



CHURCH OF CHRIST THE KING

The Gospel Shape of Worship

Corporate worship that is shaped by the gospel reminds us weekly of how and why we can draw near in communion with God despite our sin, and it shapes us to live our lives in light of these truths.

The order of our services each week follows the flow of the gospel. This is how Christians have structured their worship for hundreds of years. Each week the hymns are different, the Scripture readings vary, and the sermon progresses expositively through books of the Bible, but the “skeleton” of the service always remains the same. The basic structure of the service is the shape of the gospel:

1. Revelation: God reveals himself and calls us to worship.
2. Adoration: We recognize the greatness of God and praise him for it.
3. Confession: When we acknowledge the holiness of God, we also recognize our unworthiness to draw near to him because of our sin.
4. Propitiation: As Christians, we are assured of pardon through the sacrifice of Christ, which makes worship possible.
5. Proclamation: The Word of God is taught.
6. Dedication: We respond to the Word of God with consecration.
7. Supplication: We bring our requests before the Lord.
8. Communion: Celebration of free access to God because of Christ’s death on our behalf.
9. Commission: God sends us into the world to serve him. Just as the service began with God’s word, it ends with a word of blessing from him.

The service opens with God speaking to us. We do not come to worship of our own initiative, and we are not somehow “calling God down” or inviting him to join us. Rather, it is God who calls us to draw near to him, and thus the service begins with a scriptural call to worship.

When God reveals himself to us, two responses are inevitable. First, we respond with adoration and praise. This usually takes the form of a hymn, a prayer of praise, and a doxology.

Then, we recognize our sin and unworthiness, and so we confess our sins to God. We responded this way when we first believed, and we should continue to do so daily. Thus through a Scripture reading, a hymn, silent repentance, and a corporate prayer of confession, the congregation acknowledges our sin together before God.

As Christians, we find forgiveness and pardon in Christ, and so the service continues with celebrating that forgiveness. Through a Scripture affirmation and a hymn of praise for Christ’s sacrifice, we both rejoice in the gospel and proclaim it to any unbelievers who may be attending.

Next, we are ready to hear God’s instructions through the preaching of his Word. Our response is one of dedication and giving of our offerings.

The climax of the service is Communion with God. Worship is drawing near to God in communion through Christ, and this is what the whole service has been progressing towards. Coming boldly to the Throne of Grace (Heb 4:16) for supplication and eating at Christ’s Table means that we are welcome and that we have open access to him, despite our sin. This is possible only through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, which is beautifully pictured in the Communion elements. Communion with God is the purpose of the gospel, and thus Communion is the climax of a worship service.

The service concludes with a word from God in which he sends us into the world to obey him and share the gospel to unbelievers, along with a word of blessing.

The particular hymns, Scripture passages and other elements of the service are determined by their fit in three categories: First, we consider the church year, which follows the life of Christ through remembering his coming, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. Second, we consider the function of the hymns or Scripture passages within the gospel-shaped service order and that also facilitates the dialogue between God and us in the service. Third, we consider the sermon passage and theme for the day.

By ordering our corporate worship in this manner, through the course of the church’s life, we are formed both by the gospel narrowly (in the weekly order) *and* the “whole counsel of God” broadly (as the songs and texts connect with the church year and sermon text).

As Christian worshipers, by reenacting what we are in Christ each week in our services, we become what we are.





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