Our lesson on “The Shadow & the Reality” basically concluded the theological part of the Book of Hebrews. In the 3½ chapters left in the book, the writer’s primary purpose was to make practical application of what he had said. When we teach, there is always an unspoken question: “How should these truths affect us?” If Christianity is superior to Judaism, what difference should that make in our daily lives? That is what the text is about to tell us!

The practical teaching begins with an introduction—10:19–25—that summarizes what came before and anticipates what comes afterward. These verses illustrate what I mean when I call Hebrews “a word of encouragement.” Keep in mind that “to encourage” can mean to comfort and strengthen, or it can mean to exhort and urge.¹

WORDS THAT COMFORT AND STRENGTHEN US (10:19–22)

In Hebrews 4:14–16, we learned that Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest. Therefore, we can “draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (v. 16). Our current text expands the thought found in chapter 4. Until this point, the epistle has not discussed the heavenly sanctuary or the blood of Jesus; but those two themes are imbedded in the comforting words of 10:19–22.

Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we can enter into the presence of God (10:19). The Levitical high priest (a Levite who was one of Aaron’s descendants) entered the Holy of Holies with fear and trembling, but we can come into God’s presence with confidence because . . .

1. Jesus opened the way for us (v. 20). It is a living way, in contrast with the way of dead sacrifices in the Old Testament.
2. Jesus is a sympathetic High Priest (v. 21). He is “over the house of God”—the family of God on earth (the church) and the family of God in heaven (see Ephesians 3:15).
3. Jesus’ blood has cleansed us of our sins. Our consciences are clear (v. 22; see 9:14).

WORDS THAT EXHORT AND URGE US (10:22–25)

Beginning in verse 22, the passage encourages us to do what we should do and be what we should be. In effect, we are told, “Since these things [in vv. 19–21] are true, let us do this and that [in vv. 22–25].” The biblical writer liked to begin sentences with “let us.” In verses 22 through 25, we find “let us” three times.

“Let Us Draw Near”: Let Us Worship (10:22)

Compared to Christianity, Judaism offered little assurance. Through Jesus, we do have assurance. When our bodies are raised from the waters of baptism, our hearts have been cleansed from sin, and we are ready to worship our God!

“How Let Us Hold Fast”: Let Us Be Faithful (10:23)

The epistle was addressed to wavering Christians. It urged them to stop wavering and to

¹Review the notes about “exhortation” (Hebrews 13:22) in the introductory lesson of this series, “A Word of Encouragement.”
consider all God had done for them. They could count on God because His promises are sure.

“Let Us Consider . . . One Another”:
Let Us Encourage Each Other (10:24, 25)

Apparently, those to whom the letter was addressed were being self-centered, not thinking of their fellow Christians. They needed to consider how to encourage others (v. 24).

One way to encourage others is faithful attendance of church assemblies. The Lord did not intend for us to be spiritual “loners.” We are part of the body of Christ, “members of one another” (Ephesians 4:25). When we come together to worship, we encourage others. When we fail to do so, we discourage them.

A CLOSER LOOK AT HEBREWS 10:25

“Not forsaking.” The Greek word translated “forsaking” can mean “to leave behind, abandon.” It is used in this sense in 13:5, and some believe that is the meaning here (NIV; Barclay). If so, the text may give a symptom of total apostasy. However, Neil R. Lightfoot noted, “. . . if the author is talking of apostasy, how could he say as is the habit of some?” While verse 26 speaks of apostasy, verse 25 refers to ways to avoid apostasy: “Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (compare 2:1–4). The RSV has “Not neglecting to meet together. . . .”

“Our own assembling together” is a reference to collective public worship. The word translated “assembling” is the verb form of the word from which we get “synagogue”—reflecting the Jewish background of the original readers. From the beginning, public assemblies were important in Christianity (see Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2; James 2:2–4). When a person becomes a Christian, he becomes part of something, the church. An important part of the church relationship is coming together for study, worship, and fellowship. Christians who love one another want to come together. When a member of the body begins to neglect that assembling, there is a problem.

“As is the habit of some.” “Some [of you]” should be understood. What prompted these Christians to neglect their assembling? Probably every motivation for non-attendance today was also present then. However, the context suggests some specific reasons; for example, 10:32–34 speaks of persecution. Also, there was pressure on Jewish Christians to go back into Judaism. They would have been encouraged by fellow Jews to distance themselves from the Christian community—not to assemble (see 10:25) and not to listen to the Christian leaders (see 13:7, 17).

“But encouraging one another” does not mean encouraging others to attend worship services, but attending in order to encourage others. The previous verses (10:19–22) suggest personal benefits from worship, but this verse tells us that we need to assemble in order to benefit others. Don Klingenberg has a practice worth imitating. Before every assembly, he makes a list of men he wants to encourage. Sometime while they are together, he tells each of them, “I think you’re a good man, and I want to encourage you to live for God this week.”

“And all the more as you see the day drawing near.” “The day” probably does not refer to the Lord’s Day (Sunday). Some believe “the day” refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. A more common meaning of “the day” in the New Testament is the day of Christ’s return and final judgment. Certainly, from our perspective, “the day drawing near” is that “last day.” Our encouraging of one another should intensify as time goes by so that we will all be ready for that great day.

Hebrews 10:19–21 was written as a word of encouragement for specific first-century Christians. Nevertheless, you and I need the same message. As Christians, we should be encouraged because (1) “we have confidence to enter the holy place [in heaven] by the blood of Jesus” (v. 19), (2) we have “a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through . . . His flesh” (v. 20), and (3) “we have a great priest [Jesus] over the house of God” (v. 21). Therefore, we are encouraged to (1) “draw near [to God] with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith” (v. 22), (2) “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (v. 23), and (3) “consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (v. 24).

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