


By Grace . . . One Another
 Hebrews 10:19-25
 November 8, 2015
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~People who have received grace draw near to God, hold unswervingly to Christ's promises, and stimulate one another to do the same~

[Pray]

One of the first times I heard God speak to me was on a crystal clear night in the summer of 1999. Some of you will have heard this story before.

It was 2:00am, I was at the Husky Oil Refinery here in town where I was working as a Tank Farm operator. And part of my responsibilities were to walk among the huge tanks that are situated up the hill behind the refinery and recording how full they were.

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This particular night I was feeling down. I had been struggling in my faith and now was beating myself up for falling into sin again. And I felt like I couldn't even pray... I thought I just needed to let some time separate my most recent sinning from my pursuit of God. Perhaps by being good for a few days I could show God that this time I meant business – or perhaps He would forget that I had fallen again – have you every thought that? That's where my mind was that night.

And then, only two minutes into my rounds, a thought popped into my head that was completely foreign to what I was thinking: "Dan, you can have confidence to enter the Most Holy place because of the blood of Jesus."

And my countenance was changed in a second. My heart was filled with gratitude for forgiveness and passion for the Forgiver and I started skipping and singing and shouting praises into the night sky like crazy man wearing a blue hard hat and coveralls – God felt closer than He had ever felt before.

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It was about six months later that I found myself reading through the Bible for the first time and coming across Hebrews 10. And it was as I read the words we are going to dig into today that I realized God had in fact spoken. The text I was reading was virtually word for word what I received that night.

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So would you please open your Bibles to Hebrews chapter 10? If you are using a pew Bible you will find this on page 851.

Now we aren't in this text this morning simply because it is a favorite of mine – though it is – but because we are continuing our series through the One Another commands that are scattered throughout the New Testament. And this passage contains one of those commands.

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Now this series has been about how our love for God has to bear tangible fruit in our earthly relationships, particularly our relationships among one another here in the local church.

And this is important because while Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment was, and replied:

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matthew 22:37-39)

These words weren't everything Jesus had for His disciples – there was something more. Now love of God and love of neighbour is at the center of what it means to follow Christ, but it is what that love looks like that Jesus went on to define. You see without Jesus' definition "love" is one of those intangible things that we know exists, but have a difficult time nailing down. In North America love has increasingly become a feeling which may or may not actually affect the way we live. And if this is a problem in our human relationships then it is particularly a problem when we think of loving God. After all, even if "love is a verb" as the song says how are we supposed to love a being we can't see or touch and who has no needs? How do we love God?

This is the question the One Another commands answer practically. It turns out we love God **by** loving each other the way Jesus loved us. And so the foundational One Another Command is found in John 13 where Jesus says:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34)

Jesus says "Don't just love one another, but love the way I love you." And Jesus gave us examples of what that looked like. It meant the Teacher washing the student's feet. It meant touching untouchable lepers. And ultimately it meant not using His divine status to His own advantage, but giving up everything in Heaven to become humanity's servant, dying to make us right with God.¹ So Jesus loved us by doing supernatural, selfless acts of servant-hood in a sinless way. And Jesus calls us to do the same. A disciples does what his master does.

So it is clear what Jesus wants from us – He wants us to die to ourselves and prefer one another. The only question is "how"?

And the One Another's give this answer as well. What is impossible in our own strength becomes possible when we are filled with Jesus' Holy Spirit. So it is by grace that we love one another like Jesus loved us.

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¹ Philippians 2:5-8

Friends, our encounter with God always starts with God vertically reaching down to us. But then the evidence that this has in fact happened always plays out in the horizontal – in our relationship with each other. And while grace is free, obedience in the horizontal takes hard work.

And Hebrews chapter 10 is about what it looks like for a person to work out the grace they have received.

Now my thesis today, based on this text is that: **People who have received grace draw near to God, hold unswervingly to Christ's promises, and stimulate one another to do the same.**

So look first at verse 19.

[Read Hebrews 10:19-21]

These verses describe **People who have received grace...** and need to do something with it.

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But before we get to that, because we are picking up today in chapter 10, I need to give you a bit of context so we can understand what the recipients of this letter had received.

So, Hebrews was written to Jewish people who had become Christians, but were now being persecuted and tempted to return to Judaism.

And so the writer of Hebrews – and we don't know who that was – argues that they can't return because it would mean going back to something incredibly inferior. It's a similar argument to the one Peter used when Jesus asked if he and the other disciples were going to leave along with the crowds. Peter said: Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)

So in chapters 3 and 4 Hebrews argues that Christ is a better prophet than Moses. And then in chapters 4 through 7 Christ is described as a better high priest than Aaron. And then in chapters 7 and 8 Christ is the author of a better covenant than the Old Testament covenant.

And chapter 10, where we are today, establishes that Christ offers a better sacrifice than the Old Testament sacrifices. And this is because instead of an animal whose blood could not really atone for human sin, in Jesus, God became the exact sacrifice humanity needed to perfectly cover our sin once for all – when we are covered by the blood of Jesus, verse 18 says, a "sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary" – that's phenomenal!

So Hebrews argues that when it comes to living in a right relationship with God, trusting in Christ is superior in every way to the legalistic methods of the Old Testament. And people who come to Christ find themselves standing before a God who says:

I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds....

Their sins and lawless acts

I will remember no more. (Hebrews 10:16-17)

This describes a person who has been re-created to bear God's image the way we were designed to do in the beginning. Now it is very important to note that this doesn't mean we cease to sin. But it does mean that the primary way we come to God has changed.

Under the old covenant God's people came to Him as unworthy sinners continually needing to make restitution for their sins before they could approach. And even with a sacrifice they still needed an intermediary. They needed a priest to approach God on their behalf.

But Hebrews says there is a new way to approach God – which is good because the old way didn't work. And this new way comes through the sacrifice of Jesus. Actually the word "new" in verse 20 is significant; it comes from the Greek "*prospheton*" which is literally translated "freshly sacrificed." So there is a fresh sacrifice available which enables us to enter the Most Holy Place.

Now the language being used here is sacrificial language from the Jewish tradition, and it is hard for us to fully grasp its significance. But in the simplest form, the purpose of the sacrifice was to enable sinful people to connect with the God who lived in the Most Holy Place.

And the Most Holy Place was a room in the back of the temple where God's presence resided – YHWH actually lived in His temple. And with God as the primary occupant you can imagine that entry to this room was strictly regulated. Only the High Priest could enter once a year.

Now on one hand this was absolutely amazing. Could you imagine if there was a building in Prince George where YHWH actually lived? And you could go there and stand outside knowing that just a few feet away the God of the universe was actually present. Can you imagine that? The Jews reveled in this honour.

But while God was so close He was also so far away. There were no windows into this room and the only entrance was blocked by a curtain that separated the Holy place from the Most Holy Place – and this was known as the "veil".

And this veil was a barrier between man and God. It was made of fine blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and is purported to have been between three and four inches thick and have weighed between four and six tons. It was so big and heavy that tradition says 300 priests were required to carry it when it had to be moved.² So you couldn't mistakenly stumble past this curtain.

And this veil was a symbol of how close God was and yet how desperately removed we are from Him. He is holy, we are sinners. He is immortal, we are fragile. He is eternal we are but a moment. He's on the inside, we are on the outside.

But as you know something incredible happened to this veil. In the moment Christ died on the cross it was destroyed. Matthew writes:

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit.

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split. (Matthew 27:50-51)

Can you imagine what that would have sounded like? And can you imagine what that meant to these early Jewish Christians? Christ had made a way through the impenetrable veil. In fact the veil was a picture of Jesus. The text says "a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body." So when Jesus' body was broken He granted us access into the very throne room of God.

This is a fantastic statement. This is why as incredible as it would be to have a building in Prince George where God actually lived that's nothing in comparison to what we actually have. In the Old Testament there was a lot of blood shed, but none of it opened the veil. But now that veil is gone and we have become God's temple. And so now everyone who is in Christ has confident or bold access straight to God. That's good news!

It's like how Xavier and Ella-Grace can just waltz past security and into 24 Sussex Drive because they are Justin Trudeau's kids.³ Now because of the blood of Christ we have been adopted into God's family and so can pass through the torn veil with confidence.

Now that's grace. So let me ask you have you received that? I'm not asking if you know stuff about God, but have you been in His presence? If you haven't perhaps it is because you haven't actually submitted your life to Christ's leading. But if you've done that and still haven't experienced God in an intimate, passing through the veil kind of way, then you need to ask what is missing.

² <http://forums.catholic.com/showthread.php?t=556299>

³ Trudeau and his family haven't officially taken residence in 24 Sussex Drive yet.

And Hebrews 10 gives three things that if missing will cause us not to experience abundant “through the veil” life. And each of these ideas is introduced with the words “let us.” So verse 21 says “since we have a great priest over the house of God, **let us** draw near to God;” and verse 23 says “**Let us** hold unswervingly to the hope we profess;” and verse 24 says “And **let us** consider how we may spur one another on.”

And each of these actions describe the conditional access we have to what God wants for us. Without doing these things we will not, as the Psalmist talks of, get to “taste and see that the Lord is good.”⁴

So first, **People who have received grace draw near to God...**

Look at verse 22.

[Read Hebrews 10:22]

This verse speaks of the highly sought after “holy grail” of the Christian faith – assurance of salvation. Friends, do you not want the full assurance that your heart is sprinkled clean by the blood of Jesus, and your guilty conscience is cleansed and your body washed with pure water? Do you want to live in that confidence? Of course you do. And this verse tells us how we can get this.

But there is a confusion surrounding “assurance” that has been passed around and caused more harm than good. The idea is that in order for assurance of salvation to exist it has to be based on God’s unconditional love rather than conditional upon our response to His love. So people have said, if you pray and submit your life to Christ then you have assurance of salvation because Jesus’ blood covers sin. But while Jesus’ blood does cover sin there is no verse that links this to our assurance of salvation. And in fact believing this could actually keep you from experiencing the assurance Christ has for you.

In fact what the Scriptures say is that assurance of salvation is conditional upon our response to God’s grace. So James says:

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8 NASB)

That means put away bad habits, forsake the inconsistencies of your Christian life, and pursue the highest degree of holiness – then God will draw near.

Now yes, our justification is based on Christ’s work not our own. Paul writes:
 For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the One Man the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:19)

⁴ Psalm 34:8

But our enjoyment of that justification depends on our drawing near to God in faith. So brothers and sisters act on your faith. Put effort, extreme effort, into pursuing God seeking to pass through the veil and experience the joy of having your guilty conscience cleansed. Don't allow a false sense of assurance to keep you from drawing near to God.

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Hebrews goes on: **People who have received grace draw near to God, and hold unswervingly to Christ's promises...** Look at verse 23:

[Read Hebrews 10:23]

This verse continues the idea of gaining an assurance of salvation with an appeal that we hold unswervingly to hope. Now there are a lot of people who confess Christ, they believe He exists, but this so called faith doesn't last or transform their lives.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talked about these people saying:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name drive out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

So right belief isn't enough; knowing Jesus' name and title isn't enough. Instead we have to do something with our faith – we have to do the will of the Father. Now the will of the Father doesn't mean doing church things for God – because the people in Matthew 7 did incredible things – but rather doing the Father's will as defined by the Sermon on the Mount means giving our lives to pursuing Christ-likeness – to becoming beatitude people. And the words Hebrews uses to convey this same idea are "hold unswervingly to the hope we profess."

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One of Jesus' most well known parables is about the sower and the seed. And in it Jesus talks about four kinds of people who encounter His grace. The first kind are like a hard path. The seed doesn't get planted at all, but instead gets eaten by birds. The second kind of people are like rocky soil which appears to do better at first but dies out quickly. The third group is contaminated soil which allows thorns, or the cares of the world to choke the wheat out. And only finally some are like good soil that actually bears a crop.⁵

You see one of the big mistakes people make when they talk about assurance of salvation is they think it is dependent on the seed – on Christ's grace. But all four soils got the same seed and only one produced fruit in the end. And so only she who holds unswervingly, to the end, to the hope they profess will be saved.

⁵ Mark 4:1-20

In another place Jesus says:

If you hold to My teaching, you are really My disciples. (John 8:31)

And in Colossians we read:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now [God] has reconciled you by Christ's physical body... if you continue in your faith... and do not move from the hope help out in the gospel. (Colossians 1:21-23)

And these warnings are repeated throughout the New Testament. So you can have assurance of salvation, but this assurance is conditional or dependant on your acting out the grace you received by drawing near to God and keeping on doing this to the end. So brothers and sisters, let your faith cause you to keep holding firm to the hope that He who promised is faithful.

Finally Hebrews continues: **People who have received grace draw near to God, hold unswervingly to Christ's promises, and stimulate one another to do the same.** Look at verse 24:

[Read Hebrews 10:24-25]

In these verses Hebrews says the grace we have received gives us purpose. Jesus didn't save us just so that we can go to heaven; He saved us to make a difference in the world right now. Ephesians says:

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

And the good works we are called to do are the things Jesus did. And aside from purchasing our salvation the primary work that Jesus did was make disciples. He caused normal people to look like Him and join Him in making other people look like Him – this is what a disciple is. And so Hebrews says we are to spur each other on to love and good deeds. We are to ignite the same love and good deeds in our brothers and sisters that Jesus ignited in us – we are to make disciples.

So when you wake up do you think "Today I want to image Christ. I want to do what He did. He made disciples and empowered them to make disciples and I want to do the same." Do you say those kinds of things to yourself? Or do you just get up?

Friends, in these verses we get a third assurance of salvation. You can be assured of your salvation if your faith causes you to do what Jesus did.

And verse 25 gives us an example of what this looks like. It says: "do not give up meeting together... but encourage one another."

Now most often this verse has been used to argue for regular church attendance. And that isn't a wrong application, but there is more here because the verse says "encourage one another" not "pastors, encourage your people."

Now I'm a great believer in the importance of preaching, but if your faith journey could be summed up as being a sermon consuming pew sitter then this text says that isn't enough. Instead Christians are called to be part of a mutual ministry that involves believers encouraging one another. And this doesn't happen on Sunday morning when you are all sitting in rows looking at me. This requires intentional meeting together with a few other believers to encourage one another. And this is why we started Care Groups here at Fort George. We recognized that only as we gather with a small group of believers are we able to actually stimulate one another.

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And then Hebrews warns "do not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." This means some Christians have gotten into the habit of not gathering in a way that they can intentionally stimulate one another to love and good deeds: non-participation with a small group of believers can become a habit – we can get used to this. So ask yourself, "How am I doing? Have I fallen into the habit of not putting myself in a context where I can spur my brothers and sisters on?"

If you have then I encourage you, as you leave today to look for the blue sign-up sheet in the foyer and sign up to join our next semester of Care Groups. They will start in February and run until summer. But if you are convicted don't wait till February – you might forget. Instead choose to break your habit of not meeting together in a mutually encouraging way.

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And the text ends saying give yourself to this all the more, not less as you see the Day approaching. As you see the end of the world drawing near give yourself more and more to actions that will build your assurance of salvation and ensure that you have a through-the-veil kind of relationship with God.

So brothers and sisters wherever you are at this morning, God has a grace for you that wants to draw you through the torn veil and send you singing and shouting around your tank farm. But don't make the mistake of thinking this is all God has for you. He has an assurance He wants you to grow into as you put your faith to action. So if you have received grace then give yourself to drawing near to God, holding unswervingly to Christ's promises, and by grace stimulating one another to do the same.