

CEDARVILLE UNIVERSITY

HEBREWS 10:19-25

SUBMITTED TO DANIEL J. EBERT IV, Ph.D.
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BY
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ΠΡΟΣ ΕΒΡΑΙΟΥΣ 10:19-25 (NA²⁷):

¹⁹Ἐχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί, παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ, ²⁰ἣν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ, ²¹καὶ ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ, ²²προσερχώμεθα μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως βεβηρωμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ· ²³κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλινηῆ πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγειλάμενος, ²⁴καὶ κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους εἰς παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων, ²⁵μὴ ἐγκαταλείποντες τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν, καθὼς ἔθος τισίν, ἀλλὰ παρακαλοῦντες, καὶ τοσοῦτω μᾶλλον ὅσῳ βλέπετε ἐγγίζουσιν τὴν ἡμέραν.¹

Hebrews 10:19-25 (NET):

¹⁹Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the fresh and living way that he inaugurated for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings, because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water. ²³And let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess, for the one who made the promise is trustworthy. ²⁴And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works, ²⁵not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.²

¹ Aland, Barbara ; Aland, Kurt ; Black, Matthew ; Martini, Carlo M. ; Metzger, Bruce M. ; Wikgren, Allen: *The Greek New Testament*. 4th ed. Federal Republic of Germany : United Bible Societies, 1993, c1979, S. 578

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Syntactical Outline:

¹⁹ Ἐχοντες οὖν, ἀδελφοί,

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have

παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον τῶν ἁγίων
confidence to enter the sanctuary

ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ,

by the blood of Jesus

²⁰ ἣν ἐνεκαίνισεν ἡμῖν ὁδὸν πρόσφατον καὶ ζῶσαν

²⁰ by the fresh and living way that he inaugurated for us

διὰ τοῦ καταπετάσματος,

through the curtain,

τοῦτ' ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ,

that is, through his flesh,

²¹ καὶ [ἔχοντες] ἱερέα μέγαν ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον τοῦ θεοῦ,

²¹ and [since we have] a great priest over the house of God,

²² προσερχώμεθα

²² let us draw near

μετὰ ἀληθινῆς καρδίας

with a sincere heart

ἐν πληροφορίᾳ πίστεως

in the assurance that faith brings,

ρεραντισμένοι τὰς καρδίας ἀπὸ συνειδήσεως πονηρᾶς

because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience

καὶ λελουσμένοι τὸ σῶμα ὕδατι καθαρῷ·

and our bodies washed in pure water.

²³ κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν τῆς ἐλπίδος ἀκλινῆ

²³ [And] let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess,

πιστὸς γὰρ ὁ ἐπαγγελάμενος,

for the one who made the promise is trustworthy.

²⁴ καὶ κατανοῶμεν ἀλλήλους εἰς παροξυσμὸν ἀγάπης καὶ καλῶν ἔργων,

²⁴ And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works,

²⁵ μὴ ἐγκαταλείποντες τὴν ἐπισυναγωγὴν ἑαυτῶν,

²⁵ not abandoning our own meetings,

καθὼς ἔθος τισίν,

as some are in the habit of doing,

ἀλλὰ παρακαλοῦντες,

but encouraging each other,

καὶ τοσοῦτῳ μᾶλλον ὅσῳ βλέπετε ἐγγίζουσαν τὴν ἡμέραν.

and even more so because you see the day drawing near.

COMMENTARY:

Hebrews 10:19-25 in Context:

Before a thorough analyzing the argument of the passage at hand, it is necessary to review the context and argument of the entire epistle.³

The first main section of the epistle to the Hebrews is the exposition regarding the person of Jesus in 1:1-4:16. The author of Hebrews (AOH) begins with a majestic prologue in 1:1-4, stating that God has climactically revealed himself and spoken (to AOH and the audience) in the Son (*ἐν υἱῷ*, 1:2). The deity of the Son is then emphasized via a delineation of his superiority to the angels in 1:4-14, overlapping with 1:4 as a transition (cf. *ἀγγέλων* as a hook-word between 1:4 and 1:5). Following this is the first of the book's five "warning passages" (2:1-4), in all of which AOH exhorts his audience to persevering faithfulness in light of God's climactic revelation of himself *ἐν υἱῷ*. The focus then shifts from the Son's deity to his humanity in 2:5-9, before an exposition of how the incarnation makes it possible for the Son to function as the audience's high priest (2:10-18). The section ends with the second "warning passage" (3:1-4:13), a lengthy warning against hardhearted faithlessness and exhortation to enter the divine rest.

Connecting the first (1:1-4:16) and second (4:11-10:25) main sections of the epistle is an important "hinge passage" (4:14-16), a majestic exhortation to "hold fast to our confession" (4:14b) and "confidently approach the throne of grace" (4:16), in light of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, the "great high priest who has passed through the heavens" (4:14a). This passage concludes the previous warning and exhortation in 3:1-4:13, and also sets the stage for the lengthy exposition of Christ's priesthood to follow.

³ No two commentators agree on the precise structure of the epistle to the Hebrews. The brief structural/contextual overview here is drawn from Daniel J. Ebert IV's unpublished synthesis of the structural analyses of George Guthrie and Cynthia Westfall.

The central section of Hebrews is the exposition regarding the ministry and work of Jesus in 4:11-10:25. However, this division takes into account the “hinge passages” on both ends (4:14-16; 10:19-25). Without these passages included, “the central theological argument” runs from 5:1-10:18.⁴ In 5:1-7:28, Jesus’ priesthood in the order of Melchizedek is in focus. Within this overarching section, however, is the third “warning passage” (5:11-6:20), a lengthy warning against apostasy and exhortation toward maturity. In Hebrews 8, AOH focuses on the New Covenant which has been inaugurated by Jesus as high priest, containing a sustained quotation of Jeremiah 31:31-34. The focus then shifts once more, this time to the nature and superiority of Christ’ sacrifice in 9:1-10:18.

Finally, Hebrews concludes with a call to worship in the way of Jesus in 10:19-13:25. The passage at hand, 10:19-25, functions as the second major “hinge” passage in the structure of the book, paralleling the first “hinge” passage in 4:14-16. The two thus form a large *inclusio* around the central section of 5:1-10:18. However, the parallels between these two passages are not only conceptual and structural, but verbal as well:

| 4:14-16 | 10:19-23 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4:14 Ἔχοντες οὖν ἀρχιερέα μέγαν | 10:19, 21 Ἔχοντες οὖν...ιέρεα μέγαν |
| 4:14 Ἰησοῦν | 10:19 Ἰησοῦ |
| 4:14 κρατοῦμεν τῆς ὁμολογίας | 10:23 κατέχωμεν τὴν ὁμολογίαν |
| 4:16 παρρησίας | 10:19 παρρησίαν |
| 4:16 προσερχώμεθα οὖν μετὰ | 10:22 προσερχώμεθα μετὰ ⁵ |

Nevertheless, 10:19-25 is not a mere parroting of what was said earlier in 4:14-16. In light of the lengthy preceding exposition of 5:1-10:18, regarding the priesthood, ministry, and sacrifice of Jesus, 10:19-25 should be viewed as an expansion upon 4:14-16, drawing upon the same grounds

⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 361.

⁵ David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 334. These same verbal parallels are noted by Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (trans. T.L. Kingsbury; Vol. II; Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), 169.

(the high priesthood of Christ, now understood better by the audience in light of the previous five chapters) to exhort the audience toward deeper worship, as argued below.

Indeed, on the basis of its content and position, it seems difficult to overemphasize this passage's importance within the book's flow of thought. Bruce notes that "the climax of the homily is reached in the exhortation of Heb. 10:19-25: 'Let us draw near.... Let us hold fast....' The preceding argument leads up, stage by stage, to this exhortation, and what comes after reinforces it."⁶ He even goes so far as to claim that 10:19-25 "might well have formed the conclusion of the homily, had not our author judged it wise to expand and apply in greater detail the points made here, for the further encouragement and strengthening of his readers."⁷

Immediately following the passage at hand is the fourth "warning passage" (10:26-39), a call to acknowledgement of the truth and perseverance in faith to receive the promise. Then, the well-known exposition of examples of Old Testament faithfulness in 11:1-40 precedes a mosaic of calls toward holiness, perseverance, and New Covenant living in 12:1-24. The fifth and final "warning passage" (12:25-29) then exhorts the audience toward thankful worship and service before the final assortment of exhortations in 13:1-19 and the concluding benediction in 13:20-25. In briefest form, then, AOH moves from an exalted prologue (1:1-4), to a discussion of Christ's person (1:4-4:16), to an exposition of Christ's priesthood (4:14-10:25), to a lengthy exhortation toward faithful worship (10:19-13:25).

Argument of the Passage:

As mentioned above, the passage at hand plays a key transitional role in the thought-flow of the entire book, bridging the gap from 5:1-10:18 to 10:26-13:25. According to deSilva, "Hebrews

⁶ F.F. Bruce, "The Structure and Argument of Hebrews," *SJT* 28, no. 1 (September 1985): 6.

⁷ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 249.

10:19-25 provides a recapitulation in the form of a proposal for policy.”⁸ That is, not only does this passage “bring together the principal points of the preceding exposition,” but it also “directly urge[s] that certain actions be taken and certain courses be avoided on the basis of these principal points.”⁹

Hebrews 10:19-25 breaks down into two main sections: the twofold grounds in vv.19-21 and the threefold exhortation in vv.22-25. In brief, the argument of the passage is that, because they have (1) *confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus* and (2) *a great priest over the house of God*, the audience (along with AOH, cf. the hortatory “let us”) is to: (1) *draw near* [to God], (2) *hold unwaveringly to the hope that [they] confess*, and (3) *take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works*.

Twofold Grounds (10:19-21)

¹⁹*Therefore, brothers and sisters,*
since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,
²⁰*by the fresh and living way that he inaugurated for us through the curtain,*
that is, through his flesh,
²¹*and since we have a great priest over the house of God,*

¹⁹*Therefore, brothers and sisters,*

The inferential consecutive conjunction οὖν (“therefore”) links this passage with that which precedes it, namely the “preceding cultic interpretation of the work of the high priest Jesus Christ” in 5:1-10:18.¹⁰ The vocative direct address ἀδελφοί (“brothers and sisters”) is also significant, for it appears infrequently throughout the epistle (3:1, 12; 13:22) and here “functions

⁸ David A. deSilva, *Perserverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 335.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ O'Brien, 362, n.104.

as a discourse marker to indicate a turn in the argument.”¹¹ With remarkable economy (οὖν, ἀδελφοί), then, AOH alerts the reader to a conceptual link with the preceding passage and a shift in his argument.

since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,

However, this is all to ignore the very first word of 10:19, the present active participle ἔχοντες (“having”), which is best taken causally here, making the rendering “since we have” (NET) appropriate.¹² Syntactically, the rest of the passage hangs upon this single word, and it is appropriately shunted to the very beginning of this long, complex sentence in Greek.¹³

What does the audience “have”? The first answer to this question is *confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus*. However, is this confidence (παρρησία) subjective or objective? The audience has already been urged to maintain this παρρησία earlier in 3:6 and 4:16, where the term seems to denote “a subjective confidence objectively grounded in Christ’s high-priestly work.”¹⁴ However, there may indeed be a more objective emphasis to this term here at 10:19. Delitzsch explains παρρησία in terms of having a *right* to enter the sanctuary, and then as a consequence of that right, “a joyous confidence to avail ourselves of it.”¹⁵ Bruce renders the phrase παρρησίαν εἰς τὴν εἴσοδον (“confidence to enter”) as “freedom of access,” noting that, as elsewhere in the NT, it is “based on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ who restored the

¹¹ O’Brien, 362.

¹² O’Brien (362) and deSilva (335) both reflect this interpretive participial decision. Bruce (248) translates ἔχοντες as a simple indicative (“we have”) and Delitzsch (169) leaves the participle hanging (“having”).

¹³ See “Outline” above.

¹⁴ O’Brien, 362.

¹⁵ Delitzsch, 170.

relationship between God and man.”¹⁶ It seems best, therefore, to take παρρησία as an objective “freedom,” “permission,” or “authorization,” instead of a merely subjective inner disposition of confidence.¹⁷

This authorization of entrance has been granted to τῶν ἁγίων (lit. “the holies”), which is best taken as referring to the heavenly sanctuary, as opposed to the earthly one, which Jesus himself entered (9:12, 23-25).¹⁸ Also, Bruce notes that, even though the Greek text “does not use the superlative expression here which distinguishes the holy of holies from the holy place,” the use of “the holy place” in 9:8 shows that it is possible to refer to the holy of holies without specifically identifying it as such.¹⁹ On balance, the NET rendering of τῶν ἁγίων as “the sanctuary” seems appropriate.

This confidence to enter the sanctuary is grounded upon the *blood of Jesus*. Contra those who claim that “by the blood of Jesus” (ἐν τῷ αἵματι Ἰησοῦ) should be linked with “entrance” (εἴσοδον; thus, “for entrance into the holies *with* the blood of Jesus”), Delitzsch argues that the prepositional phrase modifies “confidence” (παρρησία): “it is the blood of Christ shed for our reconciliation which is the basis and the source of our confidence.”²⁰ Nevertheless, it seems best to see a grammatical connection between “entrance” and “by the blood of Jesus,” given that the following relative clause also modifies εἴσοδον (see below). However, Delitzsch’s sense of the phrase should still be maintained through the instrumental use of ἐν here. The meaning of the

¹⁶ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 249.

¹⁷ O’Brien, 362.

¹⁸ deSilva, 336-7.

¹⁹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 250.

²⁰ Delitzsch, 170.

preposition ἐν in this instance is extremely close to διὰ (“through, on account of”; see similar phrase at 9:12).²¹

²⁰*by the fresh and living way that he inaugurated for us through the curtain,*

Modifying the word rendered “to enter” by the NET in v.19 (εἴσοδον; lit. “entrance”) is a lengthy relative clause. Roughly translated, it reads: “(the entrance) which he inaugurated for us, a new and living way through the curtain, that is, his flesh.” Of note is the difficulty in precisely defining the verb rendered “inaugurated” (ἐνκαίνιζω). According to O’Brien, there are two main options: inauguration or access. The first sense of this word relies on its cultic character, used earlier to refer to the sacrificial “inauguration” of the Mosaic covenant (9:18). In this sense, the sacrifices which “inaugurated” the old covenant are seen as a typological foreshadowing of the sacrifice of Christ.²² The second option renders ἐνκαίνιζω as “to access, open” (i.e. “to make a way that was not there before”).²³ However, given the rich complexity of Christ’s priestly work, it seems best to take both sense of this term into account.²⁴ Jesus inaugurated the new covenant and the heavenly sanctuary with his ultimate sacrifice, creating a fresh and living way “which did not exist until he opened it up.”²⁵

that is, through his flesh,

Unexpectedly, AOH transitions from the *spatial* to the *instrumental*. The fresh and living entrance/way which Jesus inaugurated/opened for us is *through the curtain*, locally and literally

²¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 250, n. 84.

²² O’Brien, 363.

²³ *Ibid.*, 363-4.

²⁴ As Bruce does. See *Hebrews*, 250, n. 85.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 250.

referring to the curtain through which the priest accessed the holy of holies (cf. 6:19; 9:3),”²⁶ but also symbolizing “the frontier between this world and the heavenly and coming one.”²⁷ The unexpected shift, then, is the addition of the phrase, literally translated, “that is, his flesh” (τοῦτ’ ἔστιν τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ). This clause can be interpreted as modifying (1) the *way*, (2) the *curtain*, or (3) the entire preceding relative clause.²⁸

Here the commentators are divided, mainly between options (1) and (2). While explaining his personal translation of the passage, deSilva claims that “this parenthetical remark clarifies not the content or material of the ‘veil’ but rather the ‘way’ in which the believers may enter that holy place.”²⁹ Calvin, however, argues for option (2), noting that, “though His Godhead was hidden in the flesh of Christ, He yet leads us to heaven, and no one will find God unless the Man Christ is his way and his door.”³⁰ The main objection to seeing Christ’s flesh as the curtain is that “one would not expect to find the ‘flesh’ of Christ ‘treated in any way as a veil, and obstacle, to the vision of God in a place where stress is laid on His humanity.’”³¹ However, this is not a weighty problem if the full function of the curtain is kept in view. “The veil which, from one point of view, kept God and mankind apart, can be thought of, from another point of view, as bringing them together; for it was one and the same veil which on one side was in

²⁶ O’Brien, 364.

²⁷ Nils Alstrup Dahl, “A New and Living Way: The Approach to God According to Hebrews 10:19-25,” *Interpretation* 5, no. 4 (October 1951): 404.

²⁸ O’Brien, 364.

²⁹ deSilva, 335.

³⁰ Calvin, John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Hebrews and The First and Second Epistles of St. Peter* (eds. D.W. Torrance and T.F. Torrance; trans. W.B. Johnston; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 141.

³¹ A quotation from B.F. Wescott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 322, cited by Bruce, *Hebrews*, 252.

contact with the glory of God and on the other side with the need of men and women.”³² On balance, I side with Calvin (and also Bruce, Delitzsch, and O’Brien) in linking *that is, his flesh* with the previous phrase *through the curtain*, allowing the same preposition (διὰ) to govern both.³³ Delitzsch rightly notes that “the veil which was rent by the Lord’s death in order to our entrance was that pierced body of humiliation, which under its then conditions is a thing of the past, and needs no further withdrawal now.”³⁴ Jesus Christ has provided entrance to the sanctuary by inaugurating a fresh and living way into the holy of holies through his flesh, that is, through his sacrificial death.³⁵

21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

The second thing that the audience has (cf. ἔχοντες, v. 19, implied here) is a *great priest over the house of God*. “Great priest” (ἱερέα μέγαν) here is simply another way of referring to the high priest (ἀρχιερεύς), thereby evoking the earlier exhortation in 4:14-16, where “possession of a ‘great high priest’ is the ground for a bold approach to God’s throne of grace.”³⁶ Based on the earlier discussion of Jesus’ superiority to Moses, it is best to interpret *the house of God* here as referring to “the community of God’s people (cf. Heb. 3:6).”³⁷ That Jesus is this *great priest over the house of God* most assuredly includes everything that has already been said in vv.19-20. He

³² Bruce, *Hebrews*, 252.

³³ O’Brien, 364.

³⁴ Delitzsch, 172-3.

³⁵ “If our Lord’s ‘flesh’ and his ‘blood’ alike denote his human life offered up in sacrifice, then he who entered into the heavenly sanctuary ‘by virtue of his own blood’ (9:12) may equally well be thought of as entering there through his ‘flesh.’” Bruce, *Hebrews*, 253.

³⁶ O’Brien, 365.

³⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 253.

is the great priest who has inaugurated a fresh and living way into the sanctuary by means of his sacrificial death.

Threefold Exhortation (10:22-25)

²² *let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings,
because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience
and our bodies washed in pure water.*

²³ *And let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess,
for the one who made the promise is trustworthy.*

²⁴ *And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works,*

²⁵ *not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing,
but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.*

²² *let us draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings,*

On the basis of the aforementioned grounds of vv.19-21, AOH proffers three exhortations to his audience. Each takes the form of a hortatory subjunctive. The first exhortation is to *draw near with a sincere heart in the assurance that faith brings*. Although the object of “let us draw near” is not supplied, it seems best to conclude that the exhortation is to draw near to God (cf. Heb 4:16; 7:25; 11:6).³⁸ This “solemn, cultic invitation to approach the throne of God” is “not a summons but a privilege extended to believers.”³⁹ Although the fresh and living way has been inaugurated and made possible by Christ, it is still appropriate and necessary to approach God with a *sincere* (lit. “true”) *heart*, and not “the evil, unbelieving heart” in Heb 3:12.⁴⁰ And the assurance that faith brings (lit. “full assurance of faith”) parallels the “full assurance of hope” in Heb 6:11.⁴¹ Both are firmly grounded upon the high priestly work of Christ just mentioned in vv.19-21, and also just fully expounded in 5:1-10:18.

³⁸ O’Brien, 366.

³⁹ Alan R. Culpepper, “A Superior Faith: Hebrews 10:19-12:2,” *Review & Expositor* 82, no. 3 (June 1985): 376.

⁴⁰ O’Brien, 366.

⁴¹ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 254, n. 101.

because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed in pure water.

Two perfect passive participles modify the previous exhortation to draw near: “having been sprinkled” and “having been washed.” Together, they describe what makes it possible to fulfill this first exhortation to draw near to God in worship, and this is reflected in the NET’s rendering of these participles in the form of “because we have ____ and ____.” The first phrase, *because we have had our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience* is anticipated in the discussion at Heb 9:18-22, where “the listeners were reminded of Moses’ sprinkling the people with blood at the inauguration of the first covenant at Sinai (Exod. 24:3-8).⁴² Again, the typological relationship between the inauguration of the old covenant and Christ’s inauguration of the new one with his blood and sacrificial death links this inauguration with the sprinkling of believers’ hearts and the cleansing of their consciences.

The second phrase, *and [because we have had] our bodies washed in pure water* most likely refers to the practice of Christian baptism.⁴³ However, the dissenting minority opinion is taken up by Calvin, who prefers to interpret this phrase in light of Ezekiel 36:25-26: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you will be clean [...] I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you.”⁴⁴ This view identifies the “pure water” with the Spirit of God on the basis of the prophecy in Ezekiel. Thus, the sprinkling of hearts and the washing of bodies both express the same idea: “the effective power of the death of Jesus that has been brought about by the eternal Spirit (9:14).”⁴⁵ Although the minority view has less support among commentators, I side

⁴² O’Brien, 367.

⁴³ So Bruce, Dahl, Delitzsch, and deSilva.

⁴⁴ Calvin, 142.

⁴⁵ O’Brien, 368.

with O'Brien and Calvin on this interpretive decision. AOH has given us no indications that he is jumping from Old Testament cultic imagery to the baptismal traditions of early Christianity.

Although baptism would have undoubtedly been brought to mind in his audience, it seems best to conclude that he is still primarily focusing on Old Testament washing imagery.

²³*And let us hold unwaveringly to the hope that we confess,*

The second exhortation of this passage is that the audience might *hold unwaveringly to the hope that [they] confess* (lit. "confession of hope," taken as an objective genitive here). Most of the same commentators who argue that 10:22b refers to Christian baptism therefore posit that this confession of hope refers to an unknown-yet-specific baptismal confession. However, because it seems more reasonable to interpret 10:22 and 10:23 as expressing separate ideas, this phrase most likely refers to "a more general profession of the hope that is set before us (see 6:18)."⁴⁶ An important theme in Hebrews,⁴⁷ hope refers "to the objective content of hope (rather than the act of hoping, and it relates to both present and future salvation."⁴⁸ Since the objective content of this hope is Jesus Christ, the great high priest over the house of God, the audience's hope (and the confession of that hope) should be sure and firm indeed.

for the one who made the promise is trustworthy.

The ground for the second exhortation is the faithfulness of God. The audience is to hold unwaveringly to the confession of hope because *the one who made the promise is trustworthy*. Calvin rightly notes that "our faith rests on the foundation that God is true [...] if God makes no promises, no one can believe."⁴⁹ In 6:18, AOH stated that "it is impossible for God to lie," and

⁴⁶ O'Brien, 368.

⁴⁷ See Heb 3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23; 11:1.

⁴⁸ O'Brien, 368.

that same maxim undergirds his second exhortation here. As noted above, the object of the audience's hope was Christ, God himself, who is preeminently faithful and trustworthy.

²⁴*And let us take thought of how to spur one another on to love and good works,*

The third and final exhortation of this passage is that the audience is to take thought of one another. Going from the Greek to the English here is a bit tricky. My rough translation is as follows: "let us consider one another, unto the provocation of love and of good works." Most, as reflected by the NET's rendering of this verse, view the conceptual object of the verb "let us consider" to be "provocation." That is, the audience should spend time thinking about how to provoke each other on to good works, how to get others to love and do good things. However, deSilva rightly laments this tendency: "The exhortation pertains more to doing good works and showing love as the addressees look around at their fellow believers, observing their situations and persons attentively."⁵⁰ This conclusion is supported by the original syntax of the clause, where "one another" is the object of "let us consider." The main focus does not appear to be on goading each other on to good deeds (although the case could be made that such goading would not be such a bad thing!), but rather on taking careful heed of each other's needs and difficulties so that love and good works might abound from this atmosphere of selfless, careful consideration.

²⁵*not abandoning our own meetings, as some are in the habit of doing,*

In order to flesh-out this third and final exhortation a bit more, AOH shifts to a negative admonition. In taking thought of one another, they are not to abandon their own meetings. This admonition is more than just a light slap on the wrist to get the audience to simply go to church.

⁴⁹ Calvin, 142.

⁵⁰ deSilva, 341. He notes that the NKJV ("Let us consider one another so as to stir up love and good works") and NJB ("Let us be concerned for one another, to stir a response in love and good works") provide better translations.

The verb used here for “abandoning” is a term which frequently appears in the LXX to denote covenantal faithlessness, the forsaking of Yahweh, his character and his purposes.⁵¹ Also of note is that the term for “gatherings” here is also used to refer to “the eschatological ingathering of Israel,” making it likely that AOH “regards their gathering together as anticipating the final ingathering of God’s people.” Although a reason is not given for why this abandonment of the gatherings was the habit of some in their community, the intensity of this admonition still stands, especially in light of the warning passage to follow in 10:26-31. In the mind of AOH, the habitual neglect of the communal gathering of God’s people seems to indicate a deeper danger of covenantal faithlessness to God, highlighting the importance of a community-based approach to worship.

but encouraging each other, and even more so because you see the day drawing near.

In contrast to the negative admonition above, the audience is finally exhorted to encourage one another, especially in light of the eschatological realities of their worship context. Calvin interpreted this encouragement to mean that “all believers ought to strive to bring together the Church on every side by whatever ways they can.”⁵² Whatever specific notions of encouragement are seen here must be related back to the “let us consider one another” of v.24. “The day” which is “drawing near” is the briefest way in the New Testament of referring “the day of days, the final, the decisive day of time, the commencing day of eternity, breaking through and breaking up for the church of the redeemed.”⁵³ This soon-to-arrive eschatological in-breaking of God’s kingdom was to be the source and the impetus for the mutual encouragement of the people of God unto love and good works.

⁵¹ O’Brien, 370.

⁵² Calvin, 144.

⁵³ Delitzsch, 183.

WORSHIP: CONTRIBUTION TO THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS

Whether interpreting Hebrews 10:19-25 through the lens of worship confuses or resonates with us depends largely on our particular notions of what worship entails. For example, when worship is thought of primarily in terms of congregational singing during a Sunday service, then this passage seems to have little to do with worship, other than perhaps providing the theological content for a nice chorus someday.

However, when our conceptions of worship widen to include all of life and all of God's creation, things get exciting, especially when we approach passages like Hebrews 10:19-25. Commenting on 10:22, Wright notes that "'drawing near' [the first exhortation] is almost a technical term, in this context, for 'coming to worship.'"⁵⁴ When this truth is combined with 10:19-25's richness of content and pride of place within the book of Hebrews as a whole, our eyes are opened to the immense theological resources this passage brings to bear on our worship of God. I here offer the briefest of sketches, describing how Hebrews 10:19-25 teaches us that worship is vertical, horizontal, and eschatological.

Worship is Vertical

This first aspect of worship receives so much emphasis in this passage that it almost goes without saying. However, amidst the distractions of life and the consumer mentality invading today's "worship scene" (along with almost every other area of life), the reminder is still needed: when we worship, we primarily have to do with *God*. Indeed, the best news of this passage for its audience is that they have been granted access into the heavenly sanctuary, *where God dwells*.

⁵⁴ N.T. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: WJKP, 2004), 115.

The precious, sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, himself God, has inaugurated a fresh and living way into the actual, heavenly holy of holies, and not just its earthly counterpart.

However, this still has relevance for us as we vertically worship God. Although we have graciously been given access to the holy of holies through the blood of Christ, we must still approach the presence of God with a true, sincere heart, in the full assurance that our faith brings. In other words, the opportunity provided us does not negate the responsibility to approach God as “rightly” as possible. When we worship, therefore, we should not do so lightly or flippantly. The amazing privileges of access to God afforded to us through Christ should make us careful to not scorn our special status as God’s people by letting it “get to our head” and think that we no longer have to soberly approach the holiness of the King of Kings.

Worship is Communal

However, we would be very amiss if we relegated worship to our personal, private lives only. The final two verses of the passage at hand make it clear that true worship must be community-oriented. There is no such thing in the New Testament as a “solo Christian,” and yet so much of our modern worship discourse focuses on the “just-me-and-Jesus” mentality. We purposely try to craft worship environments where people are able to be alone together in “worship,” even though this goes against the communal grain of this passage and of the Bible as a whole! Instead, we must make sure that our worship looks outward as well as upward. Our access to God should spur us toward greater concern for one another, so that love and good works may abound. Also, we must not overlook the opportunities we each are given each day to either encourage or discourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we neglect and abandon our spiritual siblings, it not only breaks their hearts, but God’s heart as well. Instead, we must

focusing on selfless and compassionately encouraging one another. This is just as integral and important to worship as the vertical aspects.

Worship is Eschatological

Notice, however, that AOH is not merely content with looking upward and outward, he urges his audience to look ahead as well. We see this most notably in our passage in the final clause: “and even more so because you see the day drawing near” (10:25). However, Wright picks up on this eschatological focus earlier in the passage, commenting that “in particular, then, our worship must be accompanied by a firm grip on ‘our confession of hope,’ the hope that looks forward eagerly to what God is finally going to do for us, the hope that we ‘confess’ as part of our badge of identity.”⁵⁵ Indeed, deSilva notes that “this gives a focus to our times of prayer and worship not simply as a place where we can find strength for our daily life or solutions for temporal needs, but also as a portal through which we can begin to see and even experience the end of our journey.”⁵⁶ The soon-to-come complete and utter in-breaking of God’s kingdom, the complete nexus of the heavenly and earthly realms, should provide the resources and impetus necessary for true worship of the living God, both vertically and horizontally. According to Hebrews 10:19-25, then, we worship God by looking *up* and looking *out* as we look *ahead*.

⁵⁵ Wright, 117.

⁵⁶ deSilva, 371.

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