

XXIII. Let Us Draw Near

November 13/14/15, 2018

Hebrews 10:19-31

Aim: To draw near to God in worship, to hold on fast to our confession in hope, and to encourage one another in mutual fellowship.

Schreiner: From 5:1 to 10:18 the author has been expounding on Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood. He was anxious to explain this subject to the readers, though he feared they were too spiritually dull to grasp what he had to say (5:11-14; 6:12). He argued that Jesus is a better priest, for He is a Melchizedekian priest, one who brings people near to God and is able to save them completely (7:1-28). Jesus is not only a high priest who has completed His saving work and sat down at God's right hand, but He is also the mediator of a better covenant, the new covenant (8:1-13). Finally, Jesus offered a better sacrifice (9:1-10:18). His blood actually brings believers into the heavenly tabernacle: God's presence. Believers are truly cleansed in their conscience through Jesus' sacrificial blood. The work of priests under the old covenant is never finished: they stand and offer the same sacrifices daily. But Jesus sits at God's right hand because His one sacrifice brought forgiveness of sins once for all.

Schreiner: After this long exposition the author is ready to exhort the readers. Indeed, the rest of the letter constitutes an exhortation, and that is hardly surprising since the main purpose of the letter is to warn the readers not to fall away from Jesus. Given the greatness of Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood, the readers are urged to draw near, hold fast, and encourage others to persevere (10:19-25). Perseverance is absolutely critical, for if they turn away, there will be no forgiveness for them but only judgment (10:26-31).

Hughes: Though we do not know who the author of Hebrews was, we do know he was a preacher with flaming pastoral instincts. He did not do theology for *theoretical* ends, but rather for down-to-earth, *practical* purposes. So we come here to the great turning-point in Hebrews where the writer turns from the *explanation* of the superiority of the person and work of Christ to the application of it in the lives of the storm-tossed church. The shift can be stated in various ways: from *doctrine* to *duty*, from *creed* to *conduct*, from *precept* to *practice*, from *instruction* to *exhortation*.

Phillips: In 1976 Francis Schaeffer wrote a significant book titled *How Should We Then Live?* His purpose was to show how ideas as they have been embraced or discarded have shaped the rise and decline of Western culture. 'How should we then live?' Schaeffer asked in his book, and he answered by saying that our manner of living must be consistent with our professed faith. This is a view strongly espoused by the writer of Hebrews. He has devoted nine and a half chapters to the proclamation of truth regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ. Now, in the transition from doctrine to application he says, 'Therefore, brothers.' We should always take note of the Bible's 'therefore,' because they provide the link between cause and effect. 'Therefore,' the writer of Hebrews says by way of transition, what we believe must transfer into our life and actions.

A. New Covenant Living for Brothers (Hebrews 10:19-25)

Bruce: The practical implications of the foregoing argument are now summed up in this sustained exhortation (one sentence in Greek). In view of all that has been accomplished for us by Christ, he says, let us confidently approach God in worship, let us maintain our Christian

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confession and hope, let us help one another by meeting together regularly for mutual encouragement, because the day which we await will soon be here.

1. New Covenant Confidence (10:19-21)

Schreiner: The exhortations that begin in this paragraph are grounded in Jesus' priesthood and sacrifice. In fact, those realities are so important that our author pauses to rehearse them again before exhorting the readers.

Phillips: Verses 19-21 summarize all that has been taught in the great doctrinal sections of Hebrews by identifying two definite possessions. There are two things we have, the writer says, because of Christ's person and work.

Hughes: In making the transition from instruction to exhortation, the preacher assumes that the foregoing ten chapters, truly believed, ought to have produced a profound dual confidence: confidence in one's *access* to God, and confidence in one's *advocate* before God.

a) Access (10:19-20)

(1) By the Blood of Jesus (10:19)

¹⁹*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus...*

Schreiner: The readers are addressed here as 'brothers' (cp. 3:1, 12; 13:22). They are not merely 'readers' or recipients or even friends. They are family and are the brothers and sisters of the author.

Phillips: The first of these possessions has to do with access to God through Jesus Christ. The key concept here is 'confidence to enter by the blood of Jesus.' This confidence is something believers have and must know that they have in order to lead productive, godly lives. People who trust in Jesus Christ stand before an open door, with free and open access to God, and with their sins atoned for by His blood. It is by His blood that we come, or as verse 20 puts it, by His body, which refers to the whole of His earthly achievement in life and in death on the cross.

Schreiner: The readers are full of boldness (*παρρησιαν, parrēsian*) and confidence, and it is a particular kind of boldness, a boldness to enter 'the most holy place' by the blood of Jesus. The word could also be translated 'authorization,' which emphasizes the right of access for believers. Earlier in the letter, the readers are encouraged to approach the throne of grace boldly since Jesus is their high priest (4:15-16). The word rendered 'sanctuary' here refers to the 'Most Holy Place.' The author alludes to the most holy place in the tabernacle, but he is using the term typologically, for the tent where God meets His people points to a heavenly sanctuary where there is access to God's presence. Therefore, believers enter His presence only through the blood of Jesus, as the author has argued in some detail in 7:1-10:18. Jesus is a Melchizedekian priest and far better than the Levitical priests, for His blood actually secures forgiveness of sins once for all and brings people into God's presence. Confidence and boldness to enter God's presence doesn't stem from human virtue but from God's grace.

Bruce: The 'boldness' that believers in Christ have to enter the heavenly sanctuary through Him is set in contrast with the restrictions which hedged about the privilege of symbolic entry into the presence of God in Israel's earthly sanctuary. In it not all the people could exercise this privilege, but the high priest only, as their representative; and even he could not exercise the privilege any time he chose, but at fixed times and under fixed conditions. But those who have been cleansed within, consecrated and made perfect by the blood of Christ, have received a free

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right of access into the holy presence; and our author urges his readers to avail themselves fully of this free right. The invitation to ‘approach the throne of grace with confidence’ has already been issued in this epistle (4:16); on that occasion the invitation was based on the assurance that the high priest who has passed through the heavens is one whose own experiences of temptation enable Him to sympathize with His people in their trials. Now a further assurance is given: the way by which this high priest has entered into the presence of God is a way which remains open for His people to follow Him there. It is to the very throne of God that believers in Christ have free entry—not to the material symbol of His throne where, as in the pre-exilic holy of holies, His invisible presence was upborne by the cherubim; but to His true and spiritual dwelling. He who, ‘by the virtue of His own blood, entered the holy place once for all’ (9:12) has procured for His people equal right of entry there by means of that same blood—that is, on the ground of His accepted sacrifice.

(2) Through the Flesh of Jesus (10:20)

(a) New and Living Way (10:20a)

...²⁰*by the new and living way...*

Phillips: Access is our possession, and it is, verse 20 tells us, something new. It is a new way Jesus has opened. We possess what the Old Testament saints did not, namely, the right to enter through the holy place and into the presence of God. Jesus has opened it by His life and by His death, so that we have free access to God through Him.

Schreiner: Jesus has opened a new way to God through the veil that separates human beings from God, and they gain access to God through the flesh, i.e., through the death of Jesus. The entrance believers enjoy is ‘a new and living way.’ Even though the author uses a different word for ‘new’ (*προσφατον, prosphaton*), he almost certainly has the new covenant in mind. Jesus is a mediator of a new covenant, which is better than the old one because it secures forgiveness of sins. The word ‘living’ (*ζωσαν, zōsan*) probably refers to Jesus’ resurrection. Jesus is a Melchizedekian priest and a better priest because He is a priest ‘forever’ (Ps. 110:4). Jesus always lives (7:25) and has an indestructible life (7:16). Believers enjoy fellowship with God because Jesus has conquered death (cp. 2:14-15), because He is the ever-living one.

Bruce: The way by which they enter the presence of God is a new way, which did not exist until He opened it up and entered thereby Himself. It is thus a new way; it is also a ‘living way.’ For in effect the ever-living Christ Himself, as His people’s sacrifice and priest, is the way to God (cp. Jn. 14:6). It is a way, which (to continue the symbolism of the tabernacle and the temple) leads ‘through the curtain’ into the holy of holies.

MacArthur: Jesus’ way into God’s presence is ‘a new and living way.’ The old way could not even bring man into God’s symbolic, ceremonial presence, much less into His real presence. ‘New’ (*prosphatos*) is used only once in the New Testament. Its original meaning was ‘freshly slaughtered.’ Jesus is the new way, the freshly slaughtered sacrifice, who opens the way to God. It seems contradictory that the freshly slaughtered way would also be the ‘living way.’ But Jesus’ death conquered death and gives life. His death is the only way to life that is everlasting.

(b) The Curtain of His Flesh (10:20b)

...*that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...*

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Phillips: Furthermore, it is a living way because Jesus lives forever to secure this access. He is, in this sense, the veil through which we are invited to pass in order to draw near to God by His life and death. Christ's work as priest and as sacrifice has produced a new situation that did not exist before, but it will exist forever as He reigns eternally in heaven.

Hughes: Their confident access comes from the torn curtain of Christ's crucified body. The rending of Jesus' flesh on the cross, which brought His death, perpetrated a simultaneous tearing from top to bottom of the curtain that had barred the way into the Holy of Holies (Mt. 27:51). They walked confidently through the torn curtain of Christ, so to speak, into the presence of the Father. Whereas before they could only have surrogate access through the high priest, who slipped behind the curtain once a year for a heart pounding few minutes, they now had permanent access through the blood and torn body of Christ.

Bruce: It can scarcely be doubted that the 'curtain' or 'veil' of which our author is thinking is the inner veil which separated the holy place from the holy of holies, the 'second curtain' of 9:3, through the heavenly archetype of which Jesus has already passed as His people's forerunner (6:19ff.). The veil which was rent in two at the moment of Jesus' death (Mk. 15:38; cp. Mt. 27:41; Lk. 23:45) was probably the inner veil, and its rending is recorded not as a natural portent but as an event of theological significance: in the death of Jesus, we are to understand, God Himself is unveiled to us and the way of access to Him is thrown wide open. The teaching of the Synoptic passion narratives is thus to the same effect as that of our epistle; in both instances the teaching is given a cultic form, which is expressed realistically in the Gospels and symbolically by our author.

MacArthur: 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.

Schreiner: The 'curtain' here is the veil that separates the holy place from the most holy place (6:19; 9:3). The curtain separating the holy place from the most holy place represents restricted access to God under the old covenant, and the writer makes clear in 9:6-10 that access to God was limited to the one day a year (the Day of Atonement) by only one person (the high priest). All believers now have access to God but not by going through a literal veil.

Schreiner: The veil is described in an appositional statement as Jesus' 'flesh' (*σαρκος αυτου, sarkos autou*). But what does the author mean by this statement? It seems awkward and a bit strange to say that Jesus' flesh was like the curtain of the tabernacle that separated the holy place from the most holy place. The expression shouldn't be taken literally. The author isn't saying that Jesus' flesh separates us from God. He is probably saying that access to God is not ultimately granted by passing through a curtain. It is granted through the torn and bloody and dead flesh of Jesus (cp. Jn. 6:50-58).

Bruce: Do the words 'His flesh' qualify 'the curtain' or the 'new and living way'? The Greek affords no more help in answering this question than the English does. The ERV/ARV render the passage in such a way as to preserve the ambiguity; the AV/JJV probably, and the RSV certainly ('through the curtain, that is, through His flesh'), identify 'His flesh' with 'the veil' the NEB comes down unambiguously on the side of the other alternative—'the new, living way which He has opened for us, through the curtain, the way of His flesh.' In favor of taking 'that is to say, His flesh' as expegetic of 'the veil' is, first, the word order; it is rather awkward to relate the clause closely to the words 'new and living way' in view of the intervention of the phrase 'through the veil.' Nor is there any difficulty in supposing that our author could explain the veil

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as being our Lord's 'flesh'; like 'the body of Jesus' in v. 10 and 'the blood of Jesus' in v. 19, 'His flesh' here could mean His human life, offered up in sacrifice to God. It is by His sacrifice that the way of approach to God has been opened up. And by His death, it could be added, the 'veil' of His flesh was rent asunder and the new way consecrated through it by which human beings may come to God. But as the veil stood locally before the holiest in the Mosaic Tabernacle, the way into which lay through it, so Christ's life in the flesh stood before Him and His entrance before God, and His flesh had to be rent ere He could enter. This is the fact and the history which suggest the figure.

b) *Advocacy (10:21)*

...²¹ *and since we have a great priest over the house of God...*

Hughes: This confidence in access is especially strong because it is coupled with a confidence in Christ's priestly advocacy. As we know, the appointments of the tabernacle and the daily vestments of the Aaronic high priests were specifically spelled out to Moses by God, because they were shadows of Christ's ultimate heavenly advocacy. God's instructions demanded that the Old Testament high priest wear twelve stones on his breastplate—over his heart—to represent his people (Ex. 28:21) and representative stones on his shoulder as well, for 'Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance' (Ex. 28:12). Now Jesus, our ultimate advocate, bears our names not just over His body and heart, but in the very center of His being, for we are *in* Him, our advocate! Even more, He is our constant high priest. His intercession never ceases!

Phillips: Our second great possession is directly linked to the first: 'we have a great priest over the house of God.' We have two things: confidence to enter and a great high priest. The point is that the one who opened and secured the way for us into God's presence is there Himself. He is there as our priest, representing us and pleading effectually for our acceptance, securing and sending to us the Holy Spirit so that we are fitted and empowered to be worshipers and priests before His throne. Because our high priest is there, we can know that we belong there, too, and can thus approach with confidence.

MacArthur: Jesus not only opened the way to God but He is now our 'great priest over the house of God.' He does not merely show the way to God, or even just provide the way to God; He *takes* us with Him to God and ministers for us in heaven.

Schreiner: Believers have access to God through the blood and death of Jesus, and they also have a great priest over God's house (cp. 3:6). The author has argued throughout the letter that Jesus is a Melchizedekian priest (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:29; 7:17, 21). He expiated the sins of the people as 'a merciful and faithful high priest' (2:17). As a sinless priest and as the Son of God (1:4-14; 3:1; 7:26), He offered Himself to God as a sacrifice (9:11, 26), atoning for the transgressions of others. As the risen one He has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, reigning as high priest (4:14; 7:16; 8:1; 10:12). No Levitical priest could match such priestly qualifications, for the high priest only had access to God once a year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:1-34; Heb. 9:6-8), and previous high priests all died and could not continue their priestly ministry. But Jesus' priesthood lasts forever since He has conquered death, and thus the efficacy of His sacrifice will never be extinguished.

Bruce: Their confidence in entering the presence of God should be enhanced by the fact that there Jesus fulfills His ministry as 'a great priest over God's house.' 'God's house' over which He exercises His high priesthood is, of course, the community of God's people (cp. 3:6).

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2. New Covenant Commands (10:22-25)

Phillips: It is because of our great possessions in Christ that Christians have an obligation to live a certain way. This was Francis Schaeffer's argument, and it is the point now offered by the writer of Hebrews. In lovely symmetry he sets forth a threefold manner of life as our reasonable response to Christ's saving ministry to us. Three times in vv. 22-25 the writer says, 'Let us.' Together these exhortations present a life pattern that every believer is to make his or her own.

a) *Let Us Draw Near to God (10:22)*

(1) Draw Near in Worship (10:22a)

...²²*let us draw near...*

Hughes: From the vantage-point of the remarkable confidence that ought to be every believer's, the preacher gives three sweeping exhortations, the first of which is to draw near to God. Under the old covenant, when priests were consecrated they were sprinkled with blood (Ex. 19:21). Also, when the old covenant began, the people had been sprinkled with blood (Ex. 24:8). But with the new covenant, when the people of this Hebrew church came to faith, their hearts were inwardly 'sprinkled' with Christ's blood to cleanse them 'from an evil conscience' (cp. 9:14). For the first time in their lives the guilt was completely gone, and their conscience rested easy. Then they were baptized and their 'bodies washed with pure water'—an outward visible sign of the inner sprinkling or cleansing they had experienced (cp. 1 Pe. 3:21; Eph. 5:25-26).

Phillips: The first of these exhortations comes in verse 22, which calls us to a life of worship. Because we have confidence to approach God's throne, and because we have a great priest over the house of God, let us in fact draw near to God. This, of course, exhorts us to prayer. If we are to lead fruitful lives, we must draw near to God in our minds and hearts (cp. 4:16). More broadly, the writer exhorts us to a life of worship. Worship is both our highest privilege and our most central duty. We were made to worship God, and He demands our worship (see Ex. 20:3-4). Worship is most beneficial for us. In worship we find the freedom to be what we were meant to be. Worship is essential to our spiritual health and well-being. By worship, I certainly mean coming to church, gathering together with God's people for corporate worship as a body (see vv. 24-25). But of course worship is also more than our corporate gatherings; worship is our whole response to the mercy of God (cp. Rom. 12:1).

Schreiner: The word translated 'draw near' (*προσερχομεθα*, *proserchōmetha*) is one of the author's favorites. He encourages the readers to 'approach (*προσερχομεθα*, *proserchōmetha*) the throne of grace with boldness' (4:16). Believers have not 'drawn near' to Mount Sinai but to Mount Zion (12:18, 22), for the law can't protect those drawing near (10:1). Only the resurrected Lord can do that (7:25).

Bruce: 'Let us draw near,' our author repeats—near to God that is. No longer is the privilege of access to Him carefully fenced about by conditions like those laid down for the high priest when he made his annual entrance into the holy of holies on the Day of Atonement; the 'better hope' of 7:19, 'through which we draw near to God,' has now been realized.

(1) Sincere and Assured (10:22b)

...*with a true heart in full assurance of faith...*

Phillips: Hebrews 10:22 presents a compact how-to for drawing near to God in worship. In this single verse the writer sets forth four guidelines for worship, beginning with sincerity: 'let us

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draw near with a true heart.’ A true heart functions as it is supposed to. It relates to God adoringly, with right affections and priorities. Second, he tells us to worship ‘in full assurance of faith.’ We might say that full assurance is what is in the heart that is true. The sincere, believing heart is filled with the assurance in God, through unwavering trust in Him and His promises.

Hughes: The ‘heart’ represents the whole inner life. There must be inner sincerity from one’s whole being. One must be true, completely genuine, ‘wholehearted.’ There are to be no mixed motives or divided loyalties. There must be pure and unmixed devotion, sincere love for God. This is how we are to draw near to God in prayer—real, genuine, absorbed.

Schreiner: The readers are encouraged to draw near with ‘a true heart in full assurance of faith.’ This is another way of saying that they are to approach God boldly (4:16), confidently, and joyfully.

Bruce: Naturally such an approach can be made only with sincerity of heart—it is the pure in heart who will see God—and the ‘full assurance’ which faith in God’s word begets.

MacArthur: ‘Sincere’ (*alēthinos*) means genuine, without superficiality, hypocrisy, or ulterior motive. Coming to God with ‘full assurance’ requires commitment that is genuine.

(2) Sprinkled (10:22c)

...with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience...

Phillips: Next, the writer of Hebrews tells us to draw near to God ‘with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.’ This is a matter of great importance to him; he frequently complained that the old covenant sacrifices failed at this very point, being unable to cleanse the conscience. By sprinkling he refers to the blood of Christ, which alone sets free the sinner’s guilty conscience. Through His blood we know that our sins are removed and our hearts are set free from the burden of guilt.

Schreiner: They should not let doubts bedevil them, for their ‘hearts are sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.’ Just as the blood sprinkled Israel under the old covenant (Ex. 24:8), so the blood of Christ sprinkles clean believers under the new covenant. The evil that defiled the conscience is washed away. But Jesus’ blood avails forever in contrast to the blood spilt under the new covenant, for the sacrifices offered under that covenant did not perfect the conscience of the worshiper (9:9). Jesus’ blood, on the other hand, cleanses the conscience (9:14) so that there is no longer consciousness of sins (10:2).

Bruce: That the sprinkling of the heart denotes an inward and spiritual cleansing is obvious; it is equally obvious that our author has in mind the counterpart under the new order of the old ritual cleansing with the ‘water for impurity,’ the water prepared with the ashes of the red heifer (cp. 9:13ff.). Those who make bold to enter the heavenly sanctuary by the blood of Jesus are by that same blood purified and made fit for the divine presence; the cleansing of the conscience removes the barrier which prevented their free access.

MacArthur: This figure, as we might expect, is taken from the sacrificial ceremonies of the Old Covenant. The priests were continually washing themselves and the sacred vessels in the basins of clear water, and blood was continually being sprinkled as a sign of cleansing. But all the cleansing, whether with water or blood, was external. Only Jesus can cleanse a man’s heart. By His Spirit He cleanses the innermost thoughts and desires. ‘Having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience’ is a beautiful picture of deliverance, already mentioned in 9:14. Conscience condemns us and reminds us of our guilt; and the guilt cannot be removed until the

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sin is removed. When Jesus died, His blood removed our sins, and when we embrace Him by faith, our conscience becomes free from guilt—we are cleansed from an evil conscience. We do not condemn ourselves anymore.

(3) Washed (10:22d)

...and our bodies washed with pure water.

Bruce: It is not so clear that the washing of the body with pure water is thought of as having a similar analogue in the Old Testament ceremonial, simply because our author does not stress an analogue to this as he does stress the ritual of the red heifer. He may, however, have thought of the requirement that the priest on the Day of Atonement should ‘bathe his body in water’ (Lev. 16:4) before putting on the linen vestments in which he was to approach God in the holy of holies.

Schreiner: Saying that the body is ‘washed’ in pure water’ is another way of describing the cleansing that comes through Jesus’ offering of Himself. The language of ‘washing’ goes back to the OT where washings were required for cleanliness (Ex. 29:4; 40:12; Lev. 8:6; 11:40; 14:8-9; 15:5-6; 16:4, 24, 26; 17:15; 22:6; Num. 19:7-8; Dt. 23:12). Physical washing in the OT does not truly cleanse people before God as 9:10 attests. Such washings were ‘fleshly ordinances’ appointed to last until the time of reformation. They pointed to a more significant washing, the cleansing of sin accomplished through Jesus Christ. Jesus ‘cleansed’ His people of their sins by His death (1:3) and cleansed their consciences (9:14) once for all (10:4).

MacArthur: The other part of the cleansing, having ‘our bodies washed with pure water,’ does not refer to baptism, but has to do with our living, with how the Holy Spirit changes our lives. It is the same cleansing mentioned by Paul in Titus 3:5 (‘the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit’) and in Ephesians 5:26 (‘the washing of water with the word’).

Phillips: Fourth, we must worship having ‘our bodies washed with pure water.’ Most commentators see this as a reference to baptism, and it is hard to deny the connection. However, surely John Calvin is right to see the point not in baptism itself, but in that which baptism symbolizes: the spiritual renewal that is the work of the Holy Spirit (cp. Ez. 36:25-26).

Bruce: The present reality which the author has in mind is most probably Christian baptism—consisting, of course, not merely in the outward application of water, but in the outward application of water as the visible sign of the inward and spiritual cleansing wrought by God in those who come to Him through Christ. As we are told again in 1 Pe. 3:21, the baptismal water is not intended to remove bodily impurity but to express ‘a pledge to God proceeding from a clear conscience.’

Schreiner: Most commentators think there is a reference here to baptism that symbolizes cleansing from sin. Baptism as an initiation rite reminds believers of the cleansing received through the cross. It seems natural that believers would think of baptism when the washing of the body is mentioned. The term ‘body’ doesn’t mean that baptism cleanses people physically. The physical washing of the body that took place in baptism symbolizes the cleansing of the heart.

(4) Worship

Phillips: These guidelines apply to all seven days of the week, but it is helpful if we consider how they bear on our coming together on Sunday to worship God in church. Yes, all our lives

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are worship, but how we worship when we gather together in God's name is especially important. Verse 22 tells us we are to come to the worship service with a true heart; that is, with undivided affection and intent to worship Him. God is worthy, and we must come to worship Him, and not merely to seek some personal benefits. Second, we must come with the assurance and confidence of acceptance that comes from genuine faith in His saving work. Third, we must be able to deal with our own sinfulness, our guilt from things we have done and the sinfulness we bring into the sanctuary. This is why we should read the law and confess our sins, affirm our faith and hear God's word of pardon in our services of worship. Such elements of worship do not make up a pointless liturgy, but provide the biblical way by which sinners come to God. Finally, we must come believing and relying upon the work of the Holy Spirit, trusting Him to cleanse and renew our hearts as we come to the Father in Christ's name. If you are not benefitting from worship—as you must to grow in Christ—and if you doubt that God is blessed by your worship, you might consider the words of Hebrews 10:22 and its instruction on worship.

b) *Let Us Hold Fast Our Confession (10:23)*

²³*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

Phillips: Christians are called to a life of worship, but we are also called to a life of truth. This is the second of the three exhortations: that we must hold firm to the gospel hope in an unbelieving world. The Greek word for 'confession' (*homologia*) here means a public and doctrinal confession, and it is in this manner that we must uphold the truth. By writing of 'the confession of our hope,' the author speaks of the substance of our faith. Unswerving devotion to Christ and His gospel is obviously a matter of special importance to the writer of Hebrews, and he is determined to thwart any idea of compromise among His readers. They were not to compromise with those who called them back into the former ways of Judaism, but were firmly to take their stand for Christ. It was unpopular and costly then, and it is the same today for us. But it is essential for our salvation. This point is made repeatedly in this letter (cp. 3:6, 14; 4:14). Our confession must not waver. We have every reason to hold fast, for, as verse 23 concludes, 'He who promised is faithful.' 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. Therefore, we are not to be silent, nor to compromise the truth we have received, but to hold unswervingly to the gospel truths and promises that give us our hope. 'He who promised is faithful,' says our writer, and we, as a result, can be faithful to Him.

Hughes: The next exhortation flows naturally from the preceding because if we draw near to God, we will be disposed to heed the command to persevere in hope. The Christian's hope has substance. The hope that our text commends here in verse 23 is a conscious reference back to the writer's statement in 6:19-20. It is grounded in the life, death, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is anchored at the right hand of God. It is so substantial and real that it is called an 'anchor.' Literally, the author here commands, 'And let us hold on *unbendingly* to the hope we confess, for He who promised is faithful.' The anchor is not in the sea, but in the Heaven, the celestial Holy of Holies. It is anchored in God's presence. As the winds pick up, as the ship bobs like a cork, as we sail through all life's troubles, we must hang on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for our hope is anchored in our access to and advocacy before God the Father. We must hang on with all we have. Such tenacity will endure any storm.

Schreiner: We see, secondly, that the readers are exhorted to hold on to the faith they confessed 'without wavering.' For the third time in the letter, the readers are exhorted to 'hold on'

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(κατεχωμεν, *katechōmen*; cp. 3:6, 14). And there is a similar expression in 4:14, ‘Let us hold fast (κρατωμεν, *kratōmen*) to the confession.’ The ‘confession’ refers (cp. also 3:1) to the faith, to the doctrine the believers have acknowledged as the truth. Here it is designated as a confession of hope. Hope is the sure promise of eschatological joy for those who persevere to the end. The words ‘without wavering’ should not be confused with sinlessness. It is simply another way of describing perseverance in faith. Those who will enjoy the end-time rest (4:1-11) will continue to believe and obey until the end.

Bruce: The exhortation is threefold: ‘let us approach...let us maintain...let us cultivate mutual consideration.’ The powerful incentive which the knowledge of Christ’s high priesthood provides for firmly maintaining the confession of Him has also been stressed (4:14); here it is repeated together with the other incentives which are bound up with His high priesthood, including above all the faithfulness of God whose promises, embodied and fulfilled in Christ, are set forth in the gospel for the encouragement and support of His people. ‘Let us hold fast the confession of our hope,’ say ERV/ARV, ‘that it waver not’—doing justice to the Greek construction in which the adjective ‘unwavering’ agrees with ‘confession’; but if the confession wavers it is because the confessors waver. Our hope is based on the unfailing promise of God; why should we not cherish it confidently and confess it boldly?

MacArthur: A true believer will be around in the end. He may become discouraged or frustrated, and occasionally fall into a sinful habit. But he will ‘hold fast the confession’ of his ‘hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.’ A true believer’s faith and hope are never in vain, because they are in a God who is faithful to His promises. God’s answers may seem to be a long time in coming, and our waiting may be uncomfortable or even painful. But He will always do just as He has said He will do. The reason we can hold fast to our hope without wavering is that ‘He who promised is faithful.’

c) *Let Us Stir Up One Another (10:24-25)*

(1) Consider and Stir Up (10:24)

²⁴*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works...*

Phillips: The third and last exhortation is found in vv. 24-25. Here is a summons to a life of loving community. William Lane describes it as ‘continued care for one another that finds an expression in love, good works, and the mutual encouragement that active participation in the gatherings of the community make possible.’ This is not an invitation for us to be judgmental busybodies, making the lives of others a burden. But it does mandate that we take a lively interest in the affairs of other believers. We are to study and implement schemes that motivate one another in godly living. The first verb is ‘consider,’ which has to do with our thinking. We are accustomed to think only of ourselves, but our thoughts are better given to others. The next term, ‘stir up,’ means to incite or provoke or stimulate. The way we live and talk and act should be provocative to other Christians, in the best sense of the word. They should be reminded of spiritual truth because of what we are saying and how we are living. The result of our example and conversation should be love and good works in the lives of other believers.

Hughes: The final exhortation in this section is to mutually consider one another, and it extends through verse 25. The idea of stirring one another up is an exciting concept because the word translated ‘stir up’ is extremely strong. The RV translates it ‘provoke,’ the NEB ‘arouse.’ It is the word *paroxysmos*, from which we get *paroxysm*—a sudden convulsion or a violent emotion. Normally, as in the rest of the New Testament, this is not a pleasant word (for example, ‘a sharp

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disagreement’—*paroxysmos*—came between Paul and Barnabas, Acts 15:39; cp. 1 Cor. 13:5). But here it has a pleasant sense of prodding our brothers and sisters toward love and good deeds. The author wants us to be positive irritants.

Schreiner: The third admonition is now given. Believers should reflect and consider how to provoke one another to love and good works. Encouraging others, therefore, is not invariably spontaneous. The author calls upon the readers to contemplate ways in which they could stimulate others to love and good works. The word ‘promote’ (*παροξυσμον, paroxysmon*) is perhaps a bit too tame for the meaning of the Greek word used here. The NIV’s ‘spur’ or the ESV’s ‘stir up’ catch the meaning more accurately. The word is used for the strong disagreement that led to a parting of ways between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39). Here the term is used in the positive sense of impelling one another to love and good works. Those who persevere in faith also persevere in love. Love is not merely a feeling or emotion. It manifests itself in ‘good works.’ ‘Dead works’ lead to spiritual death (6:10; 9:14), while good works testify to God’s grace among believers. Such good works are necessary for final salvation, expressing a living and vital faith. Such good works, of course, should not be confused with perfection.

Bruce: The readers will be the more apt to confess their hope courageously and unhesitatingly if they encourage one another. Christian faith and witness will flourish the more vigorously in an atmosphere of Christian fellowship. The word ‘stimulate, provoke, stir up, arouse’ is a strong one; it appears in one other place in the New Testament, and there in a very different way, of the ‘sharp contention’ that broke out between Paul and Barnabas when they could not agree on taking Mark with them on a second apostolic visit to Cyprus and South Galatia (Acts 15:39). Perhaps this Greek word *paroxysmos*, like our English ‘provocation,’ is more commonly used in the unfavorable sense of irritation than in the more pleasant sense used here by our author. It is the former sense that Paul has in mind in 1 Cor. 13:5 when, using the cognate verb *paroxynō*, he says that love ‘is not provoked.’ But here love *is* provoked in the sense of being stimulated in the lives of Christians and by the considerateness and example of other members of their fellowship.

(2) Gather Together (10:25a)

...²⁵ *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some...*

Phillips: This means that no Christian can be an individualist. We *are* our brothers’ keeper. We must give thought to how we can be of help to other believers. We must consider the impact of our actions on the faith of others, often surrendering personal freedoms so as not to offend the weak (see Rom. 14:13-16). This alone provides an excellent reason to come to church and other Christian gatherings: that we may be of benefit to others, encouraging them and taking a care that they are standing firm as the day of the Lord approaches. This also provides a mandate for the types of practical ministries that help our churches make a power impact on people’s lives: men’s groups, women’s groups, youth ministries, college ministries, single adult ministries, marriage retreats, and more.

Hughes: People have a thousand reasons to stay away from church. This is not a new problem. Today persecution and ostracism might not be our experience, but people find many other reasons to absent themselves from worship, not the least of which is laziness. But de-churched Christians have always been an aberration. It is impossible to be a good Christian while voluntarily absenting oneself from the assembled church. The author of Hebrews is pleading

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with his people not to make such a mistake, because he knows they would not survive. And neither would we. Laxity can destroy us, so we must beware.

Schreiner: 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 such meetings signaled great danger, for if they did not return to the assembly of fellow believers, they would face final judgment and destruction. Meeting together with other believers on earth looks forward to the eschatological gathering. Their gathering together anticipates the final ingathering of God's people. The assembly is the earthly counterpart to the heavenly congregation of God's people.

Bruce: This will never happen, however, if they keep one another at a distance. Therefore, every opportunity of coming together and enjoying their fellowship in faith and hope must be welcomed and used for mutual encouragement. Our author exhorts his readers to continue meeting together the more earnestly because he knows of some who were withdrawing from the Christian fellowship. What appears to have underlain the withdrawal which our author here describes as 'the custom of some'? We may find a clue in the word translated 'meeting together.' Basically this is the word which we know in its English form 'synagogue,' but here it carries the prefix *epi*, which in this place may conceivably have the force 'in addition,' as though the word were to be translated 'epi-synagogue' (*επισυναγωγή, episyntagōgē*). If this meaning were accepted, then we might think of a group of Jewish believers in Jesus who had not yet severed their connection with the synagogue in which they had been brought up, but who in addition to their synagogue services had specially meetings of their own in a Christian appendage to the Jewish synagogue. In that case, our author fears that the discontinuance of their special Christian meeting will mean their complete merging in the life of the larger Jewish community with the loss of their distinctive Christian faith and outlook. What he would really like to see would be their decisive separation from the synagogue. It may be pointed out, however, that there is no evidence elsewhere for the use of 'epi-synagogue' in a different sense from 'synagogue' or 'meeting'; and our author may simply be urging his readers not to give up attending the general meeting of the church as some were doing. Under the various pressures which were being brought to bear upon them, to withdraw from the society of fellow-believers was to court spiritual defeat; only by remaining united could they preserve their faith and witness.

(3) Encourage One Another (10:25b)

...but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Phillips: Finally, we are to 'encourage' one another. This requires us to come alongside other people with words and actions that will strengthen them in Christ. Encouragement may mean bearing a load for them, it may mean prayer, companionship, or sharing your own conviction that God is faithful based on your experience of His loving care. One of the essential means by which Christ guides and protects His people is the active participation of other believers in their lives. The day of Christ's return is fast approaching, and it will be a day of judgment for all who

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fall away. Remembering this, let us give sober reflection not merely to our own affairs but to the spiritual concerns of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Schreiner: Instead of abandoning meeting together, believers should encourage () one another. Encouragement is vital for perseverance, as 3:13 attests. The urgency of encouragement is indicated by the nearness of the eschatological day. The day here is the day of the Lord. In the OT the day of the Lord is the day of judgment and salvation. In the NT the day of the Lord or the day of the Lord or the day of Christ is correlated with the day Jesus returns, when He delivers those belonging to Him and judges those opposed to Him (Acts 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Th. 5:2; 2 Th. 2:2; 2 Pe. 3:10). Believers should encourage one another, therefore, because the present world will not last, and thus they should urge one another to stay true to Jesus Christ.

Bruce: Instead of growing slack in the practice of their Christian fellowship, they are bidden to encourage one another. It is plain from the closing verses of this chapter that the apparent postponement of the parousia was having its effect on their minds; at least the sense of tension created by the knowledge that they were living in the end-time was weakening. The words ‘*you see the Day approaching*’ suggest that signs of the impending catastrophe in Judea were already visible to men and women of discernment; and the fulfillment of that phase of Jesus’ prediction point on to the fulfillment of the final phase. Yet for our author, as for the other New Testament writers, ‘the Day’ is primarily the final phase, the day of Christ’s parousia. The period between the first advent of Christ and His parousia is the end-time, the ‘last days.’ Whatever the duration of the period may be, for faith ‘the time is near’ (Rev. 1:3). Each successive Christian generation is called upon to live as the generation of the end-time, if it is to live as a *Christian* generation.

MacArthur: ‘The day drawing near’ could refer to the imminent destruction of the Temple, which brought all the sacrifices and rituals to a close. But I believe the primary reference is to the coming of the Lord, which makes the passage apply to all of us. The only place where we can remain steadfast until He returns is with His people. We need each other. We need to be in fellowship with each other, as we mutually strengthen each other and encourage each other.

3. New Covenant Commitment

Phillips: In these verses we have encountered three exhortations that correspond to the great triad of the Christian life set forth by the apostle Paul: ‘Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three’ (1 Cor. 13:13). These three abiding graces coincide with the three exhortations of Hebrews 10:22-25. First comes faith, which is the burden of Hebrews 10:22, since faith secures for us a relationship with God: ‘Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.’ People ask how to have a closer relationship with God. The answer is by faith. God has opened the way: He has accepted you in His love because of Jesus Christ. All that lacks is for you to believe that good news, to trust Him and the promises in His Word. You must therefore give yourself to His Word. You must search the Scripture for its teaching and claims and promises, and then you must trust God for what He has said. It is this faith that must fill our hearts.

Phillips: How should we then live? First comes faith, but, second, there is hope. The Christian lives by hope, drawing strength and stability from its anchor in the stormy seas of life. That is what Hebrews 10:23 is about: ‘Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.’ In our study of Hebrews 6:19-20, we learned that our gospel hope is certified by the oath-bound promise of the holy God, the seal of which is affixed in heaven by

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the nail-scarred hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we will hold fast to those truths, we will then possess a hope that is an anchor for our very soul.

Phillips: Faith brings us into relationship with God for a life of worship, while hope anchors us unswervingly to a future of unimaginable blessings. Last comes love, which Paul says is the greatest of these three. That is what we find in verses 24-25, in its exhortation that we ‘stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together—encouraging one another.’ 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.

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 or our own deaths, both of which bring us into God’s presence. How should we then live? If we want to please God, grow 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.

B. New Covenant Justice for Apostates (Hebrews 10:26-31)

Phillips: There are four major warnings in the Book of Hebrews. The first appeared in chapter 2, a warning against drifting away by failing to hold fast to the gospel. The second came in chapter 3 where the writer exhorted his readers that they must not turn away from God with an unbelieving heart. A similar warning appeared in chapter 5, where we read of the dire consequences of apostasy. Now in chapter 10 we encounter a fourth exhortation. All of these exhortations amount to the same thing. In them we see the concern that drove this whole epistle: that these Hebrew Christians, having heard and accepted the gospel of Jesus Christ, might turn away into unbelief.

Phillips: Our passage does not give a general statement regarding sin and its punishment, but rather a particular warning to these Jewish people who had professed faith in Jesus Christ. The writer’s concern is the same that he voice in the other exhortations, namely, that they would not turn away from God in rejection of the gospel. There was pressure for them to do this. They were experiencing persecution and temptation, just as we are tempted to repudiate Christ by opposition from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Therefore he warns them.

1. Deliberate Sinning (10:26-27)

a) No More Sacrifices (10:26)

(1) Reckless Sin (10:26a)

²⁶*For if we go on sinning deliberately...*

Schreiner: After encouraging the readers to draw near and to hold fast to the gospel, the author now warns the readers about the dangers of falling away. If they turn away from the gospel after being converted, there will be no forgiveness for them. Sinning ‘deliberately’ (*εκουσιως, hekousiōs*) doesn’t refer to any and every sin committed. The author has in mind apostasy, the rejection of the Christian faith. Those who repent of their evil demonstrate that they aren’t guilty

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of the apostasy warned against here. The author draws on the OT where defiant sin leads to destruction (Num. 15:30; cp. Dt. 1:43; 17:12-13; Ps. 19:13).

MacArthur: ‘Willfully’ (*hekousiōs*) carries the idea of deliberate intention that is habitual. The reference here is not to sins of ignorance or weakness, but to those that are planned out, determined, done with forethought. The difference between sins of ignorance and ‘sinning willfully’ is much like the difference between involuntary manslaughter and first-degree murder. *Hekousiōs* is habitual. It not only is deliberate, but is an established way of thinking and believing. It is the permanent renunciation of the gospel, the permanent forsaking of God’s grace.

Phillips: It is important to understand what the writer is talking about, and what he is not talking about. He speaks here of those who ‘go on sinning deliberately.’ This refers to a distinction made in the Old Testament between intentional and unintentional sin (see Num. 15:30). In verse 26, the key Greek word is *hekousiōs*, which occurs only twice in the New Testament: here and in 1 Peter 5:2, where it means ‘without compulsion.’ In other Greek writings the noun form is used for those who serve as volunteers. What this verse describes is not believers who are struggling with sin, or even those who have besetting sins which plague their spiritual life and displease the Lord. Rather, this refers to those who reject God’s authority to tell them what to do, and who flagrantly continue in their sin. It is clear that the writer has apostasy in mind.

Bruce: By ‘sin deliberately’ he means something like that sinning ‘with a high hand’ (Num. 15:30) for which no pardon was provided by the Old Testament law of atonement. He has already emphasized that despising the saving messages spoken by the Son of God must carry with it penalties even more severe than the sanctions attached to the law of Moses, ‘the word spoken through angels’ (2:2); and he repeats the same argument here. What he has in mind is rather that ‘deserting the living God’ of which he spoke in 3:12, that renunciation of Christianity against which he warned his readers in 6:4-8.

Hughes: The writer begins his plea by graphically outlining the terrors of apostasy. The opening terror is that it obviates Christ’s atoning sacrifice. Now the preacher is *not* saying that if believers persist in sinning deliberately, there will come a point where the effect of Christ’s sacrifice runs out, and Christ would say, ‘I have paid for your sins up to this point, but I’m not prepared to pay for them any further.’ Rather, what the writer is describing is a graceless, reprobate state characterized by two things—*deliberateness* and *continuance*. Our text is talking about deliberate, intentional sin. In fact, the word ‘deliberately’ stands first in the Greek for emphasis. Moreover, this deliberate sin is continual. The person persists in open rebellion against God and His Word.

(2) Rejected Knowledge (10:26b)

...after receiving the knowledge of the truth...

MacArthur: Here is possibly the clearest and most concise scriptural definition of apostasy—‘receiving knowledge of the truth,’ that is, the gospel, but ‘willfully’ remaining in sin. An apostate has seen and heard the truth—he knows it well—but he willfully rejects it. Every apostate is an unbeliever, but not every unbeliever is an apostate. Many people have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel, even in part. They are sinful and, of course, do not believe in Christ, because they have never heard of Him or of His claims. An apostate, however, is well acquainted with the gospel. He knows more than enough to be saved. The Greek language has two primary words that can be translated ‘knowledge.’ *Gnōsis* has to do with ordinary

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knowledge, and in the New Testament is often used for general spiritual knowledge. But *epignōsis*, the word used in verse 26, denotes full knowledge, understanding, and discernment. In other words, the persons described here are those who have much more than a passing acquaintance with the gospel. They know it well. An apostate has all the information. He lacks nothing intellectually. He has *epignōsis*. He is among those who have ‘once been enlightened’ (6:4).

Schreiner: The ‘knowledge of the truth’ refers to conversion, to embracing the Christian faith when one is saved (cp. 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1).

Hughes: Here is the point: this individual has received ‘the knowledge of the truth’—the content of Christianity as truth. He knows what God has done in Christ, and he understands it. But he intentionally—knowingly—rejects it and willfully continues on in an unremitting state of sin—as an apostate. The ignorant cannot commit this sin. It cannot be committed inadvertently. It is a sin only ‘church people’ can commit. For such, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins’ because they have rejected the one and only valid sacrifice—Christ.

(3) Repudiated Sacrifice (10:26c)

...there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins...

MacArthur: The first result of apostasy is that the apostate no longer has a sacrifice that can atone for sins. He is, therefore, beyond salvation. The only sacrifice that can bring a person into God’s presence is the sacrifice of Christ’s blood in the New Covenant. If Christ’s sacrifice is rejected, then all hope of salvation is forfeited. Opportunity is gone, hope is gone, eternal life is gone. Apart from Christ, everything worth having is gone. The only effective sacrifice has already been made, and will be made only once. To turn away willfully from this sacrifice leaves no sacrifice; it leaves only sin, the penalty for which is eternal death.

Schreiner: If one defiantly turns away from Christ after salvation, there is no sacrifice for their sins. To say there will be no sacrifice for their sins means there will be no forgiveness for them. Levitical sacrifices will not suffice, for the blood of animals can’t take away sins (10:4, 11) or perfect the conscience of worshipers (9:9). They only remind people of their sins repeatedly (10:3). And they can’t receive forgiveness from Jesus Christ because they have repudiated Him. One can’t receive forgiveness through the once-for-all offering of Jesus if one defiantly rejects Him. Forgiveness only belongs to those who continue to trust in Jesus for forgiveness.

Bruce: To have received the knowledge of the truth and then reject it is to give up the only way of salvation. ‘No further sacrifice for sins is left’ which can avail for those who have deliberately abandoned reliance on the perfect sacrifice of Christ.

b) *Expectation of Judgment (10:27)*

...²⁷but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

MacArthur: The second result of apostasy is greater judgment. The greater the sin, the greater the judgment. Since apostasy is the worst sin, it will have the worst judgment. God sees the one who knows the truth and walks away as an enemy, an adversary whose judgment is certain and terrifying. God’s judgment on His enemies is inescapable, and the ‘fury of a fire’ from Him is consuming.

Hughes: This terror is joined by a second great terror, because since there is no sacrifice, judgment follows. This is an echo of Isaiah 26:11—‘let the fire for your adversaries consume

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them’—and it is a gripping expression for judgment. The point here is that those who have rejected Christ inherit a fearful expectation of judgment, whether or not they are aware of it. Make no mistake about it—‘if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.’ What an awesome duo these terrors make—no sacrifice for sin, and inexorable judgment!

Schreiner: Those who sin deliberately, renouncing Christ and the gospel, will not be forgiven of their sins. Instead they await a ‘terrifying expectation of judgment’ and a ‘fire’ that will ‘consume the adversaries.’ Clearly this refers to the final judgment, to the day when God’s enemies will be completely destroyed. The author reaches back into the OT for the language here (Zeph. 3:8; 1:18; Is. 26:11; 64:2). If the readers revert to the Levitical cult and turn away from Jesus, they will identify themselves as enemies of the Lord. They will not enter the heavenly city but will be destroyed forever, for God’s ‘enemies’ (*υπεναντιους*, *hyphenantious*) are always unbelievers.

Phillips: There are apostates—not real Christians who fall away, but professing Christians who were never really saved and show this by their subsequent repudiation. As verse 29 makes clear, there is a kind of person who mentally grasps the teaching of the gospel, and who understands Jesus, yet ‘has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace.’ Such an apostate is deserving of eternal punishment in hell, and is in fact consigned to that fate by his or her life of the only atoning sacrifice. People who rejected Moses’ law died without mercy, says verse 28. What then will become of those who reject the grace of God? Only judgment and raging fire.

2. Deserved Punishment (10:28-29)

a) *Old Testament Justice (10:28)*

²⁸ *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

Schreiner: The author contrasts the punishment under the Mosaic law with the judgment that will be meted out on those who reject the revelation through Jesus Christ. Those who reject the Mosaic law are condemned to death on the basis of two or three witnesses. The word ‘disregards’ (*αθετησας*, *athetēsas*) should not be understood merely as a violation of the law of Moses. The verb is used to describe blatant and outright rebellion (1 Sam. 2:17; 1 Chr. 2:7; 5:25), representing Israel’s apostasy against the Lord (Is. 1:2; Jer. 3:20; Ez. 22:6; Dan. 9:27; etc.). Every Israelite transgressed the law, but the death penalty was assigned to those who egregiously violated what the law mandated (e.g., Num. 35:30; Dt. 17:2-7).

Bruce: Anyone who was convicted, on adequate testimony, of a deliberate breach of Israel’s covenant law was liable to the death penalty: ‘your eye shall not pity him,’ so ran the inexorable sentence. But that was the penalty of *physical* death; the spiritual death which lies in store for the apostate under the new order is a ‘much sorer punishment.’

Hughes: Next the preacher/writer turns to an *a fortiori* argument as he lays out the relentless logic behind the terrors he has identified, arguing from the lesser case of rejecting the Law to the greater case of rejecting the grace of Christ. Of the lesser offense he says, ‘Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.’ The accusation had to be proved beyond doubt. One witness was not enough. But when there were

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two or three witnesses who agreed, it was over. No mercy whatsoever. No appeal. Certain death!

b) *New Covenant Punishment (10:29a)*

²⁹*How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one...*

Hughes: If such pitiless judgment came from rejecting the lesser old covenant, imagine the case with rejecting the greater new covenant. This greater judgment comes from three immense travesties that characterizes all apostasy. One thing is sure—there will be no mercy shown for the hardened apostate, just as there was no mercy shown to those who willfully transgressed the Law. But the greater severity is that breaking the old covenant brought *physical* death, while rejecting Christ brings *spiritual* death.

Schreiner: The death penalty was meted out to those who transgressed certain provisions in the Mosaic law. But the death penalty was an earthly punishment, and a worse punishment awaits those who reject the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. As we have seen so often in Hebrews, the earthly punishment forecasts and anticipates a heavenly punishment. Furthermore, there is escalation typologically so the rejection of a greater revelation leads to a greater punishment.

Phillips: It is not an outrage for apostates to be damned. The outrage has to do with God sending His own precious Son into this world. He came not to judge us, though certainly we were already guilty. He came to save us. This is the kind of God we are talking about here (see Jn. 3:16). That he should judge sinners is not the outrage; the outrage is that man, having received this gift from God should then despise it, should trample under foot the name of Jesus as God's Son, should treat as unholy His precious blood, and should insult the Spirit of God as He bears testimony to the gospel in this world.

c) *Apostasy Described (10:29bcd)*

Phillips: The formulation of verse 29 makes clear that we are not talking about believers who struggle with sin. This statement of apostasy involves the flagrant rejection of three things: first, the person of Christ as Son of God ('one who has spurned the Son of God'); second, the saving work of Christ on the cross ('and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified'); third, the Holy Spirit, who has brought the gospel near ('and has outraged the Spirit of grace'). That last item relates this statement to the words of Jesus in Mt. 12:32, where He speaks about the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 10:29 makes clear that the sin involved—the unforgivable sin—is the willful repudiation of the gospel by those, like the Pharisees, who see it and understand what it means.

Bruce: To spurn the Son of God, to trample Him underfoot (as the word literally means), denotes contempt of the most flagrant kind; to treat the covenant blood of Christ, by which alone His people are sanctified, cleansed, and brought to God, as no better than the most common death is to repudiate decisively both His sacrifice and all the blessings which flow from it; to outrage the Spirit of grace is, in the words of Jesus, to be 'guilt of an eternal sin' (Mk. 3:29).

(1) Against the Person of Christ (10:29b)

...who has trampled underfoot the Son of God...

Schreiner: The author emphasizes the heinousness of apostasy with three phrases. First, if they sin deliberately and shun the gospel, they trample under their feet the 'Son of God.' Clearly those who trample Jesus under their feet reject Him fully and scorn Him. The full title [Son of

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God] emphasizes the shocking character of apostasy: it not only falls from grace, it mocks the give of grace.’

Hughes: First, they ‘trampled underfoot the Son of God.’ The word ‘trampled’ is a singularly powerful expression for disdain. Figuratively, the metaphor portrays taking ‘the Son of God’—the highest accord given to Christ in Hebrews—and grinding Him into the dirt. Thus, turning away from Christ is an attack on His *person*.

MacArthur: Apostasy involves total rejection of the godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. To trample ‘under foot the Son of God’ is the same as to trample under foot the Father. And to reject the Son is to spurn the Spirit. To have ‘trampled under foot’ means to have scorned, to have counted as worthless. Some people walk by Christ and think He is nothing. They see Him clearly, and have gotten close enough to examine Him carefully had they chosen to. But they count Him as worthless, and go on their way. It is a fearful and damning thing to count as worthless the One whom the Father has declared to be of infinite worth.

(2) Against the Work of Christ (10:29c)

...and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified...

Schreiner: Second, they consider ‘the blood of the covenant’ as ‘profane’ (*κοινον, koinon*). The word ‘profane’ refers to what is unclean in both Judaism (1 Macc. 1:47, 62) and the NT (Mk. 7:2, 5; Acts 10:14, 28; 11:8; Rom. 14:14; Rev. 21:27). It is the blood of the covenant (cp. 13:20), in the sense that Jesus’ death inaugurates and ratifies the new covenant between God and His people, securing forgiveness of sins (8:13). Those who reject Jesus, however, do not seek purification by His blood. They reject His blood as unclean, tossing it aside as one would throw a menstrual cloth into the garbage. We should not that the author speaks of the blood ‘by which’ the readers were ‘sanctified’ (*ηγιασθη, ēgiasthē*). Here is powerful evidence that those addressed are truly believers, confirming what was argued in 6:4-5, for Jesus’ blood sanctifies and sets them apart (cp. 13:12 and 2:11). Sanctification here is definitive and positional rather than progressive.

Hughes: Second, apostasy is an attack on Christ’s *work*, for the one who has done this ‘has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.’ Hebrews 9 is especially a lyrical song about the superiority of Christ’s blood. Because Christ’s blood was nothing less than His divine life willingly offered, it could do what no animal’s blood could do—namely, take away sin and bestow a clear conscience. The sort of apostate pictured here had at one time *professed* faith in Christ, *listened* to the Word preached, and *celebrated* the Lord’s Supper. Those initial acts ‘sanctified’ him. As elsewhere in Hebrews, the idea of being sanctified refers to the initial act of being set apart for God. But his faith, such as it was, was not internal and was not genuine, and now he consciously rejects Christ’s work. ‘Jesus’ blood’, he says, ‘is common, just like any other man’s. There is nothing special about it.’

MacArthur: I believe the phrase ‘by which he was sanctified’ refers to Christ. It could not refer to the apostate, who is regarding the blood as unclean, because he is hardly sanctified. The apostate regards Christ’s blood as common blood, just like that of any other person. That which cost God His Son, and that which cost the Son the agony of becoming sin for us, is counted as worthless. That which is of infinite value, he counts as valueless.

(3) Against the Holy Spirit (10:29d)

...and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

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Schreiner: Third, if they reject Jesus, they insult ‘the Spirit of grace.’ The Lord promises to ‘pour out a spirit of grace’ on David’s house and Jerusalem in the last days so that they will acknowledge the one they pierced (Zech. 12:10). They phrase ‘Spirit of grace’ here probably means the Spirit who grants and gives grace. Again the language is remarkably strong. Those who reject the blood of Jesus do not merely sin against the Spirit. They insult and despise the Spirit. In a culture where honor and shame were so prominent, the horror of the sin is featured. The sin here is another way of speaking of blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (Mt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:29; Lk. 12:10) or is manifested in the resistance to the Spirit in Stephen’s hearers (Acts 7:51).

Hughes: Third, having rejected the *person* and *work* of Christ, he also rejects the *person and work* of the Holy Spirit: ‘and has outraged the Spirit of grace.’ This is the only place in the New Testament where the Holy Spirit is called ‘the Spirit of grace’ (but cp. Zech. 12:10), and what a beautiful and fitting title it is. He *enlightens* our minds, He *seals* our hearts in adoption, He *regenerates* us with spiritual life, and He *grafts* us into the Body of Christ—all effects of grace. To ‘outrage the Spirit of grace’ is an immense act of hubris and arrogance (the Greek verb for ‘outraged’ comes from the noun *hybris*). What had happened is that the Holy Spirit had come to the apostate, witnessed to him about spiritual reality, and courted his soul, but the apostate rejected the Spirit’s witness with outrageous arrogance. Such persons deliberately close their eyes to the light, just as the Pharisees had done when they attributed the Spirit’s works of mercy and power to Beelzebub—and thus their condemnation is the same. To reject the gracious works of ‘the Spirit of grace’ renders one irremediably lost.

MacArthur: The man who has been led by the ‘Spirit of grace’ in the pre-salvation work of redemption, and has been energized by Him toward repentance (Jn. 16:8-11), insults the Spirit by turning from Christ. He rejects the gracious work of preparation done by the Spirit in his heart—and that is apostasy. By trampling under foot the Son of God, he rejects God the Father. By regarding the blood of the covenant as unclean, He rejects the Son. By insulting the gentle, gracious leading of the Spirit, he rejects the Spirit. No wonder he deserves much severer punishment.

3. Dreadful Judgment (10:30-31)

a) *Vengeance Is Mine (10:30)*

³⁰*For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”*

Schreiner: Verse 30 supports the notion that those who sin deliberately (v. 26) will receive worse punishment (v. 29). Two citations from the OT are given (Dt. 32:35; 32:36). Both quotations come from the song of Moses (Dt. 32:1-43), which rehearses the Lord’s goodness and grace to Israel and Israel’s rebellion against the Lord. Those who trample the Son of God under their feet, treat His blood as unclean, and despise the Spirit of grace will face God’s vengeance and justice. They will not be forgiven but will be judged by the Lord. The second citation confirms the same thought. The Lord will judge His people if they depart from Him. The words ‘His people’ should not be read to say that God’s people will not face final judgment even if they depart from Him since they are ‘His people.’ Those who depart show that they were only God’s people phenomenologically, i.e., in appearance only. Of course, the writer isn’t saying that they the readers have fallen away. The passage consists of a *warning*. The readers must not fall away as Israel did.

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Bruce: He drives his warning home with two quotations from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. It is God through the mouth of Moses in this Song who says, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay’—so our author quotes Dt. 32:35 (cp. Rom. 12:19). Our author’s application of the words is not inconsistent with their original context: God’s own people are not exempt from His law that men and women reap what they sow. And this is confirmed in the next verse of the Song (Dt. 32:26): ‘Yahweh will judge His people.’ This certainly means that He will execute judgment on their behalf, vindicating their cause against their enemies, but it carries with it the corollary that, on the same principles of impartial righteousness, He will execute judgment against them when they forsake His covenant. The privileges which Israel enjoyed as God’s covenant people meant that their responsibilities were the greater and that retribution would be the more severe in their case if they gave themselves up to unrighteousness. What was true then remains true for God’s dealings with His people now.

Hughes: In verse 30, in order to drive home the terror of judgment, the author quotes loosely from the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:35, 36 (cp. Rom. 12:19). The phrases appear to be proverbial and were undoubtedly understood by everyone in the church. Clearly, judgment is *inevitable*, and it is *impartial*. There will be equal justice for all.

Phillips: God has said that He will repay sin, visiting His vengeance on sinners. Hebrews 10:30 quotes two passages from Deuteronomy 32 that establish this judgment against sin. But it was in the death of His Son that God really proved it to the world, for it was God’s wrath against our sin that Jesus bore upon that Christ. What He experienced there was dreadful indeed. The point is not that God is morally objectionable, but that sin is morally repulsive. This is what we find hard to accept. This is lost on those who complain about God’s wrath. Sin is terrible, and the cross of Christ declares it to the world, even as it declares the holiness of God in letters of blood. For even when it was Jesus Himself, the beloved Son of heaven, who bore our sins upon the cross, God the Father still poured out His wrath.

b) *A Fearful Thing (10:31)*

³¹*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Schreiner: Our world is used to catastrophes and often shrugs off disasters, but the final judgment is a matter of terror. The word ‘terrifying’ (*φοβερον, phoberon*) was already used in 10:27 about the future of judgment. Here the terrible thing is to fall into the hands of the living God. The expression ‘fall into the hands of’ means to come under the power of another. In some contexts falling into the hands of God refers to His mercy (2 Sam. 24:14; 1 Chr. 21:13). God is the ‘living’ (cp. 3:12; 9:14; 12:22), and departing from Him is no idle matter. The threat forecasts 12:29, ‘For our God is a consuming fire.’

Bruce: Our author has a deep conviction of the awesome holiness of the divine majesty. ‘It is fearful,’ he says, ‘to fall into the hands of the living God.’ These words have no doubt been used frequently as a warning to the ungodly of what lies in store for them unless they amend their ways; but their primary application is to the people of God. Yet when the question must be faced, into whose hands would any one of the people of God more readily fall than into His? When King David was commanded to choose between three forms of judgment after his numbering of the people, his wise reply was the fruit of his previous experience of God: ‘let us fall into the hand of Yahweh; for His mercy is great’ (2 Sam. 24:14). Perhaps this very passage was in our author’s mind and suggested the form of words he chose: ‘to fall into the hands of the living God.’ For ‘the living God’ appears repeatedly in the Bible as a synonym of Yahweh. As

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if our author were asked why it is so fearful to fall into *His* hands, he might well reply: ‘Because He is the *living* God.’

Hughes: Finally, we come to the grand statement of terror, ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.’ May we understand how dreadful and divine this is! King David, after he had sinned against God by counting the number of fighting men in Israel and Judah, evidently viewed falling into God’s hands as divine judgment, because when God commanded him to choose between three alternatives, his wise reply was, ‘Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great’ (2 Sam. 24:14). Very possibly this exact passage was on our author’s mind and governed the form of the words he chose. However, that may be, for the true believer there is nothing better than to fall repentantly into the hands of God. His hands are our hope! But to fall into God’s hands will be dreadful for those who have rejected Him because, as we have mentioned, divine judgment will be *perfectly equitable*. The horrible truth is that one will receive what is coming to him. This will be dreadful because it involves *separation from God*. Union with God’s nature is bliss, but separation from Him is horror. It will be dreadful because it is *eternal*. The dread of eternal separation and punishment is inconceivably painful. This is an excruciating doctrine. Eternity gapes before us.

Phillips: If one thing proves the reality of verse 31, it is the experience of Jesus Christ as He contemplated God’s judgment. On the night of His arrest, Jesus went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray, and it was the dreadful wrath of God that preyed upon His mind (see Lk. 22:42-44). This was not a man shrinking from mere physical death. It was the horror of the holy, eternal Son of God as He faced the experience of being made sin for us and of bearing the wrath of separation from the love of God in our place. He was delivered up so that we might be spared. He bore the wrath of God so that we might never have to bear it.

Phillips: The cross reveals the reality of sin as well as the reality of God’s holy judgment upon it. But the cross reveals something else: the answer to the question about God’s love. How can we call the God of the cross the God of love? Because the cross reveals how wide and long and high and deep is God’s love. This is what it took for God to satisfy His holy justice, the full payment of the debt of sin. If this is what it took for God to love the world—the offering of His only Son, the only One who measured up to God’s holy standard—then God was willing to do it. If the death of Christ was required for God to be reconciled to His creatures, then in that death we see the fullness of His love. ‘God so loved the world,’ and the death of Jesus was the provision of God’s love for us.

Phillips: Therefore, let us not trample Jesus Christ, God’s Son, under our feet by unbelief. Let us not count as unholy that blood, precious in its value and saving in its virtue, that was shed for us. Let us not insult the Spirit of grace who bears testimony to such love to our hearts. And if we do, should any of us repudiate this gospel of justice and love, then surely God will avenge, He will repay. And well He should. Even the thought of falling into His holy hands for justice, without the covering of Christ’s blood received by faith, is dreadful. How terrible it will be for those who defy Him today, but on that day will fall into His hands for condemnation.

For next time: Read Hebrews 10:32-39.