



## How Shall We Live?

Hebrews 10:19-25

December 18, 2011

Pastor Nick Shaffer

---

Beloved as we look at the Word of God together this morning, I want to take some time to express my thanksgiving to God for His grace to us over these last several months as we have been returning to Christ as our first love. What a faithful God, what a faithful Savior and Lord, to confront our sin and to bring us to repentance. Over the last few months, I have been thankful to see our passion for Christ renewed and revitalized. I have been encouraged to see a fresh and stronger love for Christ, a determination to really examine our lives in light of the Word of God and bring our minds and hearts into subjection to it, a greater determination to battle sin and be obedient to the commands of God – even when they are hard, a willingness to deal with sin as it has been revealed and the rejection of idols that we have constructed. It has been a great encouragement to see an increased sensitivity to the leading of the Holy Spirit, a passion not only for theology but primarily for the Christ of that theology.

I have been encouraged to see a greater desire to pursue biblical unity, an increasing investment of our lives in one another, reconciliation that has long needed to happen between people actually happening, a renewed zeal for the gospel and a greater humility and gratitude to Christ for His gracious salvation than I have seen in us in quite some time. But most of all I have been encouraged by the evidences of true biblical love that I am seeing in this body – evidences of love for Christ and for one another – real tangible things, not just words, but real, genuine, personal worship and obedience to Christ, declaring His worth in word and in action, and serving and preferring one another above ourselves, bearing burdens with one another, rejoicing with one another, sharpening one another, praying with and for one another, caring and concern for one another. It seemed to all come together at the Christmas worship service this last weekend. It was like, as a body, we needed that context to confess our love to Christ, to declare His worth and the truth of His gospel, an opportunity as a corporate body to glorify God for his pursuing love. It was a special time that was a window, I believe, to the heart work that God has been doing in us over the last few months.

I thank God for His mercy and grace to us because all these things, ultimately, are the consequence of God's grace. But this cannot be merely a season for us: it needs to be our way of life and that is what I want for us to see this morning. I want us to see how it is that we need to live, and all the more, as we see the Day of Christ approaching, the day of His revelation from heaven as King of kings and Lord of lords. We find the answer to that question in the text that we are considering this morning.

This text in Hebrews is one of those texts of Scripture that should be written large over our lives as a continual reminder of how we must live as the people of God, of how love for God and love for brothers and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ and for our neighbor is to be the driving force of our lives.

The writer of Hebrews, for the first 9 and ½ chapters of the book, has been establishing the supremacy of Jesus Christ -- His supremacy as Savior, His supremacy as High Priest of God, His supremacy as Lord. He has been powerfully establishing Christ's labor of love, according to the will of the Father, to bring us to God and now, in light of all that He has done, the writer of Hebrews gives us this series of three overarching commands that are to define the people of God until the day that Christ returns -- three commands that give definition to the commandment to love the Lord your God and to love your neighbor as yourself. Look at Hebrews 10:19-25 with me...

---

The question before us is what needs to be our way of life in light of the love and mercy and grace that is found in Christ alone? When I look at a text like this, it makes me realize that in light of these commands, everything else is just details. In seeing these commands and considering them in the light of the Day of Christ, it makes me realize that what you do for a living, if you are married or not, how many kids you might have, what your income level is, how many degrees you may have, what kind of house you live in, what your family lineage is, where you went to school...and all the rest -- it is just details. All the things that we overemphasize are made clearly secondary by the words that we see in Hebrews 10. How do we live in light of the redeeming grace and pursuing love of God to atone for our sins? The writer of Hebrews makes it pretty clear -- draw near, hold fast, and stir one another up. The preaching outline for this

sermon is really easy. All you have to do is follow the commands. Speaking on behalf of God, the writer of Hebrews tells us to

1) Draw near to God. (v. 19-22) Look again starting in verse 19. When you take away all of the modifying and descriptive phrases, there is really only one command in verses 19-22 and that command is to draw near to God. What does it mean for us to draw near to God? The call to draw near simply means to come into the presence of God, to commune with Him and to come to know Him intimately and personally. To draw near to God is to come to know the greatness of His person, to delight in the truth that you belong to Him, to come to Him, finding in Him all that we need, confident that there is great reward in pursuing a deepening personal relationship with Him. It is a call to worship Him, to delight in Him, to make Him your boast and delight, to dwell with Him and to find supreme satisfaction in Him. That is the first command that the writer of Hebrews gives to us. Just listen to the way that the writer of Hebrews describes drawing near. (Hebrews 4:16; 7:25; 11:6, ESV)

There is bountiful mercy and unfailing grace, promised salvation and certain security, and immeasurably great reward for those who believe and who draw near to God in Christ. God commands us to draw near to Him and to do so in confidence, with boldness, recognizing the liberty and freedom that we have to draw near to God the Father. God desires that we draw near to Him with the assurance that He will receive us and in fact delights to receive us, because He does. Listen to the words of Zephaniah as he describes God's delight in His people: (Zephaniah 3:17, ESV)

How can we draw near to God with confidence? How is it that we can draw near to God with boldness and assurance He will receive us? We have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh... The writer of Hebrews is telling us that for those who know Christ as their wrath-bearer, as their Savior, who trust in the blood of Christ for redemption, we stand in the entranceway to the presence of the Lord with free and open access to God. That is the meaning behind the words "holy places." The writer of Hebrews is using Temple imagery.

The "holy places" or the Holy of holies was that place in the Temple in the OT where the Ark of the Covenant was, the Mercy Seat, the throne of God, and where the presence of God dwelt

with the people. But you remember that in the OT, the Holy of holies was off limits to everyone except for the high priest and he could enter it only once a year on the Day of Atonement as he took the blood of the sacrifice for Israel's sins into the Holy of holies and sprinkled it on the Mercy Seat. The Holy of holies, the place of God's manifest presence, was blocked off from all worshippers and even from the other priests by a thick curtain. The way into the presence of God was blocked by this great curtain which had the purpose of protecting the sinful men and women from the holiness of God and which blocked the way of approach to God.

But the writer of Hebrews is saying, Jesus' flesh is like that curtain, not that it blocks the way to God but that it is the way to God. It is through Him, through His flesh – His incarnation, His taking upon Himself our humanity without any diminishment of His deity and through His flesh torn on our behalf, for our sin, that we have access to God. When the flesh of Jesus Christ was ripped asunder at the cross, the way to God was open.

This is the new and living way to the presence of God. This is new in the sense that we have what the Old Testament saints did not have – the right of entrance into the presence of the Lord, a way into God's personal and relational presence, into intimate and real communion with Him, opened by Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The OT saints did not enjoy such an invitation from God because the blood of Jesus Christ had not yet atoned for their sins. Now, as a result of what Jesus has done, all of God's people have, as their privilege, immediate and intimate access to God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Through Jesus we may, pass directly into the throne room of God, united by faith to our Savior. That is new.

It is a living way. It is a living way because it is the death, burial and resurrection of Christ that imparts life to our dead souls. Even more than that, it is a lasting way. Christ, having died for our sins and having poured out His blood to atone for us, has risen from the dead to love forevermore. For that reason, there is no danger of this way ever becoming obsolete, ever closing or passing away.

It cannot, because Christ who has risen from the dead, never to die again is the great priest over the house of God. It is through Him and His offering of the perfect sacrifice – His own dear blood – that we are invited to draw near with confidence. As our high priest, Christ stands continually in the presence of God the Father, interceding for us, His blood continually

pleading for us and standing as the testimony of our forgiveness, we are commanded to enter boldly into God's presence and draw near to Him. The perfect life of Christ and the perfect death of Christ on the cross – His perfect obedience to the Father – has turned away and exhausted the wrath of the sin-hating, holiness-loving God. If our High Priest who “suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18, ESV), is forever at the right hand of the Father in heaven, we can be confident that joined to Christ by faith, we belong there too.

Do you see beloved? The liberty, the freedom that we have to enter into the presence of God and to know Him intimately and personally is the direct result of God's love for us, of Christ's love for us, expressed in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf. And if we understand the richness of that sacrifice for us and the reward of knowing God, we will make it our business to draw near to God, literally the idea here is that we will “wear out a path” to God's presence. And he tells us how we should come:

With a true heart..not flippantly or casually, not mindlessly or irreverently, not with hypocrisy in our hearts, but in sincerity, with a heart that is filled with passion and love for God and a desire to love and honor Him more. It is a heart that if it is lagging in zeal and love, confesses that it is so and longs to have that flagging love for God refreshed and renewed. It is to come with a heart that is singularly intent upon God and seeking after Him. We are to come

In full assurance of faith...that is, certain that Christ has done all things necessary to grant us access to God and to make us acceptable in His sight. We are to draw near to God with a confidence that is based upon faith in all that Christ has done for you, not wavering but in full assurance.

With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water...We are to draw near to God with clear conscience. The blood of Christ so completely covers our sin and removes our guilt that our consciences can be at peace - not because we are sinless and perfect, and not because we are not convicted in our conscience of sin when we fall short, but because when we do sin and our conscience does accuse us, we repent and grieve over our sin and hate it, but we also know that we have a Savior, Jesus Christ, who shed His blood for me, who bore my sin and who covers my transgressions, who because He is righteous

has made me righteous, who washed me and made me whole and clean before God the Father and who has given to me newness of life, a life transformed by the Holy Spirit, of which my baptism – bodies washed with pure water – is a beautiful picture. We have been united to Christ and so God commands 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.

We must draw near to God and we must come like this into God's presence. To approach God without confidence is dishonoring to Him and dishonoring to Christ. Is Christ's sacrifice not sufficient? Is God's love not inviting? Is his grace not greater than our sin? Beloved, God is glorified with we desire His presence, when we desire to commune with Him. The great gift of God's love is access to God Himself. Do not treat as common, do not treat with contempt the invitation this invitation to draw near to God through Christ. Written large over our lives should be these words "Draw near." Not only is the command to draw near, it is to

2) Hold fast to your confession. (v. 23) Look at verse 23 again: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23, ESV) To "hold fast" communicates the idea of guarding or keeping something, of holding to something without bending no matter the pressure and no matter the cost. The writer of Hebrews is commanding us to hold fast to the confession of our hope and the confession of our hope for eternal life is Jesus Christ. He is telling us – hold on, don't give up, don't quit, don't waver, don't walk away, but persevere, be faithful, persist and endure in your confession of Christ as Lord.

Genuine faith is persevering faith. It is lasting faith. The true believer is the one who keeps on believing, the one who continues hoping in Christ, who continues trusting in the promises of God – promises of eternal life, forgiveness of sins, to write the law on your heart, to make you pleasing in His sight, to remember your sins no more, never to leave or forsake you, to present you blameless and perfect before Him, to bless you and to keep you, to make all things work together for your good, promises of sufficient grace, to supply your every need and on and on. It is in Christ and by His grace that we have received these precious and very great promises of God. Even more the guarantee of these promises is Christ, Himself. As Paul wrote: For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. (2Co 1:20) All of the blessings of God are ours in Christ, we need look nowhere else. The true Christian is the one who confesses this truth with lips and life and who

holds fast to Christ despite persecution, despite the pressure of this world to abandon Christ and conform to its godlessness.

Listen beloved, following Christ is costly. It costs to follow Christ. Jesus never hid the cost of discipleship. He said clearly: (Matthew 16:24–25, ESV) Following Christ is costly...it costs everything. There are many who profess faith in Christ but who do not “hold fast” their profession because they never considered the cost. They wanted the benefits of Christ perhaps – forgiveness of sins, eternal life, abundant life here and now – but they do not want His Lordship. When submission to Christ costs them what they want, when the cost of discipleship is felt too painfully by their weak and worldly souls they turn back and begin to waver from their profession of faith in Christ. When it comes time to truly confess Christ by speaking the truth of the gospel, by training themselves for godliness, by rejecting worldliness, by being obedient to the commands of Scripture, they back away. While they might continue to profess faith in Christ, their way of life, their lack of obedience, their lack of love for Christ tells a different tale.

The reason that people who profess faith in Christ begin to fall away in their devotion and faithfulness to Christ is because they devalue Christ. The people who fail to hold fast to Christ fail to do so because they have devalued and cheapened Him and cheapened His precious and very great promises. They do not rightly perceive the worth of Christ, the worth of His promises, or the worthlessness of sin. They do not rightly value Christ as they should and fail to find in Him the joy that is His very person. They fail to see Christ and His promises as supremely desirable and so they let go of Him for some pseudo-savior or false promise offered by sin and compromise.

We have to fight to hold fast to Christ. There are countless temptations to let go of Him -- It comes in the way we live, in the way we act at work or at school or in the home, temptations to unholy speech and fleshly passions, temptations to reject spiritual discipline and self-control, temptations in the way that we use our money and time. Temptation to let go of Christ and lay hold of sin – that in essence is what we do when ever we choose disobedience and faithlessness over obedience and trust in Christ.

The way that we hold fast to Christ is by finding our full contentment only in Him and with Him. The way that we hold fast to our confession of Christ is by reminding ourselves continually of his perfections, rehearsing the greatness of His love, remembering the greatness of His sacrifice, recalling the promises of the gospel, repeatedly extolling and honoring Him for His praiseworthiness, and responding to all of these with trust and faith, devotion and obedience, and love. It is only as we are continually doing this that we will guard our hearts from defection from Christ.

In a world filled with people that are continually turning loose of things that no longer hold their fascination or bring them immediate gratification, we are called to hold fast to our confession of hope in Christ, to trust in His promises, to be faithful to Him and hold fast to Him no matter the cost.

Hold fast to Christ because salvation is found alone in Him.. Hold fast to Christ because He is our righteousness and without Him there is no righteousness.

Hold fast to Christ for real peace is found only in Him. Hold fast to Christ because all holiness springs from Him. Hold fast to Christ, for in Him is strength and grace for every trial and every day. Hold fast to Christ for in Him is life and hope and wisdom and joy and pleasures forevermore and a million blessings beside. Hold fast to His truth, refuse to compromise His gospel and you will not be drawn away by falsehood. Hold fast to Christ and you will guard your heart from idols and you will not fall away from the faith. Let these words be written over your life...Hold fast to Christ, fight to stay faithful, beloved. Draw near, hold fast and last, the writer of Hebrews says,

3) Stir one another up. (v. 24-25) Look, starting in verse 24: "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." (Hebrews 10:24-25, ESV)

These are such great words. The writer of Hebrews tells us to draw near, to hold fast and then to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Now I want you to notice something here beloved, because this is important. This command is not what you might expect the writer of Hebrews to give to us. The command isn't consider how to love each other and do good deeds. That would be Biblical but that isn't the command here. The command is

consider how to stir up one another to love and good deeds. The writer of Hebrew is calling us to express our love toward one another by considering how it is that we can – literally the word is incite – or provoke or encourage or fire up one another to loving God more, to loving one another, to good works in keeping with love for God and for others – everything from faithfulness and holiness, to preaching, to evangelism, to truth-telling, to using spiritual gifts, to faithful giving, to loving your wife or loving your husband – the list is endless.

Here is the thing. The Scriptures know nothing of the contemporary individualistic mindset, or the self-serving, self-contained lifestyle, the idea of “Jesus and me and nobody else is important” that has invaded so many of our churches. That is a bankrupt philosophy. God has designed and constructed His church, the body of Christ, to function like a human body. Each part interconnected and vital to the well-being of the whole. There is no such thing as an individualistic Christianity. The writer of Hebrews makes this clear with the command to consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Instead, he is calling us to consider one another – to think about one another, and focus on one another, to let our minds be focused on one another and not ourselves for the express purpose of thinking of ways to spur them on to love and good deeds.

Beloved, listen to me. The overwhelming testimony of Scripture is that thriving and strong and flourishing faith depends on Christians deliberately and thoughtfully encouraging and edifying one another and stirring one another up to love and good works. We need one another to persevere and to stay strong in the faith. Without deliberate and purposeful fellowship with one another, it is altogether too easy for us to wander from Christ, to lose our passion and fire for God and His gospel, and to become hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. That is why earlier in this same letter, the writer of Hebrews said: (Hebrews 3:12–13, ESV)

This doesn't happen by chance. In order to do this, we need to meet together, we need to be with one another. I find it interesting that the direct application of this command is the need to meet together as the people of God. You know it is a great discouragement to the brothers and sisters in Christ when people take their participation in the corporate worship life of the church so lightly as not make corporate worship a priority over everything else. The author of Hebrews here is saying that we need to love God and love one another so much that we gather together for the sake of studying the word, of lifting up prayer to God, of worshipping together, and engaging in mutual and shared life. The author is telling us there that Christ's work has a

huge implication for our relationship to one another as fellow believers in Christ as it does with our relationship with God Himself.

There is great encouragement in singing together and worshipping together, in listening to the Word of God proclaimed together – that can be exceedingly encouraging, and faith building, and soul stirring. It is like the term that football commentators are using to describe the effect that Tim Tebow has had on the Denver Broncos since taking over as the QB. They can't explain how it is that he wins based on his stats alone and so they have attributed it to "complementary football" where the offense, defense, and special teams feed off of one another. They say that because Tebow can run, he makes the defense better by allowing them to rest and all of that. They talk about how his teammates feed off of him. Because he is clutch. Likewise, there is such thing, I think, as "complementary worship" where we feed off of one another and our expressions of praise and adoration to God, our expressions of love and devotion to God, in a large corporate setting.

But, as important as corporate worship on a Sunday is, it is not enough. To meet together and to encourage one another requires more than that. We need time in which to truly exhort and encourage one another. But the idea here is of face-to-face ministry. It is one of the reasons for what we have been doing on Wednesday night during this season of returning to our first love – getting into smaller groups, devoting that time to prayer and encouragement regarding the sermon, applying the Word of God to one another and encouraging and spurring one another on to love and good works. It is the kind of thing that takes place in our small groups that meet in different houses to encourage one another with the promises of God and exhort one another in love for Christ and holiness and faithfulness to God's word. It is what needs to be taking place before the services and after the services. It requires of us investment of time, phone calls, e-mails, texts, sharing meals together, intercessory prayer, visits, and personal, non-superficial conversations, sitting with someone you don't know in church, having people over to your house for a bible study, going out of your way for the sake of others. We cannot fulfill this command by simply ducking in and out of worship services but by real investment in one another.

We cannot neglect to meet together and expect that we will be strong or fulfill our responsibility before God to strengthen and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ. But just like it is in our own age, even early in the history of the church, the habit of some was to neglect meeting together. The word that is translated as "neglecting" is a word that means to

forsake, abandon, or desert. Do you see the weight of this? Neglecting to meet together is desertion of the church, desertion of the bride of Christ. Withdrawing from corporate worship, avoiding or failing to prioritize Sunday School, neglecting prayer meeting – corporate drawing near to God, avoiding small group, avoiding personal and invested relationships with other believers is abandoning the bride and body of Christ and this neglect can be habit forming. This is not small and insignificant; it is sinful and spiritually deadly. If as a sheep, you separate yourself from invested life in the flock of God, it is only a matter of time before some wolf picks you off or one of the sheep that you should have been ministering to.

We cannot fail to see how important this is for us. Beloved, the warnings of Scripture are serious and sobering. The writer of Hebrews commands us to encourage one another even more as we see the Day of Christ approaching and he says that for good reason. Jesus said regarding the days before His appearing: (Matthew 24:11–12, ESV) Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:1ff (2 Timothy 3:1–5, ESV). If our faith is going to survive and thrive in the midst of flagging faith and lukewarmness, then we must take these words in Hebrews 10:25 very seriously. There are going to be increased pressures and trials and evil and falsehood masquerading as the truth. God's plan for us to endure and to thrive is that great encouragement come from other Christians speaking the Word of God in to our lives and praying for us – certainly the pastor, but other believers as well. God chose to design the church to be a means of grace to keep you strong, to keep you devoted to Him. God placed you into a body of believers in order that you would encourage and exhort and be encouraged and exhorted. That is what God has designed for your good and for His glory. We need one another. Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Oh beloved – this is how we must live! This is what we were made for – to draw near to God through Christ, to hold fast to Jesus Christ as Lord, and to stir up one another to greater and greater degrees of love and to good works. Everything else is just details. I have to ask you today, do these commands from the writer of Hebrews – do they describe you, are they central to your way of thinking? Do they define you or are you still too much consumed with the details of life? Do they seem like important commands, but not important enough to radically redefine your life? This is what life is about. This is what we were made to do. Let us embrace it. Let us labor in the power of the Spirit to draw near to God, to hold fast to Christ and to stir one another up to love and good works and let us do that knowing that as we do so, we are walking in “a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.” (Colossians 1:10, ESV)

---

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2011

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.