

Dabney Center
Spring 2003
Course: Liturgy
Teacher: Rich Lusk

Session #1

Introduction

- Liturgy as a lifetime study
- The breadth of liturgical studies
- Our textbook: *The Study of the Liturgy*
- Other resources

Liturgical order: Leviticus 9:15-24

- Context: Moses has led the Israelites out of slavery in the Egypt. The tabernacle has been built. The priests have been ordained. This is the first corporate worship event in the new (Mosaic) covenantal order.
- Excursus: Can Leviticus be used as a liturgical source book in the Messianic age, after the abrogation of animal sacrifices?
 - New Covenant worship is the transfiguration of Old Covenant worship, both its sacrifices and its sanctuary
 - The Old Covenant types and shadows find their true fulfillment in Christ, his person and work
 - But they also have a “follow through,” finding further fulfillment in those united with Christ. The NT repeatedly describes our worship in sacrificial categories.
 - This means our task is to read the Old Covenant liturgical instruction in light of Christ, making appropriate redemptive-historical adjustments to its application. The pathway into God’s presence is still marked out for us by these Levitical sacrificial models.
- Note further that some kind of “liturgy” is inescapable. If we do not derive our pattern of worship from these and other biblical passages, we still have a liturgy

(that is, a form of worship, or a set of protocols for entering the presence of God), but it won't be biblical.

- A good deal of the modern church's confusion over worship stems from giving inadequate attention to the Old Covenant teaching. This is where the Bible's instruction on liturgy is most heavily concentrated. The NT does not give an "order of service" because such an order was already established.

- The sacrificial order in Leviticus 9:
 - [1. Call to worship – 9:5 – "Draw near" is a technical term for gathered worship, picked up by the writer of Hebrews, e. g., 4:16, 10:22]

 2. Sin offering – 9:15 – Highlights confession of sin and absolution. Without an initial confession of sin, we are worshipping God with unclean hands and lips. Having been washed, we may enter God's presence.

 3. Ascension offering – 9:16 – The Hebrew term "olah" means neither "whole" nor "burnt," so "whole burnt offering" is a misleading translation. It is true this is the one offering completely burned up and turned into smoke on the altar. But "olah" actually means "to go up" or "to ascend." The point of this offering, then, is that the worshipper, through his representative, ascends into God's heavenly presence as smoke, being incorporated into the glory-cloud. The fire is not judgment, but the presence of the Holy Spirit who consecrates man for God's service. This offering also highlights the cutting up of the animal with a priestly knife. This knife imagery stands behind Heb. 4:12. (Fire and sword mark the way back into God's presence after the fall in Gen. 3.) The ascension offering, in its New Covenant form, begins appropriately with the *Sursum Corda* ("We lift up our hearts to the Lord!") as our entrance into God's heavenly sanctuary. (Putting this in front of the Eucharist is a leftover from the divided service of the days when the church had a catechumenate. It is more theologically fitting to place the *Sursum Corda* after the confession of sin and before the sermon. The entire liturgy after confession takes place in heaven, not just the communion portion). The ascension offering continues with a burst of sung praise, since we have received cleansing and access. We enter his courts with thanksgiving. It continues with the sword of the Spirit, the Word, as it is read and preached, consecrating us to the Lord's use. Prayer is an appropriate means of offering ourselves to God as well.

 4. Tribute offering – 9:17 – The word is usually translated as "grain" in Leviticus and it is a bread offering. But the Hebrew term is often used for taxes paid to royal figures. "Tribute" better captures the sense. The tribute offering never stands alone. It always follows the others and is put on top of the ascension offering. (Note that Cain made a grain offering apart from a blood sacrifice. This

is why his sacrifice was rejected.) The tribute offering must follow the others because it represents our works, the fruit of our labor. But our works are not acceptable to God apart from the blood sacrifice of Christ. When God accepts us in him, he also accepts our works. Thus, the tribute offering is not “raw material” from the earth, but requires human labor, e. g., harvesting and baking. The New Covenant conjugation is the giving of tithes and offerings, stemming from the dominion God allows us to exercise over his creation.

5. Peace offering – 9:18-21 – This offering includes a meal in God’s presence. God shares from the bounty of his table. All Old Covenant feasts and festivals were variations of the peace offering. The Lord’s Supper, of course, is our peace offering in the New Covenant. This is the climax of the liturgy. Note that it includes a wave offering. The offering was raised to God, and then received back from him. The meal itself is a gift from God. Raising the communion elements to the Lord is appropriate.

[6. Benediction – 9:22-23 -- Aaron raised his hands and blessed the people. We are sent out to serve God in the world, carrying his blessing as we go.]

Overview and alliteration:

Calling	Sin offering
Confession	
Cleansing	Ascension and tribute offerings
Consecration	Peace offering
Communion	
Comissioning	

- Five further observations:

1. This pattern is simply a re-enactment of the gospel. It is driven by “gospel logic.” It has the same narrative shape as the gospel itself. We come in as sinners in need of forgiveness, renewal, and wisdom. We receive these things by faith through Christ’s appointed instruments. We respond in praise, prayer, and giving gifts to God. God feeds us at his table, blesses us, and sends us back out into the world. As we rehearse this gospel story each week in this way, it becomes more and more constitutive of our personal and corporate identity.

2. If the liturgy is simply the gospel re-enacted, then it is clear that the liturgy must be God’s service to us before it can be our service to God. This, in fact, is

just what we find in the Scriptures. In Lev. 17:11, God says of the entire package of sacrificial worship, "I have given it to you." The liturgical sacrifices are God's doing first, and only reflexively ours. In the liturgy God gives us his gifts, and we respond in Christ by giving them back to him. This is the "liturgical circle." The word from which we get liturgy, "leitourgia," means "public service." Older Christian traditions, particularly Lutherans, have emphasized the liturgy is the "Lord's service" in an ambiguous, double sense. It is the Lord's service to us before it is our service to him. Any other view (e. g., "we come to worship to give, not to get") is an incipient liturgical Pelagianism.

3. While God takes the initiative in serving us through Word and sacrament in the liturgy, we must remember that even our response is given to us by grace. Christ is not only God's gift to us, he the one in whom and through whom we offer our work of praise and thanks up to the Father. He is the true "Minister of the sanctuary" who leads us in worship (Heb. 8:4).

4. This pattern outlined above is found every time God renews his covenant in Scripture. The same basic template may also be found in Gen. 3 (with some adjustments), Lev. 1 (each individual offering is a mini-model of the complete liturgy of Lev. 9), Revelation (a worship service in heaven), etc.

5. The liturgy shapes us in a certain way. We need to be much more aware of the (often subconscious) power of ritual to mold and form our worldview and life praxis. The Enlightenment, among other influences, made us suspicious of non-verbal, non-cognitive modes of communication. We must understand everything God does to us and for us in the liturgy is precisely what we are called to do to and for the world. Thus, it is no exaggeration to claim that the liturgy is not only the source of personal Christian piety, but also the fount of Christian civilization. What we do before the throne of God on the Lord's Day has untold implications for how we do everything else. A gospel-shaped, gospel-rehearsing, gospel-driven liturgy fashions us into a people who live the gospel out our finger tips the rest of the week. God forgives us, so we learn to forgive others. God feeds us at his table, so we learn hospitality. God instructs us from his Word, so we come to value literacy and promote the spread of true education. And so on. The liturgy becomes a pattern for all of life.