

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 10:19-25**

To better understand where Christian confidence and encouragement come from.

Read the Text:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 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. 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 stir up one another to love and good works, 25 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. (Heb. 10:19-25, ESV)

Study the Text:**Confidence**

Verses 19 through 22 contain the first of two major movements in this passage. Because of the work of Christ, “we have confidence” to enter the holy places (Heb. 10:19), but what does that really mean? The language of this first section, as in previous sections, employs various examples of *Temple* imagery. In other words, the work of Christ is being cast as a greater fulfillment of some of the practices of the old covenant. Below is a breakdown of some of the key words and concepts in this passage.

THE HOLY PLACES

The “holy places” likely refers to the *Most Holy Place*, the innermost part of the Temple. This was the section of the Temple that only the High Priest was allowed to enter (Lev. 16:2, 17; Heb. 9:7). Recall that Jesus Christ is our High Priest of the new covenant, and therefore is permitted the true heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 9:11-15). The Most Holy Place was separated from the *Holy Place*, which other priests could enter. But what separated these two rooms? A *veil*, or *curtain* (Ex. 26:31-35).

THE CURTAIN

The “curtain” is also referenced in verse 20, and to understand how it is used here, a couple of points are worth noting. First, recall that the veil was torn when Jesus died, along with various other omens (Mk. 15:38; Matt. 27:51; Lk. 23:45). The way into the Most Holy Place was exposed when Jesus drew his last breath, indicating at least two things. One, that the way into the presence of God is now open. Two, that the old covenant mandates had been fulfilled, thus rendering them obsolete (Heb. 8:13). But notice that verse 20 identifies this “curtain,” not as the actual curtain that stood in the Temple, but rather “through his flesh.” In other words, Hebrews is using Temple curtain language symbolically to speak about the body of Jesus Christ. In the same way the Temple was “torn,” so too was Jesus’s flesh “torn” in his atoning sacrifice. Hebrews wants you to understand that it is not the *physical curtain* that opens the way for us into the presence of God, but rather the *physical death* of Jesus Christ as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world. His death, which caused the physical curtain to be torn in two, thereby opening the Most Holy Place, opens for us the heavenly sanctuary, as well, which is the more significant effect.

A CLEAN HEART AND PURIFIED BODIES

With the Most Holy Place now open to us, we are permitted to go into the dwelling place of God through the Spirit. However, consider that in the old covenant, priests were not permitted to enter such places until they had undergone significant ritual purification. Under the old covenant, priests had to be consecrated before they could minister in God’s presence. Moses washed Aaron and his sons with water (Lev. 8:6), and he later sprinkled them and their garments with blood from the altar (Lev. 8:30; cf. Ex. 29:4, 21). The priests who entered the sanctuary therefore entered as people who had been both washed and sprinkled. Hebrews applies that priestly imagery to us in verse 22: “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.” Christ has not merely opened the sanctuary and left unclean people standing outside it. Through his blood, he has cleansed our consciences from guilt, and through the washing of regeneration, he has consecrated us as a people who may draw near to God. The old priests approached an earthly sanctuary after being sprinkled externally with animal blood and washed with ordinary water. We approach the heavenly sanctuary because our hearts have been cleansed by the blood of Christ and our lives have been washed by God’s saving work. The curtain is open, and in Christ we have been made clean enough to enter. Notice also that Hebrews never expressly calls Christians “priests” in this passage, but the imagery most certainly implies it. This is all priestly language. The people of God, cleansed by the blood of Jesus and washed in regeneration of the Spirit, act as priests who can enter into the Holy Places. We are truly “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9).

Encouragement

The remainder of this passage is devoted to identifying the source of our encouragement as Christians. We receive encouragement not only by remembering that our hope resides in the faithful work of God, but also from other believers that we gather with on the Lord’s Day. Below is a brief treatment of both concepts in this passage.

STAND FIRM

Verse 23 commands us to “hold fast the confession of our hope.” The underlying Greek verb is κατέχω (katechō), a word that means something like “to have a firm grip.” We are to hold tightly to our public confession, the “confession of our hope,” which likely refers to our public acknowledgment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This is similar to the command in Hebrews 4:14: “Let us hold fast our confession.” We are to do this “without wavering,” which doesn’t necessarily mean that you will never experience fear or doubt, but that you do not abandon Christ when those things come. Biblical faith is not the absence of struggle, but rather

the perseverance through struggle. Notice, however, how verse 23 ends: “For he who promised is faithful.” This means that though we are told to “hold fast” to our faith, our ultimate confidence does not rest in the strength of our grip on God, but on the strength of God’s grip on us. It is ultimately God who is faithful, not us. This is why Christian hope is different from mere optimism. Optimism rests on the possibility that circumstances may change. Christian hope rests on the unchanging nature of God.

STIR ONE ANOTHER UP

In light of our confidence in the faithfulness of God, we are to “stir one another up to love and good works,” reminding one another that God will not fail to keep his promises to us. You may face dire circumstances that shake you to the core, and thus the church is to rally around you and remind you that no circumstance is too big for the Lord. It is, however, impossible to do this if you “neglect to meet together, as is the habit of some” (Heb. 10:25). Simply stated, consistently coming to church and engaging other people (not just attending and leaving) matters. It should be your biggest priority. This is not to be overly dogmatic, and there are certainly times and seasons when you have to miss more than you’d like. Still, the general expectation in the New Testament is that Christians will regularly gather with the church on the Lord’s Day. We do this not only for our own encouragement and edification, but also to encourage and edify others.

What About Now?

If the main idea of this text is understanding that our confidence comes from the finished work of Christ and our encouragement is found in the gathering of the body of Christ, then the takeaways are rather straightforward. First, we ought to greatly value the written word of God (Scripture), which points us to the finished work of the Living Word of God (Jesus). Scripture reminds us why we can be confident. Second, we ought to greatly value the people of God, as well. The church gathering is the primary source of our encouragement. To neglect it is to neglect our own well-being.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 10:19. What does our confidence allow us to do? What is “the holy places?”

2. Read Hebrews 10:20. What does the “curtain” refer to? How is it symbolically used in this text?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 10:21. Who is our high priest? What is the house of God?

2. Read Hebrews 10:22. What does it mean to draw near with a true heart?

Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 10:22. What two practices does this allude to? How is it applied in this text to believers?

2. Read Hebrews 10:23. What is our responsibility in this verse? What is our confidence in?

Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 10:24. What are we to “consider” in this verse?

2. Read Hebrews 10:25. What are we not to neglect? Why? Until when?

Discuss the Text!

Session 23 Discussion: Church Matters

Hebrews 10 makes it clear that the church gathering should be among our highest priorities. To neglect it is to neglect our own well-being. Talk as a group about the importance of church to you, and what you need to change to be more consistent in your attendance and engagement.

1. Icebreaker: What is one activity or gathering you rarely miss, and what makes it important to you?
2. What is the difference between simply attending a church service and actively engaging with the church body?
3. What habits, responsibilities, or distractions most often compete with the church gathering for our time?
4. Are there changes you need to make to your work schedule, bedtime, travel, children’s activities, or weekend plans to make gathering with the church more consistent?
5. How can you prepare before Sunday so that you arrive ready to worship, listen, serve, and encourage others?
6. Kid Talk: Have your child imagine a piece of coal warm and glowing in a fire. Explain that if you took the coal out of the fire, it would quickly cool and lose its light. Now explain that Christians are like coal: we lose our warmth (confidence & encouragement) when we are removed from other coals (church). Now, ask them how going to church makes them glow with warmth (you might be surprised at their answers).

Takeaways:

1. We are to hold fast to Jesus, confident that He will hold fast to us.
2. Christians both receive and offer encouragement when the church gathers; therefore, we should not neglect gathering.