

Hebrews 10:19-25
By Grace I'm Saved
A Christian Congregation

Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church
Winchester, VA
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¹⁹ Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, ²⁵ not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Last week we started looking at the practical side of being a Christian. We've reviewed the Biblical teachings about sin and grace and we've seen the wonderful gifts of God's saving love that He has given us through Jesus but now we want to explore how we can make practical application of that to our lives. Last week we saw how our God-given status as His redeemed children shapes our homes turning them into places where the seeds of His gospel are sown and nurtured in our hearts and in the hearts of our children and where Christian family members can refuel each other by reflecting Christ's love, something we need as we live our lives in a sinful world.

But what about the time we spend out and about in that sinful world? What meaning do the saving gifts of God's grace have for your life as you participate as a member of society? That's what Peter gets after in our Epistle lesson this morning (1 Peter 2:11-25).

It's a bit of a longer section that we read through so I'd like to focus on just those first two verses, the introduction to Peter's discourse on Christian living. **Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.**

One of the most important words there is a small one which, if we aren't careful we might skip right over, the word *as*. Peter says that he is urging us, *as* foreigners and exiles, to live our lives in the manner that he goes on to detail through the rest of the chapter and even through the end of his letter.

What he's doing is connecting all of these wonderful maxims that he has for Christian living whether they're in regard to our interaction with human authority, with the government, with employers, or between husbands and wives, or even in the face of persecution and suffering—he takes this whole discourse on Christian living and with that little word *as* he grounds it into the doctrine that he just spent the portion of his letter reviewing.

We looked at part of that doctrinal section from chapter 1 of 1 Peter the week after Easter this year where Peter talks about the living hope we have through Easter and Jesus' resurrection, that Jesus has given us new birth into an inheritance in heaven that can never perish or spoil or

fade (1 Pe 1:3-4). That what God has given us, then in chapter two, Peter goes on to tell us what God has made us. He says, **you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession** (1 Pe 2:9), that, **Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy** (1 Pe 2:10).

So that's what he's talking about when he says **as foreigners and exiles** or **as aliens and strangers** I urge you to live your life in this way. We are foreigners or aliens in this world because God has made us His people, He's made us citizens of His kingdom. That status change which is God's gracious gift to us through Jesus is what is going to be the basis for the manner in which we live our lives in society. The doctrine, the teachings, the theology that God reveals to us in His Word is what will drive our practice or the way we live our lives.

There are a lot of people in society who would disagree with that. For several decades now in our country and around the world there is an increasing call for Christianity without religion. Christian practice is great, the world says. Love your neighbor? Good. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you? Okay, that's a golden rule we can accept. Help the poor and the needy? It's good stuff sure, but the problem with Christianity is all of this doctrine nonsense. It would be better if you guys would just live as Christians and forget all of doctrine: Jesus is the Son of God, the only Way to heaven, the doctrine of atonement, and salvation and all of that just absorbs people and worse than that divides people. If you say Jesus is God that divides you from the Muslims and the Jews. If you start digging even deeper into doctrine that's where you're going to wind up with Protestants divided from the Catholics and Lutherans divided from Protestants.

So let's get away from all of this doctrine. Let's stop talking about it. Doctrine divides! The real problem with the world today the reason we have all these wars is that everyone thinks that they're right. So, the average person on the street says, let's just get rid of that. Everyone has a right to believe what they want to believe so let's stop fighting over who's right and who's wrong and just agree on loving service and loving behavior.

Do you recognize that line of thinking? Have you heard it floating around out there, that it's a good idea to live like Christians but we just don't need to teach like it, we don't need to try to convert everyone?

You'll find that in line of thinking in your classrooms and your work places and you'll hear it from your own friends and relatives. But one place you won't find it is here in God's Word. Whether it's Peter or Paul or even Jesus Himself speaking, you're always going to find encouragement for Christian practice firmly rooted in Christian doctrine. Last week we had another perfect example of that when Paul said **Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you may have with one another because you've been forgiven as the Lord forgave you** (Col 3:13). When Jesus gave His new command to the disciples on Maundy Thursday He said **love each other as I have loved you** (Jn 15:12). And John reminds us of that in his letter to the church when he says **We love because He first loved us** (1 Jn 4:19).

The reason for that, the reason Jesus and His apostles and evangelists will always link Christian practice to Christian doctrine is that without the doctrine the practice is contradictory and unsensible. You can't say, "Don't insist on doctrine." It doesn't make sense because that, then, becomes a doctrine. You can't say, "Just don't go around trying to convert people," because by doing that you are trying to convert people. You can't get around it. You can't avoid

doctrine. Everyone believes something even if what they believe is that there's nothing to believe in.

If you take away the doctrine behind a life a Christian service then what you're left with is someone saying let's be loving, let's serve each other, let's be kind and generous, but there's no reason why. Just because society says so? Well maybe I don't want to, after all loving people is hard work. Going out of my way to befriend someone with different opinions and a from a different culture than myself? That's not going to be easy. Give from my time and my energy and my possessions to help other people... why? Why should I do any of that? Maybe someone would say because every person has dignity and worth, but how can you come to that conclusion without doctrine? Human worth isn't something that can be proven scientifically with empirical data.

If we buy in to the push to get rid of doctrine and just "be loving," then being loving becomes something that is completely arbitrary. But when we look to doctrine, when we look to what God teaches us in His Word, then we find the answer to that question *Why?* Why should you love others and dedicate your time and energy or your money and possessions to helping and serving and befriending others? It's because of what God has done for you. It's because He gave everything for you. He set aside His dignity to come into this world and expend His time and energy and even His life so that you could be a part of that timeless plan that He has had for you from all eternity. He took the punishment for your sins on Himself so that you could be with Him forever.

And He didn't just do that for you; He did it for everyone. Do the people in society, the people around you in your life have some sort of intrinsic value? Absolutely they do! By sending His Son to die for all people, God has imposed value on all people, and on all people equally regardless of age, or ethnicity, or ability, language, gender, means, or any other qualifier. You have never encountered anyone—no matter how much they rubbed you the wrong way or how absolutely awful of a person they may seem—you have never encountered anyone worth less than you. You have never encountered anyone for whom Jesus did not shed His blood. The value that God has placed on you and on them, on all sinners is this: this person is worth the expenditure of the precious life of my own Son.

That's what Christianity is about. The essence of Christianity is status; it's value. Not our own self-value or self-esteem but the value and esteem He has given us through His saving gifts of grace that He delivered to us through the work of His Son Jesus Christ. God tells you that because of the redeeming work of His dearly beloved Son you are now also His dearly beloved sons and His dearly beloved daughters. You are now citizens of His eternal, heavenly kingdom which means you are foreigners and strangers here in this world.

And that's what is so liberating. Why am I going to put in the hard work to become an active part of somebody else's life? Why am I going to expend my time and energy and resources to help or befriend or serve the people around me? Because those things don't matter to me anymore. As an alien in this world I can set aside those selfish, sinful desires that want to safe guard my time and my energy and secure my wealth and possessions and I can set my mind on heavenly things. I can live my life in a way that demonstrates my praise and thanks to God. I can love and serve others because Jesus loved and served me.

As I do that—as *you* do that—Peter tells us here and Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:16, our lives are going to make a difference in society, they are going to impact the people around us. As we let our light shine by living good lives of love and helpfulness and service, the godless society that surrounds us will see our good deeds and some even many will be led by that to praise and glorify God. Christian lives have that effect because the natural question that follows acts of love and charity and service is *Why?* Why do any of those things? And with a life of Christian practice rooted firmly in the biblical doctrine that you are saved by grace you will be ready and waiting with the answer to that question.

Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among society that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us.

Amen.