

SESSION TWENTY - THREE

THE CALL TO ENDURANCE IN FAITH

Heb 10:19-39

I. INTRODUCTION

This unit will bring to a close the major unit begun in 8:1. In the previous sections (8:1–10:18), the author has carefully elaborated the sacrifice that the New Covenant High Priest has to offer. It is immeasurably superior to the Old Covenant sacrifices, and is a once for all eternal sacrifice that brings perfect forgiveness and a clear conscience. This grand truth, however, has implications, and the author will highlight those in 10:19-39. In light of what he will share, it is imperative that the readers seek to endure through faith. This section could be summed up by the following statement:

In light of the superior sacrifice for sins of the New Covenant, believers must faithfully endure in their allegiance and service to Jesus Christ!

II. THE STRUCTURE

This unit of 10:19-39 divides up into three primary paragraphs:

- A. The Admonition to draw near to God and faithfully participate with the community of believers (10:19-25).
- B. The Warning of judgment for those who turn away from Christ (10:26-31).
- C. An Encouragement and call for endurance through faith (10:32-39).

This unit also has numerous parallels with chapter six, suggesting that the two should be understood in the same way. See *Suppl. 23.1* for details.

III. THE ADMONITION TO DRAW NEAR TO GOD AND FAITHFULLY PARTICIPATE WITH THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS (10:19-25)

The New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ has brought about astonishingly new realities for God's children in comparison with those who worshipped under the Old Covenant. The earthly tabernacle has served its purpose, and the greater tabernacle (the heavenly one) is now our point of focus. Furthermore, we have access to this heavenly Holy Place.

In this paragraph, the author is going to set forth a series of exhortations to faithfulness that ought to arise out of our New Covenant position. Before doing so, however, he will first give two reasons why we ought to respond faithfully.

A. Two reasons to draw near (19-21)

As far as our author is concerned, his readers are "brethren" (10:19). The matter of their *justification* is not the issue which concerns him in the following verses. The readers have previously believed in Christ and now share in the blessedness of the New Covenant. Hence, they have the forgiveness that the New Covenant provides. That past act of faith, however, does not guarantee their future attitude toward Christ's sacrifice of Himself. Sluggishness and immaturity (ch 6) that is left uncorrected can make one susceptible to delusion, even to the point of forsaking one's faith in Christ. Such a choice would be disastrous and put the errant child of God in a position of receiving the chastening judgment of God. In light of what the author taught in 9:1X10:18, there are good reasons to embrace the New Covenant truth and not turn away.

The circumstantial causal participle (ἔχοντες) at the beginning of vs 19 serves to mark both objects: confidence (παρρησίαν) and a high priest (ἱερέα).

1. We can now have confidence of having access to the heavenly Holy Place (19-20).

Based on the doctrinal presentation in 9:1X10:18, the author can now say that we have free access to the *Holy Place* (τῶν ἁγίων).¹ The author means by this the heavenly reality itself. The presentation of the blood of Jesus in the heavenly *Holy Place* gives us confidence (παρρησίαν; cf. 3:6; 4:16; 10:35) for entrance there.

Just as the Old Covenant had a veil which separated the outer room from the Holy of Holies, so the New Covenant has a veil. But the New Covenant veil is not a curtain at all; rather it is the body of Jesus Christ. Under the Old Covenant, the veil served two purposes: (1) it hid the *Shekinah glory* of God and (2) it gave access to the presence of God. Only as one passed through the veil (in that case, only the High Priest), could one come into God's presence. Correspondingly, Christ's "flesh" is the *new veil*. During His time on earth, His human body was like a shield preventing us from fully beholding the glory of God. Furthermore, by coming through Him [by faith], we can have access to the presence of God. Old Covenant believers never had such access. [Compare Mt 27:51 and the rending of the temple veil at the time of Christ's death].

2. We are part of a greater spiritual tabernacle, which is headed by Jesus Christ as priest (21)

In Heb 3:6, the author had cautioned his readers, "whose house we are, if we hold fast the παρρησίαν and the boast of our hope until the end." The nature of the

¹Recall that the earthly "Holy Place" (the outer room) was designated ἅγια (9:2).

New Covenant is such that we are part of a spiritual temple and called to exercise a priestly ministry in accordance with this new reality. Furthermore, we have an infinitely superior priest in the person of Jesus Christ.² For the author's Jewish audience, turning away from Jesus Christ to retreat to the shadows of the earthly temple would not only be foolish, but would also be an abandonment of their priestly calling and responsibilities.

B. Admonitions to faithfully participate in the New Covenant community (10:22-25)

Based upon the two provisions that we have under the New Covenant (vv 19-21), the author proceeds in vv 22-25 to make three exhortations. Note the subjunctive verbs in 10:22, 23 and 24.

1. **Draw near with a genuine heart in full assurance of faith (10:22)**

In 3:12, the author had cautioned the readers of having an "evil heart of unbelief" in falling away from the living God (as was true of the wilderness generation who received the Old Covenant). Now the readers are exhorted to have a sincere or genuine heart that is fully assured. With such a heart, they are to draw near to God (similar to 4:16). The opposite of falling away is to draw near, and that is what they should do. They can do this by exercising faith (especially in times of suffering), along with prayer and worship.

This "drawing near" to God is to be accompanied by a heart that has been sprinkled from an evil conscience and a body that has been washed with clean water. The author seems to be drawing on the background of the Old Testament imagery presented in Heb 9. The word "sprinkle" only occurs three other times in Hebrews, all of which are in ch 9 (vv 13,19,21). In 9:13, the author said, "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh . . ." This probably has in view the inauguration ceremony for the Old Covenant (see Ex 24:1-8), since he elaborates on this in Heb 9:18-22. In that ceremony, the blood of animals was sprinkled *outwardly* on the covenant participants. This outward sprinkling obviously had no inner effect on the people. In contrast, what Christ has done (in inaugurating the New Covenant) is effective to "cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (9:14). The reference to cleansing of water may have in mind the purification water of the Old Covenant (see Num 19:1-10, 17ff.), or the ritual bath that was required of priests before serving (cf. Ex 29:4,21; Lev 8:6, 30). Certainly, those participating in the New Covenant enjoy a greater reality. Lane (2:287) understands the washing to refer to "Christian baptism, which replaces all previous cleansing rites, though Hodges (805) takes this to be "personal holiness" in the life.

²Though He is called *ιερέα μέγαν* here in contrast to *ἀρχιερέα μέγαν* in 4:14, the LXX commonly used the former expression for the high priest.

2. Hold fast the confession (10:23)

Vv 23-24 closely parallel 3:12-14. The fact that they are told to "hold fast their confession without wavering" suggests that they have made such a confession (cf. 3:1; 4:14). This confession (especially for the Jewish audience) was the confession of Jesus as Messiah.

The author reminds his readers that "holding fast" is worth it. He tells them "For He who promised is faithful." This, too, should be seen in light of ch 9 and the "promise of the eternal inheritance." As was seen there, this *eternal inheritance* was conditional (cf. 6:12), contingent upon "serving the living God" (9:14). In light of the parallels with 9:27-28, this inheritance is connected with the "salvation" that Christ will bring about at the Second Coming.

3. Faithfully participate in the New Covenant community (10:24-25)

The author wants them to consider ways they can stimulate one another to love and good works (cf. Gal 5:6). This would be a *New Covenant team spirit*. All of us are weak and can falter, but there is mutual benefit in communal worship and interaction: we can stimulate one another positively. The opposite would be a withdrawal from the New Covenant worshipping community, and apparently some had already done so.

Mutual encouragement is needed, and "all the more as you see the day approaching." Here, the author no doubt has in mind Heb 9:28 and the second coming of Christ to usher in salvation (which will be accompanied by a period of judgment known as "the day of the Lord").³ An eschatological perspective has been dominant throughout the book. Note especially the reference to Christ's second coming in Heb 10:37 (near context).

IV. THE WARNING OF JUDGMENT FOR THOSE WHO TURN AWAY FROM CHRIST (10:26-31)

In the previous paragraph, the author encouraged a positive response to the presentation that had been made in 8:1X10:18. Despite the fact that they are Christians, there is the possibility, however, that they may respond in a negative way. That would be a disastrous choice, for it would call forth the chastening judgment of God upon the errant believer. They must be warned of the consequences, and the author now does so. See *Appendix B* for a detailed exposition of Hebrews 10:26-31.

³Randall Gleason, following J. Dwight Pentecost, attempts to argue that "the day" refers to the judgment that was about to fall upon Israel in AD 70 at the hands of the Roman army ("A Moderate Reformed View," in *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 336-429 [Grand Rapids: Kregel Pub., 2007]). The problem with this view is that it depends upon a Palestinian destination for the recipients of the epistle (which is not altogether certain), and as I have pointed out above, a judgment connected with the second coming is more likely, in view of the preceding context (9:28) and the following context (10:37).

V. AN ENCOURAGEMENT AND CALL FOR ENDURANCE THROUGH FAITH (10:32-39)

Selective comments about these verses can be found in *Appendix B*. Turning their back on their profession of faith in Christ is equivalent to throwing away their confidence in His priestly work on their behalf (such that they could enter the true "holy place"; cf. 10:19). If they were to do so, they would be severely judged (vv 26-31). On the other hand, if they cling to it, they can be assured that a "great reward" awaits them. Thus, they need endurance . . . an endurance by faith . . . in doing the will of God. Then, they can receive "the promise." Receiving the promise will follow the Second Coming, referred to in verse 37. The quotation from Habakkuk points out that God is pleased with a life of faith. In chapter 11, the author will expound this with lessons from the OT of those who pleased God by a life of faith. This they should emulate. Endurance is also necessary to receive the full benefit of God's discipline, which the author will explain in chapter 12.