

“How to Respond to Christ”

Heb. 10:19-25

- INTRO. - ILL. – An interesting study (that you can do quickly on the Internet) is the history of the altar call in Evangelical churches in America (especially Baptist churches, and even more especially in the South).
- Most historians attribute this practice to Charles Finney in the 19th century. This was part of what was called his “new measures,” which were (really methods of manipulating people to get more so-called “decisions” for Christ).
- This practice was employed by famous mass evangelists, such as Dwight L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and (of course) Billy Graham. By the mid-20th century, altar calls had become a staple of evangelical and Baptist life in America.
- These altar calls were often connected with revivalism, “hitting the sawdust trail,” and the famous hymn “Just as I Am.” It became a way to “create an atmosphere” for sinners to feel compelled to “come to Christ.”
- Another interesting aspect of its history is the fact that the altar call was predominant in the Holiness movement. In fact, the very name “altar call” likely came from the Holiness and Pentecostal churches.
- Arminian theology has also contributed to this methodology. And (in my opinion) it has led to a lot of people coming to a *false* assurance of salvation, because they responded in some emotional way to an altar call, and they are (now) trusting in the fact that they “walked an aisle” and said a prayer.
- Genuine spiritual regeneration is much deeper than that, and it always results in a changed life. Those who are trusting in the fact that they once responded to an “altar call” but show no evidence of new life in Christ, are only fooling themselves.
- All these are reasons why we don’t do altar calls here, but having said all that, I need to move on and say that (biblically) we are always called upon to respond to God’s Word.
- The NT *not only* contains long sections on sound doctrine, but it also included fervent appeals to *respond* (with genuine faith) to the truth that is presented. That’s what we have in our present text.
- Listen my friend, theologizing alone is never sufficient for a holistic vision of the Christian life. We must always *act* on the truth of that theology. We must always respond to good theology with faith and practice. So the author of Hebrews makes an appeal to do exactly that.

- Heb. 10:19-25 is one long sentence (in the Greek) that powerfully expresses the intensity of the author's appeal. The structure of the sentence is built on three imperatives – all beginning with the phrase “let us.”
- The imperatives are “let us draw near,” “let us hold fast,” and “let us consider.” And these three imperatives are connected with the three central graces of the Christian life: faith, hope, and love.
- The word “therefore” (in v. 19) ties this appeal to everything that has been presented (really going all the way back to the beginning of the book, but at least as far back as 4:14). The fact that he has just concluded the central theological section of the book, it makes sense that he would make an urgent appeal to respond to its truth.
- He addresses his hearers as “brethren,” which in *this case* is synonymous with “fellow Jews.” As we have seen all along, there are some who are born-again Christians and some who have yet to make that commitment to Christ.
- But he identifies with them by using the pronoun “we.” That is a pastoral type of identification with his hearers. And really, (when we think about it), there are only two possible responses to this appeal.
 - His hearers can respond with faith, or they can fall back into apostasy. They can go back to their Judaism and reject Christ and the New Covenant.
 - John MacArthur says “Hebrews 10:19-25 is speaking to the person who does the former, the one who makes a positive response to the claims of Jesus Christ.” This is the kind of response the author of Hebrews was hoping for (and the kind of response any preacher today would hope for).
 - Now, I'm outlining this passage this way: A confidence of faith (vv. 19-22), a confession of hope (v. 23), and a consideration of love (vv. 24-25). Faith, hope, and love (in that order). We begin with:
 - I. A CONFIDENCE OF FAITH (vv. 19-22)
 - The invitation to “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace” has already been issued in this book. We saw *that* all the way back in 4:16. Bruce says, “Now a further assurance is given: the way by which this high priest has entered into the presence of God is a way which remains open for his people to follow him there.”
 - So we see (in 10:19), “Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus...” This is the way in! How do we get there? “...by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh...”

- We can have absolute confidence to enter into the presence of God through that new and living way – the gospel of Jesus Christ. He has inaugurated that way to God (through the establishment of the New Covenant).

- What is that confident faith based on? Verse 21, “and since we have a great priest over the house of God (as he has been saying all throughout this book), let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...”

- But now, you know I went through that too fast. Let’s go back and break this down a bit. We (really) see three aspects of this confident faith. First, we see:

A. The Facts (vv. 19-21)

- In vv. 19-21 the author of Hebrews gives us the facts upon which our faith is based. This is the first necessary element of saving faith. Your faith has to be based on truth. And in this case there is concrete, historical basis for having confidence to enter into the holy place (into the presence of God).

- If a person tries to gain access to God on his own works, his own religious practices, or his own moral integrity – he will never succeed. The only way of access to God is through genuine saving faith in the finished work of Christ.

- Verse 19 says it is all on the basis of the blood of Jesus. That represents His entire work of atonement on the cross. And (as he said earlier in 4:14) when we come on

the basis of that, we can expect mercy and grace instead of judgment.

- In fact, we don’t even receive justice, because if we received justice we would be condemned for our sin. No, we receive His mercy and grace. We don’t get what we deserve. Instead we get what is undeserved.

- Why? Is it because we are worthy? No. It is solely on the basis of Christ’s atoning work on our behalf. It is all because of His shed blood on the cross.

- Go on to v. 20, “by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh...” Our Lord has opened up a new and living way – a way of access to God that was *not* there before.

- The old way could *not* bring man into God’s presence. There was no access to God under the Old Covenant system. But the new way can and does. Because of what Christ did, we now have access to God through saving faith.

- And notice how personal this is. He did this “for us.” We could never gain access to God on our own, but He has gained it “for us.” He died in our place and by faith God imputes His righteousness to us.

- Notice the phrase “through the veil, that is, His flesh.” When Jesus’ flesh was torn, so was the veil that kept men from God. The veil in the Temple was torn as a symbol of

that spiritual reality – but it was the veil of Christ’s flesh that actually gained our access to God.

- That way is now open (permanently) to all who will place their faith in Him. Christ “inaugurated” (for us) this way to God through His death on the cross.

- And notice that this is “a new and living way.” The word for “new” (there) is an interesting word. It originally meant “freshly slaughtered” or “freshly killed.” So (in this sense) we would say that Christ is the “freshly slaughtered sacrifice” that opened the way to God.

- And yet, the amazing thing is, that the One who was “freshly slaughtered” became the “living way” to God. The word for “living way” literally means “the one that gives life.”

- His resurrection and ascension opened the door to everlasting life. His death conquered death. His death brought life – eternal life. And that “new and living way” is the only way to God.

- The word for “new” can also mean “one that was previously unavailable.” This new and living way was not available under the Old Covenant. It was *not* until the “inauguration” of the New Covenant that it became available. That’s what the author of Hebrews is trying to get his Jewish hearers to understand.

- It is the same message Jesus Himself declared (in John 14:6) when He said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the

life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.” The Apostle Peter wrote (in 1 Peter 3:18), “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God...”

- And notice v. 21, “...and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith...”

- The author of Hebrews has spent several chapters showing that Christ is the superior High Priest. As our great High Priest, He is continually interceding for us at the throne of grace. The “accuser of the brethren” can have no success before God because our great intercessor is there defending us.

- And it’s on the basis of all these “facts” that we can (now) “draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” So that leads us to the next point in our outline, which is:

B. The Faith (v. 22a)

- It’s *not* enough to give mental assent to the facts of the gospel. You must also exercise genuine saving faith. You’ve got to start with the facts. You have to understand the truths of the gospel and mentally agree that those things are true. But you’ve got to go beyond that.

- You’ve got to “draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith.” The word for “sincere” means “genuine, without any superficiality, hypocrisy, or

ulterior motive.” MacArthur says, “Coming to God with ‘full assurance’ requires commitment that is genuine.” The word for “full assurance” can be translated “with conviction” or “with certainty.”

- This genuine, sincere faith has been illustrated in various ways. One way is through the story of the tightrope walker (tell the story).

- That illustrates the truth that professing Christ without commitment to Christ is *not* true saving faith. But another powerful illustration originally comes from the mission field.

- ILL. – As a missionary translator in the New Hebrides, John Paton was frustrated in his work for a long time because the people had no word for faith. And (as you can imagine) it is difficult to communicate the gospel without this concept.

This frustration continued for several years, until one day a man who was working for him came into the house and plopped down into a big chair. When the missionary saw that, he immediately had a thought. He asked him what the word would be for what he had just done.

The word he gave communicated the idea of fully trusting his full weight upon that chair, and from that time on, the missionaries in the New Hebrides had their word for saving faith. Paton used this word to translate the English word “faith” in his New Testament.

- John MacArthur explains why this was the perfect word for true saving faith. He said, “Without hesitation or reservation, the man had totally committed his body to the chair. He had felt his need for rest, he was convinced that the chair provided a place for rest, and he committed himself to the chair for rest. A believer must, in the same way, totally commit his life to the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then is faith, saving faith.”

- Now, we’re going to spend a whole lot more time on genuine faith (because the entire 11th chapter is devoted to that), but there must be a response to the truth of the gospel of genuine saving faith.

- This response is the exact opposite of what he had warned about earlier (in 3:12) where he said, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God.” Don’t respond that way – instead respond with genuine saving faith. (Pause) Well, this leads us thirdly to:

C. The Forgiveness (v. 22b)

- Look at the last part of v. 22, “...having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” He’s writing this from the perspective of those who do (in fact) respond with genuine saving faith.

- What do they experience? A spiritual cleansing and complete washing. The concepts (here) are taken from the ceremonies of the Old Covenant system, but they are

spiritually applied to New Covenant believers. The priests were continually washing themselves and the sacred vessels in the basins of clear water, and the blood was continually being sprinkled as a sign of cleansing.

- And yet these things were merely external, so they had no power to truly cleanse the inner man. Only the gospel can do that. One of the clearest verses on the power of the gospel is Titus 3:5, which says, “He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit...”

- It is that “washing of regeneration” that Heb. 10:22 is referring to. That regeneration of the HS (which takes place at the moment of salvation) can cleanse our conscience and completely wash away our sin.

- That phrase “and our bodies washed with pure water” has nothing at all to do with water baptism. It has to do with the spiritual cleansing that comes from regeneration.

- In Eph. 5 Paul talks about the church becoming sanctified by God “having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word.” The word of the gospel cleanses the heart and makes believers brand new on the inside.

- And you may remember what we saw in chapter 9. *There* it was mentioned that the water used for the cleansing of impurity was prepared with the ashes of a red heifer.

- And in 9:13ff the rhetorical question was asked, “For if...the ashes of a [red] heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh [under the Old Covenant], how much more will the blood of Christ, who...offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

- The prophets declared that the New Covenant would result in the cleansing of the inner man. In Ezek. 36:25-26 it says (of the New Covenant) “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

- What does that mean (now) for New Covenant believers? It means that we no longer have to fear (in approaching God) as one who has an evil conscience – but we can approach His throne (now) with boldness and confidence, knowing that our hearts are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

- So we have the confidence of faith (as part of how we are to respond to Christ), but secondly we also need:

II. A CONFESSION OF HOPE (v. 23)

- Look with me at v. 23, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful...” Now, this is in the Greek present tense, so it

is something that is to be continual – and it is in the imperative, which means it is something we are commanded to do.

- And there are two critical aspects of understanding this rightly. First of all, we have to understand that (biblically) “hope” is never wishful thinking (or optimism) on the part of a believer. It is absolute certainty!

- The NT does *not* use the word “hope” in the same way our world uses that word today. Our hope is something *not* yet realized, but that does *not* mean it is uncertain in any way.

- And secondly, we have to understand that a genuine believer *will* be hopeful. The word for “hope” and the word for “faith” come from the same root. And (as John MacArthur points out) “A person who genuinely trusts, cannot help being hopeful.”

- In fact, a hopeless believer is a contradiction in terms. And a person who is genuinely hopeful, *will* (indeed) hold fast. What this is describing (here) is really the human side of the doctrine of the “perseverance of the saints.”

- This is a Reformation doctrine, and it is thoroughly biblical. It is the teaching of Scripture that those who are truly born again (spiritually) *will* (in fact) persevere unto the end.

- The teaching of Scripture is that anyone who falls away from the faith was never truly born again to begin with. “Faith that fizzles before the finish was faulty from the first.” Or (as 1 John 2:19 says), “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”

- Those who are truly born again *will* hold on – but that is *not* why we are eternally secure. We are eternally secure because *He* is holding on to *us*. That is the *divine* side of this doctrine.

- And so, the imperative to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” is *not* based on the idea that we can (somehow) keep ourselves saved, but it is based on the fact that “He who promised is faithful.”

- God is the One who saved us in the first place, and He is the One who *keeps* us saved. That’s where our eternal security comes from. It does *not* come from our own ability to “hold on.” We can hold fast our profession because He is holding onto us.

- So what is the “perseverance of the saints”? It is *evidence* that we are truly born again. From the human side, it shows that we have been genuinely, spiritually regenerated.

- And (as John MacArthur writes), “It is a paradox, just like the doctrine of election. God sovereignly chooses those who are saved, but He will *not* save anyone who

does *not* believe. God keeps us secure in His Son, but our own wills, expressed in holding on in perseverance, are also involved.”

- Even the most fervent Calvinist recognizes that God’s sovereignty does *not* negate man’s responsibility. Jesus said, “No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). But He also said, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine” (John 8:31).

- In the parable of the sower we see four different responses to the gospel, but true believers are pictured (in Luke 8:15 as “those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.”

- A genuine believer will always “hold onto hope.” Genuine faith cannot fail. However, it *can* “waver.” And that is why there is an imperative (here) to “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.” It’s why we are reminded that “He who promised is faithful.”

- From the human side, our command from the Lord is to be like a bulldog in hanging on that eternal hope, and *not* letting it go (even for a moment). We’re to have an unflinching grip on that future hope. Why? Because that will carry us through suffering and adversity. It is a huge part of our enduring faith in God.

- What is a major problem in the contemporary American Evangelical church? It is the fact that too many

professing Christians sway back and forth with the winds of falsehood, persecution, doubt and unbelief that blow against them. What the author of Hebrews is endeavoring to do, is to make unwavering pillars of us, that do *not* bend no matter what winds may blow.

- It’s interesting – the word that is used for “without wavering” (in the NASB) literally means “unbending.” It communicates the concept of stability or immutability. It can be used of a lasting friendship (for example) that stands up through thick and thin. Philo even uses this word to describe the immutability of God.

- In other words, our holding onto hope should be unchanging. It is to be lasting and permanent. The word for “hold fast” is a word that means “hold to, keep, retain, occupy, or possess.”

- Guthrie says that “in extrabiblical sources students could be said to ‘retain’ a body of teaching, which calls to mind early Christian exhortations to hold onto the traditions of the faith (such as 1 Cor. 11:2 and 15:2).”

- It is the Greek word “katecho,” and it speaks of keeping a tight grip on sound doctrine and *not* letting it be lost in any way. In fact, the word “catechism” comes from this word.

- So we have a confidence of faith and a confession of hope. Thirdly we see:

III. A CONSIDERATION OF LOVE (vv. 24-25)

- Look with me at v. 24, "...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."

- The imperative (here) is that we make sure we give consideration to the responsibility of stimulating other believers toward "love and good deeds." The main verb is "consider." Again, it is in the present tense – keep on considering.

- What does this mean? It means you have to give it some thought. It means you have to come up with a plan. It means you have to develop a strategy for enhancing the fellowship of the church.

- And this verse deals with the issue of "how to connect." Listen, don't tell me that you are just having a hard time "connecting" with other people in the church! This verse tells us that each of us has to come up with a plan for doing that. It is our responsibility as Christians to make sure we are constantly considering how to stimulate other Christians to love and good deeds.

- Invite someone over to your house. Get involved in a ministry. Do something to help disciple someone. This is an ongoing divine responsibility for every Christian. It is an assignment from God.

- I like what Jay Adams says (at this point). He says, "This week, make a list of at least 30 ways that you can stimulate other Christians to love and fine deeds." This would greatly help most of us, because we tend to get so consumed with ourselves that we would be greatly benefitted in changing our focus to others.

- Listen, any time I hear someone say that they are just *not* connecting, it really says more about their own spiritual immaturity than anything else. It tells us that there are those who are *not* heeding this command from God.

- And notice the word "stimulate." It can be translated "provoke, stir up, or arouse." It can mean "to sharpen." This is a very strong word. It is only used in one other place in the NT – and *there* it is used in a very different way.

- In Acts 15:39 it means "sharp contention." We're told there that Paul and Barnabas disagreed about whether they should take John Mark with them on their next missionary journey, and it says, "...there arose such a sharp disagreement [there's your word] that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus."

- So it is used (there) in a negative sense, but here in Hebrews it is a positive admonition. The idea of "provocation" is more often used in a negative way, but here it is the exact opposite. We are to provoke each other

(in the sense of stimulating them) to love the brethren and to be involved in “good deeds.”

- And this is connected with something else. Verse 25, “not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.”

- This is all in the context of the regular assembling together of the believers. This has to do with when the church gathers. (Explain the two times when the church gathers corporately...) And listen, one of the main reasons why you need to be faithful to assemble with the church regularly when it gathers, is so you can encourage other believers.

- It's *not* about what *you* get out of it. It's *not* about whether you like the song the choir sang. It's *not* about whether you like the preacher's tie. It's *not* about whether you like the topic of the sermon. It's about being able to encourage other believers in the Lord. It's not about what we get out of it, but what we give to it.

- By the way, that's why you should want to come back on Sunday night – because it is much easier to do that on Sunday night than it is on Sunday morning. But the point is, every time the church gathers corporately, you should be there so you can stimulate others to love and good deeds, and to encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ.

- And notice that this verse refutes the false idea that the church is *optional* for believers. Apparently there were some (in that day) who were in the habit of *not* meeting with the other believers when they gathered.

- Perhaps they bought into the lie that we can worship God anywhere at any time, so we don't need to gather with the church. You know, we hear that today – “I can worship God down by the lake or river just as much as I can in church.”

- Perhaps there were some who thought they could just worship God at home with their family, and that they didn't need the rest of the Christians in the community.

- But listen, any kind of notion like this is really saying we think we know better than God – because God's Word says we are to be faithful to gather together with other believers.

- And notice it says, “and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” Some commentators have seen that as a reference to the imminent destruction of the Temple which brought an end to all the sacrifices, but it most likely is a reference to the Second Coming of Christ.

- Listen, some of you are prophecy gurus, and you're always talking about the return of Christ. If you really believe His return is near, you ought to be the most faithful church member around, because the Word of God declares that we ought to be more diligent to obey this command the closer the Day of His coming draws near.

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER