

SERIES: The Absolute Supremacy of Jesus Christ

SERMON: **Privilege Demands Responsibility**

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 10:19-25

SPEAKER: Michael P. Andrus

DATE: February 21, 2010

As Josh mentioned last Sunday, we have come to the end of the portion of the book of Hebrews that is primarily theological and enter today into the portion that is primarily application. I say “primarily” because the author has been sharing practical application of his arguments all along, as seen in his frequent warnings and in his numerous encouragements to draw near to God and to persevere in the faith. But in chapter 10 and verse 19 he uses the word “therefore,” signaling a major transition from doctrine to duty, from principle to practice.

The structure of our text today is really easy to identify. If you’ll turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 10:19-25, you will notice there are two clauses introduced by “since,” followed by five introduced by “let us.” The logic is inescapable: since A is true, and since B is true, we should do 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. In fact, if you mark up your Bible, why not take out your pen and underline “since” in verse 19 and 21, and then draw a box around “let us” in verse 22, 23, 24, and then maybe circle “let us” as it appears twice in 25, because we’re going to treat those a little differently. It’s rare indeed that I have to do so little work to outline a passage—the author has done it for us.

The clauses that begin with “since” describe our resources or privileges as participants in the New Covenant. The clauses that begin with “let us” describe our responsibilities in light of those privileges. You know, privilege and responsibility always go together. To expect privilege without responsibility is unrealistic and immature. To demand responsibility without privilege is unrealistic and unfair. God has offered His people some incomparable privileges, but in turn He expects us to act responsibly. Let’s now stand and read the text:

*Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Just before we examine these our privileges, I want to point out a rather amazing parallel between our passage today and a paragraph in chapter 4 where Jesus was first introduced as the Great High Priest of a New Covenant. The best way to illustrate this is by setting the two passages side-by-side and noting the similarities. The order is different but the themes are identical.

4:14-16

Therefore, since we have a great high priest  
 who has gone through the heavens,  
 Jesus the Son of God  
 let us hold firmly to the faith we profess  
 let us then approach  
 with confidence

10:19-25

Therefore, since we have confidence  
 by the blood of Jesus  
 through the curtain  
 and since we have a great priest  
 let us draw near to God  
 let us hold to the hope we profess

Here's what I think's going on. The author of Hebrews told us in chapter 4 what he was going to tell us, then he spent 6 chapters telling us, and now in chapter 10 he tells us what he's told us. Friends, we learn by repetition.

### **The privileges we can count on (19-21)**

When I first became pastor of this church in 1975 one of our members, Jim Lew, was Senior Vice-President of Beech Aircraft Corporation. Not long afterward Jim was elected Chairman of our Church and invited me to come to his office and talk with him about plans for the coming year. Beech at that time had a number of government missile projects, so when I arrived at the plant I had to report to the security office. They checked my name against a list of invited guests, and typed up a special badge which I was told to wear on the outside of my clothing. That badge gave me clearance to enter Beech Aircraft.

The security guard ushered me to an elevator and took me to the fourth floor, through the engineering department, to the Senior Vice-President's office suite. There Mr. Lew met me and dismissed the security guard. He personally ushered me around the plant, to places even regular employees could not go. We ate in the executive dining room and no one gave us a check. So long as I was with Jim no one asked me any questions or challenged me in any way or even checked my badge.

That's illustrative of what the author is telling us about our access to God's presence. We have confidence to enter by the blood of Jesus—that's what removes the barrier and gets us in the door. His blood is our badge, our credentials. But then the resurrected and living Lord, our great priest personally meets us, puts His arm around us and guides us. He's our friend, our advocate, our intercessor, and our defender. In other words, we have access and we have a friend.

Now let's examine these two privileges a little more closely.

**We have access.** Christians today have difficulty grasping what a magnificent benefit this is. The reason is simple—many of us have never known it any other way! But for worshipers coming out of Judaism access was pretty much an unknown quantity. They had been taught to approach God with a spirit of fear and trepidation and to avoid getting too familiar with Him. In fact, they were not even allowed to verbalize His personal name, YHWH. Even today when orthodox Jewish commentators like Mona Charen or Charles Krauthammer mention God in one of their articles, they write it this way [G\_d].

But all that has changed because of a new and living way has been opened up to God. Some of the questions that will help us unpack this are: who, what, where, when, and how.

**1. Who has access?** The answer is “brothers,” verse 19. *Not everyone* has clearance to enter God's presence. The term “brothers” is never used of unbelievers in the NT, but only of those who, by personal faith in Christ, have become God's spiritual children and are therefore related to one another as spiritual siblings.

**2. Of what exactly does this access consist?** “We have confidence to enter.” The Greek word translated “confidence” here means “boldness, courage, or fearlessness, especially in the presence of persons of high rank.” How do we react when we are in the presence of a rich, powerful or famous person? I dare say that boldness or fearlessness is not our normal reaction. One day more than 30 years ago Jan and I and our son Eddie were in Washington, D.C. We were standing outside the U.S. Capitol looking confused when a guy drove up in an old Pinto and asked if I needed some help. I told him I was wondering which of those buildings across the street was the Supreme Court, so he pointed it out and told us to have a good time.

The man looked somewhat familiar so I said, “Do I know you?” “I don't know,” he said, “my name is Mac Mathias.” Then I realized I had seen him many times on TV because he was the U.S. Senator from Maryland and had been heavily involved in the Watergate hearings. All of a sudden I felt nervous and wanted to say something intelligent but I couldn't think of anything. The insecurity I felt in the presence of a powerful Senator is the opposite of what this verse speaks of— “confidence to enter.”

**3. Where do we have this access?** We have a free right of access, not into a mere Senator's presence, but into the Most Holy Place, the throne room of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. We've talked about the Holy of Holies many times during our study of Hebrews. It was that mysterious place into which only one person was ever allowed to enter and he could go in only once a year. No layperson, no Gentile, no woman, and not even a Jewish man could ever go in there except the High Priest alone. But we have access—not just to a room in the temple but to the heavenly throne room.

**4. When do we get this access?** The answer is “now.” It isn't stated directly, but it is clearly implied by the tense of the verb. “We *have* confidence.” Not, we will *get* confidence, but we *have* it. Now it's possible we may not realize it, or we may not act upon it. But it's available to us now.

**5. How do we get that access?** It is “by the blood of Jesus,” which is described as “a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body.” We have spoken often of the great curtain or veil in both the tabernacle and the temple that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies. But at the instant Jesus died on the Cross, that huge veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom, signifying that full and complete access was, for the first time in history, available to every believer. When Jesus' flesh was torn, so was the veil that kept men from God. When he rose

from the dead, He provided us a new and living way into God's presence.

But not only do we have access...

**2. We also have a friend. (21)** He is called "a great priest over the house of God." The "house of God" here is clearly the family of God, not a building, as Hebrews 3:6 makes clear: "we are His house."

As God's house or temple, we have a great priest. He has been described in the first ten chapters of Hebrews as

a mediator,  
 able to sympathize with our weaknesses,  
 having endured all the temptations we experience,  
 ready to extend grace and mercy to help us in our time of need,  
 able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray,  
 the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him,  
 the guarantor of a better covenant,  
 a permanent priest,  
 able to save completely those who come to God through him,  
 always living to intercede for us,  
 holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens,  
 made perfect forever.

The hymnwriter really got it right:

*What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear.  
 What a privilege to carry, Everything to God in prayer.  
 Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share?  
 Jesus knows our every weakness—Take it to the Lord in prayer.*

We have examined the privileges we can count on—we have access and we have a friend. It is time to look at

### **The responsibilities we must shoulder (22-25)**

**1. Let us draw near to God. (22)** This is the third time in Hebrews that we are urged to draw near. But doesn't it seem just a bit odd that immediately after being told, "We have confidence to enter," we have to be urged to draw near? I suspect the reason is that we do not always act upon our privileges. As a citizen of the United States I have access to my representatives in Congress, but I do not often take advantage of that. Every time I have written to one I have received a prompt, courteous reply, but sometimes when I should write, I do not write, thinking that they're probably too busy to be interested in my concerns.

By the same token, sometimes we have intellectual, theological knowledge of our free access to God, but we do not take advantage of it. We choose to fret and stew, or manipulate people to achieve our ends, rather than go directly and boldly before the throne of grace. Of course, free

access does not mean that we should approach the throne room flippantly or hypocritically. There are certain conditions to drawing near to God. In fact, our text mentions four of them.

#### **Four conditions:**

**(1). Sincere hearts.** The word “sincere” here means genuine, without superficiality or ulterior motive or legalistic performance. Sadly, many try to draw near to God by going on long pilgrimages or doing great deeds of penance. Simon Stylites, a monk in the early years of the church, sat on a pole for 36 years in an effort to draw near to God. But God isn’t looking for pole sitters or record-setters; He’s looking for sincere hearts.

**(2). Total trust.** The phrase, “in full assurance of faith,” implies that God is eminently trustworthy. Even if we are faithless, He remains faithful. The author not only believes that full assurance is possible but assumes it should be the norm for all worshipers who take advantage of the “new and living way.” In the next chapter, often called *God’s Hall of Faith*, he will begin sharing the life stories of numerous men and women of faith, who demonstrated full assurance of faith.

Then he mentions two more related conditions—hearts sprinkled and bodies washed. The point of the first is that our consciences must be cleansed.

**(3). Cleansed consciences.** Verse 22 speaks of “having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.” We spoke three weeks ago of the immeasurable blessing of a cleansed conscience, a blessing available only to New Covenant participants. One’s conscience is cleansed, not by confession alone, or repentance, or penance; it is cleansed only by the blood of Christ. Only when we come to realize that He paid the penalty and our sin has been eliminated as a barrier between us and God are we able to draw near to God with no fear of retribution or paralyzing guilt.

And then the end of verse 22 speaks of “having our bodies washed with pure water,” which I think refers to . . .

**(4). Changed lives.** It's interesting to read commentaries on this phrase, for many evangelicals go to great pains to prove this does not refer to baptism. I'm inclined, however, to think it probably does. Baptism was a much more important act in the early church than it is in most of our churches today; in fact, there is no such thing as an unbaptized believer in the NT. Baptism was viewed as symbolic of putting off the deeds of the flesh and putting on the righteousness of Christ. That's why the person being baptized always changed clothes and put on a white robe. The white clothes spoke of a new life of purity which the baptized person was committing to live.

Now friends, please understand that these conditions are not given to discourage us from entering God’s presence but to help us. Satan lies to us all the time, of course, regarding these four conditions. He tells us that legalism is the way to get God’s favor, that we can trust our own efforts, that our guilt is too great, that we’re not good enough, that God is too busy, that God

doesn't care. We must resist Satan and draw near to God.

**2. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess. (23)** Once again we are faced with this issue of perseverance in the faith, and once again we are told, in effect, that the Christian life is not a 50-yard dash but a marathon. I think verse 23 reveals the author's concern that many in his Jewish Christian audience were beginning to waver in their commitment. Persecution was getting stronger and pressure was mounting. In John 12 Jesus faced a similar situation with some of His disciples. It says in 12:42-43, "Many even among the leaders believed in Him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise from men more than praise from God." What at first promised to be a revival among the religious leaders turned out to be a secret society of half-hearted believers, who are actually counted by God as unbelievers.

Perseverance is critical to any true profession of faith. There is no place in the Christian experience for a hope that is firm when things are going well and shaky when they are not. We must not waver, vacillate or play games. We must remain firm and solid so that family, fellow workers, and neighbors can measure our confession by our long obedience in the same direction, as Eugene Peterson put it.

The third responsibility urged upon us is intimately related to perseverance, because there is almost no possibility of perseverance if one decides to go it alone in the Christian life:

**3. Let us consider how we may spur one another on to love and good deeds. (24-25)** Notice, if you will, that the author does not tell us to consider how to love each other and do good deeds. That would be Biblical and good. But instead, he tells us we are to consider how to stimulate each other to love and good deeds, that is, to focus on helping others become loving people, to aim at stirring up others to do good deeds. The Greek word translated "spur on" is a strong word that means to incite or provoke. Sometimes we can spur others on by simple modeling, but at other times we may need to go to a fellow-believer and invite them to participate with us.

Jan and I had never attended Twelve-two, our ministry to skaters on Friday night. Skaters can be a little intimidating to geezers, and besides we were busy enough doing other things. But several months ago Dan and Susan Wilson called us up and said, "We're going to make pancakes for the Twelve-two kids this Friday. Do you want to do it with us?" We did, and it was a great experience. They spurred us on.

Gary Bugg has a heart for the lost. He regularly does personal evangelism, but he also has written letters of encouragement to the friends he has trained to go with him to do personal evangelism. Now the author give us two important pre-requisites to accomplishing the objective of spurring one another to love and good deeds. In the NIV these appear to be a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> responsibility, because each is again introduced by the words, "let us." But in the original they are participles, one negative and the other positive, qualifying the exhortation to consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds. The ESV correctly translates 24-25 as follows: "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.” The point is that you cannot spur one another on if you aren’t involved in community, but you can by encouraging one another.

**(1) Not neglecting to meet together.** Apparently, some of the first century Jewish converts receiving this letter were responding to persecution by withdrawing from the meetings of the church. For fear of the authorities they decided to return to the synagogue and keep their faith in Christ a private matter. Thankfully in our country government persecution is *not* a reason for withdrawing from Christian fellowship, though some certainly have experienced persecution from colleagues or family members. Of course, neglecting to meet together is no less a problem today, but the more common reasons for it range from busyness to apathy to the pursuit of pleasure.

Now before you put up your defenses on the sensitive subject of church attendance, let me say that I have never felt that it is my place to judge anyone’s attendance habits; rather it is my job to make sure that when you do come there is spiritual food and fellowship available. In other words, I believe that the best way to get people to come to church is to make it an attractive place to be. I want Sunday morning to be the high point of your week, and if it’s not, I take a certain amount of responsibility for that.

However, we have a verse here that is part of the Word of God, and we need to deal with it honestly. I believe it is saying essentially that it is inconsistent, counterproductive, and even dangerous for a Christian to make a habit of absenting himself from Christian worship and fellowship. Theoretically, I grant that you can worship God anywhere. You can worship Him on the golf course or at the lake or at the park. Whether you do or not is another matter, but certainly you can. But one thing you cannot do when you are absent from the Body is to spur others on to love and good deeds.

Part of the reason that church attendance is so irregular today, even on the part of many true believers, is the popular notion that church meetings are where we go to have our spiritual needs met. If that’s the case and I don’t feel particularly needy, or if I’m needy but the church isn’t meeting my needs, then I shouldn’t feel obligated to attend. But friends, meeting our spiritual needs is not the sole purpose of assembling ourselves together; it may not even be the primary purpose. Rather we gather to minister to others. That’s how I read Ephesians 4. Paul is speaking about the gifts Christ gave to His people:

*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service (literally, “for the ministry”), so that the body of Christ may be built up.*

*You* are the ministers here at First Free, not Josh or Dick or Judy or I. We are the equippers, the undershepherds, but you are the ministers. The primary reason why absence from church is destructive to your spiritual life is not that you miss the sermon, but that you miss key opportunities to minister to your brothers and sisters in the body. If you miss the sermon you can get it online and still profit from it. If you miss the offering, you can still mail in a check. But if you are neglecting to meet together you can’t be spurring one another on to love and good deeds

as God desire you to do.

I am personally greatly blessed to see people standing around in this auditorium for 20 or thirty minutes, or even longer after worship services. That really does my heart good, because I know that ministry to one another is taking place. On the other hand, it's a sad thing to see some people arrive at the last minute and then leave immediately after the service. Why? Because they are not availing themselves of the opportunity to learn what the needs of others are so as to effectively pray for them. They are not encouraging one another. And that brings us to the positive pre-requisite he mentions in verse 25:

**(2) But encouraging one another.** The world is full of discouragers. There are some people who seem to have a gift for turning the brightest day cloudy and putting a damper on the greatest enthusiasm. God bless the encouragers; there are few enough of them. I am told there is a regulation of the Royal Navy which says: "No officer shall speak discouragingly to another officer in the discharge of his duties." If that is appropriate for the Navy, how much more appropriate for the church! One of Job's friends described him this way in Job 4:3-4: "Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumble; you have strengthened faltering knees."

Encouragement consists primarily of two things—appreciation and affirmation. We appreciate what a person does, and we affirm who he or she is. Appreciation is important, but affirmation goes deeper. It is directed to the person himself or herself. No matter how influential or secure or mature a person may appear to be, I guarantee you he or she needs genuine encouragement.

One of the beautiful things about encouragement is that anyone can do it. You don't need a lot of money; you don't need to be a certain age; you don't even have to know your Bible from cover to cover. You just need to be available and to look for ways to show appreciation and give affirmation to others. There's a little Japanese lady in St. Louis named Taeko who is a world-class encourager to my family, as well as to many others. Though nearly 80 years old, she is constantly encouraging us through cards and calls and little gifts.

Finally, we are offered an added incentive to spur one another on to love and good deeds. It is the approaching Day.

**(3). An added incentive: the approaching Day.** Our text concludes, "And all the more as you see the Day approaching." What day? The day when Jesus returns for His people. The early church lived with the constant anticipation of the Second Coming. Perhaps they had an advantage over us in this regard. They lived not only within a few decades of Jesus' personal promise to return, and they lived at a time of intense persecution, which happened to coincide with the description Jesus left of the end times.

We live nearly 2,000 years later, with virtually no persecution. Thus it is easy for us to lose consciousness of the fact that one day history is going to culminate in a cataclysmic event divinely ordained. We may not have a lot of time left to fulfill the Great Commission, taking the

Gospel to every person, or to fulfill the Great Commandment to spur one another on to love and good deeds.

**Conclusion:** Let me summarize our passage today. Our responsibilities are significant, but our resources are inexhaustible. Since we have access into the throne room, and since we have a friend in high places, let us draw near to God, let us hold unswervingly to our profession of faith, and let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds, by not absenting ourselves from one another and by encouraging one another—all the while keeping our eye on the fact that history is moving inexorably toward the Second Coming of Christ.

But before I conclude this morning I want to make a very personal appeal to you to consider how important it is to be in true Christian community if you are going to persevere in the faith. One way to do that is, of course, to attend worship as regularly as possible, meeting for fellowship around the preaching of the Word.

But there is another form that Christian fellowship can take, and that is spiritual friendships. In a large church it is actually possible to remain quite anonymous in a worship service. What may be even more important is to be in accountable relationships, in a small group, or in a Bible study where life change can take place as people become vulnerable with one another, challenge each other, pray for each other, strengthen and help each other grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, and spur one another on to love and good deeds. I understand that the giant redwood trees of the Western United States have a relatively shallow root system, but their enormous weight is supported by the interlocking of one tree's roots with those of the trees around it. As Christians we need interlocking roots to withstand the enormous weight of life.

Days of stress, pressure, hardship, darkness, and evil lie ahead of us. It will not get any easier to be a Christian, and lone-ranger Christians will drop like flies. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching."