

# Worship: The Ultimate Goal

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Or perhaps you'd open your Bibles at Hebrews chapter 10. We'll refer to this and to chapter 12, and particularly chapter 13, a bit later on. But my title this evening is this, Worship the Ultimate Goal.

I think it's probably fair to say that there are probably few areas more controversial in church circles today than the whole area of what people tend to call worship. But like so many areas of controversy, often it arises out of great confusion and ignorance about what the Bible is really teaching about worship, what it actually is.

In fact, I'd have to go as far as to say that often when we're talking about worship, we're actually not at all talking about what the Bible means by worship.

The trouble is that when this happens, when we get very confused, when people go off in one direction, emphasizing something that's clearly erroneous, then what happens is that other people react in the exact opposite way.

And often that can be an overreaction, which becomes an emphasis that's just as unhelpful. And they can take a healthy biblical corrective, but then go far too far.

[ 1 : 2 3 ] As Martin Luther once said, I think, that in regards to this kind of thing, that a drunk man riding a galloping horse is as likely to fall off on one side as on the other. And once he's fallen off on the left side, he'll get back on and lean across to the right, and he'll fall off on that side.

And that's often what we do in our thinking about the Christian faith. And I think that's the situation we get into when we talk about worship. We find that what's missing is the Bible's wholesome, balanced emphasis in two directions.

And people miss that, and they go in one or another direction and tell only part of the story. So, on the one hand, we have today the very common idea, and it's very common in evangelical circles, especially probably charismatic circles, that worship is merely what we're doing as we gather together in church like this.

For many people, in fact, worship is merely the singing that we do when we gather together. So, if you go into Wesley Owen or look on their website, as I did yesterday, you'll find that it's full of worship CDs.

And they're offering, quote, spine-tingling sensations of worship. One artist has, quote, sent shivers down the spines of hundreds of thousands of people.

[ 2 : 4 7 ] That's what's meant by worship. It's the same as the comment that I had from somebody in a letter a little while ago about a conference they'd been to.

They said, quote, we had some great Bible teaching and some really brilliant worship. See, the Bible teaching wasn't worship, but the singing was what they were talking about.

A lot of this thinking is focused on the music as a vehicle to bring us into God's presence, to help us experience God. That's the kind of talk that you read.

And therefore, of vital importance, of course, is the worship leader. And in the Christian pop scene, some of these have attained almost rock star status.

Well, that's one view, one common view of worship today. It's one view which is very reductionistic in one direction. Maybe it's what you think when we're talking about worship.

[ 3 : 46 ] But I want to try and tell you, I think it is very deficient. It all focuses on the event. There's absolutely nothing there to focus on what we do the rest of the week, what our life is.

Something we decide whether it's great or not, depending on the singing. That's got very, very little to do with the Bible's idea of what worship is. I'll say more about that.

But in reaction to that, you get people who then go right away in the opposite direction. They rightly point out that in the New Testament, the worship language isn't really very used of Christians when they gather together in the assembly.

In fact, almost always, it's used of the whole of life. And they point that out rightly. But they make so much of that that they want to say almost that what's going on when we're meeting together in church isn't worship.

It's just encouragement, edification, teaching, training, and so on. But it's not worship. To call what we do in church worship at all, in any way, well, that's really leaving us back as though we're still in the Old Testament.

[ 4 : 55 ] So that's the opposite extreme. It emphasizes rightly that worship is the whole of life. But it almost seems that the only time in the whole of life when we can be sure we're not worshipping is when we're in church.

And that really seems equally reductionist. We have to ask the question in the New Testament, does God suddenly become disinterested in the personal communion with his people, in the enjoyment of the fellowship and the whole concept of fellowship offerings of God's people together?

Is God only interested now in our works of service? Are our meetings together purely horizontal things between us to train one another so that we can go out and do our real worship tomorrow?

Is that really right? Well, I don't think so. The problem is that when we do theology like drunk men on a galloping horse, it doesn't tend to work out very well.

And we tend to fall into one of these extremes. So what we need to do is come back to the scriptures and get a balanced biblical view about all of this. And when we do, we find that there's truth and error in both of these things.

[ 6 : 05 ] Both of them contain truth and both error. Not necessarily in equal proportions, but there is truth and error in both sides. So tonight what I want to do is tackle the wider issue of what worship really is as far as the Bible is concerned.

And as we're going to see, it is indeed a matter of the whole of life. Indeed, it is life, according to the Bible. But next time we'll look at the particular issue of what we call corporate worship.

I think we can use that term. And how that also is clearly important and biblical. And that there is an emphasis on that, although we must be clear what it is and what it isn't.

So tonight I want to paint some broad brush strokes about the Bible's story, the Bible's big picture of worship. Under three headings.

The story of worship in the Bible. The language and life of worship in the Bible. And then finally the shape of worship, especially for New Testament Christian believers.

[ 7 : 05 ] So first then, the story of worship. Listen to this by Don Carson. Listen, the heart of all biblical religion is God-centeredness. In short, it is worship.

What do you make of that? It's a big statement, isn't it? But he's right. Worship is in the Bible the beginning and the end. The alpha and the omega. Think about what we see in the very opening chapters of the Bible.

In Genesis chapter 1 and 2. It's a picture of worship. Worship. Humanity is created in God's presence, God's fellowship, in communion with God. Man is in totally right relationship with God.

Everything is as it should be. That's worship. It's a situation of covenantal perfection. Man relating to God as he's meant to be. With all the potentiality laid out for man to conquer the universe for God.

In the end of the Bible, if we turn right to the book of Revelation, we find exactly the same thing. It's a picture of worship. Humankind, all the world, seeing God's face, reigning with him, everything restored to that perfect, right relationship of everything in the universe with God, the creator, and indeed the redeemer.

[ 8 : 22 ] And if you read the book of Revelation, the language of worship pervades that book. So here we have in the Bible the beginning and end. The purpose of creation and the purpose of redemption. The recreation of God is worship.

It's the beginning and the end. The very word worship in English comes from the old English word worth-ship. It means right relationship between God and man.

It means God having his place of rightful worth in our lives. And us having a right view of our own worth in relationship to him. He is the king and the Lord.

We are his servant creatures. And we serve him. That's worship. Things in the right place. And of course the problem is, as we know, that what we call the fall was in fact a great rebellion against this rightly ordered state of affairs.

That right relationship of worship was turned absolutely upside down by man seeking to become God. Seeking to become our own ruler instead of serving God.

[ 9 : 27 ] That's anti-worship. And that's the heart of sin. That's the great problem of man. The self-centeredness. The self-preoccupation in all of us. It's the opposite of true worship.

And so the story of the Bible between Genesis 1 and 2 and the book of Revelation, the end of the world, is a story of worship lost and worship found.

True worship abandoned by humankind in Adam and his descendants. And then true worship restored in Christ and in those who are in Christ. That's the story of the Bible in a nutshell.

It's the story of worship. So where Adam failed and transgressed the covenant, so the second Adam, the last Adam, Christ, triumphed as keeper of the new covenant.

Jesus is supremely the man who restores right worship. He's the one who restores the right relationship between God and man. God's image bearer to God the Lord.

[ 10 : 27 ] So that's why, if you remember, when we were studying in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 4, in the temptation, we see that exact thing demonstrated. It's a reversal of man's first rebellion.

Here's Jesus now, not in the garden, as Adam was, but in the desert. Here's Satan speaking to him. All this I'll give to you, Satan said, if you will bow down and worship me. Jesus said to him, unlike Adam and Eve, away from me, Satan, for it is written, worship the Lord your God and serve him only.

That's true worship, you see. So in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 5, we're told, when Christ came into the world, he said, Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you've prepared for me.

In burnt offerings and sin offerings you've taken no pleasure. Then I said, behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the book. You see, that's true worship restored.

Human beings in bodily form obeying, doing the will of God. Right relationship, right worship. True God-centeredness is true worship.

[ 11 : 40 ] And that's what we see supremely in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's the goal of God in creation. It's the goal of God in recreation. Listen to the first few words of John Piper's book on mission called, Let the Nations Be Glad.

These are the first words of the book. Mission, he says, is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn't.

Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more.

It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. Worship is ultimate. That's what it's all about.

So when we're thinking about worship, fundamentally, before anything else, we must be thinking about that. Worship is fundamentally not something to do with aesthetics.

[ 12 : 42 ] It's not to do with types of music or liturgy, whether you like cathedrals and organs, or round the campfire with a guitar. Nothing to do with that. It's not an aesthetic matter.

It's a spiritual matter. It's not about mystical things. It's about moral things. It's about whom you serve, to whom do you bow down.

That's worship. And of course, that's where the fundamental problem for humankind lies, because sin, as we've said, has inverted the natural order of that worship.

We've thrown off God's yoke. We've usurped His place. We're in a situation of wrong worship, of anti-worship. In fact, it's impossible for ordinary, natural human beings to worship God at all, in any meaningful sense.

Even to begin to worship God in that true sense requires a great revolution to take place within us, a change, a transformation, something to restore that which has been lost.

[ 13 : 45 ] Here's a quote from our father. Until a man is converted, which means that his proud ego is broken and he takes his proper place in relation to God, he remains the center of his world and even God Himself is kept on the circumference.

For God to have His rightful place means that we also must take our rightful place. Only then is worship in a true sense a possibility. The words with which we begin a service, let us worship God, are strictly considered best taken as an invitation to get right with God, to take one's proper place in relation to Him, to bow the knee before Him.

Because that's what it means to worship, to begin to worship. William Temple, one time Archbishop of Canterbury, defined worship thus, to worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.

That's a very fine definition. And it clearly emphasizes that worship is the giving of the whole of oneself in totality to God and for God.

But it also demonstrates for us so clearly the massive size of the revolution that must take place within us, for that even to begin to be a possibility.

[ 15 : 11 ] Isn't that right? And it's when we begin to consider how God brings our conscience, our mind, our imagination, our hearts, our obedience into bowing down to Him.

It's when we begin to understand how God does that in us that we begin to understand what are important centralities in worship. How does God do that to us?

Well, He does it through the word of His gospel. That is how He works His work within us, restoring humankind to obedience. It's the living word of God that is the great promoter of worship.

It's the word of God that is the chief inspiration of worship in our hearts. Only through God's word at work in our souls, by His Spirit, only can we even begin to worship God.

Only as our response to God's word becomes deeper, only as His word penetrates deeper into every part of our life, can our worship become more meaningful? Can it deepen? Somebody once said to me, not long ago in the church here, where I asked how long they've been coming to the church, he said this, put it very interestingly, I began to come on such and such a date, but I began to worship three weeks later.

[ 16 : 37 ] And what he meant by that was this, he'd been converted, he'd bowed the knee to Christ, God's word had changed his heart, and he'd begun to worship. Before he'd been sitting here, but he hadn't been worshiping.

That's right. To worship God in any biblical sense at all is to be transformed into a right relationship with God. And to go on being increasingly molded and transformed so that that relationship grows as we engage with God throughout all our life.

That's worship. That's what mission is. It's the restoration of worship. That's why John Piper began his book like that. Mission exists because worship doesn't. But one day, one day, worship will exist perfectly forever.

Everything in all creation will once again be restored in its right relationship with God. That's the story of redemption. God is recreating, reclaiming the whole cosmos for right relationship, for worship.

That's what the gospel is all about. It's not about individual people being saved, although it sweeps us up in that. Paul talks in Romans 8 about the grand scheme of God's redemption.

[ 17 : 51 ] It's the restoration of all things. That's what's happening. All people, men and women, the whole of nature is being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ so that he may be the firstborn among many brothers, many worshipers, just like him.

God is filling the cosmos with true worshipers, filled with the spirit of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the true worshiper. As his spirit is being born in us and beginning to shape us and change us and conform us into the image of Christ, that's true worship beginning and growing.

That's the Bible story of worship. It's the Alpha and the Omega. It's the beginning and the end. Lost in Adam, restored in Christ, and imparted to men and women through the gospel of Christ applied to us by his Holy Spirit.

And so it can't be something that we do. It can't be something we achieve. It's a response. A response to the restoring grace, to the transforming grace that comes to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It begins by response to God and his word and it goes on as we continue to respond to God through his word. Worship isn't just an activity of life.

[ 19 : 15 ] It's an attitude of heart. In fact, it is life. It is life. According to the Bible, life is worship. So we're all worshiping.

You've got to understand that. Not just that some people are worshiping. We're all worshiping. The question is, who and what are we worshiping? Either we're worshiping the one true God made known in Jesus Christ or we're worshiping false gods.

Whatever they are. It's what Paul's arguing in Romans chapter 1, isn't it? We've exchanged the truth of God for a lie so that we've worshiped created things, not the creator.

And the most worshiped created thing, of course, is our own self. But true worship is the transformation by God's grace so that we begin to worship Him.

Not something we can do. It's what He's doing. That's the Bible story. The restoration of true worship in Jesus Christ.

[ 20 : 17 ] And that's reflected in the language and life of worship, secondly. In the Bible, in the Old Testament and the New Testament, the language of worship reflects this business that it's the whole of life and it's all about transformation.

And that's true right from the very beginning, right through Genesis, through the whole Old Testament and into the New Testament. It's very common for us to think that our Bibles divide between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

My colleague David Jackman, when I worked at the Proclamation Trust in London, had a framed picture on his wall and it's that page between the Old Testament and the New Testament that it's been torn out of the Bible.

Just to make that point. No, there's no division there. The division, if there is one in Scripture, is between Genesis 2 and the rest of the Bible. Between what was in existence before man's transgression and rebellion and everything afterwards.

She speaks about the restoration. That's very important for us to grasp because sometimes when people are speaking about worship, when they're wanting to emphasize rightly that in the New Testament the worship language is all about the whole of life, not about ceremonies, not about meetings, it may seem as if the Old Testament time it was different, that what really mattered there was sacrifices and offerings and temples and dancing and whatever all those things are.

[ 21 : 42 ] And so we say, well no, we're New Testament believers. It's different. We leave all that behind. No, we're not New Testament believers in this sense. We're Bible Christians.

It's one story right from the beginning. There's one story of God's people. Of course there are differences since Jesus has come. Very important ones. But it's one story of the restoration of true worship right the way through the scriptures from Genesis 3 to Revelation 22.

There's one people of God, not two. What we have as the New Testament believers is the great privilege of living in this great age when the Spirit has come, when the end of the ages is upon us, when we inherit all the great promises that the Old Testament people had.

But we don't have a better salvation. As Sinclair Ferguson puts it, we don't have a better salvation, but we have the same salvation better. But we mustn't think of the Old Testament period as just a time when what really mattered was empty ceremonies and things like that and all of it is fulfilled so that we have the reality in the New Testament.

No. Right from the very start of our Bibles it's absolutely plain that what mattered always was a response that involved the whole of life.

[ 23 : 04 ] That's why incidentally the apostles in the New Testament and their writings are constantly pointing us back to the Old Testament for examples of how to live the life of New Testament faith. Just look at Hebrews 11 for example.

A whole litany of those that we're to look to and emulate. But we see this emphasis on the whole of life in a number of ways. First, in the very pattern of God's revelation.

Think back to Exodus chapter 20. God's great revelation at Sinai which Hebrews 12 calls the great gathering of the church in the Old Testament the congregation.

Well, what do we have? We have God revealing himself in his holiness. We have a revelation of his gospel grace. This is the people he's redeemed. Then he commands them worship the Lord your God and him alone.

Well, what does that mean? He doesn't then go on to recite the index of a hymn book. There he goes on in Exodus 21 and following with all sorts of instructions about daily life and the way that they're to live and be obedient and follow his commands.

[ 24 : 10 ] It's even more evident in the book of Deuteronomy where all of that is repeated. An exposition of God's way of life for his people. We have the Ten Commandments but this time because they're on the lip of the land about to go and enter the land at last we have 34 chapters of detailed instruction about what their life of worship is to be all about.

That same emphasis is very clear just if you look at the words that are used in the Bible to designate worship. There's four of the most common words. The first one is the word bow down.

It's meaning kneeling or bowing low or falling at somebody's feet. It's homage. It's submission. It's worship. So for example in Genesis 18 the story of the three men coming to Abraham.

He meets them and he bows down before them. That's worship. Acknowledging obedience to them. Or Psalm 95 verse 6 Come let us bow down in worship.

Let us kneel before the Lord our maker. The point is you see that the physical posture reflects the inward attitude of the heart. you're bowing down to reflect.

[ 25 : 22 ] The fact that you're bowing yourself to God. And in fact bowing down physically is only meaningful if you're bowing down also with your heart. In the New Testament the Greek word that translates that word in the Hebrew is used very particularly for people's response to Jesus.

So in Matthew 14 after the stilling of the storm we're told that the disciples worshipped him. They bowed down. Or in John 9 in verse 38 the blind man says Lord I believe and he bows down and worships Jesus.

Incidentally that in itself is a very powerful proof of the claim at least of the Bible for Christ's divinity. A Muslim wouldn't like that or a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon wouldn't like that.

But it's very clear the language of bowing down of worship to God is used in the New Testament repeatedly of Jesus. It's used all the way through Revelation when all the living creatures are bowing down before the throne of the Lamb and God.

And the whole basic idea is one of submission. It includes adoration and praise but it's one of submission submission of life in obedience as a servant. That's worship.

[ 26 : 36 ] Another word is the word to serve. The word latruo which translates the Hebrew word for servant. So in Exodus chapter 3 Moses says I need to take the people out into the desert so that they can serve God worship him.

It includes all sorts of ritual things the Passover service of the priests and so on but clearly it indicated a whole of life service. Just listen to Deuteronomy 10 verse 12 And now O Israel what does the Lord your God ask of you?

But to fear the Lord your God to walk in all his ways to love him to serve the Lord with your heart with all your soul and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I'm giving you today. That's worship serving him.

It's pretty all-encompassing isn't it? Sounds remarkably similar to Romans 12 verses 1 and 2 I appeal to you I appeal to you brothers by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God which is your well some translations spiritual worship others reasonable service which is rightly understood your worship.

What does that mean? Not being conformed to this world but being transformed by the renewing of your mind as the gospel word does its work in your whole of life. That's worship.

[ 27 : 57 ] Again the New Testament uses it specifically of the way that we relate to God and Jesus. Romans chapter 1 for example verse 9 Paul is worshipping serving as he preaches the gospel of Jesus.

In Philippians chapter 3 he says we are the circumcision we worship we serve who glory in Jesus. Another word is the word for priestly service liturgo it's where we get our word liturgy from.

In the Old Testament it was a word used almost exclusively to designate the service done in the temple by the priest something done directly to God by the priest not by the people but in the New Testament it's transformed.

In Acts chapter 13 verse 2 we read that they were worshipping together when they were in prayer together as a congregation. In Romans 15 verse 16 Paul says proclamation of the gospel is his priestly duty liturgo.

In Hebrews 8 and verse 2 the same noun is used of Jesus as being the worship leader the one who leads the worship in the heavenly assembly. Incidentally he is the only worship leader the New Testament knows.

[ 29 : 18 ] We don't need any others. Staggeringly in Romans 13 verse 6 that word is also used of the government as being God's priests his priestly servants.

That's why we pay taxes Paul says. Imagine that Gordon Brown God's priestly worship leader as he takes your income tax extraordinary. It's also used in the New Testament of self-sacrificing service to the saints by giving money by serving others.

So the direct worship of the priests which was given in the temple directly to God in the New Testament he's used of us serving God directly through proclaiming the gospel through prayer through giving to other saints.

All of these ways of worshipping God directly. The fourth word that's very common is the word for fearing God showing him reverence. And again it entails keeping his commands keeping his ways obeying his voice.

Deuteronomy 5.29 Oh that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always. Acts chapter 10 in the New Testament God accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.

[ 30 : 32 ] You see fearing God worshipping God is obeying God for the whole of your life. So throughout the whole Bible we could sum up this whole emphasis on the words and the meaning of worship in this way.

I quote David Peterson Faithfulness and obedience to the covenant demands of God in every sphere of life were the distinguishing marks of true religion.

So as we move from the Old Testament to the New Testament the change isn't from outward empty rituals to an inward heart reality. No. That inward life worship was there all the time and that's what it was all about.

In that sense nothing has changed. The saints of old Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all of these were just like us. The Bible tells us that. They had sinful hearts like ours that constantly drifted away from God.

They too had to be called back constantly to true worship through repentance through forgiveness through God's acceptance of them restoring them into a state of right relationship just as God has to do with us again and again and again.

[ 31 : 45 ] from the first day of God's people right until the days when at last we'll be utterly restored in heaven. From then until then God's spirit is at work constantly drawing his people's heart back to him again.

And we couldn't survive any other way we couldn't go on we couldn't begin to worship in any real sense unless God was doing that all the time. That's why I love that hymn I need you every hour most gracious Lord I need you oh I need you every hour I need you.

And we do need Christ we need him to come to us again and again with forgiving grace with restoring power with power to help us to live and to follow him just as much as those Old Testament saints did.

That hasn't changed but what has changed is how we come to Christ. How we receive the mercy that we need day by day how he imparts his power to us so that we can live for him and to him.

It's still the word of God that calls us back to faithfulness still the word of God that nurtures us back into right relationship with him it always has been but of course for us now the word is not just the word of the prophets we have the word of Christ the fulfillment of the prophets we have the gospel we have the commands of Christ through all his apostles we have far more of God's word than they have we're greatly privileged and what a blessing that is isn't it?

[ 33 : 18 ] That we don't have to go and search out a prophet in the desert in the Middle East for God to give his word to us to restore us to him no we have it in the scriptures near to us but unlike the people of God in the Old Testament who could never dare to draw near to God without the priests without the sacrifices in the temple without all of these things that they had to go through unlike all of that we have freedom of direct access to him as we read in Hebrews 10 the Old Testament believers did of course receive real forgiveness from God they did have real fellowship with God they did receive real powerful living from God of course they did Christ is the only mediator between man and God they received from Christ Paul tells us they drank from the same spiritual rock as we do and that was Christ but they only had that through this mediated apparatus of the temple the priesthood the sacrifices and all of these things that kept them at a distance but what we have is something so much more wonderful because Christ's work is finished because the revelation is complete because all of that has been done away with forever we have access directly to Jesus Christ he's near to us and so we can go right to him we don't need a temple because he is the temple he is the place where we meet God we don't need worship leaders to bring us into God's presence because we always have access to God's presence through his spirit who's in us the whole book of Hebrews is written just to show us how wonderful is our inheritance as inheritors of the new covenant in Jesus Christ we still need a priest though of course we do we still need a sacrifice for sin of course we do but we have in Jesus Christ a great high priest a priest forever a priest whose sacrifice has been completed once and for all and therefore which is effective forever a sacrifice that pleads day and night before his throne and so as

Hebrews 7 verse 25 says he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him he always lives to make intercession for us isn't that a wonderful thought you can't go along meeting a priest and find the priest on holiday you can't have some disastrous rupture in your relationship with God I know it's the minister's day off so I can't get there no you have a priest forever interceding day and night Jesus Christ so what does it mean to worship what it means is this drawing near to God through our great high priest Jesus Christ that's what we read we have confidence to enter the holy place therefore let us draw near through our great high priest and let us hold fast the confession of our hope you see we draw near to have fellowship with our saviour and lord and having done so as it were we go out with strength and enabling so that we can hold fast without wavering so that we can offer lives of true worship to Jesus our saviour so how does it begin to look then for

Christians today living out that great privilege living out the high privilege that we've inherited of direct access to Jesus and his word and his spirit his cleansing his empowering well thirdly we need to think about the shape then of that true worship and it's simply a shape that is evident all the way through the epistles the letters of the new testament and all the commands that it gives us for living together but just look at Hebrews chapter 12 in the beginning of chapter 13 where it's abundantly clear it's especially exceptionally clear for us here all in the context of worship you see in verse 18 of chapter 12 we're told of the privilege we haven't just come to Sinai we haven't come to just that staggering thing we've come directly to the throne of Jesus verse 22 we've got the whole throng of heaven around us that is our privilege but get this he goes directly on to say that huge privilege brings huge responsibilities doesn't he the stakes are so much higher for us just because of this privilege we listen not just to an earth shaking voice but to a heaven shaking voice so how are we to think of our responsive worship look at verse 28 it's very clear not frivolously not casually we are to worship with reverence and awe for God is a consuming fire you see great privilege confers enormous responsibility but notice this it's not just a matter of a right attitude of awe and reverence when we're all together in church singing or listening or praying although that's clearly obviously implied here it's not just that is it it's much more what the writer goes immediately on to talk about is a deadly serious attitude to working this out in our daily lives there's no break between the end of chapter 12 and the beginning of verse 1 of chapter 13 real worship is a right relationship with

God a right response to God and what he's saying here what he makes very plain is that the way that we express that in the church is by right relationship to one another with all due reverence and diligence in expressing that in the church let brotherly love continue that's the evidence of right worship says the writer that above all is the worship of the church that's feeling God with reverence and with all let brotherly love continue so just in closing let's glance quickly at the shape of that brotherly love that corporate worship it's so down to earth isn't it look at the first thing in verse 2 it means a right relationship to strangers real worshipers give a generous welcome they give a generous welcome in the collective fellowship of the body of Christ and in our own homes such an encouragement isn't it when we have that welcome when people open their homes to us well Christ's home is an open home a worshipping home is a generous open hospitable home so ask yourself when did I last worship

God like that Jesus is much more interested in having your home open and welcoming than he is in whether you've got a good singing voice look at the second thing verse 3 true worship is a right relationship to the mistreated to those who are suffering for the gospel that's the implication here those who are in prison for the sake of the gospel I spoke this morning about release international about the Barnabas fund do we care about that do we care that brothers and sisters in Christ are in prison being flogged being killed all over the world do we care do we care with our wallets that's worship he says you've got bodies too surely you must feel it you've got families too surely we must feel it when we read of families disrupted persecuted for the sake of Jesus remember Jesus saying if you're doing things of mercy to those you're doing it directly to me that's worship thirdly verse 4 true worship means right relationships and marriage that's an expression of worship that Jesus wants from us do you see that part of love for one another part of love for our fellows in the fellowship is the quality of our own marriage how about that

[ 41 : 32 ] Jesus wants us our marriages to express worship he wants us to encourage one another in our marriages there's a huge potential isn't there to discourage the people of God if we're careless in our own marriage and think of the huge encouragement that it is to so many when there's a godly marriage a strong marriage a fruitful marriage such an encouragement especially for younger married couples especially when people are going through hard times to see a godly marriage that's solid that's worship it's right relationships to sex too in verse 4b part of our worship to God is guarding our sexual purity brothers and sisters such an encouragement when we do isn't it to others and it's so devastating when we don't isn't that right it's anti worship it's anti God it's anti love it hurts people not just you I've heard of two ministers in recent months two evangelical ministers who are now out of the ministry through adultery and that has terrible consequences your sex life's a big part of your worship needs reverence at all says the writer that's worship verse 5 it's right relationships to possessions when did you last teach your bank account or lead your bank account in a great worship session that's what he's saying here

God wants you to worship with your bank account it's not just something that affects you it affects your brothers and sisters what a huge encouragement it is when we're able to give generously together for gospel work it's a great encouragement isn't it we love it but what a tragedy it is when the love of money pierces somebody's soul it doesn't just affect you and ruin you it affects everyone it's part of corporate worship it means right relationships to leaders and authority verse 7 and verse 17 part of our worship he says that they were to be rightly thankful to God for those who have taught us were to show that loyalty by emulating their way of life not departing from it one of the saddest things you hear is people who have drifted away from the evangelical faith saying oh I owe a lot to so and so to Billy Graham to Willie Still to Eric Alexander oh yes great influence way back then but of course I've moved on no says

Jesus don't move on follow on it's part of your worship verse 17 needs to be taken seriously too easy for us isn't it in church to think that we can worship while actually we're very out of sorts in our hearts with the leadership that God's appointed in his church never going to be perfect is it never going to please us all all the time but Jesus says we have to be joyful not groaning not grudging that's part of our worship finally it means a right relationship doesn't it to the scorn and reproach of the world for the sake of the truth of the gospel look at verse 15 it's often quoted when people are talking about worship offering a sacrifice of praise to God but what's that sacrifice of praise that he's talking about it's the confession of lips who acknowledge Christ's name and who do it like Jesus in verse 12 suffering outside the camp despised and scorned and rejected in the world for the sake of his people it's the witness of those who in verse 13 go to him and stand with him outside the camp bearing his reproach because in their hearts they consider the glory of

Jesus Christ the glory of his eternal city far above the ethereal claims of earthly wealth that's the sweet smelling savour that rises up from that sacrifice to God it's a life that's totally committed to Jesus in his kingdom that's unashamed to take the insults of this world that's uncluttered by the pleasures of this world that's determined to make Christ known in the world whatever it costs and whatever the scorn and the opprobrium that's heaped upon it that says Jesus Christ whose voice thunders from heaven that is worship that's the worship I want corporately from you my church from a congregation unashamed proclamation of the glory of Jesus in a hostile world that's worship that's the worship I want from you brothers and sisters every one of the brothers of the Lord Jesus

Christ we go to him we stand outside the cultural and the religious mainstream we take the name of Jesus and the scorn of Jesus that's worship you see the shape of true Christian worship it's life lived in the shape of the one true worshipper Jesus Christ isn't it it's shaped by his love for his many brothers it's shaped by his love for the world it's shaped by his cross on which he suffered for the sins of the world that's the shape of the great worshipper and that's the shape that the Holy Spirit is writing upon the hearts of all who Jesus is calling as his brothers and sisters fellow worshippers around the great throne in heaven so friends brothers and sisters in our own lives and in our life together here as a fellowship in the Lord let us offer to

[ 47 : 36 ] God acceptable worship with reverence and awe never forgetting that our God is a consuming fire we have great great privileges we in this country have great privileges and in this congregation we have great and bountiful privileges that many would long for that means that we have great and weighty responsibilities upon our worship upon our lives with the Lord Jesus Christ well let's pray through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name help us oh Lord our God to be unafraid unashamed and unhindered by this world and the things of this world in acknowledging the name of Jesus

Christ may his life be ours and may our worship be acceptable in your sight today together and in this coming week for we ask it in his name Amen