



Welcome Back Sunday

Jesus, The Veil, and the Sacrifices

Study Passage

Hebrews 10:19-25

Key Verse

Hebrews 10:22

²² let's approach *God* with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Statistics show that the vast majority of Christians today are biblically illiterate, meaning they don't really know what is in their Bibles. As it pertains to Jesus' death on the cross, very few could explain its connection to the sacrificial system described in the Old Testament, but this understanding is foundational to grasping the full majesty of Jesus' work.

Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we can have direct access to God without a human intermediary. The gospel message should change how we live, and the author of Hebrews provides three practical applications: we should draw near to God, we should hold fast to what we believe, and we should stir one another up in community.



BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- How is everyone's week going? Any life updates?
- What is something the group can be praying about?
- What is something the group can praise this week?

- Why did Jesus have to die on a cross in our place?
 - What do you know about the Temple and the sacrificial system described in the Old Testament?
 - Is there a relationship between these things and Jesus' atonement?
- What do you think should be our response to Jesus' death and resurrection?
 - How does our belief in Jesus meaningfully impact our lives?



BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Hebrews 10:19-25 (New American Standard Version)

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers *and sisters*, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, *through* His flesh, ²¹ and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, ²² let's approach *God* with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³ Let's hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let's consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, ²⁵ not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Jesus and the Veil

The passage opens in verses 19 through 21 with a presentation of the gospel. However, as is characteristic of the book of Hebrews, the author's description places Jesus' work on the cross in the context of the sacrificial system found in the Old Testament. This connection is important for Christians to grasp because it provides a fuller understanding of Jesus' atonement and brings the full story of the Bible together.

The Hebrew word translated in English as 'atonement' is *kaphar*, which means "to cover." This suggests that through the act of atonement a person's sin is 'covered' so that God can no longer see it.¹ This is necessary because, without our sin being covered, we cannot approach God and have a relationship with Him. The holiness of God prevents Him from even being the presence of sin, meaning a solution is required.

In the Old Testament, the idea of atonement for sin is found as far back as the beginning of creation. After Adam and Eve's rebellion in the Garden, they come to the realization that they are naked and in their shame they are afraid to be seen by God. In order to help them, God provides animal skins to *cover* their bodies. The implication seems to be that God sacrificed an animal on their behalf to make them whole again.

¹ 2091



This establishes the principle that an innocent party must be punished in the place of the guilty party in order to achieve restoration. Unfortunately, God's covering of Adam and Eve with animal skins was not enough to reconcile them. Despite this important first step, God casts Adam and Eve out of Eden and into the broken world they had created.

After the Jews are rescued from Egypt, God commands them to build a tabernacle, essentially a tent whereby the Ark of Covenant will be maintained, and the High Priest can enter to approach God on behalf of all the people. In order to do so, the High Priest must provide an animal sacrifice to ritually cleanse himself. Without it, the priest could die when stepping into the central chamber and encountering God's presence.

Eventually, the Jews establish a home in the land of Canaan and the nation of Israel is born. At its center, in the capital city of Jerusalem, stands the Temple, a permanent structure that replaces the tabernacle and holds the Ark. The Temple rests upon Mount Moriah, and the innermost chamber of the Temple, where the Ark is kept, sits right atop the mountain's peak. Separating the inner chamber, called the Holy of Holies, from the rest of the Temple is a veil, or curtain.

When Jesus died on the cross, the Bible tells us that the veil was torn from top to bottom. In other words, there was no longer separation between God and man. The place where God's direct presence resided was now freely open for any man to approach without fear of death. Jesus' sacrifice covered every man's sin, thus allowing them to restore a relationship with their creator. Animals were never enough to satisfy God's need for justice. Jesus on the other hand, being God in the flesh and without sin, represented a perfect sacrifice that would be sufficient for all time.

After Jesus' death, the sacrificial system in Israel largely disappeared. Whether the Jews understood it or not, there was no longer a need to make sacrifices at the Temple because Jesus' sacrifice was enough. Further, the role of the High Priest was no longer necessary because anyone and everyone could approach God boldly. The only "veil" by which we must pull back to seek God is Jesus Himself. He is our High Priest who advocates for us before God and allows us access to the Father.

The work that God began in the Garden has now been completed in Jesus. The good news of the gospel is that although our sin separated us from God, God has stepped down from history to take our punishment in our place. He offered Himself up as the ultimate sacrifice, and in doing so has granted us unlimited access to Himself through His Son Jesus. God's presence no longer resides within the Temple or a building; He now dwells in every person who repents of their sin, accepts the gift of reconciliation, and follows Him with their whole heart.



The faith that one places in Jesus must lead to action. The Christian faith is not some stagnant or passive thing; it should lead to meaningful and practical application.

1. Draw Near

Verse 22 tells us to approach God with a sincere heart. In other words, the author is telling us to draw near to God. Because of Jesus' work, we have been purified from our sin, and so have nothing to fear of God and His wrath. He no longer sees our sin, but rather the perfect life of Jesus in its place. There is nothing stopping us from approaching God any longer, so we have no reason not to approach His throne boldly and with confidence.

Drawing near to God should be the natural consequence of the gospel on you. If you can have a relationship with God, why would you not draw near to Him? Having access to God directly and yet not drawing near to Him is unnatural, and it goes against the very nature of the relationship. The problem is that many of us have a divided heart when it comes to God. We honor God with our lips, but our hearts are far from Him. We want the benefits of reconciliation, but we still want to live our own way.

The veil no longer separates us from God, and there is no intermediary like a High Priest needed to speak to God for us. We can be as close or as far away from God as we want to be. The choice is ours.

2. Hold Fast

The author tells us to hold firmly to the confession of our hope without wavering. To hold fast means to hold onto something tightly, not willing to let go. Our self-proclaimed faith in Jesus should be such a thing. The story of the cross and resurrection means that God has defeated sin and death, and a glorious future awaits us. If we hold our belief loosely, we open ourselves up to worry and despair.

If Jesus has not died for our sins and risen again, then we are truly without hope. Our sin has not been atoned for, and so we have no ability to approach God. We better find an animal quickly and sacrifice it, because that is the best we can do (and it's not enough!). The Jewish people in Israel today seek to rebuild their Temple, and begin again the sacrificial system, without realizing that such a thing will never bring them reconciliation with their creator.

We as the church know the truth: that Jesus has fulfilled the Law and the Prophets, making the Old Testament system obsolete. We can have direct access to God right *now*, so this is what we should keep our minds focused on. Although evil still exists in the world, God has overcome it. The author says that He is faithful, meaning that our confidence stems from who He is. Should we have faith that Jesus is enough? Yes, because God said so. Should we have faith that Jesus is coming again to make things right? Yes, because God said so.



Living as a pessimist, a life that is constantly “glass half empty,” is uniquely un-Christian. No matter the state of things in our world, God has the victory.

3. Stir Up

The author asks us to consider how to encourage one another, or to stir up one another in other translations. To stir up is literally to spur one another on toward the things of God. Humanity is by its very nature communal, and so the church, as per God’s directive, is most effective when its members work and live together. This is the picture of the Christian life in the New Testament. We were made to advance as a community, not alone.

The author is adamant that we do not neglect our gathering together. In the United States today, people tend to conceive of church as a building where people gather to worship God, but this is incorrect. The church *is* the people who gather, the ones who follow Jesus with their lives. A church on a Sunday morning *is* church because the people of God are there. Church isn’t something you do; it’s something you *are*.

As a Christian, you have an obligation to participate in a local church because this fulfills your responsibility to gather with other believers. The motivation should not be legalistic, meeting with fellow brothers and sisters simply because God tells us to. Rather, we should *want* to gather with Christians because they worship the same God that we do. Because more than anyone else in the world, they *get* us. Because without believers coming alongside us, our lives would be so much more *difficult* when it doesn’t have to be.

If your church doesn’t reflect this kind of love and compassion for one another, then the church is doing something wrong. However, the author of Hebrews identifies an even bigger reason for meeting together. According to him, the meeting together and the stirring up of the church is more and more important as we see the day of Jesus’ return approaching. In the time leading up to Jesus’ return, the world is going to get very chaotic, very fast.

If we do not have a firm support structure in place, we could lose our way. This is true today of any Christian who neglects a meaningful faith community, but even more so in the day of the Great Tribulation. The time of trouble that precedes Jesus coming back will require us to stand firm against evil for the sake of the gospel. We will need every Christian standing at arms, working together, supporting, and encouraging each other to face Satan’s last attempt to defeat God.

Those spiritual forces are already at work in the world today and so very clearly church is not optional. When we stand before God, we won’t wish that we had spent more time doing worldly things; we’ll wish we had been more committed to Him and His people.



BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- What does 'atonement' mean? How is it used/seen throughout the Old Testament?
- How does Jesus' death on the cross relate to the Temple and the sacrificial system?
- What prevented us from drawing near to God before Jesus? Why has that changed now that Jesus has come?
 - How then should we draw near to God?
- What does Jesus' atonement demonstrate about God's character?
 - How should God's character, and what He has done, give us confidence?
 - Why is it so important to hold fast to our belief in Him?
- Why does the author of Hebrews prioritize the gathering together of the saints?