

Since We Have Confidence...

- ¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have **confidence to enter the holy places** by the blood of Jesus,
²⁰ by the **new and living** way that he opened for us **through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,**
²¹ and since we have **a great priest** over the house of God,
²² **let us** draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our **hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.**
²³ **Let us** hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.
²⁴ And **let us** consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
²⁵ 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 10:19-25

Doctrine and Life

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN doctrine and life? The answer to this question is something that a lot of people do not understand and get badly wrong. One answer is to say that “life” is the reason that doctrine exists. “Give me something practical,” seems to be the mantra of our age. In other words, tell me how this doctrine matters to how I live. The end result of this is often that the only doctrines that “matter” are those seen to “apply” to my life and that make me behave better. These doctrines are almost always something in the law. “Tell me what *to do*.” This is a big problem, so let’s pursue this whole line of thinking a bit longer.

Most people, and all true Christians, desire to live lives that are happy, contented, and be “at peace.” For most I dare say that this seems to be their goal in life. Unbelievers most often seek such things by putting themselves at the center of their own happiness. They obey whatever appetite tells them will give them these things, and those appetites come from a heart that is running from God. Many times these are destructive and in conflict with the goal. Then they can’t

figure out why they don't have a lasting "peaceful, easy feeling." For, as the Eagles told us, this is what they mean by being "at peace."

But of course, it is sometimes the case that they will do things on principle, for altruistic reasons, that is with the interest of others in mind. I suppose it could even be argued that at least some of the time, they really are doing these things for truly selfless reasons and the result is still what we said above. They get this from the law written on their heart, or perhaps even from the law in the Bible that they have heard all of their life. What makes the unbeliever wrong here may not be how they are behaving outwardly or even what they are attaining inwardly, for it is not wrong to outwardly obey God's law about your neighbor, nor even to seek your own happiness, as Pastor Piper has shown many times. The Bible presupposes that we will (for example, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" is rooted in the idea that you want what is best for yourself).

So what is the problem? Here's the key. If the outcome they sometimes get is exactly what you are desiring as the highest goal of your life, then **it makes God irrelevant**. They have managed to live their lives exactly how you desire to

live yours, but entirely without God. Thus, Christianity turns into this inward, subjective “experience,” that just becomes my way of being happy. They have their way. We have our way. Let’s all just get along and not worry about those move divisive doctrinal things (starting with God himself) that really don’t matter to our lives anyway. This is the failure of Liberal Christianity and so much of Evangelicalism which seeks “life-change” through experiences, feelings, emotions, and gentle law preaching. This ought to be enough to tell you that such a goal as happiness or a feeling of peace is not what you are to be thinking is the goal of Christianity, or why you are to come to church. And make no mistake, this is the spirit of our age in most churches, for this is what dominates what our churches look like, preach, and sing.

But there is **another answer** to the relationship between doctrine and life. This answer is that **doctrine is the reason that life exists**. Plenty of non-believers know all about theology. They are mentally acquainted with whole systems of Christian theology, but they employ that theology as **an end to itself** and the results are things like puffing up their own heads, being proud about their mental prowess, loving

a tradition more than Christians or the Bible, standing up as a lighthouse against the evil liberals, being the last bastion of True Faith in all the world, standing firm against doctrinal drift, beating other people down with how smart they are, or simply just thinking that the study of theology and getting all of your theological ducks in a row straight is the purpose of life. This is what God *really* cares about.

Again, at least in some of these cases, these are **not bad things in and of themselves**. What is bad is when they become the reason you exist, when your whole life is consumed with just them, when they eclipse all other things, when the relationship between doctrine and life is one that is all about the head, but not the body or the heart. This is particularly a problem in a lot of churches that place a high value upon theology. It is an easy trap to fall into. In fact, both of these answers to the relationship between doctrine and life are easy traps to fall into.

Back to Milk and Meat

Now, there really is a relationship between doctrine and life, and not only non-Christians, but many **true believers**

can be quite confused on this subject. Back in **Hebrews 5:12-13** we saw how the Apostle talked about **milk and solid food**. We saw that the “milk” was the very basics of theology, kind of the opposite of what many people think of as milk. The solid food is the deeper levels of the theology that he has been talking about now for several chapters, beginning with Melchizedek. Today, something else enters the picture and it is a further answer to our question about doctrine and life, milk and solid food.

The Bible always follows the same pattern when answering this question. It doesn't do it so much with explicit statements as with **how the material in the books of the Bible are organized**. Learning and living always follow the same basic pattern. What I mean is that the Bible always gives you milk and *then* it gives you meat. This parallels the way we grow from infancy into adulthood. It doesn't assume one or the other—at least not on the whole. It actually gives you both. It expects you to drink and eat both. And it knows that when you do it in **the right order**, with **the right goal** in mind, that it will change your life. *But not for the sake of changing your life*. It never sees doctrine or our own behavior or happiness as the end, but only as the means

to a much greater end.

The more I think about the material in the sermon that is Hebrews, the more amazed I am at how it actually balances the two parts of the “solid food” without prioritizing one over the other. What are these two parts? I’m talking about just the solid food now. The first are those **weighty, fantastic, but sometimes difficult to understand doctrines** of the Bible. The second is our ethics and **how we are to behave**. There are several warning passages in Hebrews and we are about to enter into another of them. These warning passages always tell you how to behave. But they also are always built upon the solid foundation of **weighty, necessary, wonderful theology**.

Hebrews has been talking about the amazing types in the OT and how Christ fulfills them all: priest, temple, sacrifice, atonement, and so on. This is the meat. It hasn’t done this as an end to itself however. No, the point is never merely to know these things so that you can come away from the sermon having some kind of great religious head-trip. God forbid. That is never the point of theology. Rather, the point—and this is really the essence of our original question—is that we may come to know the Father through

Jesus Christ his Son by the Holy Spirit who testifies to us and comes to live inside of us. **Knowing God. That is the proper relationship between doctrine and life.**

Thus, our passage today begins with the very important word: “**Therefore.**” Constantly building upon what has just been said, it widens our understanding of **God**, of **his ways**, of **his gospel**, and of **ourselves**. You see, in his first coming, Jesus has done everything necessary to bring us to God. He has lived a perfect life, thereby obeying the terms of the original covenant. He has totally pleased his Father in all things, and is therefore able as a man to represent us. He has offered a sacrifice that appeases God’s wrath against sin, defeats the powers and principalities in heavenly places, and atones for what we have done wrong. He has entered into heaven itself thereby tearing down the OT shadows, replacing them with the reality of himself. He is the mediator who is able to perfectly represent God to us and us to God. Everything is finished.

The reason it has told us about these things and more is so that we might, through this good news, come to know God. When you know the True God, everything changes for you. Your priorities are not longer about yourself first,

nor even your neighbor—*first*. They are about God first, about pleasing him, glorifying him, and worshiping him. This becomes the end for which you exist, for why church exists, for why you gather together. It is a very different end than seeking your own contented life or seeking to be right all the time about what you believe. Those things are important and good, but only means or fruit. They are not the end, the purpose.

Two Morsels of Doctrine

Entering Holy Places with Confidence

Our passage today presupposes that you have come to know the the Lord Jesus, though it will soon impress upon you even more Gospel because we are always in need to the good news. But since, for now, it assumes that you know Jesus, it says, “Therefore, brothers.” You are brothers, one to another, shoulder to shoulder, whose elder Brother is Jesus himself. “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus” (Heb 10:19).

Confidently entering the holy places. This is the first of two delectable morsels of meaty solid food of doctrine that he wants to yet feed you. It is a rich, meaty thing to know that we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus. Only the priests could do that in the OT, in fact, only one of all those priests, and that only one once a year. Now, it says that we all have this privilege, because the sprinkled blood of Christ has purified us from all of our sins, once for all. Do you understand the great power of Christ here to open such a place to you, the great honor that has been bestowed upon you who, apart from Christ, are without honor, and the great responsibility you have to do what he says, and to actually go to God through prayer and worship with his people?

Do not forget the newness of this. Realize the life that comes to you through such a thing. “By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh” (20). One more type is here introduced to richen this savory meat even more. Jesus’ own flesh—that is his human body—is the True Curtain to which the curtain separating the holy spaces in the OT tabernacle pointed. All things point to Christ and his work, so that God might be

glorified and the Son might be exalted.

The High Priest Over God's House

The second morsel upon which you are to savor as you chew, like the first, begins with the word “[since](#).” “[Since we have a great priest over the house of God](#)” (13). Jesus is our Melchizedekian priest-king, the one who has done all things for us and our salvation and who continues to intercede for us as he looks over the heavenly house of God. He has observed and continues to observe all the things told him by the Father, so that he is more faithful than Moses over the house, more able and obedient than Aaron over the priesthood. When we enter the holy places, we do so by coming to him and through him. He is our intercessor, our sacrifice, our atoning blood, and our priest.

Three Tidbits of Living

These two truths which have been discussed in detail now become the grounding for further meat that you are to chew. These come in the form of [three exhortations or](#)

commandments¹ that all begin with the words “let us.” You see, in the Bible, the commandments of God always come after the gospel has been given. For, the God knows that only when you have a heart changed by his Holy Spirit through good news will you be able to obey the law with the correct end in mind. And this is the relationship between doctrine and life. Our spiritually renewed hearts, which are changed by the omnipotent power of God through the gospel that comes into our hearts and minds, then empower our bodies to do good works. We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone. It is necessarily accompanied with good works. *Necessarily*. God does not save a person only to leave them unable or unwilling in the spirit to obey him.

And so both theology and now the law become meat for us today. The good doctrine fuels our lives by the power of a transformed life in Christ. So what are we exhorted to do? Let us look at the three instructions.

¹ **Going Deeper:** They are three verbs, not in the usual imperative mood—which is the mood of command, but in the subjunctive mood, which is the mood of hope or wish. So while not strictly commandments like we usually think of, they nevertheless exhort us to obey and do the things described. If we do not, then we are not obeying God, demonstrating fruit, or using the means he has given us to grow in the faith.

Draw Near to God

First, “**Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.**” The command is to **draw near to God**. “Drawing near” is entering into communion with him. Therefore, while it is a command, it is also the very essence of why we exist, for in doing so we worship and glorify him.

Every Christian desires to draw near to God. They can’t help it. But some are afraid. Others don’t know how to do it. Hebrews teaches us **the correct way** to draw near. In the verse, this is explained as being both **internal** and **external**. Both the heart and the body are involved. Christianity is not purely outward—just doing the right things. Nor is it purely inward—just being sincere without caring about doing anything right (such is actually a contradiction). No, it is both inward and outward.

We draw near **first inwardly**. This is seen in the two prepositional phrases which modify the command. First, we draw near “**with a true heart.**” Second, we draw near “**in full assurance of faith.**”² Third, we draw near “**with our hearts**

² The ESV has another preposition “with our hearts sprinkled...” But this is technically a participle (having our hearts sprinkled) and rightly belongs with the second participle “Having the body bathed.” See below.

sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.”

A “true heart” is sometimes translated as a “sincere” heart (NAS). But in our day, people think you can be sincere even if you are false. It is only the feeling that matters. “He means well,” we often say. True hearts must be sincere, but sincerity in drawing near to God comes only because the heart has been made new. This was the new covenant promise, “I will write the law on their hearts” (Heb 10:16; Jer 31:33) because God gives you a new heart (Ezek 36:26). This new heart with the law written upon it is no longer a false heart that hates God and deceives self. It is a true heart, given life by God with a new Spirit within it. This is why it can be sincere. Therefore, this sincerity is more than a feeling that you have, it is a status and a state of being. But it is also a desire that comes from within. When you draw near to God, do you do so because you want to, or because something else forces you to? Far too many people come to church out of obligation rather than because they truly want to because God has renewed them.

Second, we draw near internally is with full assurance of

faith.³ We do not draw near because of or by our works, but **by faith.** Faith has full assurance that Jesus has done what needs to be done. Hebrews will soon launch into an entire chapter on just this topic so that we can understand this very point better. It is therefore faith in God as its object, in the work of Christ in history, and in the imparting of the Holy Spirit in your heart. When you draw near, you are not to doubt that God hears or love you. You are assured of it in Christ. This is a commandment of God. It is not an option.

(Sprinkling and Washing)

From here, we move to two objective reasons why we may approach God this way. The first continues the internal idea, and actually helps us understand the two prepositional phrases. We draw near “**with**” or “**having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.**” Our hearts are true *because* our hearts are sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ. We draw near in full assurance *because* our evil consciences no longer condemn us. Not that they do not continue to tell

³ Notice the relationship between this verse “full assurance of faith” and Heb 11:1, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for.” These are two different words for assurance in Greek, but the concept certainly overlaps. This verse helps lead us into the Hall of Faith chapter.

us when we do wrong, but they do not condemn us. They do not tell us that God will judge us as sinners.

The image here applying the act of OT **sprinkling**—which is a type—to the NT antitype. We need to spend a little time here in order to understand a difficult topic better. Like the tabernacle curtain which is a type of the body of Christ (which is the antitype), having our hearts sprinkled clean of evil consciences is the antitype that fulfills the Levitical sprinklings of the old covenant. Sprinkling was one of **two kinds of ritual baptism in the OT**. Hebrews has talked about “**various washings**” (**Heb 9:10** ESV). I do not like this translation, because the word for “washing” is *baptismos*. “Washing” presupposes that only washing should be considered baptism. This is wrong.

Sprinkling is also baptism, that is why there are *various* baptisms in the OT. But **sprinkling is a very specific kind of baptism**. What does sprinkling signify? It signifies **purification**. “**For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh...**” (**Heb 9:13**). This is said in the context of “various baptisms” just three verses earlier. This is why many Paedobaptists sprinkle when they

baptize.

Now, our church is not Paedobaptist, but Credobaptist. We are Baptists, immerse, we do not sprinkle. My reasoning may be different from others. I don't sprinkle, not because I think sprinkling is not baptism (like most Baptists think), but because sprinkling is *the wrong kind* of baptism. What it signifies is incomplete. According to this same passage in Hebrews, sprinkling with water or blood is a type. Its antitype is the death of Christ. Therefore, external sprinkling ceases to be.

The death of Jesus is a baptism. Long after Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, he told the disciples, “I have another baptism to undergo” (Mark 10:38-39; Luke 12:50). This baptism caused him great distress, because he was referring to his death. This death is now said to be a “sprinkling with his blood.” On the cross, blood and water literally dripped or sprinkled off his body (John 19:34). This was for the cleansing and forgiveness of sins. Curiously, this is the same thing we find with circumcision where the physical sign pointed ahead to the circumcision of the heart by the Spirit through the “cutting off” of Christ from this life on the cross. This is why circumcision no longer continues as a sign

for the Church. The same is true of sprinkling.

Again, in Hebrews, we have seen that “for this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant” (Heb 9:15). Jesus’ sprinkling baptism is what allows—in the new covenant—the Holy Spirit to “sprinkle our hearts” (Ezek 36:25). This is the true new covenant sprinkling. It is the heart that needs sprinkling, not the body; the heart that needs circumcising, not the body. Sprinkling served no other physical purpose than that of a sign. Especially if Luke is the author of Hebrews, then this would correspond directly to what he calls the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” in Acts. It is nothing short of regeneration, the application of the death of Christ to God’s elect when they trust by faith in Jesus’ death for them. Therefore, sprinkling baptisms were a type, a shadow, and a copy. They were baptisms, but they find their purpose and end in the baptism of Jesus on the cross. Therefore, they have ceased, just as animal sacrifices and circumcision have ceased, because they were all fulfilled in the death of Jesus Christ.

But there is **another kind of baptism** in the OT. Hebrews now talks about it, and it moves us from the inward “**true heart,**” “**full assurance,**” and “**sprinkled consciences,**” to the

outward of having “our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). What is this talking about? It is obviously talking about baptism.⁴ No longer is it talking about our hearts and consciences, but our bodies. Where else do Christians get “washed” in their bodies than in the sacrament of baptism?⁵

“Washing” (*louo*) is the word used to translate immersions, baths, and washings in the LXX, but never sprinklings. The word connotes lots of water, and other words (like “sprinkling” above) connote small amounts.⁶

⁴ Some commentators inexplicably deny this, which just baffles me. For example, “The “washing” of our bodies has usually been viewed as a reference to baptism. Calvin, however, rightly dissented from this, p 516 stating the author contextually is referring to the “old ceremonies of the law” where the priests had to wash at the laver in the tabernacle before beginning their daily duties. He also rightly connects the “washing” concept with other Old and New Testament passages which use this language to refer to cleansing by the Holy Spirit or the Word of God and not to baptism.”³⁹ Guthrie correctly pointed out that our author “gives no overt signals that he has the Christian rite [of baptism] in mind,” and that the author is continuing his use of the Old Testament imagery of purification from Hebrews 9.” (David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary [Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010], 515–516). The reason is therefore that “pure water” refers to something impossible in the physical realm, therefore it is spiritualizing and is therefore the equivalent of having a heart sprinkled. This is a failure to understand the meaning and purpose of the NT sacrament of baptism as a sign and a seal of the inward reality.

⁵ Kistemaker and Hendriksen correctly observe at this point—even citing the most vital text (Ex 29:4) to the relevance of baptism, “Baptism was not unknown to the Jew. The law of Moses stipulated that the high priest on the Day of Atonement should bathe himself before putting on his garments to enter the sanctuary (Lev. 16:4; see also Exod. 29:4; Lev. 8:6).” Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 288.

⁶ See my Appendix in *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism* on the meaning of these words.

“Pure” can be translated as “clean” (Num 5:17). It is the equivalent of fresh or living water as opposed to stale, stagnant water. The law required the former and never were washing baptisms to be performed with bad water.

Now, since it is a baptism and sprinkling is a baptism, the signification of these washing/immersion baptisms overlaps with sprinklings. Specifically, they also symbolize purification. But they do so with a slightly different figure. It is not the figure of splashing something upon a body to make it ritually pure, but of washing the body to make it clean. Sprinkling doesn't “clean” anything. If it is blood, it actually makes it dirty. Washing cleans. Bathing cleans. Immersing cleans. Sprinkling serves no real purpose other than a sign. Washing is continually needed throughout our lives on earth, for we take showers or baths all the time.

But washing baptisms signify something more that sprinklings do not picture. They are performed on things in order to ordain them and sanctify them from ordinary to special use. This is why the priest at his ordination (Ex 29:4) was not sprinkled, but bathed in water.⁷ He was being set

⁷ The Levites were sprinkled at their ordination, but it specifically says this was to “cleanse” them (Num 8:7). But in the same verse, they were then also to be washed. The word for “wash” is a different word in both Hebrew and Greek from that of the Priest in Exodus 29:4.

apart for a special purpose to serve God as priest. This follows the pattern set in creation itself which, as the Fathers taught, was baptized in Genesis 1 (using the term *mikveh*; **Gen 1:10**, a common term for a baptism among Jews to this day). God was creating a temple and setting it apart as “good.” (He later does the same thing even with cups and dishes in the tabernacle).

The NT links this kind of baptism to our water baptisms. This is why NT baptisms needed “much water” (**John 3:23**), following the example of Qumran *mikvehs* and the OT itself which necessitated lots and lots of living water in the temple Sea and lavers. Immersion baptism is not for regeneration itself, that is what our sprinkling by the Spirit is for. It does point *like a sign to regeneration*. Perhaps Peter is the most relevant for us, “**Baptism, which corresponds to this [that is, the Flood, which is a total immersion], now saves you, not as the removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ**” (**1Pe 3:21**). Both Peter and Hebrews talk about the conscience in relation to baptism.

Nevertheless, the point remains. Sprinkling is for cleansing. More water is used to signify something more.

But Hebrews has both the inward baptism of sprinkling and the outward baptism of washing with water together. Why? Someone might say that it is pointless to have an outward washing. Wouldn't it be fulfilled in Christ's death too? The answer is that God has seen fit to give Christians outward signs of invisible graces so that we might be strengthened that what has taken place on the outside is a picture of exactly what has taken place on the inside. He has also chosen to have the fulfillment of the priestly baptism continue in the form of water baptism as a sign that we are legally ordained into the new covenant priesthood when our hearts have been sprinkled by the Holy Spirit. This follows Christ's own baptism in the Jordan which was done in fulfillment of the priestly immersion of **Exodus 29:4**. That was a physical immersion, not a sprinkling, and it was at that moment that he was set apart as holy to serve as God's high priest. Therefore, the sacrament of baptism points us both to the regeneration cleansing of Christ by the Spirit through his blood, but also to the setting apart of those who profess Christ as priests who serve the living God.

Concluding this command, let us imagine what would happen if Christians actually believed that God commands

them to come near to him in these ways? What if Christians really believed that God wants them to come into his presence in prayer and worship? What if we really desired to obey him in things like baptism because we had confessed him as Lord? The world would be turned upside down, even as it has been wherever the the church has gone up strong against the gates of hell. Are you obeying the things commanded in this verse?

Hold Fast the Confession

Hebrews second exhortation is closely related to the first, but takes it a step further. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.” The idea of “holding fast the confession of our hope” is intimately related to baptism. Paul tells Timothy, “Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses” (1Ti 6:12). As many have said, this is Timothy’s confession of Christ at his baptism.⁸ One early

⁸ See Philip Towner, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, vol. 14, The IVP New Testament Commentary

Christian retelling of Acts' story of the **Ethiopian Eunuch** (**Acts 8:36-37**) has the Ethiopian asking, "What is to prevent my being baptized?" Philip replied, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." Whereupon the convert confessed, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."⁹

Confessing the Faith is an essential part of baptism which is an essential part of Christianity. Hebrews is presupposing that you have done so, publicly. Baptism is the place where this occurs in front of many witnesses. This is no private religion. "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved" (**Rom 10:9**). In the NT, baptism

Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1 Ti 6:12. **John Stott**, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1009, 157. "In the Pastorals 1 Tim 6:12f. speaks of the "good," i.e., orthodox, confession of Jesus as the Son of God. "Timothy" made this confession at his baptism." **Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider**, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-), 516. A summary statement of the article **Decker, William B.** "Baptismal Confession." *Restoration Quarterly* 1957, Vol. 1 (4), pp: 180-184 states, "Texts such as **Rom. 10:9-10, Phil. 2:11, and 1 Tim. 6:12** (along with the Western text of **Acts 8:37**) demonstrate that a confession was made in public in connection with baptism. **It was not so much a creed as a statement of loyalty.**" **William Sailer, J. Creighton Christman, et al.**, *Religious and Theological Abstracts* (Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, 2012)." **William Sailer, J. Creighton Christman, et al.**, *Religious and Theological Abstracts* (Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, 2012). Also note 5.

This is also a very significant point, because Timothy was raised by a Christian mother and grandmother. Since he is being baptized in front of many witnesses, yet was raised in a Christian home, it means he was not baptized as an infant.

⁹ **Bruce A Demarest**, "The Contemporary Relevance of Christendom's Creeds," *Themelios* 7, no. 2 (1982): 9.

happened at the moment of conversion, because it was not treated as a graduation ceremony from seminary where finally you know all the right things. Rather, it was treated as a proclamation that Jesus is Lord. You believe it and so you tell people through baptism.

This obviously ties in with the previous command. But this command is now to “**hold fast**” to **this confession**. It is a confession of your “**hope**” in Christ, and therefore it still awaits certain future promises. But because some things are still future, because we do not see all that is hoped for yet, it is easy for us to tire, to weaken, to give up. This is especially true under dire circumstances where our faith is put to the test in the **fires of persecution**.

Since the very earliest days, the church has had to deal with this problem. Someone comes and tempts or even forces you to recant your loyalty to Christ. What do you do? Obviously, the temptation is to waver and to let go. That is why the command is to hold fast without wavering. Beloved, some of us have such a hard time holding fast that we get embarrassed to even pray in public for a meal. How much more difficult will it be when they round us up into death camps for being Christians? Will you waver? Will you

give up? Will you abandon the Lord Jesus who died for you?

Notice that the command here is again propped up, not by your strength, but his. “He who promised is faithful.” Our hope is certain because of what has already taken place. If we abandon him, he will not abandon us. This has already been an important point in trying to understand the warning passages of Hebrews and it will continue to be so even in the rest of this chapter. Christians cannot “lose their salvation” because the promises depend upon God, not us. This is meant to give you great encouragement when times are difficult. It is not meant to give you a way out, so save your skin on the day of man’s testing of your faith. It is meant as gospel power to give you the grace to stand firm to the end. This is the command of God. It is the exhortation of Hebrews. It is much better to prepare now, while days are good, than come to that moment in the future having never given this a second thought.

Stir One Another To Love and Good Works

The third exhortation also begins with “let us.” “Let us

consider how to stir up one another to love and good works” (Heb 10:24). This also builds upon the previous command. The previous command implied a temptation to give up the faith and so give up our confession. Therefore, we need help in not giving into this particularly difficult trial. How has God provided for us to stand firm in the faith? Through one another! The body of Christ is not just you, but all of us, together.

This idea of severe trial is seen again at the end of vs. 25. “all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” This refers to the Day of the LORD. But that day is a day that is preceded by great tribulation on earth. Nations rise against nations. Wars, famines, disasters. Finally, there is a gathering together of the host of hell against Christ’s church, surrounding her as it were like an army surrounding a huddled mass of helpless women and children. This is the picture Revelation paints for us just before Christ returns.

And so what do Christians who see this day approaching need more than ever? They need one another. This is why it says, “Not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another” (Heb 10:25). This is talking about church. Many who call themselves Christians

never dawn the doors of the church, because “that is religion, and I’m not religious, I’m spiritual.” They don’t understand that church is the main place we go to draw near to God together, and “togetherness” is what this exhortation is all about.

But is it not only about drawing near to God. It is also where God has chosen to have us gather in order to stir one another up. This cannot be talking merely about the corporate meeting, the covenant renewal ceremony where we draw near to God. It has to be talking also about when the church gathers to do other things, such as fellowship, service, interactive learning and so on. Christian, you need others in the church. You don’t just need them in times of trouble. You need them now, so that they can help you prevent certain kinds of trouble from arising in your life. And they need you, so that you can help them when trouble comes upon them.

Church is corporate worship, but it is so much more. It is getting to know one another. This can be a hard thing for Christian in our day to hear, because the idea is that “church” is wherever two or three are gathered together (taking that passage completely out of context, for it is a

passage about elders in a local church!). We have this idea that if I'm just around other Christians anywhere, whoever they are, that this fulfills the command. This neglects the undivided, uniform idea of the NT that church is a local body of committed believers.

Are there people that have been coming to this small congregation for a long time now that you still have never even talked to, that you do not even know their name? How is that obeying this command? Isn't it just a stones throw from neglecting to meet together, even if you come to the worship service, but really have no desire to encourage one another and to stir each other up to love and good works? Hard words made all the more difficult in a context where we all drive so far to get here. Nevertheless, does that excuse us?

There is only so much exhortation you can get from a sermon. Only so much excitement you can get from a song. Only so much help you can get from the means of grace. These things are vital and we need them. But we also need one another. God has provided living, breathing Christians bonded together in mutual covenant to one another in the local congregation to extend those things and to help those

things be planted in your soul.

We are commanded to stir one another up to love. This includes **love for God**. Therefore, it includes things like learning good doctrine and helping people “know God” in a biblical sense. It also includes **loving your brother**. That only happens when you are in actual living relationships with others in the church. When they gather, you want to gather, not out of manipulation, but out of love and to build them up in love. Do you have one another over for dinner? Do you like to do things with one another outside of our time here? The local body is your family. When you neglect this duty, I suffer. When I neglect this duty, you suffer.

It is also to help one another **learn good works**. This means helping me obey God’s law. It is a holding each other accountable. It is a willingness to be disciplined. I need your help to do this. You need mine. It is not enough to be a Christian by myself. It isn’t even enough to be a Christian in my immediate family unit. It isn’t enough to just have Christian friends. You need those who are not your flesh and blood, who are not like you, who are difficult to be around, who have different gifts, different talents, different passions, who are covenanted together, who have the God

ordained structure to discipline and restore, and so on.

It is so easy in our day to substitute the local assembly for other things—good things. But God created the church. Not just “Christians” floating around in cyber space. Not just friends who are Christians whom you see at a soccer game or after school picking up the kids. But Christians who have chosen to worship together and commit their lives together in a local congregation. What I’m saying goes against the grain of almost everything we hear in today’s Christianity. But it is biblical, for this is exactly what Hebrews is talking about.

The word “meet together” is *episunagoge* (from which we get synagogue). As Calvin points out, it means a congregation increased by additions, but also the wall of partition having been pulled down. That is temple language and it harkens back to Christ’s body which is the “veil,” doesn’t it? He is the Head. We are the body. He has gone into heaven so that we might go into heaven when we assemble together. The NT knows nothing of life as Christians apart from the church. It makes you wonder just how far we have come from NT Christianity.

Let’s conclude by bringing our three exhortations

(drawing near to God, holding fast our confession, and spurring one another on to love and good works) home a little more. The next part of Hebrews begins, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth...” (Heb 10:26). This begins the real warning part of the chapter. But it is connected directly to the exhortations. The things we are talking about here are not good ideas or suggestions. They are the commandments of God. To not do them is to deliberately sin against the Lord.

Approaching God boldly, being baptized legally, confessing our faith unwaveringly, and stirring one another up to good works faithfully, meeting together regularly, these are the “practical” things of our passage today. They are meat. They come from deeply rooted theology, properly understood in light of Jesus Christ in whom we trust. This is also meat. He is the goal and the purpose of these things. Only the good news will truly make you desire to obey them.

Therefore, see how the Bible answers the question of the relationship between doctrine and life. Good doctrine leads to obedience and holy living. But both have as their end goal the glory of God. They are not ends to themselves. They

only find their meaning because 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 of his flesh.

All praise to Jesus and all help to the saints by his Spirit.