

Intro

A recent article in *Le Monde Diplomatique* portrayed evangelical Christians (that's us!) in a negative light. They quoted Brazilian theologian and professor, Valdemar Figuerdo, who claimed evangelicals are trying to "perform a U-turn against the secular state, the autonomy of science, the importance of universities, free-thinking, women's status, gender issues, minority rights." Then he said, "They are medieval in the worst sense." In other words, the world should be afraid of evangelicals because we're still living in the dark ages. Presumably the threat is that we want to bring the world back into the dark ages.

A recent survey from the Barna Group in November 2018 evaluated the perception of evangelicals among non-Christians:

Very negative: 20%

Somewhat negative: 27%

Neutral: 45%

Somewhat positive: 8%

Very positive: 1%

In other words, very few non-Christians view evangelicals positively. And about half view us negatively. Because we're perceived so poorly, we will encounter some form of hostility, whether it's being stereotyped, ostracized, or slandered. And this puts us in an uncomfortable position. Will I follow Jesus or will I go along with public opinion?

This morning we answer this question:

What do we do when our faith is opposed?

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Three commands and the reasons behind them. Believers were subject to public ridicule and some were imprisoned, but none had been killed (10:32-34; 12:4; 13:3).

Author is unknown but likely writing to a majority Jewish believing community. The theme of the book don't give up your faith.

FCF: persecution and denying the faith

Gracious provision: promises, warnings, and fellowship

A: Approach

C: Cling

E: Encourage

Point 1: Approach God with full assurance (10:19-22)

Explanation

Gospel is our assurance

The writer tells the local church community to approach God with confidence. Why?

since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

If we've turned to Jesus in faith and repentance, we should have confidence to approach God because of Jesus' blood shed for us. We can't do anything to erase our sin. Sin = breaking God's law. We can't do anything to appease God. So we need to have a substitute who suffers in our place, taking the punishment we deserve. Through faith, Jesus' shed blood covers all our sins (past, present, future).

and since we have a great priest over the house of God

Jesus is our great high priest. Speaking of those who draw near to God through Jesus, Hebrews 7:25 says that Jesus *"always lives to make intercession for them."* If you're a believer, Jesus is pleading with the Father on your behalf.

let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

Jesus covered our sins by shedding his blood, and he intercedes for us, so draw near to God with full assurance you'll be received. Jesus died to grant us relationship with God.

Application

Our confidence is in Jesus, not in ourselves, so we have a clean conscience. Jesus took the full weight of the punishment for our sins on the cross, so our debt is paid. Our guilt is gone. We have peace with God. No more worry about whether or not God will accept us. So draw near to God in your time of need.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

God provides strength to endure opposition. The gospel is resented for a number of reasons. Some we can't help. But we can break some of the stereotypes.

Maybe you're asking, "how can I be sure I'm right with God without a shadow of a doubt?" Our passage says we can approach God with full assurance and a clean conscience. **That's certainty we're accepted.** No matter what you've done, you can be accepted by God. Because Jesus is worthy to take the punishment you deserve. We've all broken God's law and rebelled, so our only hope is trusting in Jesus. Only Jesus can make us acceptable to God.

If you're struggling with assurance, remember, assurance comes through trusting Jesus.

"If you believe in Jesus, you cannot doubt that his promises are true. And if you believe in him, you cannot doubt that those promises apply to you, because they apply to everyone who believes." – John Frame

These believers needed help because of the persecution they were facing...

Point 2: Cling to your hope in Christ (10:23, 26-39)

Explanation

Gospel is our hope: sins forgiven, freedom from enslavement to sin, eternal life

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Because of opposition, members of the local church were tempted to turn their back on Christ and give up their hope. Hope = expectation of fulfilled promises (new heavens and new earth, sin and death gone forever), not wishful thinking. Why should they cling tightly to their hope in Christ? Because “*he who promised is faithful.*” God is going to deliver.

In verses 26-31 we’re warned that turning away from Christ results in judgment.

The situation is a person who receives the truth and then turns from it, placing themselves under God’s judgment (10:26-27). The writer reasons, if under OT law rejecting the law brought the death penalty, won’t a person who turns away from Christ be punished (10:28-29)? God is a terrifying judge (10:30).

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Don’t waver, cling to Christ, because there’s a final judgment.

In verses 32-39 we’re warned that if we turn away from Christ, we’re excluded from the promises. They’ve endured so much. Why give up now?

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

They’ve experienced verbal assaults, physical affliction, imprisonment, and the loss of property.

Reproach: Hebrews 13:13 uses the word to describe what Christ himself endured = mockery, accusations, etc. = verbal abuse

Affliction: the general word for persecution and tribulation = some unspecified suffering; anguish of a woman in labor, Joseph’s suffering as a slave and prisoner in Egypt, physical harm

Plundering: doesn’t specify whether it was local judges or mob violence that was behind their loss of property

10:34 says, “*you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property.*” Does this shock you? Who joyfully accepts the loss of property? My wife was angry last weekend about a kid destroyed a lawn chair she bought for \$2 at a yard sale. I was driving home from Living Waters and some animal jumped out in front of our van and ruined part of the bumper. I’m not rejoicing. I’m thinking about the \$500 deductible. So why the joy?

since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

God rewards faithfulness. An eternal city awaits God’s people. This is better than property. They rejoiced in suffering for Christ. This is supernatural. People don’t rejoice when they’re plundered. Only the Holy Spirit can produce this joy. So have confidence. When we’re faithful under persecution, the Spirit works joy in our hearts.

Hope for the struggling = if God can make people whose property was plundered joyful, what can he do in your life?

Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

Reward drives endurance.

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

Obtaining the promises requires endurance. Quoting from Habakkuk 2:3-4, the writer reveals that if we shrink back God will have no pleasure in us = rejection and judgment (10:37-38).

Illustration:

Obtaining entrance into the new Jerusalem is kind of like completing a college degree or an apprenticeship → if you don't complete the program you don't get the diploma → you need to finish to receive → you don't quit when it's hard because of the reward

Despite the warnings, the writer is confident the church will endure:

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Theology

Maybe you're confused. The author is writing to believers and warning them that they can be rejected and face God's terrifying judgment. Aren't believers eternally secure? Didn't the writer just say we can approach God with confidence and full assurance? How can we do that with the threat of hell hanging over us?

Eternal Security

- 1) All those who are justified will be glorified = no one who is saved fails to attain final salvation (Rom 8:30)
- 2) Those who fall away won't attain final salvation
- 3) If everyone who believes attains final salvation, and some who profess faith fall away and don't attain final salvation, those who fall away never truly believed
- 4) God gives us his Spirit and strengthens our faith so that we don't fall away
- 5) God uses warnings in Scripture to preserve our faith
- 6) God uses warnings to bring unbelievers in the church to faith

In simple terms, there's no guarantee that everyone in the church is saved. God uses warnings to help us endure, and to bring unbelievers to faith.

Confidence

As for confidence in approaching God, if we believe God's promises are true we believe they are true for us.

How do I handle these warnings? I am presently trusting Jesus and I know he has changed my life. So I am not worried about falling away and I approach God boldly. I have full assurance of salvation and I trust he will preserve my faith. But I do guard my heart, engage in spiritual disciplines, and maintain a healthy fear of God. I don't take my faith casually. Like being petrified of committing adultery. Under opposition to my faith I remember God's promises, my responsibility (be salt and light, proclaim the gospel), and I pray (e.g., courage, love, and wisdom).

Hell

The judgment is hell. Hell being that place where those who trample underfoot the Son of God will suffer eternal conscious torment. Hell is described as weeping and gnashing of teeth. A place of sorrow, anguish, and fright that lasts forever and ever. A place to be avoided at all costs. Hell is severe because sin is a serious. Sin is serious because of who it's against: the infinitely holy God who is perfectly righteous, untainted by sin and

wholly opposed to it. But God is merciful. Because sin is a serious offense against God, Jesus had to die for sinners, so that we could approach God. This is the good news: that guilty sinners can be forgiven because of what Jesus did on the cross. We can only approach God through Jesus.

We can receive forgiveness and dwell with God forever by trusting God's promise of a heavenly city and clinging to that hope. We encourage you to trust Jesus and follow him today.

Point 3: Encourage one another (10:24-25)

Explanation

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

10:25 has gotten a lot of press lately because of restrictions on public church gatherings. Let's see why public gatherings matter. Because persecution exists, believers need to encourage one another. Consider means we need to think about this. So we see a fellow believer struggling with opposition to their faith and we ask ourselves, "how can I encourage that brother or sister?" This assumes contact with fellow believers and concern for them. Love and good works in this context would mean care and generosity for afflicted believers, and maintaining a gospel witness despite persecution.

Encouragement requires continuing to meet with one another. If we're absent, how can we encourage others? If we're absent, how can others encourage us?

"*as it is the habit of some*" = some had already stopped meeting because of persecution. But encouragement is necessary because "*the Day is drawing near.*" One day Christ will return to dispense eternal punishment and eternal life. So encourage one another with God's promises.

The day = the realization of judgment and hope

Application

Because of stereotypes and resentment towards the gospel, we might experience:

- hostility (anger)
- verbal abuse
- slander
- stereotypes (sometimes we justify them)
- public outrage
- ostracism (don't want us around)

We're not being assaulted or imprisoned. And our property isn't being plundered. But hostility and ostracism wears us down. This requires a local church that intentionally encourages each other, which requires meeting regularly.

But opposition = opportunity to witness and opportunity to overcome stereotypes. With God's help we can endure opposition joyfully, and live out the gospel realities we proclaim. To help us endure, **God provides** us with promises, warnings, and fellowship.

How should we deal with friends or family who haven't endured?

If they've left the church recently = deserting the local church is linked with falling away (deserted the faith not switched churches)...

Hold out hope for a return to fellowship. Maintain contact. Get a feel for where they're at. Do they still believe the gospel? Are they living in unrepentant sin? Sin is usually the reason for leaving. Sometimes they're doubting the faith. Or facing peer pressure. Pray. These people may still be saved.

Friend illustration: immorality → stopped coming → contact → admitted wrong (didn't try to twist Scripture to fit his behavior) → sporadic appearance → praying → returns after repenting → still going → had full confidence he was saved because he was wrestling and admitted his sin

If they've left years ago...

Approach them as non-Christians who've shrunk back. Don't give them the impression they're okay with God. Graciously give them the impression that they need to repent. Bear with their sin as you would with other unbelievers. After all, they need the Holy Spirit. Don't aim for behavior modification. Aim for a response to the gospel. Maintain contact. Spend time with them. Pray. Love. Be patient. Invite to church. Invite to a small group. Engage them in gospel conversations wisely. Encourage them to trust God's promises and follow Jesus.

Conclusion

As a pastor there's a fear that you may be bullied by public opinion. That the entertainment industry will seduce you. That you may get worn down by the insults and stereotypes. That the fear of ostracism will lead to compromise. Pressure to forsake Christ is as real today as it was back then. But God's given us a game plan to endure opposition to our faith?

First, **Approach God with full assurance.** Seek God's help in your time of need.

Second, **Cling to your hope in Christ.** God is faithful to keep his promises.

Third, **Encourage one another.** Strengthen one another when opposition arises.

God is with you, strengthening your faith.