A Greater Confidence

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[0:00] Amen. Praise the Lord. Well, it's good to see you back here after spring break. This is the time of year when you're tempted to slack off in school. Anyone already felt that temptation? You're like, B's not so bad. We're a C. That's fine. Also, it's the time of year you can be tempted to slack off from church as well. So I just encourage you in both realms to be diligent, be faithful as we're on kind of the downhill slope of the school year.

How many weeks of school left for everyone? Don't know. Eight, four. Nice. All right. Some of you are closer than others. But I just encourage you that in light of summer getting closer and school seeming even more laborious and torturous, that you stay faithful in both realms.
All right. Well, we were gone last week for spring break. We've been going through the book of Hebrews, and we come now to chapter 10. So if you would open your Bibles with me to Hebrews chapter 10.
And just to remind you briefly, the author of Hebrews is writing to us and writing to this original audience to tell us that Jesus is greater than everything.
Jesus is over absolutely everything. And he's been showing us different ways in which Jesus is greater than absolutely everything these Jewish Christians have ever known.
[1:30] And so in chapters 8 and 9, he's arguing that in chapter 8, Jesus is greater than the old covenant. Jesus is greater than the covenant made with Moses. Jesus is greater than the promises made to Moses and the Israelites.

And if you look at chapter 8, just briefly, chapter 8 verses 8 through 12 are a quote from Jeremiah 31. Talking about this promise of a new covenant that's going to come for the people of Israel.
And Jeremiah 31 shows back up in chapter 10 tonight. In chapter 9, Jesus is greater than the Old Testament sacrifices. He is able to take us into the presence of God, and he himself is in the presence of God.
And tonight, he's continuing that argument that Jesus is greater than the Old Testament sacrifices. And this gives us a greater confidence.
A greater confidence. So we'll break this text up into two parts. Number one, we see Jesus is a complete sacrifice. A complete sacrifice.
[2:38] And we see this in verses 1 through 18. And these verses point out to us several key ways in which these Old Testament sacrifices were insufficient.

Several ways in which those lambs and bulls that were killed in the Old Testament did not actually atone for sin. Did not actually pay for sin. They were shadows of the things to come.
They were offered every year repeatedly. But they could not save. And they could not cleanse the worshiper himself. They could not cleanse his soul.
They could not give him a new heart. It could not perfect the people trying to draw near to God. Whereas the sacrifice of Christ accomplishes an eternal redemption.
He forgives our sins forever and cleanses our hearts perfectly. Something an animal sacrifice could never do. These sacrifices in the Old Testament could never actually and fully atone for a single sin.
[3:46] And we might ask then, what was the purpose of them? God's the one who commanded these sacrifices. If they were just temporary, if they couldn't actually pay for sin, then what was the purpose?

Why did he command these things? Well, there are three reasons why these sacrifices were made in the Old Testament. Two of them we've looked at already. The first two pointed to the true reality. These sacrifices pointed to what was real. They pointed to Christ, who was the ultimate sacrifice. Who was the true sacrifice. And secondly, they were a reminder that sin leads to death.

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When you sinned under the Old Testament, something had to die. And they were learning year after year, the wages of sin is death. And so those first two things we've covered already.
But thirdly, these sacrifices delayed God's wrath temporarily. They temporarily delayed God's wrath.
[4:47] And so they did accomplish something. They didn't perfect the worshiper. They didn't give him a new heart and a new soul.

But they did put off God's wrath temporarily. And you think about places in the New Testament, like Romans 3. If you write down verses 21 through 26, Paul says that God passed over former sins. He was able to look past former sins based on the sacrifices that were made until Christ would come. And if you think about maybe the most foundational sacrifice in the Old Testament is the Passover lamb.
That first Passover when the Israelites are enslaved in Egypt. And God tells them, I'm going to kill the firstborn son of every household unless you kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorposts. And that sacrifice caused God's wrath to pass over the Israelites' houses. Now their sons did not live forever. Their sons were still sinners.
[5:48] Their sons were not cleansed of their sin. But God's wrath in that moment was temporarily delayed. And that's how the Old Testament sacrifices are functioning. And so in chapter 10, verse 1, he says, For since the law, the revelation given to Moses, has but a shadow of the good things to come, instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

They were simply a shadow of the good things to come. We talked about shadows a few weeks ago, but shadows don't have a true existence in themselves.
They merely point to something that does exist. And believe it or not, you have to learn this. You don't just come out of the womb knowing what your shadow is. Or at least my daughter did it. I remember a couple years ago when she was younger, we were out in the backyard and the sun was kind of setting, and she discovered her shadow, I guess for the first time.
And she was going crazy. She was waving her arms everywhere, jumping and dancing. And she was like, what is that? I was like, that's your shadow. And she goes, why is my shadow doing that? And we're like, because you're doing that.
And so a shadow doesn't have existence in itself. It just reflects the thing that truly does exist. And so that's how the Old Testament sacrifices were functioning.
[7:14] And he says there were shadows of or pictures of the good things to come. And that's really just a summary of all the blessings that Christ brings us in the gospel.

Verse 2, otherwise, so these sacrifices could not make anyone perfect. Verse 2, otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins.
And so his question is, if these sacrifices were actually paying for sins, then wouldn't these sacrifices at some point stop being made? If these sacrifices actually made people clean and pure, then at some point they would have no longer been necessary.
Because the worshipers would not have had consciousness of sins. But under the Old Testament, the conscience could never be cleansed by these sacrifices.
Obedience to the law could never remove inner guilt. Guilt is something that God gives us. It's actually a gift. It's a warning system for our lives, showing us when we are in error.
[8:23] And the law and its sacrifices could never remove the guilt. If they could have, they would have stopped. Verse 3, but in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year.

And so instead of permanently cleansing the people, these sacrifices were a permanent yearly reminder that they were still sinful. Every year was a fresh reminder that the sacrifices made last year did not pay for this year's sins.
It was like a merry-go-round that they could not get off. And as you get older, you'll discover a beautiful thing called taxes. Some of you have already discovered this. You know, if you're working your first job, you're like, okay, yeah, I'm getting paid $10 an hour.
I worked 20 hours this week. I'm going to get a check for $200. And you get your check, and it's less than $200. And you're like, what in the world? Taxes, baby. And then there's another beautiful, melodious time of year called tax season.

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And you figure out if you paid enough taxes or not. And some years you find out that even though I paid taxes last year, the payment I made to the government does not pay for my taxes this year.
[9:40] And so every year it's a reminder that the government owns us. Not really. But so taxes come around every year, and these sacrifices were a yearly reminder.

Instead of permanently taking away sins, they were a permanent reminder that they were still sinful.
Verse 4, For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
Now in chapter 9, 22, he said, there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood. But in chapter 10, verse 4, he says, the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin.
And so in order for forgiveness to take place, something's blood has to be shed, and the blood of bulls and goats is not sufficient for it. The blood of bulls and goats merely pointed to the ultimate sacrifice that actually would take away their sins.
And in verses 5 through 10, he now shifts us to looking at why Christ came into the world. What did Christ come into the world to accomplish?
[10:47] And why did he have to die? Why did he have to give up his life? There are some atheists who mock God and mock Christianity because of Christ's death, saying if God truly wanted to forgive sins, he could just forgive them.

He shouldn't have to demand this payment. But why did Jesus have to die? And he quotes in this section from Psalm 40, verses 6 through 8.
And David wrote Psalm 40, but as we read this, he seems to be saying that Christ is the one speaking these words. Let's read through verse 7. Verse 5 says, Christ is presented here as the speaker of this psalm.
And now as we come to Scripture, we believe and confess that the triune God is the author of Scripture. And so when the Bible speaks, Jesus is speaking to us as a member of the Godhead. But here specifically, he says that Christ is the one who spoke these words when we know it was David who originally wrote them. So what's going on here? David is writing about something going on in his life.
[12:15] He is writing true words that are true about him in that moment, telling God, sacrifices aren't ultimately what you're about. You delight in obedient hearts.

You delight in your people being obedient. And so even above sacrifices, you have given me this body that is to be a living sacrifice to you. And the author of Hebrews is saying that David spoke these words in such a way that it was a prefiguring of the ultimate David, of the ultimate king of Israel, of Jesus, whose body was prepared for him in order to be a sacrifice that was pleasing to God.
Jesus knew, based on these verses, that his body would be the sacrifice that pleased God, that God did desire. And Jesus' desire was always to do his Father's will.
He wanted to do what his Father commanded him. And so the Father did not send Jesus to offer sacrifices, but he did give Jesus a body that was to be sacrificed in obedience to the Father.
What we learn from this passage and others in the Old Testament is that God delights in obedience more than sacrifice. He delights in obedience more than sacrifice.
[13:35] Now again, the sacrifices were commanded by God. So why does he say here that he doesn't desire them? Why does he say that he's not pleased with them? Because again, God desires obedience.

And in the Old Testament, obedience was expressed through these sacrifices. These sacrifices were signs and symbols of obedient hearts.
God didn't want dead animals for the sake of dead animals. He wanted his people to obey him. And the reason some of these sacrifices were not pleasing to him is because they offered them with dead hearts.
Many of the Israelites were going through the motions and just saying, we're going to do this to check a box. We're doing this to keep the rules. We're doing this to satisfy our consciences. And God says, sacrifices are not ultimately what this is about.
I want obedience from my people. And for us as well, the Lord wants our hearts to delight in obedience because it's pleasing to our Father.
[14:43] In verses 8 and 9, the author of Hebrews now explains some of this to us. It says, when he said above, you have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings, these are offered according to the law.

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This is what God commanded. Verse 9, then he added, behold, I have come to do your will. His will was that his son would be the ultimate sacrifice.
And when he says these things, in verse 9, he does away with the first, that is the law, in order to establish the second. And so Jesus, through his death, through accomplishing the Father's will, he does away with the law.
He does away with the old covenant and establishes the new covenant that was promised even from ancient days. Because of Jesus' death, the era of the law is fulfilled.
It has been done away with. And when Jesus is hanging on the cross, his last recorded words in the Gospel of John are, it is finished.
[15:49] He has done away with the first and established a new and better covenant. Verse 10, and by that will, by the will of God for him to die on the cross, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

It says, we have been sanctified. That's completed. And so, as you're reading through the New Testament, it uses sanctification in many different ways. Typically, what we mean by sanctification is the progressive, step-by-step growing in holiness and Christ-likeness.
And so, we are currently being sanctified day by day. But in other times, it talks about this as a completed action. So how do we understand this? Well, as we stand before God, we are perfectly holy.
As we appear before God, we have Christ's righteousness. And he has our sin. And that's a true reality that we will fully live in one day, but now, we are still fighting against sin.
We are still struggling against sin. That true reality, that completed sanctification is still being worked out in our daily lives. And so he says, we have been sanctified in verse 10.
[17:06] But in verse 14, if you look over there, it says, we are currently being sanctified. So as we stand in Christ, we have been perfectly cleansed, perfectly purified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Once for all is one of the most important phrases in Hebrews. Christ's sacrifice is complete. It does not need to be repeated ever again because he is completely atoned for the sins of his people.
In verses 11 through 14, the author of Hebrews is contrasting Jesus and these Old Testament priests. He's comparing and contrasting who Jesus is as our priest and who these Old Testament priests were.
So let me read verses, well, verse 11. And every priest stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifices that can never take away sins.
So these priests are many in number. They're spoken of in the plural. They stand daily. They offer repeatedly.
[18:14] And what they repeatedly offer can never take away sins. Contrast that with how he speaks about Jesus in verse 12. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Jesus is our singular priest. He offered a single sacrifice. His sacrifice actually took away sins and now he is seated at the Father's right hand.
And so all of this work done by the priest was never ending and they were never making any progress. It was like multiplying by zero. No matter how many times you do it, you're not getting anywhere.
And for those of you who don't know, multiplying by zero is zero. Okay, yeah. Got it. Just checking. And so it was an exercise in futility.
They were never getting anywhere with these sacrifices. But now Jesus has taken his seat. He is seated at the right hand of his Father and we're now back to the author's favorite psalm which is Psalm 110.
[19:25] He's seated at the right hand of God and what is he doing? He is waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet.

Jesus is waiting and he will return not to offer another sacrifice but to destroy his enemies until he walks on the necks of his enemies until he completely obliterates and destroys those who are opposed to him.
His sacrifice was so complete it did not just pay for our sins it also conquered his enemies and one day we'll see that fully fleshed out when he returns. In verse 14 for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

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Jesus' work on the cross forever makes us perfect. We are currently being sanctified day by day but we have been perfected in heaven by this sacrifice for all time.
Are we perfect here and now? No. We must every day fight sin. Every day we must wake up and decide to go to war against our sin but one day we will experience the fullness of what Christ has purchased for us.
[20:43] We will experience the full limits of this perfection that's already ours in Christ but we will experience it in our lives and in our living. No longer will we sin be forever perfect in Christ.

In verse 15 and the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us and what he quotes is Jeremiah 31 as I referenced earlier he attributes it ultimately to the Holy Spirit who inspired Jeremiah to write these words.
He says for after saying this is the covenant that I will make with them talking about the new covenant after those days declares the Lord I will put my laws on their hearts and write them on their minds. So this new covenant will be a law that actually changes the hearts and minds of God's people.
Verse 17 then he adds I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more because the blood of Jesus blots out our sins forever.
If you're a Christian the Lord does not hold your sin against you. Now that doesn't mean that we walk in our sin that doesn't mean we brag about our sin but this verse is true of us that the Lord because of what Christ has done does not remember our sins anymore.
[22:03] He will not hold them against us he has truly and fully forgiven us. In verse 18 where there is forgiveness of these talking about the sins and the lawless deeds where there is forgiveness of these there is no longer any offering for sin.

Jesus has fully forgiven us and so there is no need to repeat these offerings there is no need to reproduce these sacrifices Jesus is a complete and full sacrifice he has forgiven us and the father no longer remembers our sins and so because of that sacrifices have stopped.
Full forgiveness has been purchased by Christ and so we do not offer sacrifices of animals any longer. And this is why if you have been in our church when we do Lord's Supper this is why when we do Lord's Supper there is a table at the front of the sanctuary and not an altar where we make sacrifices.
We come to the table and eat in remembrance of Jesus' death in remembrance of what he has purchased for us we do not go there to offer new sacrifices we are remembering the once for all sacrifice that brings forgiveness of sins and we remember what the Lord has done.
Jesus paid it all to forgive us and so there are no more offerings. Our first point was that Jesus is a complete sacrifice and secondly we see that this brings full assurance.
[23:30] full assurance. And the author of Hebrews is constantly turning over these gospel truths and emphasizing similar themes over and over again from slightly different angles to lead us to meditate on these rich truths.

There is one gospel but there are many truths of that gospel that deserve our meditation. And ladies if a guy ever loves you enough and buys you a diamond one day you can sit there and look at it in the light and just slightly shift it and it gives off new and different lights.
It changes in its appearance. It's the same diamond but as the light hits it at different angles there are new facets of it that are worthy of being looked at.
And the gospel is the same way. And so the author of Hebrews is not giving us new themes or a different gospel here. He's reminding us of truths he's touched on before but from a slightly different angle.
And here again he continues to take us back to the death of Jesus. But this time he calls us to action. This time it comes with commands.
[24:42] And there have been very few commands in the book of Hebrews so far so this should bring us to the edge of our seats. This should get our attention because he hasn't given us many commands but he gives us three in verses 19 through 25.

In the Old Covenant there was a lot of fear and trepidation and uncertainty when the high priest was entering into the holy places.
Unsure if he would come back out alive but because of Christ's death and resurrection we as believers can enter God's presence boldly.

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We can enter with confidence. We can enter with assurance and joy. The door to his presence is now wide open to sinners through the death of Jesus. In verse 19 it says therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.
Confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus. Without Christ's blood there is no access to God. There is no forgiveness of sins apart from the blood of Christ.
[25:55] And many people today who would call themselves Christians want to talk about forgiveness without talking about the blood of Christ. They want to talk about acceptance before God without talking about the death of Christ on the cross.

They look at it and mock it and say that is foolish. They look at it and say that's just divine child abuse. That's nothing inherently worthy of our consideration.
But what the Bible says is that if Christ did not shed his blood on the cross he could not save us from our sins. These people want to talk about Christ as an example but not Christ as a sacrifice. But according to the New Testament if there is no blood there is no salvation. If there is no sacrifice there is no salvation for his people. And so we enter these holy places confidently by the blood of Jesus.
Verse 20. By the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh. Really interesting phrasing in verse 20.
[27:03] Remember back to chapter 9 the author said that while the curtain still stands that separates the most holy place from the rest of the tabernacle while that curtain still stands there is no access to God.

And if the high priest was to get into the presence of God he would have to go through the curtain. The curtain was the way in which he got into God's presence. But now as believers it is through the death of Jesus that we enter his presence.
The ripping open of Jesus' flesh on the cross also ripped open the curtain that separated us from God. And if you remember Matthew 27 as Jesus was dying on the cross the curtain in the temple was torn into from top to bottom.
As his flesh was torn he opened up the way into God's presence. The blood of animals in the old covenant temporarily allowed the high priest to be in the presence of God for a short amount of time.
And then he had to get out. But the blood of Jesus allows everyone who believes to enter for all eternity to enter eternally with confidence and boldness.
[28:13] Jesus had to die in order to accomplish this. If he remained alive the curtain would not be opened. It would not be torn. An uncrucified savior could not be called savior in any meaningful sense.

He had to pay for our sins with his life in order to save us. And through his death he is now the way we go to God.
As John 14 6 says which I have quoted a lot through the study in Hebrews. Jesus says I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father but through me.
But he doesn't just say that Jesus is the way. He calls him the living way. Because Jesus did not just die he also rose again.
He also conquered death and is alive forevermore. He is not dead but he is risen. And so because of that we currently have a high priest over the house of God like verse 21 says.
[29:17] Since we have a great priest over the house of God. And he gives us three commands. In verse 22 he says let us draw near. In verse 23 he says let us hold fast or hold tightly.

And in verse 24 let us consider. And so three commands in rapid succession. Verse 22 he says let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.
With our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. We can draw near to God in full assurance.
We can stand before God as believers and be absolutely certain that our sins are forgiven. we can stand before God as believers knowing that Christ has paid for and atoned for our sins based on our faith in him.
And if you're a Christian Jesus wants you to have this certainty. If you're a believer Jesus wants you to have this assurance. We all go through seasons of life where we doubt our salvation and some of that can be healthy if there's sin in our life that needs repented of.

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[30:33] But God's desire for his children is to know that they belong to him. And so in 1 John 5.13 John says I write these things to you that you who have believed in the son of God may know that you have eternal life.

And Romans 10.9 and 10 that if anyone confesses with his mouth and believes in his heart that confesses with the mouth that Jesus is Lord and believes in his heart that God raised him from the dead he will be saved.
Jesus' desire for his people is that they would have this assurance, this confidence. Now Michael our senior pastor has distinguished well between assurance and security so I'll just kind of quote him throughout this next little section but there's assurance which is a feeling a feeling of confidence knowing that we are secure and there is security.
Assurance and security. All believers are perfectly secure in God's hand. Salvation is eternal life. Christ is a perfect shepherd who will not let his sheep escape him.
Will not let his sheep wander away eternally. And so if you're a believer you are secure. Regardless of how you feel, regardless of what's going on in your life you are secure as a believer in Christ because Christ is the good shepherd who has purchased your soul.
[31:57] Now assurance can come and go a little bit. If you have sin in your life that you're not repenting of or if you notice sin in your life that needs repenting of, you can begin to doubt, am I actually a Christian?

And that's a question I get a lot. Am I actually a Christian? So how do we answer that question? Well our confidence, our assurance is not based on ourselves, it is based on Jesus and his blood. Our security has nothing to do with us but with God who is a perfect Savior. But also always remember that salvation produces fruit.
And so a believer should be able to look to their life and say I love Christ. I hate my sin. I delight in the Bible. I love other Christians.
Salvation will produce fruit in your life. And so if your life is not changed, if you do not have a new heart, according to the New Testament, you are not a believer. But a true Christian, even in spite of our sin and our shortcomings, we can know we're secure and we can have assurance that we belong to Christ.
[33:18] And this is God's desire for us. But at the same time, don't be comforted by a false assurance. Don't think to yourself like, yeah, my life hasn't changed at all since I've come to Christ, but I got baptized, so that's more than most people at least.

Don't think, oh, I had warm feelings about Jesus at one point, I guess I'm good, I'm good to go, I have assurance. That kind of false assurance will deceive and blind people.
God wants us to have assurance, but real, genuine assurance that's based on what the Bible actually teaches. And we can have this assurance, this confidence, because of Christ's sacrifice. The heart's sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. It's a reference to the salvation of our souls. Jesus' blood, unlike the blood of bulls and goats, can actually purify and cleanse our hearts, can cleanse our souls.
And this reference to pure water is borrowed from the Old Testament and other places in the New Testament. Old Testament places like Ezekiel 36, New Testament John 3, Titus 3.
[34:30] Titus 3 says the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. It's talking about what happens to us on the inside. Only God can do this.

And now baptism corresponds to this. Baptism is a symbol of this. And so many of you have been baptized and what you're doing when you're baptized is you are saying this is an external visible picture of what has happened to my soul.
Christ through his blood has sprinkled me clean. He has washed my heart with pure water. And so when I go under this water and come out nothing magical is happening. It is a sign of what has taken place on the inside.
It is a picture of my allegiance to him and my following after him. In verse 23, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful.
What is this confession? Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ is both God and the one who died to save us.
[35:36] Let us hold on to this because he who promised is faithful. What is it that will keep you believing until the end? It's a confident trust in God's promises.

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And we'll see a beautiful display of that next week in Hebrews 11, Lord willing, that these men and women of old trusted God. They counted him as faithful who made these promises.
His promises might seem slow but wait for them. And in verse 24, the third command, let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works. Not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another in all the more as you see the day drawing near.
How do we have this assurance? How do we possess this confidence? And how do we persevere until the end? One way we do this is by going to church.
So go to church. And I recognize I'm saying that to people who are here on a Wednesday night. But go to church. It's commanded by God. It is good for your soul. He says, do not neglect meeting together.
[36:46] When we think about assurance and confidence, we should not have these things apart from the church. There are people who say, I believe in Christ. I haven't gone to church in 10 years but I love him and I obey him.

Really. Go to church. Just do it. We desperately need the church. We cannot make it on our own. And he says to stir up one another to love and good works.
The word for stir up is literally the word to provoke. We are trying to provoke each other. We should strive to actively and verbally bring out the best in each other. And really, this is the flip side of drama.
And not drama like you do in theater. But drama that can separate friends and stuff. What's happening when there's drama? Well, there's a lot of things that are happening. But typically, there's someone or some people behind the scenes who are manipulating things.
Someone who's scheming and plotting in their minds of how to provoke someone to anger. How to hurt someone. And the author of Hebrews is calling us to the positive side of this in the church.
[38:03] We should plan how we are to encourage each other. We should scheme of ways to provoke each other to good works. We should think about ways that we can bring out the best in each other.

And those who cut themselves off from the church are cutting themselves off from the way that Christ feeds and grows and protects his people. The only place we can stay faithful is in the church.
So go to church. And there are so many excuses that get brought up when we talk about this topic. I can hear better preaching online. It's probably true, especially on Wednesday nights.
I'm not a people person. You know, I just don't really like people. Or I work better by myself. I never liked group projects. You know, I just, I'm an independent man, independent woman. People in the church have hurt me in the past.
There's scars from things that have happened in my past in the church. Or lastly, it isn't safe. And that was really the case at the time the book of Hebrews was written.
[39:11] We experienced some of it during COVID when it was said it wasn't safe to go to church. And in this context, persecution was happening.

And going to church could very well risk your life. Associating with Christ and with his people brought danger into your life. And so some people were withdrawing.
They had neglected to meet together, as is the habit of some, perhaps through this discouragement of persecution and affliction. But all of those excuses have something in common.
All of those excuses we went through have one underlying theme. They come from disobedient hearts. Ultimately, they come from someone who says, I know what God says in his word about going to church, and I'm not going to do it.
We should search for excuses. We should not search for excuses to miss. We should be fighting to meet together as often as possible. And there's a great illustration in this room tonight.
[40:16] Probably should have asked permission, but Jonathan Landis. This is coming from your dad, so I hope I don't embarrass you. But anyway, earlier this spring or maybe in the fall, young Johnny got sick.

I don't remember exactly when it was. But his dad came to me and said, Jonathan was so angry, we would not let him go to church. And I said, praise the Lord.
He had flu and Rona and everything and was angry his parents wouldn't let him come to church. That's the kind of desire we should have. Now, if you're sick, please stay home. Don't share that with us.

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But that attitude is beautiful. So good job, Johnny. So not only do we need others as Christians, but God commands us to serve others.
An essential part of our faith is encouraging others. And you cannot do that if you're at home while the church is gathered. This is where to do this all the more as you see the day drawing near.
[41:18] This day is probably capitalized in your Bible. It's a reference to the day of the Lord. We saw that a ton in the minor prophets, the day when God will return in judgment. We should encourage each other more and more because of the nearness of Christ's return to put his enemies under his feet.

Back in my football playing days, I had a coach at the high school who was, really knew what he was doing, but would aggravate us sometimes. And so we'd be out in the heat and we'd be doing 100-yard sprints.
If you don't know 100 yards, it's from goal line to goal line and you're sprinting the whole way. It's brutal, awful. There were times you couldn't just like slack off and not really run. You had to sprint. And he would get us, though, he would say, we're going to do 10 of these.
We're going to do 15 of these. And at the start, we're like, oh, man. But as we got closer, we started to encourage each other more. As we got to five, we were counting down every time. Like, we're yelling at each other, like, we've got to get this.
We've got to make our time so these reps will count. And we'd get to the last one and he would say, last one. Try hard. And so we're all, like, going as fast as we can.
[42:25] We'd get done with that and he'd say, all right, 90-yard sprints. Like, oh, man. Got us good. You evil man. But the point is that as we saw the end in sight, as we were getting closer to the end, our verbal encouragement to each other picked up.

It increased. And the author of Hebrews is saying, the day is near. Christ is coming back soon. Encourage each other. Pour yourselves into each other. Provoke each other to love and good works.
Church isn't just something fun or optional we do. Our faith isn't just a private matter. Church is necessary preparation for the return of Christ.
Those who cut themselves off from the church cut themselves off from Christ himself. In verses 26-31, we get the fourth warning passage. And we'll have to go quickly through this.
But it says, if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins but a fearful expectation of judgment.
[43:30] judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. If after knowing the gospel, knowing who Christ is and you walk away, there's no sacrifice for your sins.

You cannot be forgiven by Christ and mock Christ. And what does he mean by deliberately sinning? This isn't just any sin.
This isn't just any sin that's stubborn and difficult for us to get rid of. This is the sin of what's called apostasy. Of claiming to follow Christ and then walking away from him. Abandoning him entirely. And if this sin is continued in, this person is headed for hell. They claimed to be believers at one point. Judas is a prime example of this.
Someone who is so close to Christ and ultimately walked away from him. There's no sacrifice for sins. You cannot receive Jesus' forgiveness while at the same time rejecting him.
[44:36] And there's a fury of fire that awaits the adversaries. This makes you an enemy of God and of Christ. In verse 28, he says, Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

For big sins committed in the Old Testament, they brought the death penalty. Things like idolatry and adultery. Big, massive, rebellious sins like those.
And you would die at the hands of two or three witnesses. Verse 29, How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace?
If you turn your back on Christ, you receive a much worse punishment. Worse sin receives worse punishment. And by claiming to follow Christ and walking away from him, you're trampling the Son of God under your feet.
You're mocking his blood. You're outraging the Spirit of grace. He says, We know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. That comes from Deuteronomy 32.

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[45:47] And again, the Lord will judge his people. Verse 31, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. This warning statement is shocking and it's bone shaking in its simplicity.

It is a fearful thing. This is like when I was a kid, sometimes I'd wear my mom out during the day and she would say, Wait till your dad gets home. And I didn't have trouble understanding her words, but I was terrified.
And that's kind of how this warning is. It's very simple and to the point, but it shakes us to the core. If we do not endure, we will fall into the hands of the living God.
This life is not a game or a simulation. This is, this would result in eternal horror. If you reject the Son, you have every reason to fear the Father.
Father. And some people will say, Why do we take student ministry so seriously? Why is there so much Bible in your student ministry? Why do we not have as much fun as other churches do?
[46:49] And one reason is this. Middle school and high school students are old enough to die in their sins.

And so we preach Christ. Christ, we preach the Bible to you because that is what your soul needs. And it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
And so we give you the Bible. We want you to know eternal truths because it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
In verses 32 through 39, he recalls their former zeal. He is trying to stoke them up to love and good works and says, Recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.
Sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction and sometimes being partners with those so treated. And so in the early days, after they were enlightened, after they were first saved, they were unashamed of Christ.
[47:54] They were willing to associate with his people, even the ones in prison. And if you show up in prison associating with one of the prisoners, you're kind of putting your life in danger. And so they were willing to help those in prison for the cause of Christ.

They were willing to associate themselves with them. And our tendency when trouble comes is kind of withdraw and step back. When I was in elementary school, I had a dog.
He was a beagle. His name was Buddy. And he would break out sometimes, just roam the streets all night doing who knows what. And one of these nights he had gotten out. And he wasn't back in the morning.
And so I'm going to the bus stop. And I'm standing there. And I hear this like horrible animal-like screeching. And I look over and I can see in this open garage. And it was coming from a woman. She was like, just awful noise. And there was some creature in her garage. And she had her dog as well. And she's like yelling and kicking at this creature.
[48:54] And out comes Buddy of her garage. And he sees me and immediately runs up to me. I grab him by the collar like stupid dog and drag him back to the backyard and put him in.

I get back to the bus stop. And this lady's like, whose dog was that? And I said, I don't know. I was horrified. I didn't want to start getting yelled at like that and kicked or whatever.
And she's like, he ate a whole bag of dog food. I'm like, I don't know. These dogs. And so I was scared to associate with my dog when he was in trouble.
But these believers were not withdrawing at signs of trouble when their friends were getting put in prison. They did not throw away their confidence. And they were even having stuff stolen from them.
Verse 34, if you had compassion on those in prison and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. It's not shocking they had stuff stolen from them.
[49:55] What's shocking is they joyfully endured these things. And how was it that they were able to enjoy these things because they had a better possession and an abiding one? He says in verse 35, do not throw away your confidence, which is a great reward.

Verse 36, for you have need of endurance. So when you've done the will of God, you may receive what is promised for, here's a quote from Habakkuk 2, yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay.
That's Jesus. But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. And here's the author's confidence.

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We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. We must have faith. We must endure if we will live.
We must stay faithful to Christ regardless of what comes. In chapter 11, we get a beautiful picture of those who have faith and do not shrink back. But as we approach Good Friday and Easter, let's remember that it's the blood of Christ alone that pays for our sins.
[51:01] Not our good works, not our good deeds. It is the death of Christ alone that opens up the way to God for sinners. Apart from his death, apart from his shed blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.

So come to Jesus and be saved. We also do not worship a dead Savior. He is risen and reigning, seated at the Father's right hand, and will return again to put his enemies under his feet.
We will see him, and we will be with him forever. Let me pray. Our Father, we praise you for the book of Hebrews. As we approach Easter and Good Friday, I pray you'd allow us to meditate fully on the truths that your Son shed his blood and rose again on the third day.
It's in Christ's name we pray. Amen. Amen.

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