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# The Continuing Responsibilities of our Present Privileges

## Hebrews 10:19-25

Hebrews is like land with broad, deep valleys of doctrinal foundations, hillsides dotted with God-centered, Christ-exalting motivation, topped with peaks of practical exhortation and personal examples. The writer teaches us about God and what He has done to secure precious and very great promises for us. Then He tells us the kind of behavior that grows up from faith in these promises and God submitted desires. So we are being practically called to affections and acts of real love, *on the basis of* promises. These promises are that God will be all we need in midst of the mess. (Adapted, Piper)

### Hebrews 10:19–25

<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, <sup>21</sup> and since we have a great priest over the house of God, <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> 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.

### Our Privileges (v. 19-21)

Verses 19-21 remind us and point us back to the wide valleys of truth we have just passed through. "Since we have..." This has been the focus of chapters 9-10. Since we have these amazing privileges which are summed up in these two phrases.

#### ***We have Access (v. 19-20)***

Here is our confidence to enter. This privilege rests on the sacrifice of Jesus. It is what He has done in providing a new and living way which has opened the curtain into the Holy of Holies, the very Presence of God. What only one priest in the Old Covenant could do and did with great fear and trembling, every New Covenant believer may do with confidence and assurance.

#### ***We have an Advocate (v. 21)***

Here is our High Priest over the church. This privilege rests on the person of Christ. He is our High Priest, not just over the New Covenant church, but over all the house of God of all the ages. We have no junior priests and certainly no pope nor cardinals. We have one great high priest. This is not a burden to us, but is the essence of the gladness of our living sacrifice.

I pray that you have been hearing with understanding hearts all that the author has been telling us about these wonderful privileges. We have the privilege of entering the Presence of

God because there we have our great High Priest who has done everything that is necessary to give us an assurance to draw near.

But with all privileges come responsibilities. Since all these things are so, then here is what follows. Hear me, loved ones. We have wonderful freedom and forgiveness under the New Covenant. But that does not mean that we do not have obligations. Out of New Covenant privileges emerge Biblical duties. In order to do our responsibilities with regularity and delight, we must develop the disciplines that go support them. So there are duties and disciplines.

Duties – These are what God requires. Not doing them is sin. They are measures of our spiritual maturity.

Disciplines – In order to cultivate regular obedience, there are habits of Christian discipline which will help us to be consistent. They are how we translate the commands of the Bible into regular practice. They do not measure, but they develop our spiritual maturity.

If we are New Covenant Christians with these privileges, then what are our duties?

## **Commune with God**

**(v.22)**

“Let us draw near!” The first of our responsibilities is wrapped up in this phrase, “draw near.” This phrase is the enticing label on the package of worship in Hebrews.

<sup>22</sup> 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.

Draw near to the throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16.)

Draw near to God through a better hope (Hebrews 7:19).

Draw near to God in a secure salvation (Hebrews 7:25).

Drawing near requires perfection (sanctification) (Hebrews 10:1).

### ***Its Great Reality***

What does it mean, “To draw near to God?” Let me put it this way. This is a command. The “Let us” here is not a suggestion like, “Let us go to Pizza House for supper.” So if it is a command, *how do you know when you have obeyed it?*

There are two clues that come out of verses 19-21. Drawing near is what we do when we understand that we can enter the Presence of God and we have a Priest with God. Drawing near then is something that involves the God’s Presence and God’s Priest.

Now it is not necessarily a physical act. It’s not something you can always see immediately on the outside. Drawing near is not moving from one place to another. So drawing near is not coming to a church building nor singing worship songs. It is an invisible act of the heart that can be done in your car, your home, your cubicle at work or even in your seat at church. It is a directing of the heart into the Presence of God who is as distant as the Holy of Holies in heaven and yet as near as the door of prayer entered by faith.

Drawing near is a conscious inner effort to focus your attention on God and to worship and fellowship with Him by Jesus Christ. This is easy to illustrate. Think of the name of someone you really love. Now think of the thing you like most about their character. Think about something special they have done for you. Think about a really difficult time you went through together. Do you see how all of this is *an inner act of the heart?* If you were in the

presence of this person looking into their eyes with your thoughts resonating together, this would be called “communing” with them. This is what it means to draw near to God.

### ***Its High Requirements***

The text states this in the positive. When we draw near, we must have a true heart, genuine faith, cleansed consciences and purified lives. But let me show you how not having these things is the reason we don't draw near.

We do not have a true heart for God. What we do in our religious stuff is simply an outward form without the inward reality. If your heart is wrong, then what you are doing is not pleasing to God. Does that mean I stop doing until I feel right in my heart? No, you change your heart.

We do really believe that all this is really so. I am convinced that some listening to me this morning are right here. You do not draw near to God because you are not sure that it really happens. So you replace the inner realities with outward shadows and frustrate yourself and anger God. Drawing near to God *is an act of faith*. It is the obedience that follows believing that I can come and do actually come into the Presence of God by Jesus Christ.

We have not had our consciences cleansed or our conduct purified. We are barred from drawing near when we are not clean. Yet, when we ask for mercy to be cleansed, that in itself is an act of drawing near.

Now I must not leave this on a negative note. Let us draw near to God in a heart that is true, convinced that it is so having been cleansed and washed. Let us draw near with sincerity, conviction and inner and outer purity.

So I must ask you. Do you draw near to God?

Sadly, even here in corporate worship, some of you are not drawing near to God. You find it very difficult to focus your attention on God when gathering with His people *because you rarely do it alone*. Loved ones, the more you discipline yourself to turn the inner focus of your attention on God and think about Him and talk to Him and commune with Him, the richer will be your personal and our corporate drawing near.

How many of you were glued to the TV watching the International Cup in professional Cricket? For many of you, drawing near to God is sometimes like watching cricket or soccer. You have little experience with it, so you have little enjoyment of it.

Do you have a passion for drawing near to God? We should not draw near lukewarmly, or indifferently. Even when we feel dull and lifeless, John Piper suggest as prayer like this: “O God, I am dull and lifeless and there is only one hope for me, nearness to You. I come. Have mercy on me. Give me life in Your Presence. Open my eyes to see Your glory in Jesus.” That is what this is calling for, a zeal and passion for the nearness of God.

John Owen, that great Puritan drawer near to God wrote, “What better preparation can there be for [our future enjoyment of the glory of Jesus Christ] than in a constant previous contemplation of that glory now.” There it is for us: our present reflection on the glory of Christ prepares us for a greater enjoyment of it later. Our present drawing near expands our capacity for future delight. This present commitment for future glory brings us to the next exhortation.

## Cling to our Hope

(v.23)

Embrace your hope! Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess.

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

Here is an individual responsibility (hold, cling, embrace the hope) in the midst of community (the hope we profess). So this is not just any hope. And it is eternally important that we do what this text commands.

### *Its Biblical Meaning*

The words here command us to cling to something with all our might. I do not think it means to convey an act of desperation, like clinging to a life jacket or a rescuing rope. No, it is the grace enabled holding fast and embracing of something that is vital and sustaining.

Holding fast to our hope shows that we are God's house (Hebrews 3:6).

We must be diligent to make our hope sure. We must not be inattentive or sloppy about our hope (Hebrews 6:11).

We must take hold of hope that is offered to us in the promises of the God who cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18).

This firm and secure hope anchors our soul in heaven (Hebrews 6:19).

This better hope is how we draw near to God (Hebrews 7:19).

So our hope is a conviction and assured belief about the promises of God for the next moment all along the way to eternity. We hear God's promises, we believe them, we take hold of them for ourselves, we work hard to make them real in our lives, we refuse to let them go so that eventually they become treasured possessions to which we cling and which anchors and draws our souls heavenward to Jesus. Obeying this command all the way through death shows that we are God's people. God's people will cling to their hope.

### *Its God-centered Motivation*

Hold fast to your hope in the future grace of God by His promises for this reason: God is faithful. The quality of our hope is related to clarity in our understanding the character of God. From this point forward, this is the powerful thrust of the book of Hebrews. If we are going to hold fast to our hope in God's promises when the crunch time comes, then we must be absolutely convinced that God is true to Himself and His Word.

Now loved ones, we too often turn away from the promises of God and embrace promises held out to us by the world. God says, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" and yet we feel lonely and so seek out wrong relationships. God says, "I will provide your every need" and yet we try to amass what wealth we can and bank our future on it. God says, "Sin will stain and corrode and corrupt your soul" yet we are addicted to its pleasures. God says, "Confess your sins and I will forgive and cleanse" yet we often hide them and quiet the insistent voice of conscience in alcohol, or TV, or music or hobbies.

The promises of God are the common possession of His people. The more we speak of them and praise God for them and share how God has helped us by them, the more we will be encouraged by these continual demonstrations of the faithfulness of God. We will hold fast.

We will refuse the weak and feeble and faddish substitutes held out to us. That is why this is addressed to you. YOU must hold fast to the hope-giving promises WE profess and possess.

This is something you do with your heart. You cannot go to the kitchen or the office to embrace your hope. Clinging with trembling joy to the future expectation of all a faithful God promises is **DONE WHEN WE DRAW NEAR!**

But we have already begun to sense a moving from the private to the corporate aspect of these exhortations. The text is moving us from thinking about our relationship to God, to our relationship to one another.

## Care for One Another

**(v.24-25)**

These two verses have had an enormous impact on my own life. I want then this morning to bring us face to face with both the need for and the necessity of careful, grace enabled obedience to this exhortation.

<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, <sup>25</sup> 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.

I want to suggest to you that the heart-beat of these two verses is authentic care for one another.

The structure of the text is somewhat as follows:

The Precept – “Let us consider one another.” Here is what is actually commanded and commended to us.

The Purpose – To what ends are we to obey this exhortation? We are shown what is to be achieved by authentic love making sacrificial choices for one another.

The Process – These two are deeply connected. “Not neglecting” and “but encouraging.” They convey an on-going sense of how purpose filled obedience to the exhortation is fleshed out. It is how we go about it.

The Perspective – As the end of the age comes, what motivations and perspectives will stir our obeying this exhortation?

What is being commanded here is authentic care and concern for one another that translates our savoring of the supremacy of Christ into sacrificial deeds of love for one another. So we must commune with God, cling to our hope, and now finally, care for one another.

### ***By Knowing One Another***

I get this from the phrase, “let us consider one another.” I see this because *one another* here is the receiver of the action of consider.

Now the Author has used this word before in the epistle. In Hebrews 3:1, we are to “consider” or to “fix our thoughts on Jesus.” Same word. Same structure. If we are to consider by focusing our thoughts and attentions on Jesus in such a way that we learn of Him and know Him and cultivate a relationship with Him, is that not what is in view here? In Hebrews 3:1, consider Jesus; in Hebrews 10:24, consider one another.

So we must know one another. What is actually commanded here is a focusing of our attention on one another that grows and develops our relationships and our knowledge that is like the way we are to develop our relationship with Jesus.

***By Motivating One Another***

The word here is to stimulate, to provoke, to stir up. We can think of prodding someone along. The idea of these two is captured by our translations. We need to care for one another by knowing each other so well that we can motivate and stir one another up.

***By Having Biblical Objectives***

To what end are we to study people in order to know how to stir them up. What is it that we are trying to motivate people to do?

Well, here it is. We are to study and know people well in order to stir them up and motivate to love and good works. We want to be pushing people in their loving and in their serving. We want to know what hot buttons in people's lives stir up the grace of God in them so that they are energized to deeds of sacrificial love for one another.

Do you know 5 people in this church well enough to do this?

Spouses – husbands and wives, is this true of you? Do you know what it takes (not necessarily what it ought to take) to energize and excite your spouse for sacrificial giving and serving?

Parents – Apart from simply commanding it (which is not at all what is in view here), do you interact with your children in such a way that they are motivated to love and do well?

People – I must focus this on our ministry together as a church. If we *must* draw near to God, if we *must* cling to our hope, then we *must* do this as well. Disobedience cannot be excused. To say that you are not a people person is neither an excuse nor is it commendable.

What is it going to take for this to happen?

***By Faithfully Meeting Together***

We learn to know each other well enough to motivate one another to love and good works in gathering together to encourage one another.

Not forsaking – We must not abandon our gathering together. There is first a forsaking of it in our attitude. We do not value being together as God's people. Then we forsake it in our action. We bit by bit become less and less engaged in the life of God's people *together*.

But encouraging – The word here is also translated *exhorting* in some contexts. The point is that we are to actively engage in helping one another along in the process of growing in grace. Whether it is encouraging or exhorting, it pictures people actively engaged in one another's lives.

What *gathering together* does the Author have in mind? Even a brief look at the book of Acts depicts a church life quite different from ours today. There is an emphasis on daily and weekly. There is a definite rhythm of one-on-one, small group and then corporate gathering. It certainly means the regular and faithful participation in the gatherings of the church. Note that I did not say *attendance*. Simply being here is not the point. You must be actively participating in the gathering; simply showing up is not what God has in mind.

Is this the only purpose of gathering together? No, it is one of the purposes that we gather as a church. We gather as a church for outreach, worship, fellowship, discipleship and ministry. Encouraging and exhorting one another is the task of the purpose of fellowship.

What must we do to foster this? I am utterly convinced that we must get beyond the superficial talk that we do and call fellowship. There is a necessary but insufficient surface talk we all engage in. But do we get beyond this to priority issues. Do you talk about your temptations and struggles? Do you share insights you learned? Do you hold one another accountable for regular Biblical disciplines? Let me say this: I have no greater (nor lessor) obligation for this as your teaching elder than you do for each other. If I understand the language of this exhortation, all of you are to be initiators and responders. If you are simply passively waiting for someone to engage you, then you are disobeying this exhortation.

I know all the objections. We are all very busy. But I am going to say this carefully because it impacts me as well. If you are too busy to be actively engaged in each other's lives *then you are too busy*. The devil has tricked many of us into thinking that everything else is more important. It is not.

Finally, he brings some real perspective. As we come upon the end of the eschatological age, we must do this more. We must gather more, consider more, encourage more and be more faithful. And yet, it is just the opposite of what is happening. It is the pain and persecution and suffering that comes upon us in the last days that frame the expectation that we will do this even more.

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## Reflect and Respond

Loved ones, here is God's Word to you this morning:

Draw near to God. Commune with Him. Turn the inner eyes of your soul in delighted reflection on Jesus.

Hold to your hope. Never let go of the promises of God. Fight unbelief with the Word. Do so because God is faithful.

Care for one another. Give time and attention to be actively engaged with one another to motivate one another to love and good works. Do this by not forsaking our gathering together in all the ways we do and at all the times we do.

Do it all the more as we come to the end this age.

## Notes