

Holy Confidence

The Book of Hebrews

By Chris Hand

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Crich Baptist Church
Market Place, Crich
Derbyshire. DE4 5DD (UK)

Website: www.crichbaptist.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/crichbaptist

Well, tonight we're taking into consideration that passage we read a moment ago, all 20 verses of it, Hebrews 10:19-39, and considering in that we're giving it a title "Holy Confidence." Holy confidence.

This is actually the beginning of a new section in the composition of this letter, interesting letter, and cast up before there and if we are new, as it were, to it, many expressions I'm sure which we were reading a moment ago that you won't fully understand and I'm not going to have the time to explain them all to you, I'm afraid, this evening. But we're going to take that theme of holy confidence because what the writer is doing here, you'll notice he begins in verse 19, "Therefore, brethren." He's been considering in some detail what it means to be our high priest, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the things that his blood has obtained, and the covenant and what that means. We thought a little bit about that again last week, didn't we? And that took him from chapter 4, verse 14, to chapter 10, verse 18, the biggest part of the whole book, the largest, sort of, section there right in the middle of the book. And so he's drawing conclusions, that's why there's a "Therefore." This that he's been saying is not just given to us just as a bit of information, or to perplex us, or to just lead us into some sort of Old Testament Bible study, it's got implications and one of those implications is that we have holy confidence. The result of what our Lord has done should generate in us confidence and we'll come to that a little bit more fully in a moment.

The book is not just there so we might say, "So what." No, this is given so that we can take away from it very vital things that are going to inform how we behave, how we think, how we behave, and this is what he begins to do in verse 19. Part, I'm sure we noticed as we read it through, part of the passage is quite negative. There are some warnings again. There are some very severe warnings and then other parts are very positive. I'm going to dwell over it more actually on the positive this evening but so as to contradict myself straight away, the first heading is this: a warning, just to dwell a moment on these parts that are, well if you will, the more sort of darker elements within what he has to say there, the warnings that he is still mixing up with his encouragement. Remember as we've been traveling along in this book, that he intersperses warnings and encouragement, that he will bring something really quite shocking at times, quite startling, but then he will bring on top of that and there's a kind of counter-balance to that,

an encouragement, and it is that they'll take the warning to heart but they'll also take the encouragement to heart. They will be informed by the warning, it will do them good, and the encouragement will also do them good. They'll benefit from both parts.

Those, really, in a way that are the people that he's talking about here when he talks more negatively in Hebrews 10 are those who perhaps aren't going to listen anyway, they're not going to heed the warnings, they're not going to heed the encouragement, they're just going to remain unchanged and they will go to the place that they will go. We notice there this idea of petition, verse 39, sort of negative idea their words. It's hell, isn't it? This is it, destruction, and it's warning, the reality of that. The warning, that it's possible to end up there and it's actually possible to end up there having started by professing to be a Christian, that you can seem like a Christian, you can talk like one, you can sing hymns when you can sing hymns and do all those sorts of things and still not actually be a Christian, and it'll show. Something will happen gradually and then will leave suddenly and that person who seemed everything there to be right and in working order, suddenly is not and if anything they are now denying the faith instead.

And of course, that's a disaster because what has the writer been saying again and again, if you will, until we've got the message is the superiority of the Lord Jesus Christ over and above anything and everything that was there in the old covenant and what composed, if you will, the worship of the Old Testament. Good though it was in its place, in its time, necessary though it was, in its place and its time but it was all preparatory and it was all designed there with a kind of built-in life expiration that when the Lord Jesus Christ came, then sacrificial system, all of the shedding of blood of bulls and goats and such things would come to an end. Now the Lord Jesus has brought those things to their right and proper conclusion. All our affection and all our hope and all our trust now resides in him. We no longer look to Aaron, the high priesthood that he was the fountainhead of. We no longer look to sacrifices. We no longer need a temple and the tabernacle and a tent we're describing there, and the holiest place. We have greater realities, spiritual realities.

So to turn away from him, to have held him in high honor, at least at one point something amounting to lip service but it seemed to be credible, and then to turn back and away from him is a disaster because you've now turned away from the only solution, the only answer for your sin, from the only place where you could find peace and comfort, cleansing for your evil conscience, every benefit. And once you've done that and if you continue doing that and reject him most emphatically, then that is it and you become what the Bible calls an apostate. You're now denying the faith and that's this negative part here, this willful rejection that it speaks of in verse 26 and what will the happen, vengeance that God will bring, the destruction that will follow. And it's a bit like, we saw when we looked in Hebrews 6:6-8, that you're destroying your only hope. You're now damaging and irreparably damaging if you go on doing it, you're only hope, and there's only one end to it and it is destruction.

And we see those terms there, God's wrath in verse 27, and punishment spoken of in verse 29, and the fearfulness of God's vengeance against any who decline, as it were, the

offer of the gospel, and most especially those who once accepted it and then bad-mouthed it afterwards. Fearful expectation of judgment to come. The warning, therefore, for those who have an ear to hear it, those who are apostate laugh at this. They think that's a waste of time. "I'll see what I like about the Son of God, trample Him underfoot and blood of the covenant," but part of the covenant, that precious blood that seals our pardon, that gives us peace, well, if you [unintelligible], well, the writer is saying do not stop. Do not stop, verse 35, "Therefore do not cast away your confidence." The holy confidence that you should have, a confidence which is grounded in spiritual reality, the finished work of Christ. Don't cast it away. That's what these people are doing, trampling the Son of God underfoot, counting the blood of the covenant sanctified as a common thing, insulting the Spirit of grace. It's the Holy Spirit who witnesses to the blood, witnesses to the person of Christ, witnesses to the truth of what he has accomplished, and so if you miss all of that, then there is grief to follow and that grief is summed up in verse 39, that perdition, if you draw back, if you withdraw from him, if you push him away in that way, then perdition is what follows in that regard.

So we hold fast our profession, that's there with us in verse 23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering," without declining in it, without diminishing our confidence in it. Let's do the opposite than those who draw back. So there's the warning but actually there's the encouragement already mixed up within it. So, well, let none diminish the person of our Lord Jesus Christ by asserting something against his humanity or against his deity, or both, both, assert both. Let none diminish the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and its power, what he accomplished, what that blood that was shed there accomplished. Let none speak ill of that and let none deceive us that actually if we do reject all of that, there's no consequence. And the writer is telling us there lots of consequences. The Lord will judge his people and a verse there that we're not going to dwell on now but it's a verse to catch your eye, isn't it, in verse 31, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." There's something to take to heart there.

So that's the warning part. We move on. Second heading: a holy boldness. A holy confidence part, that positive message and it's a very positive message. In fact, the whole book is a positive message. When you take what it says, then it is only positive. What is it saying and how we react to it? Well, we should react to it with great confidence. We'll be taking as our final hymn the hymn of Wesley there, "And Can It Be," "Bold, I approach the eternal throne." That is one of the verses and doubtless within that verse 19 was in Wesley's mind, "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way." And that is our birthright. That is what the Lord died in order that we should enjoy. That is our inheritance, to come boldly. That's what adoption gives to us as his children, that we are able to approach him in this kind of way, not drawing back in verse 22, if you like, but actually drawing ever nearer to him, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."

These are words, aren't they, of confidence, true assurance of faith, full assurance of faith and of hope, and these are very positive things because this is what we draw from this. It's not academic. The Christian faith is not just words, it's not just parroting something, it's actually reality, it's a truth, and it affects us, it affects how we pray, it affects how we

worship, it affects the people that we are, how we come across, how we go about life and living it. And that confidence that we have in the finished work of Christ, we have all that he has accomplished, should translate into the kind of people we are, it should, as it were, percolate down into the very depths of our soul and root out every argument against it, cast it down, every argument, every assertion against the knowledge of God, that this is the answer to it. And every way in which we are dissuaded about these things, well, we should be persuaded of them. Everything is working in the favor of the Lord's people. Not fear but confidence, and so we see his blood answers all our needs.

If you like in verse 19, the writer is still glancing backwards at where he's been, reminding his readers that this has something very relevant to say to you, to me. And his blood there has opened up for us this way through the veil, that is, his flesh. And that veil would have been the veil, speaking here figuratively, that stood between the holy place and the most holy place in the tabernacle, and the most holy place stood for heaven. There it was, it was an earthly object but it stood for heaven. And the Lord Jesus Christ, it's as though he's flesh, broken on the cross, there's blood that was shed, was that veil that now is parted and you can enter into the very presence of God. You can enter into heaven and that access is through him, through the cross, through what he did for sinners there.

So we come through. We believe in his ministry. We believe what it is saying and we are able to see by faith now, well, ourselves seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. We can see by faith now that our names are written in the Lamb's book of life. That does something for us, it does something to us. It makes us to feel, well, we have God with us, we have him working on our side, all of this. Well, how will he not, then, beside all those things freely give us all things? So we reckon on that. We do a little bit of logical thinking on that and like logic, like reason, it leads to conclusions that are like bold moments in us and for us, and we are able to approach God in prayer. Confidence and conviction, we're able to witness to his truth and his reality to other people, non-Christians, with a greater measure of conviction and the power of what he's done is living with us and that comes over. We really think we have found something wonderful, we really have found that pearl of greatest price, and they see it and they understand it because we've got that holy boldness.

And we realize in it that God is faithful all the way in those promises. There are promises and the promise is given to us of that mercy. He's promised, he's faithful. Well, he's promised us through his Son he will fulfill. He's promised us heaven through his Son he will fulfill. He's promised that he'll be with us here on earth, he will fulfill it. He has promised that he will hear our prayers and graciously answer our prayers, and he will fulfill it. All his promises, he is faithful to them.

A mind change on this, a little bit of a shift in our thinking. We can sometimes feel, can't we, I don't know, maybe when you come to church even or when you try to pray, well, as if God is saying, "What are you doing here? Should you be here? What are you doing here trampling on My courts like this?" And we can feel guilty and feel as if we don't belong, feel as if we shouldn't have come, as if we're not, if you like, entitled to be there.

And that thought can hang around the air with us and detract from our, put it this way, our enjoyment of God's presence, our enjoyment of our relationship with him. We feel like trespassers, fugitive, hardly dare set foot inside a shop, COVID 19, am I standing in the right place? Am I too near? Am I too far? Have I got the right face mask? Is it covering my nose? And somebody will wag the finger at you and you're in some grief there. We can feel almost like that, that we're trespassing here, we're not quite right here, we don't quite fit in here, belong here. Should we stand here? Do we sit here? And that thought can detract from what the Lord would have us to enjoy.

A holy confidence. Well, we know, don't we, I guess most of us don't give a moment's thought when we drive over bridges. Yes, I don't know, I might put an evil thought in your mind, you're worried right now about them. No, we drive over them, don't we? Or on trains with no second thought and rightly so. They're not given to collapsing and I think we can be fairly sure in our country that the maintaining of standards on them guarantees, you say. And so we are, we're safe. We're safe in our Lord's hands. We're safe. We're traveling on a highway that is secure. It's safe. All the bridges are maintained, nothing in this plan of salvation is going to fail. We might at times think a bit high up here and it's a long drop down there. Don't worry. The bridge is fine, built to the highest standards and it will bear you. Have faith.

Well, what God has given to us, it can bear it, and our confidence, he can bear that. It's justified. It's reasonable. It's right. Why indeed you might think it's to be offending God that he's given us his Son and all that his Son has done, as if we still are finding fault with it and reason to worry and think, "Well, I'm not quite sure about this." We say, "No, look, look, look again that you belong here and you belong in My presence, and you belong as My children and I welcome you." So we have holy boldness, faith, assurance of hope and we approach the Lord, we approach the Christian life from that position of strength, from that position of expectation.

Well, my third heading is this: fellowship keeps us on track. And herein I'm just drawing upon verses 24 and 25 though there are some other verses too that I'll refer across to. And what obviously was happening, that just as, if you will, the Lord in their eyes was diminishing was the value of coming together to hear about him, that also was diminishing in their sight. They weren't seeing the importance of that, not seeing the importance ultimately of him. And that's why we're so glad to be meeting back, that's why we're so glad to be together, to be here that we can encourage each other, spur each other on to love good, otherwise the opposite things happen and people drift and we give way to fear or unbelief or sloth or whatever else there might be that we give way to. Being able to meet together, it's together. It's not the same on Zoom, is it there? You don't get the same sort of intimacy. You don't get the same energy, if you like, coming from each other in that. That's only something that can happen when we're together, assuming when we come together that we don't sort of suck out the energy from everybody but just going to everybody in sight. No, that we are there spurring each other on and it's better done in the same room or in the garden, wherever it is together that we keep each other then on track, to stop drift. It prevents us drifting off, losing our warmth, losing our perspective, failing to appreciate the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so our presence together is valuable in that way. God's designed it as such and it's valuable and we should value it too. Obviously the people here weren't but we should because ideally this, that when we see each other, we should be seeing something of the Lord Jesus Christ in each other, or seeing something of what he means to each of us in each other. And your faith and my faith and your hope and my hope, and your assurance and my assurance, and it stimulates and it builds it and we grow together in it. That's the beauty of meeting together. Of course, it's got all its aspects, hasn't it, that we share burdens together, all those things that we might read about in the word of God and the more serious kind, as it were, the woes that we might share, just as Romans 12 and there in verse 15. We have Paul writing there to us, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." Well, it's better done, isn't it, together and face to face human contact, the sympathy that God has designed for each of us to be able to show to the other. Or 1 Corinthians 12:26, "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." And meeting with each other helps that process, makes that process happen, bearing each other's burdens in that way.

So we don't really think in the end there is such a thing as a virtual church, a church that kind of exists not in the same place but wherever you are, anywhere in the world, if you like, and that that counts as valid. Well, it might have to be for the season if people can't meet in one place because of COVID 19. We accept that but that's not the way forward, it's not the ideal. And we hear, don't we, some who say, "Well, perhaps we'll stay a virtual church," and thinking this is a great thing to do, and we say, "No, no, you're missing all of this, keeping each other on track, bearing each other's burdens, and all of that aspect of it."

And so much of what fellowship is, that real-life experience including sacrifice, including the sacrifices that we have to make and in which we have to help each other and encourage each other in, and often it is that we know that we're real because we care for each other. We care for Christians. We care for Christians and their griefs. Why, we care for Christians the other side of the world and it shows us something of the reality of what God has done, that we wouldn't have cared anything of these people, why, wouldn't have even had a thought for anybody much outside of, you know, the UK if you like, racism and those things this morning. We couldn't have cared less about people the other side of the world but now we do and we're interested. What's happening to Christians there? What's happening in Africa at the moment? What's happening in Mali and Democratic Republic of Congo and all of these places? Well, we are pressed to find them on a map but we know a bit about them. We know what's going on and the Christians are suffering there and we feel that. There's fellowship we have with them.

And the writer actually makes sort of reference to that, doesn't he, when he talks about the way that they remembered him when he was in chains, that they cared for Christians when they were suffering, verse 34 of that 10th chapter. No, indeed, they themselves accepted the plundering of your goods. You're willing to suffer. Your fellowship, the reality of that meant you're willing to suffer for the Lord Jesus Christ and you cared for

other people who were suffering for him. And so there's that fellowship which, in a way, helped to prove the reality of their faith. That's what the writer's doing and he's saying, "Don't forget what you used to do. And it was real, you really cared. It made a difference for me," he's saying, "and that shows the reality of your faith." He's encouraging them, in other words, "and in our fellowship together." It, in a way, helps to confirm the reality of our faith in our care for each other and in our care for people, we're well beyond our own country in far distant countries. And part of our confidence, in fact, that we have when we draw near to God is built upon that fact. We realize actually we were for real. We realize that when we are in times of suffering, that what was coming forth from us was a concern for the Lord Jesus Christ, a concern for his church, concern for its welfare, for its safety, its well-being. To us it's real and you're for real and though it's saying everything about what salvation by grace is and how we rely only upon the Lord Jesus Christ, well, how do we know we're relying upon him? Where is supplementary evidence? Because you care about his church. You care about Christians and that's where fellowship helps to make that actually happen before our eyes. It encourages us in that way.

Remember how the Apostle Paul on various occasions commented about the care or lack of care that people were showing to him in his time of need. 2 Timothy 1:15-18, "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me, among whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he arrived in Rome, he sought me out very zealously and found me. The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day--and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus." The apostle reflecting there upon some who remembered him in his chains and others who did not, and where it's questionable, really what kind of Christians that they were if they really had no thought towards Paul in his time of need. 2 Timothy again and chapter 4 this time, and just reading there in verse 10, "for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica--Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia." And you can hear the apostle's sadness, can't you? "These people deserted me. They walked away." And same chapter again and verse 16, "At my first defense," and Paul is here in prison, he's having to make his appeal to Caesar, "At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them." Sobering, isn't it, there? Might not be charged against them. So Paul appreciated fellowship and he also noted its absence, and he had the names of the people that were the absentees and he's not [unintelligible]. Or in Philippians 4 on a happier note altogether, the church there renewing its affection for Paul in practical ways, so Philippians 4, just read a few verses there, verse 10, "But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity." Gladdened, the church is well with him, its fellowship with him is real and they've shown this reality and that's refreshed Paul's heart. Again he speaks to that in verse 14, "Nevertheless you have done well that you shared in my distress." Then again in verse 16, "For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities."

And so we see that fellowship does keep us on track and we're living out of that fellowship reflecting back to us our reality. We know we've passed from death into life

because we love the brethren. There's that that's happened within us that's brought us together with people and caring for people in their sufferings, in their chains, the persecution that they face. So not virtual church and virtual love and virtual suffering. Well, what does that look like? It's real. It's flesh and blood stuff and this is part and parcel of what we have together as the Lord's people and in which we can build each other up, spur each other on to love and good works.

So we see the beginning then of the practical outworkings that the writer is now turning his attention to so all the doctrine, all of those points that he's been making, those distinctions, the minutiae that he has gone into to establish this point, the supremacy, the superiority, the absolute necessity of what Christ has done and now he's taking us into the good things that that results in. Now fellowship can be part of that and instrumental in it.

So, God willing, we'll pick up there in chapter 11, that famous chapter, and do some further study in that in the weeks ahead.