

The Heart of Biblical Religion

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

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

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:19-25)

Maybe you know someone who likes to say, "I am not religious, but I am a very spiritual person". Usually such a person means something like, "I don't like organised religion, but I know there is more to life than just physical existence."

Religion has gotten a bad reputation, and often for good reason. Religion, broadly considered has produced many violent and blood-filled wars. Religion has produced barbaric customs of human sacrifice, or acts of torture and mutilation. Religion has produced terrible pride, terrifying corruption, and awful persecution of one people by another. And it's tempting to say something like "Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship". I know what people mean when they say that, and the contrast between personal, living faith as opposed to mere externals is important. The English word religion comes from an old word meaning "piety, devotion; respect for what is sacred, reverence for the gods; conscientiousness, sense of right, moral obligation; fear of the gods; divine service, religious". In fact, James 1:27 speaks of "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father (Jas. 1:27)

Now in the end, if religion means worship of God and the conduct that comes from it, then there is ultimately a true religion, and all others are false. Some are more false than others, but there is one that is true.

In some ways, the whole book of Hebrews is concerned with the question of the true faith, the true religion. The reason why he has to argue like he does is not because Israel had been a bunch of idolaters, but precisely because the true religion was committed to the Hebrew people. Of all the nations on Earth, Israel was blessed with the clearest revelation of the true God. Israel was blessed to be the vessel through which the Bible was written. Israel was blessed to be the vessel through which the God-Man, the Messiah would come.

But the problem with Israel by the time of Jesus was that their religion had gotten off course. They still worshipped one true God, but their hearts were going cold. Jesus said of the Pharisees: "Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with *their* lips, But their heart is far from Me. 9 And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'" (Matt. 15:7-9)" Judaism had devolved into the idolatry of Jewishness, the worship of the Law. Its customs had become ends rather than means, and the heart of biblical religion was being lost.

So much so, that even when the Messiah had come, Israel couldn't see, and kept up the old customs, and traditions. Messiah had come and fulfilled all of Moses, but they remained under Moses. Messiah had come and fulfilled all of Aaron and Levi, but they still wanted Aaron and Levi. For ten chapters, he has proved to us that Yeshua is the Finisher of the true faith. Yeshua is the fulfillment of biblical religion. He is the true Chosen One of the true, ancient faith, the true biblical religion.

But now, once you agree with that, what does the true religion do? What does the true faith do? Chapters 10 through 13 flesh that out. These verses, 19-25, are a concise summary of what true

biblical religion looks like, what true faith, true love for God, true worship does.

Now belief must turn into behaviour. Your position in Him must now translate into practice. Your doctrine must now become a duty, your faith must now work. Verses 19 to 25 gives us the three calls of biblical religion, seen in the three “Let Us” statements.

If we have found the true Messiah, then

I. Let Us Commune With God

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb. 10:22)

The first invitation is simply, “let us draw near”. These are the words Hebrews uses to mean to enter the Presence of God. There is an initial time you do that, when you come to God for salvation, and then there is a continual coming to Him to worship Him. Chapter 4:16 says Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace.

This is the great goal of the true faith of the Bible: to draw near to the true God so as to love Him and glorify Him. In Eden, He drew near to us, and we to Him, and we communed in the cool of the day. But when we sinned, we were cast out, and now there were barriers to fellowship. And even when God said to Israel “I will dwell among them”, the Tabernacle had a barrier of linen, and then blood sacrifices and a laver, and then another enclosure, and within that enclosure another barrier.

But this is what verses 19 and 20 tell us we can do.

19 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, (Heb. 10:19-20)

Jesus consecrated or inaugurated a new and living way into the true Holy of Holies, the very Presence of God. His death gives us not so much a subjective confidence, but an objective confidence: the defilement that kept us out has been dealt with.

What is this new and living way? The word new actually means “freshly slain”, while living speaks of His resurrection. His death and resurrection is the way. It is the Gospel, the way, truth and the life and the only way to the Father.

In the Tabernacle, the veil was what kept you from the inner Presence of God. But here we read that the flesh, the Incarnation of Jesus is the veil. How could that be? In the Tabernacle, the veil had two sides: a side that faced men, where the priests operated, and a side that faced God: the Shekhinah glory of God in the Most Holy. In His Incarnation, Jesus is fully God and fully man, two natures which are completely and fully human and deity, but yet united in one Person. When He was torn for us on the Cross, as the physical veil was torn, He became the access, the opened way to the direct presence of God.

Eph 2:18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Eph 3:12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.

Not only has He opened the way, but He is on the other side. 21 and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, (Heb. 10:21) He is the High Priest in the true tabernacle, in the Holiest, waiting for us, interceding for us, calling us to come.

Now with all this, what should we do? We should draw near. From God's side, He is not angry with us. He has opened the way.

Now he tells us how to draw near. These two phrases are very important because they tell us how to worship, and indirectly, they tell us why we don't. Think about it: you know these New Testament truths. You know you can approach. You know the way is open and that you need not present a sacrifice. You know that your sins are fully dealt with in Christ. You know all this. But you still find yourself avoiding prayer. You procrastinate on purpose until there is no time to read the Word. You find work or health reasons to not attend a service, to not go before God. Why?

Here are the two reasons we don't draw near. The one is guilt. Whatever may be the objective realities about your position in Christ, about your forgiveness, if your conscience does not know and feel those as true, it may as well be untrue. Your conscience is the living witness that mediates between you and moral realities. If your conscience is relying on your works, or if it is driven by perfectionism, or if it has failed to turn full forgiveness into present-tense confession, then guilt dominates the conscience. And guilt in the conscience always has the same result: avoiding God, drawing back from God. When your heart condemns you, you do not want to go where the conviction will grow even stronger. Guilty people hide. Look at Adam and Eve in the Garden. Look at Cain skulking away from God. Look at the brothers of Joseph terrified to approach him. Look at David avoiding God after his sin.

From our side, verse 22 describes our state: our hearts are sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies are washed with pure water. That sense of lingering guilt in the conscience is removed by the sprinkling of the blood of the new covenant as we saw in chapter 9, and our bodies are washed with pure water. That phrase might be referring to baptism, since it is the answer of a good conscience to God. Likely he is simply referencing the sprinkling and washing of the old now having taken place in a full New Testament sense. We are forgiven and clean, and fit to approach.

So the writer tells us to draw near in full assurance of faith. That means, you have to trust that the finished work of Christ, and believe there is nothing lacking. Your faith, your confidence that God accepts you in Christ can be full and certain, and bold, not because of you, but because of Him. This is what it means to pray in Jesus' name, to come to God through Him. Place your weight entirely upon the merits of Christ.

But there is a second thing that keeps us from drawing near. It's what Scripture calls double-mindedness. Double-mindedness is when you are hovering between two opinions, seeing if you can hold on to two masters. You want the world, but you also want Heaven. You want to serve God, but you also want to serve self. You want to trust Him, but you also want to be in control. You want holiness, but you also want the flesh. In fact, you can do this, even when you go through the motions of coming to church, or doing your devotions.

Therefore the Lord said: "Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me, And their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, (Isa. 29:13)

If you are still deciding if God is to be the treasure of your heart, then you are not wholehearted. Your heart is divided, and so your worship will be lukewarm and dull.

So this is why the writer tells us to draw near with a true heart. This means trustworthy, sincere, honest. A heart that is not playing games. A heart that is not using this as a means to some other end: to feel happier, to have good luck, to keep my family together, to feel religious, to appear

devout. That's not a true heart. It's thinking you can come to God with ulterior motives and somehow you'll hide it, slip it past Him, steal the treasure and hide it under your tent. In the Book of Common Prayer, one of the prayers, taken from an 11th century prayer says "Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen."

What's keeping you from drawing near? Some combination of guilt and double-mindedness. Deal with the guilt with the finished sacrifice of Christ. Deal with the double-mindedness by deciding He is the ultimate treasure, and He can see all, there is no point in faking anything. As Elijah said to Israel, "How long will you falter between two opinions? If Yahweh be God then follow Him." If the world is your god, then follow it! If money is your god, then pursue it! If fame is your god, then follow hard after it! If the Lord is God, then why do you keep looking back?

Draw near with a true heart, and with full assurance of faith.

But the second great application of the book of Hebrews is what we do when we are in the faith, having drawn near for salvation. If we have found the true Messiah, then

II. Let Us Continue in the Faith

Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. (Heb. 10:23)

Since we have this new and living way in to the Holiest, and since we have this High Priest, Hold fast, faithfully retain, perseveringly grip what you have confessed to be your hope. You have claimed that Jesus is your Lord and Saviour. You have made that confession privately and publicly. Now, don't waver. Hold it without wavering. That means, without bending to the side. Without compromising the truth, without fudging on the exclusivity, maintain the same confession your whole life long.

We've seen this often in Hebrews.

Heb 3:6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

Heb 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Heb 4:14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

The reason is simple: if Jesus is the Final priest, the final prophet, the final king, you cannot truly come to Him, and then go to someone else after Him! No, if you have truly come to know the Final Priest, then He is where you finally settle and finally rest. If you have a living connection with the living Christ, then you have a living faith that cannot die. You hold fast.

If He is Finisher of the faith, the completion of the faith, then it would be contradictory to have partial, incomplete believers. He is the Author and the Finisher of the faith. If you are a Christian, you will finish. Why? Because He is the finisher, and will sustain your faith.

Notice the reason, or the ground of our faithfulness is given here: for He who promised is faithful. The Promise-Maker, the Covenant-Cutter is absolutely trustworthy, 100% truthful, and utterly reliable. What did He promise?

1Co 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

1Th 5:24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

2Th 3:3 But the Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.

He will faithfully sustain your faithfulness. He began the work, He completed the work, He has perfected us forever, He has saved us to the uttermost, and with that being the reality, the human responsibility is to endure to the end.

We commune with God. We continue in the faith. If we have found the true Messiah,

III. Let Us Consider Each Other's Faith

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,
25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:24-25)

Since we have this High Priest, and since we have this new and living way into God's presence, let us consider one another. That's literally, let us take note of one another. Let us be aware of each other. Notice the order: you love God, and you endure, but immediately that enduring love for God take on a horizontal dimension.

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God *must* love his brother also. (1 Jn. 4:20-21)

If we are truly drawing near to God, we will not be able to remain committed to ourselves. *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

If you are drawing near to God, then you will be drawing near to believers. What will you seek to do?

“In order to stir up love and good works”.

A worshipping Christian becomes a discipling Christian. When you love God, you begin to love what He loves. That means you are not committed to your own Christian life, or to your own enjoyment of preaching, or to your own private study of theology. You become committed to this body. You desire that others in this body be stirred up, be urged on to greater love for God and others, and greater good works – holiness, Christlikeness.

This word stir up has the idea of rousing, provoking, inciting to a fever pitch. That shows us that fellow Christians are often spiritually slumbering, spiritually dull, needing incitement. It shows that what we need is a true zeal that comes out of our drawing near to God, out of our perseverance, we then want to see others provoked to loving God, loving the body, serving God, serving others. Love and good works.

There's a real problem with “mind your own business” Christianity. Sure, we are respect each other's normal privacy. But the normal Christian life is one in which I am involved in the body, and the body knows me, and can help and admonish and stir up. If you deliberately keep the church at arm's length, the only thing you really protect is your pride, and your pride needs no defending.

He tells us both the negative and positive of considering each other's faith.

First, here's how not to do it.

25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some,

Don't abandon, don't desert the times of assembly. In fact, this word for assembly is *episunagohgein*, a verb form of *synagogue*. It is the public, corporate gathering times of the church, on the Lord's Day, or any other day that the church agrees to meet on. To deliberately neglect or skip those times is to not consider one another.

Do you realise that your most basic form of service to this church is attendance? And do you know what it does to others when you are not here? Do you know the encouragement of simply being here? Do you know what kind of example you set for the children when you are present in Sunday School? Do you know what they think when they see you never coming? Just your presence sets an example or your absence does the opposite.

Beyond that, the only way you can stir others up to love and good works is if you actually arrive, and very importantly, stay long enough afterwards to engage in stirring others up to love and good works. Some of you leave so quickly that even a high definition slow-motion camera wouldn't be able to capture your departure. A 1000 frame a second camera would see you open your eyes after the closing prayer, and the next frame, you're gone – the gift of teleportation from the auditorium to your car.

How can you encourage if you are seldom here, or here a third of the time, or have some random attendance pattern? One of the marks of true Christian maturity is a genuine otherness. The immature are chronically selfish and self-centred. But those who truly draw near become genuinely interested in the spiritual wellbeing of others.

Rom 15:1-2 We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

Instead of abandoning and withdrawing, our text says we should rather be exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. (Heb. 10:25)

Encouraging each other, and encouraging each other again, even as the day of the Lord's return hastens near. Remember back in 3:13, we read:

Heb 3:13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Ask yourself, after I have been to corporate worship, was the effect I had on others, to encourage? Because of me, did someone leave with a little more faith, a little more endurance, some more hope, a renewed will, a strengthened commitment, a desire for more godliness and less worldliness? Or did I actually drain and discourage God's people. I remember a sermon by Dr. Charles Kean many years ago and he said that in church he had observed VUPs, VTPs, VNPs, VDPs, and VWPs. VUPs are Very Useful People. VTPs are Very Teachable People. VNPs are Very Nice People. VDPs are Very Draining People. And VWPs are Very Wicked People. Churches filled with the last three categories just eventually collapse under their own weight. Churches filled with useful and teachable people are busy exhorting one another and so much the more. Every Lord's Day is one less opportunity I have to encourage, to make a difference to the body, to prove I am not committed to myself, but to Christ's body.

We come to commune. We continue to confess. We consider how to encourage.

Now it is not too much to say: Jesus died for you to do these three: to draw near in worship, to endure in the faith, and to provoke the brethren to love and good works. If you don't worship, or endure, or disciple, you're missing the point of why God sent His Son. He sent His Son to open the way, not so we could admire it from a distance, but so we could enter, and abide, and then invite and encourage others.

A.W. Tozer said, “Whatever else it embraces, true Christian experience must always include a genuine encounter with God. Without this, religion is but a shadow, a reflection of reality, a cheap copy of an original once enjoyed by someone else of whom we have heard. It cannot but be a major tragedy in the life of any man to live in a church from childhood to old age and know nothing more real than some synthetic god compounded of theology and logic, but having no eyes to see, no ears to hear, and no heart to love.”