

Thriving in a Hard and Hostile World

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Date: 04 October 2020

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[0:00] We're coming up here, and please come give us his word, sorry, not yours, his. Well, good morning.

Good morning. Good morning. All right, yeah, thank you for having me. My name is Roy Augustine, and my wife is here with me, Leslie.

We have four kids, and we left them. We left them at home. No, we left them with my sister, and she's taking them to church this morning. So it's just nice to get a little break from them, especially for my wife, and enjoy a nice an hour and 15-minute drive up here and anticipating worshipping the Lord with you up here.

And we just love that. We just love just being together, having a nice talk, and catching up without the interruption of the kids, knowing that we'll get to a very like-minded church, a very gospel-centered church, and just share God's word with you.

So again, thank you for having us. Your pastor is a sweet brother, sweet friend. We've become friends starting last year, I believe.

[1:17] I've been here, I think, twice now, and I always look forward to when he invites me to fill in for him. We went to a conference, a pastor's conference last year with him, and we just hit it off.

He's probably all serious behind this pulpit, but I'm sure you know that he's a fun, adventurous guy, and we just had a blast. We had a great time in Florida together.

I got to know him. I think we sat together on the plane to and then from, and I just appreciate your pastor. He loves you. He loves you dearly.

I had no doubt of that when I hung out with him in Florida. So this is a privilege for me, a sweet opportunity to be with you.

So without delay, grab your Bible and open to Hebrews chapter 10. Hebrews chapter 10.

[2:25] I've titled this morning's sermon, Thriving in a Hard and Hostile World. Thriving in a Hard and Hostile World.

And that's exactly how the Bible describes our world today. Doesn't it? In those two specific words. We live in a world that's hard, and we live in a world that's hostile, specifically, especially toward us as Christians.

Listen to a few passages that talk about this, that describe our world in these terms. The Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy chapter 3, and by the way, in that chapter, Paul talking to Timothy, he's specifically talking about the church.

He said to Timothy, realize this, that in the last days, difficult times will come, and that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be what?

Persecuted. The Apostle Peter also talks about this in 1 Peter chapter 4. Peter said, Beloved, do not be surprised.

[3:31] He said, Don't be shocked at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing. Talking about the testing of the faith, the testing of your salvation, as though some strange thing were happening to you.

So Peter is saying pretty much, Hey, you are a Christian. So this is part of your life. This is the Christian life, the pressure and persecution.

So don't be shocked. And then Jesus himself says in John 15, A servant is not greater than his master, right? So if they persecuted me, Jesus said to his disciples, they will also persecute you.

So again, it's just normal. This is the Christian life, pressure and persecution. We live in a hard and hostile world and we shouldn't be shocked. We live in the last days.

And if they persecuted Jesus Christ, they will also persecute his followers, his disciples. So the Bible is clear about that. The Bible is clear that that's the world we live in.

[4:36] And also the Bible, you can by implication say that the Bible only gives us two options, how we approach persecution and pressure from the world. The first option is that we trust the Lord.

Okay, we trust the Lord and we hold fast to our convictions. And as a result, we thrive in our Christian walk. We thrive in our spiritual growth. So that's the first option.

The second option is to fear man, to fear man and to allow that to affect us and we end up doing just the bare Christian minimum and hoping that we would survive.

So again, big picture. The Bible is clear. We live in a hard and hostile world. Persecution and pressure are coming to those who live a godly life, to those who profess to be Christians, to those who are members of a church.

So now you're faced with two options really. Are you going to trust the Lord and are you going to hold on to your convictions and you thrive spiritually or are you going to fear man and because of that, you just end up doing the bare Christian minimum just to kind of get by and hopefully at the end survive.

[5:58] So Christian, you choose, right? You choose. Well, this morning, I want to show you the encouragement, the help from Hebrews chapter 10.

Hebrews chapter 10. And before we read it, really, I want to give you the big question. The question that I want to ask you this morning is that, just think about it.

In these past several months, right? In these past several months, difficult months, right? challenging, worrisome, fearful, difficult months.

As you see the world become harder and more hostile, as a Christian and as a Cottonwood Bible Church attender or member, are you just, do you find, have you found yourself just trying to get by just doing the bare minimum as a Christian?

Or, are you holding fast to the Lord, to the gospel, to your convictions and thriving in spite of what's going on outside of these walls? So, look at Hebrews chapter 10 and follow as I read verses 11, I mean, 19 through 25 and we are going to find encouragement and help here.

[7:17] chapter 10, verse 19, the author says this, therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he inaugurated for us through the veil that is his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promises faithful. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another in all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Now, before I walk you through the passage, let me give you the background of the letter. I know you've been in Matthew, I believe, and you just finished Matthew, right? You're in Hosea, which is exciting, I'm sure.

So, if you're not so familiar with the epistle of Hebrews, here's the big picture of it. We don't really know who wrote the letter. Okay? A lot of speculations who wrote it, but really, we don't know who. But we know to whom he wrote the letter to. Okay? This author, this person, wrote this letter to Jewish believers. Okay? Very key important terms that I'm going to mention here.

[8:44] He wrote this letter to Jewish believers who just recently did a lot of switching. Okay? That's kind of how I picture the recipients. Jewish believers who've been doing a lot of switching.

They used to hold on to the law. They used to hold on to rituals and traditions and sacrifices and all those things. They used to go to synagogues. They used to go to the temple.

They used to really, you know, focus on Jerusalem. And now, Christianity comes, right? The gospel comes. Jesus Christ died. Jesus Christ suffered and died for sinners.

So now, that's going all over the nation, all over Jerusalem. And now, these Jewish believers are getting saved. So, they're switching from that old life to now, this new life of Christianity.

New life of Christianity. Christianity. And as you can imagine, they're starting to face all kinds of persecution from their own people, from their own Jewish brothers and sisters.

[9:48] And not only that, they're also facing all kinds of pressure from their own hearts. So, they're facing persecution from the outside, from people, and now they're facing the pressure from their own hearts.

They started thinking to themselves, okay, I just became a Christian. persecution. And now, my family is threatening persecution. They're threatening to disown me because I have switched. I have left Judaism, the old religion. And now, I'm following this new religion, Christianity. So, they're starting to doubt and worry a little bit because of those pressures and persecution.

They're starting to say, did I really make the right decision? Is Christianity really worth it? And some of them may have been saying to themselves, okay, I just became a church member and now my friends are starting to hate me.

My boss is starting to make fun of me. Friends are starting to disown and hate me. So, did I really do the right thing? I used to go to the synagogue.

[10:53] I used to focus on the temple. But now, I'm a part of this local church. I go to this local church, you know, Cottonwood Bible Church. That's now my place. That's now my church.

But, I'm starting to worry. I'm starting to fear. Is this really the place for me? Because everybody is starting to disown me. Everybody is starting to threaten me. So, that's what's happening to these people.

So, because of that, the author writes to them and gives them, really, if you can summarize the whole letter in one sentence, it would be this. Jesus is better, he says.

That's really the theme and the thrust of the letter for these worried and fearful new Christian Jewish believers.

The author says, Jesus is better. So, he started telling them, guys, don't waver in your Christian convictions. Okay, just because you're being persecuted, just because your friends and your boss and your families, just because they're persecuting you, don't waver in your Christian convictions.

[11:58] Why? Because Jesus is better, he says. Jesus is better. And he says, guys, don't be tempted to leave your local church. I know it's this new thing.

I know it used to be a mystery. Now it's been revealed. I know that Jesus Christ is building his church, but because of these persecutions and pressures from the outside, you might be tempted to leave your local church.

Don't do that. Don't leave your local church just because it's being targeted right now. Why?

Because Jesus is better. Jesus is better. And guess what?

Cottonwood Bible Church needs to hear the same message today. I don't know how life has been up here. I'm sure it's the same as down in Phoenix.

You face persecution and pressures, especially in the past several months. I'm sure you are worried in some areas of life for your family, for your church, for your loved ones.

[12:58] I'm sure you've been battling sinful fear. All those things are common to man, even to Christians because we're sinners. We're prone to wander. So this old message is the same exact message that I want to share with you this morning.

So what we're going to do is we're going to look at two means of thriving in a hard and hostile world. So two means of thriving, two important lessons how you, Christian, how you, Cottonwood Bible Church, can thrive, not just survive, but thrive in the midst of the world we live in.

So before I give you those two massive points, let me point some small details in the text. So just look down for a moment. Make sure you have your Bible. Make sure you have it open to Hebrews chapter 10.

And I'm going to ask a few questions and I want some participation. You can, it'd be a dialogue, you know, for a little bit here. So look down at your Bible.

What is the first word do you see? Therefore, right? Therefore. Now, every time you see that word therefore, you need to ask the question, what is that therefore?

[14:17] Therefore. Good. Good, class. What is that therefore? Therefore. Now, therefore is what in grammar? What, is it a verb?

Is it a noun? What is it? Conjunction. Good. What do conjunctions do in our English grammar? They conjunct. Awesome. Now, they connect, right?

They connect. Conjunctions connect. They, they connect two things. So, so this therefore, here in verse 19, connects what he has already said.

Okay, you can even see all the way to chapter 1, verse 1, all the way to chapter 10, verse 18. All of that is being connected to what follows all the way to the end of the book. Okay, so this is a big conjunction.

This is a big therefore. This, this would be like, I'm sure you're familiar with the book of Romans, right? You get to the middle. Romans chapter 12, verse 1. What, what do you see there? Therefore, right?

[15:16] Colossians chapter 3, verse 1. Therefore, so it's a big transition, but it's really just connecting both, both halves. So, this is an important therefore here. Now, where is the command?

Okay, because, because typically, when you see a big therefore in your Bible, typically, usually, it's followed by a command. Okay, in Romans chapter 12, it says that, right?

In Colossians chapter 3, it says that, it's followed by a command. So, here, it's the same thing, but where is the first command that you see after this therefore?

Let us. Let us. Yeah, let us draw near, right? So, there's the, there's the command, let us draw near. Where's the second one? Let us hold fast, and you can see the pattern, verse 24, let us consider. So, you have a therefore, connecting, you know, what's gone before to what's going to come next, and now you have those three commands that follow the therefore.

[16:23] Now, the next question is, what do we do with the middle there, verses 19 through 21? Now, what, here's the, the next question for you, class, what, what phrase that's repeated twice do you have between the therefore and those three commands?

Since. Since. You guys following that? You guys see that? It should be the same for all translations. Since we have, or maybe yours, say, says, having.

So, since we have, or having, same thing. So, if you look at verse 19, since we have what?

Confidence. Right? You look at verse 21, you have the second one, since we have a great priest.

Okay? So, I wanted to take time to give you the small details. Okay, kind of, I trust that you are taught well, and I know that you, you know your Bible well, but it is helpful to just kind of zoom in and look at the small details.

So, when you zoom out, the clarity, the picture of the big picture, is more like a 4K, you know, a high def. That's kind of how I think about it. You look at the pixels so that you can appreciate the high definition.

[17:38] So, so he, so that's what we're going to do this morning. We're going to just section this, this, these verses in two. Okay, that's why I'm calling it two means of thriving in a hard and hostile world.

So, the first one, the first means is for you to humbly appreciate your Christian privileges. Okay, to humbly appreciate your Christian privileges.

And I'm taking those two sins we have as our privileges as Christians. And then the second half later on is the three let, lettuces, lettuce, and those are going to be for, for the next section.

So, humbly appreciate your Christian privileges. Look at, look at verse 10, verse 19. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, stop right there, the first Christian privilege that we have is a confident access to God.

Confident access to God. And the word confidence here in verse 19 is to have boldness. Okay, think, literally, really, it's to have boldness of speech.

[18:53] Boldness of speech. This would be like no fear of man, you know, just genuine comfort, you know, trust in the other person and you just say whatever you want to say to that person.

That's this boldness here. Boldness in speech. And the phrase to enter the holy place means to approach God's presence. confidence. So this picture is a bold confidence within you that you can just access God and tell him whatever is on your heart and tell him all the concerns and cares that you have.

This is that kind of boldness of speech. And look at verse 20. He gives us the source of that kind of confidence, that confident access to God.

There's a source to that. Verse 20. By a new and living way which he, talking about Jesus Christ, inaugurated or opened up for us through the veil, what's the veil?

That is his flesh, his body. Now, this phrase, new and living way, is crucial for you to understand. So here's an illustration. Because if you are, again, put yourself in the shoes of the hearers, new Jewish believers, really used to the Old Testament, right?

[20:12] Grew up relying on the rituals and the laws and the traditions of the Old Testament. So when they get to chapter 10 and then when they read verse 20, by a new and living way, they're asking the question, what is this new and living way?

What makes this, my confident access to God, my privilege as a Christian, why is that being described as a new and living way?

Well, here's an illustration that may help you. I used to work for a dermatologist. While I was doing seminary in Florida to provide for my family, I worked at a dermatology practice, a skin doctor. And we removed many skin cancers, lots of skin cancers, Florida, right, sun, beaches. So we did that all day long.

And there was one surgical procedure called Mohs surgery. And it was started by Dr. Mohs, I believe, back in the days, I don't know when, but it kind of became this well-known surgical procedure by a dermatologist to cut out skin cancers.

[21 : 22] What you do is you take one layer at a time of the lesion, right, and then you take it, you put it on the slide, you freeze it, it's called frozen section, and then you put it through these dyes, and then skin cancer cells will take on the dye, and then when you look under the microscope, you can tell where the skin cancer cells are.

And then you have a little map and you'd be able to tell, okay, it's still positive, 12 o'clock. Okay, so go back to the patient, you know, take a little sliver, 12 o'clock. Do the same process, put it under the microscope, look at it, okay, it's clear, no more skin cancer.

So you go back and you sew it up, good to go, no more skin cancer for the patient. Well, one day, we had this patient who had one on his scalp, one on his scalp, and it didn't look like it was going to get serious, but it ended up being a serious ordeal.

Multiple layers, and it's gotten bigger, it's gotten deeper, so the next layer, I'm assisting the surgeon, this doctor, and he takes his next layer and he ends up cutting a blood vessel, a nice, I don't know what it was, artery or vein, but it was this nice, good, plump blood vessel.

So you can imagine what happens next. I don't know if you've cut your scalp, you know, even a tiny, tiny scratch would bleed a lot, but you know what happens next.

[22 : 49] And a split second just starts bleeding, and I'm panicking over here, and I'm just the assistant, and I don't know what just happened, I don't even know if the doctor noticed what he just did, but he's all calm, the patient, he's clueless, you know, he can't feel anything, he doesn't know what's going on, I'm panicking, the doctor's calm and relaxed, so he just clamps it, he takes the little machine that cauterizes it, unclamps it, no more bleeding.

He takes his layer, goes to his lab, does his next process, does all that, and afterwards, I'm thinking, man, did he see what he just did?

And I'm thinking about the patient, that guy's going to be leaving today, if we don't do anything, he's leaving with a missing blood vessel. Now I'm thinking about, okay, what's going to happen to his scalp, he's going to lose hair, you know, and I'm thinking about all these things because I just saw that we just cut this big blood vessel, so I go to the doctor later on and I ask him, hey doc, are we going to go back and, you know, you know what happened?

Are we going to go back and reconnect that blood vessel? And he's like, oh, Roy, actually, it's not a big deal, it's fine, you don't need to worry about that, that happens all the time, you know, unintentionally, but you know what, Roy, the scalp is very vascular, he said, and that's why it bleeds a lot, very vascular, lots of blood vessels, you know, system going around up there and the body is just amazing, he's not a Christian but he was just telling me how amazing the body is and he says, it's going, what's going to happen, Roy, it's your body, his scalp, that patient's scalp is going to grow another blood vessel and it's going to reconnect that part of the scalp to the other part of the scalp and that new blood vessel is going to be this new and living connection, he said, so that that part of scalp will continue to get the nutrients and the blood and hemoglobin from the heart.

So he said, it's totally fine, it's totally fine. So I find that as a great illustration here in verse 20, you have confident access to God and the author says, it's new because it's never existed before.

[25 : 17] The Old Testament believer didn't have this access to God that you have today and he says, it's living because it's available 24-7.

It's available all the time for a Christian. Remember, in the past, the Old Testament believer had a way to access to God. It's not like they didn't have a way to access God. They did have a way to access God but it was only available once a year.

Right? It was only available once a year in Jerusalem in the temple through a priest. But now, as a New Testament believer, you have access to God just like they did but it's this new and living way because it's never existed before and it's living because it's always available available for you.

And because of that, just like that part of a scalp, you will not miss out. You will always receive God's nutrition through his word because you have this new and living way of accessing God that's never existed before.

And the author also says that this was inaugurated or opened up for us through the veil that is, he tells you what he's talking about. He's not talking about the veil in the temple.

[26:37] He's talking about the veil that is Jesus Christ's body. It's describing what happened on the cross. When Jesus Christ died on the cross, his body was torn figuratively so that his blood would be spilled out or shed.

Right? To become this righteous covering of sinners like you and me so that we can have what? Access to God. Because apart from that, there's no access to God.

Even the Old Testament believers didn't have that kind of access to God. So Christian, that is your first privilege that you need to humbly appreciate is that you have this confident, bold, confident access to God because of what Jesus Christ has done.

here's your second Christian privilege, the next since we have and I'm calling it constant advocate in Christ. You have a constant advocate in Christ.

Look at verse 21, the second since we have and since we have a great priest over the house of God, talking about the church, the house of God.

[27:54] Again, if you were in the Old Testament, if you were an Old Testament believer back then, you had to rely, like I said, on a human priest. On a human priest. And you had to rely on him for the forgiveness of your sins.

Right? For the forgiveness of your sins. And this is how they did it back then. That priest would have to enter the temple, okay, and he would have to enter the holy place, and he would have to enter the holy of holies.

And only he, the priest, could do that. But before he did that, he would have to make all these preparations for himself, right? Because he knew that he would need sacrifices for his own sins. And then secondly, he would make all these preparations, sacrifices, and offerings for the sins of the people he represented. So he would go all through that and then he would go into the holy of holies and he would make those sacrifices, those offerings, and guess what?

That only bought God's patience for how long? One year. One year. And he would have to do that again the next year and the next year.

[29:13] More animals sacrificed, more priests going in and out. Every year he would have to do that so that the Old Testament believer would be forgiven for another year.

But now as a New Testament believer you have a new and better priest. And he is a better priest, like the author calls him all over the chapters here.

Is that because it's Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ was sinless? not like the human priest who was sinful. So Jesus Christ didn't have to make sacrifice for his own sin because he was sinless.

Not only that, he's a sinless advocate, a perfect mediator. And not only that, his sacrifice is better because he sacrificed not animals but himself.

Right? He sacrificed himself. And he did it how many times? The author also says once and for all. And then after he did it, he didn't go back and start planning for the next year.

[30:29] Right? The author says he what? Sat down at the right hand of the father. Meaning it's done. It's completed. And the picture there of him sitting next to his father and us being here is this go between, this mediator, this advocate.

And that's what we have. We have this constant advocate in Christ. So if you're a Christian this morning, you have those two amazing privileges.

And they are sweet, undeserved privileges. And I'm sure you already know that. I'm sure you know that you have access to God. I'm sure you know that you can always whenever, wherever, however, you can just go to God and pray to him.

I know you know that. And I also know that you know that you have this constant advocate named Jesus Christ because what he's done on the cross for you. But do you humbly appreciate those privileges though?

I know we live in America and we're all about rights and privileges. Right? And we hold on to them as if we deserve them. But let me ask you this.

[31:46] If all of those things are taken away and you're left with these two privileges, would that be enough? Would that be enough?

Would you be able to say, I don't care what's happening around me. They keep taking away privileges. They keep taking away my rights. but you know what can never be taken away? My access to God. My advocate in Christ Jesus. Therefore, I can thrive. I can thrive. Here's the second means. The first means of thriving in a hard and hostile world is to humbly appreciate your Christian privileges. Secondly, it's for you to faithfully obey your Christian responsibilities.

With great privileges come great responsibilities. That's the second half here. Faithfully obey your Christian responsibilities. This is where we're going to take those three let us one at a time. [32 : 54] The first one, we had two sins we have, so two sub points there. Now we have three sub points from the three let us. Here's the first Christian responsibility that you're to faithfully obey.

Number one, stay close to your God. Stay close to your God. Look at verse 22. Let us draw near, that's where I'm getting that, stay close to your God, let us draw near with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

So this first command draw near, you can summarize it, like I said, staying close to God, staying close, personally close, have this personal saving relationship with God the Father. And let me remind you, this invitation wasn't really given to the Israelites in the Old Testament. If you read the Torah, the first five books, Moses was very careful how he described the relationship of the Israelites to Yahweh.

You didn't really have this open invitation from Yahweh to the Israelites, hey, just draw near to me, just draw near anytime, anywhere, whoever you are, just draw near to me.

[34 : 16] That didn't happen because if they did, okay, if an Israelite drew near to God uninvited, what would have happened to that Israelite?

killed on the spot. Why? Because God was too holy and they were too sinful and it's the same today, right? You do not draw near to God uninvited.

Think about it in Exodus, right? So Yahweh is with Moses, he's talking to Moses, he's giving him the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, and then Yahweh told Moses, hey, I am going to, word for word, draw near to my people.

So I'm going to initiate it. I'm going to do it. So Moses, I'm going to give you guys three days. You go down there, you tell the Israelites, hey, Yahweh is coming down, he's going to draw near to us, so here's what we need to do, we need to stay back.

We need to stay back. Put a fence around this mountain, you know, do not draw near that mountain who would be touching the glory of God, right?

[35 : 24] Because if you draw near to that mountain, if you touch that mountain, who happens to be touching the glory of God, you will die. And if somebody happens to do that and you're standing here, you're not even allowed to grab that guy and pull him out.

Because you, who's touching that guy, who's touching the mountain, who's touching God's glory, will die, you will die too, so you don't do that. That's how holy God is, Moses said. God is so important to think about.

The command here, verse 22, draw near, is a humbling command because now God is giving the open invitation to you and I and we should and we can draw near to God because Jesus Christ has covered our sins.

yes, God is still holy just as how holy he was on that mountain with the Israelites. It doesn't mean that he's less holy that we can draw near to him but we can draw near to him because we now have the covering of Jesus Christ.

Apart from that you do not obey this command because if you do you'll die. You can only do this. You can only draw near to God because of what Jesus Christ has done for you.

[36 : 45] And the author says here's how you're to obey this command. We're to draw near to God with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith.

Now what is that? This is to have a heart that has strong faith in God and if you want to simply define faith in God it's to have trust or it's to take him at his word really is a simple definition of faith in God.

To take God at his word. It's to trust him when he says all of the characters about him you trust that. It's to trust him whatever he says or promises in his word so you believe those things so you just take God at his word.

That's faith. So he says you draw near to God with that with a sincere heart and full assurance of faith taking God at his word. Whatever he says about his character and whatever he says about his promises you trust those things.

Secondly we're to draw near to God with a heart that's been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water. This is to have a heart that's free from any unrepentant sin and a conscience that's clean.

[38:00] A conscience that doesn't accuse and bother you because you're not living what you claim to believe. And also it's to have a life that's pure from the inside out.

It means whatever you believe inside whatever convictions you have inside those things show up in the way you live your life in front of people. So that's how we stay close to God.

We can obey the draw near and we should obey the draw near and we can do that with a sincere heart with strong faith with clean conscience and with a lifestyle that's pure from the inside out.

So church how are you doing in this first area of your Christian responsibility of staying close to your God?

Are you close to God? Are you spending time with Him? Do you know Him?

[39:01] When I say do you know Him do you know His character? Do you know His word and do you know His promises? And not only that, do you have that full assurance of faith in those things?

Do you pray to Him? Right? If verse 19 says that we have confidence to enter the holy place, this confident access to God and this advocate in Christ Jesus, since we have that, do you even pray to God?

God? Or have you distanced yourself away from God? That's your first Christian responsibility. You are to stay close to your God.

Number two, you are to stay committed to your hope. So stay close to your God. Secondly, stay committed to your hope. Look at verse 23. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for because He who promised is faithful.

This second command, hold fast, is to have a tight grip. It's to cling on to something, to have a firm grip on something. And the author tells us what we're to hold fast to.

[40:16] He says the confession of our hope. hope. And that's a beautiful picture there because the hope there is talking about what Jesus Christ has done for you, the gospel, so holding fast to that.

And the author also says the confession of our hope, which implies that your commitment to your hope is a confessing type of commitment.

A confessing type of commitment, which means that people around you should know that you are a Christian. Right? People around you should know that you love Jesus Christ.

People around you should know of that hope, that gospel hope that you have because the author says it's a confession. It means you share it with your words and you live it out with your life.

And he says you are to do that, he says, without wavering. It means you don't fear man, you share it, you live it out, and you are not ashamed of it.

[41:18] You share it, you live it out. That's the type of hope that you have, and it's this committed kind of hope, and he says you are to hold fast to that.

And look at the motivation. How can I do that in this hard and hostile world, in front of my family who don't know the Lord, in front of my boss who has control, it seems like, right, of my paycheck, how can I do that?

He says for, because he, Jesus Christ, who has promised, is what? Faithful. Not just sometimes faithful, always faithful.

And it doesn't even say he's faithful if you are faithful. It doesn't even say he is faithful if you hold fast to the confession of your hope without wavering. It doesn't even say that. He says regardless of what you're going through, regardless of your unfaithfulness and your weakness and your fear, he who promises always faithful.

That's how you can be so committed to your hope, to your gospel hope, to your Lord Jesus Christ.

So let me ask you again, church, how are you doing in this area?

[42:33] In this difficult time, where is your hope? Is your hope in a person? The next elected president?

Is that your hope? Is your hope in a circumstance? Oh, she's got to go through November. It's going to be better after that. It's going to be great again.

We're going to keep this thing great. Is that your hope? Oh, this virus just has to get through. And it'll be gone.

And after that, I'm really going to be committed. I'm really going to be hopeful. We just got to survive this thing. Is that where your hope is? Or is your hope on Jesus Christ alone?

Lastly, number three, your third Christian responsibility. God is to stay connected to your church.

[43:39] So, stay close to your God. Stay committed to your hope. Lastly, stay connected to your church. Stay connected to your church. Look at verse 24. And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

So, you find the third commander, let us consider. And it's in the present tense. So, it's to always be thinking about is the idea. It's to always be concerned about your church, about the people in your church, about the person next to you and behind you and in front of you right here in this morning. To be considering them, to be thinking and be concerned about them. And the author says, unto what? He says, to stimulate one another.

And that is to spur one another. NIV translated. And ESV says, to stir up one another. You need to be so concerned, you need to be in consideration, you need to be thinking about the people in your church in a way that you are to stimulate them unto what?

Love and good deeds. Love and good deeds. And those two go hand in hand. You can't say that you love your brother and sister in Christ in this church without giving them love and good deeds.

[44:58] Right? Those two go hand in hand. You cannot say, I love you, and then you don't do anything that's loving, you don't do any good deeds toward that person.

So the author says, you need to be doing that, you need to be the example, you need to tell people in your church that you love them, and you need to show that by your love and good deeds to them. So you are to model that, you are to be an example of that, and also you are to stimulate them to do the same thing toward other people.

So this is discipleship, this is body life, this is church life, this is the week in and week out of Cottonwood Bible Church, that's the life that he calls you to do.

and then look at the last verse, verse 25, just the first half, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some, which is interesting because it's implying that the people he was writing to, okay, these Jewish believers who are doing a lot of switching, right, and they're facing persecution and pressure from people, right, they really started fearing and started thinking, man, okay, if I go to this church right now, okay, Cottonwood Bible Church, and my family, they've disowned me, my boss is threatening me, my friends have left me, and the government is targeting my church, you know, you know how I can escape and dodge that pressure and persecution?

I just stop going to church, forget church, and I'll be okay, that's the temptation they were facing, and unfortunately, sadly, the author says, people are starting to do that, they're starting to do that, they are forsaking the assembling of being together, and sadly, and unfortunately, it's become a habit to some people, as is the habit of some, he says.

[47:08] Now, you may be asking me, okay, pastor, what absence is okay and not okay, right? How do I know when it becomes a habit for me personally?

Well, instead of giving you a list of do's and don'ts, because the Bible doesn't really do that to us, it doesn't say, okay, if you're live streaming, you're sinning, okay, if you have to work on a Sunday, you're sinning, the Bible doesn't say that, so instead of giving you concrete do's and don'ts, let me describe you three categories of church attenders, and I think this will be helpful, okay, three categories of church attenders, and as you sit there with an honest heart, it's just between you and the Lord, you determine where you are, where you fall under, and then you take that to the Lord, and you repent where you need to repent.

So here are the three categories of church attenders, here's the first category, people in the church are shocked when you come, people in the church are shocked when you come, when you show up, the conversation goes like this between you and your wife, hey, did you see who showed up to church this morning?

Oh, I know, right? I know, I saw them, but I thought they've moved like two years ago. So that's the first category, here's the second category, people in the church are unsure if you will show up.

So the first category, people are shocked when you do show up, the second category, people in the church are unsure if you show up. So the conversation goes like this, do you think we'll see so and so tomorrow because I need to give him or her hand-me-downs?

[48:57] You think we'll see them? And then the spouse says, I'm not sure, I'm not sure if we will, they've been kind of hit or miss for a very long time so I have no idea.

Third category of church attender, people in the church notice when you don't show up. People in the church notice if you do not show up.

The conversation goes like this, hey, I haven't seen so and so at church in a while. I don't know how long but I haven't seen them. Maybe I missed them but I haven't seen them.

And then your spouse says, oh yeah, oh yeah, I know who you're talking about. He was on a two-week vacation and they went to Florida, you know, vacation and while they were there he found a spot on his scalp and so they couldn't wait so they saw a dermatologist in Florida and then he had to get this like most surgery thing and you know, this massive thing, you know, big ordeal and lots of stitches and the doctor says you need to stay home for the next two, three weeks until I take the stitches out.

So I'm sure as soon as that happens, Mr. Stone, so that person will be right here, he'll be the first one here next Sunday. So you just take that, you evaluate your life, you see where you're at and then I think that would be helpful for you personally or as a family to say, okay, have we forsaken the assembling of one another?

[50:31] Has it ever become a habit for us? And I hope that you fall into the third category. So the author says, church, stay connected to each other.

Don't forsake being together and spur one another to love and good deeds. And lastly, the last half of verse 25, encouraging one another. Okay, I love the word here because it's the title for the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, which is the helper.

Here it's translated encouraging one another, but really in essence it's to be an encouragement to your brothers and sisters in Christ here because you are a help to that person.

So do you even know the needs of the people in your church? Are they encouraged by you because you know their needs and you don't wait to meet their needs, you're just there always ready, always available to help?

That's the picture here. And the author says you do that, okay, you are to encourage, you are to be a helper to one another in your church and you do that all the more, meaning you're excelling in that all the more as you see the day drawing near, as you see that the day of Jesus Christ's return gets closer and closer.

[51:52] Today, this morning, October 4th, Sunday, Jesus Christ's return is closer than last Sunday. day. So does that drive you to be this encourager and helper to your brothers and sisters in Christ?

The author says it ought to be. You are to do that. Listen to this story. I'll close with this, and I found this very helpful when it comes to staying connected, staying close, staying committed to your church as your Christian responsibility.

The story goes like this. A pastor went to see a man who didn't attend church very faithfully. The man was sitting before a fire, watching the warm glow of the coals.

It was a cold winter day, but the coals were red hot and the fire was warm. The pastor pleaded with the man to be more faithful in meeting with the people of God, but the man didn't seem to be getting the message.

So the pastor took the tongs beside the fireplace, pulled open the screen and reached in and began to separate all the coals. When none of the coals was touching the others, he stood and watched in silence, and in a matter of moments, they were all cold.

[53:15] And the pastor said to the man, that's what's happening in your life. That's what's happening in your life. As soon as you isolate yourself from God's people, the fire, he says, goes out.

There is no such thing as a lone ranger Christian. He was right on. So Christian, Conwood Bible Church, do you know your privileges?

And again, I'm sure you do, but do you humbly appreciate them? You have this access to God, and it's new and living. God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God's God.

And do those privileges propel you, okay, motivate you to faithfully obey, not perfectly, but faithfully strive to obey your Christian responsibilities?

You need to stay close to your God, you need to stay committed to your hope, to the gospel, and you need to be committed and close and connected to your church, to this church, to these people,

to your pastor.

[54:31] Amen? We're going to take a few moments here, and I would love for you to just think about what we just looked at and meditate on those truths and think about how you can apply them moving on.

Thank you. you.

If ever I loved Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your word that we heard and sang and prayed. I pray for this church.

I pray that you will have new souls who love you today because they have repented and believed and given their life to you.

[56:18] And I pray that those who already are saved and believing, I pray that they love you even more because of the reminder of what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross.

Bless this church, Father. Father, you use this church as a light here in this town through their pastor, through their preaching ministry, and especially through the gospel message and life proclamation of every single individual in this church.

So be with them and bless them. And I pray that they would see their privileges and responsibilities as just undeserved and it would humble them and make them just most thankful people here because of Christ.

Be with them. And again, thank you for being here and for giving me the opportunity to be with this church, this body.

In Christ's name we ask and pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[57:55] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.