

Exhortations From *the* Sanctuary



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Heb. 10:19–25; Heb. 4:16; Exod. 24:8; James 4:7, 8; John 13:34; Heb. 10:24, 25.*

Memory Text: “And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (*Hebrews 10: 21, 22, NASB*).

Throughout the book of Hebrews, passages about Christian faith alternate with passages about Christian living. In other words, theology has practical implications. The “what” of faith leads to the “how” of living that faith. In Hebrews, after the author has painted the magnificent theological picture of Christ as our Sacrifice and High Priest (*Heb. 7:1–10:18*), he encourages and exhorts believers to live according to the implications of these truths. This exhortation is especially seen in Hebrews 10:19–25.

This passage is one long, complex sentence in Greek. It consists of two basic facts that lead to three exhortations, each starting with the phrase “let us,” and each containing the familiar triad of faith, hope, and love. Also, each “let us” section contains another facet of Christian faith.

This week we will study Hebrews 10:19–25 and its practical exhortations for Christian living.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 28.*

Access to the Heavenly Sanctuary

Read Hebrews 4:16; 6:19, 20; and 10:19–21. To what do believers have access, and what does this mean for us? What hope is offered here, and more important, what impact should this hope have on our life and faith?

Believers have spiritual access to the heavenly sanctuary, to the very throne of God. We can seek closeness to God because our “entry” was made possible by the blood of Christ and by His representation in our behalf as our High Priest. The texts assure us that our soul has an anchor, Jesus Christ, who is in the very presence of God (*Heb. 4:14–16; 6:19, 20*). The assurance for us is that Christ gained full access to God after He was inaugurated as the heavenly High Priest (*Heb. 6:20*). At the inauguration, Christ sat on the heavenly throne, an image that demonstrates His royal status (*Rev. 3:21*).

The good news for us is that our Representative is in the presence of the Father. No mere earthly priest, who himself is sinful, serves on our behalf. We have the better Priest. Nothing separates the Father from the Son. Because Christ is perfect and sinless, there does not need to be a veil that shields God’s holiness from Jesus, our High Priest (*Heb. 10:20*).

“What does intercession comprehend? It is the golden chain which binds finite man to the throne of the infinite God. The human agent whom Christ has died to save importunes the throne of God, and his petition is taken up by Jesus who has purchased him with His own blood. Our great High Priest places His righteousness on the side of the sincere suppliant, and the prayer of Christ blends with that of the human petitioner.”—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him*, p. 78.

What assurance we have that we can have close communion with the Father, all because of what Jesus has done and is doing for us!

Dwell on what it means that Jesus is interceding for you in heaven. Why do you need that intercession so greatly?

Cleansed and Sincere

Read Hebrews 10:22. What conditions for approaching God in the heavenly sanctuary are laid down in this verse?

According to this verse, worshipers should meet four conditions when they draw near to God:

1. *Come with a sincere heart.* The heart is our inner being, our thoughts, our motivations, our emotions, our will, and our character. God wants us to be sincere. However, the heart can become sincere only if it is cleansed. This doesn't mean that we are perfect, just that we are striving toward revealing the character of Christ.

2. *Come in full assurance of faith.* As we saw in yesterday's study, there is no more reason to doubt that we will gain access to God.

3. *Come with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.* The sprinkling of the heart is sanctuary language that refers back to the blood sprinkled upon the people at the wilderness tabernacle (*Exod. 24:8; Lev. 8:23, 24*), which made them ritually clean but could not cleanse their conscience (*Heb. 9:9, 13*). The cleansing in the true tabernacle in heaven, however, is a cleansing of the conscience, brought about by the blood of Christ (*Heb. 9:14*). The justification of the repentant sinner is symbolized by this cleansing. We can have a clear conscience because we have been forgiven.

4. *Come with our bodies washed with pure water.* This sounds like an allusion to Christian baptism, but we can also understand it in a more spiritual sense as the "washing of water with the word" (*Eph. 5:26, NASB*), reading the Bible and applying its principles to our lives.

In James 4:7, 8, James struggles with the "double-minded" attitude of his readers. They have apparently lost their single-mindedness toward God. They have compromised and are in immediate danger. He uses language associated with purity at the sanctuary. It is truly a sanctuary concept that approaching God is possible only if purification takes place.

It should be clear that only God can cleanse our hearts. The question is: what painful choices do we make that allow Him to do this work of grace in our lives?

Faith: Be Confident

Read Hebrews 10:19–25 again. One theme appears again and again, and that is “confidence.” The Greek word for “confidence” (*Heb. 10:19*) refers to a boldness, courage, and fearlessness that in the New Testament describes our new relationship with God.

Originally, the word referred to an openness of speech, which, in this context, could specifically mean that one can freely approach God in prayer. This type of openness in our relationship with God produces a joyful confidence. The reason and object of our confidence is that we have a High Priest in heaven through whom we can have access to the presence of God. This access is unlimited and not blocked by anything but ourselves and our wrong choices. We have an open invitation to come into the heavenly sanctuary.

Where does this confidence come from? It is not produced by ourselves but by recognizing, again, that the blood of Jesus has won access to God’s presence for us.

There are other texts in Hebrews that speak about confidence and assurance: Hebrews 3:6, 14; 4:16; 6:11; 11:1. What kind of confidence do these texts describe?

Assurance and confidence do not anchor us in ourselves but only in Christ. These conditions are not dependent upon who we are but who our Mediator is. Interestingly, there is no mention that believers would have anything less than “full assurance” (*Heb. 6:11, 10:22*). Obviously, the new way that has been forever opened through Jesus’ death will lead without fail to full confidence. Nothing less is expected.

There are two ways to obtain Christian confidence and maintain it in faith. One is through faith itself (*Eph. 3:12*); the other is through faithful Christian service for others (*1 Tim. 3:13*). Both aspects are necessary and important. In Hebrews, too, assurance of faith and exhortation to prove oneself as a Christian go hand in hand. Christian living is never detached from Christian faith.

What things in life challenge your confidence in God or your full assurance of His good will for you? What can you do to help protect yourself from this spiritual danger?

Hope: Be Steadfast and Unswerving

Look up the texts below. What do they all have in common? What should believers hold on to?

Heb. 3:6 _____

Heb. 3:14 _____

Heb. 4:14 _____

Heb. 6:18 _____

Heb. 10:23 _____

Besides having the assurance of salvation, it is important to persevere and uphold the hope offered us all. In Hebrews, to hold fast is a serious appeal. One gets the impression that some believers were slipping away from their Christian faith and hope. The apostle had to encourage them not to let go. The text expresses, quite similarly, the things that are worth holding on to: hope, confidence, assurance, and confession. All of these terms refer in an objective sense to the Christian belief. We can do these things because our hope isn't in ourselves but in Jesus and what He has done for us. The moment we forget that crucial truth, we will surely lose confidence.

These texts challenge us to be steadfast from the “beginning” (*Heb. 3:14*) and “until the end” (*Heb. 3:6, 14; 6:11*). To do so “without wavering” (*Heb. 10:23, NKJV*) refers to an immutable and unshaken faith. Whatever the circumstance may be, our hope remains the same and our commitment to God is unchanged because we can trust that He is faithful and will do what He has promised.

There is no question that God is true to His Word. He fulfilled the promise that He made to Abraham and Sarah (*see also Rom. 4:19–21*); He fulfilled the promise of Christ's first coming (*Gal. 3:19*); and He will also fulfill the promise of His return (*Heb. 12:26*). God's ultimate promise, however, is eternal life, which He promised even before time began (*Titus 1:2, 1 John 2:25*).

God's faithfulness is immovable. Even “if we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself” (*2 Tim. 2:13, NASB*). Our unfaithfulness or disbelief will not change God's intention for us. His promises remain unshaken by our moral lapses. The promises will still be available for us because faithfulness is part of the divine nature.

It is so easy to become discouraged because of our sins. How can we overcome those sins, and yet, at the same time, not give up when we fail? Why must we cling to these promises, especially when we fail?

Love: Encourage One Another

“And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (*Heb. 10:24, NASB*).

Whereas the exhortation in Hebrews 10:23 focuses on the individual attitude, the next one in Hebrews 10:24 has the community of believers in view. We do not walk alone on our path with Christ. We should care for one another consistently.

The challenge to love one another is a traditional component of Christian behavior (*John 13:34, 35; Gal. 5:13*). However, loving one another does not just happen naturally. The act of “considering” suggests concentrated and careful pondering. We are urged to pay attention to our fellow believers and see how we could incite them to love others and to do good works. Unfortunately, it is easier to provoke and antagonize others than it is to spur them on to Christian love, isn’t it?

Then let us consolidate our efforts to work for the best of the community so that, because of our inducements to love, others cannot help but love and perform good works, as well.

Read Hebrews 10:24, 25. What do “love” and “good deeds” have to do with the “assemblies”?

One point that Hebrews stresses is that we can express love toward one another in Christian gatherings. If someone does not come to worship, how can he or she ever fulfill Christ’s law of love? Some people may think that they have “good” reasons to stay away from Christian meetings. Hebrews, however, touches on the sensitive issue that, in the end, it might be their own apathy that keeps them away. If one wants, one can always find reasons to avoid church attendance or other Christian gatherings. Those reasons, however, pale in contrast to one of the reasons for coming: to be a blessing to others.

Such behavior is all the more pressing as the day of Christ’s return comes nearer and nearer. At the beginning of Hebrews 10:19–25, the author admonished believers to draw near to God in the heavenly sanctuary, and at its conclusion he reminds them that the Day of the Lord draws near to them. Christ’s return should always be a major incentive for Christian behavior.

Who in your church do you want to encourage with your words, deeds, or just by your presence? If you are deliberate in that intention, you can make a big difference in people’s lives and, in turn, be blessed yourself.

Further Study: “The Mediator, in his office and work, would greatly exceed in dignity and glory the earthly, typical priesthood. . . . This Saviour was to be a mediator, to stand between the Most High and his people. Through this provision, a way was opened whereby the guilty sinner might find access to God through the mediation of another. The sinner could not come in his own person, with his guilt upon him, and with no greater merit than he possessed in himself. Christ alone could open the way, by making an offering equal to the demands of the divine law. He was perfect, and undefiled by sin. He was without spot or blemish. The extent of the terrible consequences of sin could never have been known, had not the remedy provided been of infinite value.”—Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2, p. 11.

“Faith in the atonement and intercession of Christ will keep us steadfast and immovable amid the temptations that press upon us in the church militant.”—Ellen G. White, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, p. 484.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Skim through the book of Hebrews. What are all the times in this book that we are called to act in certain ways, ways that directly result from our faith?
- 2 Dwell more on the idea that we have full access to God. What does that mean? How should this influence our lives, especially in times of temptation or in times of discouragement over our spiritual state?
- 3 What is the difference between “full assurance” of faith and a presumptuous attitude?
- 4 Dwell on this line taken from the Ellen G. White quote in Friday’s further study: “The extent of the terrible consequences of sin could never have been known, had not the remedy provided been of infinite value.” What does that tell us about just how bad sin is that it cost something of “infinite value,” the life of Jesus? How do we understand the idea of “infinite value”? How does the fact that Jesus is the Creator help us to grasp this amazing truth? Knowing these things, how can our lives not be transformed? How can we know these things and not want to teach them to others?
- 5 How can we develop spiritual friendships in which we encourage one another to be more loving and to live a life of good deeds? What spiritual benefits do you gain from “assembling together”? What would you miss if you could not worship with other Christians in church?

Nurturing Spiritual Roots

Mi Eh Kim was disappointed. She had arrived in Tokyo from China to study, but she couldn't find a Chinese Seventh-day Adventist congregation and didn't yet understand enough Japanese to understand people. She was used to worshipping God every Sabbath in China, and she worried about her spiritual life when she couldn't go to church. She prayed to find a place to live closer to a church.

While Mi Eh studied Japanese, she prayed that God would lead her to a university located near a Seventh-day Adventist church. She was accepted at a university outside Tokyo, and to her joy discovered that a Seventh-day Adventist church was nearby. Members offered to pick her up on Sabbaths. What an answer to prayer!

The pastor of the small group of worshippers welcomed her and introduced her to the members. Instantly Mi Eh felt the warmth of fellowship and enjoyed the spiritual feast in the town her friends had told her was cold to foreigners. She looked forward to Sabbaths with an intensity she found hard to imagine.

When she graduated she moved back to Tokyo to work. Once more she searched for a church in which to worship. But this time she learned that a Chinese-speaking congregation was worshipping in one of the Japanese churches in the city. How precious it was to worship God in her mother tongue.

Mi Eh has been in Japan for ten years now, and sometimes she still feels like a foreigner. She knows the stress people feel in a foreign country, and she knows how happy they are to meet with people who speak their own language. Her church family helps nourish her spiritual roots and makes a huge difference in her life.

Part of a previous Thirteenth Sabbath Offering has helped nourish this Chinese-speaking church in Tokyo. It has now formed a second congregation so that more Chinese-speaking people can find spiritual nurture in a foreign land.



Mi Eh Kim (left) is one of thousands of Chinese studying or working in Japan.

Christ's example of disciple-making must be the model that believers follow in answering the Great Commission (*Matt. 28:19*).

In our study for the first quarter 2014, entitled *Discipleship*, by Dan Solis, we will look at discipleship as the process by which we become followers of Jesus and, as such, become better soul winners.

How did Jesus attract His followers? What can we learn from Christ's example that would enable us to effectively lead others to Him?

These are not merely discussion questions that stimulate intellectual interchange; rather, they are a crucial area of study for Christians whose desire is to follow Jesus' example of guiding lost sheep to the loving Shepherd.

Our study this quarter will focus on these important aspects of discipling.

Lesson 1—Disciples and Scripture

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Jesus and the Bible** (*Luke 4:1–12, 16–21*)

MONDAY: **The Authority of Scripture** (*Matt. 5:17–20, 12:3–8*)

TUESDAY: **Public Proclamation** (*Matt. 5:17–39*)

WEDNESDAY: **Personal Ministry** (*John 13:18–20, Luke 10:25–28*)

THURSDAY: **The Next Generation** (*Matt. 12:15–21, Mark 1:1–3*)

Memory Text—*John 5:39*

Sabbath Gem: All of our disciple-making endeavors must, ultimately, be about Jesus and what He has done for us.

Lesson 2—Discipling Through Metaphor

The Week at a Glance:

SUNDAY: **Old Testament Examples** (*2 Sam. 12:1–7, Isa. 28:24–28*)

MONDAY: **Architectural Wisdom** (*Matt. 7:24–27*)

TUESDAY: **Agricultural Analogies** (*Matt. 13:1–30*)

WEDNESDAY: **The Revolutionary's War** (*Matt. 21:28–32*)

THURSDAY: **Christ's Creative Legacy** (*1 Cor. 3:10–15*)

Memory Text—*Matthew 13:34, 35, NIV*

Sabbath Gem: Complex concepts like justification, righteousness, and sanctification were easily grasped through the Master Storyteller's art. In other words, concepts that are often difficult to grasp in ordinary language can be taught through symbols and metaphors.

Lessons for the Visually Impaired: The regular *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is available free each month in braille and on audiocassette to sight-impaired and physically handicapped persons who cannot read normal ink print. This includes individuals who, because of arthritis, multiple sclerosis, paralysis, accident, and so forth, cannot hold or focus on normal ink-print publications. Contact Christian Record Services, Box 6097, Lincoln, NE 68506-0097.