

HEBREWS 31
(Hebrews 10:19-25)

THE PRIVILEGES AND DUTIES OF CHRISTIANS
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INTRODUCTION

We come now to the practical portion of Hebrews. We have finished the doctrinal portion and now we move on to the practical. This is the way of most of the epistles. First, they teach us a little theology. They teach us the principles and the great doctrines of God. And then, they teach us what it all means to us in a practical way. They teach us how we should think and how we should act if these things be true.

So we have learned that Christianity is the true religion of which Judaism was carnal picture. We have learned that Christ is better than all those Old Testament types. We have learned that Christ is the better prophet; that Christ is the better Moses; that Christ is the better Joshua; that Christ is the better Aaron; that Christ's priesthood is the better priesthood. We have learned that Christ's sacrifice is the better sacrifice. And we have learned that Christ's covenant is the better covenant.

We have learned that the ceremonies and the services under Judaism were never-ending. They went on and on because they were mere pictures that never really took away sins. But the work of Christ was once for all because it really took away sins.

We have learned that the substance is better than the shadow; that the end is better than the means; that true spiritual worship is better than ceremonial worship. All of this we have studied in this great book of Hebrews.

Now, we ask the writer of Hebrews to tell us how to act in light of all this. We believe all of this about Jesus. We believe with all our hearts that he is the only mediator between God and man. We believe that the flickering flame of Judaism has vanished away in the bright light of Christ's coming. And in light of all that, what must we do?

Now, in our text this afternoon we are going to see three things that we have in Christ. These are our great privileges in Him. And after we look into these three privileges, then we will see three duties that we have.

And this is only right, for with privilege comes responsibility.

Example: If a person is born with bodily or mental deficiencies, we allow for that and we don't expect such a person to be able to perform everything that others do. On the other hand, if a person is given great physical skills and mental abilities, we expect him to perform up to his abilities.

And we have been given great privileges in Christ and we are expected to behave in a way that is consistent and commensurate with these privileges. We have been made a child of the king, and now it is our duty to conduct ourselves as royal children.

Our three great privileges in Christ

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . (v.19)

I. We have boldness to enter into the holiest.

Now let me ask, where is the holiest? We know where the holiest place was in Judaism. It was that inner cubicle where only the High Priest could enter. And he could enter only once a year after he washed and changed into simple white linens. He had to humble himself and tip-toe into this little tent area. But that was under Judaism and that was just the picture.

But where is the holiest place in Christ's ministry? The holiest place in the ministry of Christ is wherever God the Father is. We can't really conceive of this because we know that God cannot be contained by a place. A tent can't contain him. A temple can't contain him. The earth can't contain him. The heavens can't contain him. And yet, it says, "We have boldness to enter into the holiest."

All we can say is that in Christ we have the right to come into the very presence of God. Whereas before we were excluded from his presence by

sin, now we are welcome because of the atonement of Christ.

And it says we have boldness to enter into the holiest. (v.19)

Now you should now know that the Old Covenant did not produce boldness. It produced just the opposite. When God was on Mt. Sinai preparing to give Moses the law, the people trembled at the foot of the mountain. There were rumblings and lightnings and quakes and the mountain was dark and foreboding. And the people were terrified. This was to show that sinners could not approach God. Even if wild beasts set foot on this mountain they were killed. Only Moses was allowed to come up.

When sin broke out in the camp of Israel, there was great terror, because inevitably death was on the horizon. There was no boldness under the Mosaic Law. There was only fear.

When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once every year on the Day of Atonement, he entered with great carefulness and with fear of his own safety, because approaching God under the Mosaic Covenant was a most dangerous thing.

The very arrangement of the tabernacle teaches that God was virtually unapproachable under the law. The people could only come into the outer courts of the tabernacle. They could not come into the holy places. And the general priesthood could only go so far and then there was a veil that kept them away from the very presence of God. And even the High Priest could only go behind the veil once per year. You see how there was no boldness to come to God under the Old Covenant.

But in Christ, there is boldness. Look at the text. It says, “having boldness to enter into the holiest.” And this is our unspeakable privilege. We can approach God with confidence. We don’t approach with irreverence. But we do approach with confidence. There is no veil that prevents us. The way is open. We may come. And, we may come boldly in Christ.

I fear that none of us come often enough. Nevertheless, God has given us an open invitation in Christ. We may come to him. We may come with our troubles. We may come with our petitions. We may come with our fears and our insecurities. But whatever our circumstances, we may come

to the Almighty God. We may come with our questions and we may come with limited understanding. But whatever the situation, we may come. And I hope ever so often that we come to him with our praise and our thanksgiving. Whatever it is, we may come to Him because Christ has taken away our sins.

Example: If you wanted to visit with some movie star, you could drive to Beverly Hills and you could wind your way around that exclusive neighborhood. But when you got to the right house, you would find that there is a strong gate. And they won't let you in.

Example: If you wanted to visit with the governor of the state of Tennessee I doubt they would let you in.

Example: If you drove up the White House and asked to see the President, why you would be met by security guards with guns and they would not let you in.

But because Jesus has taken away your sins and because he has made you sons, you may walk right up to God's front door and it is unlocked. You may come right in. And you may come boldly. You can come without fear for in Christ you will be well received.

Now I want you to see the second privilege mentioned in our text:

2. We have a new and living way.

The Jews had the old way. It was a ceremonial way. It was a shadowy way. But, thank God, we have a new way. God has been very gracious and he has given us a much better covenant than they had. We have better promises. They were promised the land of Canaan. We are promised a better land – a heavenly land. They were promised earthly blessings. We are promised spiritual and heavenly blessings. They were promised temporal blessings. We are promised eternal blessings.

They never had the purging of the inner man. They never had their consciences purged of sin. Every year there was a remembrance of sins. But we have a new way in Christ. Christ forgives our sins once for all. Past present and future, they are cast into the deep sea. Though we can hardly believe it, they are gone. Under the Old Covenant, the Jews were never out

from under the guilt of the law. But we have a new way and we are free from the guilt of sin.

But it says, we have a new and a living way. That old way was a ministration of death, but the new way is a living way. The old way was a ministration of condemnation, but the new way is a ministration of justification. Under the Old Covenant, all of those religious ceremonies were dead works. They could not atone for sin. But in the new way, Christ performed a living work – a work that was not just a ceremony but a work that actually put away sins. It is a new and living way.

By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

Hebrews 10:20

All other work is dead work. Judaistic work is dead work. But, Christ's work is effective. Therefore, all religions that reject Jesus Christ are dead religions. And all their work is ultimately fruitless. But, for those who place their trust in Christ alone, they serve an effective mediator and their work is fruitful and alive.

So, we have boldness to come to God and we have a new and living way. Thirdly,

3. We have a high priest over the house of God. (v.21)

Now under the Old Covenant, the house of God was a tent - not really, of course, but symbolically. And a cloud hovered over the tabernacle to symbolize God's presence.

And in the New Covenant, there is a house of God. Now we think of God residing in the heavens, and so he does. But there is also a place on earth where God really resides and it is called his house. Look at verse 21.

And having a high priest over the house of God.

Even in the New Covenant there is a house or household of God. And in this New Covenant God resides not in a tent but in his people. And they are his house.

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

I Peter 2:5

Here we find that we, that is believers, are the household of God.

Now remember in Hebrews 3:5 Moses had a house. And it says Moses was faithful in his house. And who composed the house of Moses? It was physical Israel. It was not the Philistines, nor the Canaanites. But it was one nation. And you see that Moses had a very limited household.

And likewise Christ has a household. (See Hebrews 3:6) And his household is also limited. Not all human beings are in the household of God. His household is reserved for his own sons and daughters. We show that we are his household if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. (Hebrews 3:6)

Many people suppose that all human beings are the house of God – that somehow all the world has been redeemed. But no, God has a limited house. It is composed of all those who have tasted of the grace of God. It is composed of all those who have been born again by the living Word. It is composed of all those who have saving faith in Christ. In short, it is composed of all those who He loves and all those who love Him.

In the new covenant there is a new house. It is not the house of Moses. It is the house of Christ.

But notice that there is a high priest over this house. He is not everyone's high priest. But he is our high priest. And he is an eternal high priest and he is our high priest every day for the rest of our lives. We are sinners and he will mediate for us every day. And God will be graciously disposed toward us forever because he is our great high priest.

Now those are the privileges that we have. We have boldness to come to God. We have a new and living way. And we have a high priest.

Now considering all that we have in him, what is our responsibility? Now I think many people suppose that if they come to Christ that God will lay all kinds of heavy burdens on them. They think they will have to go door

to door witnessing or they will have to do this or do that. But it is interesting to note what God most wants from us.

Our duties to God

It is our duty first of all to,

1. Draw near. (v.22)

God doesn't ask first for any great act of self-sacrifice, does he? He simply asks that you draw near. Now I understand why the writer of Hebrews is most interested in advising us to draw near. Under the law, the proper advice was, "Stay away, God is angry."

But, in Christ God is not angry any longer. So now the advice is, "Draw near."

Now it takes us a while to understand that we can really draw near to God.

Example: When James came home he brought with him his cat. So, we now have a new cat at our house. And at first, you couldn't get the cat to come to you at all. She was timid and frightened. But day by day she tested us a little more and she is finding out that no one is going to hurt her. Now all along, we would try to call her so we could pet her and love on her. But she wouldn't come. But one of these days she is going to have full confidence in us and she will draw near.

And the writer of Hebrews tells us to draw near to God. This is our duty – to draw near. And to do so, we must believe that our sins are forgiven. We must believe that in Christ, God has already judged sin. We must believe that God loves us. And it is our duty to draw near to Him.

Now how do we draw near? There is an initial drawing near when you first come to God by Christ. And then there is a continual drawing near day by day.

Now there is a lot of confusion in evangelical churches about how to draw near to God. Some preach that you must walk the aisle and come to the front of the church to come near to God, as though somehow God is

seated up here in front of the church and you must come here to find him.

Some say that you must recite a prayer in order to draw near.

Some say that you must go to a human priest and confess your sins.

Some say you must sell all your goods and give it to the poor in order to draw near.

But it is clear that drawing near to God is not so much coming to him with your legs, but it is a matter of the heart. It says,

Let us draw near with a true heart. (v.22)

Many people want to draw near with their legs or with their tongues or with their pocketbooks. But we draw near to God with our hearts. That is, we draw near to God with the very core of our being. Nothing less will do. We can fool others with our legs and our tongues and our pocketbooks. But we can't fool God. He insists that we draw near with our hearts.

But it says, "Draw near with a true heart."

That is, draw near with a genuine heart for God. We draw near with a sincere heart.

Now Israel drew near with their lips. They gave lip service to God but not with their hearts.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me . . .

Isaiah 29:13

Now we draw near with a true heart and we draw near with full assurance of faith.

God has determined to save his people not by works but by faith. And we must draw near to him with full assurance of faith.

But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Hebrews 11:6

So look, we must come with a pure heart, we must come in faith, and we must come being sprinkled from an evil conscience.

You can never come to God unless your inner man has been sprinkled with the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ must be applied to you. This is a work of the Holy Spirit of God and it makes you acceptable in his sight. Being sprinkled from an evil conscience the effect of regeneration and conversion. God justifies you and takes you out from under the law. He takes the guilt away and your evil conscience is washed.

We must hurry on here. Our first duty is to draw near. Our second duty is to

2. Hold Fast.

Once you have seen that Christ is better, once you have seen that salvation is truly in Him and not in ceremonies, once you have seen that you are saved by his work and not your own work, once you have seen that salvation is by grace, once you have seen that salvation is by the mediation of a great high priest, once you have seen that his sacrifice is better because it is effective, once you have seen that his covenant is better because it actually saves, then hold on to him for dear life.

In the course of your life, there will be trying circumstances. There will be discouragements. There will be doubts that creep in. There will be trials. There may even be persecution. But it is our duty always to hold fast to Christ. In this context the warning is, "Never go back to Judaism." But for us, the warning is never to leave Christ for any reason. If the world calls you to embrace any other doctrine but that of Christ, reject it and hold fast to Christ. Your salvation in Him draweth nigh. It is right around the corner. As the song says, "Soon and very soon" he will appear.

Notice that we are holding on to hope. (v.23)

Now hope in Christ is not wishful thinking. Wishful thinking is when

we buy a lottery ticket and we hope we win. There is a strong probability that we will not win. But hope in Christ the expectation of certain blessing. It is certain, but unseen as yet. We have just barely tasted of salvation in this life. We have had a sip of his grace and goodness. But just around the bend is salvation indeed. It is about to come into view. So hold fast, the writer says, to this hope.

Now here is our last duty. We have seen that we are to draw near and we are to hold fast. Lastly we see that we are to,

3. Consider one another.

It seems that this is a chief duty of Christians. It is to consider one another. It is said in the same breath as “Draw near to God” and “Hold fast the profession of our faith.”

This word “consider” means to take very serious and deliberate thought about a matter. And we are to take very serious and deliberate thought about one another – that is, about our brothers and sisters in Christ. One of our chief duties is to care for one another.

You know, many people come to church wondering what they can get out of it. How great would it be if we all came to church wondering what we could contribute to the spiritual welfare of one another. We should all be looking around to see how we might be of service to one another.

Now it says that we are to consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works.

Now when you think about provoking one another, the first thing that comes to my mind is sort of a negative provoking.

Example: Back when I was a kid, we used to go on car trips. And there was Mom and Dad and 6 kids in the vehicle. And 6 kids can only be good for so long. And pretty soon someone would get bored and would start provoking one of the other kids. If they couldn't find any other way to provoke them they would simply poke them or pull their hair. They would do something to aggravate the other one.

Now that is kind of a negative kind of provoking. But here I think we

are encouraged to think up ways to provoke one another in a positive way. Obviously, the goal is to provoke them to love and good works.

Now there may be countless ways to do this and I think we do a good job of that here at our church.

I've noticed that when anyone misses church for some reason, many of you call them just to find out where they were. And when you call to check on them you are provoking them, or encouraging them.

When people are sick many of you go and visit them. This is a way of encouraging them along the way.

We have a card ministry. Ms. Grace has taken over our card ministry and she sends cards out for birthdays and anniversaries. She sends get well cards out on behalf of the church. And all of this is a good way to provoke people to love and good works.

Ms. Bernice encourages our ladies to come to the ladies bible studies and this is provoking others to love and good works.

Marion works hard on her Newsletter each month to keep us informed and also to encourage us along the way. She always has spiritual encouragements sprinkled through the Newsletter.

Several of you make sure prayer requests are e-mailed out to our members – especially when there are special needs.

Our teachers are constantly provoking you, encouraging you to live a Christian life.

Our deacons are always meeting about one thing or another and the ultimate goal is to provoke one another to love and good works by making sure our business is taken care of.

In our text, the writer mentions two ways that we are to provoke one another.

1. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.

Did you know that this is the only place in the Scriptures where there is a command to go to church. We have plenty of places that show us that the early church did assemble together, but here we are commanded to assemble together.

And furthermore, this is one of the principle ways that we provoke one another to love and good works. We meet together. It is encouraging to one another when we assemble together. When we have a good healthy crowd – when all of our members are here – it is a good feeling isn't it? It is encouraging. And it stimulates us to love and good works.

On the other hand, if you came to church and all the other members decided to stay home that day - that would be quite discouraging.

So our first duty is to assemble together.

One of the things that we did recently was to start eating lunch here at the church after the morning service. And I think this has been a good thing. It is a time for us to be together. It is a time for us to talk to one another and to encourage one another.

So, it says, provoke one another to love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.

And lastly it says, exhorting one another.

Obviously, we are all human beings. We all have weaknesses. And we need constant encouragement to live the Christian life. Obviously, if we see someone engaged in sin, we need to exhort them regarding that sin. But one of the great ways to encourage people is to praise them for the good things that they do.

Exhort one another.