

Hebrews 10:19-25

By
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"Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

Introduction

If you think about your Christian lives, there are probably a number of things that you would pray for. You would probably pray to be more effective in terms of ministry, or even in terms of preaching the gospel to those you care about. You may pray for those that have particular needs. But if you are praying for yourself and your own character, at least something you might consider might be the issue of confidence or maybe even courage or boldness. What Christian could not use more boldness or courage to face the life that we live or the world in which we find ourselves? We would be delighted if the Lord would grant to us a heart like that of the man of faith that we read about in Christian biographies or in the Scriptures—we would ask for that. And I think that's the point, in fact if you would turn to Hebrews 10, we'll be looking this morning at verses 19 through 25.

This is the heart of the letter to the Hebrews. Here, the author of Hebrews discusses the idea of who we are in Christ and what that means for Christians, and particularly the Hebrew Christians who had a rich understanding of Old Testament law and what it meant to worship the God of the Scriptures that the Old Testament revealed to the present time. In the midst of that understanding, they talked about what it meant to have courage or boldness because we can draw near to the living God. And from there he gives us three exhortations of application. You'll notice in verse 22, there is a "let us," verse 23 there is "let us," verse 24 there is "let us." It's like a salad, "let us...let us...let us..." But it is excellent for us to think about the basis by which we find boldness in Christ, and what do we do with such courage and boldness given to us in the design of God in our salvation.

So let's pray and ask that the Lord will instruct us in this time around His Word this morning and prepare our hearts for the receiving of the Word.

Heavenly Father,

As we come before You, we thank You so much. We thank You that we can set our hearts right by the singing of praise, by the meditation by the greatness of our God. And even as we do that, Lord, help us not to wander away. Help our minds to be more disciplined.

Lord, forgive us because there is in those small sins in the course of this week, just the sinful hangovers of our own minds. We think upon sins more easily. We meditate and we lose our concentration because the things we have sinned against You remind us and draw our attention away.

Lord, there are so many things that we allow ourselves to unravel in terms of the discipline of our hearts, and the meditation of our minds, I pray that You would help us put that away for now.

And Lord we ask for Your Holy Spirit, that He would take the Word of God and would minister it to our hearts, so that when we look upon this great portion of Scripture, Lord, it reminds us of the access we have to You because of Him who died for us.

Lord, I pray that You would help us see with new eyes the exhortation to draw near to You, to hold fast to You, to consider how we can stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Lord I pray that

the Word of God will speak to us this morning and it would enrich our thinking, enrich our lives so that we might be useful to your glory. Lord, do not abandon us to uselessness. Make our lives of account, that we may bring You some glory, however small, that we might delight you.

*We pray these things in Jesus' name,
Amen.*

The issue that is placed before us is this idea of confidence or boldness in the things of Christ and how that boldness is played out in terms of the interaction of the saints. It is a basic concept. I believe this to be the heart of the epistle to the Hebrews. In other words, if you were to boil down what the author of Hebrews is trying to get at, it's this point right here: the idea that *we have an access in the New Covenant relationship with God that is unlike anything the Old Testament saints have ever experienced.*

Nero's persecution of the Christians was a horrifying time when Christians ran into the catacombs; they ran for the hills; they needed to escape because they would be dragged off and thrown into the Coliseum to be hunted and killed. The epistle to the Hebrews was probably written during Nero reign, about the time when the persecution had begun. Those Hebrew Christians hadn't seen just how bad it was going to get. And here the author of Hebrews is writing to encourage them by saying, "Have confidence and boldness in the midst of the most horrifying things you might hear. Hang on to the Lord and hang on to the salvation that is so rich and believe on a God that is greater than the worst nightmare or circumstances that you might find yourself in."

In our time, we might not suffer the same kind of brutal, state-sponsored persecution whose goal was to kill us, but we suffer in other ways. It is easy for us as New Covenant believers to take for granted what is given to us freely by grace, the salvation of grace, in Jesus Christ. In fact, we can take that grace for granted to such an extent that we live our lives in any manner we want despite considering ourselves Christian. We live no differently than the rest of the world – we do whatever we want. And we imagine that this is acceptable to our God. Why? Because God exists for *my* existence. And that inversion of thinking that God has sent His Son to die for my sins, so that I could be happy and live how I want and do whatever I want with my life—that kind of inversion is such foolishness that we need to eradicate that from our lives. That form of thinking does not take into account the true God of the Scriptures; and if we think upon our God well, I we should not gravitate toward such foolishness.

It is recorded in church history that when John Chrysostom (notable Christian bishop and preacher from the 4th and 5th centuries in Syria and Constantinople) was brought before the Roman emperor and was threatened with banishment if he remained a Christian, this was his reply:

"You cannot banish me for this world is my Father's house."
The emperor says to him, "but I will slay you."
He says, "No, you can't. For my life is hid with Christ in God."
"I will take away your treasures."
"No, but you cannot. For my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there."
"I will drive you away from man you will have no friend left."
"No you cannot. For I have a Friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do that can hurt me."

There is a courage and boldness that should exist in any Christian that understands what their salvation means. We lack confidence and boldness because we have drifted off to a worldly or sinful mindset. This passage reminds us that we need to draw one another back into the fold of thinking God's thoughts after Him.

Access to the Father (v. 19)

"Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near..."

The first thing we see in this passage in Hebrews 10, starting in verse 19, is the idea that we have an incredible access to the heavenly Father. There are three exhortations in the rest of the passage; "*let us draw near...*" (v. 22), "*let us hold fast...*" (v. 23), and "*and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds...*" (v. 24). Before we get to those particular applications, the author of Hebrews gives us this incredible statement.

"Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus." Now when he says, "**we have confidence**" he uses this interesting Greek word *parrhesia* (παρέσησις) that in its context is most frequently used with "a kind of boldness of someone speaking or replying." In other words, it is "the individual who may speak freely" and sometimes it is translated that way. Sometimes, it speaks of "a speech that is unreserved, and says what he wants to say." In fact, it is frequently used in family context. In other words, how a son would speak to a father or how a father would speak to a son. He speaks with confidence, with a familial instinct or certainty that lets him know he can say whatever he wants and he is accepted. The beauty of our families is that we may speak freely to one another. Negatively, we may speak freely to one another. We will say things to members of our immediate family that we would never say to a good friend. We'd say, "Wow, your hair makes you look just fat." I just choose that because it that sounds so ridiculous (!

can't imagine anyone ever having said that)—so, don't say that to me! But, we will say stuff to each other, in our families that is wild because there is a freedom there; and that is what this word **parrhésia** describes. The author of Hebrews is saying, "Listen brothers, we have this bold kind of way of approach, this confidence that is nearly familial. It's like you can go talk to your dad, and in that same way, we have that familial confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus."

It's just a few words and it may be something that we would pass by too quickly, but let me recall for you what the recipients of this letter would be thinking about. These were Hebrew Christians. These weren't Christians that never heard of anything in the Old Testament and only know the New Testament. These were *Hebrew* Christians. These were individuals who had grown up reading, memorizing and delighting in the Old Testament law and what it taught about God. And what the Scriptures teach more than anything in the Old Testament is that we ought to revere and be careful about how we approach God. Remember when Moses says "Lord, let me see your glory?"

"Then Moses said, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!" (Exodus 33:18)

This is Moses speaking to the Living God. This is the same Moses that earlier had seen the presence of God in a burning bush that wasn't being actually burned. It was on fire, but none of the branches were being burned or consumed, that's what the Scriptures say—he had seen that. This is the same Moses that God had spoken directly to and said "Moses, I want to send you to Pharaoh to free my people." This is the same Moses that in Egypt would approach Pharaoh, who was the most powerful individual on the face of the earth at the time, and he would challenge him and God would send plague upon plague upon plague. It is the same Moses that when the Israelites came up to the Red Sea and he says "Lord, what do we do now?" the waters divided and they walked across on dry land and the waters splashed together to the destroy Pharaoh's armies. The same Moses—the same Moses who met with God face to face. This Moses said, "Lord, let me see your glory." In my mind I'm thinking if anyone had already seen all the glory of God, it was Moses. And here's Moses desiring more and what does God say to him? He says, "I tell you what, Moses, you can see my back when I run by because if you look up on my face you will die. None can look upon my face and live."

Now if you take that concept (because this is what the Hebrew Christians would be thinking), then the idea that we would have a familial boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus would be almost an impossible thought. So for us who have been raised up in churches and have grown up singing songs about Jesus as my best friend, we diminish our God with saying, "He is just my pal and that I can treat Him the way I want and He's always there for me and we kind of treat Him like Santa Claus etc." To us, we just look at our access to the holy place as if that was just an easy and normal thing. To an Old Testament saint, we don't just approach God. We don't just come into His presence. We don't look upon His face. We don't treat Him that way. Even Moses, who of all the men in Scripture had seen God's glory detailed in a more definitive way than we will ever see until we are in glory with Him, God said would die if he saw Him.

Here were God's instructions for the building of the tabernacle. The tabernacle was set up with an outer court (this huge rectangular outer court) and an inner tent of meeting. In the inner tent of meeting, the priests would go in and do all this kind of stuff and there would be this huge veil—it would be about 50 feet tall in the temple by the time of Jesus and it would be made of really thick material and would come all the way down to the floor; so much so that no sunlight would penetrate the holy place, or the holy of holies. The only time that anyone could enter beyond that veil is the high priest, once a year, on the Day of Atonement for the nation of Israel.

The high priest would take a week of ritual cleansing, living over there near the temple, and he would bathe himself so that he'd be clean, and he'd begin the ceremony. He would kill the animal, sprinkle the blood, and then take in the basin some of the blood and go beyond the veil into the presence of the Ark of the Covenant and he would sprinkle blood on the mercy seat. Curiously, part of his wardrobe as the high priest included little bells. Tradition also holds that as they went in there would be a rope tied around one of their ankles. You know what all this is for? This is in the event that the individual going into the very presence of God would fall down dead due to his unworthiness. You would hear a little jingle, jingle, boom, and then everyone would have to pull him out because he would be dead. This is what they thought of in terms of the holiness and inapproachability of our God. This is entirely different from our "Santa Claus" God that we think about. Our approach is to come to Him in prayer and the first thing out of our mouths is "Lord, this is what I need" or "Father, these are the things I'll pray for...these are the things I feel are lacking in my life." They (Hebrew Christians) come with an approach to a holy God that would undue their existence. And these individuals hear this from the author of Hebrews, divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit.

"Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus"

At first reading, they would think to themselves "Whoa. Wait a minute now. You're going a little far here. You know we have the New Covenant. I get that. You know, our hearts are new, God dwells in us as the Holy Spirit—good, excellent. Don't be talking about we just walk in like we're family members without knocking; into the very throne room, into the very presence of God. That is insane!" But that is exactly what the author is suggesting.

The access we have to God in the New Covenant because of the blood of Jesus and not because of the blood of bulls and goats. Because of the blood of Christ, we are not forgiven of just our sins past (which is what the Day of Atonement was about) and we're not just forgiven of our sins present (which right now if we confess our sins to the Lord, that would be allowed) but even from the sins we have yet to commit—all of our sins bound up in Christ's sacrifice so that full payment of our sins has been given in Him.

That kind of access, that New Covenant access, should give us boldness. Guys, if you are forgiven of your sins and you know that this is true for all of eternity, forever. We have a very limited idea or concept of what is truly eternal or infinite. Only God is infinite. He is infinite and yet He draws us unto Himself. So we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus.

Piercing the Veil (v. 20)

“by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh”

His death in the flesh on the cross inaugurates for us a new and living way that is piercing the veil. What veil is this? Again, this veil represents the curtain that stood about 50 feet tall which was so thick that it didn't even let the sunlight through. This verse is saying that it's not just the high priest that is able to enter, but we ALL get to enter into the family room of God! And I'm telling you, if you were around at this time, and you were one of these saints who received this letter, and you would have thought “What a wonderful thing! I need to share this with my Jewish brothers and sisters. My friends, they need to know the kind of access that we have to the Father.”

If you had gone to one of the elders in the Jewish community and said “Mr. Elder, the apostle Paul and all these different apostles are telling us that we have access to the holy place by the blood of Christ.” There's a good possibility that the unconverted elder may just slap you....and say, “What in the world are you talking about? Do not blaspheme God. You don't have access to the living God! No one has access to the living God except the high priest and only once a year through proper ritualistic cleansing!” And yet, here it is—Jesus inaugurates, or He begins for us (what is us piercing the veil) through His flesh. His death means that we actually have access to the very heart of the holiness of God.

In Matthew 27:50-51, it tells us very specifically when Jesus gave up His Spirit (when He died on the cross; at that moment of sacrifice), the veil in the Temple that separated the holy place from the holy of holies was torn from top to bottom.

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth shook; and the rocks were split.”

Isn't it strange that it isn't described from bottom to top? Scripture makes it clear that no one could claim that all these ruffians came in and ripped the veil from the bottom. No—“from top to bottom” as an absolute sign from the living God that now begins a new relationship with His people. And we have that access to the living God.

Jesus our High Priest (v. 21)

“and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near...”

I won't mention too much about the idea of our advocate, the high priest, and what it means that Jesus Christ is our High Priest, but if you will notice that throughout the book of Hebrews, it mentions the idea of Him being the High Priest and gives us a number of rich ideas concerning that. For example, in Hebrews 2:17 it says that He is the high priest pertaining to all things concerning God and He made propitiation, full payment, for our sins.

“Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.”

Hebrews 4:15 says He is not a priest who can't sympathize with us. He would never say, “What? You get tempted? I had no idea.”

“For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.”

No. He was tempted, but was without sin. He is tempted as we are in all things and yet without sinning. So it's like what one of my professors used to say in an illustration, if you talk about running a marathon, who should you speak with? With someone that ran the marathon. But should you talk to the person who ran a mile and had to quit because it was too hard? No. Well, how about the person who ran 10 miles who had to quit because it was too hard? No. How about the individual who ran the full thing? Yes, that's the person you want to talk to because that individual experienced whatever the person who ran one mile experienced, whatever the person who ran 10 miles experienced; he experienced the entire thing and completed the task.

We can talk to one another about being sinless, but there's not a single one of us that can say beyond, “Well, I try not to sin.” But Jesus Christ was tempted in all things as we are and prevailed without sin. Thus, He has a greater access to holiness and is a greater High Priest than all previous high priests. There's also mention of the fact that He is the High Priest that mediates a better covenant, not the Old Covenant of the law, but the New Covenant in His blood.

Hebrews 7:25 says He is able to save forever those who draw near, and He always makes intercession for us.

"Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

In other words He is eternal in His ministry towards us. He is the great High Priest for us. If you add up all these qualities what you get is that Jesus Christ is not only our sacrifice so that we may enter the holy place, but He is also the High Priest that ministers to us, who has torn down the veil for us to enter into the holy place. On that basis, we see the beauty of how verse 21 says "**and since we have a great priest over the house of God**" and as a result, let these exhortations be true of us.

Exhortation To Draw Near (v. 22)

"Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

The first exhortation we are given is the sense of continually drawing near. The author of Hebrews would say that if it is true that we have access to the glory of God, the nearness of God and we have that familial confidence in that, then what are we doing hanging around on the outside of the camp? We should rush inside! See that's what he's saying: "Let us then continue to draw near." He's saying, "Why would you linger on the outside among the Gentiles? Why would you leave yourself separate from the experience of the nearness of your God? How could you not draw near? Are you kidding me?"

Some of the Old Testament saints that we love, men like David—what was their one ambition in life? It was to sit in the court of God, to meditate in His temple and meditate in His courts, and to enjoy the things of God forever. That was his one ambition in life. And what we have as New Covenant believers is that privilege given to us. What David would have killed for is given to us by the blood of Christ. Draw near to the holiness and nearness of our God. Enjoy the experience of God's glory and who God is as none of the Old Testament saints could ever do.

The New Covenant is glorious for a number of reasons:

1. It is glorious because it is the Holy Spirit, God Himself, indwelling us (Romans 8:11)
2. It is glorious because it is taking out the stone heart and giving us a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26)
3. It is incredible because God says He actually writes the law upon our hearts (Romans 2:15).

In other words, there will be a time when the new covenant is completely fulfilled when we go into glory and no one will need to teach anybody anything. We'll all know the will of God and we'll fully understand His Word. We have an advantage over the Old Testament saints because we have been transformed (from the inside) into the likeness of Christ. And if this is true, why not draw near to the living God?

J.I. Packer (conservative evangelical, author, and theologian in the Calvinist tradition) once said:

"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and his prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Covenant new and better than the Old, anything that is distinctly Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God. Father is the Christian name for God. There is an intimacy, a familial intimacy that we have through the blood of Christ."

So then, let us draw near—and it gives us the manner by which we might draw near. He says, "**Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.**" It speaks to the issue of the heart, and he says "How do we draw near to God?" Well, here is the manner by which we do that.

We draw near with a true heart, "**a sincere heart.**" There is no guile. We don't come with trickery. In other words, don't put on Christian face—that's not necessary. Put on a genuine heart. Don't come with the external kind of showing yourself to seem fairly "Christian" in everything you do. Don't worry about that. Don't worry about the "Christian-ese." "Christian-ese" is vernacular for those things that believers learn to do to appear more Christian-like. Example: When you meet some believers who ask, "Hey, how you doing, brother?" You start thinking, "Okay, I have to talk like that." You then say, "Oh hey brother, how you doing brother..." and you're calling the girls brother and all that. That's fine if that works for you. If it doesn't, that's alright. It's not about the vernacular or the subculture. It's about the sincerity, the purity of the heart. And when it says that we are to have a true heart, it says to have a true heart "**in full assurance of faith.**" We are to have hearts that are sincere and convinced of the fact that we are saved—full assurance of faith. In other words, we are to be confident in who we are in the eyes of God. Look at what it says about this idea of the full assurance of faith.

"having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

Understand the heart of what he's trying to say here. He's saying, "Let us draw near to the living God with a sincere heart with full assurance of faith"—you know why? Because we have been sprinkled clean; because we are righteous in God's eyes. And we are sprinkled clean from any kind of an evil conscience. In other words, we might live guilt-free.

You might think well what's the big deal? Most of us live guilt-free anyway. Unfortunately, this is more because of a lack of knowledge and pure ignorance than because of anything else. What the author of Hebrews is suggesting is that even though you know the holiness of God, if you have read through the Scriptures, you understand that God must eradicate sin because He hates sin. And despite that knowledge and understanding, we are still indulging ourselves in sin. This gap of sin is crossed by the blood of Christ and we can draw near with our conscience sprinkled clean, "**our bodies washed with pure water.**"

He's saying you are pure in the eyes of God and we can live guilt free and not languish in our guilt. We don't have to be petrified by our inadequacies. We don't have to run away when someone talks about something that has to do with holiness or sin. We know that our sins are paid for and paid for in full. We have a confidence that doesn't rely on making ourselves righteous. Instead, it says that I could not make myself even close to righteous. Jesus Christ has made me righteous and made my standing before the God righteous.

There are two men that I would like to talk about. The first is the apostle Peter (before he became an apostle and just in the beginning of his discipleship) and the other is F.B. Meyer.

In Luke 5:4, the Lord meets Peter and his friends, who haven't caught anything all day. These guys are professional fisherman, yet Jesus says, "*Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.*" And if you're in the boat, you might think, "What is this guy thinking? Like all the fish like to congregate on one side of the boat versus the other?" And for whatever reason, they listened—maybe someone recognized Jesus as a teacher so they listened. And when the nets were bursting from the number of fish caught, Peter understands (he had probably already heard Jesus preach) he is seeing this incredible miracle. He runs out and says "Lord, I will follow you! Make me your disciple! I'll be the greatest disciple you have ever seen!" Is that what he says? No. He says, "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*" (Luke 5:8) He understands who he is. He doesn't pretend. And when the access to God is given to him by salvation, he becomes an individual bold enough to say "I will die for the Lord." Tradition holds that his wife was crucified before him first just to make him recant, to make him suffer. And all he could say is "Remember our Lord Jesus." And when it was his turn to be crucified, he requested to be crucified upside down. He felt unworthy to be killed in same manner of his Lord. How remarkable the boldness, the courage, and the confidence that comes from a pure and forgiven heart. That's what we're talking about.

In flocks, we've been reading a book by Joseph Carroll who has this great story about F.B. Meyer. I don't know if you guys have read anything about F.B. Meyer. He has a number of works that float around—he's one of the old school guys. I didn't know this, but when I was reading that account, F.B. Meyer apparently had been introduced to C.T. Stud. C.T. Stud (he was a stud, his name is kind of cool) was a missionary. But before he went into full-time ministry, he was a cricket player and was considered the best cricket player at that time in all of England. He would be like Barry Bonds I suppose or someone like that. He was excellent. And all of a sudden at the height of his career, he announced that he was going to share the gospel of Jesus Christ in missions. At that time, missions weren't a very popular thing to do. There were still a lot of denominations struggling over whether or not it was a righteous and good thing; i.e. to support individuals, young people especially, going to the heathen and pagans where they might be killed or slaughtered or eaten. But, he desired to go.

The story that Carroll relates in his book is about how F.B. Meyer listened to C.T. Stud preaching on a particular evening, and afterwards F.B. Meyer goes up and talks to Charlie Stud and says, "It is quite obvious that you have something that I lack; something that I need. What is it?" Now, F.B. Meyer was already a Christian. I believe he already might have been in ministry, but I'm not sure. Regardless, he felt that there was a passion in C.T. Stud that he lacked. C.T. Stud (in a very forthright manner) looked him straight in the eye and asked, "Have you ever surrendered everything to Jesus Christ?" F.B. Meyer thought for a moment, and he said, "Yes, I have." But a small voice within him said, "No, you haven't." He tried to save face and said what he thought was the right thing to say.

The story continues and says that he then ran home to pray. He imagined it as a scene in his heart, where the Lord Jesus said, "Come. I'm here F.B. Meyer to collect all the keys to your heart." And he would hand over the keys and the Lord starts counting them. And even as He's counting them, he imagines that he knows that he has hidden one or two things, and he's hoping that the Lord doesn't realize it. And when the Lord says that there's a couple keys missing, then F.B. Meyer says, "But they're just small corners, small rooms—they're insignificant." The Lord begins to leave and Meyers says, "No, please. Wait." And the Lord says, "If I'm not Lord of all, then I'm not Lord at all." And He begins to leave again, and then he says "No, Lord, please." There's this ongoing dialogue between him and the Lord until finally he gives over those final, small insignificant keys in his heart. It was then he knew Jesus Christ was truly Lord of his life.

This is the concept of "**let us draw near.**" Instead of just hanging around and keeping one foot on the outside, the veil has been torn by God; the blood has been paid for by Christ. We can come near to God and experience what our lives might be to its maximum effect for the glory of God. Yet, here we are hanging around, trying to taste of all the delights of this world, but for what purpose? To what end? It is illogical. If you are to give yourself to the Lord, why not make him Lord of all and find yourself useful to this kingdom? That's the beauty of this idea—that we can draw near. It doesn't say "Let us draw near if we are all pastors and elders and crazy godly men." It admonishes every Christian to draw near with a pure heart that is sincere without blame and pure that we might be able to draw near and enjoy our living God to His purpose.

Exhortation to Hold Fast our Hope (v. 22)

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

Verse 22 says, "**Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.**" Because there is this boldness in Christ, we ought to draw near and we ought to also hold on to our hope. What an appropriate exhortation to these Hebrew Christians who were about to be scattered and hunted down like animals; these individuals that if found, would be crucified or lit on fire by the roads that leads into Rome; these individuals (men, women and children) who would be rounded up and thrown into the Coliseum for sport. These are Christians who were about to suffer immensely, and to them what does he say? "Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."

He says to "**hold fast.**" This word **katecho** (κατέχω) means "to hang on." It talks about how to hold ground in the midst of struggle. I think it's interesting because he says to hold fast, particularly to "**the confession of our hope.**" You would expect him to say to the confession of our faith because that is more commonly used in the New Testament. Why would he say "to the confession of our hope?" If it was to the confession of our faith, we would know what he's talking about. He would be speaking about the concept of the doctrine of Scripture—theology. If he was saying hold fast to the confession of your faith (which Paul uses frequently in his epistles), then he would be saying to stand your ground with doctrinal certainty; know what the Scripture say and stay convicted on those things—do not budge in terms of what you believe. But, he's saying "hold fast to the confession of hope". Now, we're talking about a slightly different animal. The idea is similar and related, but not so much with keeping to the ground of truth, but keeping to that which we trust our hearts and our lives to.

Hope is that great gift that comes by way of salvation. If you think about the world, it has hope, but the world's hope is this strange, vague, odd kind of thing. There was this study by a Professor William Marston of NYU. He asked 3,000 people "What have you to live for?" He was shocked with all the answers that he received because 94 percent of the answers that he received from people were simply enduring the present while they waited for something in the future. Things ranged from "I'm waiting for something to happen, waiting for next year, I'm waiting for a better time, I'm waiting for someone to die, I'm waiting for tomorrow." There's this vague kind of hope that something will get better in a little bit of time. That's what human beings wait around for.

I remember in a particular biology class at UCLA during my undergraduate years, there was this professor who liked to bash on people of faith, especially concerning things like evolution. She was constantly berating people who live in faith and I thought it was kind of funny that in our last lecture, she would be talking about the problem of global warming and the fact that diseases seem to mutate and how there's so many different forms of cancer, that even the AIDS epidemic (which was a real concern at that time and still is) seemed to continue to spread without cure and so on and so on. She mentioned all these things that are crazy catastrophes of our time. Then she would go on to say, "But you know what? The human spirit will endure." And I thought, how hypocritical! You're busting on us (men and women of faith) for believing in the things of the Lord and having hope in Him and yet, our hope is absolutely certain compared to yours. Global warming, everything is going wrong, too much nuclear warheads... something's going to give; something's going to happen. The whole world can destroy itself a number of times over and yet, "the human spirit will prevail because it always has." Even logically, isn't that laughable? Are you ridiculous? That's nuts! There's no way! Yet, here is the vagueness of the hope of the world.

I think Ecclesiastes captures this worldly concept of hope well. When Solomon says, "Listen, when I put my mind to it, and tell you what I've discovered, when I've pursued everything that this human world (and remember he uses the phrase "under the sun" he means if you exclude heaven and the things of God and you just live in the naturalistic, under-the-sun world in this life), that is building projects (things for humanity), harems (sensual delights), eating... and he goes on. What does it all add up to? It adds up to chasing after the wind. It's foolishness. It's empty. It's vague enough to keep everyone going. That is the philosophy of the world. Christian hope is always certain.

I like what Donald Guthrie (British New Testament scholar) said:

"The word 'hope' or **elpis** in the Greek, when used in the Christian sense conveys an element of absolute certainty—an element generally lacking in the modern use of the word."

And that's true. When we talk about hope, we usually talk about something vague, uncertain. But in the Christian context, it is never vague, never uncertain.

In Romans 5:4, it talks about how we ought to rejoice in our suffering because it produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and characters produces at the pinnacle of this—hope. And it says, "*hope never puts us to shame*" (ESV). Why does it never put us to shame? Because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. In other words, the New Covenant has made our hope absolutely certain. We don't ever need to feel like "I'm hoping for this... Oh, I'm so disappointed." Not in regards to salvation. We're hoping for something that is absolutely real and certain.

In Colossians 1:5 it says, "*because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.*" Our hope is already there! It's already laid up for you. It's not vague. It's not uncertain. It's not "I hope God has reserved a place for me in heaven." No. There's a certainty to it. In fact, later on in Colossians 1:27 it says "*and to them God chose to make known how great among the*

Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (ESV). Again, hope is spoken as a certainty, not as something that is vague. Why is our hope so certain? Because God does not lie.

Exhortation to Consider How to Stimulate to Love & Good Deeds (v. 24-25)

"and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

I believe C.S. Lewis once said "There are only two days: there's today and there's that day." It's a great way for Christians to look at life because as bad as things are today, there's only two days: today and that day. Today might be bad or today may be good; it may be better than most. But you know *that day will be glorious*. And that day when the Lord returns—that day is to come; it is certain. That day (according to the Word of God which never fails and God cannot lie) is to come upon us and give us the blessing of not having to struggle with sin anymore, of being fully righteous and established in Him; in the fullness of everything that we might enjoy and experience, giving us the full potential of what a human being completely devoted to the living God might have—that day is to come.

Therefore, don't forsake assembling together as some have already developed the habit of. This is such a significant passage because we live in a time and a culture where church attendance is quite optional. Why? Because there's church every Sunday! We imagine (as we do with so many of our other things) that we can plan ahead, we can plot out, and we can say, "Well, I have how many Sundays in a given year? I'll go to those days and catch one of those Sundays along the way." We forget the admonition of Luke 12:20 which says, "*Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?*" Does He owe you the next 52 Sundays? Is God obligated to you to give you 60+ years of happiness in this life? Or can He not take you tonight? It's up to Him according to His purpose and glory to maximize your effectiveness for the sake of others.

Let me go back to the exhortation to clarify that in verse 24. "**Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.**" The exhortation there is not "let us love and good deeds." Did you notice that? Let's be precise because the Scriptures are precise and given to us with precision. Let's not just generally round that together and just say that the command there is to love and good deeds. No. It says very clearly that we are to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds." And even more clearly than that, it says that we are to "consider how to stimulate another to love and good deeds."

In other words, the main verb there in that exhortation is not "stimulate" and it's not "love and good deeds" but it is "**to consider.**" The Greek word is ***kataneoē*** (κατανοέω). It means to use your creative energies and your mind. This is where we lack sometimes concerning our ministry to one another. The encouragement and exhortation here is that we are to use our minds for a greater purpose than absorbing all the junk that we watch on television. We are to use our minds for a greater purpose even than to get advanced degrees or to demonstrate ourselves well-read. We are to use our minds (in particular in our meditation) and in our creative energy to figure out how in the world I might prod my brother and sister to love and good deeds. That's what our minds are given for. Think about that. The Scriptures would commend for us to use our minds not just to demonstrate our ability to remember a few vague, loose, obscure, unimportant facts. Our minds are to be used creatively, purposefully "to stimulate one another to love and good deeds."

The concept of love and good deeds is understood by most of us. But the word is "**to stimulate**" one another to love and good deeds. The Greek word is ***paroxusmos*** (παροξυμός). It means to prod, or to provoke, and it is often used in the negative as our English word "provoke" is used in the negative. And so you can almost imagine that it is saying to figure out in your minds how you can keep poking your neighbor, your brother and sister in the Lord, so they would love and good deeds. In fact, in the Scriptures it is used negatively to describe what happens to Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15. There was such a sharp "disagreement" (same word) that it was enough of a provocation for them to separate their ways over John Mark because of his lack of faithfulness.

Thus, we are to use our minds to figure out how we can stimulate each other to love and goodness. Do we do that? To come to church imagining "Lord, how I could best prepare myself to: 1) to think in my mind and in my heart to take in the glory of God more and to understand our God a little more thoroughly; and 2) what in the world might I be able to do, whether it's in opening my home, whether it's in talking to somebody, whether it's praying for somebody that I met at church... how can I use my life, my time, my resources, my energy so that love and goodness might flow from my brothers and sisters in the Lord?" If we haven't prepared ourselves that way, then what have we come to do? To hear some knucklehead go up in front of everybody to talk too long??? You can find plenty of churches that have easier and shorter sermons that are more fun, with PowerPoint presentations and little guys running around... You can find fun if you're looking for fun in a church but if you're looking to do something with your life for the Lord, now we're talking about Christian maturity and now we're talking about what these exhortations are for.

Concluding Remarks

1. Let us draw near because we can. Let's draw near to the Lord. Don't hang around on the outside.
2. Let's hold fast to hope because hope is real. It's not vague. It's not worldly. It's not fake.
3. Let us use our creative energy to prod each other to love and good deeds. That would be the most glorifying to our God.

And all of this because of the New Covenant relationship we have in Him; we enter into the nearness of our God. We can go beyond the veil and enter near, into the nearness of the goodness of our God for us. So let's not forsake our assembling and think carefully of how we might use our lives for His glory and let us draw near to Him as that day draws near to us. Let's pray.

Father,

We thank You for just the Word of God for its precision and its declaration upon us.

Lord, we know that the exhortations that You give us, the commands that You give us in the Scriptures are for our delight. And Lord there are times when we don't believe it, when we believe that Your Scriptures are here to spoil our fun and to deny us some of the privilege and the pleasure of this world.

But Lord, when we think rightly, when we are in a right frame of mind, and we are logical about all things, we realize that You as the Creator God of all things, You have always known what's best. And that whatever You have given us instruction for is so that we might enjoy life to its fullest potential, to the degree that You have desired for us.

Lord, each one of us in this room we have a different path. Every one of us has a different way in which we might encourage and build up the body of Christ. And Lord, for each individual, I pray that You would do a special work in their hearts, that You'd take the Word of God and that Your Holy Spirit would minister it to their hearts with conviction so that they might choose to follow You and You alone.

And whatever their life is meant to be, whatever means by which they might bring You glory, let us not shirk our responsibility, nor to walk away, but instead to draw near and find ourselves engrossed in the greatness of the glory of our God and to be delighted to display His glory for all to see.

Thank you for Your love for us, for the grace that sustains us, and for the Word of God that instructs us.

We give You praise.

*In Jesus' name,
Amen.*