

## I. Intro

Go ahead and take out your Bibles and open them to the book of Hebrews. Hebrews is in the New Testament and if you are unsure where to find it, don't be afraid to take a quick look at the front of your Bible for the table of contents and get a page number there. We will spend most of our time looking at chapter 13, verses 15-16. If you don't have your Bible, just raise your hand as our ushers walk down the aisles and they'd be more than happy to give a copy to use this morning.

We are in the middle of a sermon series on what church membership is and what it looks like according to the Bible. The elders have created a document that describes nine ways the Bible calls Christians to commit to the local church as members (There are copies of this available on the tables at each entrance).

We firmly believe that this is an essential doctrine to teach because *“Jesus' Church is strengthened when His followers are formally committed to a local assembly of fellow believers.”* To put it negatively: *“the Church is spiritually weakened when believers have a low view of commitment to the local church.”*

In an effort to continue our building our spiritual strength, we are going to focus on the third commitment which is about regularly being at church on Sunday morning. It says this:

**“I will regularly participate in our church's gatherings for the purpose of corporate worship, prayer, fellowship, and service.”**

Neglecting to come to church on Sunday morning for corporate worship is sadly a growing trend.

It was not too long ago that New Castle faced the COVID dilemma which threatened our ability to gather for corporate worship. All over the world, churches saw large dips in attendance for almost three years - from 2020-2022. But even though the pandemic is over, it has left a lasting impact on churches. A Lifeway research survey found that worship service attendance was averaging at 85% pre-pandemic levels.<sup>1</sup> The elders of New Castle can testify to this reality as we have spent a lot of time seeking to bring wandering sheep back into the fold.

Unfortunately, the pandemic only boosted a downward trend in attendance that was already occurring. According to recent Pew research<sup>2</sup> and Gallup polls<sup>3</sup>, only a little over a 1/3 of adults living in the U.S. attend a religious service regularly. Even then, the definition of “regular” varies for people.

Everyone will be absent from corporate worship from time-to-time for legitimate reasons (e.g. your kids get sick, you get sick, out of town, debilitating injuries and illnesses), but that's the not the problem these surveys have observed. The problem is the decline in people's habits.

For many people, church attendance is irregular because church just isn't a priority. Other things like vacations, sports, hunting, and hobbies are allowed to displace and replace gathering with the saints. This person may justify themselves by claiming that their personal or family worship is sufficient in the Christian life. “Me and Jesus are good. I worship Him all the time.”

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Earls, “Churches are Open But Still Recovering From Pandemic Attendance Losses,” November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022. <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/11/08/churches-are-open-but-still-recovering-from-pandemic-attendance-losses/> Accessed February 16, 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Justin Nortey and Michael Rotolo, “How the Pandemic Has Affected Attendance at U.S. Religious Services,” March 28, 2023. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/03/28/how-the-pandemic-has-affected-attendance-at-u-s-religious-services/#:~:text=The%20share%20of%20U.S.%20adults,2019%20to%2030%25%20in%202022>

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Jones, “U.S. Church Attendance Still Lower Than Pre-Pandemic,” June 26, 2023. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/507692/church-attendance-lower-pre-pandemic.aspx> Accessed February 16, 2024.

The point of our membership commitment isn't to guilt people into having a perfect attendance record. Just being physically present doesn't mean you are pleasing God. He regularly rebuked the Israelites for going through the external motions of worship without a true love for Him and every church today has people who are doing the same thing.<sup>4</sup> It's possible to be a faithful attender but not a faithful member.

That's why our commitment says **"I will regularly participate in our church's gatherings."** God wants us to be engaged in worship together. Not standing quietly during singing, not checking out mentally during prayer, not sleeping during the sermon, not coming to be served and never serve, and not evaporating from the building as soon as the last song begins or ends.

If I were to survey everyone in the room and ask "Is going to church on Sunday morning important?" I think you everyone would answer "yes." But if you asked "Why is it important?" The answers would vary. It is my goal to equip you with the proper biblical answer to that question.

I believe the biblical reason why you should be committed to regularly gathering together is because **"corporate worship is the fullest expression of God's plan for us to enjoy and celebrate Him on earth."**

Don't get me wrong, your private worship with the LORD is an essential part of life – without it you wouldn't be to worship corporately as a church. But regularly gathering together is the culmination of God's design to be glorified through the Church.

**How so?** Because the whole is greater than the sum of its parts though never less. Another way to say it is "the combined effect of a group of parts is greater than the sum of their individual contributions, even though they are never less in value."

For example, a wrist-watch with all of its intricate cogs and springs, a cookie with all of its individual ingredients, an orchestra with all of its instruments, or the human body with all its parts, have greater significance as a whole than their parts do operating by themselves. The individual parts are not less important, but they have a greater effect when combined together.

God designed the worship of the gathered Church to have greater effect than when believers' only worship alone, though their personal worship is never less important.

When you fully understand this reason, the question will change from "why should I go to church?" to "why wouldn't I go to church!" Your heart will sound like the psalmist in Psalm 84:10, ***"For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness."*** And when you can't make it to church for some reason, your heart would longingly say Psalm 42:4 ***"how I used to go with the [congregation] to the house of God with glad shouts and sons of praise, as we celebrated the holy festival!"***

I believe our text in Hebrews this morning supports this mindset about corporate worship so let's look at the passage together. Please stand in honor of the public reading of God's Word. Please follow along as I read Hebrews 13:15-16:

***"15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God."***

This is the reading of God's Word. You may be seated. Let's pray.

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<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 1:11-15; Mal. 1:10; 1 Sam. 15:22

As we walk through these two verses, the writer of Hebrews gives three motivating reasons why you should commit to regularly participating in corporate worship.

The first reason you should commit is because it's **YOUR PURPOSE**.

## **II. Your Purpose**

Throughout the whole letter of Hebrews, the writer has been making an argument to Jews that Jesus is far better than anything connected with the Old Covenant. He's positively putting Jesus at center stage and showing them in the Old Testament itself how Jesus is supreme over everything. He urges them to embrace the New Covenant in Jesus and warns them many times not to apostatize and go back to the ways of the Old Covenant.

Within this context, verse 15 begins with the phrase ***"through Him [that's Jesus] then"*** – and stop right there. That word ***"then"*** is really important. This word indicates a transition is taking place and is often translated as "therefore" (like in the NIV, HCSB, and KJV).

So let's back up and see what's going on. The context for our verse is set in Hebrews 12:28-29 where he calls Christians to respond to the gospel with worship that pleases God. Look at that with me.

***"28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire."***

Because we have received citizenship into the unshakeable kingdom of God through Jesus, the only appropriate response is to worship with reverence and awe because God is a consuming fire. Then chapter 13 goes on to detail what "acceptable" worship looks like.

So when you jump back to verse 15, the writer tells us the appropriate response to the gospel is to continually praise God together. The context surrounding this verse already couches this command in the realm of corporate worship, but we also see that in verse 16 as our worship includes how we treat one another.

Another way to put it is, "we should continually worship together because it's the reason why we were saved – it's your purpose."

You were both **created and saved for the purpose** of worshipping God with others.

In Genesis 1:26 God said, ***"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creepy thing that creeps on the earth."*** What does it mean to be made in God's image?

It means we are creaturely reflections of the God's relational harmony within the Trinity, His character, attributes, and rule over creation. We are like mirrors that reflect God's glory throughout the earth and back to Him. He made us with the capacity to have a relationship with Him so that we could glorify Him by enjoying our relationship with Him.

But God didn't create just one person to worship this way. He made two complimentary persons, male and female, in His image. But wait, there's more! It doesn't just stop with two people worshipping. In verse 28 God tells Adam and Eve to ***"be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have"***

***dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”***

The first two worshippers of God were tasked with making more image bearers to fill the whole world with worshippers. Lots of people being involved in worship together has always been at the forefront of God’s design.

But as you know, sin entered the world through Adam and Eve and as a result, all of us have been born with an evil and corrupted nature that desires to worship creation rather than the Creator.<sup>5</sup> And because of our sin were in desperate need of a Savior to not only deliver us from the penalty of our sins, but to also set us free from its power.

Even though we were created with the purpose of worshipping together, sin corrupted our ability, so we had to be **saved so we could fulfill our original purpose**. All throughout the Old Testament we see God’s redemptive plan in action in saving a large group of people for the purpose of worship. God chose to save Abraham and promised to make a great nation through him. As Abraham’s 70 descendants incubated and grew in Egypt, they emerged through the exodus as the numerous nation of Israel.

Why did God make and save a nation? He said to them in Exodus 19:5-6 ***“5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”***

Israel was chosen and saved in order to be a group of priests serving and worshipping God together and representing Him to the rest of the world. But they didn’t keep the covenant with God. Their hearts were hardened. So at the right time in history<sup>6</sup>, God sent His Son into the world to die on the cross to save His people and institute the new covenant promised to Israel. But within God’s plan to save Israel, He also included a new redeemed group called the Church.<sup>7</sup>

Our purpose as in the Church today is the same as Israel’s. The apostle Peter applies Exodus 19 to the church too! In 1 Peter 2:29-10 he wrote, ***“9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, [WHY?] that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”***

You see the fulness of our worship of God is expressed when we are gathered together as a people, as a kingdom, a holy nation, a priesthood. Instead of beaming us up into heaven immediately upon conversion where you could glorify God without sin, God designed the church to bring Him more glory on earth.

Matt Merker wrote a book on corporate worship and he insightfully wrote, ***““We don’t ‘go to church’ to worship we worship because we are the church.”***<sup>8</sup>

The purpose you were created and saved for, is also your purpose all eternity.<sup>9</sup> Revelation 7:9-12 says

***“9 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in***

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<sup>5</sup> Rom. 1:23, 25

<sup>6</sup> Gal. 4:4-7

<sup>7</sup> Eph. 2:19, 3:8-11; Rom. 11:11-24

<sup>8</sup> Merker, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 7:9-12

*white robes, with palm branches in their hands, 10 and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” 11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.””*

What a glorious glimpse into the celebration of heaven. Even in heaven we will worship as one big diverse group of redeemed people. Our Sunday morning gathering is supposed to be a foretaste of this future day.

But lest you should think it’s boring, the other reason why we ought to regularly participate in corporate worship is because it is our privilege to do so.

### **III. Your Privilege**

Let’s look back at Hebrews 13:15. It says *“Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”*

Everything in this verse indicates that corporate worship is an undeserved and unimaginable privilege.

**First, it’s a privilege because God graciously allows you to worship.**

The verse says *“Through Him then, let us ...offer up praise...”* This means we aren’t allowed to worship God on our own. There’s a requirement.

Psalm 24:3-4 asks an important question about who is allowed to worship a holy God?<sup>10</sup>

*“3 Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?  
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.”*

The answer is “those who are holy – who are blameless – sinless.” But the problem is that no one is blameless and sinless. We’ve all sinned and “fallen short of the glory of God.”<sup>11</sup> No one has the right to worship a holy God – we don’t deserve it and we’re not allowed to do it.

“But God” graciously allows us to worship by making a way through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Hebrews 10:19 tells us that through faith in Jesus we can approach God in worship without fear of being destroyed. *“19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near...”*

Jesus paid the penalty you deserved for sin so that you could have the privilege of enjoying God and celebrating Him.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> cf. Job 9:1-5, 32-33; 19:23-27

<sup>11</sup> Rom. 3:23

<sup>12</sup> Rom. 12:1; Eph. 2:8-9

If you get invited to your friend's wedding you have the privilege of being there to honor the bride and groom. If you were asked to be part of the bridal party it would be an even greater privilege. If you got asked to be the best man or the maid of honor you'd be given an even greater privilege. It's not something you had a right to or something you earned – it was graciously given to you. The privilege of the position then, is enjoying closeness with the bride and groom while you celebrate and honor them.

In a similar way, Jesus is the only way we are granted permission to draw near to God. It's a privilege.

**Second, it's a privilege because God enables you to worship.** The fact that you are here today physical is because God let you live today. He sustained your health enough to be here. He protected you on your drive here. He allows you to hear with your ears, see with your eyes, and talk with your lips.<sup>13</sup> He gave you a new heart so that you can understand and respond to spiritual things.<sup>14</sup> All of these are underserved privileges that enable you to worship.

James 1:17 says *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.”* 1 Corinthians 4:7 says *“What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?”*

Let us not take these things for granted for a moment.

**Third, it's a privilege to worship because God graciously gathers and unites us together to worship.** When you were saved, lots of supernatural things happened all at once – regeneration, faith, illumination, repentance, sanctification, justification...etc. But one of the things that can be easily overlooked is that you were united into Jesus Christ and made a member of His Church.<sup>15</sup>

The Bible uses a lot of metaphors to illustrate this reality. We are pictured as being parts and members of Jesus' body,<sup>16</sup> we are his Bride,<sup>17</sup> we are the temple and building of God<sup>18</sup>, branches on a vine<sup>19</sup>, citizens of a kingdom<sup>20</sup>, and a flock of sheep<sup>21</sup>.

Each of these metaphors are wonderfully profound and describe how we are united together as a Church. Ultimately your understanding of the church will affect your understanding of corporate worship. It's like family dinner or a family reunion. It's a unique time together where we celebrate and enjoy our common bond in Jesus.

Gathering together is unique because only the church is mouthpiece of God's kingdom.<sup>22</sup> Only the church is the visible manifestation of an invisible Savior<sup>23</sup>, it's the body<sup>24</sup> and Bride of Christ<sup>25</sup>, it's the temple of

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<sup>13</sup> Ex. 4:11; Ps. 40:6; 1 Cor. 2:12-14

<sup>14</sup> 1 Cor. 2:12-14

<sup>15</sup> cf. Rom. 6:1ff.; 1 Cor. 12:12-13

<sup>16</sup> Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27; Col. 1:18, 24

<sup>17</sup> Eph. 5:25; Rev. 19:7-9; 22:17

<sup>18</sup> 1 Cor. 6:19; Eph. 2:19-22

<sup>19</sup> John 15

<sup>20</sup> Eph. 2:11-22; 1 Pet. 2:11;

<sup>21</sup> Acts 20:28-29; Eph. 4:11; Lk 12:32; John 10:1-19

<sup>22</sup> Matt. 18:18-20; 1 Tim. 3:14-15; Eph. 3:10

<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 12:27; John 13:34-35

<sup>24</sup> 1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27

<sup>25</sup> Eph. 5:25; Rev. 19:7; 22:17

God<sup>26</sup>, it's a new spiritual family.<sup>27</sup> Only the church displays God's wisdom to angels in heaven<sup>28</sup> and only the church is led and guarded by spiritually qualified shepherds.<sup>29</sup>

In addition to that, the gathered church manifests God's presence more fully when we are gathered together. Many people want to experience God's presence. In the Old Testament people had to go to the temple to draw near to God's special presence. But now we are the temple of God who dwells in us. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul says "Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit." Not you singular – but you all together. He actually said "Ya'lls body is the temple."

Matt Merker puts it well when he wrote "God's dwelling place has a congregational shape. If we hope to encounter God's presence when we come to church, we ought to expect to find him in and with one another, rather than primarily in our own personal feelings and intuitions. A church service isn't mainly the place for me to have a souped-up, private 'quiet time.' It's the place for me to meet God by meeting with his Spirit-filled people."<sup>30</sup>

When I was growing up in Kansas, I remember my dad getting us tickets to watch the Jayhawks play at Allen Fieldhouse in Lawrence. At the time, it was in the Sport Illustrated top 10 places to watch a basketball game list.<sup>31</sup> You didn't have to twist my arm to attend. I didn't struggle to sing, chant, and celebrate with 16,000 of strangers because we were all rooting for the same team. It didn't feel like a chore to be there because I enjoyed it. I loved participating.

When we see corporate worship as the unique thing God made it to be, when our theology is deep, then our worship won't be seen as a duty so much as a privilege!

We have to be careful and balanced here because I am not saying that your personal worship is unimportant. That's why the statement "the whole is greater than the sum, though not less" is a helpful illustration of this truth.

John piper captures this Biblical balance well in a sermon when he said, "The New Testament forbids us to forget, neglect, or minimize the radical, essential, eternal significance of the individual worshiping human person. And the New Testament forbids that we forget, neglect, or minimize the coming into being of the blazingly beautiful bride of Christ who is more than the sum of her flaming parts, though not less."<sup>32</sup>

We will maintain this balance between personal and corporate worship in the coming weeks when we focus on the church member's commitment to personal holiness.

**Finally, it's a privilege to worship because God gives you guidance on how to worship Him.** God was explicit in the Old Covenant on how Israel was to worship Him. He gave 613 commandments in the Law. God cares about how we worship Him<sup>33</sup> and when Israel did its own thing, there were severe

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<sup>26</sup> Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 6:19

<sup>27</sup> Eph. 2:19-20

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 3:8-11

<sup>29</sup> Heb. 13:17

<sup>30</sup> Merker, 40.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.si.com/more-sports/2007/07/14/14top-10-college-sports-venues#gid=ci0255c96550002515&pid=cameron-indoor-stadium>

<sup>32</sup> John Piper, "God Made the World for Worship: His Glory in Individuals and Gatherings." Sermon, Sept. 5, 2022. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-made-the-world-for-worship> Accessed February 16, 2024.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Exodus 20ff.; Leviticus, Deuteronomy; Ps. 51:16-17; Is. 1:11-18; 66:2; 1 Tim. 3:14-15 1 Cor. 11-14; Matt. 28:19-20

consequences: like when they made a golden calf and worshipped it<sup>34</sup> and God killed a lot of them. Or when Aaron's sons offered strange fire to God in the tabernacle and He killed them.<sup>35</sup> When Israel paid lip service to God but didn't obey Him, He sent delivered them over to their enemies.

Even though we are not obligated to the Old Covenant any longer, He still gives us clear commands and principles that govern how we worship.<sup>36</sup> He doesn't outline every single detail of how we worship, but he puts up theological bumper guards to keep us from rolling into the gutter.

You can see God's heart in passages like 1 Timothy 3:14-15 where Paul wrote ***"if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth."*** And in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and 40 which says ***"Let all things be done for building up...all things should be done decently and in order."***

The late American theologian Hughes Oliphant Old wrote that certain actions in worship are required because "...they are clearly commanded in Scripture. The ways and means of doing them we try to order according to scriptural principles. When something is not specifically commanded, prescribed, or directed, or when there is no scriptural example to guide us in how we are to perform some particular aspect of worship, we should try nevertheless to be guided by scriptural principles."<sup>37</sup>

So when we talk about God's guidance of our worship we are appealing to scripture to be the ultimate authority over what we do rather than traditions or the current trends of society. There are a couple of ways He guides us.

God wants us to have the **right posture** when we worship. Isaiah 66:2 says God will only accept worship that comes from humble, contrite, and trembles at His word. There's a proper heart attitude to have when we want to please God.

He also wants us to have the **right principles**. Hebrews 13:15 says that it's only through faith in Jesus' that we can offer continual praise to God. John 4:24 says our worship has be in spirit and truth. Acceptable worship must be based on the truth of God's word and not our own imaginations. It must also be done through the right channel of faith in Jesus.

When the **posture** and **principles** are in place then we can have **the right practice** – things like singing, preaching, praying, fellowship, and the ordinances of baptism and communion. Colossians 3:15-17 says ***"15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."***

When we encounter areas where the Scriptures are silent, we have freedom and liberty to worship together based on our preferences and cultural differences.

Questions about lights, lasers, and fog machines, style of music, physical expressiveness in worship, how long the service should be, how often should we take communion, and countless other questions all fall into this realm of freedom and liberty in Christ. They are matters of wisdom.

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<sup>34</sup> Ex. 32:5

<sup>35</sup> Lev. 10

<sup>36</sup> Some theologians like to call this the *regulative principle*, but this term is sometimes unhelpful since it can mean different things to different denominations.

<sup>37</sup> Hughes Oliphant, *Worship: Reformed According to Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 172.



Since we have the privilege of God's guidance, there is then an expectation that we listen to it. We now have a **responsibility** to gather together for corporate worship.

#### **IV. Your Responsibility**

Hebrews 13:15-16 summarizes our responsibility in corporate worship as a sacrifice.

***“15 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”***

In the Old Testament, believers had a responsibility to worship God through offering sacrifices. The priests were commanded to offer sacrifices every day in the morning and the evening and on all the holy days. All the rest of Israel was required to offer sacrifices as needed for personal sin and during special holy days like Passover, the Feast of Harvest, and the Feast of Booths. They would sacrifice their time, energy, finances, and animals to worship God.

But since Jesus offered himself up as the once-for-all perfect sacrifice, we don't have to sacrifice animals anymore. However, the New Testament still describes our worship with sacrificial language.<sup>38</sup>

**The first sacrifice we offer up** through Jesus our High Priest, is praise to God. “Praise” is using our words to celebrate out loud how awesome God is. The writer further describes it as ***“the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.”*** Some of your translations say ***“confess His name.”***

What does it mean to “confess His name?” The Greek word is **ὁμολογέω** which means “to say the same thing.” When we praise God, we are saying the same thing God says in His Word, we are publicly agreeing with His truth.

This verse is most likely alluding to Hosea 14:1-2 when the prophet calls Israel to profess allegiance to God by confessing sin, asking for forgiveness, and worship through sacrifices. He said,

***“1 Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. 2 Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, “Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.”***

All of our celebration of God is based on His Word. Bob Kauflin wrote, “True worship is always a response to God's Word.”<sup>39</sup>

We respond to God's Word by using God's Word in our response. The Word is central to everything in our corporate worship: 1) we sing the Word, 2) we pray the Word, 3) we hear the Word through preaching, 4) we see the Word through the ordinances of baptism and communion, and 5) we live out the word through our fellowship and service.

Worshipping through service is what Hebrews 13:16 describes. ***“16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”***

There's a vertical element to our worship where we all confess God's name together, and there's a horizontal element where serve one another.

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<sup>38</sup> e.g. Romans 12:1

<sup>39</sup> Bob Kauflin, *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters To God* (Crossway Publishing, 2015), 40.

On the night before He was crucified, Jesus prepared his disciples on how to live life with an invisible Savior. It's was a little easier to see and speak to Jesus when he was physically present. The spreading of the Good News was easier when Jesus was their leader and was doing the bulk of the teaching and performing verbal jujitsu on the Pharisees and Sadducees. But now he was leaving and they were gonna be left to do the work without Jesus physically present. This begged the question, "How do you love and worship an invisible Savior?"

The answer is "by loving His church." Jesus said in John 13:34-35 ***"34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."***

Your love for Jesus is most clearly displayed by your love and service in the church. To serve the church is to serve Jesus. The opposite of that is true. A lack of love for the church translates to a lack of love for Jesus.

If you told me that you really enjoyed hanging out with me, but that you didn't like my wife that much, and you ask me to leave her home, I would rightly be offended. That's my wife you're talking about! We are one flesh! How much more so is it offensive for us to profess love for Jesus but to scorn His bride?!

The writers of Hebrews called the church in general terms to do good to each other. In the context of the original audience who were suffering persecution and being plundered, he specifically calls them to share material possessions with each other.

The general principle applies to us in all circumstances. When we gather we are not to come only to be served but to serve. We are to actively look for ways to minister to each other's physical and spiritual needs. Several passages remind us to utilize our spiritual gifts in order to build up the body so that we will live more holy lives.<sup>40</sup> When we don't, not only does the whole church body suffer, but so will you.

No matter what your spiritual gifts are, no matter what season of life you are in, and no matter what kind of trials and suffering you may be going through, you are an indispensable member of the church. There's no such thing as a useless or worthless member. We need each other in order to fully enjoy and celebrate God through the church. Don't neglect this.

We are responsible to worship God, through faith in Jesus, by celebrating Him and to serving one another.

## V. Conclusion

Because of the great gift of salvation, Heb. 10:24-25 says ***"24 let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."***

Because of the great mercies of God who has blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies and supernaturally knit us together into the body of Christ, don't neglect to regularly participate in the church's gathering!

On top of that, we should meet even more because Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming is imminent and can happen at any moment. Our corporate worship is a key element to enduring in the faith until that time. Those who neglect to gather together are at a far greater risk to fall away from the faith.

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<sup>40</sup> Rom. 12:6; 1 Cor. 12:7; 1 Peter 4:10

The Scriptures call us to make the commitment to “**regularly participating in our church’s gatherings for the purpose of corporate worship, prayer, fellowship, and service.**” It’s your purpose, your privilege, and your responsibility.

I want to give you a couple of practical steps you can take to help you live out your commitment to corporate worship.

**First, pray.** Pray that God would help you have the right attitude and heart about corporate worship. Ask Him to help you discern the motives of your heart. Ask for forgiveness where your view of church membership has been wrong or weak. And ask him to help you respond to the gospel in sacrificial worship that pleases Him. And when you come to the Sunday morning service after a tumultuous and stressful week or morning, pray that the Lord would help you reorient your heart for His glory.

**Second, prepare.** Gathering together for corporate worship doesn’t happen spontaneously. It requires a lot of preparation. Protect your Saturday evenings so that you can be ready for Sunday morning. Don’t stay up late watching movies or playing video games. Don’t let your kids stay out late with their friends. Go to bed at a decent time so that you have energy for Sunday morning.

Remember that worship involves sacrifice. What evidence is there that you are sacrificing for the LORD? Are you giving your best to Him or are you giving Him your leftovers?<sup>41</sup> Parents with young kids, prep everything you can on Saturday night. Lay out clothes, pack your bags, so that you’re Sunday morning isn’t as hectic. Be intentional to prepare yourself so that you can give your best, whatever you are physically and spiritually able, to the Lord and to others.

**Third, participate.** When you are here, participate. Come to offer sacrifices of worship to your Savior and King! Sing. Pray. Listen. Fellowship. Serve. In other words – obey the LORD and worship Him. None of these are optional.

At times you will need to discipline your body to serve God. When you find yourself distracted, refocus. When you find yourself sleeping, pop in a stick of gum in your mouth and take notes. Your personal, internal battle is itself an act of worship.

But don’t forget, that what makes our worship acceptable to God, is not our ability to be perfect, but Christ who is perfect. Even when we are at our best, or even if we are at our worst, our faith in Christ is the only thing that makes our meager attempts to worship God pleasing in God’s sight.

When you have a good theology of the church, then you will come to see corporate worship as the fullest expression of God’s plan for us to enjoy and celebrate Him on earth.

You’ll joyfully embrace the commitment to church membership by regularly participating in gathering for corporate worship. Instead of asking “why should I commit to this?” you’ll ask “why shouldn’t I commit to this?”

A watch is a complex collection of tiny little pieces that work together to make a sophisticated time keeping device. An orchestra is a complex group of instruments that come together to make a beautiful

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<sup>41</sup> 2 Sam. 24:24; Mal. 1:8

sound. The human body is a complex system of parts and organs that function together to do amazing things. In all these examples, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, though never less.

The same is true of the church. When we gather together for worship on Sunday morning, we are giving full expression to God's plan for us to enjoy and celebrate Him on earth because the church is greater than the sum of her parts, but never less.

Let's pray.

**For Further Study:**

Ephesians 3:8-11

Hebrews 10:19-31

*Corporate Worship* by Matt Merker

*Engaging with God* by David Peterson

*True Worshipers* by Bob Kauflin

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What are some of the various difficulties and temptations Christians face weekly that make corporate worship challenging?
2. What reasons does the Bible give us for committing to corporate worship?
3. How does your theology of the church relate your understanding of corporate worship?
4. What makes corporate worship unique from personal and family worship?
5. How can we better equip ourselves to embrace the benefits of corporate worship?

**"Committed to Corporate Worship"**  
Hebrews 13:15-16 - *Pastor Tysin Smith*

**I. Your Purpose**

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**II. Your Privilege**

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**III. Your Responsibility**

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