

An Exhortation to Faith, Hope, Love

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 10:19-25
Preached on: Sunday, May 7, 2017

It is always such an enormous privilege to be able to come together and open up the infallible record of the word of the living God and we do that again this morning with great reverence and great expectation by taking our Bibles and turning to Hebrews 10. For those of you that haven't been with us, we are very careful to make our way through various books of the Bible verse by verse and this morning we come to verses 19 through 25 in Hebrews 10 and I have entitled my discourse to you this morning "An Exhortation of Faith, Hope and Love."

Now before we read the text and examine it, I'd like to get you to think with me for just a moment. I'm sure you would agree that there is very little cost to following Christ in our culture, although persecution is growing, but right now it's still fairly mild. For many, Christianity is defined basically by one's profession of faith and by church attendance and nothing else and, frankly, the ?? claiming to be believers but really not living a life that honors Christ and, therefore, would cause the world to hate them. Most professing believers today are what I would call Sunday morning Christians, but their private life and their public life show no indication whatsoever that they have a passionate love for Christ, that they have a devotion to his glory, an appetite for the word of God, purity of life, a burden for the lost. Most have a Christ-less Christianity which, I might add, is a worthless Christianity that cannot save. It is a Christianity that the world adores but God abhors. All you have to do is go into most Christian bookstores and look at the bestseller list and I would submit to you that much of what is there is superficial at best, heretical at worst. If you think about it, if Jesus were here today and his apostles, they would never be able to write anything that would make the bestseller list, in fact, it probably would never be published.

But the cost of following Christ in the first century was very very different. Persecution was common and it was severe and it tempted many of the Hebrew believers, those that had come out of Judaism, to cower in fear and return to Judaism. Historically we know that God uses persecution to purge his church of pretenders and strengthen those who really know him and cause them to persevere by his grace and, frankly, the greatest tool that God uses down through redemptive history is his Spirit-inspired, Spirit-empowered word and that is what we have here in the letter to the Hebrews. This is why it was so powerful to them and to us today.

You will recall that the inspired writer has been engaged in an extended argument extolling the supremacy of Christ and the superiority of the new covenant over the old,

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Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

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crucial issues for these new Hebrew believers to understand and, frankly, crucial for us as well. But now he moves from exposition to exhortation, from explanation to practical application. For ten chapters he has extolled the sheer grandeur of God in the face of Christ. He has explained his role as prophet and as priest and as king, but now the Spirit shows those early believers and us as well how to live in light of all of this, how to respond to the surpassing glory of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, who was the superior prophet and in these last days has spoken to us as we read in Hebrews 1. Here we learn about our Christian duty in response to God's great high priest, what he has done as our substitute; the one who gave his life as the final and perfect sacrifice to appease the just wrath of God that we rightly deserve; the one who has forever secured our redemption and cleansed our conscience from any fear of judgment. And here the Spirit of God sets forth the duty of the subjects of the King of kings, that King who patiently awaits that day when his enemies will be made a footstool for his feet.

Now, imagine what it would be like to live in those days, to come out of Judaism to hear about the Gospel, to come to a saving knowledge of Christ, and you look around and there are no other Christians. Imagine what that would be like. You live in your little village or maybe in a larger city, your family now thinks you're nuts, and you have nobody to talk to, really, about Christ. Very few people. Oh, the apostles or whoever brought you the Gospel, you would be able to talk with them some, but apart from that, I mean, there are no churches, there are no seminaries, there are no Bible schools because there is no Bible. You have some of the Old Testament writings, you have a few of the epistles that have been recorded but basically you have no Christian heritage. It's all new. And you really have no idea how to live out the Christian life. That's really foreign to us because we have so many of these resources and so much history.

The Jews certainly knew how to live out their Judaism according to the old covenant law, but now the new covenant has come along and replaced the old. God has written his law upon their heart, they now understand the Gospel of grace, but what does that mean practically? How then shall we live, is the question and this text begins to answer that question by exhorting them to faith, hope and love, and we see this great trilogy of Christian virtues throughout the New Testament record and the remaining three chapters of Hebrews will expound upon each of these characteristics of a new creature in Christ and all of this is now just being introduced in verses 19 through 25. We will discover that the theme of chapter 11 is the power of faith in Christ. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. The theme of chapter 12 is the power of hope in Christ which enables us to run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. And the theme of chapter 13 is the power of – you guessed it – love in Christ. In fact, the very first verse of chapter 13 says, "Let love of the brethren continue," and he goes on to describe in very practical ways

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

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what that looks like: showing hospitality to strangers; caring for the ill-treated; avoiding any love for money; being content with what you have and so forth. Now, while the seeds of faith, hope and love have been supernaturally planted in the heart of every true believer, you must understand that we must nevertheless nurture them in order for them to bear much fruit for the glory of God and for our everlasting joy, and by God's grace we will learn more of how to do that this morning.

Now with that introduction, let's look at the verses. Notice Hebrews 10, beginning in verse 19.

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Often when a nurse is about to give me a shot, she will say, "Now this might sting a little bit." Have you ever heard them say that? Beloved, what you're going to hear today might sting a little bit. It has stung me all week long, now it's your turn so brace yourself. Better yet, humble yourself and enjoy the loving truths that our heavenly Father wants us to understand.

I want you to notice first in verses 19 through 21 how this Spirit-inspired writer establishes the basis for our faith, hope and love. Notice what he says, verse 19, "Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus," in other words, in view of the finished work of Christ as our substitute, knowing that we are forever united with him, we are hidden in him, we are clothed in his righteousness, since this is true, we have confidence. The term literally can be translated "we have freedom of speech or complete freedom." Now, you must understand this is more than an exhilarating boldness grounded in the reality that our sins have been forgiven and we are now justified, but it carries the idea of the right to enter or the complete freedom, or you might say the authorization that we now have.

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

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Bible Text: Hebrews 10:19-25
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"We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus ," and of course, the holy place was that part of the sanctuary in the tabernacle and later on the temple, that symbolized the presence of God. So now because of what Christ has done, we can enter into the presence of God.

Verse 20, "by a new and living way." Now mind you, this was a way that had never been known before by the Jewish people who longed to be in the presence of God. A new and living way because we are now united to a living Christ and we're now commanded, therefore, to present our bodies a living and a holy sacrifice that is acceptable to God. A new and living way because Jesus said, "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. No man comes to the Father but through me." It's amazing, isn't it? We have eternal life because of Jesus' death.

We have "a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh." Now, all of this imagery was very clear to the ancient Hebrew people. There was a veil in the tabernacle, there was a veil in the temple. It separated the people from the holiest place, preventing sinful man from entering into the presence of a holy God, and so too, what we see here is the physical veil of Jesus' flesh prevented man from seeing his glory and entering into the presence of his glory, but when his flesh was torn asunder upon the cross, suddenly all of that changed. That barrier was removed and because of Christ now, sinners have access into the presence of God, and of course, all of that was symbolized by the veil of the temple that was torn asunder when Christ was crucified.

So since we have all of this, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, and verse 21, "since we have a great priest over the house of God." And of course, this refers to Christ Jesus, the one who has entered as a forerunner for us, chapter 6, verse 20; the one who has now sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, remember chapter 1, verse 3; the mediator of a new covenant, chapter 9, verse 15. He is the one as our great high priest who ever lives to make intercession for us. So what the writer is saying here by way of introduction, "Since all of these things are true, let us do three things pertaining to faith, hope and love." First of all, let us draw near in full assurance of faith. And folks, this is our duty to God. Secondly, let us hold fast our confession of hope which is our duty to unbelievers. And finally, let us stimulate one another to love which is our duty to fellow believers. So because we are united to Christ, we have the power to be able to do these things. Apart from him we can do none of them so let's understand what the Spirit has to say here.

First of all under the heading: he wants us to draw near in full assurance of faith, notice verse 22, "let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

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Bible Text: Hebrews 10:19-25
Preached on: Sunday, May 7, 2017

Now, here the writer uses familiar imagery. He reaches back into the sacrificial ceremonies that the Hebrew people were familiar with, all of the ritual washings that the priests were constantly doing, the endless cleansing of the sacred vessels, the constant sprinkling of the blood that symbolized the external and the temporary covering of sin but could never accomplish a permanent cleansing of sin.

Now under the old covenant, many Jewish people drew near to God with a sincere heart. They had a genuine heart. That's what the term "sincere" means, a genuine heart. They were seeking fellowship with God. They had a heart that was without hypocrisy. Now obviously, many of them did not but many of them did. But it was hard for them to do that under the old covenant in full assurance of faith until they were given the gift of faith in Christ, Ephesians 2:8. Only then could they enjoy that inward permanent cleansing of the heart. Only then could they enjoy the purification of an accusing conscience that somehow fears divine retribution. Only then would they be able to benefit from the cleansing of the body that was polluted with sin. And folks, I might add this is such a practical doctrine, a truth that we should wear as our great shield. Think about it: have you ever determined in your heart to draw near to God, maybe in prayer, or to find some private place, kind of sneak away with the word or a devotional study or whatever and spend time with the Lord? Or maybe to draw near to him by serving him in some maybe obscure way, some special way? And then suddenly as your heart begins to move in that direction, as if somebody is watching, you are flooded with interruptions and distractions? You're all smiling. Yeah, you know what that's like, and many of those things are external. That's why you're kidding yourself if you go to do something like this with your cellphone. Bury that thing for an hour, alright? But the most troublesome of the distractions come from an accusing conscience. It's as if something within us says, "Huh, who are you? You really think God is impressed with you? I mean, look at what you've done. Who are you to serve him? Seriously? Do you really think God wants anything to do with you?" I've talked with many people who struggle with that.

Dear friends, it's as though there are two vicious lions that stand guard at the threshold of God's presence. One is our flesh that is easily attracted and even obsessed with things that are eternally inconsequential. Our flesh will deceive us into believing a thousand lies. And then the other lion is Satan, the accuser of the brethren, the slanderer who can ?? a thousand voices to testify against us. And both of these enemies, you might say, stand ready to prevent our access to God, pointing out all of our private sins, all of our public sins, all of our weaknesses, all of our failures, accusing memories that suddenly flood the mind and the heart and shake our confidence. We begin to hear those mocking voices that never stop condemning. Many times I have sat across from a person and heard them say, "Oh, how could God love a person like me? How could he ever want anything to do with

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

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me?" Dear friend, if that is you, please know that you are never closer to grace than when you are quite certain you should never have it.

Moreover, we must never approach God in the confidence of our flesh, but we do so as the text says here, in full assurance of faith. You see, we rest completely upon what Christ has done, not what we have done either good or bad. Beloved, our confidence is in one thing and one thing alone: the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. So he's saying here that we have this great privilege, we have this great duty to draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. We know that the blood of Christ has cleansed the heart and the body once for all. We know that he has purified our, shall we say our material as well as immaterial nature so that we can be consecrated to God, so that we can be set apart unto him. Dear Christian, what a marvelous privilege this is. We should never take it for granted.

And this must have been an utterly astounding concept to those early Jewish believers. They had never heard of such a thing. The unapproachable Yahweh that once thundered from Sinai now summons from Zion. Because of Christ, we have access into his glorious presence and he not only asks us to come, he commands us to come. He no longer commands us to stay back lest you die. Isn't it amazing to know that God has saved us so that we might have fellowship with him and he with us? So that he might restore what was lost in the garden. Oh child of God, you must understand what Christ has done and based upon what he has done, understand what he would have you do and what he would have you do is learn to draw near to him with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. Draw near to him in private worship. Draw near to him in public worship. Draw near to him in holy living. Draw near to him by longing to hear his voice through his written word. Draw near to him by serving him in his body, the church. And draw near to him by drawing near to his people in Christian love and fellowship.

And what a heartbreak to hear of folks who claim Christ as Savior but they have no desire to draw near to him in any of these ways. Oh it's typical, especially in our culture. You draw near to him on Sunday, especially that's what you do here in the South, right? That's what we do. And even then our worship can be a mockery because we're not doing it with a sincere heart. A sincere heart meaning a genuine devotion to living for his glory and enjoying intimate fellowship with him. Instead it's easy for people to live in a fool's paradise, a parallel universe of religious hypocrisy where their Christian life is a sham. They are nothing more than hollow pretenders, an abomination to an all-knowing God. I know a number of these kind of people personally. Some of them have been a part of this church. Some of them still are.

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

An Exhortation to Faith, Hope, Love

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It's so easy to project an image of piety but know nothing of the reality. Husbands who sing hymns on Sunday and abuse their wives on the way home. Wives who nod their heads in agreement with the sermon and then wag their tongues in slander at lunch. Professing believers addicted to alcohol and drugs and immorality, obsessed with the idol of social media, clearly in love with the world and the things of the world which proves that the love of the Father is not in them.

My friend, if this describes you, make no mistake, truth and time walk hand-in-hand. The word of God says, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, that will he also reap." You see, friends, inward sin is like a worm that eats away at the apple's core until it is ruined. Know this: God hates hypocrisy and eventually inward sin will become your outward shame. Hypocrisy has always been the great scourge of the church. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 7 that most people who call him Lord will never enter into the kingdom because of self-deception. You're familiar with that text. The only ones who will are those who do the will of the Father. You see, it is inward obedience that validates genuine saving faith, not outward reputation.

So, folks, hear what God is saying here. Because of the astounding privilege that we now have to confidently enter into the presence of God the Father because of what Christ has done, it is the believer's cheerful desire as well as his duty to draw near to him with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith. To draw near to him privately and even publicly as we're doing here. Why? Because we long for fellowship with the living God. Because we long to worship him. We long to hear from him. We long to be more conformed to the likeness of our precious Savior.

So our duty to God is to draw near in full assurance of faith but, secondly, to hold fast our confession of hope and, frankly, this is our duty to unbelievers. Notice verse 23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." Folks, aren't you thankful that we have a confession of hope? Aren't you thankful that you have that all because of the Gospel of Christ? You realize this is something the world doesn't have. The world doesn't have any hope. Why do you think drugs are such an epidemic in our culture? Why do you think they keep building more and more malls? Why do you think people are addicted to entertainment? It's because they have no hope in anything else. They're trying to find life.

And here the writer is urging believers to firmly lay hold of the hope they profess; to never loosen their grip on the promises of God, especially in times of trouble. I want you to notice what he says here: we must hold fast this confession of hope, he says, "without wavering." The term means "without vacillating; without equivocating; without waffling; without changing your mind." This was so important for those Hebrew believers that

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

An Exhortation to Faith, Hope, Love

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were being hammered by their friends and family to abandon the Jesus of Nazareth cult and to come back to Judaism.

He says he wants us to "hold fast." This was a phrase the ancients used in various contexts. It carries the idea of remaining secure or intact, but it was also, interestingly enough, a very technical nautical term for "to make for, or to steer towards so as to land at a specific safe harbor." In fact, the writer of Hebrews used the same phrase in Hebrews 3:14. There he says, "For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast," in other words, if we remain whole-heartedly committed to, "the beginning of our assurance firm until the end," and there we have a call to self-examination, of watchfulness. We are joint partakers of an intimate personal fellowship with Christ and co-heirs with him in the possessions and the blessings of the kingdom of God if we hold fast, he says, the beginning of our assurance. And what is that? What is that assurance? It's that confidence, hypostasis in the original language. It described in other contexts the assurance that a property owner owned a particular piece of property that they possessed because they had the deed to the land. That's the idea. So spiritually a true believe is to remain absolutely confident that he has the title deed to heaven and all of the blessings of his inheritance because he is in Christ. Because he is united to Christ, he belongs to Christ because he has been given eternal life. So true believers will remain steadfast in their faith which were indeed the beginning of their assurance, and they will end their Christian life in the same way they began, with an unwavering belief that they were saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone like the Apostle Paul who you will recall said in Philippians 1:6, "I am confident of," what? "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in me will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." In fact, in Luke 8:15 Jesus described true believers as "the ones who have heard the word in an honest and good heart and hold fast and bear fruit with perseverance."

So back to verse 23 of Hebrews 10, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." I think we would all agree that it is so easy for us to loosen our grip on our confession of hope and to end up wavering. And again, this was the great danger of the Hebrew Christian and what a sad testimony that is to a watching world that has no hope, to watch those who claim to be the undeserved recipients of saving and transforming grace, to watch those people gradually let go of the steering wheel and allow their ship to go wherever the wind takes them.

Don't you love to spend time around believers that know what it is to hold fast without wavering? My, what a joy that is to hear their confession of hope in Christ, to hear their stories, to see their steadfastness of love and purpose, their determination. Folks, that's what the world needs. It doesn't need our self-promoting selfies on Facebook. It doesn't need our contextualized Christianity so that those who are at enmity with Christ can think

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

An Exhortation to Faith, Hope, Love

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he's cool. The world does not need another Christ-less Christian that is stoned out of his mind pretending to love Jesus. It doesn't need another pusillanimous pastor with skinny jeans trying to warm fuzzy people into the kingdom with a sanitized, politically correct Gospel that does not save. Dear friends, what the world without hope needs is to see godly men and women with a resolute, determined, steadfast commitment to hold fast the confession of their hope without wavering. Folks, this is our duty to unbelievers, even if it takes us to a cross. This is the fire in the furnace of evangelism.

And notice the last part of verse 23, he says, "for He who promised is faithful." You see, a believer who holds fast his confession of hope without wavering is thoroughly convinced that God is faithful to do all that he has promised. As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:24, "Faithful is He who calls you and He also will bring it to pass."

So because of all that Christ has done, it is our duty before God to draw near to him in full assurance of faith, it is our duty before unbelievers to hold fast our confession of hope and then, thirdly, it is our duty to believers to stimulate one another to love and this will be the inevitable fruit of those who are faithful in the first two duties, but you will not see this in the lives of those who are not faithful to the first two. Notice verse 24 and 25, "and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Folks, this is an admonition to what we would call intentional fellowship.

Now especially in our culture which tends to be very superficial even in the ranks of Christendom, we are very skilled at hello-ship but we are woefully inadequate and negligent in real fellowship and that's what the Spirit is exhorting us to do here, intentional one-anothering. It's easy to come to church, for example, and we grip and grin and we bump and run, but we don't consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

I want you to notice this word "consider," verse 24, "and let us consider." It means "to carefully think about; to look attentively at something very important; to direct one's whole mind and energy in focusing on a particular object." And what is that? How to stimulate, in other words, how to spur on, how to motivate, how to animate, how to excite another brother or sister in Christ to love and good deeds. This was absolutely foreign to the early Hebrews. You see, they were accustomed to dutifully fulfilling the requirements of the law to somehow, hopefully, make themselves acceptable to God, and it's easy in that kind of a system to become very self-focused, even self-righteous, but to become self-absorbed and self-centered rather than being selfless which is at the very heart of

Website: cbctn.org
Online Sermons: cbctn.org/sermon/648/An-Exhortation-to-Faith--Hope--Love.html

An Exhortation to Faith, Hope, Love

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what it means to love and to serve others. And we can all get caught in the same snare and I would submit to you that many times we are. I have been. I can be. So can you.

Might I ask you: how often do you take time to prayerfully and carefully consider how to motivate a friend or a family member to love and good deeds? How often do you do that? Of course the very best way to do this is to model it in your own life. Isn't it interesting when we love and serve others, it's really contagious, isn't it? It gets people stirred up. It gets them stimulated to do the same. And we all tend to be so negligent in this area of Christian living and this was so important to happen to those beleaguered Hebrew Christians that were suffering in some significant ways.

I can think back in my life and I'm sure you can too, when certain people that I loved and respected made a special effort to come to me and talk to me and encourage me to press on in some important direction in my spiritual journey. Isn't it a blessing when somebody does that and you see that they've actually been thinking about you and praying for you and carefully considering how to stimulate you to love and good deeds? That's what this is all about.

But will you notice what is required for this to be effective in verse 25, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some." Dear folks, you will never be able to do what this text is asking you to do unless you assemble with other believers. We have got to congregate. We have to come together. And I want you to understand that this is a very clear command, it is not a suggestion. We are not to forsake our own assembling together. We're not to live in isolation. We should never be – and, boy, I'm going to date myself here – a Lone Ranger Christian. Some of you will remember the Lone Ranger and Tonto and that's how a lot of believers live, kind of in isolation. You see, some of those early saints feared persecution so they would isolate themselves from other believers, avoid being seen with other Christians. But you know, this admonition goes beyond the mere assembling together on the first day of the week in public worship, it is broadened to include the importance of other gatherings, of intentional times of fellowship of one-anothering. In fact, fellowship is basically the intentional sharing of life and ministry and purpose.

That's why I like the name that somebody came up with, the wifi groups that we have here at church: weekly intentional fellowship interaction. That's right. I should have checked that out. That's such a great name because, dear friends, we all need this. That's what this text is talking about. We need each other. God has wired us for fellowship. We're all cells in this mystical, glorious organism called the body of Christ and we cannot function apart from one another.

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I love to come together with God's people, even if it's just one or two people. You know, there is something mysteriously wonderful that occurs when you gather together with those of like precious faith, when you spend time with your church family, your brothers and sisters in Christ, the Lord's people. Suddenly we are surrounded with a multiplicity of spiritual gifts that are working together synergistically in some supernatural way to put the glory of Christ on display and I can feel it. I can sense it. I grow by it. I thrive on it. And if that's not true of you, there is something terribly wrong with your faith.

What profound happiness the Lord is encouraging us to participate in here, the oneness of life in ministry. And when I spend time with unbelievers that are in love with the world, I experience something very different. Oh, I can have fun. I can have some measure of happiness in some superficial way, but I can't experience anywhere near the level of soul-satisfying joy that I experience when I'm around my brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the things that I do occasionally to get away and kind of let my mind clear is I like to shoot, especially sporting clays, and from time to time I'm put on teams of strangers and, by the way, this is one of the great ways I have of being salt and light, and many times I'm put on teams with other people that know nothing of Christ and it's always funny how the language changes as soon as they find out I'm a pastor. You know how that goes. In fact, usually I'm kind of like the skunk that enters the room. You know, everybody just kind of clears away. And you know, I can enjoy my time with them, but dear friends, I never feel as though I belong. It's not like being a part of my family, my spiritual family. Moreover, I'm so burdened for their souls I feel uncomfortable being around them for long.

But not so when we have fellowship with another believer, with other believers. Beloved, think of this: in light of everything that God has done to save us, to give us access into his presence, to give us eternal life, is it asking too much for us to commit ourselves to considering how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds? Shouldn't this be the joy of our heart, the delight of our souls, and expression of a heart that is overflowing with love for God and for one another? And shouldn't this be just a welcome natural duty to one another?

Notice again, verse 25, "not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." Literally it means urging. Urging one another. Coming alongside another believer. In light of the blessed hope and the promises of God and all of the blessings that are ours in Christ, coming alongside them. And he says, "all the more as you see the day drawing near." For into the day of judgment upon the world which verses 26 and 27 go on to address.

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An Exhortation to Faith, Hope, Love

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Hebrews 10:19-25
Preached on: Sunday, May 7, 2017

I must tell you, as a pastor I've noticed a pattern over the years of ministry. Whenever I see people in the church very quietly and almost imperceptibly begin to disappear from fellowship, especially opportunities for intimate personal fellowship, I know that the trajectory of their spiritual life is in decline. I know that something bad is happening. I know that their heart is in silent and secret search of another lover, not of Christ, and gradually they are leaving their first love as those did in the church at Ephesus. I know that it's going to be just a matter of time that something will surface in their life that has been hidden for a long time. I know on the basis of Scripture that some men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. Suddenly they don't have any time for Sunday school. Ah, they're hit and miss on Sunday, Sunday morning services. Always a thousand reasons to not want to come. And friends, I might say that those times when you think you shouldn't come are those times when you most need to be here. A thousand excuses to avoid a wifi group. "Oh no, don't have time for that." Not even able to find time to share a meal with someone that reaches out to you. You ask somebody, "Hey, do you think we could get together? Boy, I'd love to buy you a cup..." "Well, you know...." And you hear the song and dance, what I call the Nashville Two Step. And whenever I see this, dear friends, based upon my experience, and more importantly on the clear warnings of Scripture, I know that that person is wavering. They're not holding fast.

Let me paraphrase this text in light of this kind of attitude. Verse 19 I know that that kind of a person is indifferent to the amazing privilege of being able to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, his flesh. That's of no consequence to them. It never goes through their mind. Kind of meaningless drivel. I know, verse 21, that they have become so self-centered that they care nothing about having a great high priest over the house of God. Boring. Verse 22, therefore they know nothing of what it means to draw near with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith, having their hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and their bodies washed with pure water. Again, that's just a bunch of meaningless religious jargon. They don't understand, don't even care to understand. So verse 23, in their heart and in their life, they know nothing of what it really means to hold fast the confession of their hope without wavering. Unbelievers don't see Christ in them, they see some religious commitment to a church, perhaps, or to a philosophy but they don't see the living Christ. No, their life doesn't match the profession of their lips, in fact, they care nothing about the idea that he who promised is faithful.

So given that kind of arrogance, that kind of self-centered living, the idea of verse 24, considering how to stimulate another believer to love and good deeds is something that never shows up on their personal radar. They only think about themselves, not others, so naturally they have no desire to congregate. They have no desire to be around other believers who might make them feel uncomfortable, who might expose their hypocrisy,

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who might love them enough to confront their sin. So you will not see this person assembling together with other believers. By the way, especially in a wife group, especially when maybe another couple calls and says, "Hey, you think we could get together?" "Oh, boy, I don't know if I want to do that. No, we've got so much going on. Maybe next month." Nor will you see these kinds of people encouraging other believers, having them over, considering them, thinking about them, praying for them, encouraging them. You're just not going to see that and certainly they have no concern about the day of divine judgment drawing near.

On the other hand, dear friends, I would submit to you that there is perhaps no greater evidence of genuine saving faith and spiritual maturity than witnessing someone who gladly, habitually and joyfully draws near in full assurance of faith, who holds fast his confession of hope, who stimulates others to love and good deeds by loving and serving others. So may I challenge you this morning to take every advantage of the privileges and the blessings that we have because of what Christ has done and to live out faith, hope and love, and pray that God will do a mighty work of grace in these areas in your life. And then exercise your faith this week by drawing near to God in some special way, maybe through a commitment to a devotional time or getting the sermon podcast, listening to them on the way to work, whatever it might be, and then hold fast your confession of faith without wavering by presenting the Gospel to someone this week. Pray that the Lord would give you opportunity. Target certain people. And then stimulate someone to love and good deeds this week by coming alongside of them and just telling them how highly you value them and serve them in some special way. Dear Christian, these are the virtues that the Lord esteems, that he longs for us to live out so that we can experience the fullness of blessing that he has for us, again, for our joy and for his glory.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these eternal truths that speak so directly to each of our hearts. And I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will bring conviction to bear, and you will cause us to begin to live out our faith, our hope and our love in ways that bring great glory to you and great blessing to us so that sinners can be saved. Lord, we commit all of this to you in Christ's name. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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