

Introduction

Today we are going to consider the duty, or better, the privilege of drawing near that is central in our text, Hebrews 10.19-22: ¹⁹ **Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,** ²⁰ **by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,** ²¹ **and since we have a great priest over the house of God,** ²² **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**

To understand this privilege, we will cover what it means to draw near and the basis of drawing near.

1A. What does it mean to draw near?

To draw near means to seek holiness, promote one another's love, and to converse with God.

1B. It means to seek holiness

The opening word of Hebrews 10.19, **therefore**, could be written with capital letters and put in bold print because it is a linchpin between the two major sections of the book. There are many "therefores" before this one and many that come after it, but this one, so to speak, does double duty: a regular function and a transitional function. It has the *regular function* of introducing a conclusion within the unfolding paragraphs of the letter (in this sense, it is one of 21 occurrences; 13 before 10.19 and 7 after 10.19). It also has the *transitional function* of introducing all the remaining conclusions of the letter to the Hebrews. The remaining conclusions make up the application section of the book.

Our text for today (Heb. 10.19-22), gives the first application, to draw near: ¹⁹ **Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,** ²⁰ **by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,** ²¹ **and since we have a great priest over the house of God,** ²² **let us draw near ...**(Heb. 10.19-22). Typically, for our author, this is not something totally new; he has already given this exhortation in 4.16: **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.** The parallel shows that he exhorts us in 10.22 to draw near to the throne, to Christ, and to the Father.

This linchpin "therefore"(10.19) shows us that the previous paragraph opens the door to this application and to all the applications yet to come. In the previous paragraph, we have a discussion of the sanctifying effectiveness of the sacrifice of Christ. Attention to sanctification is an appropriate way to open the door to the details of the sanctified life that we find in the rest of the book (from 10.19 to 13.25). The author tells us that our sanctification is an accomplished fact and a present reality (**we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified, 10.10, 14**).

Understandably then, we encounter matters of holiness in the application section now before us in Hebrews 10.19-22: ¹⁹ **...enter the holy places...** ²⁰ **by the new and living way ...** ²² **with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.** A point to remember as we go forward in the book of Hebrews is that everything yet to come in the book comes under the umbrella of sanctification. Therefore, as a first step, drawing near is a vital part of the process of sanctification. The duty is to draw near to God who is "holy, holy, holy." What a privilege this is! Despite the fact that in ourselves there is no good thing, that we are defiled, and unholy, our Lord encourages us to come to Him. We are to draw near by a new way with the awareness that

we have been washed and that therefore we come to Him sparkling clean. We have many needs, especially spiritual needs. We need spiritual strength to overcome our weaknesses, and He bids us come into the holy of holies to receive grace and mercy to help in time of need. Thus, because we are washed, clean, perfected, sanctified, then the recognition of our failures has nothing to do with judgment. It is not for fearful exposure that we enter the holy places. It is only for progress; we come seeking holiness. That is one part of drawing near.

2B. To draw near means to promote one another's love

(¹⁹ Therefore, **brothers...we have... let us** draw near). The use of the term brothers is endearing and speaks to the warm family bond of brothers and sisters bound to Christ as His covenant family: ¹¹ **For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin [are all one]. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,** [and sisters in the congregation] ¹² **saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise"** (Heb. 2.11-12).

That he speaks to "brothers, sisters, we, and us" shows that this duty includes the preacher with the family listening to preaching (the writer with the family reading his sermon). Thus, there is a corporate church family dimension to drawing near. It includes the one anothering principle. Therefore, drawing near to God in pursuit of holiness is not something that the Christian does on his own without contact with and interaction with the preacher and the other family members, as is clear in Hebrews 10.24-25: ²⁴ **And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,** ²⁵ **not neglecting to meet together,** as is the habit of some, but **encouraging one another,** and **all the more** as you see the Day drawing near). We discussed this principle to some degree when we covered what it means to go beyond regarding the laying on of hands in the ordination of pastors (Heb. 6.1-2). So let us briefly consider how we go beyond the elements of pastoral ordination.

In a word, conversation on Scripture with one another and with the pastor is on the top of the list for going beyond a mere sketchy understanding of the laying on of hands. You help me transcend my ordination by the laying on of hands in practical ways when you share your needs with me for prayer, seek my counsel, converse with me on the Scriptures, use me as a resource. These things prompt me forward in fulfilling my calling with joy, and this is for your advantage, as Hebrews 13.17 tells us (**Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you**).

Who then are the people who are so fit and strong, so advanced in holiness that they do not need the one anothering (brother, sister, pastor one anothering) of the church for themselves? Who are the members of the body that are so strong in holiness that they will not give of themselves to assist others in need of one anothering love? By God's ordination, nothing can take the place of the church family. Without it, you lack the support, the staying power, and the spur that comes to each member from healthy interaction. You cannot neglect the corporate family framework of sanctification and expect growth in holiness instead of stagnation and coldness of heart. Even more significantly, *you do not (you cannot) draw near to God in the holy places without seeking holiness by means of God-appointed family mutuality*. You operate at cross purposes with nearness to God if you try to approach Him without or in neglect of brother, sister, pastor one anothering. Nearness to God goes hand in hand with nearness to His family.

3B. To draw near means to converse with God

(¹⁹ Therefore, **brothers...we have... let us** draw **near**). There is a remarkable contrast to the distance from God projected by the OT rituals. The preacher uses the language of the old structure that allowed only the high priest to enter into God's presence and only once a year. Coming into the holy places is an act of worship in which we approach God in His very presence. This is distinct from the fact that He is present everywhere: as the Psalmist tells us, ⁵ **You hem me in, behind and**

before, and lay your hand upon me. ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. ⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. ¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well (Ps. 139.5-14). To be sure, we can never escape His presence and that fact is marvelous good news because **You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me** (139.5). No matter how fast I may travel **on the wings of the morning**, no matter how far I may go out to **the uttermost parts of the sea**, God is there, not to smash me with His fist, but to hold on to me and hold me up: **even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me** (139.10).

How then can we enter His presence? How can we draw near to Him when we are never away from Him? To enter His presence is to establish a line of communication; it means to enter into conversation with God in which He listens to what we have to say: we have His ear; He attends to our needs; we need to talk things over with Him. Also, He communicates with us through His word preached by His servants and applied by His Spirit. We can gain some perspective on this point by further reflection on God's call. In our sinfulness, we strayed like wandering sheep; we left our father like a prodigal to go and do our own thing in a far country. But we never left God's presence, we merely went our way suppressing the truth we knew of Him. We went about our business not noticing God. But then in saving grace, He called out to us, got our attention and introduced Himself to us. He was always there but we had to meet Him. That could only take place when He drew us to Himself by revealing Himself and establishing a line of communication with us. Now we know God and we cannot "unmeet" Him. Nevertheless, because our journey is not yet complete, we must direct our attention and focus all our thoughts for conversation with God. We must establish a line of communication by calling out to God to get His attention and to reveal our deepest needs to Him.

Distilled to the simplest terms, drawing near refers to prayer and study of Scripture. Of course, it means to pray to God and to hear from Him. But there is more to it than what first meets the eye. We need things from Him, of course. And He bids us come to His throne to receive grace and mercy to help in our times of need. Although we are so needful and this is such a reassuring word, there is a greater need, perhaps our greatest need staring us in the eyes. We need communication with God. We need fellowship. We need conversation in which we earnestly, openly, candidly, and lovingly pour out our souls to the Lord and carefully listen for His word of comfort. Drawing near, in pursuit of holiness and in the context of family love, means that we wrestle with the Lord as did Jacob saying, **I will not let you go unless you bless me** (Gen. 32.26). If we draw near like Jacob did at Peniel, then we will be people who strive with God and with men. Striving after holiness and striving after one another in love go hand in hand with striving after God. To draw near is to seek holiness with the family in conversation with God.

2A. What is the basis of drawing near?

Sometimes our fellowship with God and with others becomes out of joint. There are times when it is difficult to concentrate in meditation and prayer because we are in some way out of joint. Recall, that the Lord touched Jacob's hip socket and put it **out of joint** (Gen. 32.25). But Jacob persisted and God blessed him with a new name, Israel. His new name means "God strives." Thus, there is a dual message here: you find God's blessing by striving persistently in prayer wrestling with the Lord for His blessing, and you find God's blessing because He strives with you to work out His plan and manifest His blessing. If we limp, if we are out of joint and

out of sorts at times; that is not because we have failed; it is evidence of God's working His victory in us. Sometimes, you may limp into God's presence for conversation and limp away as well. Your very limping, with things all out of joint, is included in the process of your sanctification. Thus, whether you are "all out of joint" or not all out of joint, draw near to God in the most holy place and do so in pursuit of holiness in a context of one another's family love.

How can we do this? On what basis can we enter the most holy place? He gives us two reasons. We are to draw near because we have confidence and because we have a great high priest.

1) Because we have confidence to enter the holy places

The writer says, **since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...let us draw near (10.19-22).**

You will not enter into conversation with God unless you have confidence to do so. We gain confidence by consideration of the how Jesus opened the way for us as our forerunner. Our confidence is not self-confidence; it is confidence in the work of Christ. Confidence comes from knowing certain things. It comes from knowing that the blood of Jesus, His flesh, is the offering that opened a new and living way of direct access to God. The tearing of the curtain at the time of the crucifixion signifies His flesh. His very body placed on the altar of sacrifice is the work of Christ that opened the way to God. In the old way of worship, sin remained and the entire system revealed that barriers, as pictured by this curtain, block entry into God's presence. Now there is a new way because it is open to all (not just to the high priest and that once a year). It is a new and better way because it is a living way, which means that it is ever new and eternal because the access was secured by the priest after the order of Melchizedek who has the power of an indestructible life. Because of His resurrection, we know that His offering brings us through the second curtain reeking with the sweet smelling aroma of God's acceptance and delight.

So, because we have this confidence in the work of Christ, let us draw near to God with one another's love in the earnest pursuit of holiness.

2) Because we have a great high priest over the house of God

The second reason/encouragement comes from meditation on the greatness of Christ in His role of high priest. What does it mean to say that **he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him (7.25a)**? To save "to the uttermost" has, as we noted before, an ambivalence that enriches the idea here because it combines the two ideas of "for all time" with "completeness" (Hughes, *Hebrews*, 269). Thus, our Lord's saving ability is complete and total covering all time, all circumstances, and all needs. Accordingly, we know that Jesus is our perfect Savior. Jesus is a perfect Savior because He is a priest that lives forever ("**The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, 'You are a priest forever'**" (7.20); : ²³ **The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, ²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever (7.23-24).**), because He is sufficient for the priestly task (**For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens (7.26), and because He is the priestly offering. He is a priest that supplies what we need. It is fitting (needful; appropriate to our need) to have such a high priest who is holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself (7.26-27).**

Because Jesus is our great high priest, because of His greatness and perfection, and because of His holiness in obedience to God, let us draw near together in pursuit of holiness.

Conclusion

Therefore, we have the duty, yes, and the privilege to draw near to God through Jesus Christ our Lord. If you see Him, if you see His perfection, then you will desire Him and draw near to God through Him. He calls us to a nearness of fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 Jn. 1.3; 2 Cor. 13.14). He calls us to the privilege of the communion of the Spirit and the communion of the saints. We have access, and more than that, we have fellowship, friendship, and conversation. We have the blessing of a personal relationship with God. Since He draws near to us despite our sinfulness, then how much more ought we to draw near to Him because of His holiness! So, seek holiness with family one another in close conversation with God.

Let us fall down before the majesty of the Lord Jesus, God the Son who as our forerunner into the holy places accomplished our redemption. May the Spirit give us confidence to enter the most holy place in the Father's presence and may He teach us to grasp more and more of what it means to have Jesus as our great high priest in the things of God, to grasp that He continues a priest forever in the power of an indestructible life. To the triune God be all glory, now and forevermore, amen.