

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

(Hebrews 10:19–25)

Introduction

There are 59 “one anothers” in the New Testament. Healthy churches are constantly “one anothering” each other. This is what could be called congregational care.

Hebrews 10:19–25 contains one of these: “Consider one another.”

I have written about this recently, and I want to develop this theme briefly in this study. But before we look at the text, we need to grasp the context.

The book of Hebrews highlights the shift from old to new covenant, from the old wine to the new wine of the gospel, from the old wineskin to the new wineskin.

The Boldness to Enter

As we approach vv. 19–21, we read the writer’s exhortation to boldly enter.

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Be Bold, Brothers

The writer reveals his pastoral heart by his use of the word “brothers.” He is careful not to give the impression that he thinks his readers are apostate. Rather, tenderly exhorts them to embrace their privilege to “enter the holy places” (sanctuary); he desires for them to boldly go where no man, merely on his own merit, would ever dare to go. This is the privilege of

every Christian. As Guthrie says, “In view of what Christ has done and now is doing, there is no reason why all believers should not approach with confidence.” We are to boldly lay hold of Christ and be reconciled to God.

Consider what this would mean for an old covenant Jew – especially those who were led by the Pharisees, terrified of stepping out of line!

The Boldness to Enjoy/Experience

In vv. 22–25, the writer highlights the boldness to enjoy and experience the relationship with God entered into in vv. 19–21.

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(Hebrews 10:22–25)

In these verses, the writer applies the doctrine of access of vv. 19–21. We are exhorted to enter boldly into the experience of this boldness.

Here we find the trilogy of gospel virtues: faith, hope and love. As we embrace the gospel of the person and work of Jesus, let us experience these virtues.

Faithfully Draw Near

First, in v. 22, we are exhorted to faithfully and confidently draw near: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” We experience this bold access by faith. Faith is the foundation for our relationship with God. Belief precedes boldness, otherwise all you have is presumption.

Saving faith is marked by having a “true heart.” This speaks of a genuine heart – wholehearted trust in Jesus Christ as your once-for-all sacrifice. Christianity is not a set of heartless rituals but rather a heartfelt response to the grace and mercy of God in Christ. Those saved by God believe him with all of their heart and grow in loving him with all of their heart.

Hopefully Draw Near

Second, in v. 23, we are encouraged to hopefully and continually draw near: “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” It is one thing to *initially* draw near to God by faith but the Christian life calls us to *continually* draw near. There is a battle for such boldness. We can notice several things about this.

Hopeful Confession

Our hope is with respect to our “confession.” When it comes to the promises of God, there is no such thing as hope-so; rather, there is certain expectation.

Having confessed Christ in baptism, further evidence of whether or not this profession came from a “true heart” is manifested in a hopeful and ongoing confession of Christ (see 3:1; 4:14). As someone has said, a hopeless Christian is a contradiction in terms.

Hopeful Continuance

We are to be unbending. The words “without wavering” speak of being firm or unbending. We could say that the Christian who grasps the gospel will be like an arrow rather than like a bow. We are to head straight for God rather than being wayward from God.

Hopeful Confidence

Our hope is unending. We are to be unending in our unbending because “he who promised is faithful.” God’s faithfulness is unending and therefore our helpfulness is unending.

Let Us Lovingly Draw Near

Verses 24–25 exhort us to lovingly and corporately draw near: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

With these verses, the trilogy of Christian virtues is complete. The Christian is to be marked by faith, hope and love. She draws near to God by faith, in hope, with love. And to love requires others beside self!

That is, the Christian is to boldly enter and to boldly enjoy God in the context of others. Drawing near is not for lone rangers. Drawing near is a team effort; it is a family affair. And it is driven by love.

We must have a loving concern for the community of faith. We must be concerned that everyone in the community of faith experiences the blessed privilege of bold entrance and the blessed privilege of bold enjoyment. We must have such a loving concern for one another that we notice when a brother begins to bend and their hope begins to end. This loving concern is to be lived out in the context of local church life.

Every member is to share in this burden of loving concern. To ignore it is to invite peril. As Moffatt says, “Any early Christian who attempted to live like a pious particle without the support of the community ran serious risks” And the times have not changed.

Let’s see the characteristics of this loving concern and let us practically live it out.

Look Carefully

First, we are to look carefully. We are to “consider” one another.

The word translated “consider” means to observe fully or to fix one’s eyes or mind upon. This is not an exhortation to merely give a passing glance to one another; rather, it is a strong admonition to pay careful attention to one another, to look out for one another. It is an exhortation to take responsibility for the spiritual welfare of each other. This is clear from what follows: “in order to stir up love and good works.” That is, we are to so closely observe one another that we notice when love lags and good works languish. Our concern is to translate into effort to encourage one another in the love of God and to motivate them to keep on keeping on. “Provoking to perseverance” is a good way to put it. But, again, this requires that we give thought to each other. We are to set our minds on practically caring for each other.

It is all too easy in our selfish individualistic era to pay little heed to the welfare of others unless something of huge magnitude takes place. So, are you concerned? You should be. Richard Phillips says, “If we are not doing this, then we are nothing more than takers, consumers of religion who are of little use for the eternal destiny of other people.”

We are to look around carefully at our own congregation and be concerned for one another. Do you notice when someone who professes Christ begins to show evidence of not drawing near but rather of drawing away? Do you notice when a fellow church member shows signs of drifting and of bending to the ways of unbelief? Noticing is not enough, but it is a necessary place to start. But I wonder how observant we are. Are we so self-consumed that we do not notice?

Some years ago, a stabbing took place on a San Francisco subway. Other passengers were so busy on their devices that they failed to notice. Let us not be like that in the church.

The writer is addressing the community of faith, not merely the elders. We are all to be involved. A visitor to our church recently told me that he and his family were looking for a place where they can be active members. It was music to my ears, for this should be our attitude at all times.

I'm sure we can all state reasons why we cannot be as involved as I am calling for, but let's not annihilate the principle with a thousand qualifications. Our responsibility is clear. We must take it seriously. We must continue to look carefully! Keep your eyes open for those who need to draw near. But there is more that is required. That is, we need to observe but we also need to act.

Love Constructively

The reason that we keep our eyes open for one another is because we want to *help* one another. We want to “stir up to love and good works” (v. 24). We are to help others to embrace their privilege and to act like it (see Ephesians 2:8–10).

The words “stir up” mean to incite. They are ordinarily used in a negative sense (see Acts 15:29). Perhaps the author uses this word for that very reason: to make the emphatic and bold statement that Christians are to provoke each other in a positive way to follow Christ. We do so out of love, which is obvious since our goal is to stir up love.

The “good works” are perhaps in contradistinction to the dead works of an ineffectual old covenant sacrificial system. The word means beautiful or excellent. The point is that the community of faith is to be concerned that the faith of the community actually works. For faith without works is, of course, dead (James 2:26).

The community of faith has the corporate concern that each member be the real deal. We not only want others to draw near to God but we desire that each draws near with hands full of excellent works to the glory of God.

We need, also, to consider how to do so. Practically, what can you do? You can begin by asking! Take a fellow church member for coffee. Read a book with them. Share an article with them. Be an accountability partner for them.

Live in Community

A final word of exhortation: To do the above, we must communicate with one another: “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” This is a basic requirement of exhortation. But to communicate usually requires that we have contact with one another. We must be connected to one another. As Donald Guthrie puts it, “Something more than individual effort is needed if love and good works are to be fostered.... Corporate action is indispensable.” As the household of God, the priests are to gather.

If the underlying motif is the Day of Atonement, then perhaps the writer is emphasizing that these believers need to worshipfully gather in the same frame of mind. That is, when they gather (on the Lord's Day?), they are to do so remembering that there is an atonement

for their sins. They will gather sobered by this, but as they exhort one another by the gospel there will be a corresponding joy.

At the same time, there is a serious danger to be aware of. Christians face doubts, discouragements, defeats. We need the corporate fellowship to help our perspective. Therefore “to be needlessly absent is to deprive oneself, both of being helped and of helping others, but more seriously of drifting in the direction of danger” (Jones).

Apparently some were withdrawing from regular worship even to the point of abandoning such gatherings. How could they fulfil their responsibility to stir others to love and good works if they were not even present? How could they exhort one another if they were absent from one another?

This writer was concerned—and with good reason. As Proverbs 18:1 says, “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgement.” This verse makes a very strong case for the necessity of meaningful congregational life.

I can hear the excuses at this point. For example, someone might object that it is not necessary to go to church to be a Christian. (This, incidentally, is not true. Going to church may not make you a Christian, but you cannot be a Christian in any meaningful sense of the word if you will not prioritise what Christ prioritises.) Others might object that church attendance twice on Sunday is nowhere commanded in Scripture.

Such excuses all share the dubious characteristic of missing the point! In fact what Calvin said so long ago is still very relevant:

There is so much peevishness in almost everyone that individuals, if they could, would gladly make their own churches for themselves.... This warning is therefore more than needed by all of us that we should be encouraged to love rather than hate and that we should not separate ourselves from those ... who are joined to us by a common faith.

A simple reading of this passage makes it clear that if we are not meaningfully and frequently connected to our church family we are not fulfilling our responsibility to help each other. In fact we may be in serious spiritual peril. Bruce nails it when he notes, “To withdraw from the society of their fellow-believers was to court spiritual defeat; only by remaining united could they preserve their faith and witness.” This is no less true in our day.

“That Day,” I am persuaded, is a reference to the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple in 70 AD. The writer was aware that the prophecy of Matthew 24 was on the horizon. He warns them, therefore, to make sure that they stick together because times are going to get tough. They need one another. They need to be connected if they will be

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Doug Van Meter

constructive for the glory of good and to the good of their souls. If they isolated themselves, they ran the risk of apostasy, just as Jesus warned. But if they stuck together, they would endure to the end and be saved.

Though we do not live in such a time frame, we nonetheless need help from one another. The church faces difficulties, and many Christians face personal challenges to their faith. You may not be one of those, at least not now. But you have a responsibility to help those who are.

So, gather to connect. Don't withdraw in selfishness; come together to give of yourself. Let us consider how we can stir one another to love and good works! Apply your mind to this by having and applying the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5–8).

AMEN