

I believe the greatest challenge to our faith these days is slowly drifting away and unknown parasites.

Allow me to share two quick divorce stories to illustrate today's point.

At a prior church Connie would walk with ladies from the church. One day, only one other lady from the church showed up to walk. As they walked she told Connie, 'I am having an affair. If anyone finds out in the church, I'll know it was from you. I will tell everyone you cannot keep a confidence.'

- Satan is evil. He has been stealing, killing, destroying, and dividing for years. So, we had this information and could do nothing about it but pray.

She started openly saying that 'he is so boring.' Perhaps a year later it was obvious to nearly everyone but the husband. I met him for lunch near his work and slid a piece of paper across the table with the signs of a double life.

Just take a picture of this and review it later.

Eight Signs of a Double Life

1. Unaccounted Time.
2. Non-intimacy.
3. Cutting off close relationships.
4. Blame game.
5. A new way of handling finances (e.g. unaccounted finance, personal accounts).
6. Unwillingness to do what is right.
7. Disposal of items dear to them.
8. Rapid weight gain / loss or new attention to external appearance.

He got the message and eventually they were divorced. Okay, so he was not the most exciting man, but he was faithful and loved God and her. One of the secrets to a good marriage is the ability to tolerate each other's uniqueness. She drifted away from love.

The other couple was similar, except for the motive. One of the ladies in our church became enamored with the party lifestyle. She wanted to be rich and began posting pictures of herself in risky clothes as she partied in the Hamptons. Which was

increasingly frequent. One day, she wrote an email to another man in the church asking for a date and inferred a hookup. He showed his wife and together they brought it to me. When I showed it to the lady's husband, he got so mad that he kicked me out of his truck, and I had to call for a ride back to church. **She allowed parasitic thoughts and habits to live.** She did not even know she was infected with a parasite that would eat away at her marriage.

We will circle back to the importance of those two stories later.

We are going through **the book of Hebrews** this fall. It is 'a strange and difficult book'¹ for several reasons.

Hebrews can be 'strange and difficult' because ...

1. Five different cultures (Roman, Hebrew, Hellenists, Hellenistic Christians, and our culture.
2. It is a sermon to a very specific audience. He quotes and unpacks 8 different OT passages – sometimes using Scripture in a way that does not make sense to us.
3. It uses symbols from Judaism to make two arguments:
 - Don't go back to Judaism.
 - Judaism is fulfilled in Jesus.

Our preacher **has finished his** thoughts about Jesus being better than all the OT symbols. A very difficult section of the Bible.

Minute Review

- Jesus is better than the angels, 1:4-2:18.
- Jesus is better than Moses & Joshua, 3:1-4:14.
- Jesus is better than the High Priest, 4:14-7:28.
- Jesus is better than the OT Covenant & Sacrifices, 8:1-10:18.

Today is a **turning point** in our preacher's message. He transitions from the contrast between the old and new to its practical application. Today, he now encourages us to draw near and persevere.

Something Better



¹ N.T. Wright and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2019), 710.

From now on he explains **how to live a life of faith** during persecution and **points to examples** of those who lived a life of faith.²

Remember *when you were a child* and you were not allowed into certain rooms? Perhaps you were not allowed into your **father's workshop** because of dangerous tools, or **grandma's bedroom** because it was her private space.

The **ancient Jews** were *not allowed into the Most Holy Place*: 'Aaron ... is *not* to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die (Le 16:2 NIV).''

- The **Most Holy Place** represented God's presence on earth.
- The **high priest** was allowed in one time per year, and then, *only after* a sacrifice, a ritual bath, and carrying incense.

But we have received a great blessing ...

1. Draw Near, 10:19-25.

'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 (He 10:19-20 NIV).'

- Because of *who Jesus is* and *what* he did, we **have unheard of privilege!**
- We have **confidence to enter God's presence**; there is no fear or exclusion.
- Don't remain outside but enter more deeply into God's presence.

'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 (He 10:22 NIV).'

- Imagine, we can draw near to God. Just like little Samuel was sleeping near the ark of God, as close as possible to God's presence, we are encouraged to draw near (1Sa 3:3).
- Friends, 'drawing near' is a **relational phrase**.
- **Our heart's desire** should be to be close to God. **God responds relationally** to our heart: 'Come near to God and he will come near to you (Ja 4:8 NIV).'

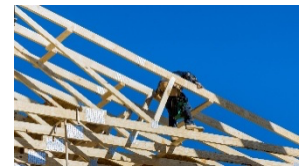
² He 'appeal(s) to ... faith and endurance', R.T. France in Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition 13* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2006), 133.

- When Connie and I were dating 47 / 48 years ago, we wanted to be near each other. We were drawn to each other.
- **Let's draw near to Jesus, hang on tight, and persevere to the end.**

The **words of the church** should be 'let us.' **No one should command** or Lord over God's people, but *we should encourage each other* - 'let us.' **Some translations** have 5 'let us' here.

The first is, 'Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful (He 10:23 NIV).'

We were setting roof trusses on the church in CT. We had set the end truss, and the crane had moved the second one into place. Normally, you stand on a couple of trusses to install the next one, but it takes at least two trusses to stand up there – like this man. Right or wrong, we decided to use an extension ladder.



Two beefy guys held a ladder, and I shimmed up about 20 feet to tack the new truss to the end truss. Then, to disconnect the crane's cable, I stepped off the ladder onto the new truss. I gave the two men a heart attack who thought I had fallen. To get down the crane operator suggested I ride the crane like this man. I held tightly to the cable because my emotions were warning me it was unsafe to do otherwise.

- **Let's draw near to Jesus, hang on tight, and persevere to the end.**

We can be **sure of our hope** because **of God's character**. He **is faithful** to what he promised.

We can summarize ...

- **Drawing near** to God *represents* our attitude toward God.
- **Holding unswervingly to hope** *represents* our emotions towards God.

Here is another, '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 (He 10:14-25a NIV).'

We can add ...

- **Meeting together** *represents* our attitude toward fellow believers.

Attending **church** is more than it seems:

- **Something deeply spiritual** happens when we joyfully participate.
- **Encouraging each other** should be a regular part of our worship and gathering.

There is to be a **mutual concern**:

- No negative speech, but honest when necessary
- Not looking at the failings of others.
- Genuinely seeking the other's best - building up each other.

This means **we must be close enough** to each other to support and speak into each other's lives.

'And all the more as you see the Day approaching (He 10:25b NIV).'

- This mention of Jesus' **second coming** adds urgency.
- We are **to meet and encourage** one another *all the more* as we see signs of Jesus' return.
- **Let's draw near to Jesus, hang on tight, and persevere to the end.**

Next, we have the preacher's fourth warning.

2. Fourth Warning, 10:26-31.

'If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (He 10:26-27 NIV).'

'There would be **no point in setting out a purely hypothetical scenario**; **this is a warning of what *could* happen if they are not careful.**'³ However, he is thinking of 'deserting the living God ... **outright apostasy.**'⁴

He uses the **illustration of the discipline that ancient Israel received when they turned away from God**. **If God punished Israel, how much more those who now believe in Jesus and the superior covenant?** 'How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace (He 10:29 NIV)?'

³ France, *Expositor's*, 138.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *NICNT Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Willam B. Eerdmans, 1990), 261

Each of the warnings we have looked at so far have a consequence and a corrective action.

The **warnings**, consequences, and corrective action ...

- 2:1-4 – **don't drift** or there's *no escape* // pay attention to your faith
- 3:7-19 – **don't harden** your heart or there's *no rest* // encourage one another
- 5:11-6:8 – **don't fall away** or it's *impossible to return* // love God & others, imitate people of faith
- 10:26-39 – **stop sinning** or there's *no forgiveness* // remember your faith and persevere

He is using **every stick and carrot** to get them to stay focused on Jesus, because, 'It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (He 10:31 NIV).'

This next section begins of some of the most popular and beloved portions of Hebrews.

3. Persevere, 10:32-39.

'Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering.

³³Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had *better and lasting possessions*. ³⁵So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. ³⁶*You need to persevere* so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised (He 10:32-36 NIV).'

So that they don't slip back into Judaism, he encourages them to ...

- 'Remember those earlier days ... when you endured ... suffering (v. 32).'
- And to look forward to a 'better and lasting possessions' and to 'receive what he has promised (v. 36).'

We **don't know exactly** what suffering they endured.

- The persecution after the **stoning of Stephen** (Acts 8:1)?
- The **expulsion of the Jews** from Rome by Caesar Claudius (49 A.D.)?⁵
- Caesar **Nero's persecution** in Rome (64-64 A.D.).⁶

⁵ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 269-70.

⁶ However, later he says, they have not yet shed blood in their struggle against sin (12:4).

Regardless, **they so sympathized** with their fellow Christian that they joined in the suffering and joyfully had their property confiscated.

Someone **once wisely said**: 'It is *easy* to die for Christ, it is harder to *live* for Christ.'⁷

When there is a direct attack to our faith, we naturally stand against it. It is far easier to backslide or slowly drift away from our faith ...

- When we doubt.
- When we let our relationship with God atrophy.
- When we allow parasites a foothold.
- When we become curious about evil.
- When we grow tired of doing what is right.

Even **though he is harsh** with his 5 warnings, he is *also positive*, pointing them towards **something better**.

A Better ...

High Priest, 4:15.

Hope, 7:19.

Covenant, 7:22.

Promise, 8:6.

Sacrifice, 9:23.

Possession, 10:34. Remember, theirs were confiscated.

Country, 11:16.

Resurrection, 11:35.

Word, 12:24.

Let's preserve because **God has a great future planned for us**. 'For, "In just a little while, he who is coming will come and will not delay (He 10:37 NIV)."'

- This world is not all there is to our existence. We have hope in an eternal destiny.

The two great chapters on faith are next. What you may not realize is that **they are his exposition** of a passage from the prophet Habakkuk (2:3-4): 'And, "But my righteous one will

⁷ Attributed to Mother Teresa.

live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back.”³⁹ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved (He 10:38-39 NIV).’

- As usual, he **quotes the passage** and then explains it. His explanation will be our next 3 or 4 sermons, chapters 11 & 12.
- The Greek **word for faith** usually means ‘intellectual acceptance.’ This is **Paul’s emphasis** - faith as a part of salvation - ‘I accept Christ.’
- But our preacher uses the **more Hebrew-like meaning**, **which is enduring and holding on no matter what – more like our word ‘faithful.’** It as ‘an **attitude of commitment** and ... trust in God.’⁸ Holding on and persevering.

Conclusion.

The two ladies I began with did not marry their husbands with the intention of getting divorced 20 years later. They **slowly drifted away** from their relationship and **allowed new desires**, parasites, to make them relationally sick.

The **antidote** for *spiritual sickness* is to **draw near to Jesus, hang on tight, and persevere to the end.**

- **Moses’ curiosity** caused him to draw near to the burning bush.
- **Nicodemus’ interest** in Jesus’ miracles caused him to meet with him at night.
- And the **woman with the issue of blood** *had a need* that caused her to pursue Jesus.

I encourage you to rekindle your love of God today.

- Be curious about spiritual matters, **like Moses.**
- Study to satisfy your interests in what God has revealed to us, **like Nicodemus.**
- Pursue him for your needs **like the woman in the crowd.**

Pray.

⁸ France, *Expositor’s*, 142.