:19-23; 12:18-29; Rev 4-5).

[Maplewood site only] **Q:** *What is the meaning of the dialogue that comes after the declaration of forgiveness: "Leader: Lift up your hearts/People: We lift them up to the Lord/L: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God/P: It is right to give him thanks and praise"?*

A: This dialogue is called the *Sursum corda*, which is a Latin phrase that means "Lift up your hearts." It is an ancient (3rd century) formula used to focus the attention of the congregation upon the worship of heaven and our "ascent" to join in that worship of angels and the church in heaven. This dynamic connection between the worship of heaven and earth is an important reality that takes place in our liturgy. In the Old Testament, the pattern for the Tabernacle and Temple was revealed to Moses on the top of Mt. Sinai (Exod 25:9), and these earthly structures (lavishly decorated with gold, silver, and jewels and with various forms of angels) were a copy and shadow of a heavenly reality (Heb 8:5). When Jesus ascended into heaven, he entered the heavenly tabernacle/temple where he now appears before the Father on our behalf and leads us in worship (Heb 8-9; cf. Isa 6; Rev 4-5). This heavenly tabernacle/temple is the true "location" that we enter when we participate in corporate worship in the power of the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:19-22; 12:18-29; cf. Ps 11:4).

[Maplewood site only] **Q:** After the *Sursum corda* dialogue (“Lift up your hearts...”) why do we give thanks and praise “together with the angels, and all the company of heaven, and the whole church on earth”?

A: The prayer that begins “Almighty Father...” connects to the end of the previous dialogue and interprets its meaning by emphasizing our access to the Father in heaven through Jesus Christ, and calling us to join in the worship of all heaven and earth. Most of the very words of this prayer are very ancient and widespread in Christian liturgies, and thus it connects us to the worship of the one catholic church throughout history.

[Maplewood site only] **Q:** *Why do we put the Sursum corda at this particular point in the service?*

A: It is most appropriate to emphasize our “ascent” to heaven with the *Sursum corda* dialogue following confession and forgiveness. In the Old Testament, the pattern of corporate worship that began with a purification or sin offering for confession and forgiveness of sins continued with an ascension or burnt offering that accomplished our “ascent” to God’s heavenly presence (Lev 8-9). This pattern is fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead and ascended to heaven after he had offered himself in death as a sacrifice for our sins. And it is fulfilled in our worship, for Christ’s sacrifice (and the forgiveness we receive on the basis of his death) gives us access to this heavenly worship. By forgiving our sins, God makes us ready to take our place in worship around his heavenly throne in order to hear his word, to offer ourselves afresh for his service, to pray for the world, and to celebrate the feast at his table.

Q: *After receiving God’s forgiveness, why do we sing songs of praise and thanks?*

A: Since this part of the service immediately follows the cleansing work of God that we have received through confession of sin and his forgiveness, we sing songs at this point in the service that offer praise and thanks to God for the grace and mercy that we receive in Christ on the basis of his death and resurrection for us. We also sing songs at this point in the service that focus on our participation in the worship of heaven along with angels and departed saints in God’s heavenly throne room (see Rev 4-5). In worship, God grants us a special audience with him in heaven through the power of the Holy Spirit on the basis of the work of Jesus our high priest, who has opened the way to God’s heavenly presence and who leads us in worship there (Heb 4:14-16; 7:23-8:7; 10:19-22). By forgiving our sins, God makes us fully ready to take our place in worship around his heavenly throne in order to hear his word, to offer ourselves afresh for his service, to pray for the world, and to celebrate the feast at his table. When we sing words like “Holy, holy, holy” and “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,” we are taking the songs of angels on our lips (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8) to join with them in worship before the throne of God above.

[Olivette site only] **Q:** Why do we exchange personal greeting with one another in a time of “community welcome”?

A: Corporate worship is not only an event to experience communion with God but also with others who have gathered to worship. The earliest Christians regularly greeted one another in their assemblies with a kiss of friendship (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26; 1 Pet 5:14). Furthermore, the Lord’s Supper, which is the heart and culmination of the

liturgy, is not only a meal that embodies peace and unity with God but also peace and unity with the people of God (1 Cor 10:16-17; cf. 11:17-34). Thus, Christian worship services throughout the history of the church have often included some physical gestures of greeting and affection. This action demonstrates that Christians belong to one another as members of one united family, and it expresses an active commitment to seek to live in peace and reconciliation with others.

God Consecrates Us By His Word

We Pray for the Reading and Preaching of God's Word

Scripture Reading(s)

Corporate Response to Reading

Sermon

Q: Why do we read the Bible in the worship service?

A: God requires Scripture reading as a core element of Christian corporate worship (1 Tim 4:13; Exod 24:3; Deut 1-32; Josh 8:30-35; 2 Kgs 23:1-3; Neh 8:1-8). The Bible is the word of God in written form, and it is one of the primary ways that God speaks and reveals himself to us. We usually read consecutively through books of the Bible in order to provide a systematic understanding of the Bible. We occasionally have readings from both the Old and New Testaments because this provides additional biblical insights that demonstrates the inner unity of the Bible by showing how the progress of God's revelation throughout history finds its fulfillment in Jesus.

Q: What is the purpose of the prayer that comes before the Scripture reading and the corporate response that follows it?

A: We pray to ask God's help before reading the Bible because we cannot understand and respond to God's word rightly apart from the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit who opens our minds and hearts to understand and receive Scripture as God's personal word to us (1 Cor 2:6-16). The response that follows the reading of Scripture (from Isa 40:8) is a way of responding rightly to that word by confessing our confidence in its truth and divine authority.

Q: Why does a pastor preach a sermon after the reading of the Bible, and how can we benefit from preaching?

A: God requires the preaching of Scripture when his people assemble for worship (Neh 8:8; Rom 10:14; 1 Tim 4:13-15; 2 Tim 4:1-5). The sermon explains the text(s) that we read and also applies it to the life and mission of the church in our contemporary cultural setting. In the sermon, God himself speaks to us to remind us of his grace and to call us to a renewed commitment to him and to the growth of his kingdom in the world. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism explains, "the Spirit of God causes...the preaching of the Word, to convince and convert sinners, and to build them up in holiness and comfort through faith to salvation." Because the sermon is God's word to us, the pastor is the one who preaches because he has been called and authorized by God through the church to speak and act as

Christ's representative in order to serve the church. The Catechism also summarizes the way that we should receive the sermon in order to benefit from it: "For the Word to become effective to salvation, we must pay careful attention to it, prepare ourselves, and pray for understanding. We must also receive it with faith and love, treasure it in our hearts, and practice it in our lives."

We Offer Ourselves to God (Offering with Offertory Hymn)

We Confess Our Faith in God

We Offer Our Prayers for the Church and the World

Q: Why do the offertory, creed, and prayers of intercession follow the sermon?

A: These three elements of the liturgy are the church's three-fold response to the ministry of the word of God. Through the reading and preaching of the Scriptures, God calls us to a renewed love and commitment to him. This is how the Lord consecrates us through his word: he declares and reaffirms that he has set us apart from the rest of the world to belong to him and to participate in his mission. (To be consecrated means to be set apart for God). Then, God calls us to respond actively by offering ourselves in loving obedience to him. We respond immediately to God's consecrating word in the liturgy by offering ourselves to God in tangible acts of giving gifts to support his mission, confessing the creed as an expression of our love and loyalty to him, and praying for God to provide for the progress of his mission in the church and the rest of the world.

Q: Why do we offer ourselves to God with money and song after the sermon?

A: In the offertory, we respond to God's word to us in the reading and preaching of Scripture by offering ourselves to God again with renewed faith, love, gratitude, and commitment. The offering is a reminder of our obligation to support the ministry of the church financially and a symbolic way of acknowledging God's authority over all of life by offering our whole lives to God. We not only offer ourselves to God with money but also with our praise for the word of grace he has just spoken to us in the reading and preaching of the Bible. The hymn that we sing to respond to God is usually a corporate prayer or confession of our love, commitment, and submission to God and a prayer for God's help to serve him in the world. This has roots in the Old Testament pattern of corporate worship where a tribute offering of grain & wine (part of which was used to support the priests financially) was placed upon the ascension (burnt) offering. This offering was a token of the congregation's labor and a tangible response of renewed commitment to God that was symbolized in the ascension offering. In the New Testament, the church continued this pattern of giving in worship to care for the financial needs of their leaders (1 Cor 9) and the poor and needy both inside and outside the church (e.g. Acts 2:44-45; 1 Cor 16:1-3; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 6:18-19).

Q: Why do we confess our faith in God with the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed?

A: The Christian church formulated the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed in the early centuries of the church's history for use in corporate worship, baptism, and Christian

education. They are based soundly upon biblical revelation, and they are the most ancient and universally received summaries of the most foundational truths of the Christian faith. In the liturgy, we confess these creeds not merely as a list of facts or ideas that we affirm but more as an expression of our personal trust in God in response to God's call to renew our commitment to him in the reading and preaching of Scripture. We are saying not simply "I think that..." but rather, "I put my trust in God the Father...and in Jesus Christ...[and] in the Holy Spirit." Therefore, these creeds are an oath of covenant loyalty to the Triune God, a renewal and remembrance of our baptism into Christ. By confessing these ancient and universally accepted creeds, we also confess our unity with the whole catholic (i.e., universal) Christian church throughout history and across different denominational lines.

Q: Why do we pray together for the church and the world?

A: Prayer is the third way we express our renewed faith and commitment to God in response to his word to us in the reading and preaching of Scripture. In the Old Testament order of worship, the offering that expressed renewed commitment to God (the ascension or burnt offering) included incense (Lev 2:15-16; 9:17), which is a symbol of prayer (Ps 141:2; Rev 5:8, 8:3-4). Israel prayed together by singing the psalms, and the early church also prayed when gathered for worship (Acts 2:42; 4:23-31; 1 Tim 2:1-8). Jesus is the one who leads us in prayer by interceding for us and with us before the Father (Heb 7:25). Although our ministers or elders are the ones who usually speak the specific prayers aloud, we are all participants together with Jesus in this prayer and ought to focus on praying with the pastor as he leads us. When we bring the needs of the church and the world before God in prayer, we are exercising our collective role as a kingdom of priests who represent the world before God and seek God's blessing for the world (Gen 12:1-3; Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9-10; Rev 1:6; 5:10). We stand to pray because this is a sign of active response and reverence in prayer (Neh 9:2, 4; 2 Chron 20:5, 13; Matt 6:5; Mark 11:25; Luke 18:11, 13).

Q: Why do we pray the Lord's Prayer together each week at the conclusion of our prayers for the church and the world?

A: The Lord's Prayer is the model for prayer that Jesus himself taught his disciples when they asked to learn how to pray (Matt 6:5-15). Praying this prayer together expresses the corporate nature of the whole time of prayer (thus, we pray "Our Father..."). The central petitions in the prayer for the honoring of God's name in the world, the doing of his will, and the coming of the fullness of his kingdom are a fitting summary of our prayers for the church and the world. The repetition of this prayer each week helps us memorize this important prayer (which Jesus gave as a paradigm for all prayer), and the memorization of this fixed form teaches our children how to pray and facilitates the participation of younger children in prayer in the liturgy. Finally, praying the Lord's Prayer connects us to the ancient tradition of the one holy, catholic, and apostolic church, which has regularly prayed the Lord's Prayer in corporate worship since at least the fourth century A.D.

God Feeds Us at His Table

Invitation to Communion

Communion in the Lord's Body (with Hymn)

Communion in the Lord's Blood (with Hymn)

Q: Why do we conclude the service with the Lord's Supper, and what does it mean that God "Feeds Us at His Table"? (Part 1)

A: When God renews his special covenant relationship with his people in corporate worship, he serves a meal as the climax of that event. In the Old Testament, the service of worship that began with purification and ascension offerings always concluded with a peace offering, which was a meal served from God's altar-table celebrating renewed reconciliation, peace, and communion with God (Exod 24; Lev 9; 2 Chron 29). In the New Testament, this pattern finds its fulfillment in the Lord's Supper, a ritual meal with bread and wine that Jesus established to celebrate his saving death and resurrection and to be a means through which he is present with the church and bestows the blessings of salvation upon all who believe (Matt 26:17-29/Mark 14:12-25/Luke 22:7-23; cf. 1 Cor 10:1-22; 11:17-34). Ministers preside at this meal because they have been called and authorized by God through the church to speak and act as Christ's representatives in corporate worship. Following Jesus' example, we begin the Supper with a prayer of thanksgiving, and we pass the bread and wine to one another while seated around the table. Because the Lord's Supper is a meal, we sit to eat, relax, and enjoy our peace and friendship with God and one another. We sing because it is a festive meal of joy and hope in which we celebrate Christ's victory over sin, death, and Satan in the past, present, and future.

Q: Why do we conclude the service with the Lord's Supper, and what does it mean that God "Feeds Us at His Table"? (Part 2)

A: By receiving food from God with thanksgiving, we are confessing that our life and the created world as a whole come from God, and we are leading the whole creation in our response of thanksgiving and praise. In this way, we are restored to our proper priestly role within creation in the Lord's Supper. The Supper is also a "memorial" (or "remembrance") in which God "remembers" his covenant with us in Christ and blesses us on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection for us. In the meal, we receive the very life of the risen Christ in a way that strengthens our union with him (1 Cor 10:16; cf. John 6:22-59). In the Lord's Supper, we also "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" again, and Jesus himself promised that he would one day eat the Supper again with us in his kingdom in the universal banquet (Isa 25; Matt 8) that is a great wedding feast between Jesus and his people (Rev 19). Thus, Jesus identifies the Lord's Supper as a foretaste of this future victory and peace in the fullness of God's kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21-22). Finally, the Lord's Supper is a communal meal that renews and expresses the unity of the church community in Christ (1 Cor 10-11).

Q: Why do we conclude the Lord's Supper with prayers of praise and thanksgiving?

A: The dialogue of thanks and praise after communion is a transition that concludes the meal and prepares us to be sent out into the world to serve with God's blessing. It looks back to the past at what we've just experienced in the Lord's Supper to offer thanks and praise

explicitly for the many gifts we receive in Christ at his table. This is the basis upon which God then calls us to serve him. This concluding praise and prayer also turns our attention to the future by calling us to the work of the kingdom and our service in the world as a response to the blessings we've received in the liturgy. The liturgy is not just a self-contained event; rather, it opens out into the rest of life and orients and empowers us to live for God in the world according to the pattern of life in God's kingdom set forth in the liturgy.

God Blesses Us and Sends Us Out

Prayers of Praise and Mission

Doxology

We Receive God's Blessing

Q: Why do we conclude the service with the singing of a doxology to praise God?

A: We conclude the liturgy with a final song of praise to God (usually a short song of praise to the Trinity called a doxology, i.e., a song that praises and exalts the glory of God), which is an appropriate concluding response to all that God has done for us in the liturgy. In order to emphasize that we are responding to God with our whole person, we express our thankful praise not only with the words of our mouths but also with the posture of our bodies by raising our hands. In the Bible, this posture is associated with expressions of praise (e.g., Ps 63:4; 134:2).

Q: Why does the worship service conclude with a blessing from God?

A: In the Bible, corporate worship often ends with God's blessing pronounced by the priests or ministers who are called to speak and act as God's official representatives (Lev 9:22; Num 6:22-27; 2 Cor 13:14; Heb 13:20-21). God thus has the final word in the liturgy. After calling us to worship, forgiving our sins, speaking to us through Scripture, receiving our offerings and prayers, and serving us a meal to renew his life in us, God sends us out into the world to serve him with his own blessing. Our response to the Lord's blessing is to love him and do the work of his kingdom in the world where he has called us. Thus, our whole lives become an act of worship as we go forth to live out the covenant blessings that God bestows upon us each week in the liturgy. In order to emphasize that we are responding to God with our whole person, we express our thankful praise not only with the words of our mouths but also with the posture of our bodies by raising our hands. In the Bible, this posture is associated with expressions of praise (e.g., Ps 63:4; 134:2), and here it is also a receptive posture indicating that we eagerly desire to receive God's blessing.

Notes

¹ For further discussion and biblical evidence for these four symbolism in the structures of the Tabernacle and Temple, see Vern S. Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1991), pp. 9–40; Peter J. Leithart, *A House for My Name: A Survey of the Old Testament* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2000), pp. 82–86.

² Biblical scholar A. F. Rainey notes that when different sacrifices were offered together in the same worship event, they always occurred in the same sequence: sin/purification offering, ascension offering, and peace offering. See A. F. Rainey, “The Order of Sacrifices in the Old Testament Ritual Texts,” *Biblica* 51 (1970): 485–498. Other contemporary Old Testament scholars who recognize this liturgical sequence and its relevance for Christian worship include Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p. 66; Gordon J. Wenham, “The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, eds Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), pp. 82–84; R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), pp. 106–107; Philip P. Jenson, “The Levitical Sacrificial System,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, eds. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), pp. 25–40; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1997), pp. 110–113. See also the fine summary in the *NIV Study Bible* notes: “When more than one kind of offering was presented (as in Nu. 6:16,17), the procedure was usually as follows: (1) sin offering or guilt offering, (2) burnt offering, (3) fellowship offering and grain offering (along with a drink offering). This sequence furnishes part of the spiritual significance of the sacrificial system. First, sin had to be dealt with (sin offering or guilt offering). Second, the worshiper committed himself completely to God (burnt offering and grain offering). Third, fellowship or communion between the Lord, the priest and the worshiper (fellowship offering) was established. To state it another way, there were sacrifices of expiation (sin offerings and guilt offerings), consecration (burnt offerings and grain offerings) and communion (fellowship offerings - these included vow offerings, thank offerings and freewill offerings).” See the chart entitled “Old Testament Sacrifices,” *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 150.

³ This sacrifice is commonly translated “whole burnt offering.” However, the Hebrew word is *’olah*, which comes from the same root as the verb *’alah* (“to ascend”) and means “that which ascends.” Just like all the other sacrifices, this name signifies its theological meaning and effect.

⁴ For more evidence that the Lord’s Supper is the New Testament fulfillment of the peace offering, see the article by Covenant Seminary Old Testament professor C. John (Jack) Collins, “The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 66 (2004): 1–23.

⁵ This mode of argument should be quite familiar to Reformed and Presbyterian Christians since Reformed theology appeals to the Old Testament ceremony of infant circumcision as the primary biblical grounds for the practice of baptizing infants. God commanded Abraham to circumcise the infant children of his household as a sign of their inclusion in the community to which God had bound himself in a special covenant relationship. Presbyterians conclude that this pattern of infant initiation into the covenant community remains binding upon Christian believers in the new covenant in spite of all the ways that initiation rites have been transformed by Jesus Christ. The New Testament nowhere explicitly instructs Christians to baptize the infant children of believing adults; rather, the argument rests upon an inference from the continuity of the relationship between the New Testament church and Old Testament Israel in general and from the connection between baptism and circumcision in the New Testament in particular (see Col 2:11-12). The argument for the relevance of the Old Testament sacrificial system for Christian worship follows precisely this same form: it is an

argument based upon the continuity of the relationship between the church and Israel inferred from the connections that the New Testament draws between the church, Christian worship, and the sacrificial system of worship in the Old Testament. Since Presbyterians accept the pattern of infant initiation into the covenant on the basis of this continuity of Old and New Testaments (and despite the absence of explicit New Testament commands or examples to baptize infants), then it seems that we cannot object in principle that Christians who derive norms for worship and sacraments from the Old Testament are doing something wrong merely because they are drawing upon Old Testament ceremonies for guidance.

⁶ James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), p. 21.

⁷ Torrance, *Worship*, p. 20.