

With a resounding “Therefore ...” the author of *Hebrews* exhorts his audience to persevere and endure in their faith whatever may happen. Thus he launches on what amounts to a four part statement of how they are expected to respond to what he has been saying. His purpose is to motivate and rejuvenate these weary Christians in their pilgrimage of faith.

First, he reminds them once again of what Christ has done for them, urging them to take advantage of his self-sacrifice. In 10:19-25 he summarizes what he had been saying in the previous three chapters (7:1-10:18). Jesus Christ has made access to God available to us. That which in Judaism had been the privilege of the high priest alone and only on the Day of Atonement, is now freely available to all through faith. This was the effect of the high priesthood of Jesus so clearly defined.

Next, *Hebrews* urged them “to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23). This hope brought forward the expectation of Christ’s return to bring God’s purposes to fulfillment. The resurrection is the symbol that this will indeed be accomplished. With Paul *Hebrews* believed that the “Day” approaches (10:25) because the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is faithful to promises.

More than two thousand years have passed since this letter was written. Many people scoff at the expectation of Christ’s return. On the other hand, Jews of the 1st century CE did not think in symbolic terms. They thought that Jesus’ return *in the flesh* would happen at any moment.

We see it somewhat differently. There are many NT passages clearly stating that God is not dependent on our timing for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. God only requires that we, *in our lifetime*, be faithful in every way we can as we wait for whatever God has in mind.

Hebrews next exhorts to his audience to pursue every opportunity they can to love and do good deeds, thereby showing what it means to live the Christian life (10:24-25). This love is not whatever makes one feel good, but doing what is most helpful for others. The NT Greek word for this kind of love is *agape*. It in no way serves oneself, but does everything to serve others. It is modeled on the self-giving of God in Jesus Christ and in Jesus’ own giving of himself on the cross.

Crucial to this way of loving, *Hebrews* notes especially “not neglecting to meet together.” Worshiping, hearing about Jesus and eating together had been practiced since the first gathering of the apostles. (See Acts 2:46-47.) *Hebrews* tried to motivate his audience by warning them in rather stern words (10:26-31). We have no way of knowing how the recipients of this warning might have responded when they realized that the sin of apostasy – of falling away from God – was a constant danger.

Every religious tradition is a synthesis of many forms drawn from many sources and developed over considerable time. In the Christian tradition this process has gone on in every culture and historical situation where it existed. This has led to many accusations of apostasy. In many ways this also accounts for the many divisions and denominations that have occurred within the Christian tradition.

Another way that *Hebrews* used to encourage his audience to be faithful was to recall their previous history (10:32-39). Apparently they had been through some very trying times that are now unknown to us. Yet *Hebrews* is convinced that the future is assured for all who persevere to the end.

Finally, *Hebrews* recalls the power of faith throughout long history of their Hebrews forebears. A long citation of former heroes is set out in 11:1-12:2.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Exhortation has always been a part of Christian preaching. Is that what you look for in the sermons you hear from week to week?
2. On a scale of 1-10 what significance do you place on exhortation in preaching?
3. For the past several centuries we have been learning of the true nature of the universe as space, time and energy. Thus it has become impossible to think in the biblical concepts of God, Jesus and ourselves living in a three-tiered universe of heaven above, hell below and our planet in between. Yet our theology, our thinking, and our words in worship, preaching and everyday conversation still reflect this biblical view, commonly called "theism." How can we develop a different way of saying what we believe that reflects the true nature of our existence?
4. "Reject theism; but think differently and accept uncertainty" is how retired Bishop John Shelby Spong wrestles with the issues raised in #3. Is Spong's view a more satisfactory way to move forward in faith following the way of Jesus?

CLOSING PRAYER

How mysterious you are in this universe, Creator of all that exists. We are humbled even as we hold firm to our faith in your love, our God. **AMEN.**

14 – THE ENDURANCE OF FAITH

Hebrews 10:19-39



Our Galaxy in God's Creation

OPENING PRAYER

Lead us today, gracious God, in our search for understanding, for truth, and above all for the way to express your love, as we search the scriptures today and always. **AMEN.**