

10. Consistent with his approach throughout his epistle, the writer followed up his instruction with a pointed exhortation (10:19-39). He'd made considerable effort to provide his readers with a profound portrait of Jesus' priesthood and priestly ministration and what it accomplished and inaugurated (4:14-10:18), but his intent went beyond a more complete and accurate understanding. He labored to present Jesus in this way because he was jealous for his readers' perseverance and progress in living out their faith. It wasn't enough for them to understand what Jesus had achieved, or even to personally own His triumph as being relevant to them. They needed to truly and fully embrace *Him* as their enthroned high priest, with all that entails and implies. This meant reframing their faith in Israel's God around Him, and reorienting their convictions and practice according to the truth of what God had accomplished and inaugurated in Him.

- a. The writer's exhortation is multifaceted, but his core concern was to encourage his readers' confidence and tenacity in holding fast to Jesus. This followed his main purpose for writing, and his burden for their encouragement and perseverance is evident in everything he exhorted them toward from this point forward. All manner of opposition and challenges were pressing them to forsake their Lord, and the writer understood that *devotion* was key to their endurance in faith (10:19-25). Learning more about Jesus' person and work was important, but deeper understanding needs to evoke greater devotion. And there are two fundamental dimensions to that devotion, the first of which is obvious, namely devotion to Jesus *Himself*. The second is less obvious, but no less important, which is devotion to Jesus' *saints*. Indeed, the two are inseparable, because devotion to Jesus' saints is actually a key component of devotion to Him. One cannot love and serve Him without loving and serving those who share in His life, those in whom He has His fullness (Ephesians 1:22-23; also 1 John 4:7-21).

This exhortation to devotion consists of three specific charges: "*Let us draw near*" (v. 22), "*let us hold fast*" (v. 23), and "*let us consider*" (v. 24). The first two pertain to devotion to the Lord, the third to devotion to His people. It's also important to note that the writer grounded these charges in the confidence that derives from Jesus' ministration as God's great High Priest (vv. 19-21). But beyond that, this confidence *itself* has a priestly quality; it is the confidence of open approach to God through the veil of Jesus' flesh. *The implied point, then, is that Jesus' saints share His priestly status and ministration as sharers in Him; they enjoy the same fully assured and fully confident approach to His Father.* He is the regal and priestly Image-Son, and they are such sons in Him (2:5-13).

The writer based his three charges in the confidence granted to his readers in the Messiah. In a word, he was charging them with the obligation to authentically live out their new life in Him; *they were to be in their thinking and practice who they were in their persons*. This was the goal of his extensive instruction concerning Jesus' priesthood. His triumphal offering and ongoing mediation afforded them more than forgiveness; it granted them permanent, confident access to their God and Father. And not remote access through a representative priest, but perfectly intimate access as sharers in the High Priest who sits at the Father's right hand.

The writer wanted his readers to understand that, in a very real and profound way, they *resided* within the veil, just as Jesus does. He drew on the Israelite priestly imagery of access to God in His sanctuary (vv. 19-20), but he intended the same meaning as Paul when he reminded the Ephesians that they had been resurrected in Jesus and were now seated with Him in the heavenly realm (2:4-6). As those whose “*lives are hidden with Christ in God*” so as to become His *dwelling in the Spirit* (2:19-22), it would be wrong for them to think of themselves as entering briefly into God’s presence as Israel’s priests did. No, according to the Father’s will, enacted through Jesus’ self-offering and the power of His Spirit, the triune God had come and made His abode with them (John 14:18-23). As Jesus offered Himself up “once for all,” so their passage through the veil of His flesh was “once for all” (cf. 12:18-24). Their access to God was by a *new* and *living* way – a way previously unknown and unavailable; the way of *living union* with Him.

Thus the writer’s exhortation to “*draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith*” (v. 22) was a call to his readers to embrace and hold tightly to a proper perspective – a conviction of thinking that was to govern their daily lives. Because he used imagery associated with Israel’s high priests and their ministration, many have interpreted his words as reassuring Christians that they can be confident in approaching God in prayer whenever the need arises. But this oversimplifies his meaning and the power of his exhortation. Rather, he was calling them to all sincerity and assurance in their relationship with God (as opposed to fear, doubt, duplicity, etc.), because the separation between them had been removed forever in the Messiah. Jesus removed the barrier between God and His image-bearers, *but more than that, He gathered them back to His Father by gathering them up in Himself and His resurrection life by the power of His outpoured Spirit* (cf. Matthew 27:50-54; Ephesians 2:1-20; ref. also John 14-17).

And so, whereas Israel’s priests entered God’s presence after undergoing ritual cleansing (Exodus 40:30-32), these Hebrews had been cleansed fully and forever by the blood of Jesus (10:19, ref. also 9:13-14). Those who share in the Messiah are “clean” (v. 22; cf. Ezekiel 36:22-28; John 15:1-3; Titus 3:1-7), but because they are clean *in Him*, they also share His permanent place “within the veil.”

- They abide forever in God’s presence, unlike the former high priests who entered His dwelling place for a few brief moments once a year.
- Most importantly, this abiding is *ontological*, not spatial – it involves their very being, not a place of encounter. *They abide in God’s presence as themselves being His everlasting dwelling place.*

This is what it means to be a Christian, but this reality is readily obscured by life “under the sun.” Under the best of circumstances, the believer’s present resurrection to be seated with Jesus in the heavenly realm isn’t apparent – to him or anyone else. *How much less is it apparent when the pressures and evils of this world preoccupy his eyes, mind and heart, as was the case with these Hebrews?*

Hence Paul's exhortation to the saints to continually pursue the discipline of binding themselves to the truth – the truth that defines them as Christians, and yet readily eludes their conscious awareness (Colossians 3:1-3). The Hebrews writer had this same perspective in mind when he exhorted his readers to “*hold fast to the confession of hope without wavering*” (v. 23). He wasn't talking about holding tightly to a doctrinal confession, or even one's own profession of faith, in the sense that a Christian can find assurance by looking back to his initial confession of Jesus. The writer was exhorting these Jewish believers to hold fast to Jesus the Messiah, whom God had promised to Israel, and in whom they had set their hope.

The issue, then, wasn't *their* “confession” (their personal beliefs and convictions), but the confession of *the hope*. These Hebrews had staked themselves and their future on Jesus and their share in Him, and they needed to hold tightly to this hope. And such hope was no mere whimsy; it was grounded in the faithfulness of Israel's God – the God whom these Jewish Christians knew from their scriptures; the God who had persevered in faithfulness toward their forefathers from the time that He called Abraham out of Ur and made His covenant with him. This God had never forsaken His promises to Israel, and now, in the fullness of the times, all of them had become “yes and amen” in the Messiah. And if Jesus fully vindicated Israel's historical hope in Yahweh's promises, how much more sure is the hope of those who've embraced Him as Messiah? The one who has inaugurated the new creational kingdom will surely see it through to its consummation.

The writer's first two exhortations were personal in their orientation, but the final one was *corporate*; it pertains to faithfulness regarding Christ's body (10:24-25). As these Hebrew Christians were obligated to persevere in faith and hope, they were obligated to nourish this same faith and hope in one another; they were to “*consider one another*” with that aim in mind. Many church leaders have used this verse to justify obligating everyone to be present at every church gathering. But the writer was making a much more profound point. He was calling for an orientation of mind and heart that expresses itself in an authentic “communion of saints” – *a community of believers living out their shared participation in Jesus' life with a view toward His work among them and His goal for them in the world.*

Christians can gather every day of the week, but that doesn't imply that they care for one another, or even know each other. Proximity to others says nothing about a person's independence or self-interest. On the other hand, Christians who forsake vital relationship with Christ's people demonstrate that they're immature at best, and perhaps not members of Christ at all. Aloofness in the body is telling, but so is closeness that doesn't reflect union with Christ and His aims in His Church. What the writer was calling for is *Christ-shaped community* – informed, disciplined intent in laboring together for the good of His body, that it should fulfill its calling in the world: “*taking note of one another unto the provocation of love and good works.*” This is genuine Christian “communion” that looks forward as well as backward; it stands on the foundation of Jesus and His priestly work, but with a view to the coming day when all things will be summed up in Him.