

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 16 January 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

“Therefore, Brethren”

Hebrews 10:19-25

There are many people in our world who spend their lives studying the writings and ideas of others. They progress through masters’ and doctorate degrees, until they have become experts on the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Isaac Newton, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, Charles Dickens, Robert Browning, Carl Jung, Leo Tolstoy, Albert Einstein, or William Yeats. They learn all about the intimate details of the lives of these authors, so that they can understand what influenced their worldview, their philosophy, or their discoveries.

Yet, if you were to ask the experts how the knowledge of these authors and their ideas helps to meet man’s deepest need, you would not get a uniform answer--nor a satisfactory one. How *can* all this knowledge help us? To be sure, you can make a career of researching and teaching it; yet, how does all this knowledge *solve our deepest problems*? Studying literature reveals how authors’ ideas have affected and changed society; but did those authors’ ideas really meet man’s *deepest need*? Studying history and political science helps to reveal the mistakes that societies have made in the past, so that we won’t repeat them again; yet, we keep repeating those mistakes anyway, don’t we? Studying psychology might give small nuggets of insight into human behaviour; but can it fundamentally *transform* man’s behaviour for the better, from the inside out? Studying science certainly can (and does) provide a better standard of living for us; but has science stopped people from hating others with a different skin colour, or from waging devastating wars against each other, or from oppressing the poor and vulnerable? Can any of these fields of knowledge keep the drunkard from destroying his life, or the liar from telling lies, or the adulterer from destroying his marriage, or the lazy person from mooching off others, or friends and family from hating and betraying each other? Can these fields of knowledge provide *answers* to the *real* problems that plague us? Can science eliminate pride, selfishness, greed, anger, vengeance, covetousness, cruelty, or unbridled lust, which spring from the heart of man like a toxic pool? No, it cannot. Can philosophy draw us any nearer to the God who created us? No, it cannot.

Countless philosophers and scientists have offered “answers” to our problems, and society has followed them. (“Follow the science,” they say.) Yet, mankind is in greater peril now than it ever was before. The world today is like a giant powder keg that is ready to explode. Despite all the learning that mankind has accumulated, more blood has been shed in the last century than in any previous century of recorded history; and it keeps getting worse. The study of men’s philosophies merely refreshes the same old questions that still have not been answered!

Yet, what if there were an all-knowing *Creator* who has the answers to our problems, and who has revealed the answers to us in a Book? Would not *those* writings be worth studying? They surely would...and *are*. That Book, of course, is the Bible! Tragically, though, the world ignores, ridicules, and tries to destroy that Book. That’s why people’s lives are falling apart. Unfortunately, even many *Christians’* lives are in sad shape because they don’t pay much heed to God’s Word.

We who know Christ as Saviour *say* that we believe that the Bible is relevant to every area of our lives: but *do* we really? Do we get glassy-eyed when we hear doctrine taught to us? We shouldn't! Without sound doctrine, there can be no right understanding of how we should live our lives! We cannot rightly understand the *practical* instructions for our lives without understanding the *doctrinal truth* that God has given us concerning Himself.

In our study of **Hebrews**, we've learned much truth about the Lord Jesus Christ. We've learned why He is "better." We've seen Him in His role as Son of God, Son of Man, King, Sacrifice, and High Priest. However, at this point in the letter, Paul is shifting from *doctrinal* teaching to *practical* teaching. All that teaching about Jesus' identity is about to be put to practice; and it will profoundly affect the way you live your life--*if* you will receive it! The title of this message is, "**Therefore, Brethren.**"

Read Hebrews 10:19-22.

From the passage we've just read, we will examine three things, in particular, that every believer should practice in his daily life. First of all, Paul says...

I. Let us draw near to God (vv. 19-22).

In light of what we've learned about who Jesus is, and what His mission is, it is only fitting that Paul is now urging us to "**draw near**" to God! That is the whole reason that Jesus Christ came into this world. We were *separated* from the Father by our sins; and Jesus came to reconcile us to Him! He came to "**quicken**" those who were dead in trespasses and sins (**Ephesians 2:1**). God's desire for you, Christian, is not that you should be happy, comfortable, and prosperous in this world: His desire is that you should "**draw near**" to Him!

Yet, what, exactly, does it mean for a Christian to "**draw near**" to God? After all, God's Holy Spirit lives inside every true believer: therefore, if you have been saved by God's grace, and God Himself lives inside of you, you can't get any closer to God than you already are, right?

Well, asking that question is like asking how a wife can get any closer to her husband! ("After all, she lives in the same house with her husband, right? They sleep in the same bed. How could she get any closer than that?") Obviously, she *can* get closer, and *should* get closer. To have a *close* relationship with her husband, a wife must draw near to him. She must commune with her husband. She must talk with her husband a lot. She must get to know him intimately, by spending lots of time in his presence, and by seeking to know his innermost thoughts and feelings. The same is true for the husband, as well. Living in the same house and sleeping in the same bed isn't enough. He must *draw near* to his wife by communing with her.

So it is in our relationship with God. To "draw near" to God, you must be spending much time in prayer. That is how we communicate with Him!

Read Romans 12:12.

Every Christian is commanded to be "**instant**" in prayer. "**Instant**" means "constantly and earnestly diligent." God wants to have intense, intimate communion with *you*, Christian; and God wants you to draw near to Him.

Now, this leads us to the question: **How was this privilege of “drawing near” to God made possible?** Well, this is where all that Christology (“the doctrine of Christ”) that we’ve been learning becomes vitally important. *Because* Jesus is our Sacrifice and our High Priest, we are now able to **“enter into the holiest.”** (Read Hebrews 10:19-20 again.)

“The holiest”--the “Holy of Holies”--was the part of the Tabernacle that symbolised the throne room of God; and the Ark of the Covenant, which sat in the middle of this room, symbolised the throne of God itself. Now, when you turn to **Ezekiel 1**, and **Isaiah 6**, and **Revelation 4 and 5**, and you read Ezekiel’s, Isaiah’s, and John’s descriptions of God’s heavenly throne room, you can’t help but be awed and overwhelmed at the thought of God’s holiness. Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John certainly were overawed! When they, in vision, saw God sitting upon His throne, they fell down on their faces like dead men, and upbraided themselves for their sinfulness! Think of that, Christian. If you were in God’s actual throne room in Heaven, would not you do the same? You certainly would. Yet, Paul urges believers to **“draw near”** to the very throne room of God--and with **“boldness,”** no less! How can we do this? How can sinners approach God with boldness? Paul answers that question for us. He says that it is by a **“new and living way”** that we can approach Him.

What is that **“new and living way”**? Is it a path of philosophy or morality? No. Is it a path of religion? No. These are dead and lifeless “ways.” This “living Way” is a living *Person*; and that Person is the Lord Jesus Christ! Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”** (John 14:6).

As we’ve seen in our study of **Hebrews**, there are two roles that Christ had to take on in order to be our living “Way” to the Father. First, He had to become our **Sacrifice**. Paul reminds us of this fact when He says that we can draw near to God’s throne **“by the blood of Jesus.”** Jesus had to shed His precious blood in order for us to be able to approach the Father. He is the Lamb of God, whose blood washes away our sin. Secondly, Paul says that we can enter the throne room **“through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.”** In the Tabernacle, a veil separated everyone from the Holy of Holies (except for the high priest, when he came into that room once a year to offer the blood of bulls and goats for the sins of the nation). In contrast, Jesus Christ, our *true* Sacrifice, was offered up to God on the cross *once*. His *blood* was offered in ransom for us; His *body was broken* for us: and the way to the Father was opened!

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Read Matthew 27:50-51.

In order for the **“new and living way”** to be opened to us, Christ had to become our Sacrifice, by offering His shed blood and His broken body as our ransom for sin. But that’s not all. Paul also points out that Jesus had to act as our **High Priest**. A perfect representative of humanity had to go to the Father on our behalf and offer His sinless blood in atonement for *our* sinful lives. Again, the only Person who could meet that qualification was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, our High Priest, offered up that perfect blood *one time*. The work of our salvation is done; and our High Priest is now *seated* on His throne, where He is interceding to God for us.

Read Romans 8:31-34.

Why can we enter the holiest, and approach God? Because Christ has acted on our behalf as Sacrifice and High Priest. And *how* can we approach Him? With **“boldness,”** Paul says. We can draw near to God with absolute confidence! Why? Because Christ is the “Anchor” of our souls. (We saw this in **Hebrews 6:19.**) Christ is firmly, immovably “anchored” on the heavenly throne; and those who are bound to that Anchor (those who are truly saved by placing their faith in Christ) have no fear of missing Heaven!

That is why we can draw near to God with **“boldness.”** Of course, this doesn’t mean we may approach God with presumption or arrogance. We should approach Him with humility. Yet, at the same time, we can approach Him with *confidence*. It is a confidence that is grounded in God’s sure promise. That is why Paul also says that we can draw near with **“full assurance of faith.”** In **1 John 5:13** John says that every Christian can **“know”** that he has eternal life. Every true child of God *knows* exactly what his standing is with God: namely, he is accepted with God because of what Christ did for him on the cross!

Now, let’s read **Hebrews 10:22 again.** (Read **Hebrews 10:22.**) Not only can Christians approach God with **“boldness,”** and with **“full assurance of faith”**: they can also approach Him with a **“true heart,”** which is **“sprinkled from an evil conscience.”** Now, what does Paul mean by this? Isn’t the heart of man **“deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked”**? Yes, it is. How, then, can we have this **“true”** heart?

Well, first of all, we need to realise that every true Christian can and *does* possess a **“true”** and “pure” heart. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t be able to see God!

Read Matthew 5:8.

The “true” heart—the “pure” heart that Jesus talked about—is **not** the old, wicked heart of the old nature. *That* heart cannot be reformed or made better to any degree. The **“true”** heart is the *new* heart that God puts inside every Christian the day he is born again. Every Christian has been given a new nature. We still have the old, sinful heart (for now); but we also have a *new* heart, which is generated by the power of the Holy Spirit. As long as we are surrendering ourselves to God every day, the old, sinful nature is put to death, and the *new* heart—the **“true”** heart—is in control of our thoughts and actions. A true Christian *will* manifest purity!

Read Ezekiel 36:25-27.

We can approach God with **“boldness.”** We can approach Him with **“full assurance of faith.”** We can approach Him with a **“true heart.”** However, there is one more way in which the Christian should approach God: with a body that is **“washed with pure water.”** What does this mean? Paul is talking about the purification that every priest had to undergo in order to enter into the Tabernacle. Before going into the Tabernacle, a priest had to wash in the laver just outside the Tabernacle door. Likewise, before a Christian can enter into the throne room of God with assurance and confidence, he must confess and be cleansed of his daily sins. This cleansing doesn’t restore a Christian’s *salvation*, because our salvation will never be revoked. However, it does restore right *communion and fellowship* with God.

Read 2 Corinthians 6:17 - 7:1.

Do you feel as though your prayers aren't going higher than the ceiling, Christian? If so, it's probably because there is sin between you and God. Will you confess and forsake it, so that you can draw near to God? James wrote, ***“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.”***

Every day, Christians should draw near to God. Yet, there is a second thing that we should be practicing. Paul says...

II. Let us hold fast our profession (v. 23).

(Read verse 23.) The second thing that we should put to practice is a **steadfast profession of faith**. Now, remember: Paul was writing to Jewish people who *professed* to believe on Jesus Christ. Some of them had made a *profession*; but it was not a real profession. Though they claimed to be saved, they were not. They weren't truly trusting in Christ. Paul has repeatedly warned those with empty professions of faith to repent while they still have the chance.

Now, most of Paul's readers *were* truly saved; yet, they were struggling under great persecution. Paul was exhorting those who were truly saved to stand fast, and not waver. Even the most steadfast Christians *can* be moved with fear at the thought of pain, suffering, or martyrdom: yet, even in the face of the most horrific persecution, a true believer *can* stand fast. How is that possible? Well, Paul has spent the whole book telling us how! If Jesus Christ be all that Paul says He is—our Sacrifice, our eternal High Priest, our Anchor, and so on—then those who belong to Him have *every reason in the world* to ***“hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering”***! Furthermore, we have the *ability* to hold fast!

The ability to ***“hold fast”*** doesn't spring from our own will power. Our “will power” will fail us! The ability to hold fast is grounded in the **faithfulness of Jesus Christ**. Paul says that we can ***“hold fast our profession of faith without wavering,”*** because ***“he is faithful that promised.”*** In **John 10**, Jesus promised that no man can pluck the believer out of His hand. It is *He* who will not let *us* go. God's promise gives us assurance and fearlessness in the face of persecution; and His divine power enables us to do what we otherwise *could not* do--namely, not deny His name. This is why Paul prayed that the Ephesian believers would be ***“strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man”*** (Ephesians 3:16).

Very soon, real persecution may be coming upon us. Are you prepared to ***“hold fast”*** your profession under *real* persecution? Are you standing fast *right now*, in the face of *mild* persecution? If you be ashamed to mention your Saviour's name for fear of being laughed at, you need to ground yourself in this truth. Draw near to your Saviour right now, and ask for the strength you need to “hold fast your profession.” He *will* be faithful to you!

Now, there is one more thing that we must practice every day. Paul says...

III. Let us consider one another (vv. 24-25).

(Read vv. 24-25.) The third thing that we should put to practice is to “*consider one another.*” This is where Paul’s instruction really hits home. This instruction deals not just with our fellowship with *God*, but also with our fellowship with *others* (particularly, other Christians).

“To consider” means to pay close attention to something (or someone), so that you can have a proper understanding of him. This goes beyond smiling at your brother and saying, “How are you?” This goes beyond making “small talk.” It goes *way* beyond that. The way in which we are to “consider” one another is “*to provoke*” each other “*unto love and good works.*” It should be every Christian’s heartfelt desire to “provoke” (literally, to “stir up”) fellow believers. The spiritual welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ should be on our hearts.

Now, just like every other command in the Christian life, this command goes against our flesh. In our fleshly reasoning, we convince ourselves that “minding our own business” and “keeping our nose out of others’ affairs” means that we should just sit idly by and say nothing while our brother struggles through a trial, or stumbles in sin. Nothing could be more *opposite* of what we are supposed to do! Paul says that we should “*provoke*” (stir up) our brethren to “*love and good works.*”

So, what does that mean? How can you “*provoke*” someone to love and good works? Well, let me start by saying what it *is not*. This is not talking about “peer pressure.” That’s the way it works in *false* religions. In the Kingdom Hall, for example, there is a tremendous pressure to be “the most happy and loving people on earth.” That is the PR image that the Watchtower has projected to the public; and that is how their people are expected to appear to outsiders. It’s all about conformity, and it’s all about *face*. However, the *reality* (as many former J.W.’s have revealed) is that there is great frustration brewing under the surface. They are *not* happy, because they are trying to do the impossible (namely, to earn their salvation); and their “good works” of knocking on doors, meeting quotas, and obeying everything the Watchtower says, are *not* motivated by love at all!

“Peer pressure” is outward conformity that is generated by *fear of the group*. Nothing could be more opposite the way that Christians operate! True love is placed in a Christian’s heart by God; and this love is the *opposite* of fear. True love *casts out* fear!

Read 1 John 4:17-18.

“Provoking” does not mean “pressuring into conformity.” What, then, *does* it mean to “provoke” someone to love and good works? Well, how do you “provoke” someone to *anger*? By *showing* anger! Angry words and actions “stir up” anger in others! That is why God says, “*A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger*” (Proverbs 15:1). Should we be surprised, then, that love and good works can provoke love and good works in others? By your love and good works, you can encourage others to follow your example.

Yet, there is something that is very necessary in order for this “provoking unto love and good works” to happen. What is it? Paul answers that question in **verse 25. (Read Hebrews 10:25.)** Paul says that in order to provoke your brother to love and good works, you must not forsake the assembling of yourselves together! You need to be at church whenever it meets. How can you provoke a fellow believer to love and good works if you are rarely around him,

because you are skipping church? How can *they* encourage *you* if you aren't in church? Even if you do show up for church every now and then, you are not really demonstrating good works to others, anyway, because you are showing, by your actions, that church isn't overly important to you, and that they needn't be overly concerned about it, either!

What is church really all about? I think this story by Mark Littrell captures it well.

“A member of the church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a comfortable chair near the fireplace, and waited.

The pastor made himself at home, but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the dance of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember, and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone; then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet contemplation. As the one lone ember's flame flickered and diminished, there was a momentary glow; and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and dead.

Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. The pastor glanced at his watch, and realized it was time to leave. He slowly stood up, picked up the cold, dead ember, and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow, once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it.

As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said, with a tear running down his cheek, "Thank you so much for your visit, and especially for the fiery sermon. I will be back in church next Sunday.”

Folks, we *desperately need* the preaching of God's Word, and the fellowship of the saints. Are there times when we *can't* attend? Yes. There are genuine emergencies that can arise (such as a broken-down vehicle), or dire sicknesses or hospitalisations that can prevent us from coming. Aside from this, though, we have no reason to miss God's house. *Jesus* always shows up for His assembly; and *He* waits expectantly for each member to arrive to honour Him. He takes it very seriously. When we don't show up (for no legitimate reason), how does *He* feel? Probably like a wife whose husband has completely forgotten about their special anniversary date, and has left her waiting alone in the restaurant booth.

Brethren, we need to get rid of the old “pre-conversion” thinking that church is a “duty.” Most people go to work because it is their *duty*; but when the clock hits quitting time, they punch out, and don't put in a minute more. Tragically, many Christians view church much the same way. They think, “I've done my duty by coming to church; so why should God expect more of me? I'll not talk to anyone, or stick around any longer than I must.” If that be how you view church, you have missed its whole purpose! The purpose of church is **to be strengthened** by the preaching of God's Word; **to encourage** other believers, and to *be* encouraged by them; and **to work together**, as an assembly, to spread the Gospel to the lost

Brethren, are these things in our hearts? Are we “considering one another”? Do *you* think about the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of your brothers and sisters in Christ's

assembly, and try to meet them? This is Christ's doctrine put to practice! **Jesus died for the church!** It is precious to Him! Is it precious to you?

Conclusion: We've jumped from doctrine to practice today. It's one thing to know all the doctrine about Christ; it's another thing to put it to practice. Are you "drawing near" to God in prayer? Are you "holding fast your profession"? Do you consider other Christians, to provoke them unto love and good works? Or does that rarely cross your mind, if at all? If so, "draw near" to God this morning! Perhaps you are not sure if you are saved, and on your way to Heaven. Perhaps all this talk about a personal relationship with God seems foreign to you. If so, you need to be saved! Won't you place your trust in Christ today, so that you know Him personally, and "draw near" to Him?