

Draw Near

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Hebrews 10:19-22

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

How privileged we are here today to have heard this text, for it is a sacred invitation to enter into the very presence of God Almighty. Think about it. Don't let the thought pass in one ear and out the other. Consider it for just a few moments. The Creator of all things has extended to you and me an invitation this morning that we would draw near to Him, that we would enter what holy men before us have called the sanctum sanctorum. The holiest of holiest. There is no place more sacred on heaven above or earth below. What am I talking about? The very presence of God. Ponder that for a few moments.

It's not unusual that a little bit of fear and trepidation, a little bit of concern overwhelms you when you think about drawing near to God. You think, *am I presentable to go before the King? Am I worthy to approach Him? On what basis can I approach Him? How should I come to this One who is the Ancient of Days, who sees all things, knows all things, has all power? How do I approach Him?* Sadly, most of us, including His children, do not take this invitation to heart. Most of us are pleased to be on the peripheries of His manifested presence, rather than to be right there near Him. We're fine to go about our daily life and chores, doing our thing, fulfilling our dreams, and trying to satisfy our desires, rather than to be right there beholding Him, experiencing Him, having the assurance that you have drawn near to the very heart of God. Isn't that true? So much of the time there is little thought given to being right there in the eternal throne room of God or that the all-seeing eye is ever watching me. Would I cast my eyes upon Him and watch and behold Him?

Men in general do not want to draw near to God. Why? Because God makes them feel guilty. Let's admit it. Sometimes when you know you're in the presence of a really spiritual, holy person, how do you feel? Do you ever get a little uncomfortable, being in the presence of someone you know is a little closer to God than you? Doesn't it kind of put you on edge and make you want to watch what you say? It makes you very uncomfortable, doesn't it? We're not talking about another human being that is sinful just like you and I are, we're talking about God—the Holy of holies, the Almighty with no hint of imperfection. He makes us feel guilty and our guilt prevents us from drawing near to God. And guilt is a universal experience. You're not the only one who suffers it. Every man and woman and child feels guilt.

A young child can be told by his mom and dad not to do something, and, of course, what do most children do? Just the opposite of what they're told, they do the very thing that was forbidden. Then all of the sudden, within this child is this sense of guilt. And what does the guilt make them want to do? They want to hide from mom or dad. *I don't want to go in there with dad because he can tell when I've disobeyed. He knows. I don't want to give any clue. I'll hide.* They shirk. There is something in them that makes them feel guilt. Where did it come from? It came from the Creator—He made you with a conscience and that conscience will always sound its alarm when you do not live up to the very morality that is instilled in every human being. You see, even those who say to us today that there are no absolutes, no rights and wrongs, even their own conscience betrays their profession. Now and again they feel the tinge of guilt. Where did it come from? It came from the law of God written on their hearts, written on every heart.

Even if you've never read the Bible before there is something deep-seated in you that tells you this is the way you ought to live and the way you're living is not the way God intended. That's born in us. It's just as much a part of who you are as your eye color, your height, your DNA.

Guilt is a universal experience and it is a hindrance to drawing near to God.

I. The Hindrance of Guilt

A. Guilt Says You Cannot Draw Near to God.

“let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,

Well, how can I have full assurance of faith? How can I approach God knowing fully and completely, without doubt, that He will receive me? He gives the answer in the latter part of the verse.

having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”
(Hebrews 10:22)

The writer of Hebrews knows that your guilt, your conscience that says, “You're not perfect, you're not good like God,” will hinder you from coming in full assurance of faith. There is something within you that creates this doubt and it's guilt. Guilt says you cannot approach God. You don't know what He'll do. You don't know what He'll require. You don't know what He'll ask of you. You know He has the right to ask anything of you because you violated His laws and you've not lived up to His expectations.

It was guilt that caused Adam and Eve to hide when God came walking in the cool of the day.

It was guilt over his adulterous affair and murder that caused David to say, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away from my groaning all day long.”

The Roman philosopher Seneca said, "Every guilty person is his own hangman. And we put ourselves, as it were, on the block of judgment before God because of our sin. And yet we are left to ourselves, unable to do anything to remedy the problem."

Every man is his own hangman. Even as I speak to you right now, you're remembering something you did this week that violated God's holiness. All during this service you've been unable to sing heartily. "Bold I approach the eternal throne," you say, "No, I can't because of my performance this week." You see how guilt can keep you from wanting to draw near to God?

B. Guilt Has to Be Dealt With.

You either bring an end to your guilt or it will bring an end to you. Guilt is like the red warning light on the dashboard of the car. Have you ever had that little light flash on that tells you your engine is getting too hot? You can either stop and deal with the problem, or break the light. But breaking the light won't solve the problem.

That's what a lot of people do. They try to deal with their guilt by ignoring their guilt, by silencing their guilt, but it doesn't work. The problem continues and they're still guilty before God. They feel they can't approach God because there is never a moment of inner peace. Even in their happiest moments there is agitation within. Guilt! The conscience knows. If you don't deal with your guilt it's like rust on a metal, corrupting and consuming the very metal until it is no more.

The guilt will destroy you. How? It will put you into a situation of neurosis where you live in self-pity, which leads to multiple problems, even physical problems. Do you know there are people today who are living under severe depression because of something they did as a young person? They cannot cleanse their conscience, it's still there, something is said and a flashback comes. They wallow in this self-hating, they grieve over this one event. Another way people deal with the guilt, as I mentioned earlier, is they try to silence it, try to ignore it, but that comes at a very high price. When you don't listen to your guilt, like rust, it begins eating away at you.

So many have lost the capacity to feel guilt because they cease to listen to that guilt and deal with it the way God has told us.

If you decline to listen to your conscience it will become dimmer and dimmer and you will not hear it as strongly as you did in the past. But, believe me, you will never silence it completely. There have been some terrible, terrible people who have walked the face of this earth. There have been the Hitlers and the Mao Zedong, who have slaughtered people with no remorse. In Nazi Germany they did terrible experiments on children, putting them under operations with no anesthetic trying to discover some key to a super human race. On and on the atrocities could be mentioned and some of those men went to their death wishing they could have done more. Yet, those same men had certain things they could not do because it violated their morality and conscience too much. You cannot silence your conscience or destroy it altogether. It's still there working, eating, plaguing, disturbing.

We're living in a society that has lost its capacity to feel guilt on many different levels. A man lost his wallet. A few days later he received a letter: «Sir, I found your wallet. I feel so guilty that I am returning some of your money. If guilt bothers me any more I shall send some more.» We've lost our capacity to feel guilt like we ought to and there is a price to losing the ability to feel guilt.

Culture loses beauty. You and I lose our ability to recognize beauty. That which is ugly and vile we now consider beautiful and that which is truly beautiful we consider ugly and vile. Up is down and down is up. This is where we are at this moment in our history as a nation. We're at a crossroads where we've lost the ability to feel our guilt and therefore we've lost our way. There is no true north morally speaking. There comes desensitization. Objectivity is gone. And with that is a loss of ourselves and with that a loss of moral protection. God in His goodness gave you that conscience. It wasn't to hound you in an unmerciful way; it was given to you as a warning to protect you. Otherwise you'll cast yourself head first over a moral cliff and perish. This is for your good. Beware how you deal with it.

There lived a boy, this really happened, whose nervous system took a long time to tell him of pain. He put his hands on the stove and felt nothing for a while. When he did, it was too late, his hands were stuck, melted to the stove. Our sense of guilt is meant to warn us of danger, because sin is dangerous to your spiritual life and your whole being.

Did you hear about one of the Democratic candidates for president say that all lives matter and he was booed? He later apologized for saying all lives matter. Where are we today?! What is going on? In the last two weeks we have seen two doctors for Planned Parenthood discuss the sell of aborted baby parts while eating their meals. They talk so casually as if they were talking about trading recipes, and all over a meal. How did we become so calloused?

We prefer darkness over light. This is what the Bible says about us, "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). This is why we don't want to draw near to God. Light exposes us. It shines in places we don't want it to shine because we have closed our minds to the possibility that we might be wrong and we can't bear it. The darkness makes no moral demand of anyone. You can do anything you want, say anything you want and live any way you want because there is no right or wrong in darkness. And we have seared our consciences and unless God does a miracle for you, you will die in your willful ignorance of God.

Oh what it would be like to live today with a pure conscience. What would you give to be able to go to bed tonight for the first time in a long time and your heart be at peace? No worries, no doubt, no agitation, with no sense that something is wrong, no plague of trying to put your finger on what's wrong with your life and you can't figure it out? What would you give to have that eliminated?

We who have had this life-changing experience of Jesus sometimes take this for granted. And even we who have been cleansed don't stay near to the Lord and our conscience once again be-

comes stained with our sins and then we feel like we can't come to God, when He says, "Please, draw near. I give you an invitation. I'm the answer to your guilt!"

But we say we can't because,

C. The Law of God Stands Against Us.

Our guilt knows that we have violated God Himself. It's not about commandments or rules. I'm talking about a Person! When you sin against someone you violate that person, their integrity, their honor, their decency, who they are. We have sinned against God by violating what He has told us to do and our guilt knows it. So what do some people do? They attempt to be religious, probably the worst thing you could do.

Our attempt at religion doesn't help either. We are still guilty.

"For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. ² For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. ³ But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. ⁴ For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins."
(Hebrews 10:1-4)

What is he saying here? It's very clear. When you turn to religion and you try to clean up your own way by your own doing it will never work. Religion can't cleanse the conscience! It can't get that deep. Religion only deals with what we do with these hands and say with these mouths. It only regulates behavior. But what God can do goes deeper than that. He says the law is just a shadow of something better to come. It's not the real thing. Every year God had given those old Jews laws to approach Him through sacrifices. Some of them were animals, some of them were agriculture, some of them were monetary. They would bring these sacrifices to the temple and there they would worship God and get some sense of satisfaction that they were honoring Him. But this is the problem with religion, this is the problem with being a do-gooder: every time you try to do something to please God it's a reminder that you're not pleasing to God. That's what the writer of Hebrews says; otherwise those sacrifices would never have had to be repeated. It's not possible for religion to satisfy the conscience.

Guilt creates a twin monster called unbelief.

II. The Hindrance of Unbelief

Not only do I not draw near to God because of guilt but that guilt works in tandem with unbelief. We don't believe the love of God.

"let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith"

You draw near with no doubting that God would receive you. There's not a single question in your mind. Yes, God will receive you. But we don't come with that kind of assurance, do we? I'm talking to Christians. How many times have you sinned and it's so blatant, it's so knowledgeable, you can't hide it, and immediately you think, "I can't pray and ask Him to forgive me. How hypocritical would that be?" You don't feel like you're clean. You don't feel like you can. The conscience has been stained. And at that moment what is ruling the hour? Unbelief.

A. We Don't Believe the Love of God.

You don't really believe God loves you like He says He does. *How could God love us? How could He love me? How could I draw near to Him in light of what I've done?* Ah, but see, you don't understand the love of God. In fact, I think that's our problem. It doesn't matter if you're a Christian or not, we Christians are still confused about the love of God.

We've been fooled by modern terminology. We've been taught that God loves us unconditionally, no strings attached. He loves you just because He does and loves you just the way you are. Well, that is true, the Bible does give us the understanding that God loves even the sinner. The Bible says Christ came to die not for good people but for the ungodly, enemies. Yes, there is a sense where His love is unconditional. But to the twenty first century mind we mean that God loves us and it doesn't matter what we do, how we live, or if we continue to disregard His ways and His will, He's still going to love me. Dear friends, that is not what the Bible teaches about the love of God. I want to suggest to you the Bible teaches something far better. God's love is the kind of love that won't leave you in your sin. This text is talking about an actual cleansing. What does He say in this twenty-second verse?

having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

He's not talking about water baptism or some physical, religious rite. These are spiritual illustrations, something spiritual God does by His love. Because He loves you, He transforms, He changes us from the inside out. But better than that—could it be better than this? Oh yes—God loves you not unconditionally but undeservedly. What's the difference? The way we interpret unconditional is God loves us no matter what we do He is always going to love us, He won't judge us because He loves us. Undeserved love says yes, you stand under the judgment and yet in spite of that He loves you and you don't deserve it. It's undeserved love.

B. We Know Nothing of Undeserved Love.

Why do I make this distinction? Most of us, if not all of us, don't love this way. I want to illustrate this.

This illustration requires your cooperation. When you forgive someone don't you truthfully expect something in return? Before you answer, let me qualify. Someone has actually wronged you and they may have come and asked for forgiveness or maybe you're super spiritual and you've already granted it to them. When you've demonstrated this forgiveness to them, they know you've

forgiven them, doesn't something internally say, "They should treat me differently now that I've forgiven them?" Now answer my question. "They ought not to do the same thing again, now that I've been good enough to forgive them." So you see, you do expect something. We find it difficult to love people undeservedly and expecting nothing in return but that's how God loves us.

He knows full well that when He saved me there would be days and hours and moments when, instead of honoring Him for His loving kindness, I would dishonor Him in high-handed rebellion. And yet He still loves me. We don't deal with one another like this, do we? Because this kind of love is not earthly defined or created. It's from above. This is the way only God loves. So we do not approach God in faith believing that He will receive us because that's the way we operate, even toward our loved ones. Even toward our spouses. We expect certain things from them. We demand certain things. And when it doesn't come we shut down our love. But not God! Thankfully He's not like you or me. He continues to love! How do I know that? He keeps His door opened and He extends the invitation to draw near to Him. Come.

Remember the invitation of Jesus, "Come, you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Come, learn of Me for My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Come. Come. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The call goes forth from pole to pole, from hemisphere to hemisphere. Anyone who comes under the sound of the preaching of the Gospel is given heaven's invitation—Come!

Why can you come, knowing you are the person you are? Because He loves undeservedly.

There's another reason you can come boldly today. He's annihilated every obstacle.

III. The Annihilation of Obstacles

A. All Obstacles Have Been Removed.

"a new and living way which He consecrated for us" (v. 20)

God has prepared a new avenue of approach. He's blazed the trail. He's done the excavation work, He's leveled the ground and He's paved it. There is no impediment, no hindrance for you coming to Him at this moment. He's prepared a new way. It's not by the church, it's not by religion, and it's not by keeping the commandments. It's a different way. It's a way all of those other things were merely shadows.

"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest" (v. 19)

If you come with doubts you're saying to God, "I'm not sure that You love me, nor am I sure that the way You prepared is suitable."

What is the way He has prepared? How has He done it?

He tells us.

B. The Power of the Blood.

“Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.” (Hebrews 10:19)

There’s your answer.

All of your sins, the ones that trouble you and the ones that don’t—all your sins have been placed upon Him like a lamb for a sacrifice. Think about it. It will do you good to think of this. Imagine every wrong thing you’ve done in life. You say, “Sir, I can’t remember them all.” I know, I can’t either, there’s been way too many. We’ve done too much. Not only have we sinned against God but look how we treat one another. Look how parents are treating their children these days. Husbands and wives, why, we treat our animals and pets sometimes much better than we do our own spouses and children. It’s true. All our sins are so heinous, so ugly, but what would it be like if it were true that every one of those sins were placed upon Christ and that there on a cross dying He suffered the penalty for all of those sins?

Do you know what that means? It means that God can now truly forgive you and the guilt with those sins. You can leave here today a guiltless person, a person upon whose conscience is no stain, a person of whom the law requires nothing. Justice is silenced because in Christ God wreaked His wrath upon Him.

In my place, condemned He stood

There is nothing left for me to do. The blood has washed my sins away. Now they are as far from me as the east is from the west. They will never return. I may bring them back up. I may remember them (and I do way too often) but the truth is the blood still works. Its efficacy, its power to expunge and clean is still alive and functioning. Those sins are not recorded against me. I stand not condemned. I owe God nothing because Jesus paid it all. By the blood we can come.

I love the Horatius Bonar hymn *Not What My Hands Have Done*.

Not what my hands have done can save my guilty soul;
Not what my toiling flesh has borne can make my spirit whole.
Not what I feel or do can give me peace with God;
Not all my prayers and sighs and tears can bear my awful load.

Your voice alone, O Lord, can speak to me of grace;
Your power alone, O Son of God, can all my sin erase.
No other work but Yours, no other blood will do;
No strength but that which is divine can bear me safely through.

In Richard Hoefler's book, *Will Daylight Come?* there is an illustration of how sin enslaves and forgiveness frees. A young boy visiting his grandparents was given his first slingshot. He practiced incessantly but he could never hit at what he aimed. One day in his grandparent's back yard he saw his grandmother's pet duck. On a sudden urge he took aim and let fly. The stone hit its intended target, and the duck fell dead. The boy panicked. Frightened he hid the dead duck in the woodpile, turned around and saw his sister watching. Sally had seen it all, but she said nothing.

After lunch that day, Grandma said, "Sally, let's wash the dishes." But Sally said, "Johnny told me he wanted to help in the kitchen today. Didn't you, Johnny?" And she whispered to him, "Remember the duck!" So Johnny did the dishes.

Later Grandpa asked the children if they wanted to go fishing. Grandma said, "I'm sorry, but I need Sally to help make supper." Sally smiled and said, "That's all taken care of. Johnny wants to do it." Again she whispered, "Remember the duck." Johnny stayed while Sally went fishing.

After several days of Johnny doing both his chores and Sally's, he couldn't stand it any longer. He confessed to Grandma that he'd killed the duck. "I know, Johnny," she said, giving him a hug. "I was standing at the window and saw the whole thing. Because I love you, I forgave you. I wondered how long you would let Sally make a slave of you."

That's how guilt works. God has already forgiven us through Christ Jesus but we stay in bondage because guilt, like Sally, whispers to us, "Remember the duck!" "Remember your sin." "Remember what you've done." "Remember how you made a profession of faith. You said you would follow Jesus, now look at you. You've turned your back on Him and you're not walking with Him anymore. Remember!" How do you answer that kind of conscience?

My only solution is this text.

C. The Conscience is Clean.

I want to tell you your conscience can be clean today. When your conscience accuses you, here is what I've learned to do, I don't do it perfectly but I'm learning to do it. I say something to this effect, "I know I have sinned and I hate it so. But I must not lay down in self-pity or endless mourning. I must arise and go to my Father and confess my sin for He will welcome me into His presence for I have an Advocate with the Father, it is Christ Jesus the Lord. Therefore, conscience be silent and trust in the blood of the Lamb!" That's what you do.

There are two other stanzas to that hymn, *Not What My Hands Have Done*, that are not in our hymnal and I want to share them with you as I conclude.

Thy work alone, O Christ, can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God, can give me peace within.

Thy love to me, O God, not mine, O Lord, to Thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest, And set my spirit free.

I bless the Christ of God; I rest on love divine;
And with unfaltering lip and heart I call this Savior mine.
His cross dispels each doubt; I bury in His tomb
Each thought of unbelief and fear, each lingering shade of gloom.

My love will never be what it ought for God. It's not my love this thing is based upon. God's forgiveness and cleansing is not based upon how much you love God, it's based upon His love for you! Not only that, but His love can free you from this dark unrest and set your spirit free.

It's the cross of Jesus Christ that dispels each doubt. Bury in His tomb every thought of unbelief. When you're tempted to not believe in the saving power of the blood, what do you do? Take that thought and bury it in the tomb. Take it to the cross and say, "There. It's been satisfied, conscience. Look. Say no more. He died for that."

Draw near to God in the full assurance and faith that you will be received. The invitation is still before you. Draw near to God. Draw near. He's made a promise to you and He will fulfill it. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). My thoughts about the day I die, and I think about it often, are about what it will be like when I awake in His presence and I'm taken on this new way to the throne of God, made by Jesus Christ. There He sits, the Lamb of God on the throne. Will He wait until I make it the entire way where I will bow at His feet in humble worship? I don't know what it will be like, but I have a sneaking suspicion He will not wait on His throne for me to approach Him but He will fulfill His promise and draw near to me. He will leap off His throne and come running for me where He will catch me falling in His arms. There I will know love unbounding, ceaseless love, love beyond degree—the love of God in Christ Jesus for me. Amen.