



G R A C E

REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

SOLI † DEO † GLORIA

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Our Access to God

Hebrews 10:19-25

December 13, 2009

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

- ❖ In the introduction to his book *The Consequences of Ideas: Understanding the Concepts that Shaped Our World*, author, teacher and theologian R.C. Sproul tells the story of a man he met in the summer of 1959, the end of Sproul's sophomore year in college. Given the fact that he (Sproul) was a philosophy major, he was rather limited in his possibilities for summer employment. He ended up in a custodial position at a local hospital. Yet, as he relays the story, in his first week on the job, he met an interesting man. A fellow-custodian, this man was an expert in philosophy. He spoke fluently of the works of Descartes, Socrates, Plato, and Kierkegaard. As Sproul got to know the man, he found out he was German Philosophy professor from Berlin with a PhD. in the field Sproul had just begun to study. Yet, upon further probing, Sproul discovered that because this professor was so educated – a true intellectual – Hitler's Nazi Germany viewed him (as well as many other like him) as a real threat. In fact, when this man spoke out against the Nazis, his wife, and all but one of his children – a daughter – were arrested and executed. According to Sproul, "Hitler so feared the consequences of my friend's ideas that he did everything possible to eliminate him – and his ideas."

- ❖ Most certainly ideas – beliefs – have profound consequences. In fact, proper belief is fundamental to all noble actions. To put it another way **there is not a sinful or heinous act that cannot be traced back to an equally wicked belief.**
- ❖ Consider, for example, someone we have already spoken of – Adolf Hitler. As we just saw, he understood the fact that beliefs had consequences.
- ❖ In her 1951 book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt wrote: “Underlying the Nazis’ belief in race laws as the expression of the law of nature in man, is Darwin’s idea of man as the product of a natural development which does not necessarily stop with the present species of human being.”
- ❖ Also, in *Hitler: A Study in Tyranny*, Alan Bullock writes: “The basis of Hitler’s political beliefs was a crude Darwinism.” What Hitler found objectionable about Christianity was its rejection of Darwin’s theory: “Its teaching, he declared, was a rebellion against the natural law of selection by struggle and the survival of the fittest.”
- ❖ John Toland’s *Adolf Hitler: The Definitive Biography* says this of Hitler’s *Second Book* published in 1928: “An essential of Hitler’s conclusions in this book was the conviction drawn from Darwin that might makes right.”
- ❖ In his biography, *Hitler: 1889-1936: Hubris*, Ian Kershaw explains that “crude social-Darwinism” gave Hitler “his entire political ‘world-view.’”
- ❖ In an article in the National Review Online, David Klinghoffer states, “Hitler, like lots of other Europeans and Americans of his day, saw Darwinism as offering a total picture of social reality.”
- ❖ The point: beliefs have profound consequences and Hitler’s belief in Darwinism served to only fuel his desire for a “final solution.”

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- ❖ However, the convictions that beliefs have consequences is certainly nothing new with R.C. Sproul. Rather, the concept is rooted in sound biblical theology. In fact, the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, spends three chapters articulating sound doctrine, then three chapters applying it.
- ❖ And so it should be with us, for **doctrine matters**. What we *believe* has a direct impact on what we *do*.
- ❖ This is exactly the pattern that the author of Hebrews follows. He has spent the past nine chapters outlining a theology – a Christology. Now, he conveys the consequences of his theology / doctrine.

- I. Christ is the Way to the Father
- II. We Must Approach God in Faith
- III. We Must Hold Fast our Confession of Hope
- IV. We Must Encourage One Another in Love

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I. Christ is the Way to the Father

- ❑ The author begins **Verse 19** with the word, “Therefore...” His point becomes very clear as the reader continues in this Verse: “**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...**”
- ❑ In other words, **because of what Christ has done on our behalf, we have confidence to approach God – we have access to Him.**
- ❑ As stated earlier, this passage is a transitional passage in the Book of Hebrews. The author has spent over ten chapters explaining the superior work of Jesus Christ on behalf of His people. **Now the author explains the implication of the doctrine he has articulated.**
- ❑ The first implication is: **we are confident that we have access to God.**
- ❑ Francis Schaeffer once wrote, “The central message of biblical Christianity is the possibility of men and women approaching God through the work of Christ.”
- ❑ Why do we have confidence to approach God? Because of “the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...”
 - The Greek word translated “new” is only used here in the New Testament. It literally means “freshly slain” or “freshly slaughtered.” This is a clear reference to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Lamb who was slaughtered.
 - However, the “way” is also **living**. Consequently, the passage reads, “the freshly slaughtered and living way...” These two words coupled together (“new and living”) seem to summarize the great work of Christ in His **death and resurrection.**

John Gill writes, “some render it, ‘a new slain way’; because Jesus was but newly slain, and his blood lately shed, by which the way is, and entrance is with boldness: and Christ is a ‘living way’; in opposition to the dead carcasses of slain beasts, and to the dead and

killing letter of the law; Christ gives life to all his people; and all that walk in him, the way, live; and none in this way ever die; it leads to eternal life, and infallibly brings them thither.”

- Notice as well that it is the “new and living **way**...” This was precisely the title that the early Christians were known by “The Way.” Yet, the reason was clear: they were followers of the resurrected Christ – who is Himself “The Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).
- The author continues, stating that Christ gave us access to God the Father “**through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...**”
 - Although the Greek could be associating “his flesh” with “the new and living way”, it appears that the author is associating “his flesh” with “the curtain” – that is, the inner veil in the Tabernacle that separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place.
 - John MacArthur writes, “When Jesus’ flesh was torn, so was the veil that kept men from God. The blood of animals allowed only the high priest to enter the veil briefly. Jesus’ blood allows everyone who believes in Him to enter the veil permanently.”
 - In other words, it was through the tearing of the “flesh” of Christ that veil was itself torn. It was through the death of Christ that we have life before God the Father.
 - Yet, the author’s use of *flesh* goes a little deeper than this. The **flesh** of Christ was His humanity. This word (*flesh*) underscores the significance of the Incarnation – when “the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us...”

F.F. Bruce states, “The veil which, from one point of view, kept God and mankind apart, can be thought of, from another point of view, as bringing them together; for it was one and the same veil which on one side was in contact with the glory of god and on the other side with the need of men and women. So in our Lord Godhead and manhood were brought together; he is the true ‘daysman’ or umpire who can lay his hand upon both because he shares the nature of both.”

- What is also interesting is that by Christ’s **flesh** in a sense “fulfilling” the symbol of the curtain, something that was a barrier actually becomes the way or the means of access to God. **For it was through the humanity / flesh of Christ that we have access to the divinity of Christ and the Father.**

Donald Guthrie writes, “It is possible...to regard the curtain as symbolic of the means of approach rather than as a hindrance to such an approach, in which case there would be

less difficulty in connecting the ‘flesh’ with the ‘curtain.’ As far as the high priest on the Day of Atonement was concerned, the curtain ceased momentarily to be an obstacle and became instead the way in.”

- Therefore, because of the work of Christ, the curse of the Garden of Eden is now reversed. In Genesis 3:24, after the Fall of Adam, we read, “²⁴He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.”
- In other words, because of Adam’s sin, mankind no longer had free access to God. In fact, the access was guarded by the sword of justice.

A.W. Pink writes, “But now the flaming sword of justice being quenched in the blood of the Surety, the door of access is again wide open.”

Pink continues, “It is through the humanity of Christ that the way to heaven has been opened, renewed and consecrated. But prior to His death, the very life which was lived by the man Christ Jesus only served to emphasize the awful distance which sinners were from God, just as the beautiful veil in the tabernacle shut out the Israelite from His presence. Moreover, the humanity of Christ was a sin-bearing one, for the iniquities of His people had all been imputed to Him. While, then, the flesh of Christ was uncrucified, proof was before the eyes of men that the cruse was not abolished. As long as He tabernacled in this world, it was evident that sin was not yet put away. The veil must be rent, Christ must die, before access to God was possible. When God rent the veil of the temple, clear intimation was given that every hindrance had been removed, and that they way was opened into His presence.”

- Therefore, through the humanity of Jesus Christ, we have free access before God the Father. We are called to approach Him and come near to Him now.

II. We Must Approach God in Faith

- The author of Hebrews continues, in Verses 21-22, stating, “...and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed pure with water.”
 - In other words, because of the finished work of Christ, we have a great high priest “over the house of God.”
 - This phrase is reminiscent of Hebrews 3:1-6, where the author describes Jesus as being far superior to Moses.
 - Consequently, since we now have a high priest that is infinitely superior to Moses, “**let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...**”

That is, our faith / belief in what Christ has done on our behalf should lead us to draw near to God with great confidence.

- Notice, as well, that the author makes an objective statement that we have a “true heart”, a heart that is no longer made of stone, but flesh, and has the right affections toward God – all because of what Christ did on our behalf.
- Furthermore, we stand before God with a “pure heart” *because* “**our hearts [have been] sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies [have been] washed with pure water.**”
- Our author has already articulated the truth that Christ, in the New Covenant, has purified our consciences; however, he now proceeds to explain that “our bodies [have been] washed with pure water.”
 - This reference is not directly related to baptism, per se; rather, it is to **what baptism symbolizes**. Consider the words of Ezekiel 36:25-26:

“²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

- And so, through the work of Jesus Christ, we are not only cleansed, but given full access to God. This is, indeed, the greatest possible blessing God will ever provide – **direct access to Him that we might be near Him, and He near us.**

The great 20th Century Welsh preacher, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “It is only when I am near to God in Christ 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.”

III. We Must Hold Fast our Confession of Hope

- In Verse 23, the “rubber meets the road.” The author writes, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”
- This certainly begs the question, “What is the nature/substance of the ‘confession’ of which the author is urging his readers to hold fast?”

- ❑ It is most certainly sound doctrine...orthodoxy. It is the **substance of the faith** that the believers exercised. Yet, he assumes that his hearers know the substance of this confession.
- ❑ What appears clear from this text is that in the early Church, **doctrine mattered**.
- ❑ Tragically, however, in the modern-day evangelical church, doctrine no longer matters.
- ❑ I often hear modern-day preachers say that their sermons are “relevant.” This is another way of saying, that “we will avoid doctrine that has the potential to confuse you or cause conflict, and we will go immediately to explaining how to live your life.”
- ❑ To put it another way, “We will give you the *how* but not the *why*.” This is precisely why the modern church is so ineffective. The church has no anchor, no foundation upon which to build a ministry of “good works” because there is little to no doctrinal basis for it.

IV. We Must Encourage One Another in Love

- ❑ Then, in **Verses 24-25**, the author explains the final “fruit” of Christians: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”
- ❑ Given our faith in approaching God, our hope in our confession, we should love and encourage one another.
- ❑ The word translated “stir up” literally means to “provoke” or “stimulate.”
- ❑ Next, the author says, “...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another.”
- ❑ This is one of the chief marks of the Christian – love for one another.
- ❑ In the first century, Jews who converted to Christianity faced intense persecution. So, in this context, the author is admonishing them: do not cease meeting together. The same command applies to us today: we should not neglect coming together in order to encourage and love one another.
- ❑ **Yet, given what we have read, why do we encourage one another to love? Why do we forgive? We do we do “good works?”**
 - Certainly it is because of what Christ has done for us, giving us access to God.

- It begins with Christ’s work on our behalf, then, to the grace which God extends to us because of Christ. Then, our faith in Christ; then, our hope and finally, it “blossoms” into love for God and one another.
- This is consistent with the Apostle Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13:13 “Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three...”
- Richard Phillips writes, “Though love is the greatest, it is not the first of these graces. There is a progression at work here. First is faith, which unites us to Christ and brings us to God. The result of that faith is hope, which secures our hearts in the storms of this life. With hope we no longer fear for ourselves but are able to give loving encouragement to others. Hope therefore springs forth in love, the love of God that fills the hearts of all who hope in him.”
- This brings us back to the error of many modern Christians. Doctrine is not popular, and is seen as irrelevant. However, apart from a theological basis, our motives will always be selfish.
 - For example, we forgive not because we want others to forgive us. Also, we do not forgive because it in some way releases us from the control of the person who wronged us. We forgive because God forgave us, in Christ.
 - Also, we do not do good works to earn the favor of God or men. Our ultimate motive is not to make ourselves feel good. We do good works because we are examples of the work of Christ. We are His hands and feet.
- And, as we see, the final motive for doing good works is because we live as though Christ may return at any time.
- Geerhardus Vos writes:

The Christian is a man...who lives with his heavenly destiny ever in full view. His outlook is not bounded by the present life and the present world. He sees that which is to come in their true proportions and in their proper perspective. The center of gravity of his consciousness lies not in the present but in the future. Hope, not possession, is that which gives tone and colour to his life. His is the frame of mind of the heir who knows himself entitled to large treasures upon which he will enter at a definitive point of time.”

- Therefore, what we **believe does indeed impact how we live**. Therefore, may our lives be marked by a love for God and man that is rooted in an unswerving faith and confidence of who Christ is and what He has done for us.