

A Walk through the Worship Service, Part II

Last time we considered the opening elements of the worship service through the hymns. Here we consider the Prayer of Confession through the Doxology.

Prayer of Confession, Assurance of Pardon, and the Gloria Patri

The next three elements of the service form a unit. We confess our sins together as a people in the prayer of confession, God assures us of His forgiveness in Christ through a portion of His Word, and we respond with praise by giving glory to Him in song. “Gloria Patri” simply means “Glory be to the Father” in Latin and represents the beginning of what is actually a mini-hymn of praise to each of the three Persons of our Triune God. This three-part unit comes early in the service since repentance and the forgiveness found in Christ by faith are essential prerequisites for fully benefiting from the remaining elements of the service, chiefly the ministry of God’s Word, prayer, and the sacraments.

Old Testament Reading

Every service includes the reading of an Old Testament passage that either supports the sermon text, is part of the sermon text, or reinforces another element of the service (such as a baptism, officer commissioning, or missionary commissioning). It is sometimes a Psalm that is read responsively using the alternating boldface type in the back of our hymnal and always seeks to look ahead to the fulfillment of our salvation found in Jesus Christ.

Congregational Prayer

Having heard from God through His Word, we once again respond to our Heavenly Father through the privilege of prayer. Though only one voice is heard, everyone present unites their hearts and minds in adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication in the Name of Christ. With respect to specific matters for prayer, needs of the congregation are balanced with needs of the wider community and world.

Tithes and Offerings

God has provided us with everything we have and it is a fitting act of worship to return to Him the tithes and offerings He prescribes in His Word. A tithe is a proportion of one’s income (typically beginning at a tenth) that is given freely, cheerfully, and prayerfully so that God’s work in this world might advance. Special musical selections are offered to the glory of God while the tithes and offerings are being collected, providing another opportunity to reflect on His goodness and provision.

Doxology

Along with the Gloria Patri, the Doxology is the only element of the service that does not change each week in terms of content. While the tunes selected to accompany these professions of praise occasionally rotate, their words remain steadfast from week to week, reminding us of the unchanging nature of our God. The Doxology is simple and concise, easily learned by children, and ideally suited for bringing a portion of the corporate worship service into the home as an element of family worship.

In Part III we will look at the New Testament reading through the Benediction, as well as other special elements that periodically take place during the worship service.