

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.

Introduction

Today we return to the book of Hebrews and to the general theme of drawing near to God, which is the central exhortation in 10.22. In our last study, we discussed the privilege of drawing near based on 10.19-22. Today, we will cover the manner of drawing near that the writer outlines for us in a series of phrases in 10.22: **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.**

Before we take up the phrases in 10.22 we will do well to review the context (vs. 19-21) by answering the question: what does it mean to draw near? To draw near means to enter the presence of God in the holy places (v. 19). It means to enter for conversation, seeking holiness (sanctification), and doing so with the Christian family of brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Distilled to the simplest terms, drawing near refers to prayer and the 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 of grace and mercy, there is a greater need, perhaps our greatest need staring us in the face. 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 meditate on His word of comfort and direction. To draw near is to seek holiness with the family in conversation with God.

We have the blessing and privilege of a personal relationship with God. Since He welcomes us in His presence despite our sinfulness, then how much more ought we to draw near to Him because of His holiness. Perhaps, we should add: how much more ought we to draw near to Him because of His welcoming, loving, and forgiving holiness.

So we can do this; we have the privilege of entry, but there is more to the story than privilege, there is also responsibility. We are responsible to draw near *in a manner that befits conversation with God*. This brings us back to the phrases in 10.22: **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.** Two things stand out and call for explanation: sincerity and assured faith.

1A. Sincerity

We have some more of the writer's tight and compact way of saying much within brief compass when he says: **draw near with a true heart.**

It is interesting that he speaks of "a true heart." It is easy to describe the heart as clean, thoughtful, affectionate, or kind as in kind-hearted. But it is not so easy to understand the description of "true" in relation to "heart." Moreover, the true heart connects with faith of a fully assured kind.

We have to wonder about putting true here in connection with heart. It helps us understand if we reflect on the opposite of true, false or the false heart. A false heart is insincere. The opposite of a true heart is a form of hypocrisy, but a unique kind. We usually think of hypocrisy as pretence, pretending to be something in the eyes of men that you know is not the real you. But the false heart is definitely not outward; it is not what people see and perhaps applaud being misled. It is not seeking the praises of men for their applause in a fake and exaggerated piety. The writer is not speaking to out and out Pharisaical hypocrites. He is speaking to the Christian community. He is inviting and welcoming Christians to come into the holy of holies. He tells them (and us) to come responsibly.

Whatever the “hypocrisy” may be that we are to avoid, it is not what we usually think of as hypocrisy. The false heart is not something that any other human beings can see, no more than they can see the true heart. This is a very personal and private matter. It is a direct, personal, and private matter of relationship to God. We are to come to God with sincerity and not pretence before Him, in relationship to Him, in relationship to the one with whom we have to do and to whom all things are naked and exposed. There is no “cover up” here; those who draw near know it.

Thus, the true heart is the sincere heart or pure heart that Jesus speaks of in the Sermon on the Mount (**Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God**, Mat. 5.8). The Lord bids us to draw near to Him in the holy place seeking holiness. We are to do that sincerely; that is, open to the exposure of what we truly are deep down. Prayer involves pouring out your heart and soul to the Lord. In the holy of holies, you come with a true heart when you come openly for examination by the pure light that reveals every sin and imperfection. Drawing near to God is a conversation in which you open your soul to Him, to His word, and to His authority over your thoughts, words, and deeds. That is how you receive the blessing of seeing God.

Now let us put this into a broader context. In the OT, the Lord told Moses that "man shall not see me and live" (Ex. 33:20). The context in Exodus has to do with the giving and re-giving of the Ten Commandments. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is about to re-give the Ten Commandments in their new covenant form and He says, “**Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.**” What is the vision of God? What does it mean for those with true hearts to see God? It is to come into the presence of God, to know Him and see His glory and goodness, both now in the present and in the not yet of the eternal future. It means to enter into His presence, to see Him, to see His perfect righteousness, and to face the burning wrath of God that can only bring death to those with whom God is angry every day. Yet the hand of God protected Moses in the cleft of the rock. Thus, the true-hearted present themselves to God for full exposure. Likewise, Jesus says that those who come to Him with a true heart "shall see God." He is telling us that those who acknowledge their sins, their failures, and their utter need of Him are in the cleft of the rock. They see God and live. God’s hand covers and protects them there.

2A. Assured Faith

We have one more aspect to this phrase: draw near with a true heart **in full assurance of faith**. “Full assurance of faith” gives us something more about drawing near to God with a true heart. Trueness of heart and fullness of faith must interrelate. We find our clue to this “something more” in the nature of faith.

1B. Commitment

Faith has three ingredients: knowledge, assent, and commitment. To believe something you must have knowledge of it and you must assent to its truthfulness. There is both knowledge and acknowledgement in faith. But we should note that someone could believe in Jesus, in His miracle working and even His sonship to God without having saving faith. For example, the devils believe and tremble, James tells us (2.19, **You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder!**). Many people believed in the Lord Jesus, according to John, but Jesus would not commit himself to them because He knew their hearts (Jn.2.23-25).

What then makes for saving faith versus faith that is not saving? The difference is in the disposition of the heart; it is the third ingredient, commitment. That is what is missing in non-saving faith. Thus, to draw near to God, to converse with God directly, to personally seek holiness in His holy presence with a true heart means that *you come committing yourself to God and to holiness of life before Him*. You come entrusting yourself to Him; you give yourself away to Him; you offer your body as a living sacrifice that is holy and acceptable to Him.

2B. Knowledge

But how can we come into God’s presence and commit ourselves to a life of holiness before Him? That is, how can we do this in the full assurance of faith?

1) We need knowledge of Christ and His work

This overlaps with the discussion of confidence. We have *confidence* to enter the heavenly sanctuary into the presence of perfect holiness because we have a great high priest who is our mediator before God. He opened the new and living way by sacrificing His own body and blood on our behalf and in our place (¹⁹ ...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, let us draw near). This is an astounding privilege and thankfully we have a basis for it in Christ; otherwise, drawing near to God would expose our sins in an unbearable way and we would have no confidence but only fear.

All that we learn in the book of Hebrews about the person of Christ as God incarnate, as the Son, and as our great high priest after the order of Melchizedek deepens our confidence and assures us of the new and living way into the most holy places. For example, consider the end of chapter 4 again: 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. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 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 (14-16). We need to absorb the truths in this text, namely, Jesus is a priest, a high priest, a great high priest because of His resurrection-ascension on one hand (high and lifted up) and because of His humiliation on the other (tempted as we are yet without sin). So, draw near...to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace for all your needs!

2) We need purity of heart

We properly approach the Lord God, as we have seen, when we come without inner hypocrisy but with genuineness, sincerity, and purity of heart. This openness to God in the holy place must involve devotion to the Lord and to His will. You are there to say what the Psalmist says, ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps. 139.23-24). That is the responsible way to come to God! It fits well with conversation with God, but there is more to it.

3) We need the testimony of baptism

We might call this the requirement of drawing near with clean hearts: 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.**

Granted, approaching God with clean hearts partially amounts to saying that one must be a Christian to have access to God. But there is more here than the right to come, there is the matter of duty in coming that we are discussing. Clean hearts and clean bodies give us a little more about that duty. The sprinkling of the heart and washing of the body speak to the same reality: they speak to the symbol of baptism that pictures the cleansing of the entire person, body and soul. We come in the right manner when we come to God with due recognition of the work He has done and to which He testifies by baptism.

a) With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience

The conscience is a good thing; it is part of the inner man of the heart. Thus, to be cleansed from an evil conscience is to be cleansed from the defiling evils that impact and plague the conscience. It is a red flag that troubles the soul because of the presence of evil. An evil conscience is a conscience overrun by sin that renders us, in the language of the OT, unclean and defiled. The defiled have no place with the people of God; they must remain outside the camp. Therefore, God's word to us in baptism gives us the knowledge that our hearts are clean.

This is good news. Do you always feel clean? No. This is the testimony of the Lord to you. You are washed fully, in a bath, but you get your feet dirty as you walk around in the marketplace. To be sure, you need to have Jesus wash your feet on a regular basis. But know this: your hearts have been sprinkled clean from the evil that plagues the consciences of sinners.

There is fellowship without the burden of conscience for we know that our sin has been dealt with on the cross (**Hebrews 9:9-10 According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper,** ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations

for the body imposed until the time of reformation; Hebrews 9:13-14 ¹³ For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God)..

Because of the use of blood within the tent, we first watch the killing of a spotless animal. Then, the priests open the first curtain and enter the holy place to do their work, which includes burning incense daily (Ex. 30.7-10). But once a year, the high priest opens the second curtain, allows the sweet smelling incense to fill the holy of holies, takes the blood of the innocent victim with him, and sprinkles the blood on the mercy seat that covers the law. This takes place in the presence of God who manifests Himself above the mercy seat between the cherubim. The author transports us there to see and to smell what God sees and smells when the blood of an innocent victim covers man's law breaking with His mercy in His presence.

We were defiled but now we are clean! The Christian life begins with the acknowledgment of spiritual uncleanness and poverty: **Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven** (Mat. 5.3). Thus, because of the blood of Christ, we have access to the Holy One. The manner of our coming must always include a due recognition of our spiritual poverty as we rest everything on the work of Christ.

b) Bodies washed with pure water

Baptism furnishes strength for faithful living with commitment to a clean life (1 Peter 3:21 ¹ **Baptism...saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**). This involves good behavior in separation from the world that is perishing (1 Peter 3:15-16, **make a defense...with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame**). In context, Peter defines a good conscience by good behavior. Therefore, the baptismal pledge of a good conscience is a commitment to good conduct, but not in some self-reliant way. There is no self-reliance because baptism saves in the sense of the promise it reiterates of God's cleansing **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**. Therefore, the gospel sign of baptism not only embodies repentance (for example, as the "first act" of turning in obedience toward God), but it also advances our faithfulness *because God is faithful to His promise* to cleanse us from sin in sanctifying stages throughout our lives until we reach glory. Consequently, you make your promise of good conduct consciously "by the grace of God" and *by the power of His gift of new resurrection life* (cf. Rom. 6). You can make this promise and grow in your determination to keep it with confidence; not with confidence in yourself but with growing appreciation of the fact that your promise has its roots sunk deep into God's unbreakable promise. You can come with strong and assured faith because of God's promise reiterated in baptism (as you hear that promise in your own baptism, the baptism of others, and in the doctrine of baptism from texts like Heb.10.22b).

Conclusion

Augustine spoke of "hiding myself behind my back." This can apply to prayer in God's presence! This is possible; it is a pitfall. The key way to avoid this pitfall and the key to prayer is the openness of sincerity.

Thus, you are encouraged to come into the holy places seeking holiness by faith with confident and assured commitment to a clean life. This newness of life you seek by conversation with God and with your heart fixed firmly on the promise of God that reveals His commitment to save you to the uttermost through Christ your high priest.

May we fall down before the majesty of our God in humble thankfulness that He bids us to draw near and drawing near He welcomes us with His loving embrace and He gracious promises. To the triune God be all glory, now and forevermore, amen.