

# Liturgical Habits - Counter-Formation to Rival Liturgies

by Michael Flowers

---

*Michael Flowers discusses how liturgical habits serve as a counter-formation to rival liturgies that distract believers from true worship and transformation in Christ.*

**Duration:** 35:00

**Scripture:** Psalm 84:1, Isaiah 1:16-17, Matthew 15:18, Colossians 3:12-16

**Topics:** "Liturgy"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the process of forming Christ within us. He uses the analogy of getting dressed to explain how Christ is formed in us through repetition and practice. Just as we need someone to teach us how to get dressed, we also need someone to disciple us in knowing how to put on Christ. The speaker emphasizes that this process is not a one-time event, but a continual rehabilitation that requires us to remember and practice the new practices given to us by God.

---

## Transcript

We're going to continue our series called Why, and this is going to be part two. Why liturgy? And this is going to be called counter formation to rival liturgies. Counter formation to rival liturgies.

Okay, what on earth are we talking about here? Well in Isaiah 1, in our first Old Testament reading this morning, Isaiah calls God's chosen people, his very precious ones, rebellious children. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master. But Israel does not know.

My people do not understand. This is the prophet Isaiah speaking. The Lord is all the more grieved when they come to worship and they offer their sacrifices.

I hate your festivals. You know, this is the Lord's attitude towards what's going on, something that he established, something he laid down, the liturgy of their lives in the temple. What's going on? The whole narrative of their calling to worship, worship of the one true God is being rivaled.

It's being rivaled by another liturgy, so to speak. A way of life is being rivaled by another liturgy, a way of life likened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Wow.

It's verse 10. He pleads in verse 16 to be washed. Oh, that you would be washed.

Oh, that you would cleanse yourselves to cease evil and then underscore this in verse 17. Learn to do good. Learn to do good.

How? Well, the invitation is to come. Come, let us reason together. Let us converse.

Come and get to know me all over again. Come, let us reason. And he speaks almost prefiguratively of baptismal language.

I will cleanse you. I will wash you. Uses the analogies of red, the images of red like crimson and white as snow.

So we have that situation in Isaiah, and then we read today the responsorial prayer in Psalm 84. And this brings us a little closer to the intention of human flourishing God has in communion with God. Says how lovely, how lovely is your dwelling place? How lovely is this place of worship? Oh, Lord of hosts.

My soul longs. Yes, thanks for the courts of the Lord. My heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.

My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. Think about that as we juxtapose that with the reading today about the heart in Matthew 15. See what Jesus is wanting to show us in all of this is the source of rival liturgies, rival liturgies, the way we script our lives.

We script our lives. We script our lives. We script our lives.

We script our lives. Counter to his kingdom by the values and habits that we come to accept. That's what rival liturgies can be the way we script our lives, narrate our lives.

Our lives are telling a story and we're living inside of a story. We have to ask what story is that? What story is my life based on? What story is my life proclaiming? We script our lives counter to his kingdom by the values and habits that we come to accept as normal. It's just normal.

And then he quotes Isaiah 29. Jesus does in Matthew 15. This people honor me with their lips, but their heart right here, the core, the Latin word for heart, the core, their heart is far from me.

They have words of intimacy. Spirituality is there, but the heart, the core of their being is far from them in vain. Do they worship me in vain? Do they worship me teaching his doctrines, the commandments of men? And we heard that today.

We heard Jesus's illustration what that is. And then he goes on to say. The fallacy of their traditions is that it violated the scriptures, what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, Jesus is saying, and this is what defiles a person.

And he describes just a little bit of this, he says, for out of the heart, the core of our being come. Singing for joy to the living God we see in the Psalms, but we also see evil thoughts. Think about the evil thoughts for a minute.

I was reading a little piece the other day that says that 80 percent of our thoughts are negative. You think about the autonomic thoughts, right? The unscripted thoughts in the moment that just flash across the screen. Many times they will be negative, many times they will be something that you don't want to think about, right? Eighty percent of our thoughts can be negative.

And this is coming out of this heart that needs formation, that needs a solution, right? Evil thoughts, murder, adultery, all these activities are coming out of the heart, the source, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands, no, that doesn't defile anybody. And so the core, which I said is the Latin word for heart, the core source of our motives, our desires, our impulses leading to our actions, comes from this place Jesus describes as the heart.

And so Psalm 84 describes a heart that longs, even faints for the courts of the Lord's heart and flesh, sing for joy to the living God. How does the source of all such evil, as Jesus describes in Matthew 15, come to a place like Psalm 84? That's a beautiful hope. Well, in Colossians three, really the whole book of Colossians, Paul is concerned with this same problem, the same issue.

And he uses the analogy of undressing. OK, taking off specific garments and getting dressed up is something that we do every day, right? We undress and we get dressed up. We dress up again.

We put off. These are the language, some of the way the translation goes, put off and put on. It's baptismal language.

What happens in the exchange when we are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ and into the resurrection of Jesus Christ? We're putting off the old Adam, the old creation, and we're putting on the new creation, the new creation that is in Jesus. If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. All things have passed away.

Behold, all things have become new. OK, now, what on earth does that mean? Because you read the news today, right? Or you read the news yesterday and you know that that not all things have become new yet. We have to read that in Christ.

There's still a very, very. There's a lot of rivalry going on inside of us right now. That's not happening in Christ.

He is the one who has the complete victory over death, over sin. And over corruption. And he's the only one right now.

And so you say that I thought I'm a new creature in Christ. We are. But it's progressive in recovery until we're changed by the twinkling of an eye when we see Christ and then the struggle will stop.

The writer of Hebrews talks about this life is in your struggle against sin. That's what this life is. It's a struggle against rival liturgies.

And so that we are renewed, we are transformed by the renewing of our mind, the renewing of our hearts, not just the mental capacity that Paul is talking about here, but it's the renewal of the very core of our being. And that's taking place progressively inside of our lives. Some days I look at my life and I go, wow, I'm very discouraged.

Where is the transformation? Where is the transformation, Lord? Have you ever felt just like giving it all up? Right. These are all feelings you see. These are all those negative thoughts, that 80 percent quotient that seeks to lie to us and tell us and define reality by what we're thinking in the moment.

Reality, brothers and sisters, is far from what you're thinking in the moment. That's good news that what you're thinking in the moment doesn't define who you are, your identity. This is the trick, and this is really

what Paul is trying to get out throughout the whole book of Colossians.

He's trying to get us into a place called in Christ and to learn habitually. Rehab, it's rehab, it's to rehabilitate our lives from evil practices to good practices, learn to do good, says the prophet Isaiah. Christianity doesn't spend a lot of time on this, especially in the Protestant world, because we're so hung up with being do gooders.

You don't want to be a do gooder, right? You ever heard that? You're just a bunch of do gooders. As if doing good is something like wrong. Incredible.

I'm not propagating moralist moralism and all of this other kind of legalistic kind of living. That's not what I'm saying, but I'm trying to correct a misunderstanding, a misapplication of what even Paul is trying to get up here. And so I want you to think just for a moment what it's like.

What was it like for you when you were learning how to get dressed? Can you even remember how old you were when you finally didn't put your shirt on backwards? I would have a brilliant mind if I could do that, but I can't fully get in touch with that. And I was struggling so bad that I called my daughter because I'm a grandpa. And I didn't think Nova, who has just turned three, I didn't think that she was dressing herself yet.

Now, you could ask a mother this, I mean, like Liz would have known the answer to this, but, you know, we're slow of learning and slow of heart. We're those guys on the road to Emmaus.

You can tell because Jesus said you're slow of learning and slow of heart. Yeah, but I called my daughter yesterday or day before yesterday and I said, hey, you know, I'm looking at this passage about getting dressed and undressing and I'm just thinking, does Nova dress herself? And she says, oh, no, she doesn't want to dress herself yet. Remember what it was like to learn how to tie your shoes? Oh, man.

Yeah, that's why that's why I wear these, because I never learned. Right. And then, you know, today kids are wearing Velcro.

Right. So it really makes it easy on mom and dad. Right.

At some point we have to learn how to pull the Velcro off and learn how to tie our shoes. Right. And think about the repetition this is coming, this is ripping off of last week.

Right. Think about the repetition that was involved in learning how to dress yourself. Oh, man.

Last week, we concluded that anything that is formative must be repetitive in answering why liturgy, anything that is formative must be repetitive. And we said that the liturgy and the repetition of the liturgy. Day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, with its many colors and shades of the liturgical calendar, is drawing us into another story.

It's drawing us into another narrative and it's centered in Jesus Christ. In fact, the narrative was so strong once upon a time that we divided it into A.D. and B.C. It's not politically correct to use that anymore. Right.

C.E. Something life altering happened in that culture. The mastery of a golf swing or a musical instrument, the mastery of a musical instrument, to name a few, is a formational process involving repetition. A lot of practice.

Practice makes perfect. Right. And so getting dressed, likewise, doesn't come natural to us.

It just doesn't come natural. It takes practice and somebody has to teach us those skills. Somebody has to apprentice us, disciple us in knowing how to get dressed.

Somebody has to show us how to do it through demonstration, observation. How do you do that again? Repetition, practice, corrective input until the integration of mind and body happen and muscle memory is developed. Right.

Remember the time when you start? I don't know if you take typing lessons anymore. Everybody seems like they're just they come out of the womb doing this now with their iPhones. But once upon a time, we had to learn how to type.

And wow, what a liberating thing. That was the most practical thing I learned in high school was learning how to type. And I'm using it to this very day.

It's fantastic. But man, you remember how hard it was to separate the right and the left hand and the fingers and the little fingers. And this was like a ribbon in my day.

It wasn't like a computer. I hand coordination and muscle coordination and muscle memory and all of the stuff. And all of a sudden what's happening is that you're you know, what messes you up so much is because you're thinking about it.

The goal is not to think about it. You know, that day you just remember that day where the freedom comes and the thoughts are not there and you're just doing. Something has been formed in you at that moment.

Paul uses the analogy of getting dressed to emphasize how Christ is formed in us, how to put on Christ, what happens in our baptism has to be continually rehabilitated. It's not a once and for all deal here. It isn't Jesus.

But for us, we forget, we stray like Isaiah and the people of Israel in his day. We drift. And the same is true today in Christ, where he is the same yesterday, today and forever, but we're forever drifting, we're forever drifting and we need to be pulled back through rehab.

We all need to go to rehab and that's what church is. That's what the liturgy is. The liturgy is the script for rehab.

Right. We're rehabilitating. Good practices.

The right story, the good news, the victory in Jesus Christ that we're living into and we have to struggle to live into that, right. But the struggle is so worth it. And so in baptism that we have to rehabilitate, we have to rehearse what happened in our baptism throughout our lives.

And this is why we have the baptismal font there, so that when you come in to liturgy, you dip your finger in and you don't rush. Nobody's going to push you out of the way. Come in a little early.

And breathe and breathe and take a deep breath and put your finger in that primordial water. Right. The spirit was hovering over the waters.

It's that same kind of substance. You just dip your finger in that, the substance that Jesus stepped into in the River of the Jordan and you remember Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. You reflect on that.

See, a non-reflective culture is doomed to death. Richard Foster used to say, hurry is the devil, hurry is the devil. Even when you're thinking, hurry and get through with the sermon.

No. And I'm going a little slow today, right? Yeah, a little slow. And so we remember our baptism and we remember our baptismal vows, if we took them in the liturgical.

And if you even if you didn't take those baptismal vows, go back in the Book of Common Prayer and read them and claim them as your own. They're beautiful. It's a putting off.

I renounce Satan in all of his ways. I renounce this and I renounce that. And I confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Yada, yada, yada. You're putting on Christ. You're putting off and you're putting on.

Right. And that can never be just a one time memory. Paul is saying we have to do this all the time, put off your old nature, put off the old man, the old Adam and put on the new Adam.

This is a habitual process for the Christian. And if we stop doing this, then we wonder why we've stopped growing. OK, so it's a formative process.

And so he begins with verse 12. He begins the chapter, actually, which we didn't read, putting things off, getting undressed. And it's a list, something like that Jesus actually mentioned in.

Matthew 15, out of the heart, proceed these things. Paul is still picking that up and he's saying these are the things that we have to constantly take off. Where did clothes originate? Where did clothes originate? You fashion designers, you in the garden, right? What was the first thing that man and woman did when they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden? They realized they grabbed the first thing they could fig leaves and they made clothes.

That's where clothes came from. And then the Lord didn't like those clothes. And so he put animal skins representative of what it was going to take to turn this thing around.

The blood, but not of bulls and goats. But the one prophesied later in Genesis three, right, the one who will crush the head of the serpent is going to be Jesus himself. Beginning with 12, he begins to list a list of virtues put on then as God's chosen and holy, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, put on compassionate hearts.

This is putting on Christ, put this on, get dressed in compassionate hearts, kindness. Humility, meekness, impatience. All those things they teach you in business school.

How to make it in this world, bearing with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgiving, forgiving each other. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive, forgive. And above all of these virtues, all of these things put on love, put on love, which is the highest of all.

The greatest of these is love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. It's like the belt. Right, love is like the belt around the new garments of Christ that you're wearing, the white L that could be in

revelation, right? The white L, the white L, the white L, your baptismal garment, you see, back in the day, they used to baptize you naked and you would come up out of the water and they would put a baptismal garment on you.

And it was a white L, imagine that white L, that baptismal garment and you're, you're just putting that belt around you, which holds it all together, holds you all together. What holds you all together? It's love, it's love. This has been the message the last three weeks.

Why do we go to church to learn how to love? Why do we do liturgy to learn how to love? It's doing something to us. It's doing something to us in faith, right? This all has to be in faith through grace. Or we're wasting our time.

If it's not in faith through grace, then it's sort of like I hate your worship, you know, because I can't accept it because it's not in faith, right? The only thing that can please God is faith, right? And that's not a work of any kind, it's just a raw trust. I'm doing this in faith. And so what does it mean to get dressed up in these virtues? What are what are they? What is a virtue? What are these things? They're good moral habits, good moral habits.

What are habits? Well, from the days of Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, right on down, viewed the habits as internal dispositions to the good. Acquiring a habit involves learning and embodying dispositions which become second nature. And it was Aristotle who used the word for the first time, second nature, first nature would be you come out of the womb and you get a little pat and you go, wow, you take that first breath.

Nobody has to teach you how to breathe. First nature, but second nature is like learning how to get dressed. You got dressed this morning at the speed of light, probably.

Unless you're a contemplative dresser and you just so mindfully this you go out into your little Zen garden and you have your cup of tea. Otherwise, you're kind of getting dressed pretty fast, probably. And that's second nature.

These things are second nature. Driving a car, driving a stick shift. Remember when you learned that or maybe you haven't learned.

But, you know, that five speed with the clutch and all of that. And I remember when I went to the UK and I was doing it on the wrong side of the road and I was doing it on the wrong side of the road with the other with the other foot. It became second nature, though, after a few days.

I liked it. It didn't take very long. Acquiring a habit involves learning and embodying dispositions which become second nature.

So if the virtues are good moral habits to become virtuous is to become the kind of person who does the good without thinking about it. In fact, an overly conscious person who's doing the good is struggling with the motives of why am I doing this? Am I doing it to be seen? Am I doing it? Blah, blah, blah, blah. All of that has to get out of the way where you're doing it second nature without thinking about it.

And it comes through practice. It comes through getting into the presence of the Lord. It comes through Psalm 84, what we saw today.

And in fact, Paul is bringing it all together here. Don't you think it's interesting that the first paragraph. Three, 12 through 14, he's talking about the virtues and he ends up with love being the greatest, and then he goes right into church.

He goes right into church and starts talking about worship. I'd never read those things together like that before, but it is in the church, it is in the liturgy, it is in the community of the saints that we learn the virtues. That we learn the virtues, he's saying, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful, Eucharistic, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all worship, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God and whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

How do I acquire these virtues? Two ways, number one, by imitation, imitating others, imitating others who model those virtues. Being in the company of those who embody these virtues, Paul said, be imitators of me as I am an imitator of Christ. Right.

And then number two, it's through practice and repetition, through practice and repetition. Acquiring second nature demands repetition until you learn how to tie your shoes, type on a keyboard or play guitar. Or like I said, he took ballroom lessons for that first dance and then it paid off, it really paid off.

That was a lot of practice, dude. I was impressed. And so if we're going to understand virtue, we must accept that God has created us as creatures of habit.

It's just which habits will we develop? And so he meets us where we are as creatures of habit and gives us the new practices, the practices of Colossians 3, 12, the new practices to develop the virtues. You know, we were created to worship. And worship we will do will either worship the wrong things or will worship the one true God.

But it's not an issue if we will worship or not, just go to a Chiefs game. Yeah, this is why verse 16 takes us in that direction. It takes us right out of put on love, which binds them all together to speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

You see, these two things go together because something is happening to us and in us as we worship and as we actively participate in the presence of God in the worship, we are changed from glory to glory. Amen. We clothe ourselves in Christ's love by letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly, by teaching and admonishing one another, by immersing ourselves in the practices of Christian worship.

It's in Christian worship that our love is formed. I get that by loving God one day in his courts, the one thing we become more loving. Because we become like that which we worship, and so if we worship the one true God, we shall become more and more Christ like because God is Christ like.

If you've seen me, you've seen the father, right? And so we need the icon, the image of Jesus Christ, in order to get a hold of what the father is like. So if virtues are habits and love is a virtue, then love is a habit. Instead, again, if virtues are habits and love is a virtue, then love is a habit.

We habitually learn how to love by loving like swimming, by getting into the water. Right. You won't grow in love by reading a Ph.D. thesis on love dissertation.

You won't grow in love just by merely reading. First Corinthians 13 all the time, that's a good start. But then now, what are we going to do this? I'm going to learn how to apply this love is patient.

OK, how am I doing today? As I get behind the wheel, love is patient. Love is kind. You start monitoring your habits and your reactions and you become aware of what kind of clothes you're wearing.

Maybe you didn't get undressed and you're wearing the old nature, the old Adam. Put on Christ at that moment and press into him and say, Lord, have mercy. Right.

And so our immersion in cultural practices have effectively trained us to love rival gods, disordered dispositions, implanted vices over virtues, compulsions to sin, disordered dispositions, drives and desires to sin, crowding out the impulse to worship God. We try to a fault to root these vices out with just information, the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And this is why Paul is juxtaposing the virtues with active worship, active participation in worship, speaking to one another, admonishing one another.

Right. This is where the love this is the fountainhead of where love is grown in the presence of God, because worship is the space in which our loves are trained. You say that again, worship is the space where our loves are trained and aimed and indexed to Christ and his kingdom.

And so in the practice of Christian worship, which we're doing today, we are called out of disordering liturgies in our culture and are immersed in practices that will train us to love Christ. culture and are immersed in practices that will train us to love Christ. It doesn't just happen, no possible way to be a successful follower of Jesus without being immersed in worship practices of the church.

And so Paul is putting these together and he's saying that in order to press in and kick out, as it were, rival liturgies, you must come and learn how to love a right, put on compassion. And so that's our prayer today, that everything that we're doing that might seem mechanical to us would become a place where our disordered loves would become ordered. Our disordered affections would become ordered so that we could be a church, we could be a people, I could be a person after God's own heart.

Amen. It's the heart of God that we're growing into. And as David was a man after God's own heart, may we be a church after God's own heart.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28627.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/michael-flowers/liturgical-habits-counter-formation-to-rival-liturgies/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**