

## Practical Implications of Our Position in Christ

### Hebrews 10:19-25

Today as we continue our study through Hebrews we are looking at 10:19-25. These verses form what is called an *inclusio* with 4:14-16. An *inclusio* is a kind of literary device that bookends the beginning and ending of a unit of material. Both the verses that we are looking at this morning and the verses in chapter 4 have many similar topics helping us understand that all of this material in between hangs together.

What has been the emphasis of this unit of material? It has focused on Jesus as our true high priest and His perfect sacrifice for our sin. Jesus' perfect, sufficient sacrifice is what the author reiterates in the first 18 verses of chapter 10.

As we come to our passage, there is a shift from exposition to exhortation. Verse 19 begins with, *therefore*, indicating that the author is ready to talk about some of the implications of all of this teaching about Jesus' priesthood and His sacrifice. His aim is to spur his readers on to action in light of what he has taught about Jesus. He will make three practical applications of our position in Christ. But before he gets to those practical implications, he offers, as a kind of summary, two statements about **our position in Christ**.

First, he says that **we have a right to enter God's presence**. Look at verse 19:

*<sup>19</sup> Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup> by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,*

*The holy place* is where God dwells. He says that we have confidence to enter that place. *Confidence* really means "openness." It is the idea of having "authorization" or "permission" and based on this permission, this right to enter, we have confidence to enter God's presence. This right to enter is not because of anything we've done; rather it is *by the blood of Jesus* that we have this right. His sacrifice on the cross is what has opened this access to God to us.

Last year a friend of mine who works for the RCPD had an extra sideline ticket for a K-State game and so he invited me to go with him. I've watched a lot of college football in my day, but never from the sideline and so I jumped at the chance. But I have to tell you, as we walked to our spot on the sideline in front of the student section, it felt like I was doing something I didn't have a right to do. I felt like I was some place I wasn't supposed to be. But the reality was that I did have the right to be there because I was with my friend who had legitimate sideline passes for us. I was authorized to be there, I had permission; not based on anything I had done, but based on my friend and the pass that He had.

What Jesus did for us on the cross is our "sideline pass" into God's presence. And based on that, we have a right to enter God's presence.

The author goes on in verse 20 to call this access to God *a new and living way which [Jesus] inaugurated [or opened] for us*. It is *new* in the sense that it had never been available until Jesus' death and resurrection. But it is also *new* in the sense that this way brought about in the New Covenant will never become old. And it is a *living way*, in the sense that it is the way that that leads to life.

This way the author says Jesus opened for us *through the veil*. Remember it was through a veil that the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Jesus opened the way into the very presence of God. *Through the veil* is parallel to entering the *holy place* (v. 19). Now, the final phase in verse 20, *that is, His flesh*, is probably best understood to mean that this new and living way was opened for us by means of *His flesh*. In other words, by the means of his obedient death on the cross Jesus opened the way through the veil. And so verses 19 and 20 are parallel. They speak of access; they speak of access to the very presence of God; and they speak of the way in which this access was gained – Christ sacrificial death. The point is that positionally in Christ, we have the right to enter God's presence.

The second positional truth is that **we have a great priest over us**. He says in verse 21:

<sup>21</sup> *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,*

This is another of the themes that the author has been spending so much time developing in the last several chapters. Jesus is our *great priest* and as such He is *over the house of God*, which is Church (cf. 3:6). Right now as Jesus serves in God's presence as a high priest, he is exercising his administration over the Church. The author personalizes this by saying, *we have a great priest*. Jesus is over the Hebrews as their *great priest*. We too should understand this to mean that for this community of faith here in Manhattan, KS, called Faith, Jesus is in charge as our *great priest*. He is our leader. We have a great priest over us.

These two positional truths about our relationship with God essentially sum up what the author has been talking about. And since these things are true, the author goes on to flesh out three **practical implications of our position in Christ**.

First, he says we should **draw near to God**. In verse 22, he writes:

<sup>22</sup> *let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

The writer has already given this command to *draw near* back in 4:16. We can do this because Jesus has secured the right for us to enter God's presence. *Draw near*, he says, *with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith*. A sincere heart is one full of trust and devotion. It is the opposite of the "evil, unbelieving heart" that turns away from God

that he talked about back in 3:12. We must not have that kind of heart, he says, but rather one that has *full assurance of faith*. A heart that has a confident conviction based on what Christ has done for us.

Now, when he says, *having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*, he is talking about why we can actually draw near. The imagery here of being *sprinkled clean* probably looks back to what he talked about in Hebrews 9:19. There it says that Moses took blood and sprinkled the people in the ratification of the Old Covenant. Based on the shed blood of Christ, our hearts are sprinkled clean so that we no longer have an *evil conscience*. The second phrase probably refers to baptism. But in speaking of baptism, he is pointing to the reality of an inward cleansing that the rite of water baptism symbolizes. The point is clear. For the believer everything has been done to make a bold approach to God possible. We can draw near to God because we have a relationship with Him. And that is exactly what we are commanded to do – *draw near*.

What does it mean to *draw near*? Back in 4:16, where we find the same command, it says that we can draw near to God through prayer. But there are other ways to draw near. Spending time in God's Word is another way. The Bible is God's communication to us. When we read it and reflect on it and apply it to our lives we are drawing near because we are putting ourselves in a place to hear from Him.

One of the equipping classes that we teach here at Faith is called the Habits of Maturing. In that class we look at some of the spiritual disciplines that Christians have found helpful down through the centuries to seek God. Things like solitude and silence, or worship and celebration, or service and many other such practices are things that believers have found helpful in opening their lives up to God and drawing near to Him. You can't be passive in drawing near to God. This is a command. It takes effort. The way is wide open because of what Christ has done, but you need to draw near. At the heart of a life of drawing near to God is pursuing a lifestyle of aligning myself with God and His ways. It is a life of choosing to walk with God and to obey Him.

As I've reflected on this idea of drawing near to God this week, I've thought about what would it look like if we truly were a church full of people drawing near to God? What would be the impact of that? One of my favorite little books is a book by Henri Nouwen called, *In the Name of Jesus*. He makes this statement:

The question is not: How many people take you seriously? How much are you going to accomplish? Can you show some results? But: Are you in love with Jesus? Perhaps another way of putting the question would be: Do you know the incarnate God? In our world of loneliness and despair, there is an enormous need for men and women who know the heart of God, a heart that forgives, that cares, that reaches out and wants to heal (24).

Draw near to God. It matters for your walk with God. Draw near to God. It matters for a lonely and despairing world.

Now, as we come to verse 23, the author gives the second command. He says we are to **hold fast to our hope**. He writes:

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

In Hebrews, *hope*, refers to the objective content of hope, rather than to the act of hoping. The content of our hope is the salvation that God has made possible through Christ – both our present and future salvation. It is that truth to which we are to *hold fast*. We are to remain firm in our confidence that God has saved us and that He will save us.

We are to do this *without wavering*. Be firm and stable in what you believe. The reason you can be so solid in holding fast to this hope points back to what Jesus has done. He has dealt with our sin. He has made it possible to enter God's presence. Jesus is our high priest. Our confidence is based on Him; not us. And so *hold fast*. The bottom line reason that we can do this is that God is completely reliable. *He who promised is faithful*. God does what He promises to do. This is the basis of an unwavering hope.

As we have discussed before, the author of Hebrews was concerned that the Hebrews were drifting from their commitment to Christ. They were being lured to return to seeking God through Judaism with all of its sacrifices and rituals. But again, the positional truth that the author has made so clear is that the way to God is through Christ and His sacrifice. Salvation is found only in Him; not in ritual and animal sacrifices. And so they needed to hold fast to their hope of salvation through Christ.

Do you have this unwavering hope of salvation? Everyone who trusts in Jesus' perfect sacrifice for his or her sin is forgiven and salvation is accomplished. We can have this certain hope because of the sacrifice of Christ and because of His priestly ministry. Our confidence rests not in our performance, not in living a perfect life, but in God's faithfulness. And so hold fast to that hope.

Draw near to God. And hold fast to your hope. Finally, as we come to verse 24, the author gives his final command. He says that we are to **consider how to spur others on to love and good deeds**. The first two commands were vertical commands – about our relationship with God. This one is horizontal – about our relationship with other believers. Verse 24:

*<sup>24</sup> and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> 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 drawing near.*

The word, *consider*, means to devote one's mind to something; to reflect on something. This is not just a random thing. We are to give intentional, careful thought to how we can *stimulate one another to love and good deeds*. The KJV translation, "provoke" does a great job of capturing the intensity of this word, *stimulate*. We are to provoke or spur on one another to live lives of love and of good deeds. We are to *encourage one another* to live lives characterized by these things.

Twice in these verses the author uses the expression *one another*. Sometimes people will talk about the 'one anothers' of Scripture, which refers to a mutual kind of ministry that we are all called to have in the lives of each other. These things are not just the responsibilities of the pastors or the leaders; this is a mutual responsibility that each of us have for one another. It is your responsibility.

How do we do this? There are probably a number of ways that this happens. I think that most often this happens through the words that we speak to each other. But as well, it can happen through the example of our lives. When I see the generosity, or the hospitality, or the acts of service of many of you, that example spurs me on to live the same way. So, both our words and the example of our lives can stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

But here's the deal, if we are going to be able to do this we need to be close enough to one another relationally that we can consider how to encourage one another. That's why he says *not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some*. There were some of the Hebrews that were abandoning gathering together with other believers. He doesn't say why. It is possible that for some it was because of the opposition that they were facing. But the way he says that it was *the habit of some* suggests that it very well could have been simple apathy that caused some to forsake gathering with other believers. His point is that to not assemble together is a bad thing because it is when we assemble together that this ministry of spurring on and encouraging one another happens.

And so gathering together provides the context that lets us get close enough relationally to have this kind of ministry in each other's lives. One of our core values as a church is authentic community. We believe that we need to be connecting in a deeper way with at least some others so that this mutual, 'one another,' kind of ministry can take place. This is one of the reasons that we put so much emphasis on Life Groups. They provide a way for us to regularly meet with one another so that we can have this kind of ministry in each other's lives.

I have no doubt that this can happen on Sunday mornings when we gather; it should happen on Sunday mornings. But the reality is that for the most part, Sundays aren't structured to spend a lot of time getting to know each other. It can be hard in our Sunday gatherings to have the type of interaction that helps us consider how to encourage someone else.

Here's the question that I think we need to ask ourselves, "Am I regularly gathering with other Christians in such a way that I'm genuinely getting to know them and they are getting to know me such that we are having the mutual ministry of spurring on and encouraging?" If not, it is possible that you are doing the very thing that the author is concerned about. You are forsaking assembling together. Let me encourage you to when the next sign up time for Life Groups take place in January, sign up for one and see what God might do through that.

Now, let me make one other point of application before we close. Let me encourage you to think about praying this prayer as you are showing up to any gathering of Christians, whether that's a Sunday morning worship time or a Life Group or whatever it is. Pray this: "Lord, use me to encourage someone during this time." Make it more your intentional purpose to actually do what the author commands here.

Draw near to God. Hold fast to your hope. And make it your aim to stimulate others to love and good deed. That's what he commands. These are things that the author of Hebrews knows will help the Hebrews to press on with endurance in their walk with God. These are things that will help them not give up.

The same it true for us. If we will draw near to God, and if we will cling to our certain hope, and if we will be in places where we are mutually encouraging one another, we will be better able to live with endurance when things are hard. But here's the deal, these things are not just about what we are to do when things are hard, these are things that we are to do to thrive in our walks with God. These are things that we can do, that we must do, to cooperate with God that our lives would grow and be transformed.

Amen.