

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

XIX. DRAW NEAR! (CHAP. X. 19-31.)

IN what I have to say on the remainder of the epistle my object will be simply to notice those passages which touch and lend support to the leading idea of the doctrinal part—Christianity, the religion of unrestricted fellowship with God. In this connexion the exhortation which begins at ver. 19 of the tenth chapter claims special attention. It rests on and is expressed in terms of the central truth. “Christ has made it possible to have perfect fellowship with God; that is the objective significance of the Christian era. Therefore draw near, realize your privilege subjectively.”

Draw near! that is the appropriate application of the whole foregoing argument, the goal to which the long train of thought has been leading up. Readers who have felt the force of the theoretical statement can do nothing else than come into the presence of God with filial trust and holy joy. They do not merely hope for free access as a future good. They consciously enjoy it now as a present possession. For that is implied in the exhortation *προσερχώμεθα*, “let us draw near.” The thing is to be done now, the privilege can be enjoyed at once; if it be not, it be our own fault. There is thus a noteworthy advance at this point on the teaching in the sixth chapter, where the *summum bonum*, nearness to God, appears as a boon in store for us in the future. Christ has gone within the veil as our forerunner, and we shall follow Him by-and-by; but meantime we only cast into that sacred region the anchor of our hope. Now not hope, but full assurance of faith, making the future present, is the watchword. The increased boldness of tone befits the close of the argument intended to show that Christianity is the

perfect religion. And yet we are not to conceive of this boldness as something to which the writer has gradually worked himself up. It is but a return to his manner of speaking when he was on the threshold of his great demonstration that in Jesus Christ we have the true ideal Priest over the house of God (chap. iv. 16).

The exhortation to draw near is enforced by the two reasons, that there is an open way, and a powerful friend at court (vers. 20, 21). The terms in which the way of access is described are worthy of note. It is called *new* (*πρόσφατον*) and *living* (*ζῶσαν*). With reference to the former of these two epithets one has occasion to repeat the observation already more than once made in the course of our study of the epistle: how boldly the writer puts in the forefront just those features of the Christian religion which a timid prudence would take care to conceal! To the conservative mind of Hebrew readers enamoured of the ancient Levitical system, the novelty of the way might seem the reverse of a recommendation. Nevertheless the teacher hesitates not to proclaim with emphasis the fact that the way is new. And his boldness was never more completely justified. For in this case the contrast is not between a new, unfrequented path, and an old one, familiar and well-trodden; but rather between a new way and no way at all. While the veil existed, dividing the tabernacle into a holy place and an inaccessible most holy place, the way into God's presence was not opened up. Men were kept at a distance in fear, not daring to go beyond the door of the tent, or at farthest, in the case of ordinary priests, the screen which separated the outer from the inner compartment. To call the way new was simply to pronounce on Leviticalism a verdict of incompetence.

In the expression a "*living way*" we have an exhibition of boldness under another form. The writer not only dares to emphasize an unpopular aspect of the Christian religion by

the use of the term new, but has the courage in its praise to coin what on the surface appears an incongruous combination of ideas. For such courage all the New Testament writers had need. A "living way," "living stones": such expressions bear witness to the inadequacy of ordinary language to convey the truth concerning the good that came to the world by Jesus Christ. Bible writers laboured in expression, throwing out words and phrases with a certain sublime helplessness at an object passing human comprehension. And yet the meaning here is plain enough. The epithet "living" implies that God's presence is not now, as of old, restricted to any particular place. To be near Him we do not need to pass locally from one point in space to another. We draw nigh to God by right thoughts of His character, and by loving, trustful affections. When we think of Him as revealed to us in Christ, when we trust Him implicitly, as one who for Christ's sake forgiveth our sin, we are in His very presence. The way is living because it is spiritual, a way which we tread, not by the feet, but by the mind and the heart, as is hinted in ver. 22, where it is said, "Let us draw near with true heart and with full assurance of faith." The way is Christ Himself, the Revealer and the Reconciler, and we come to God through Him when we trust Him in both capacities.

Of the new and living way it is further affirmed that it has been consecrated for us by Jesus through the veil. It has been consecrated for us by being first used, trodden by Him. The expression, "through the veil" (*διὰ τοῦ καταπέτασματος*), suggests a double contrast. First, between the old and the new dispensations in respect of access to God. Under the Levitical system there was a veil which barred the way, so that beyond it no man but the high priest might go. Under the new economy there is no bar—the way lies right through the veil to the very presence of God. But, secondly, there is a contrast between

Christ and Christians not less than between the two dispensations. There is no veil for us, but there was a veil for our great High Priest. He opened up the way for us through the veil, pushing it aside, never again to be drawn across the entrance. What this means is explained in the words, "that is to say, His flesh." The thought of the writer seems to be that the veil through which Jesus had to pass, by the pushing aside of which He opened up an entrance into the Divine presence, was His mortal flesh. That is to say, in unfigurative terms, the truth taught is, that we owe our liberty Godwards to the fact that Christ took a body and passed with it into glory through a course of humiliation and suffering. There was a veil for Him, inasmuch as it behoved Him to suffer in the flesh, and so pass into glory; there is no veil for us, because the Just One suffered for the unjust, that He might bring them nigh to God. This conception of Christ's flesh as a veil is beautiful as a passing, poetic thought, but care must be taken not to press it too far. It "cannot, of course, be made part of a consistent and complete typology. It is not meant for this. But as the veil stood locally before the holiest in the Mosaic tabernacle, the way into which lay through it, so Christ's life in the flesh stood between Him and His entrance before God, and His flesh had to be rent ere He could enter."¹ The one truth to be laid to heart is, that our liberty of access cost Christ much. The making of the new way was no light matter for Him.

Having stated the grounds of the exhortation to draw near, the writer next describes the appropriate manner of

¹ Professor A. B. Davidson, p. 211. Bishop Westcott, in his recently published commentary on our epistle, points out the difficulties connected with the view that the veil means Christ's flesh, which he thinks so serious as to justify a departure from the universal exegetical tradition, to the effect of identifying Christ's flesh, not with the *veil*, but with the *way*. He renders "the entrance which He inaugurated for us, even a fresh and living way through the veil, that is to say, a way of His flesh."

approach: "With a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (ver. 22). These four particulars are to be regarded, not in the light of legal requirements necessary to an acceptable approach, but rather as together indicating the state of mind which is congruous to the privileged position of Christians. "Come thus; in our happy circumstances we can come so; it is fitting and easy"—so we are to take the exhortation. A parallel suggests itself between this text in our epistle and Romans v. 1-11, where Paul expatiates on the privileges of the justified man. "Being therefore," exclaims the apostle, "justified by faith, let us have peace with God; and let us joy in hope of a blessed future, yea, even in present tribulation, and, above all, in God Himself." He means to say that, the method of justification being by faith, and not by legal works, such a bright, buoyant, joyous mood is within the reach of all believers; life need not be a thing of gloom, sadness, and uncertainty. Even so here. We must be careful not to read this verse as if it meant, take heed how ye draw near to the presence of God; see that ye come in a right frame of mind and heart. It means rather, think of the open way and of the powerful friend at court, and come boldly, gladly, assured of your welcome. All the phrases which indicate the manner of approach must be interpreted in this spirit.

With a true heart. This is commonly taken as equivalent to "in sincerity." I object to this rendering as too narrow, and moreover as leaning to legalism, making the expression point to requirement rather than to privilege. Literally translated, the words mean: "With a heart answering to the ideal" (*ἀληθινῆς*); that is to say, in the excellent words of Bishop Westcott, "a heart which fulfils the ideal office of the heart, the seat of the individual character, towards God." The question thus comes to be,

What sort of heart is that which realizes the ideal of worship, offering eloquent worship, blessing God with all that is within? An undivided, sincere heart, doubtless, but also something more. Besides sincerity there must be gladness, the gladness that is possible when men worship a God whom they can utterly trust and love. Along with this gladness begotten of faith go enthusiasm, generous self-abandonment, spontaneous service, rendered not slavishly, in mechanical compliance with rigid rules, but in the free spirit of sonship, the heart obeying no law but its own devoted impulses. In short, the direction, "with a true heart," must be analysed into two: with *heart*, as opposed to heartlessly; with a *true* heart, as opposed to half-heartedly or insincerely. I am persuaded that the writer of our epistle had in view the former not less, rather more, than the latter. It was not his purpose to insist so much on the subjective, ethical condition of an acceptable approach to God, as on the objective, religious condition of an approach which shall be real, involving actual, conscious fellowship with God. There is a latent contrast between the gladheartedness in worship which is possible to one who worships the Father whom Jesus revealed, and the depression and gloom inseparable from all religion that has for its object a God who hides Himself, and keeps His votaries far off. It would be false to say that the religion of Israel was joyless; on the contrary, in comparison with ethnic religions it was bright and happy. Witness the 100th Psalm, beginning, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands," and ending with that noble confession of faith which reveals the secret of the gladness: "For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations." But Israel's religion was joyous in spite of the peculiarities of the Levitical system of worship. Its many rules and restrictions, with penalties attached for transgression, its jealous arrangements for protecting the majesty of God, all tended to

engender an oppressive sense of solemnity, and a chilling feeling of fear. The spirit of the system was sombre and awe-inspiring.

Even if sincerity were the thing primarily intended by the requirement, "with true heart," it would still be necessary to interpret it widely, so as to include the gladness inspired by faith. For sincerity and gladness are closely allied: to have a sincere heart you must have a glad heart as well. Insincerity has two sources, the moral state of a corrupt heart, and the fear of a timid true heart. A religion of fear makes the best men hypocrites, feigning sentiments which they do not feel. The formalism of such a religion tends to aggravate the evil. There is so much routine duty, that worshippers almost inevitably get into a way of putting exact compliance with the rubric in the place of worship "in spirit and in truth." Indeed, it may be affirmed that the votaries of crude cults have no conception of worshipping in spirit or in truth. The very notion of sincerity is possible only when God is conceived of as good and as Spirit: His goodness drawing out the heart into eloquent utterance of adoration, trust, and love, His spirituality emancipating the conscience from bondage to form.

In the light of these remarks we comprehend why our author, having said "with true heart," goes on next to say "in full assurance of faith." He simply indicates by this second expression that which makes the glad, sincere heart possible: absolute, unqualified confidence, without any doubt of a gracious reception. It is implied that such confidence is justified by the facts mentioned in the preamble to the exhortation.

In the first two specifications spiritual truth is expressed in spiritual language. The third and fourth, on the other hand, are stated in typological terms suggested by the Levitical rules of purification by blood and water to be observed by the priests. When Aaron and his sons were

consecrated to the priesthood, they were sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices. They were also washed with water.¹ It was, further, the duty of the priests to wash their hands and feet in the brazen laver every time they entered the tabernacle or approached the altar.² How then are we to understand these two last clauses in the directory for Christian worship? Are we to find in them nothing more than a graceful allusion to Levitical ritual? or shall we extract from them merely the general idea that Christians have all the privilege and standing of priests, yea, of high priests coming into the very presence of God? There can be little doubt that the writer does intend to suggest that idea. He says in effect: Draw near priest-like, for priests indeed you *are*. But it is reasonable to suppose that he also means to indicate in what priestlikeness consists; in other words, that he attaches some definite, practical sense to the specifications, "having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

It is not difficult to determine to what the former points. The heart sprinkled from an evil conscience is synonymous with the conscience purged from dead works (ix. 14). The state described is that of a heart or a conscience which has experienced the full effect of Christ's sacrifice, taken in all the latitude assigned to it in a previous paper, as embracing the pardon of sin, moral renewal, and deliverance from the dominion of a legal spirit.³ It is not so easy to decide what precisely is signified by the body "washed with pure water." The meaning is plain in reference to the Levitical type, but what is the corresponding fact in the spiritual sphere? The common reply to the question is, Christian baptism. The suggestion is tempting, and even not destitute of probability; and yet one cannot help feeling that, if baptism

¹ Exod. xxix. 4.

² Exod. xxx. 19-21.

³ THE EXPOSITOR for March, 1890, pp. 232-237.

was in the writer's mind, it would have been easy and natural for him to have indicated his thought by the addition of a word. I doubt if this final specification serves any purpose beyond expressing the thoroughness of the cleansing process undergone by a Christian man who surrenders himself completely to the redeeming influence of Christ. The whole man, body, soul, and spirit, becomes purified, consecrated, transfigured, a veritable king and priest of God. The two clauses express together one thought. "The rhetorical balance of parts must not be made a doctrinal distinction of effects."¹

Such then is the ideal state and standing of the Christian worshipper, the manner of approach to God possible and real for one who understands and appreciates his position as living in the era of the better hope through which we draw nigh to God. He can and does come into the Divine presence with gladness and sincerity, with heart and with the whole heart, having no doubt at all of his welcome, and untroubled by the thought of his sin, being assured of forgiveness and conscious of Christ's renovating power; he comes in the evangelic, filial spirit of thankfulness, not in the legal spirit of a slave; asking not, How may I satisfy the exacting demands of an austere Deity? but, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits?" This is the type of Christian piety which prevails at all times when the intuition of God's grace in Christ is restored. It was pre-eminently the prevailing type in the apostolic age among all who understood the epoch-making significance of Christ's work, and the extent to which He made all things new. But, alas! the difficulty is to remain up in that sunny region, or indeed ever to get up to it, away out of the low-lying, unhealthy valleys of legalism, filled with mist and gloom.

The Hebrew Church, to which our epistle was addressed,

¹ Professor A. B. Davidson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 213.

had never been up there, or, at least, had been unable for any time to remain there; and hence the glowing description of the ideal Christian worship, which we have been considering, is followed by a most depressing picture of the actual situation in that unhappy community (vers. 23-25). What we find in these verses, formally indeed, is but an exhortation which might with more or less point be addressed to any Christian community. Yet it is not to be taken as a commonplace admonition, but as a counsel urgently called for by a state of things presenting a sad contrast to the bright ideal previously depicted. Each clause in the exhortation points at an evil not imaginary, but imminent. "Let us hold fast the profession of our hope without wavering," points at a more than possible apostasy. "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works," points at the chilling of the religious affections. "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," points at a tendency to isolation, involving forfeiture of all the benefits that come from association in religion. That is to say, the Hebrews were letting their faith go, allowing their love to grow cold, neglecting social worship and all means of keeping one another in heart, so that they were becoming like a demoralized army with its discipline broken, a mere disorderly mob, a sure prey to the foe.

For this sad state of matters there is but one radical cure: clear vision of the ideal, vivid realization of the grace wherein believers in Jesus stand, insight into the incomparable value of the Christian faith. Given this, the faith would be dearer than life; cold, selfish isolation would cease; a close brotherhood would be established, inspired by the sense of a common possession of something worth living and dying for. It was the knowledge of this that moved the writer of our epistle to make a great effort to expound the nature and show the glory of the new covenant religion. He believed that the best of all antidotes to apostasy was intelligent

conviction. In the course of his work he plies his readers with every conceivable aid to constancy, calling up old memories, appealing alternately to hope and fear, pointing, on the one hand, to historic examples of the fate of unbelief, and, on the other, to lives made sublime by the power of faith. But his main trust is in instruction. If he can only get them to understand the religion they profess, all will be well, everything else will follow of course.

The teacher has done his best, but at the end of his great effort he seems to be depressed with the sense of failure. Witness the ominous passage following, concerning the doom of apostates (vers. 26-31). I have drawn a parallel between Hebrews x. 19-22 and Romans v. 1-11, but I must here note a contrast. There is nothing in the Epistle to the Romans corresponding to this sombre picture of judgment without mercy. Paul allows no shadow to fall on the sunny landscape of the justified man's privileges. The summer mood lasts till we come to the ninth chapter, when there is a sudden change. The explanation of the difference is, that in Paul's case the causes of gloom are without the Church, in the spiritual state of unbelieving Israel. Here, on the contrary, they are within the Church, among Christians who are in danger of joining the rank of their unbelieving countrymen, the question of the hour being whether they are to remain Christian, or to renounce the Christian name.

It was a solemn question for the Hebrew Church *on the eve of Israel's judgment day*. For such is the situation suggested by the words, "and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (ver. 25). This is one of the passages in the epistle which help us to fix the time when it was written, as falling within the fateful period of the Jewish war, which in 70 A.D. issued in the destruction of the holy city. The "day" is that predicted by Jesus as He sat on the Mount of Olives, looking sorrowfully down

upon the temple, and said: "Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." If our author was conversant with our Lord's prophecy, we cannot be surprised at the tragic style in which he depicts the horrors of that day, winding up with the reflection, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." It was a fearful thing indeed for Israel in those years. And it would be a fearful thing for the Hebrew Christians also, if they apostatised; for then they would inevitably share the fate of the guilty nation. And surely most righteously! For how great would be their guilt!—greater than that of men who in ancient times transgressed Moses' law, greater than that of their contemporaries who had never believed in Jesus, the greatest guilt possible. For what greater crime can be conceived than to tread underfoot the Son of God, to treat the precious blood of Christ shed for man's redemption as a common thing, and to do outrage to the Spirit of grace? Of all this, it is rightly held, he is guilty who, having once believed, apostatises. He once worshipped Jesus as the Son of God, and now he curses Him; he once believed that Jesus died, the Just for the unjust: now he thinks of Christ's death as that of a common man, or even of a criminal; he once was a partaker of the Holy Ghost, and now he laughs at his former religious experience as a hallucination.

Two points in this sombre passage, of exegetic interest for one who is mainly concerned with the theology of the epistle, may now be noticed. One is the combination here, as in chapter ix. 14, of blood with spirit. The "blood of the covenant," the "Spirit of grace." Here they appear as distinct sources of sanctification. But in the writer's mind, as in truth, they are closely allied. The blood is the blood of Christ, the Spirit is the spirit of Christ. He is the Spirit through whose inspiration Christ shed His blood, and He is the Spirit who passes into the hearts of all that

believe in Christ, and thus becomes a renewing influence. The other point is the unique title for the Spirit—the Spirit of *grace*. The question arises, How is the designation to be understood? Does it mean the Spirit who imparts grace, or the Spirit who is Himself the gift of God's grace? Formally distinct, the two meanings run into each other. The Spirit's presence is felt as an energy, producing effects through which God's grace is manifested. The more important question is, What is the nature of the effects? Are they *ethical*, or merely *charismatical*? Does the grace of which the Spirit is the vehicle consist in the power to speak with tongues and to do other supernatural acts, or in the power to live holy lives? In the former case, we should have to recognise a difference between the doctrine of the Spirit taught in our epistle and that contained in Paul's epistles, according to which the Holy Spirit, while the source of miraculous charisms, is, before all things, the immanent ground of Christian sanctity. I do not think any such difference exists. I believe that the writer of this epistle, if not a disciple of Paul, is at least in sympathy with Paul in his conception of the Spirit's work. As was meet in one who had so enlightened a view as to the absolute worth of the good that came to the world through Jesus Christ, he uses repeatedly the word "grace," and in most instances he employs it in an ethical sense: as in the expression, "the throne of grace"¹; in the saying, "it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace"²; and in the concluding prayer, "grace be with you all."³ There is little reason to doubt that he uses it in the same sense here. It has been remarked that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews does not speak of the Spirit's influence among Christians in so lively a way as Paul.⁴ That may be; but the explanation of the fact is probably to be

¹ Chap. iv. 16.² Chap. xiii. 9.³ Chap. xiii. 25.⁴ Vide Ewald, *Die Lehre der Bibel von Gott*, iii. 400.

found, not in any supposed abatement of the Spirit's power in the subapostolic generation,¹ but in the circumstance that the Pauline doctrine of the Spirit had become, when our epistle was written, the common possession of the Church.

A. B. BRUCE.

EPHESUS.

A POSTSCRIPT.

MY paper in THE EXPOSITOR for June, and the conjecture which I ventured to lay before its readers, will have done good service, if only by eliciting the interesting observations on "Saint Paul at Ephesus" which Professor Ramsay contributed to these pages last month. His acquaintance with the geography and the antiquities of proconsular Asia is so thorough, that his criticisms and remarks upon my paper could not fail to be valuable and suggestive.

This is not the place for controversy, and I am writing these lines under circumstances which preclude any reference to my books and papers. But I should like to add a few words by way of postscript to my previous paper, and in order to remove one or two misconceptions of my meaning which may be entertained by Professor Ramsay.

1. My chief object was to suggest the identification of the Demetrius of the inscription with the silversmith of Acts xix. That identification stands or falls with the date to be assigned to the inscription. Professor Ramsay was inclined at first, as I was myself, to assign both the documents engraved on the marble to the same date, *viz.* the

¹ So Ewald in *l.c.* Ewald seems to regard the doctrine of the Spirit in the Epistle to the Hebrews as essentially Pauline.