

Pastor Steven J. Cole
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship
123 S. Beaver Street
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001
www.fcfonline.org

PUTTING YOUR POSITION INTO PRACTICE

Hebrews 10:19-25

By

Steven J. Cole

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Hebrews Lesson 29

Putting Your Position into Practice Hebrews 10:19-25

The modern American evangelical church has largely relegated theology as being irrelevant to life, boring, and even divisive. I once told a former elder, who no longer attends here, that another pastor and I were reading through Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* and discussing it. He responded, "Be careful! That stuff is dangerous!" He was serious! I was so startled that I didn't reply! But I have often recalled it. Imagine, *reading theology is dangerous!*

The emphasis in the modern American church is on pragmatics: "How can I improve my marriage? How can I rear my kids? How can I maximize my potential on the job? Don't give me any doctrine. I just want to know what works!"

But the New Testament never divorces doctrine from deeds. What we believe impacts how we behave. Paul spends the first three chapters of Ephesians laying out many glorious theological truths before he applies it in chapters 4-6. He does the same thing in Romans 1-11, before the practical instruction in chapter 12. It is vitally important that we understand who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us in Christ as the foundation for how we live as Christians. Understanding our position in Christ is the basis for our practice in daily life.

The author of Hebrews follows the same pattern. Although a few times he has interrupted his doctrinal themes to apply it, most of the book to this point has been doctrinal. In the first four chapters, he demonstrated how Jesus Christ is superior to all in His *person*. From chapter 5 through 10:18, he shows how Christ is superior to all in His *priesthood*. But beginning at 10:19 and running to the end of the book, based on the truths that he has presented, he shows how Christ's superiority should spur us on to enduring faith, even in the face of trials. He shows us here how to put our new position in Christ into practice.

Because of our new position in Christ, we should draw near to God in faith, hold fast the confession of our hope, and consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

In 10:19-21, he briefly summarizes our position in Christ with two vital truths. Then (10:22-25) he shows how this position should affect our daily practice. Although he was concerned that there may be some in the church in danger of apostasy, he addresses them as “brethren” and includes himself in the need to apply these truths, using the first person plural: “Let us draw near... Let us hold fast... Let us consider....”

1. Our Position: We have a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ (10:19-21).

He presents two vital truths, both introduced with “since”:

- A. We have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus (10:19-20).

He presented the same truth in 4:16, “Therefore, let us draw near *with confidence* to the throne of grace....” But here, instead of the throne of grace, he says that we have confidence to enter the holy place—the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter there, and only once a year. It was blocked off from all worshipers and even from the other priests by a thick veil. The author uses it here as a metaphor for the presence of God. It was a radical concept for a Jew to think about going into the very presence of God, much less, doing it *with confidence!*

The basis of our confidence has nothing to do with anything in us. Rather, it is “by the blood of Jesus.” As we saw in chapter 9, the author emphasizes the importance of Christ’s blood to provide for our forgiveness (9:22). His shed blood satisfied the just penalty that God imposed on our sin. Thus we do not approach God with any good works or any merit of our own, but only through the merit of Jesus’ blood. The name *Jesus* emphasizes His humanity and the fact that His blood atoned for human sins in a way that animal sacrifices could not (10:4).

In 10:20, the author elaborates on this way of approach to God. He calls it “a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh.” The word “new” comes from a Greek word that originally meant “freshly slain.” (G. Abbott-

Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* [Charles Scribner's Sons], p. 388). But this Sacrifice was not only freshly slain, He is also "living," risen from the dead! This new way is not only living because Jesus lives, but also because He imparts spiritual life to us. The beginning of salvation is regeneration, which means that by God's power, we move from spiritual death to spiritual life (John 1:13; 5:24). "Way" reminds us of Jesus' claim, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

The author asserts that Jesus inaugurated this new and living way for us "through the veil, that is, His flesh." A few Greek scholars (notably, B. F. Westcott) have difficulty with the concept of Jesus' flesh being equated with the veil. How could Jesus' humanity block us from God's presence prior to the cross? So they argue that "His flesh" is in apposition to the "living way." But the emphasis of the writer is not so much on the veil as a means of separating men from God. Rather, it is on the fact that when Christ died on the cross, the veil was torn in two from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51), thus opening the way into the Holy of Holies. The point of the analogy is that Jesus' flesh had to be torn apart in order for us to have access to God.

But there is a sense in which Jesus blocks sinners from the presence of God. In Luke 10:22, He stated, "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him." After speaking to the multitudes in parables, Jesus explained to the twelve, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.... Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matt. 13:11, 13). Many of the Jews stumbled over Jesus' common humanity, that He was a carpenter (Mark 6:3). So in that sense, His humanity was like the veil in the temple, blocking sinners from God. But the cross opens the way for us to enter the holy place with confidence.

If some were still hesitant to enter with confidence, the author reminds them of a second vital truth:

B. We have a great priest over the house of God (10:21).

As I have said, the Book of Hebrews is the only book in the Bible to develop the truth of the priesthood of Jesus. By offering Himself as the sacrifice for our sins, He fulfilled everything connected with the Levitical priesthood. Beyond that, Jesus is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 5 & 7). In that role, He surpasses the Levitical priests. He abides forever at the right hand of God to intercede for His people (7:25).

The author refers to believers as “the house of God” (see 3:6). God does not dwell in tabernacles or temples made by human hands, but in the hearts of His people. Individually, but in a greater sense, corporately, we are the temple of the living God (1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16). Paul uses this great truth to drive home our need for holiness.

Thus to recap our new position in Christ, the author emphasizes these two vital truths: We now have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus. We have a great priest over the house of God. He proceeds to apply our position to our practice:

2. Our Practice: We should draw near to God in faith, hold fast the confession of our hope, and consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (10:22-25).

As we saw in 6:9-12, the author brought together the three Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love. He does that again here.

A. We should draw near to God in faith (10:22).

The exhortation is, “Let us draw near” (“to God” is implied). Under that command are four things that describe the regenerate person: (1) a sincere heart; (2) in full assurance of faith; (3) having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience; and, (4) [having] our bodies washed with pure water.

“A *sincere heart*” is literally, “a true heart.” It refers to a heart without divided loyalties. A true heart means “true in God’s sight.” There is no hypocrisy, putting on a good front for others, but hiding sin in our hearts. Christians live to please God, who examines our hearts (1 Thess. 2:4). Every thought and motive must be taken captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor. 10:5).

This does not mean that believers are beyond temptation or sin, but rather that although we were formerly enslaved to sin, now

we have become “obedient [to God] from the heart” (Rom. 6:17). This does not mean sinless perfection, but rather that the tenor of our lives should be growth in godliness, not a life of bondage to sin (1 John 3:7-10). Christianity is not just a matter of outward conformity to certain moral standards, but also a matter of loving God from a heart that has been transformed by His grace. This requires that we judge and confess our sin on the heart (or thought) level. It is easy to fake out others about how spiritual we are, but if our hearts are not sincere before God, we’re only deceiving ourselves. As John Owen points out, “Without this sincerity of heart there can be neither boldness nor confidence in our access to God” (*Hebrews: The Epistle of Warning* [Kregel], p. 199).

We are to draw near to God “*in full assurance of faith.*” The author will devote chapter 11 to this theme. He says there, “Without faith it is impossible to please [God]” (11:6). Faith is both God’s gift and our responsibility. Faith rests on the promises of God. We are saved through faith (Eph. 2:8) and we are to walk by faith (Col. 2:6). Our faith is not a mindless, blind leap in the dark. Faith rests upon the person and work of Jesus Christ, which the author has been expounding on from the start. The better we know Him as revealed in His Word, the more we will trust Him. The more we trust Him in the difficult matters of our lives, the more we prove His faithfulness and can trust Him the next time.

Also, we are to have “*our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.*” For this and the following expression, the author is drawing on the picture of the Old Testament priests, who were consecrated for their office by being washed with water and sprinkled with blood (Exod. 29:4, 21). Also, the author is probably referring to the ritual of the red heifer (Num. 19; Heb. 9:13-14), where the ritual sprinkling cleansed the outward man so that he was not ceremonially defiled. But the blood of Christ cleanses the inner man, the conscience, from dead works so that we may serve the living God.

The fourth description of the regenerate person is having “*our bodies washed with pure water.*” Although not all agree, this seems to refer to baptism. Both the sprinkling clean and the washing are perfect participles in Greek, which point to a past action with ongoing results. In other words, both of these cleansings took place at salvation, but have ongoing effects. Baptism, which in the New

Testament is closely associated with salvation, pictures outwardly what God did to us inwardly, namely, He cleansed our hearts by faith (Acts 15:9; 1 Pet. 3:21). Taken together, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water, point to inward purity that manifests itself in outward behavior. Both stem from our salvation. If we do not have a clean conscience or if we are aware of sins in our conduct, we will not draw near to the holy God. So we must confess and forsake our sins, so that we can draw near.

Before we move on, let's apply the author's point: *Do you frequently draw near to God through His Word and prayer?* I am often amazed to discover professing Christians who do not spend consistent time in God's Word and in prayer! Their only intake of the Word is when they go to church. The only time they pray is when they're in a crisis. Drawing near is really the same thing as "seeking" the Lord. The Hebrew word translated "seek" means literally, "to trample under foot." The idea was that if you frequently sought your neighbor, you would trample under foot a path to his house. There ought to be a well-worn path between you and God because you go to Him so often. What a great privilege this invitation is, to draw near to the living God! But it won't happen if you don't make it a priority to spend time alone with Him.

B. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (10:23).

"Hope" refers to the future hope of our salvation. "Confession" is coupled with and follows baptism. At baptism, we publicly confess our faith in Jesus Christ. That public confession should serve as a strong motivation to hold fast to Him in faith and obedience when we are tempted to sin or to compromise with the world. It is comparable to my wedding, where before witnesses, I pledged my faithfulness to my wife. As a symbol of that pledge, I put on my wedding ring. If I am traveling in a city where no one knows me and an attractive woman tries to seduce me, my ring should remind me of my pledge, so that I flee from the temptation. In the same way, I should remember my confession of faith at my baptism and be faithful to Jesus, my Bridegroom, when I am tempted to sin.

"Hold fast" implies that there is some danger or difficulty that is trying to pry me loose from my confession of hope in Christ.

The Hebrew Christians were under the threat of persecution. We may yet face persecution in America, and we should be ready for it. We all face the pressure of conformity to the world. It's easier to blend in at work or school, instead of standing for Christ. It's easier not to say anything by way of witness. You don't want people to think you're a religious fanatic. But the author enjoins us to hold fast the confession of our hope.

"Hope" points to the certain, but not yet realized, promises of God. We know that they are certain, because "He who promised is faithful." Peter warns us that in the last days, mockers will taunt us, "Where is the promise of His coming?" But they fail to notice that with the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The day of the Lord will come like a thief, bringing with it His inescapable judgment. Peter concludes that in light of these certainties, we ought to be people of holy conduct and godliness (2 Pet. 3:3-13). Even if we face martyrdom, we have hope in the promises of our faithful God.

Because of our new position in Christ, "Let us draw near in faith." "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope."

C. Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds (10:24-25).

Verse 25 is not a fourth exhortation (as the NIV translates), but rather a participial phrase that explains how to carry out the exhortation of verse 24. Note that the command here is not to love one another and perform good deeds, although many other Scriptures tell us to do those things. Rather, the command is to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. It is the only use of "one another" in Hebrews. "Consider" means that you have to give some thought to this or it won't happen. To give thought to it means that you have to take your focus off of yourself and think about others. "What does this other person need to help him [or her] grow in love and good deeds?"

"Stimulate" is an unusual word to use here. It normally has a negative connotation, meaning to provoke (Acts 15:39; 17:16). Here, the author may be using it ironically to grab attention: "Rather than provoking one another to anger, think about how to provoke one another to love and good deeds." This also implies

that Christian love needs to be worked at. It isn't automatic. It requires thought and effort.

The context where this provoking to love and good deeds takes place is when we assemble together. Some had dropped out of the church. Perhaps they had their feelings hurt by other believers, and now they claimed that they could worship God better alone. Almost invariably, when people drop out of church, their focus is on themselves, not on God and others. Instead of thinking, "How can I be used of God to spur others on in love?" they think, "My needs aren't being met. That church is unfriendly and unloving!" You can practice faith and hope when you're alone, but you can't encourage others to love and good deeds when you're alone! You have to gather with the saints to do it!

The author adds that this ministry involves "encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." The word "encouraging" can also mean, "exhorting." The noun is used of one who comes alongside to give aid, such as an advocate who pleads your case in a court of law. If you're in doubt as to whether to encourage or exhort, you should encourage! Save the exhortations for those you know well, and only then when you have prayed and sense the Lord is so leading. "The day" refers to the coming day of judgment, when we all will give account to Christ.

This third command has several important implications. First, you *are* your brother's keeper! It is impossible for the pastoral staff and elders of this church to shepherd everyone who comes here. For the body to be healthy, every member needs to take responsibility to encourage their fellow members. If you sense that someone may be dropping out or drifting from the Lord, consider how you can encourage them to deal with the problems that are keeping them away. If they're having a conflict with another believer, encourage them and coach them (if need be) to work through it. If they isolate themselves from the body, it is only a matter of time that the wolves will pick them off.

Second, this ministry implies knowing one another on more than a superficial level. Again, it is impossible to know everyone in this church well, but each of us can and should know some fairly well. This means meeting together outside of Sunday mornings. Our Sunday gatherings are crucial for worship and instruction in

God's Word, but it is also of vital importance that you meet with other believers on other occasions so that you can encourage one another in your Christian walks.

Finally, this takes some deliberate focus and effort. You must take your eyes off of yourself and think about others. If you see someone at church who seems lonely or depressed or ill at ease, take the initiative to introduce yourself and take an interest in him or her. Perhaps you need to set up a time to meet them later in the week. It's really just an application of the "golden rule": Treat others as you would want them to treat you.

Conclusion

I would ask you to think prayerfully through each of these three exhortations. Which one do you need most to apply? Do you need more consistency in drawing near to God in faith? This discipline is really the foundation for the other two. If it is lacking, the others will not be strong, either. Perhaps your need is to be bold in holding fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. Probably all of us can improve in considering how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Think through some specific ways that you can grow in the area that God prompts you to consider. Ask Him how you can put your glorious position in Christ into daily practice.

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the three exhortations do you need most to apply? Jot down some specific ways that you can grow in this area.
2. A young believer tells you, "I feel so unworthy to draw near to the holy God." How would you counsel him [her]?
3. Where is the balance between boldness and sensitivity in our witness? See Eph. 6:19-20; Col. 4:3-6.
4. If you know of a believer who is drifting from the Lord, how can you know whether you should get involved? How would you go about encouraging him [her] in love?

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