

"THEREFORE..."

**I. Introduction**

- A. Having spent the bulk of the past six chapters explaining Jesus' ministry as the great high priest of the new covenant, the writer of Hebrews now turns his attention to what we should do in light of this great truth.
  - 1. In these verses, the writer first summarizes the blessings that we have through Christ's mediation, then he gives these three exhortations:
    - 2. Let us draw near to God in full assurance of faith.
    - 3. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope.
    - 4. Let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works.
- B. The interesting thing about these three exhortations is that they are a basic summary of the Christian life.
  - 1. This becomes even more evident when we notice that these exhortations contain the triad of Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love.
  - 2. The reason why this is worth noting is because it reminds us that Christ's priestly mediation is the basis upon which the entire Christian life is to be lived.
  - 3. The Christian life is the "therefore" that follows from Jesus' ministry as our mediator with God.

**II. The New and Living Way**

- A. In the first three verses of our text, the writer summarizes the blessings that we have in Christ.
  - 1. He begins by stating that we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.

2. This is a blessing that was not shared by Old Testament saints, except in a shadowy sense.
  3. The only way that Old Testament believers could enter into God's sanctuary was through the representation of the high priest, who entered the Most Holy Place once per year on the Day of Atonement.
  4. This did not inspire very much confidence about the possibility of entering into God's presence.
  5. On the contrary, it reminded God's people of all of the things that kept them from drawing near to his presence.
  6. But now that Christ has come as the true high priest ministering in the heavenly sanctuary, we have full confidence to draw near to God.
- B. It is important for us to understand the basis of this confidence.
1. The Christian's confidence before God does not derive from anything inside of us.
  2. It does not come from anything that we do.
  3. The basis of Christian confidence is the blood of Jesus Christ.
  4. Our confidence is based upon something that is external to us, something in which we participate by faith alone.
- C. There is something within us that fights against this.
1. It is easy for us to slip into thinking that we have to do something make ourselves presentable to God.
  2. This is especially the case when our consciences are afflicted by our sins and failures.

3. We think that we have to do something to get back into God's good graces.
  4. That is what the Roman Catholic Church teaches in its system of penance and absolution, but it is not something that is taught in the Bible.
  5. While it is true that God is displeased with his children when we sin, he does not disown us or require us to do something to get back into his favor.
  6. The fact that our confidence rests upon Christ's blood means that we never have to be skittish about going to the Lord.
  7. Even when you are greatly discouraged by your failures, do not let yourself shy away from the Lord.
  8. Just as nothing in you was the ground of God's promise to begin with, so also nothing in you can overturn that promise or make it of no effect.
- D. The writer refers to our way of access into God's presence as "the new and living way" that Jesus opened for us.
1. This way is new in a temporal sense.
  2. It has only been made fully manifest through the coming of Christ into the world.
  3. This way is also new in a qualitative sense.
  4. Unlike the way that God provided under the old covenant, this way will never grow old or expire.
  5. This way is also a "living" way because it leads to life instead of simply reminding people of their sin every year.
- E. The text says that Jesus opened this new and living way through the curtain, that is, through his flesh.

1. In other words, the temple curtain was a symbolic foreshadowing of Jesus' flesh.
  2. The curtain pointed to Christ's flesh because it simultaneously hid God's presence and was the only way of access to that presence.
  3. John Calvin explains it this way: "As the veil covered the recesses of the sanctuary and yet afforded an entrance there, so the divinity, though hid in the flesh of Christ, yet leads us even into heaven; nor can anyone find God except he to whom the man Christ becomes the door and the way."
- F. The last thing that the writer says in his summary of Christ's mediatorial work is that we have a great priest over the house of God.
1. As we noted earlier, this is the point that the writer has been driving home in the bulk of the letter up to this point.
  2. We should also note that the phrase "the house of God" is referring to us, to the church.
  3. We know this because of what was said back in chapter 3: "Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope." (3:6)
  4. God's true house, his true dwelling place with man, is not a temple made by human hands but a structure with God's people as the living stones out of which it is made.
  5. As our great priest, Jesus rules over and administers the affairs of God's household.

### III. Let Us Draw Near

- A. We turn now to the first of the three exhortations in this passage: "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

1. We draw near to God when we pray to him and offer our worship to him.
  2. Drawing near to God is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian.
  3. Through Christ, we enjoy fellowship with the true and living God.
  4. We can come to God with a true heart, a heart that is not hypocritical or deceitful, a heart that doesn't have to justify itself because it knows that it has been cleansed by Christ.
  5. Christians draw near to God with "full assurance of faith."
- B. When we think about the subject of assurance, it is important to differentiate between the objective ground of our assurance and our subjective sense of assurance.
1. These two aspects of assurance are not always in sync with each other.
  2. A true Christian can have his subjective sense of assurance shaken.
  3. A true Christian can also make the mistake of thinking that his subjective sense of assurance is the basis of God's acceptance of him.
  4. Both of these errors are prevented by keeping the objective and subjective aspects of assurance distinct.
  5. As Robert Shaw explains, objective assurance has "for its object the faithfulness of God in the gospel testimony; whereas [subjective assurance] has for its object the existence of a gracious work in the soul. The former arises from a single view of what is contained in the Word of God; the latter, from a combined view of his Word without us and of his work within us." [250-1]

6. The objective component of assurance should always be the basis of our confidence in drawing near to God.
  7. We do not approach God because of what we see him doing in us but because of what Christ has done for us.
  8. Our certainty and stability are found in Christ alone.
  9. As the writer said back in chapter 6, Jesus is our sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.
- C. This point is further underscored in our text when it says that we draw near to God with hearts that have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.
1. The first part of this statement refers to the spiritual cleansing that we receive through faith in Christ, while the second part almost certainly refers to the sign that God has given to represent and seal this spiritual reality: the sacrament of baptism.
  2. This helps us to see the important role that baptism plays in strengthening our subjective sense of assurance.
  3. As John Calvin explains, “all pious folk throughout life, whenever they are troubled by a consciousness of their faults, may venture to remind themselves of their baptism, that from it they may be confirmed in assurance of that sole and perpetual cleansing which we have in Christ’s blood... For so long as we live cooped up in this prison of our body, traces of sin will dwell in us; but if we faithfully hold fast to the promise given us by God in baptism, they shall not dominate or rule... we are baptized into the mortification of our flesh, which begins with our baptism and which we pursue day by day and which will, moreover, be accomplished when we pass from this life to the Lord.” [*Institutes*, 4.15.4, 11]

#### IV. Let Us Hold Fast

- A. This leads right into the second exhortation in our text: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.”
1. Notice that the writer speaks of the confession of our hope instead of the confession of our faith.
  2. The reason why he does this is because his focus here is upon waiting for the future fulfillment of God’s promises.
  3. Hope is future-oriented.
  4. It is the eschatological aspect of Christian faith.
  5. This is why there is such a close connection between faith and patient waiting, a point that the writer has repeatedly emphasized in the previous chapters.
  6. True faith is faith that perseveres to the end.
- B. This future-oriented aspect of Christian faith is not to be confused with mere optimism.
1. If that were the case, then hope would only a matter of our outlook.
  2. The problem with that is that a person can have an extremely positive outlook and still be hopelessly wrong.
  3. Christian hope is grounded upon something much more substantial than our subjective outlook.
  4. It is grounded upon God’s faithfulness.
  5. We maintain our confidence in God’s promises because we know that the One who gave these promises is faithful.
- C. We should also consider the significance of the phrase “the confession of our hope.”

1. This phrase shows us that Christian faith needs to be publicly confessed as a distinct set of beliefs.
2. The fact that the Christian faith is a matter of public profession means that it is not primarily a matter of individual experience.
3. As J. Gresham Machen explains, "The creeds of Christendom are not expressions of Christian experience. They are summary statements of what God has told us in His Word. Far from the subject-matter of the creeds being derived from Christian experience, it is Christian experience which is based upon the truth contained in the creeds." [*God Transcendent*, 158]
4. This is an important thing to keep straight, especially in our age.
5. Many Christians today give their personal experiences and feelings a level of authority that effectively surpasses the authority of God's Word.
6. This is evidenced by the kind of books that stand atop the Christian bestseller lists.
7. It is further evidenced by the fact that anyone who questions those books along doctrinal lines is regarded as having transgressed the code of niceness that reigns so supreme in our culture.
8. We need to remind ourselves that the only way we can truly hold fast to our hope is if we hold fast to the confession of our hope.

## V. Let Us Spur One Another On

- A. We turn now to the third exhortation in our text: "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works."
  1. The word that the ESV translates as "stir up" often carries the negative connotation of provoking someone.



2. Here the writer is using it in a positive sense, calling Christians to spur one another on in living a life of love and good works.
  3. This shows us that Christian faith and witness needs Christian fellowship to flourish.
  4. The Bible knows nothing of a “lone ranger” Christian.
  5. To be a Christian is to be a part of the body of Christ.
  6. And this body is not just an invisible and spiritual reality.
  7. It is also a visible institution that has local expressions all over the world.
- B. The words that immediately follow this third exhortation indicate that the primary context in which this spurring on takes place is public worship.
1. The writer says that we should not neglect “to meet together, as is the habit of some.”
  2. We do not know the exact reason why some of the Christians to whom this letter was addressed were neglecting worship.
  3. It may have been due to their desire to avoid opposition for their faith.
  4. Whatever the reason, this passage makes it clear that they were in the wrong.
- C. There are many professing Christians in our day who make the same error.
1. Many of those who identify themselves as Christians do not make Sunday worship attendance a priority.
  2. This mindset is so prevalent that we need to guard ourselves against it.

3. We need to remember that to be needlessly absent from worship is to deprive both ourselves and our fellow believers of much needed encouragement.
  4. You may not think that your attendance at worship makes all that much of a difference in the lives of your fellow believers, but it does.
  5. We spur one another on in the Christian life by our example as well as by our words.
  6. When we are surrounded in worship by other Christians who are holding fast to the confession of their hope, that in and of itself is a great encouragement to our faith.
- D. We need such encouragement, because the Day is drawing near.
1. You may have noticed that the ESV capitalizes the word "Day."
  2. It does so because this is not just any day but the Day of Christ's Second Coming.
  3. With every day that passes, that great Day is drawing nearer and nearer.
  4. If the nearness of that Day was a motivation for first century Christians, how much more should it be a motivation for us today.
  5. The seeming delay of Christ's return can cause us to forget about it and get too comfortable in this present age.
  6. But as F.F. Bruce explains, "Each successive generation is called upon to live as the generation of the end-time, if it is to live as a *Christian* generation." (259)

## VI. Conclusion

- A. There is no benefit in all the world that is greater than the blessing of having confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus Christ.
- B. “Therefore”, let us respond to this blessing by heeding the exhortations that are set forth in this text.
- C. Let us draw near, let us hold fast, and let us spur one another on, for the glory of God and the edification of his church.