

## Covenant Renewal Worship

Based on the patterns seen throughout Scripture, we view covenant renewal as the primary purpose of Lord's Day worship. There are plenty of other good reasons for the church to gather (evangelism, education, praise, etc.), but these are side effects and not the focal point. While some well-meaning Christians see no guidelines in Scripture for how the church should worship, we believe that the Bible has much to say on this and that worship "style" is much more than a matter of preference.

The pattern of our liturgy follows the basic biblical structure of sacrificial worship. This pattern is found in both old and new covenant Scriptures, but perhaps the clearest place to see this shape is in Leviticus 9, the first corporate worship service at the newly constructed tabernacle. We are fully warranted in using this pattern in the new covenant. While Jesus abolished *animal* sacrifice, He did not abrogate *the way* of sacrifice (e.g., Rom. 12:1-2; Heb. 13:15, etc.). New covenant worship is still described in sacrificial categories and the church is described as the true temple. As Augustine observed, whatever is fulfilled in Christ (the Head) is also fulfilled in the ongoing life of the church (Christ's body). Therefore, in Christ, our worship service represents the fulfillment and transformation of old covenant liturgical types. The basic service is as follows:

- 1. The Lord Calls Us:** The people are called to worship (Lev. 9:5). Our worship is a response to God's summons. He always takes the initiative. We draw near only because He first invites us.
- 2. The Lord Cleanses Us:** The purification offering (Lev. 9:15) highlights confession of sin and absolution. Without an initial confession of sin, we are worshipping God with unclean hands and lips. But having been washed, we may enter God's presence.
- 3. The Lord Consecrates Us:** The ascension offering (Lev. 9:16) corresponds to our entrance into God's heavenly sanctuary (cf. Heb. 10:19ff) and consecration. This ascent is marked by the *sursum corda* ("Lift your hearts up to the Lord"). The ascension offering consists in a burst of sung praise, since we have received cleansing and access to God's throne room. We enter God's courts with thanksgiving and joy. This offering also includes the reading and preaching of the Word, as we are consecrated to God's service by His truth (Jn. 17:17; Heb. 4:12).
- 4. The Lord Collects Our Gifts:** The tribute offering (Lev. 9:17) follows, represented by the collection of tithes and offerings. We offer *ourselves* in the ascension offering; we offer our *works* in the tribute offering. Our works are not acceptable to God apart from the blood sacrifice of Christ, but in Christ, God accepts us and our labors.
- 5. The Lord Communes with Us:** The peace offering was at the center of every feast and festival in the old covenant and is the climax of the liturgy (Lev. 9:18-21). This offering is the communion meal we eat in God's presence. The Lord's Supper, of course, is our peace offering in the new covenant, as God shares His table with us.
- 6. The Lord Commissions Us:** Finally, we are commissioned and sent out with God's benediction (Lev. 9:22-23). At the tabernacle, Aaron raised his hands and blessed the people as he dismissed them (Num. 6:22-27). We are sent out to serve God in the world, carrying His name and His blessing as we go.