

Introduction: One of the most challenging issues in the Christian's life is consistent spiritual growth. Some days, it seems that keeping track of areas of growth is nearly impossible. Other days, it feels like motivation is almost entirely gone. The author of Hebrews answers both these difficulties in Heb. 10.19-25. The main emphasis of this text is a simple three-part command to grow. Instead of offering a lengthy exhortation list in this passage, he boils growth down to three basic areas: faith, hope, and love. Before he gives this instruction, however, he explains the motivation and enablement for that growth. Pursuing the Christian virtues would be impossible without access to the Father. Specifying both the foundation for growth and its necessary marks, the author presents this message: *because we can access God in Christ, we should persevere in our Christian lives.*

1. WE HAVE ACCESS TO THE FATHER THROUGH JESUS (19-21).

Why access is such a big deal: God has authority over the world he created... (Ps 24.1-2) and has revealed his power and divinity to all men in the world (Rom 1.19-20). He is morally pure and will not ignore disobedience to his law (Ex 34.6-7; Hab 1.13; Rom 1.32-2.2). He will judge all sinners justly (Gen 18.25; Rom 2.2). We desperately need to be right with God, but our sin presents a humanly impossible obstacle.

The author's goal in this passage is a series of imperatives, but he does not give instruction – he does not give instructions without theological knowledge. In verses 19-21, the author identifies two spiritual realities that undergird the application we'll find in verses 22-26: right living before God is possible because of the standing that we have in Christ.

A. We have confidence to enter God's presence through Jesus (19-20).

The first thing that Christ gives us is confidence. This confidence is not mere optimism, but security for a specific purpose: confidence to enter the holy place. This isn't merely "we-should-stop-being-nervous-about-entering" internal-feeling confidence either. Some commentators suggest translating this word as "authorization." The author isn't just trying to help the readers overcome a feeling of inadequacy; he's reminding them that they have authorized permission to enter. They have the proper "security clearance" for God's presence!

The phrase "to enter the holy places" reminds us of the Old Testament tabernacle, in which access was severely limited. Only priests could offer sacrifices in the holy place; the high priest could only enter the Holy of Holies once a year and only after sacrificing for his own sin (Lev 16). We have a different access: Christ's own blood has cleansed us and given us access to God's presence.

This access comes because Christ inaugurated a way that is new and living. You may have heard that the original language in which Hebrews was written had two different words for "new" – new in quality and new in time. This passage uses neither of those words, but a special word with roots in sacrificial language. It originally meant "freshly sacrificed" or "recently slaughtered." A very appropriate word, considering that Jesus' sacrifice was only 30 or so years previous! The "way that is living" might call readers' minds to Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (Jn. 14.6), emphasizing that the way is living and life-giving.

This way cuts through a veil. The OT tabernacle had a veil separating the holy place from the outer court (Ex 26.31-33).

It is tempting to understand the identification of this veil with Christ's body on the ground that the veil (as it hung later in Herod's temple) was torn in two at the same time that Christ died (Mt 27.51).

However, the book of Hebrews focuses entirely on the Mosaic tabernacle, not the temples (Solomon's or Herod's). Therefore it is more natural to understand veil as the means of entrance, not the obstacle to entrance. Just as the Levitical high priest passed through the veil to reach the Holy of holies, we go through Christ (by means of his bodily sacrifice) to reach God's presence.

Because Christ's death is our living way to God, we have confidence to enter the Father's presence.

B. We have a great high priest over God's house (21).

Our second possession that enables Christian perseverance is our High Priest: Jesus Christ. We do not have a human priest who ministers in God's house; our representation to the Father comes from a divine Priest who is over God's house. Earlier in this book, the author wrote about Jesus being over a house: Heb 3.1-6.

Christ was a faithful Son over the Father's house (3.6); he is also a great priest over that house – and that house is us. As priest, he has offered the perfect sacrifice for our sins – himself (Heb 10.12).

But make sure you don't miss how personal this second spiritual reality is. It's not only that "Jesus is our high priest." The phrase "over the house of God" strongly emphasizes the fact that he is close to us! He is not an abstract, distant high priest; he is a mediator who sympathizes deeply with his household – we are that household.

2. WE SHOULD PERSEVERE IN CHRISTIAN VIRTUES (22-25).

A. We should draw near to God: faith (22).

Our manner of drawing near is sincere assurance (22a)

Our drawing near to God is not nervous or hesitant: it should be done with full assurance of faith. Because we have confidence and a great high priest, we can hold this assurance in sincere hearts and approach our Father's throne.

Our ground for drawing near is Christ's cleansing (22b).

The question is this: who is responsible for this washing and cleansing? One option is that we are responsible to cleanse our hearts and purify our bodies on regular basis so that we can draw near in full faith. However, this raises the immediate objection that the emphasis of Hebrews is Christ's finished work. The second option, then, is that we can draw near because of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice that washes and cleanses us. Both options contain an element of truth. Defilement from today's sins stands as an obstacle to drawing near; we don't gain God's presence because of our own moral reformation. The best understanding of these conditions for drawing near is this: we draw near because we regularly and currently deal with our sin through the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. His cleansing work is the ultimate ground for our faith-assurance; our daily application of that work to our lives is the immediate ground for faith-assurance.

Application: What would it do for you if you changed your view of Christian growth so that reading the Word and prayer weren't to-do list items or self-imposed expectations, but were simply part of drawing near to God? What if dealing with sin was not something you had to do hurriedly so you didn't feel guilty for communion, but instead was an eager part of regularly drawing near to God? I fear we've done ourselves a disservice by taking things that should be natural gestures of drawing near to God and turning them into tasks. We've gotten overly focused on the actionable items (you can put "read a chapter a day" and "use a prayer list" into a clean, easy checklist), and that we've forgotten the big picture: love God. If we read & pray without "drawing near," we miss the true purpose of reading and praying.

B. We should hold fast our confession: hope (23).

The hope we ought to hold fast is not mere optimism – it's not a rosy-eyed outlook that bets everything will be OK. Biblical hope, as you've probably heard, is certain and firm. It is a firmly grounded confidence or assurance – not just optimism, but certainty. What exactly is the foundation and content of our hope? The author of Hebrews has described the Christian's

“hope before: chapter six is the clearest identification of our hope: 6.19-20.

He leads into this statement by describing our hope: it is an anchor that will never let go. Then he says that our hope has “entered within the veil where Jesus has entered” – that sounds just like the words from our text earlier: 10.19-20.

What is the point of saying that our hope has entered into the same place that Jesus entered when he died to reconcile us to God? The point is that our hope is so attached to Jesus Christ and his sacrificial death that they can’t be separated. Wherever Jesus is, there is our hope following closely at his heels. I think it’s fair to simplify the image and say that *our perfectly certain hope is our savior – Jesus who died to bring us to God.*

We should hold our hope unwaveringly (23a).

The word translated “without wavering” is more powerful than we gather at first glance. In other books written around the same time as the New Testament, this same word is used to describe the unflinching way in which people endured torture (4 Macc. 6.7; 17.3). Persecution was a very real danger for the original readers of Hebrews and this exhortation is one of several verses that remind the hearers not to turn away no matter what kind of danger they face. This is an important distinction for us to note – these Hebrew Christians were tempted to let go of their confidence because their belief put their lives were endangered; we are tempted to hold our hope loosely because we’ve got it so easy. However, while we may fail to hold our hope for very different reasons, the motivation to hold is the same for us as it was for them.

We should hold our hope because God is faithful (23b).

The writer of Hebrews confirms the oft-repeated Scriptural truth: our right actions in the Christian life are based on the character and example of our God. God has made promises to us and he will not turn away from fulfilling them; likewise, we have made a profession of our confidence in him and we should not turn away from maintaining it. Because he holds up his commitments without fail, we should too.

Application: One, stop worrying about smaller things. Remember, we have no bigger need than to be right with God. Money, lodging, food, everything else is small potatoes compared to a right relationship with God. So if Jesus died to fix the problem between you and his Father (sin), you don’t need to worry that he’s going to fail to supply anything else you need (Rom 8.32).

Two, show that you’re holding fast your hope by repenting of sin. The verses we read early in Hebrews 6 (the ones that identify our hope as Jesus who died to bring us to God) follow right after a hard warning not to be hardened by sin and turn away from God. Our text for today comes right in front of an even sterner warning. The author doesn’t mince words: holding your hope and being hardened by sin are polar opposites.

Three, if your hope is as awesome as it sounds (and it is!), share it with someone else. Again, our only eternal need is to be right with God – our neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family have that same need. We have a positively certain confidence that Jesus death accomplishes that. Let’s not dishonor our hope by holding it silently.

C. We should consider each other: love (24-25).

We should stimulate love and good works by assembling together (24-25a).

When the author instructs the readers to “stimulate” (or “provoke”) one another, he uses a surprisingly strong word. Luke uses the same word to describe the disagreement that Paul and Barnabas had over taking John Mark on another missionary journey after he’d abandoned Paul on the previous trip: Acts 15.37-39.

The point of Heb 10.24 is not that we should disagree with one another, but that we should stir each other up to *produce a strong response*. The actions incited by this stimulation are love and good works. This is most likely parallelism: love and good works are not two distinct and

separable actions, but rather, two ways to describe the same action in the church.

At the risk of being painfully obvious, the author reminds them that they must meet together if they are to stimulate love. Though some had fallen out of regular attendance, perseverance necessitated participation in corporate worship.

We should stimulate love and good works by encouraging each other (25b).

The method by which this stimulation took place is encouragement. We ought to be careful not to imagine the audience sitting in a 21st century church service like the one we're in right now, but we can be confident that the writer would be flatly unimpressed by a "get in, get fed, get out" church mentality. He wants the corporate gathering of the church to be characterized by mutual exhortation and encouragement. In fact (at the risk of conceding a popular "church attendance" proof-text), the author doesn't even specify corporate worship as the only venue for assembling and encouraging. His injunction is even more basic than that: Christians must stimulate love by being together and by encouraging each other when they are together.

Application: Unfortunately, I've heard some people quote these verses as though the *only* thing they meant was "come to church every time the doors are open" – it actually means something much bigger and more foundational than that! Stimulating love amongst ourselves is not just something we do on Sunday morning – discipleship ought to be our lifestyle. We should not minimize corporate worship or church meetings at all, but the bottom line is that exhorting each other to love and good works isn't something we turn on from 9.30 till noon on Sunday – it's a lifestyle of daily discipleship.

Conclusion: The author presents a three-fold exhortation to persevere in the Christian virtues: faith, hope, and love. These three categories cover almost all the other things we might suggest as ways Christians should grow: drawing near in faith includes Bible reading and prayer, holding your hope includes repentance and evangelism, and stimulating love covers discipleship and participation in church worship.

He bases the church's ability to grow in those areas on access to God's presence, made possible by the priestly work of Christ. He concludes this series of exhortations with intensity: "and all the more as you see the day drawing near."

Perseverance is not a "plateau and relax" proposition. The final words of this paragraph add motivation to the entire triplet of Christian growth - as the day of Christ's return and ultimate judgment approaches, these virtues must be pursued with increasing vigor, and we can pursue them because Jesus authorizes us to be near God and serves as our personal high priest.