

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 29

August 25, 2019

Draw Near, Hold Fast & Consider.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Since We Have Confidence and a High Priest

vv. 19-21

“In 1976, Francis Schaeffer wrote a significant book titled “How Should We Then Live”? His purpose was to show how ideas as they had been embraced or discarded have shaped the rise and decline of Western culture. In his opening chapter he writes, “What [people] are in their thought world determines how they act...The results of their thought world flow through their fingers or from their tongues into the external world. This is true of Michelangelo’s chisel, and it is true of a dictator’s sword.”¹

A large portion of the Bible is devoted to doctrine – to show us truth, to explain its importance, to show us why God wants us to live our lives a certain way [cf. Rom. 12:1-2], to direct us how to worship Him. The consequences of Bible truth; what we believe and how we react to it, is utterly definitive. The culture we live in has developed its own ideas of truth and mostly, societal truth – and at least in North America – says we all have our own truths, and there is no such thing as ultimate truth for everyone to live by [this is edict of post-modernism]. To most people then, it really doesn’t matter what we believe as much as that we believe it sincerely and here’s the cultural key – with tolerance for other people’s viewpoints which are opposed to our own. In many cases, in a growing way, ‘tolerance’ morphs into a new definition; “you must fully support my deviant views or you are a bigot.”

But for us, as believers, Bible truth is of ultimate importance and defines salvation, our most valuable treasure, and directs us as to the proper way to live as believers. If we deny that truth, we are rebelling against God and may go too far outside of His will for us and commit the apostasy the author of Hebrews has been warning us about in this letter time after time.

According to NT examples and exhortations, our manner of living our lives must have a direct correlation with our confession of faith. For 9 ½ chapters of this letter, the author has been feeding us that necessary truth about the Person, work, superiority, qualifications, and exclusivity of Jesus Christ so that we might recognize His worthiness of our worship. Now, in these verses which form the transition between doctrinal exhortation and practical application, he starts off (as Paul does in Rom. 12:1-2 above) with, “*Therefore brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...*”. By this, he means for us to make what we believe control the actions, thoughts and deeds of our lives.

¹ Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 357

Philip Hughes summarizes how this often plays out in the NT; “The conclusion of the central doctrinal section of Hebrews is now followed by an earnest exhortation to the readers to apply and practice in their daily living the important truths which have been expounded. This insistence on the interconnection between theology and action is a characteristic mark of the NT epistolary method. Doctrine is not mere theory: it must be applied. Faith must be practiced as well as professed. Truth must be lived.”²

Consider vv. 19-20. The AH is telling us that we have 2 critical possessions, which he has been laying out on display for us through all the preceding chapters. The first is ‘access to God’ through Jesus Christ. *“Since we have confidence (or boldness) to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus”*. We have now been given a New Covenant blessing which the average Jewish believer never had in the same sense as we do. We do not have to wait a year at a time for our representative (high priest) to enter the Holy of Holies, out of our sight, to make atonement (temporarily) for our sins. Now, we see how v. 20 explains our new and living situation. This *“new & living way”* is the path to God Jesus opened for us *“by his blood”*; and it is *“through the curtain”* (of His flesh). Note I Peter 3:18.

Our text in Hebrews says we now have ‘confidence’ or ‘boldness’ (HCSB) to enter, because He has opened the way for us to enter. The concept that He went ‘behind the veil’ to gain that access for us through His blood has been at least partially, if not fully developed in this letter already – cf. Heb. 1:3; 4:1,14-16; 6:19; 7:1b; 8:1-2; 9:11-12,24; and later on, in Heb. 12:1-2,18-24; 13:5. This gift of access to God is a big part of our Christian hope, and understanding that this boldness now gives us back that access to God, which Adam lost at the start through his sin, and this hope also allows us and empowers us to live godly lives.

So, this access is new, but our verse says it is also living. How is it ‘living’? Simply because Jesus lives to secure this access for us forever. Note Heb. 7:15-16, 23-25. See also Rom. 5:10; 8:31-35.

The phrase or clause at the end of 10:20 equates ‘the curtain’ with ‘His flesh’. It is in the sense of His indestructible life that He is (symbolically) the veil or curtain – the new passage into God’s presence for us. At one point, Jesus Himself says *“I am the door”* (JN 10:7-9), and now He is the veil – both were barriers to access to the Father, and yet are now open for us! In John’s Gospel, John made it clear in 2 other passages – JN 11:25 & JN 14:1-6. In 11:25, even believers who die will live (access to God - 17:3); and in JN 14, no one comes to the Father except through Him. As a sort of ‘rabbit trail’, I want to point out vv. 2-3, and try to dispel a traditional notion about this passage, what this *“preparing a place”* means.

You have probably heard the traditional view. It goes like this” “He is going to heaven and will build their mansion to be ready for when they (& us) get to heaven. Since

² Philip Hughes, Hebrews, p. 405

He's been gone for 2,000 years or so, and is still preparing that place, and since He created the universe in 6 days, and look how magnificent that is, therefore, what a marvellous home awaits us in heaven being built by the carpenter, Jesus."

Instead, consider this idea, by D.A. Carson:

"It is not that he arrives on the scene and then begins to prepare the place, rather, in the context of Johannine theology, it is the going itself, via the cross and resurrection that prepares the place for Jesus' disciples."³

And since He goes to that extent to 'prepare a place' for His disciples, v. 3 cannot fail to materialize. He will return. The context of the rest of the brief passage and the epic "I am the way..." cements the idea that this is not about divine carpentry but is about the price of salvation in His Blood! "Through me", "through the veil of His flesh". Carson again points out regarding v. 6, "He so mediates God's truth and God's life that He is the very way to God, the One who alone can say, *"No one comes to the Father, except through Me."*⁴

Throughout Scripture, which is "about Him", we see this same implied or outright declared truth that salvation, access to the Father and His kingdom is found exclusively in Jesus Christ alone!

Our second great possession (Heb. 10:21) is that we have a High Priest over the house of God [cf. Heb. 3:6 – *"whose house we are"*]. Because of this fact, this access remains open because our Mediator, our Advocate, our Saviour is there at the right hand of God Himself and He bids us to draw near! He is there to represent us, to plead for us, to secure us, to send His Holy Spirit to empower us, and fit us to be a 'kingdom of priests' before His throne. Because of this, we can now approach that throne with confidence.

Let Us Draw Near

v. 22

This verse is the first of 3 "*Let us...*" verses in this passage (vv. 22-25), and all 3 derive their power from the "*Therefore*" of v. 19, and the "*since*" of v. 21. This is an invitation to worship God.

These 3 "*let us*" exhortations together present us with a pattern that we are to make our own life-pattern or formula. The first one is about our worship of God, and the fact that He welcomes it, and it is an incredible truth for us not just to read, but to act on. "Worshipping God is both our privilege and our most central duty."⁵

³ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Eerdmans, 1991, p. 489

⁴ *IBID.*, p. 491

⁵ Richard Phillips, p. 360

D.M Lloyd-Jones says this of this verse;

“Worship is therefore essential to our spiritual health and well being. Martyn Lloyd-Jones explains: “It is only when I am near God that I know my sins are forgiven. I feel his love, I know I am his child and I enjoy the priceless blessings of peace with God and peace within and peace with others. I am aware of his love and I am given a joy that the world can neither give nor take away.”⁶

Now, in the context of this passage (v. 25), the author is referring not to our individual worship per se, but his focus is on our corporate worship – in church – with other believers. Certainly our personal worship – prayer, Bible study, meditating on and memorizing Scripture, praise – is not to be set aside because “true worship is our whole response to the mercy of God.”⁷ It is to be done in Spirit and truth, according to Jesus in JN 4:23-24.

a.) A True Heart

Hebrews 10:22 is a comprehensive plan for believers to draw near to God in worship, and it begins first with sincerity. Note v. 22a – *“let us draw near with a true heart”*. This is a heart of flesh that God has placed in us after removing our ‘heart of stone’ (Ezek. 12:19-21) – IOW – only those who’ve been justified by God’s grace and have believed in faith can worship this way. A ‘true heart’ functions appropriately (Ezek. 12:21), adoring God, giving Christ primary priority in our lives, not worshipping ‘by rote’ but in intensity of purpose – pushing all extraneous thoughts out of our minds as we intentionally worship God. Notice God’s rebuke of those who attempt to worship without a pure heart – Isa. 1:2-20. Notice the full impact of God’s rebuke in vv. 12-13 & 14-15.

b.) In Full Assurance of Faith

Then 10:22b gives a second thing to consider – *“in full assurance of faith.”* In light of the author’s pronouncement in 11:6, this element of our worship is absolutely critical as we draw near. Full assurance is that we know in our hearts that our worship is true, that we are harbouring no resentment, no hatred for others, no evil intentions. Note what the Word says in Matt. 5:21-24. If we have something awry in a personal relationship that requires us to resolve it, we must resolve it before we can go to intentionally worship God! That of course, is easier said than done.

So, to worship in full assurance of faith is to have unswerving trust in Him and His promises, not letting worldly, sinful and distracting issues cloud our minds and hearts. I would also include here, a faithful gratitude that our sins, which had separated us from the possibility of true worship, have been fully dealt with in Christ.

⁶ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, cited in Richard Phillips, Hebrews, p. 360

⁷ Richard Phillips, p. 360

c.) Hearts Sprinkled Clean

The 3rd element of drawing near to God in v. 22c is, *“with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.”* The OC system failed at this point. The Law could never (was not designed to) cleanse the conscience. The sprinkling being referred to here is with the blood of Christ, which alone frees our guilty conscience as our sins are forgiven (cf. Heb. 9:13-15; Ezek. 36:25). Through Jesus’ blood, and only through Jesus’ blood we know that our sins are completely removed and our hearts set free from the burden of guilt. This was a part of the Day of Atonement ceremony in Leviticus 16. The first goat is sacrificed to atone for the sins of Israel, but the second one was sent out to the wilderness after the sins being ceremoniously and symbolically placed on it, to bear away the guilt of those sins. (Lev. 16:15-19,20-22).

d.) Bodies Washed With Pure Water

Some see in this fourth element – v. 22d – *“And our bodies washed with pure water”*, a reference to baptism, and there may be a dotted-line connection to baptism here, but it is not the author’s main point. John Calvin sees the point not in baptism itself, but in what baptism is meant to symbolize: *“Our bodies washed with pure water”* is generally understood of baptism, but it seems to be more probable that the Apostle alludes to the ancient ceremonies of the law, and so by water, he designates the Spirit of God, according to what is said by Ezekiel, *“I will sprinkle clean water upon you”* (Ezek. 36:25). The meaning is, that we are made partakers of Christ, if we come to Him, sanctified in body and soul, and yet that is not what consists in a visible parade of ceremonies, but that it is from faith, pure conscience, and that cleanness of soul and body which flows from and is affected by the Spirit of God. (cf. II Cor. 7:1).”⁸

Philip Hughes points this out regarding v. 22:

“In speaking of our bodies being washed with pure water,” our author must have had in mind the promise of Ezekiel 36:25, which occurs in a passage foretelling the blessings of the new covenant. There the Lord God says to his people; *“I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses.”* Plainly it is no mere external rite that is intended, but a genuinely radical cleansing, as the continuation of the promise confirms: *“A new heart I will give you and a new spirit I will put within you...and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.”* Paul is saying the same thing when he declares that God saved us *“by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior”* (Titus 3:5f), and again, when he teaches that Christ has cleansed the church *“by the washing of water with the word”* (Eph. 5:26), or, better, *“in the sphere of the word”*, that word being the gospel of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. So, too, Christ himself insisted that *“unless one is born of water and then Spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5).”⁹

⁸ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. xxii, Baker Books, reprint 1993, p. 237

⁹ P. Hughes, *Hebrews*, p. 411

There is a lot here in v. 22 – packed into only a few words, but the impact of what is being said here should lead us to think more deeply and act with more thoughtfulness as we deem to draw near to God in worship, through the way opened up by our great Saviour, Jesus Christ!

Let Us Hold Fast

v. 23

“Let us hold fast the confession of our faith without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” The ‘confession of our hope’ here, in the Greek, means a public and doctrinal confession, and in this way, we uphold and present the truth to the world.

Richard Phillips points out the lack of faith in today’s world; “Evangelical Christianity in today’s affluent Western culture is noteworthy for its cavalier treatment of truth. We readily trade our doctrines in order to get along with others, to create a more impressive sense of unity. But we are literally surrounded by a global Christianity that suffers gladly for the truth. All around the world today our brothers and sisters in Christ are valiantly taking their stand upon the hope that we profess.”¹⁰ And he also says; “We are tempted to separate our theological convictions from how we live. What other generations of Christians willingly died for, we consider needless points of doctrine. All the time today we hear that theology doesn’t matter so long as we are living good lives. But that is a false and dangerous position, and one that leads us away from god and back to the world...Nothing is more important than what ideas we believe; nothing so shapes the way that we will live, and nothing is more important to the Christian life than the content of the faith we profess.”¹¹

The confession of our faith really means the substance of our faith (Heb. 11:1). Around the world, in places like North Korea, virtually every Muslim country, China, Myanmar, Indonesia, many African countries, Turkey, Russia and so on, a public confession of faith in Jesus Christ, if overheard by the wrong person, almost always results in jail, beatings, torture and often, even death. Yet, despite this very real danger, the church grows – cf. Rev. 12:11.

The author has been (and continues) warning those who wanted to compromise their faith and heed the siren call to renounce Christ and go back to the relatively safer Judaism many of them had left. They’d be leaving the real object of worship for a dying religion without any power, one that God had abandoned. He tells his readers to *‘hold fast’* their confession of hope *‘without wavering’*. IOW – persevere – keep running the race! Cf. Heb. 12:1.

Philip Hughes points out;

“Declension from the confession of this hope (the dire consequences of which are described in vv. 26ff below) is eloquent both of deficiency of personal commitment to our utterly trustworthy

¹⁰ Richard Phillips, p. 362

¹¹ IBID, p. 363

God and of deficiency of comprehension regarding the character of God and his unfailing faithfulness. “The confession of our hope,” it should be added, does not mean some detached formula or document, but the vital personal witness of the Christian believer – a witness, in the case of those converted from darkness, first publicly made at their baptism, but also a witness thereafter to be joyfully maintained to the very end of this life (cf. I Tim. 6:12, 13).”¹²

Is there anything more important than what we believe for the direction of our life? What we believe, whether or not we are personally aware of it at all, guides the way we live, and to a believer, the content of our faith is our most important character asset. So we must hold fast, and not allow the world, or sin to compromise us or to distract us from the hope of the Gospel.

The author gives us a reason – *“for he who promised is faithful”*. This phrase immediately made me think of 2 Tim. 2:8-13, and 2 Tim. 1:12. Paul was not dissuaded by the severe hardships he endured (cf. 2 Cor. 11), but throughout his life as a believer, even as he faced imminent martyrdom in 2 Timothy, he continued to strive to serve Christ faithfully. Note how 2 Timothy 2:14-19 continues what we read above. Paul, a great example of how to ‘stand fast’, renders what may be one of the greatest confessions of faithful living in the Bible – 2 Tim. 4:6-8!

Let Us Consider

vv. 24-25

Anthony Carter, cited by Thabite Anyabwile, says this about these last 2 verses; “When we gather for worship, one of the important realities is that we testify to our being there for one another. We exhort one another. We edify one another. We challenge one another. We admonish one another. We pray for and with one another. We share with one another our time, our treasures and our talents. We teach one another, and we equip one another. Therefore, I must be reminded that I do not go to church for myself. I go to church for all those who have come to church for me. The most selfish act a Christian can do is to stay away from the gathered body of Christians. To stay away is to deny my brothers and sisters the fellowship and encouragement only I can give. God has designed the church in such a marvelous way as to have us intricately interdependent upon each other for His glory. This is a reality that takes place whether we realize it or not.”¹³

The third and final exhortation of this section as a result of our ability to now enter God’s presence because of Jesus’ blood and High Priesthood tells us that Christians are not to be individualists. We must have, as one of the main thrusts of our faith in Christ is a desire to consider how we can help other believers. How do our faithful actions affect them? How do our unfaithful actions affect them? Sometimes, we have to surrender our personal freedoms as believers, so as not to offend or confuse weaker believers (I Cor. 8:7-13). We must also show love to those in physical need as well,

¹² Hughes, p. 414

¹³ Anthony carter, as cited byAnyabwile Thabiti, Reviving the Black Church, B & H, 2015, p 89-90.

which is a display of real faith (Jas. 2:14-17). Although much of this help for others may be (& probably should be) behind the scenes, and not known by anyone but the one you are helping, the main area of encouragement we provide is in our local church where we interact every time we are in attendance. It is an immense encouragement when a preacher or teacher sees the pews filled rather than empty.

Verse 24 tells us *“Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...”*. This has to do with how we think. We are generally used to thinking about ourselves far too much. Even in our closest relationships, let alone in our church family – being offended by every perceived snub or lack of credit for things we have done for our church – we think of ourselves. But these 2 verses are trying to change the usual course of our thoughts, by causing us to look around to see what is going on in other people’s lives. Is someone questioning their faith, or been out of church for many weeks, is sad or discouraged about something, is physically ill or financially strapped and cannot keep up with their bills, etc.? We can discern these sorts of things if we are mature believers, and encourage and help in tangible ways to further encourage other believers. Richard Phillips makes a good point; *“Without needless prying, we should give thought to the condition of those around us. If we are not doing this, then we are nothing more than takers, consumers of religion who are of little use for the eternal destiny of other people.”*¹⁴

But personal involvement in other people’s lives can be a bit messy and time consuming, so we are naturally often hesitant to get involved. I know personally of a number of people in this church who are involved in other people’s lives on purpose, and this to me, is an expression of love for Christ and love for others.

‘Stirring up’ one another also involves our personal walk in public and in our church. Does the way we handle ourselves provoke others to take the Bible seriously because (in part) they know how it impacts our life? When we comment on world situations or even local ones, does our counsel cut across the grain of the world’s logic and press home God’s promises and claims? Does our behaviour present a helpful model for newer or weak believers? If not, we need to make some course corrections.¹⁵

We are to encourage one another (v. 25), and one way to do this is very simple. Show up! Tom Schreiner comments on v. 25; *“Community encouragement and love and good works can scarcely occur if believers cease to meet with one another. The fear of discrimination and persecution explains, at least in part, why some believers were inclined to abandon their meetings. Refusing to meet with other believers in this context signifies apostasy, the renunciation of the Christian faith. If believers renounce meeting with other Christians, especially because they fear discrimination and mistreatment, they are in effect turning against Christ. Apparently, some were following this course of action, for they had made it a habit of not attending. For the author of Hebrews, this isn’t a light matter. Forsaking*

¹⁴ Richard Phillips, p. 365

¹⁵ IBID, p. 365

such meetings signaled great danger, for if they did not return to the assembly of fellow believers, they would face final judgment and destruction.”¹⁶

In 2019, we in Canada are under no such fear when we meet to worship Christ. Attending the church of our choice is still (so far) a freedom we enjoy. Yet, how many people who could be in their church every Sunday and Wednesday are so intermittent in attending, that when they do show up, it is difficult to recall their names? If people are absent, how can we ever carry out the encouragement (yes, encouragement) cited in Hebrews 3:13?

We are all threatened by and tempted by the deceitfulness of sin, which, in its very character is deceptive and can easily overtake the unwary believer. Good preaching and teaching can certainly blunt this threat, but personal interaction is perhaps even better. We are not an audience being entertained in church, but fellow worshippers honouring God and learning to live lives that honour, glorify and exemplify Christ! We must, as a part of that, keep track of and look out for one another.

Notice how v. 25 ends *“and all the more as you see the day drawing near”*. This is a reference to the “Day” of the return of Christ. Peter says it this way – 2 Peter 3:1-13 (key v. 11). There is certainly an implication here that we will be able to sense the impending approach of this day, and in Heb. 9:28-29, the author relates that we are to be eagerly awaiting His return, because He will return to save those who eagerly await Him. Those who refuse to wait and hope for His return are warned in Heb. 12:25-29.

Hebrews does not have a lot of end times prophecy in it like so many other NT books, in fact, only 9:27,28; 10:25; 12:27 & 13:4 are such references. In 3 of these verses, final judgment is in sight, but here in v. 25, it is connected to our non-attendance in church, and encouraging one another. Our faith, hope and love for others is to bring us to this realization that the time is getting closer and closer for the return of Christ, and all that is connected to it. Here again is Tom Schreiner’s further take on v. 25;

“Finally, we should consider how to encourage other believers to love and good works and perseverance. Those who abandon the fellowship of the Christian church by failing to attend are in danger of the final judgment. Perseverance is not merely a private matter. It is also reflected in whether believers meet corporately with one another. Refusing and failing to meet regularly with other believers corporately calls into question whether someone truly belongs to God. It is not simply a nice thing for Christians to do. It is necessary preparation for the day of judgment.”¹⁷

We’ll end with a quote from Richard Phillips,
 “How long are we to love? Hebrews 10:25 says we are to encourage one another *“all the more as you see the day drawing near”*. The day of Christ is fast approaching. It races toward us through either the end of history our own deaths, both of which bring us into Christ’s presence. How

¹⁶ Tom Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 321

¹⁷ IBID, p. 322

should we then live? If we want to please God, grown in grace, and help other believers, let this agenda of faith, hope and love define the pattern of our lives for however much time is given to us to live on this earth.”¹⁸

The notes for this lesson were finished and typed up, and I had printed a copy of the lesson, when I watched David Jeremiah on Sunday night (Aug. 11th). He was teaching on Philippians 1:27-28, which says, “*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.*”

It struck me that this was about unity, which is extremely important in any church, so this verse is complementary to Hebrews 10:25. Jeremiah then quoted a passage out of Rudyard Kipling’s work, “The Law of the Jungle.” It reads;

“Now this is the law of the jungle, as old and as true as the sky. And the wolf that shall keep it shall prosper, but the wolf that shall break it shall die. As the creeper that girdles the tree trunk, the law runneth forward and back. For the strength of the pack is the wolf, and the strength of the wolf is the pack.” It’s a great quote, but then he applied it to the church by paraphrasing Kipling’s quote this way;

“The strength of the church is the Christian, and the strength of the Christian is the church.”¹⁹

I found this a very helpful way to close off this lesson. Please let’s all keep that in mind.

¹⁸ Richard Phillips, p. 367

¹⁹ David Jeremiah, Aug. 11, 2019, sermon on Philippians 1 on Vision Channel.