

# A Sermon on Our Order of Service

**Introduction** - While we are a 'new' church, it is pretty obvious from the time you enter that we are not following in what has become the traditionally 'new'. We are not following in the stream of today's modern evangelicalism with regard to the worship service. But we are not trying to react to the contemporary trends. Rather we are attempting to follow in (and at times return to) the practices of the Reformers who not only were committed to reforming the doctrine of the church, but were just as passionate about reforming the worship of God as well. And our desire is to imitate them only to the extent that we see that they were imitating Christ and the teachings of His Word.

Ultimately, theological concepts, not pragmatic considerations, exert the determining influence over the shape that services of worship take. Therefore, it is important as we go through a liturgy to know why we are doing what we are doing.

## The Liturgy -

**Preparation and Procession** (Psalm 122) - The Songs of Ascents (Ps 120-134) were sung by the pilgrim on his way to the appointed Temple feasts; surely there is much here for us to learn from as we prepare for our assemblies. Are you rested and ready for the journey? We do not enter into this place with any superstition about the physical place or structure. But we do enter, knowing that the New Jerusalem is gathered here at the command of God (Heb 10:25, 12:22ff). Approaching Jerusalem, one could not escape noticing its beauty, the order of the towers, and the flow of the crowd that came to unite themselves together under the name of the Lord.

**The Call to Worship** - Lack of ceremony with regard to our entrance is no excuse for lack of awe, thanksgiving, and humility as we begin, with a great sense of expectation. We begin with the Word, and our response to it for that is central to all that goes on. We often have a time of confession of sin, acknowledging up front our inability in ourselves individually and corporately to approach the throne except for the grace of the Lord.

**Singing** (Eph 5:18) - We come to sing because we are filled with the Holy Spirit, not to get filled. The modern church is giving up much of what the Reformation fought for as contemporary services continue to have less and less congregational singing and more and more performance-oriented music and skits. The goal of music in the worship service is to engage the mind and affections, not entertain and amuse. Music is the vehicle by which we bring praise to our Lord as well as our teaching to one another. So it primarily goes out from us, not into us.

**Prayers** (1 Tim 2:1-4, Matt 6:9-13, 9:36-38, Eph 6:18, Phil 1:9-11, 2 Cor 1:3-4, James 5:13-18) - These verses provide proof that we are to pray in the worship service, but they also give us examples of what kinds of prayers we are to pray. As each man prays, he must know that he stands before God on behalf of us all. We are not simply waiting for him to finish; we are to be joining with him silently and then adding our seal of agreement with our 'Amen'.

**The Sermon** (2 Tim 4:2) - Paul instructs Timothy what to do, when to do it, and what it should look like. 1 Cor 1:21 shows us that this is just what Paul did, even when the 'experts' of the day thought that preaching of that kind was 'out of style'. We preach through books, a practice reclaimed in the reformation, to deliver the whole counsel of God, and we preach through topics as the elders carefully consider the needs of this particular congregation at particular times.

**The Lord's Supper** (Matt 26:26-29, Acts 2:42, 1 Cor 11:23-26) - We currently practice a celebration of Communion monthly, and we encourage you to look forward and prepare yourselves as well for these times. It is called the cup of blessing and it is a time where we proclaim the Lord's death in the way He instructed us.

**The Benediction** (Heb 13:20-21) - Just as we see the epistles of Paul (which were read in the churches and most likely preached from as well) end with a blessing, so we end the service with a blessing. The practice began with instructions to Moses and Aaron, continued in the synagogues of Jesus' day, and into following centuries of the church. The Lord's name is placed upon the congregation and a blessing is given - not because the elder has any particular powers in himself, but because he stands in an official office of the Lord on behalf of His sheep. It is the Lord's blessing upon you - look up and receive it.

**The Rest of Your Day and Week** - If you do not come with faith, this will be little better than a lecture decorated with inspirational songs and pep-talks. If you do not leave with faith, our time will be quickly forgotten in the pace of life before you. But if God is kind, granting us faith and in His mercy placing the Word in our hearts, this time becomes the center of your life. All that you do is affected throughout the week by what went on here, and all that goes on out there becomes preparation for the next meeting on the Lord's Day.

## Order and Affections -

**Order** - When done with the affections, it is not stifling, but freeing, like a well-disciplined dance, beautifully arranged and passed down from generation to generation.

**Affections** - There are days that you will come in 'not feeling' like worshipping. You may not fake it, but must confess it (Psalm 73:21-22). There are days that you long to worship, but do not 'feel' the fullness, and you must exhort yourself (Psalm 42:5). There are days that you are bursting with praise, and you must not be ashamed (Psalm 63:3-5).

**The Gospel** - We must repent of our man-exalting doctrines and our man-centered worship services. We have no impact in the world because we are not arranged in power and beauty. We are a disheveled army - an ugly dance-troop - so no one watches.

*Dave Hatcher - August 20, 2000*