

Hebrews 10:19-39: Do You Have to Go to Church, If So, Why? Part 1

Ricardo Campos, Pastor Grace Chapel, Orange, CA October 14, 2018

I. Introduction

Where do we meet when we go to church, here on earth or in heaven? God says that when we get together as a church, we're actually in His presence in heaven. What?! And why is it so crucial that we go to church, what's the big deal? What exactly does it mean to get together as a church, what does God expect of us? Have we fulfilled our Christian duty if we go to church on Sunday (and perhaps again during the week) for a few hours?

II. Hebrews 10:19-39: Why Do We Have to go to Church and What's Our Duty as a Church?

So Jesus is greater than the Levitical Priesthood, so what? Why is this so important? Jesus is now our new High Priest over the house of God and God requires us to meet together at His house regularly. Why is this so critical that the author of Hebrews threatens his audience with a fate worse than death if they fail to go to church?

10:19-25, tradition has it that the high priest wouldn't enter the Holy of Holies without a rope around his ankle and bells around his waist. The bells were to inform those outside that the high priest was still alive. If the bells stopped ringing because God had struck the high priest dead, then the priests could drag his body out with the rope, since no one else could enter the Holy of Holies without being struck dead. But now God beckons each one of us to enter boldly into His Holy of Holies...the real one in heaven! How is this possible? Jesus has removed the barrier forever and opened the way for us to enter the heavenly Holy of Holies (Hebrews 4:16; 6:19-20; 8:1-2; 9:11-12, 24). If this is hard for you to imagine, remember that the Christian life is a walk of faith not sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). And it is heaven indeed where we gather as a church where we're surrounded by the angels and the spirits of those who have gone before us as we stand in the presence of God the Father and God the Son (Hebrews 12:22-24). Therefore, when Jesus sacrificed His life, He removed the veil that stood between us and God (cf. Matthew 27:51). Now, we can confidently walk into God's presence because Jesus has cleansed our hearts and bodies from an evil conscience, i.e., He has forever removed and cleansed us from the guilt of our sin. This should drive us to hold onto what God has promised without wavering because He is faithful to His word. It should drive us to think about our responsibility to the family that God has placed us in. We should make every effort to not simply attend church, but to consider every member of our church in order to challenge and encourage them to practice love and perform good works in every area of their lives (instead of refusing to go to church as is the manner of some).

10:26-31, if the author's audience rejects God's invitation to be in His presence and refuses to enter the Holy of Holies, then they can expect a fate worse than death. They cannot count on going to the temple to offer a sacrifice that will cover this willful sin. Jesus' once-and-all sacrifice has ended all sacrifice for sin. What awaits those who willfully disobey is God's fiery judgment which will devour His adversaries. Because if an Israelite who broke a capital command under the Mosaic Law was duly executed, how much worse will it be for someone who has so insulted God? To refuse to acknowledge that God has cleansed you and made you one of His priests (1 Peter 2:9) with the duty and responsibility to enter the Holy of Holies, is to trample His Son underfoot, to treat the blood Christ (by which you were sanctified) a common thing, and to insult the Holy Spirit who showed you grace.

Is hell the fate worse than death? No. Hell cannot be the punishment because these are children of God who have Christ as their brother and God as their Father, they are being sanctified and aided by Jesus, they have partaken of the heavenly calling and Christ, they have the right to enter God's throne room and ask for help, Jesus purchased their right to enter the heavenly Holy of Hollies, Jesus saves them to the uttermost and continually makes intercession for them, Jesus is their High Priest, Jesus paid for their sins and obtained for them eternal redemption, Jesus completely sanctified and cleansed them from the guilt of their sin, and Jesus has perfected them forever (Hebrews 2:11; 18; 3:1, 14; 4:16; 6:19-20; 7:25; 8:1-2; 9:12, 15, 24, 26, 28; 10:10, 14, 22, 29). Therefore, hell cannot be the threat. What's worse than a swift death under the Mosaic Law? A slow death at the hands of the Romans, which is what the author refers to when he says in 10:25, "as you see the Day approaching." Some think that this is a reference to Christ's Second Coming which is when He will vanquish His enemies. But Christians won't be devoured at Christ's Second Coming as 10:27 states. Christians will be judged but not to determine their place in heaven or hell. This judgment is to determine whether or not they will reign with Christ in His eternal Kingdom (2 Timothy 2:11-13). And at this judgment, Christians may feel shame, sorrow, and/or guilt because their works were only wood, hay, and straw, but they themselves will still "be saved; yet so as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). Additionally, the punishment spoken of in Hebrews 10:26-31 is physical death and it will take place during the lifetime of the audience not at the Second Coming. That is, those in this audience who refuse God's invitation to enter the Holy of Hollies will experience God's death penalty during their lifetime. And this is exactly what happened in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and its temple with fire. During this devastation, some Israelites died a slow death of starvation because the Romans cut off all supplies. That was the "Day [that was] approaching" in 10:25.

When we go to church, we're actually in the presence of God Himself and as a church He expects us to do more than sing, pray, and listen to sermons. The command found in Hebrews 10:25 to go to church is preceded and followed by two other commands: we're to challenge each other to love and good works and we're to encourage each other. This challenging to love and good works and encouraging each other happens primarily outside the meeting of the church, whether Sunday morning or a midweek Bible study. That is, the business of every Christian is to disciple and be discipled by others (Matthew 28:19-20) not simply to attend church. God is not interested in us learning about Christianity but living it. How does God transform us, how do we become better Christians? By going to church every Sunday, by having daily devotionals, by praying and singing? These are part of church, but by themselves, it is not how change happens. Our lives are transformed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18) when we actually begin to live life with Him, think like Him, speak like Him, and act like Him (1 John 1:7; 2:3-6). And this change, this becoming more and more like Christ, doesn't happen when we're by ourselves; it happens in the community of the church (Ephesians 4:15-16) where we're challenged and encouraged to be more and more like Christ.

III. Conclusion

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.