

## **Covenant Community**

Recipients of a New Covenant – Part 2

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## **RECIPIENTS OF A NEW COVENANT – PART 2** **Hebrews 10:19-39**

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Hebrews 10. Quite a contrast since last Sunday; last week many of us were holed up in our homes, or outside in our yards playing in the snow, and what is it, seventy degrees outside today? God's beauty and glory and majesty displayed in both.

There's a bit of contrast, even in our time in the Word. If you weren't here last week, you missed one heavy dose of Old Testament history and theology, and unfortunately, you missed really the foundation for what we're going to study today and next week and really in the days ahead. I'm not one to usually recommend listening to my own preaching. I think there's good sleeping material online, but I would encourage you, if you have an opportunity, to go back and maybe to listen to what we studied last week. Make sure you do it with your Bible in hand, and be ready to turn all over the place, from place to place. However, last week was a heavy dose of Old Testament history and theology with New Testament implications.

What we're going to see today is a little bit of a contrast. We're going to see the practical ramifications of the theological foundations that we looked at last week. We are diving into a picture, you've got at the top of your notes there, "Covenant Community", and what it means for us to be the church. Together, I really want us to pray. Let's pray that God would create in us a unity around the Word of God and what it means to be the church, not according to tradition that each of us are familiar with, not according to what contemporary church growth methods would tell us, but according to what Scripture tells us. What does it mean to be the church, and what really sets the church apart from every other organization or club or civic gathering or any group of people, what makes the church unique?

### **A Covenant Community ...**

#### **We are recipients of a new covenant.**

There are two foundational truths that we are seeing here in Hebrews 10. The first one we looked at last week. We are recipients of a new covenant. Last week, what we looked at is we saw how the new covenant in Christ changed everything, revolutionized everything. We didn't just dive into Old Testament history and theology for the fun of it, because we didn't have anything else better to do on a snowy day. We dove into that picture to see the important, eternally important, eternally relevant implications of what we see in Scripture for our lives.

This is why...even to go back when we were talking about earlier with Bart...why it's necessary for us to have solid biblical foundations in the local church and in each of our Christian lives, because when we face trials in this life, when we go through different struggles, face different situations in this life, we don't want to face them standing on sand

that is sinking beneath us. We want to face them standing on a Rock. When you get unexpected news from your doctor, when that tragedy hits your home that you could never imagine happening, when you're facing foreclosure or when your job is gone, when things are not working out in marriage the way you had envisioned them, you don't want sand to stand on during those days. You want a Rock to stand on during those days.

So, that's why we study theology and study the Word and go deep, because we want to stand strong. We don't just want to know stuff. We don't look at what we looked at last week. We don't talk about Old Testament priests having bells sewn into the hem of their garment just so we can have a cool, Old Testament fact when the quiz comes up to share at parties or something. That's not the point. The point is so that we know what an awesome thing it is to go into the presence of God, and we realize, we've got direct access there whenever that tragedy strikes. We've got direct access there at any moment of every day. That's why we study deep theology. We're recipients of a new covenant.

### **We are members of a new community.**

As a result of being recipients of a new covenant, second truth, what we're going to dive into today is that we're members of a new community; recipients of a new covenant, members of a new community. What I want to show you in Hebrews 10:19, we're going to read from verse 19 through verse 25. I want you to see in this passage, in this paragraph here, one foundation that the author of Hebrews...we don't know exactly who wrote this...but the author of Hebrews gives us one foundation and three exhortations based on that foundation. So, three calls to action based on this foundation. See if you can identify the foundation and the exhortations.

Listen to verse 19,

*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.*

Foundation: "Since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way...since we have a great priest over the house of God..." That's the foundation. Because of these things, now we go these three directions; a call to action, three exhortations. Let us, first, draw near to God, then verse 23, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess..." Then, verse 24, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds," and in the NIV, the translation that I use, verse 25 looks like a couple of additional ones, but really, they are based off of that, verse 24, "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

So, what you've got are three calls to action based on the foundation. As a result of what Christ has done in the new covenant, and this is huge, Christ works for us in the new covenant. What we looked at last week does not just have ramifications for our relationship with God. Christ's work for us in the new covenant has ramifications for our relationships with each other. Because Christ shed His blood to make it possible for you to go into the presence of God, let us, let us, let us do these things.

Let us do these things to one another. That phrase "one another", this is the only time the author of Hebrews uses that phrase in the entire book. So, what the author of Hebrews is showing us is that Christ's work for us on the cross doesn't just radically transform our relationship to God; Christ's work for us on the cross radically transforms our relationships with each other; recipients of a new covenant, members of a new community.

You look in verse 21, "*Since we have a great priest over the house of God...*" He's not just a great priest for you, and He's not just a great priest for me. He's a great priest over us as the house of God. Hold your place here. Go back to Hebrews 3:6. It's the only other time we see this phrase used in Hebrews, this phrase "house of God." Who's the house of God? What's the house of God about? Look at Hebrews 3:6. The author says, Hebrews 3:6, "*Christ...*" This is what we didn't get to last week in our notes that we're going to kind of fill out...we're not going to be able to camp out very long here...but we're going to fill out the end of the notes that we didn't get to last week. Hebrews 3:6: "*Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope which we boast.*" We are the house of God, not a building. The people, we are the house of God. The people of God are the house of God.

What does that mean that we have a great priest who is over the house of God? Well, it means, number one, we have a King. It's in your notes there that we didn't get to last week. We have a King who forever rules us. Remember midway through 10:12, Christ went and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God and all enemies are at His footstool? He's a King whose dominion reigns over all. He is seated at the right hand of God.

Just as a side note here, can I remind you that when we go through economic troubles or we face uncertain economic times or we face uncertain global situations, our hope is not in a president. We pray for our president, and we pray for our political leaders, but our hope is not in them. Our hope is in the King who is over every president and every king and every dictator, every prime minister, every Secretary of the Treasury and Secretary of State and secretary of whatever else; He's over them all. His dominion reigns, and there's confidence in that.

We have a King who rules over us, and we have a Priest who forever represents us; a priest who, we saw in Hebrews 7, intercedes for us, and this is that picture we have in the New Testament that does give us strength when we face trials, when we walk through struggles. It's Romans 8, "*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus who died, more than that, who was raised to life and is now...*" Romans 8 says, "*...is now at the right hand of the Father interceding for us.*" Nothing can separate us from His love, nothing at all; heaven or earth, anywhere under the earth can separate us from His love, because we have a Priest who represents us before God at every moment of every single day. His name is Jesus.

## **Implications of a New Covenant for a New Community ...**

Now, that has huge ramifications for what it means to be the people of God, the house of God, under His priesthood. So, that's what I want us to dive into, the implications of a new covenant for a new community, and I want us to look at these three exhortations that the author in Hebrews gives us.

### **Together, we draw near to God in faith.**

First, because of the new covenant, together, we draw near to God in faith. Because we have access to God, we draw near to God. Now, this really sums up what we talked about last week, the fact that we have access before God and an Advocate before God. Therefore, we come boldly, confidently into the presence of God, the Most Holy Place.

Now, the author here gives us four conditions, or four supporting clauses, to describe how we come into the presence of God. How do you draw near to God? Well, first, we come before Him with sincere desire. We come before Him with sincere desire. Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart. Part of the background of the book of Hebrews, and we're going to see this more next week, is the author is recounting the history of the people of Israel.

In fact, turn back to Hebrews 3, or maybe, you're already still there, but look at Hebrews 3:7. Part of the background of this book is the author of Hebrews is talking about how, in the Old Testament, the people of God hardened their hearts, and they would turn away from God, and the author of Hebrews is saying, "Don't do that." Listen to Hebrews 3:7, "*As the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice...'*" and he's quoting here from the Old Testament,

*"...do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.' So I declared an oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"*

Listen to verse 12, based on that history in the Old Testament, "*See to it, brothers, that none of you have a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*" Did you catch that? Don't turn away. Draw near to God.

The implication here is really startling when you think about it. Even in light of the new covenant, and the fact that we have access to God, the author of Hebrews is saying, "There's still temptation for you to turn away. Even though you have the way paved for you to go directly into the Most Holy Place before God, there's a temptation for you to turn away." So, the author says, "Draw near. Draw near with a sincere heart, pursue God, come to God, intimacy with God, desire God, long for God."

Samuel Chadwick said, "Brethren, the crying sin of the church is her laziness after God." Tozer, who you hear me quote a good bit, said, "Come near to the holy men and women of the past, and you will soon feel the heat of their desire for God. They mourn for Him. They prayed and wrestled and sought for Him day and night, in season and out, and when they had found Him, the finding was all the sweeter for the long seeking."

One of my favorite books on prayer is by E.M. Bounds. It's called, *Power Through Prayer*, a little book, and in one chapter, he goes through describing men and women of God who have been long in prayer, and who have sought Him and drawn near to Him and have been used powerfully by Him, and he mentions Adoniram Judson, one of my favorite missionaries from church history. Listen to this. Judson wrote,

Arrange your affairs, if possible, so that you can leisurely devote two or three hours every day, not merely to devotional exercises, but to the very act of secret prayer and communion with God. Endeavor seven times a day to withdraw from business and company and lift up your soul to God in private retirement. Begin the day by rising after midnight and devoting some time

amid the silence and darkness of the night to this sacred work. Let the hour of opening dawn find you at the same work. Let the hours of 9:00, 12:00, 3:00, 6:00, and 9:00 at night witness the same. Be resolute in His cause. Make all practicable sacrifices to maintain it. Consider that your time is short and that business and company must not be allowed to rob you of your God.

"Impossible, say we," Bounds writes, "Fanatical directions? Dr. Judson impressed an entire empire for Christ and laid the foundations for God's kingdom with imperishable granite in the heart of Burma. He was successful, one of the few men who mightily impressed this world for Christ."

I read that and, if I can be honest with you, I'm not there. However, I want to be there. I want us to be a people that Scripture tells us, to be a people that are there, who draw near to God. This is it. We want Him. We don't want to be big. We don't want to have stuff. We don't want to have more things. We don't want to have more activities. We want more of God. If we're not careful, we can find ourselves playing games and not seeking after God, running after God, longing for God, individually and as a people together. We draw near to God with a sincere desire, a heart that longs for Him.

We have to be very, very careful. We live in a day where we have created a whole host of means and methods for doing church that, in the end, require any, if all, help from the Spirit of God. We don't have to fast and pray for the church to grow because we have marketing to do that. We don't have to pray to bring the crowds in. We have publicity for those things. No, absolutely not. God, make us a church that draws nearer to you, that longs to know you more and more and more, because we know the privilege we have, and we don't want to neglect it looking for more stuff and more activities.

We come before Him with sincere desire; we come before Him with confident assurance. We come before Him with a sincere heart in full assurance of the faith, a confidence that you belong there, even when you fail, even when things are not going to way they should be going in your life. You come before God with confidence, because you are not there based on your own merit. You are there based on the merit of Jesus Christ. So, be confident in what He has done; what He has done is sufficient, and there's nothing you can do to be sufficient. So, trust what He has done and have confident assurance in what He has done for you.

We come before Him with cleansed hearts. We talked about this last week. Our hearts sprinkled with the blood of Christ to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. We come before Him with hearts that know we're not guilty. We come before Him with a clean conscience, a heart that says, "Yes, I am justified before you and able to stand before you." We come before Him with cleansed hearts, and we come before Him with purified bodies; our bodies washed with pure water.

Now, a side note here. There is a tension. We know that Scripture is teaching here that we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. So, you have confidence to come before God boldly. At the same time, we know that all of us in this room still struggle with sin.

So, how do we bring these two together? The picture that Scripture gives us, and this is so key: Three words. These are not in your notes. This is no extra charge. Three words that are so crucial for understanding our salvation. First, we've talked about this before, but just a reminder: Justification. We are justified before God. It's what we're seeing here in Hebrews 10. It's what we saw when we studied Galatians. We are justified. What we sang

about earlier in the song that Steven wrote, we are justified before God. We are declared righteous before God. When you and I stand in the presence of God, He looks at us and He sees us clothed with the very righteousness of Jesus Christ, justified before Him.

At the same time, we are being...second word...sanctified; sanctification. We're being made holy. There are still areas of our life, facets of our life where the flesh and the sinful nature are still at work, and we're asking God to purify us more and more and more. So, we have a right standing before God. At the same time, in practice, we are being made holy. We're being made pure more and more every single day. It's a process called sanctification.

Then, a third word, we're going to be glorified one day: Glorification. There's coming a day when sin will be gone from our lives. We will not struggle with sin anymore, and our salvation will be complete, and we will be with Him and dwell with Him forever. We will be glorified. So, we're justified, we're being sanctified, and we will be glorified.

So, when we talk about Hebrews 10, coming before God confidently, know that we can do that because we're justified. We've got to guard against these thoughts that the Adversary will put in our minds that say, "You're not worthy enough to go before God. Do you see what you did last night? You know what you did last week, last month? You can't go before God." You're justified. You're not guilty; no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

At the same time, we don't say, "Well, I'm justified so, all right, I guess there's nothing else to do in Christianity. I'm just going to coast my way into heaven." No, we're being sanctified, and we're working on our salvation, Philippians 2, and we're being purified more and more every single day. It's a process, and we're going to dive into that next week. However, just keep that in mind when we talk about coming before God in faith.

### **Together, we hold fast to God in hope.**

First thing we do: Together, we draw near to God in faith based on the new covenant. We draw near to God in faith. Second, together, we hold fast to God in hope. We hold fast to God in hope. Verse 23, "*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*" Wow, what a verse. Now, there's a little problem this morning. When I submitted the outline that you have in your hands earlier this week, I got things a little backwards. So, we're going to have to switch things around a little bit. You've got the basis for our hope, and then the barriers for our hope. We're going to switch those around. This shouldn't be too difficult. However, we really need to understand the significance of the barriers to our hope before we understand the glory behind the basis of our hope.

So, we'll start with the barriers to our hope, and this is the context in the book of Hebrews and in our lives today. We will face...first barrier to hope: We will face trials. The author of Hebrews is writing to a group of people in a day where it was not easy to be a follower of Christ. The readers were predominantly Jewish Christians, and they were facing persecution from all sides. On the one hand, you had the threat of Roman persecution. On the other hand, you had Jews who would persecute you or ostracize you or make threats against you because you were leaving Judaism to go to Christianity, and you see this struggle all throughout the book of Hebrews because the people are tempted. These Christians were tempted to go back into Judaism. It's safer there. You had them facing trials.

Look down in Hebrews 10:32. Listen to this picture of what they were facing. It gives us a little context.

*Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. Sometimes you*

*were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathized with those who were in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.*

Did you catch that? Insults, persecution, imprisonments, they were facing all kinds of trials because of their faith and not just trials. We face trials, and we face temptations.

All throughout this book, we see them tempted because of these trails, many times, to drift away from God, to drift away from their faith. We see in the context of the passage that we're studying here in verses 24-25, that many of them were tempted not to gather together with other believers for worship because of what it might cost them. Facing trials and facing temptations, and the author is saying over and over again throughout this book, "Hold on to the hope that you have; hold unswervingly; hold tightly."

Same word he uses...go back to Hebrews 3. We're going to be all over the book here, and I want you to see this picture, this theme of hope and even this word of holding fast to God. Look at Hebrews 3:6. You might circle it. I'm going to show you two times where that same word, "hold on", just like we saw, "Hold unswervingly to the hope we profess," in Hebrews 10:23. Look in Hebrews 3:6, "*Christ is faithful as a son over God's house...*" We read this earlier. "*We are his house if we...*" What? "*...if we hold on...*" Circle it there, "*...hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.*" Same word that's used over in Hebrews 10:23.

Then, you get to verse 14, same chapter, Hebrews 3:14, "*We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly...*" Same word there, "*...hold firmly until the end the confidence we had at first.*" You get over to the next chapter, Hebrews 4:14, and it's not the exact same word in the original language of the New Testament, but it's a synonym, a very similar word. He says, "*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone to the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us...*" Here it is, "*...hold firmly...*" Circle it there, "*...to the faith we profess.*" He's telling them over and over again, "Hold on, hold on, don't let your faith slip away."

How do you hold on? Well, because you have hope. Look two chapters later, Hebrews 6:11. I want you to see the emphasis he places on the hope that we have. You just circle every time you see the word "hope". I'll show you really quickly, Hebrews 6:11, "*We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.*" Circle it right there. Then, go over to verse 18, same chapter. "*God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to God to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged.*" There's the hope right there.

Verse 19, "*We have this hope...*" There it is again, "*...as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.*" We have a hope in God that is an anchor for our soul. Keep going to the right, and you'll come to Hebrews 7:19. We'll start in verse 18. This is contrasting old covenant and new covenant. Listen to verse 18. "*The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God.*" We draw near to God. See the relationship between drawing near and hope here in 7:19. Then, we see it in Hebrews 10:23. Then look to Hebrews 11:1; Hebrews 11, the great faith chapter. We get somewhat close to a definition of faith here in Hebrews 11. What does it say? "*Faith is being sure of what we...*" What? "*...hope for...sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.*"

So, what's happening in the book of Hebrews is the author is saying to a group of people who are facing all kinds of trials and all kinds of temptations in their lives...he's saying,

"Hold on. Don't let go because you have hope; you have hope. Hold on and hope in God." Now, why...on what basis do we hope in God? When we face imprisonment, when you come home and all of your property has been stolen or burned, when, men, your wife and your kids are threatened because you're following Christ, what kind of hope enables you to hold on in those moments? What kind of hope keeps you from lapsing back into what's safer, what's easier? What kind of hope helps you walk through that kind of time?

The basis is twofold. First of all, our hope is based in the faithfulness of God to His promises. God is faithful to His promises. "*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess for he who promised is faithful.*" Here's how you can hope. Look at the character of God. See the character of God and know that He is worthy of your trust, that He is worthy of you placing all of your hope in Him, everything in Him. Back in Hebrews 6, where we read just a second ago, it talked about how God...it's impossible for God to lie, Hebrews 6:18. The reality is, when you hear a promise from God, how do you know that God is going to keep that promise? You know He's going to keep it because, if He doesn't, then He contradicts His very nature, and He lies about who He is, and it diminishes His glory, and He is no longer God. If God lies, then He is no longer God. So, think about rock solid confidence that way. As long as God is God, then whenever you see a promise from Him, it's going to be kept.

It's even better when you get to the end of Hebrews 6, and he talks about His promise to raise up Christ as a high priest, in the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a strange figure in Scripture that causes all kinds of questions. We're not about to get into that today. However, the picture is God promises to raise up Christ as the high priest and to keep Him there forever. The reality is all of the promises we've received from God are promises we've received through Christ, and so, we can know those promises are sure as long as Christ is at the right hand of the Father, as long as Christ is reigning supreme, then we can know those promises are true for us.

Think about this. You hear a promise, maybe like Hebrews 10:17, when God says, "*I will remember your sins no more.*" How do you know that? How do you know that one day God's just not going to say, "I've had it. This has been going on far too long. It's time to bring all of that old stuff back up to the forefront and count it against you."? How do you know God's not going to do that? You know God's not going to do that because He has said to you, "I will remember your sins no more," and He has bound up the fulfillment of that promise with His very own character and His very own Son, and as surely as God is God, and as surely as Christ is exalted, He will remember your sins no more.

In the same way, Hebrews 13:5, when God says, "I will never leave you or forsake you," you can know that for sure. As surely as God is God, and Christ is exalted, you can know that you are never alone, brother or sister. Hebrews 12:10, God promises that He will use the pain that you are going through for good. How do we know that? How do we know that, in the end, this trial that I'm walking through is not going to just be wasted? You can know for sure because, as surely as God is God and as Christ is exalted, He is going to bring good out of your pain. He who promised is faithful.

The faithfulness of God to His promises, but then second...don't miss this...the return of Christ for His people. Hebrews 10:25, you get down a little farther, the end of this whole exhortation picture. "*Let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*" Now, scholars debate what the "day" is, and some scholars think that the day is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple in Jerusalem. Some scholars think that the day is referring to kind of just a general day of judgment. However, it seems in the context of this book, that the day is very clearly pointing us to the second coming of Christ.



Look back at the end of Hebrews 9:27. The chapter before this lets us know what the author said there. It's interesting, just as a side note, the only other time we see this word for "meeting together" in the New Testament like it's used here in Hebrews 10, the only other time we see this word "meeting together" is in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, when it says, "We meet together," and it's a reference there to gathering together in the presence of Christ at His second coming.

However, even in the book of Hebrews here, look at Hebrews 9:27, "*Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*" So, the author of Hebrews said the chapter before this, "He's coming back."

You get to the end of this chapter, Hebrews 10, look at verse 35. After he's talking about all they've been through in the past, listen to what he says,

*Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.*

Here's the reality that Scripture teaches. There is coming a day when Jesus, who is seated at the right hand of God, will rise and come back for His people and will take us to be with Him, and that's how you deal with being imprisoned for your faith. You deal with being imprisoned for your faith by looking out and knowing there's coming a day when Christ is coming back for you, and that's how you walk through confiscation of your property. It's just stuff. You've got a Savior who is coming back for you.

Now, I know some of you are thinking, "That was in the first century, and this is the twenty-first century, and He's still not back." You know what that means? We're that much closer. Yesterday, Heather and I celebrated "Gotcha Day" with Caleb. It was two years ago yesterday that we stood before a judge in Kazakhstan after spending four weeks going and visiting with him for an hour, twice a day, just agonizing, seeming like it would never end. We wanted to bring this child into our family, and he's living in this orphanage, and we went day after day after day to this orphanage, and that day before "Gotcha Day", we looked out and said...he's ten months old, like he didn't understand this. He didn't even know our language at that point, but we looked at him, and we said, "We're coming back tomorrow, and tomorrow, we're going to take you home to be with us."

So, the next day, two years ago yesterday, we went before a judge, and the judge declared that Caleb Thomas Platt belonged to us, and this child that had lived in this orphanage now had a home, and Heather and I, it's one of those surreal moments when you realize...and first parents you've been there before...like, "What have we done? We're about to have a child in our home, and we're in Kazakhstan. What are we doing?" So, we started making preparations ready, getting everything ready before we went to get him and to bring him into our home.

I want to remind you, brothers and sisters, I don't know the challenges that you are walking through, and I don't know the trials that you're facing or the temptations that are very real in your life at this moment. I do not know how hard it is, but I do know this: You have One who has gone before the Holy Judge of all the earth, and He has paid the price for you, and

you have been declared His, and in a short while...He's making preparations...and in a short while, "Gotcha Day" is coming, and He is coming back for you, and He is going to take you to be with Him where there will be no more crying or pain or mourning, for the old will be gone, and the new will have come. So live...live in anticipation of that day. Hold on. Hold on, hold fast, don't drift away. Hold fast in the middle of trials. Hold fast in the middle of temptations. God is faithful, and Christ is coming back.

### **Together, we motivate one another to love.**

All right, third exhortation: Hold fast to God in hope, draw near to God in faith, and third, together, we motivate one another to love. Now, it's interesting. Up to this point, we might be tempted to think, "Well, I can do those first two things on my own. I can draw near to God, and I can hold fast to God." However, that's not what the author of Hebrews is saying. The whole picture here...don't miss it... "Let us do these things..." "Let us do these things..." This is in the context of community. Drawing nearer to God is a community project. Holding fast to God is a community project. We need each other to help us draw near to God. We need each other to help us hold fast to God, and we need each other. That's the whole picture, to motivate one another to love.

It's really interesting. When we get to verse 24, and it says, "*Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,*" that's the best English translation that we could get for this sentence in the original language of the New Testament, but it misses something really important, and I want to show it to you here. Hold your place and go back with me to Hebrews 3:1. I want to show you that word "consider" in Hebrews 10:24 is used one other time in the book of Hebrews.

Now, follow with me here. One other time, and it's talking about how he considered Jesus. Look at Hebrews 3:1: "*Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on...*" The same word that's used over here; it's translated "fix your thoughts on". It's "consider" over here, the same word in the original language of the New Testament, "Fix your thoughts on Jesus." So, the picture is consider Jesus, fix your eyes on Jesus, fix your thoughts, your attention on Jesus; focus yourself on Jesus.

We get the exact same phrase over here except, instead of saying "Jesus", it says "one another". So, in Hebrews 10:24, really the way this verse reads in the original language of the New Testament, it says, "Let us consider one another..." Just like it said "consider Jesus" back here, focus on Jesus, "consider one another, focus on one another, how we may spur on toward love and good deeds." Now, that sounds weird if we were to translate it that way. "Let us consider one another how we may spur on to love and good deeds." That doesn't make sense, so we switch it around.

However, if we're not careful, we miss the point. What the author of Hebrews says is, "In light of the fact that you have access to God, an Advocate before God, as you draw near to Him, and you hold fast to Him, you focus on each other. You fix your thoughts on each other, look at each other, consider each other, think about each other." The picture here is clear. The author of Hebrews is showing us that what Christ has done for us has huge ramifications for the focus of our lives on the people around us, and the author of Hebrews doesn't tell us here, "Be loving and do good deeds." That wouldn't be wrong if he said that. Obviously, we see that in other parts of Scripture, but that's not what the author of Hebrews says. The author of Hebrews doesn't say, "Go out and be loving and do good deeds." What does he say? "Consider others and spur them on to love and good deeds."

Think about what he's saying there. Fix your focus on others and consider how to help them be more loving, how to help them do good deeds, how to spur them on towards that. That

word, "spur on", it's usually used in a negative context. It literally means "to irritate" or "to provoke", "to exasperate". As our kids grow a little bit older, it's funny how they're beginning to learn each other's buttons, and they know how to provoke the other one, and they know if you press this button, and you get this reaction, and they just press it over and over and over again. That's the picture here. The author of Hebrews is saying, "Look at each other." This is deep community. Focus on each other, so that you know what buttons to press in their life that result in them being loving and doing good deeds.

This is fascinating. Think about...have you ever been around people that just being around maybe a certain person just makes you better, more love, more desire? You spend a few days with men and women who are serving starving children in the slums of northern India, and you walk away wanting to love more, wanting to love better, and that's the picture in the New Testament church the author of Hebrews is giving us, a people who make one another better in the way we love one another. We spur one another on just by being around each other. We're provoked to be loving and to do good deeds.

Listen to what one email that I got from a random person.

Dear Dr. Platt,

About two weeks ago a member of your church was visiting in New Orleans in the French Quarter where our son works part-time as he is putting his way through school. Somehow, as the lady from your church conversed in a jewelry store with our son, she learned that he was studying in school. The lady left but came back a little while later and placed an envelope in his hand as he was waiting on someone else and left. Later he opened it to find a large sum of money. As he shared this experience, we praised God. He is Jehovah-Jireh. I don't think we're supposed to know this person's name, only to let her light shine before men that they may see her good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven. God used this person to testify to our son and to the many people I have shared it with. God is so good. We just wanted you to know.

Look what happens when a community of faith is spurring on that kind of activity amongst each other. This is what the church is about, intended to be, and that's why the author says, "Don't give up meeting together." We gather with one another regularly. Why? Why do we need to gather with one another regularly? Because if we're going to be loving and do good deeds, apparently the New Testament is telling us we need others to spur that on in us. Do you catch this? The implication here in Hebrews 10 is you will not be near as loving and do good deeds for the glory of your Father in heaven, you will not do those things if you're living Christianity in isolation. You will miss out on the life of love and service that God has designed and formed you for if you're not walking in the context of Christian community.

This picture of gathering with one another regularly is sometimes used, "Well, that means we need to go to church." Most often people think this verse is telling us to get together in a room like this every Sunday morning. I think that's a possible application of this passage, that we should gather together for worship around the Word. However, I think it's much deeper here. This picture of focusing on each other, considering each other, fixing our thoughts on each other, that's a lot deeper than sitting next to each other in a seat. This is intimate involvement in each other's lives. It's something that, quite honestly, can't be accomplished in a room this size once a week. It's why we talk all the time about small groups and why we encourage every member of this faith family to get plugged into a small group, a group of believers where you are sharing life with each other, where you are able to focus on each other, when you know people well enough, you know what buttons to

press in their life to cause them to bring glory to God. You know how to spur them on. That's the context of what the author of Hebrews is telling us here.

We gather with one another regularly, and we encourage one another continually. Let us encourage. Another reason why I don't think this passage is just referring to a corporate worship gathering like this, because this is mutual encouragement that's going on, and sure, in a room like this we encourage one another with our singing, and every once in awhile there's an occasional encouragement from an "Amen" in the crowd or something for the preacher. However, on a whole, there's not a lot of mutual encouragement. We're not really focusing on each other's lives.

When I gather together with my small group this afternoon, we sit around, and we talk about the trials we're going through, and we talk about the struggles or the temptations we wrestle with, and we pray for each other, and we learn about what's going on in each other's lives. This is what this picture of encouraging one another is all about. We encourage one another continually, and the Bible's saying here, very clearly, "Every believer in this room, you will face trials. You will face temptations. You will walk through all kinds of things in this life, and you are not intended to do one of them alone. You're intended to do them in the context of community, a community that is helping you draw near to God in faith. It's helping you to hold fast to God in hope in a community that's encouraging you, spurring you on to love and none of those things can be accomplished apart from the context of community." You see the ramifications of a new covenant for a new community.

The last few weeks have been interesting, and in some ways, challenging for Heather and me. About two weeks ago, we got a call from Atlanta that Heather's grandfather had passed away. He was 98 years old, incredible life, incredible legacy. So, we went to be with her family, and then on Thursday of this last week, my mom called me, and my grandmother had passed away, and she was 101 years old, was going to be 101 this month, my dad's mom and my last grandparent. I remember when my first grandparent passed away. It was my granddad, my dad's dad. I was young. I didn't realize everything that was going on around me, but I remember...I remember like it was yesterday, one particular moment. I remember walking out of that funeral home behind that casket, and I remember seeing my dad, and I had never seen my dad cry before, and I looked at him, and he's just bawling, he's weeping over the loss of his dad, and I didn't realize everything that was going on.

So, I'd held it together pretty good up until that point, but when I saw my dad crying like that, it was heart wrenching. You know that feeling don't you? When you see somebody you care about, and your life is so intertwined with in such a way that, when they weep, you weep. When they laugh, you laugh, because your lives are so linked together in an intimacy that really transcends time and space.

This is the picture. This is it. Brothers and sisters, we are recipients of a new covenant, each of our hearts sprinkled with the blood of Christ, and as a result, our hearts are intertwined with one another, linked together, a body. 1 Corinthians 12 says, "A body such that when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers with it, and when one part of the body is honored, the whole body rejoices with it." You can't manufacture that kind of relationship. You certainly can't manufacture it on the assembly line of programs, and you can't manufacture it overnight. This takes time. It takes vulnerability. It takes work. It's not easy, but it's worth it. It's what God has designed us for.

So, as the church, let's be careful. Let's be careful not to settle for sitting shoulder to shoulder in a room once a week. We're the people of God, recipients of a new covenant, members of a new community. Let's share life together. The Bible doesn't say, "Go out and

live your life, and hopefully, run into some brothers and sisters you can encourage every once in awhile, or interact with your brothers and sisters here or there.” This is an intentional get together, be together, share life together, and in the process, draw near to God and hold fast to God and keep one another from drifting away and motivate one another to love, because there’s a lost and dying world that needs the greatest love they can receive from the body of Christ.

## **Our Corporate Confession...**

So, this is our corporate confession: The covenant by which we belong to Christ creates a community in which we belong to each other. It’s good. It’s infinitely good to belong to Christ, but it’s also infinitely good to belong to each other.

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