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MINISTRIES INTERNATIONAL

Sermon

Analysis of Hebrews: Chapter 10



Part 16/23

God's Last Word: An Exposition of Hebrews By Derek Prince

Last time I believe we ended at Hebrews 10:22. I would like just to go back in your outline over what we have there from Hebrews 10:19–22 and then we'll go on. Rather than translate from the Greek I'll read the New American Standard Version for Hebrews 10:19–22.

> "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place [that's the Holy of Holies] by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

That is a very, very important passage. As I meditated on the way we dealt with it last time, I felt that the Lord was indicating to me that one of the greatest needs of His people is to have total confidence of access to God. And I am inclined to think that many of God's people—and it could be some here tonight—are not fully confident of their right of access to God and of their basis of access. And if you don't have that confidence, you're going to be handicapped in every area of your Christian life. This particular passage is probably one of the most emphatic in all Scripture about the right we have of access to God. So I think I'm just going to review it again to try and imprint it on your hearts and minds.

I would have to say that looking at the church, by and large I think the vast majority of Christians— and I'm not suggesting that's people here tonight—but the vast majority of Christians do not have this kind of confidence. As I say, it hinders them in every area of their lives.

Let's look, then, at what we have in the outline. I'm not going to go very much further than that. But at the lower part of your Page 10/2 we see there three encouragements to direct access to God. Number one, confidence freely expressed in the blood of Jesus. I've spoken to you about

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that word confidence. It's really a political word. It means "freedom of speech" in secular language. So it's a confidence that must be expressed, it's not enough just to feel it or think it or believe it. It has to be expressed. And here it's confidence in the blood of Jesus.

What do you do when you're driving along in your car and you're not doing anything in particular? Or maybe sitting in a doctor's office waiting for an appointment, something like that. What is your mind occupied with? I suggest to you that that's a very good time to be expressing your confidence in the blood of Jesus. If you're in your car, unless you have strangers with you, you can say it right out loud. If you say it out loud in the doctor's office you may get more treatment than you expect! But you see, many of us are often conscious of some kind of darkness or discouragement or oppression. Well, if you are continually affirming your confidence in the blood of Jesus, you trouble the devil much more than he can trouble you. He will find somebody else to dog the footsteps of.

This is a little comical incident; I may have mentioned it to some of you before. But years back when I was a pastor in London, England—as if there could be any other London—I mean, I just have to say that because British people would think me crazy if I said London, England. Where else is London but in England? But anyhow, that's by the way.

I was pastoring there and we had in our congregation at the time two Russian Jewesses who had come from Israel, really followed us to London. They had found the Lord in Russia out of a background of materialism and atheism. They were on the point of suicide one night and a Baptist pastor was directed supernaturally to their door, knocked on the door and asked them what they were doing. They were so shocked because they were just making preparations to take their lives. They asked him in and he spent the whole night telling them about Jesus. By the morning they had found Jesus as their Savior and also their Messiah. Then they made their way to Israel later, which is a story that is very dramatic but I can't tell it tonight.

Then, when we left Israel they followed us later. They were theoretically Baptists but I have to tell you that my observation is that Russian Baptists are more Pentecostal than British Pentecostals. They were not the kind to keep quiet about anything. So one day they had visited my first wife and me, Lydia, and we were together in our bed sitting room praying and worshiping the Lord. They were really pretty noisy. Lo and behold, a lady from the congregation arrived at the door with a very embarrassing situation for me. She had her husband by the hand and she said, "This is my husband. He's just come out of prison and he has demons." Well, I believed in demons. Ever since I believed the Bible I believed in demons. But I preferred them at a distance! I hadn't really got any idea of what to do with them in those days. But I couldn't turn the man away, so I said, "Come up; we're praying." He came up rather sheepishly, I don't think he had his heart fully in it at the time.

So these two Russian ladies, they began to really make a noise. I mean, they were praising the Lord and clapping their hands and in those days that wasn't so usual as it is nowadays. So after awhile this man sneaked up to me and took me by the hand and he said, "I'm going. Too much noise here." I had no idea what to say, but I gave him an inspired answer. I could never have improved on it. I said, "I'll tell you something. It's the devil that doesn't like the noise, and he doesn't like it because we're praising Jesus. And you've got two options. If you go now, the devil will go with you. If you stay, the devil will go without you." He said, "I'll stay."

I didn't know what to do, but we just went on praising the Lord and after awhile he came up to me and took me by the hand again and said, "It's left. I felt it leave my throat." So that was a tremendous lesson to me of who really dislikes to hear the praises of the Lord. It's the devil. And if you maintain this confession, this freedom of speech continually, you embarrass Satan much more than he can ever embarrass you. And he will find somebody else to hang around who hasn't learnt this lesson.

So let's bear that in mind. Confidence freely expressed in the blood of Jesus. Really, provided we're reverent and not self-righteous, we can never talk too much about the blood of Jesus.

And then, going on in our outline, a new and living way through the veil. That's the pierced flesh of Jesus. Bearing in mind that under the Old Covenant only one man went and only once a year through that veil. Here it's open, we can go any time into the immediate presence of Almighty God.

Then we have a great high priest, Jesus, waiting for us beyond the veil to welcome us and bring our needs and our requests before the Father. But I want to point out to you that all encouragement centers in Jesus. Every one of those three reasons centers in Jesus.

Now the devil's favorite trick is to get you focused on yourself. Your problems, your failures, your sin, and the moment our eyes are taken off Jesus we lose our confidence. If the devil can get you arguing about what you've done and your weaknesses and defending yourself on that basis, he has you defeated. You have to take your

eyes off yourself, both your successes and your failures. They're irrelevant so far as access to the presence of God is concerned. Not even our greatest success qualifies us for access to the presence of Almighty God. Nothing qualifies us but the reasons given here.

Then let's go on a little further in this outline at the bottom of Page 10/2 and at the top of Page 10/3 we have the four requirements for the true worshipper. That's a phrase taken from Andrew Murray's book The Holiest of All, which is, if you want to read about a five hundred page book, a verse by verse exposition of Hebrews. I really should have recommended it to you long ago but it is an outstanding book.

At one time through my newsletter we sold that book and it was a high price even in those days. It was about $8, if I remember rightly. We sold about four or five hundred copies. Nothing has really impressed me more than that, that there is such a real hunger in the hearts of God's people for real meat.

Anyhow, here are the four requirements. A sincere heart. That means that we must not relapse into being religious and trying to impress God and say things that we think sound good and we hope God will like us. We have to be very, very honest. Most of the prayers in the Bible that really accomplish something, if you study them, they're very honest prayers. There isn't a lot of fancy language about them.

Then a full assurance of faith. I believe that the truths I'm unfolding to you right now can impart to you that full assurance. No questions, no doubts, no reservations.

Third, hearts cleansed from an evil conscience by the blood of Jesus. What I did not bring up last time and, which is important, is that the word that's translated there "cleansed" is "sprinkled." If you look in Hebrews 10:22, "having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience." And that word is specifically the word that's used for the ceremonial application of the blood of the sacrifice. So if you don't use the translation "sprinkled," you tend to miss it.

I would like to direct you to three places where it's used. Hebrews 9:19.

> "For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people."

So the association is cleansing with the blood of the sacrifice, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience.

Then again in Hebrews 12:22, one of my favorite passages. This speaks about what there is in Mount Zion when we come there by faith.

> "You have come to Mount Zion [and then it lists all the things] ... the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel."

But the Greek says "to the blood of sprinkling." Again, it's the same thought, it's the blood of the sacrifice ceremonially applied.

And then, finally, it might be worthwhile looking in 1 Peter 1:2. I'm going to turn to the New International Version because I don't like the translation in the New American Standard. It uses verbs and I prefer nouns. I think you'll see when I get there what I'm saying. I'm reading 1 Peter 1:2. It says:

> "... who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."

The same word, the same thought. It's the blood that's sprinkled.

Perhaps it would be worthwhile for a moment looking at the succession of things that bring us to the blood. If you look in that second verse, first of all, it's the choice of God and it's based on His foreknowledge. Then there's the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. I don't know whether you realize that the Holy Spirit starts to sanctify you before you're a believer. I wonder if you've ever realized that? Many of us, if we look back, can now see that was the Holy

Spirit. I didn't know who He was; I didn't understand what was happening.

I don't know whether I've ever told this story to you, but it always comes back to me in this connection. I went into the British Army in September 1940, armed with my Bible—to read it and study it and find out where it was right and where it was wrong, what I thought about it. I was rather conspicuous because I read it every night and I got to be quite well known, but I was not by any means a believer. One day one of the padres, chaplains, was having a Whitsun service. Whitsun—you don't know what that is, but that's the Catholic-Anglican word for Pentecost. White Sunday because everybody used to wear white robes. He wanted the lesson really well read. "Lesson" is the portion of Scripture. So with characteristic discernment he picked out me as the person to read the lesson. I knew that he'd made a good choice! I thought, I am going to show them how this lesson should be read. Well, it was Acts 2, the first twenty verses, something like that. What did I know about Acts 2? I didn't know what was in Acts 2. But anyhow I really studied it, I read it through, I noted the place where to pause for breath and where to put the emphasis. I thought, They are going to be treated to something. You see, I was very modest in those days!

When I got up to read, the most extraordinary thing happened. My breathing apparatus got taken over by some other agent and I began to take deep gasps and I could only read about three words and I had to pause for breath and gasp. I never have read anything with less impressive delivery than that! Well, that was May. Right at the end of July I met the Lord. But two months before I knew Him, the Holy Spirit was already supernaturally at work, even in my body. That's just one of dozens of examples we could take of how the Holy Spirit sanctifies you, He draws you out from the world and He begins to set you apart to the purposes of God. That's what "sanctifying" means.

Another thing that happened to me was at that time I used to be very keen on dancing. You wouldn't know that by looking at me now—or you might! As somebody said, "I didn't give up drinking, I just changed the brand, and I didn't give up dancing, I just changed the floor!"—though it was a long while I went to church without dancing. Then I discovered it was all right to dance in church, so I started again. Anyhow, I used to go and, I mean, I would stay there till the last dance and enjoy it. Now I began to get so sleepy. About 10:30 I would begin to go to sleep. I was only 24 years old and I thought, What? Am I getting old before my time? What's going wrong with me? Well, it was the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. He was just making me incapable of enjoying that kind of atmosphere any longer.

So, coming back to 1 Peter 1:2. You're chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. God knows you in advance and He chooses you on the basis of knowing you. Then He releases the Holy Spirit on you. Somebody called the Holy Spirit "the hound of heaven," who follows you out and speaks to you, makes you dissatisfied with things that used to satisfy you. God releases the Holy Spirit, He sanctifies you, He draws you, He entices you. God said of Israel in Hosea 2, "I will entice them. I'll get them into the wilderness, I'll get them into the Valley of Achor," the valley of trouble. Sometimes the Holy Spirit entices us into the valley of trouble. I'm sure that never happened to any of you! Then when you're there in the valley of trouble and you think, How did I ever get here? What's gone wrong with my life? He opens to you "the door of hope."

So that's "sanctified." But He's bringing us all the time to obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. That's very important. The Holy Spirit is the one who enables us to obey the Lord.

In Ezekiel 36 the Lord says about Israel, "I will put my Spirit within them and cause them to keep My laws and my statutes." Nobody can obey God without the Holy Spirit.

Then, when you obey Jesus the climax is the sprinkling of the blood. Bear in mind the blood is never sprinkled on the disobedient. So if we are not obedient we forfeit the right of access to the sprinkling of the blood.

All that by way of commentary on Hebrews 10:22.

Then the fourth condition for the true worshiper. Bodies washed with pure water. I do think it's very important that we understand that water baptism is a sanctifying work of God. For so many years I think good people like the Baptists said, "Well, you get saved and then you ought to be baptized." Like it's a little appendage to salvation. Actually that is not really scriptural teaching. I mean, I believe in being saved, I believe in being baptized, but there is no one in the book of Acts who ever claimed salvation without being baptized. It's completely unscriptural to separate. God has never said it that way. He said, "Whosoever believeth and is baptized shall be saved." He didn't say "whoever believeth and is saved shall be baptized." See? That's the way it's been presented in many sections of the church.

Now I'm not saying that to be critical, but I'm simply pointing out that baptism is a whole lot more than most Baptists have ever got out of it. And you can say Pentecostals or whom you will.

I remember I was teaching on baptism in New Zealand a good many years back now. And there were quite a number of people there who had never been baptized by immersion. We decided to have a baptismal service. There were a lot of Baptists who came because they wanted to see these people being baptized—and they were already baptized. Well, because their minds had been prepared by teaching, they expected a lot out of baptism. And I tell you, they got more than they expected. The glory of the Lord came down and people actually could not stand because of the presence of God. And the Baptists who were there said, "I wish we'd had it this way! We didn't know what there was in this for us." So what I'm saying is don't underestimate water baptism. If I'm right, which, you know, how can I help being right? If I'm right in believing that this is the water of baptism, notice that it's put immediately after the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. It's given an extremely high level of importance. I believe, in a way, that we would find it much easier to believe God for healing, for deliverance, if we understood that our bodies have been sanctified by the water of baptism. Passing through that water has moved our bodies out of the kingdom of Satan and into the kingdom of God.

There are two very beautiful New Testament pictures of water baptism. One is Noah's ark in 1 Peter

3. It says, "The like figure whereunto baptism doth also now save us." Consider what was involved in the ark. I think I've told you already in this series there's two arks: the big ark and the little ark. Each of them is Christ. The big ark is you in Christ; the little ark is Christ in you. So when they entered into the ark they entered into Christ. And in Christ, the ark, they passed through the waters. And they came out into a totally new world. Sin had been dealt with, judged and put away. They had the opportunity to begin a completely new life. That's what water baptism is.

I think many people don't really have a feel that the old life has been separated from them. Perhaps because they've never been water baptized or they've never been properly instructed about what water baptism is.

The other picture is, of course, Israel coming out of Egypt. First Corinthians 10, "all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized under Moses in the cloud and in the sea." In the cloud, that's the baptism in the Holy Spirit, they were immersed in the cloud which came down over them, they all passed through the cloud. Then they were immersed in the sea, they passed through the sea, came up on the other side into a new way of life, a new destination, a new ruler, new laws, totally new. And all the pursuing forces of the Egyptians were cut off not by the blood of the lamb but by the water of baptism.

As I sometimes say, there's no extra charge for that.

Now, we're going to go on to verse 23 which is a very important verse. Hebrews 10:23. This is the seventh "let us" passage. If you look back at your outline right at the beginning where we listed twelve "let us" passages in Hebrews, it's one of the distinctive features of Hebrews, these collective decisions that God's people have to make. "Let us" is not an individual decision, it's a collective decision.

> "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful ..."

So again we see, if you look back for a moment to verse 21 which is part of that total passage "since we have a great high priest over the house of God." I pointed out that wherever we have the concept of the high priest, we have the obligation to make the right confession. This is so important I think I'm going to go over it just once more. Turn back to Hebrews 3:1.

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. I think another translation says "fix your minds on," it's a very powerful word. Focus on Jesus who's the high priest of our confession. No confession, no high priest. His high priesthood depends on our confession so far as we're concerned.

Then Hebrews 4:14.

> "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."

First of all, we consider Him as the high priest of our confession. Now, in relating to Him we hold fast our confession. We say it and we keep on saying it. Sometimes it's easier to say it than at other times, isn't it? When you're feeling really well and the preacher is preaching, well it's easy to say "with His stripes I'm healed." But when you're alone and in pain, that's another thing, "with His stripes I am healed." The Scripture says "hold fast your confession."

Then in this passage there's on more thing added. Hebrews 10:23, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering." Why is that put in there? Well, because there

might be a temptation to waver, that's obvious. So, you see the buildup. "Consider the high priest," "hold fast your confession," "hold it fast without wavering." As Charles Simpson says, "When they put on the sign 'Buckle your seatbelt,' you can expect turbulence." And when God says, "Hold it fast without wavering," you can be sure there might be reason to waver. But the message is, it's our confession that links us to our high priest. So make it, keep it, keep on keeping it. Don't give it up.

Now, we're coming to the eighth "let us" passage. I will now translate from the Greek. I don't know how much difference it makes to you but anyhow, I'll do it. Hebrews 10:24–25.

> "And let us consider one another ..."

I just want to look back, I think it's the same word that's used in Hebrews 3:1. Yes, it is. Hebrews 3:1, "Consider the high priest." Here it says, "Let us consider one another." I think that's always true. If we consider Jesus, we'll end up by considering one another. But it's important that we do it in that order. We consider Jesus first, then one another. It makes a great deal of difference if I relate to you as just a person or a person in Christ.

My mind is full of little incidents tonight; I don't know why I'm struggling with them. I remember when I was principal of a college for training teachers in East Africa. For every vacancy we could offer students there were at least ten suitable applicants. I remember one girl that walked twenty-four miles each way in bare feet just to get an interview. You can hardly conceive of the desperate hunger there was to get educated, because education was the key to success in life, as they saw it at least. I remember one day an elderly mother came to me on behalf of her son who was a potential student at the college. He really wasn't suitable, we had not accepted him. She was bothering me. You couldn't possibly believe it, but I was getting impatient with her. What they say in Africa, they don't believe in democracy, don't deceive yourself about that. That's just an outward show. In Africa they believe in the chief, the strong man. He's the man that matters. So she would say to me, "You're the great one. What you say will go." And it wasn't true. But I got so irritated and I was just about to give her a real piece of my mind, and it wasn't my sanctified mind either! The Lord spoke to me very gently but He said, "Remember, she's one of My children. Be careful how you treat her." I repented. She was really a dear precious woman, a child of God.

But see, if we consider Jesus first it will make a difference how we consider one another. But if we do consider Jesus I do not believe we can fail to consider one another.

> "Let us consider one another for provocation to love and good works."

Now the King James says provoke. I think this translation says stimulate, doesn't it? But it really is a strong and normally a bad word. I think it's deliberately used to make you think. Provoke, what do you usually provoke people to? Anger, that's right. But the writer of Hebrews says "provoke" but not to anger, "to love and to good works." The Greek word, which is just a matter of interest, is the word which gives us the English word paroxysm. Do you know what a paroxysm is? Maybe you don't, but it's an absolutely uncontrollable outburst of anger. That's the word that's used "to stimulate." So the suggestions are bad, but in this context it's turned to the good: "Let us provoke one another or consider how to provoke one another to love and good works." And let me point out that if you want some people to do the right thing you have to provoke them to it! Furthermore, you have to consider how to provoke them to it.

I really know this is one of my weaknesses. I don't like to have to consider people's personalities. With my military background and my rather logical mind, for me it's sufficient just to tell the person. But the Bible says, "Consider how to tell them" because if you want the result from one person, you have to tell them in quite a different way from the way you tell another person. Anybody who's got a number of children will know that. You cannot treat all your children the same. I can see some of you nodding your heads. You can scold one child and get the right result. But you scold another child and you just discourage them. You've defeated them.

We had a visit from a couple of Jewish believers in Israel this summer. They had two little children with them, a boy and a girl. The boy was rather well behaved, the girl wasn't. She was fussing around and interrupting our conversation. Eventually the mother said, "Excuse me just a moment, but I just have to take her out on the veranda and give her a spanking." She said, "When she's had the spanking she'll be completely different." So out she went, spanked her, brought her back. It was completely true, it was a different personality. But she didn't do that to the boy. So some people you need to spank; other people you need to encourage. So we have to consider how to get the right result out of people.

Going on, we'll do verse 25, which is very important.

> "Not abandoning the gathering of yourselves together ..."

Or ourselves together. Now that word in Greek is the word for a synagogue. Let us not fail to attend our synagogue. Could you accept that? What kind of believers were they? Jewish. Where did they meet? Almost certainly in a synagogue. It's hard for us to imagine that. Many, many synagogues are not at all ornate places. You see in Jerusalem a few very elaborate wonderful synagogues, tremendous buildings, but most synagogues are upper rooms over a butcher shop, or something like that. They're probably not more than thirty or fifty people that ever meet there. The essence of a synagogue meeting is really informality, sharing, there probably isn't a preacher, there's somebody who leads in prayers and so on. It's much more like what we're getting used to in our cell groups or our home groups. It's rather interesting to see that's really how the church started.

The other kind of meeting was probably a later development.

> "Not abandoning the meeting of yourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting, encouraging, stirring up, and so much the more, as you see the day approaching."

The day. I believe in the early church when they said "the day," that's all they needed to say. That was one day that was fixed in everybody's mind. The Lord is coming back.

I've just been today preparing an outline on how to be ready for the Lord's coming, so it's very fresh in my mind. Basically, one of the main motivations for holy living in the New Testament was the Lord's coming. We've got to be ready to meet Him.

Going back now to verses 24–25, the third "let us" in this chapter.

> "Let us consider how to stimulate [provoke] one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more, as you see the day approaching."

Let's look at those three obligations. We turn now to our note outline, Page 10/3, the middle of the page. Three obligations of believers toward each other. Again, that, I think, is part of the same principle. First of all, we consider Jesus. Then, when we've considered Him, we consider one another in the light of our relationship to Him and our obligations to one another. But He always proceeds from the unseen, eternal, divine, down to the natural and the human.

One of the ways in which the writer of Hebrews presents truth to us is a little bit different from some other books of the New Testament. He gets us into this unseen, priestly realm and he presents to us truths that are not perceived by the senses at all. And having established the way things are up there, then he makes the practical application to how we should live and do things down here. But for the people that haven't been able to apprehend what he's saying about the priestly realm and the unseen realm, then the applications are probably not so forceful. So I trust that you've been able to, by the Holy Spirit, apprehend the unseen. I hope that the procedures of access into the presence of God have become real.

So our three obligations that we have toward one another are, first of all, to stimulate or to provoke to love and good deeds. I think we need to take that very seriously as a congregation and I know a number of people here that are not regular worshipers with this congregation. But whatever congregation you belong to, whatever church you attend, whatever group you belong to, I think we need to really see this as an art that has to be cultivated. How to get the right reaction out of people. How to approach people in such a way we bring the best out of them and not the worst. I think when the writer says, "Let us consider," I think it means it takes time, it takes thought, it takes prayer. How can I approach such and such a person and get the best out of them? In many congregations there are some awkward people. Usually the other people just steer around them. You're walking out and you see that person and you suddenly remember you have left your book behind somewhere and you turn around and go back. Well, I don't think that's exactly what the writer is saying. He's saying, "If there are awkward people, consider how to get the best out of them. Don't bypass them, don't walk around them."

I think it's also important that when people come to our assembly if they're not regular attenders, we consider how to get the best out of them. Not just head for our personal friends, the people we enjoy talking to, but cultivate the strangers or the person who's lonely. One of the biggest problems of contemporary civilization is loneliness. As a matter of fact, any church that has a remedy for loneliness that works will grow. It doesn't need anything else. There are other things that are more important but that will cause a church to grow.

So let us consider how to provoke one another to do the right thing, not the wrong thing. When somebody reacts to you the wrong way and upsets you, you need to pause and ask yourself, "Did I approach that person the wrong way?" Maybe something in it was to do with the way I approached them.

Second, maintain regular attendance at our own synagogue/fellowship. I think there are many different legitimate patterns of meeting, but one thing the Bible makes clear is we ought to be regular in attendance at some meeting place.

In my old days in London in the Pentecostal assembly I pastored there—London being a place where everybody tends to come—we always had people that would drop in to see how we were doing. If the service was good, they'd go and tell some other church and if it was bad they'd tell us there was some other church that was doing better than we were. They were never a blessing because they always came to get a blessing. That's the only thing they came for, was to get.

So I got really provoked with it. I'm not saying this is not the right way to handle the problem but I got really interested in ostriches. There's quite a lot in the Bible about ostriches. So one day I waited till some of my favorite targets were there and I preached my message on ostriches. An ostrich has wings but it can't fly. It's got very long legs, it runs very fast. It's got a very long neck but a very small head. And it lays eggs and fails to hatch them. It's not true that ostriches bury their heads in the sand, I discovered that. That's a slander against ostriches. Anyhow, I preached about ostriches who go around and lay eggs and never hatch them. They've got long legs but their wings don't enable them to fly. They've got long necks, they do a lot of talking but they've got no sense. Of course, I did it in a very loving way!

Anyhow, what I'm saying is, Don't be an ostrich! There's nobody here that would apply to, but it is a biblical principle. Be regular. See, you can impress people if they only meet you once a month but if they meet you every week, after awhile they see the other side of you. You've got to learn to let people see both sides.

Then the third obligation is to encourage or to exhort one another. That word, the verb is the origin of the word paraclete. How many of you have heard of the word paraclete? It's the Catholic name for the Holy Spirit, but it's taken direct from Greek. It's not really an English word, it's a transliteration of a Greek word. But the same word means to encourage, to exhort—and my rendering of it is it means "to stir up" or "to cheer up." If a person is discouraged they need to be cheered up. But if a person is becoming indifferent and cold, then they need to be stirred up. The one word covers both.

So again, you need to consider the person you're dealing with. If a person is discouraged it's no good trying to stir them up, you have to cheer them up. I don't think the devil has any more effective weapon against the children of God than discouragement. And I once heard Billy Graham say years and years ago, "God never uses a discouraged Christian." The first thing you have to do is get them out of their discouragement. So don't add to a person's discouragement. If a person is not walking in victory but in discouragement, don't tell them all their faults. It's not the right moment to do it.

If a person thinks that they've absolutely arrived, that might be the time to remind them gently there are some areas that still require attention. The whole essence of this is—and it's something I have to confess honestly doesn't come to me by nature by no means. But the essence of it is consider the people that you find yourself in fellowship with, to help them, to bless them, to bring the best out of them. If that mind could be imparted to all of us here tonight, I think all of our churches would be a lot better places than they are.

How many of you would agree some churches are not yet perfect? You know why? Because the people in them are not yet perfect. You probably heard me say don't go around looking for the perfect church. You know why? Because if you found it you couldn't join it. You'd spoil it.

Now we're going on to verses 26–31. This is the fourth passage of warning. I think we need to turn back to our introduction for a moment. Keep your finger there in 10/3, turn back to 0/2. All right. There are five passages containing solemn warning in this epistle. There is no other passage of the Bible that I know that contains so many solemn warnings as this. And they are the most severe warnings that I'm familiar with anywhere in the Bible. But I do believe it's very important we continue to remind ourselves of the order of the things against which we're warned.

Number one is neglect. See, most people don't see neglect as a serious danger. But it's the beginning of the downward path. Then secondly, unbelief. Again, our churches are just full of unbelief. But people don't see that as a sin. The writer says "an unbelieving heart is a sinful heart."

Then we get to apostasy, falling away. You say, "How could such a person apostasize? Why, they've been coming to church regularly for years." Probably the steps were

neglect, unbelief, then apostasy. But you see, we don't see the danger signs in our own lives or sometimes in the lives of others. We see neglect and think they're really not on fire for the Lord. Unbelief, well that's a polite religious sin. In fact, in some churches humility is a polite name for unbelief really. What they call humility is not taking God at His word.

Then we come to apostasy. Now we come to this terrible, willful, continuing to sin. And the writer here says certain things about this which are terribly serious. I don't think I'm going to try to amplify them too much, I'm just going to present them to you. Hebrews 10:26–31, I'll translate from the Greek.

> "For if we willingly continue sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth ..."

See, God deals with people differently according to whether they know the truth or not. I got away with a lot of things I did before I came to know the truth. I wouldn't dare to think that God would let me get away with them now.

> "If we continue sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there is no longer left a sacrifice for sins."

See, Jesus was the last sacrifice. If we don't avail ourselves of that and we continue sinning, after that there is no more sacrifice. It would be an insult to Jesus to suggest that there's anything more that anybody else can do than He did on the cross. The only thing that's remaining is:

> "... a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire about to devour the adversaries [those who turn against God, who resist God]. Anyone who set aside the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will the person be considered worthy who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has considered profane [that is not holy] the blood of the covenant after he has been sanctified [or by which he has been sanctified], and has insulted the Spirit of grace? "

That word insulted is a very strong word. I don't know whether anybody here knows any Greek but there's a Greek word ?hew-ber-ous?, which in classical Greek was the ultimate disaster. If you were guilty of ?hew-ber-ous? then fate was going to get you. Most classical tragedies are based on the man who commits ?hew-ber-ous? sin and the fates get him. It's really the essence of Greek tragedy. There is no stronger word in the Greek language for to be proud, arrogant, self-assertive and to flaunt the gods. I say gods because you understand Greek mythology acknowledged many gods. Verse 30:

> "For we know the one who said ..."

I just have to ask the question whether we really do know?

> "For we know the one who said, 'Vengeance belongs to Me, I will requite.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

I have no pleasure in continuing particularly to emphasize this but it seems to me that it's unreasonable to pass it by if it wasn't there.

Verses 26–27. I'll just read now from the New American Standard.

> "If we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries."

Just read my comment. Knowledge of the truth makes us doubly accountable. If we reject the mercy we have received through Christ, no other ground for mercy is left. This picture of judgment is drawn from Isaiah 26:11. Let's turn to that for a moment. I'm reading from the New American Standard.

> "O LORD, Thy hand is lifted up and yet they do not see it. They see Thy zeal for the people and are put to shame; indeed, fire will devour Thine enemies."

But I prefer the translation in the margin—some of you don't have a marginal version, but it says, "Let the fire for Thine

enemies devour them." God has a fire reserved to devour His enemies. That's what the writer of Hebrews is speaking about. "The fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries."

Going on in verses 28–29.

> "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean [the word really is profane] the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Rejecting Moses' Law brought death. But the person here is described as guilty of a far worse, threefold crime. We'll look at the crime in a minute but let's look at a passage which isn't in your outline. Deuteronomy 17:2–6.

> "If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the LORD your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, by transgressing His covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded ..."

Notice this is not every disobedience but this is the disobedience of worshiping other gods which was to be punished invariably by death. Incidentally, I want to say this, that's the same sin as being involved in the occult. That is the real nature of the occult, is other gods.

> "... and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. And behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel ..."

Notice how very careful God is. He says "make sure it really did happen." So often as Christians we hear something, we believe it, we start to report it but we never investigate it. Notice the care that God requires. Look in verse 4.

> "if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. And ... if it is true and the thing certain ..."

There's no doubt whatever, it really did happen, then take action. Most scandals in the church have never really happened. Somebody heard it and started to talk about it but it was never investigated. You notice how extremely careful God is. Don't start to do anything till you've established beyond any reasonable doubt that the crime actually was committed.

Verse 5:

> "... then you shall bring that man or that woman who has done this evil deed, to your gates [which is the place of judgment], that is, the man or woman, and you shall stone them to death. On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness."

I checked on that statement. If I remember rightly, that principle is stated nine times in the Bible both in the Old Testament and New. Again, how many times in church dealings we accept the testimony of one witness. It's totally unscriptural; we're not free to do that. Verse 7:

> "The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people."

Why do you think God said the hand of the witnesses are to be the first to throw the stones? Because if you bear a testimony against somebody, God requires you stand behind that testimony. It's not sufficient to say they did so and so, then they say you throw the first stone and you say, "Oh, no, I don't feel like throwing a stone." See how seriously God takes this?

Again, if this principle were followed in the church, we wouldn't have half the problems that we have. Failure to apply those principles there is the source of at least half church problems today.

The point we're saying now is if it is established under the Law of Moses that a person has done this thing, then when two or three witnesses are found, there's no option, he is to be put to death.

Now let's go back to our outline at the bottom of Page 10/3 and the top of Page 10/4. Rejecting Moses' Law brought death, but the person here described is guilty of a far worse threefold crime. These are the three things that the writer of Hebrews says such a person has done. Trampling on the Son of God. Desecrating the blood of the new covenant—after experiencing its sanctifying power. And insulting the Spirit of grace, who is the Holy Spirit. I have to say that's terrible language. To trample on the Son of God, to desecrate the blood of the new covenant—after experiencing its sanctifying power. Let's look there in verse 29. It says in the latter part of the verse:

> "... [he] has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified ..."

Lots of people have got theological theories but we have to fit them in with the scriptural facts. Here is a person who had actually been sanctified by the blood of the covenant and yet because of his subsequent conduct he's past hope.

I don't believe that applies to the ordinary backslider or the person who just struggles and never really gets victory. I think that applies to a person who, first of all, has put his faith in Christ and proclaimed that faith and then deliberately denies Jesus Christ. I don't think there is any way back for such a person. That's the way I understand it. Such a person has trampled on the Son of God, desecrated the blood of the new covenant and insulted the Spirit of grace.

I'd like to say in this connection that we all need to be tremendously careful how we treat the Holy Spirit. Let me say something also. As many of you know, I've been involved in helping to raise a pretty large family. All the members of our family at one time or another have had a definite experience with the Lord. I'm talking about my daughters. All of them were baptized in the Spirit, most of them before they were eight years old. Some of them later have had real spiritual problems. But none of them has ever denied their faith in Jesus. I have come to see that it's very, very important that I never questioned their faith.

See, I think there's an example there with Jesus and Peter. Jesus said to Peter, "You're going to deny me three times." Then He said, "But I've prayed for you. Not that you won't deny Me, there's no way to avoid that." What did He pray? That his faith wouldn't fail. So if you're sorely tested and under pressure and you've felt like giving up, my advice is, hang in there. Never go back on that one basic confession: Jesus Christ the Son of God has died on the cross for my sins and rose again. You see, there's such power in that, that as I said that I felt heaven's electricity go right through me. Let's be a little more simple- minded, let's keep proclaiming the fact that Jesus is the Son of God.

I was with a group of Christians that went up into Lebanon this past summer and we visited a Marionite monastery. We were entertained there, I would have to say, royally entertained, I'm not free to give the details of the entertainment but they were unusual. My fellow Christians, my kind of Christians, said, "Do you think these people are really born again?" Many of those people had actually risked their lives for their faith in Jesus facing the PLO. I said to them, "If you think that heaven is only for people who walk down the aisle of a certain kind of church, shaken the pastor by the hand and signed a card, there are not going to be many people in heaven. There wouldn't be anybody in heaven until the last century or this." The Bible says if anybody believes that Jesus is the Son of God, he's born of God. See? We've got such a myopic view of what it is to be a Christian.

I think there's a Scripture there, Matthew 12:31–32, that it would be good to look at.

> "Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come."

It's very, very solemn. Be very, very careful how you relate to the Holy Spirit. He's a dove, but He's a flame of fire, too. Why do you think that once you've insulted the Holy Spirit there is no way back? Now this is simply my opinion, but as I understand it, the Holy Spirit is the contact agent of the Godhead. We talk about coming to Jesus, and that's perfectly correct. But in actual fact, the first person you encounter is not Jesus, it's the Holy Spirit. I encountered the Holy Spirit months before I encountered Jesus, as I was telling you.

Interestingly enough, that's the way it is with the Jewish people. God is drawing them back to Himself. Everybody

thinks they ought to confess Jesus, but that's not even scriptural. God says He will pour out upon them the Spirit of grace. Then they will see the one whom they pierced. That's Zechariah 12:10, I think. At the moment, it's the Holy Spirit that they're encountering and it's very exciting to watch because they have no idea what's happening to them. Who would have imagined five years ago that I would be invited to speak at their synagogues? What's doing that? The Holy Spirit. They haven't met Jesus, but they're meeting the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the first one you meet and the last one you say good-bye to. And when you say good-bye to Him, that's it. People have said the most terrible things about the Lord Jesus Christ and been forgiven. But never about the Holy Spirit. It's a really solemn thought.

Going on, verses 30–31. I'm going to read from the New American Standard because I can go a little quicker that way.

> "For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

That's a quotation and I didn't put it in your outline, I should have done it. Keep your finger in Hebrews 10 and turn to Deuteronomy 32:35–36. God is speaking and He says:

> "Vengeance is Mine, and retribution ..."

We don't need to read the rest of that verse. At the beginning of the next verse:

> "For the LORD will vindicate His people ..."

But the Hebrew word is judge. So the Lord says, "I'm the one that takes vengeance. The time will come when I judge My people and I will execute vengeance for them." Remember in Romans Paul says "Don't revenge yourselves, vengeance belongs to the Lord." He'll do it.

Now, let's go back to my outline for a moment, verses 30–31 on Page 10/4. I've written something there which I think is tremendously important. To know God truly is to know and fear His vengeance. People who talk as though God would never punish don't know God. That's my conclusion. It's a totally unscriptural picture of God. God is love, but He's also a just God. He's a Savior, He's a Dove. Paul said in Romans, "Consider the kindness and the sternness of God." Never give people a coin with only one side, it's not a valid coin. Never present to people a picture of God which is all love and no judgment. You don't know God until you know His vengeance as well as His love.

We come to the fifth passage of practical application. Remember and endure. We can look perhaps at the first three verses of that passage, 32–34.

> "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one."

Going back to verse 32 for a moment. I think there's something a little tragic when we have to say as Christians "remember the former days." You know, some Christians are always talking about "the good old days." I want to be living in the good now days. And if we've always got to remember what it was like of old, I think there's something wrong with our spiritual condition. The writer of Hebrews reminds them of what they endured and I've just listed it there. Conflict, suffering, made a public spectacle, sharing the sufferings of others and seizure of property. What he's saying is, Don't suffer all that in vain. Remember how much it cost you. Don't throw it away.

Then he says "after you were enlightened, you endured a great conflict." I think that's an almost standard order. Enlightenment leads to conflict. It's wonderful when you get new truth, but how many of us are prepared to understand that it'll lead to conflict almost invariably?

I think of John the Revelator who was given a little book to eat. Do you remember what he said? It was a sweet as honey in my mouth and bitter in my stomach. That's new truth. Sweet when you eat it, but there's something bitter afterwards.

> "So why I'm saying this is, Don't be discouraged if you run into conflict. It's nearly always the way that the truth you've

apprehended is going to be tested. Have you really grasped it? It'll see you through the conflict. But if you've just got an intellectual appreciation of new truth, the conflict will show you that you haven't really grasped it. We could look at Acts 14:22 and then close for tonight. Acts 14:22, we have to read 21 as well."

After they had preached the gospel [that's Paul and Barnabas] to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."

So the fact that you run into tribulation may be a good indication that you're on your way into the kingdom of God. If you take a road that contains no tribulation, I believe the truth of the matter is it will not lead you into the kingdom of God. Every road that leads into the kingdom of God has tribulation along it.

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Sermon

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