

- *Our response*

We Christians are meant to have total confidence in Christ's sympathy, Christ's blood, Christ's intercession. And upon that basis there are some things that we – like the Hebrews – are asked to do.

1. We are to draw near to God

- *Closeness to God*

1. **We are to draw near to God.** ²²*So let us be drawing near with a true heart in full conviction of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water.* We constantly come to God for help, day after day. 'Drawing near' is an Old Testament phrase meaning 'approach God'. For example, a priest might say, 'Let us draw near to God'¹. God himself says, 'Draw near to me'². Hebrews uses the phrase to refer to a life of closeness to God³. Within the New Testament James also uses the phrase⁴.

¹ 1 Samuel 14:36
² Isaiah 48:16
³ 4:16; 7:19, 25; 10:1; 11:6
⁴ James 4:8

- *With a true heart*

To draw near to God, our heart must be true. We need honesty, openness, sincerity in our desire to meet with God. We need assured faith. If we have been following what our writer has been telling us about Jesus, the compassion and mercy of our great high priest will make it possible for us to have this kind of confident faith.

- *Guilt-free*

As we come to God in this way, our consciences are sprinkled clean by the blood of Christ (as it says here, but see Hebrews 9:14 also). We shall be relieved of the burden of guilt knowing that the sacrifice of Jesus satisfies God. We need not bear the guilt of sin, or any sense of pollution, any more. We feel clean in conscience and clean in body – ²²*having our bodies washed with pure water.* This has nothing to do with water-baptism! These Hebrew Christians had been 'saved' a long time before and ought to be teachers¹. Surely after all this time he is not asking them to be water-baptized! That had happened a long time previously! The drawing near and the sprinkling and the washing is to take place there and then as his readers respond to what he says. But they had been baptized a long time previously. It was one of the foundations no longer to be discussed (if it is included in the *baptismo* – 'washings'²). It is a pity that some people are so obsessed with water-baptism that every time they see the word 'water' or 'washing' they rush to take it as a reference to water-baptism – and then such people generally go on to say 'the sign is accompanied by the grace', that is, the water is accompanied by spiritual power. But surely the one thing Hebrews ought by now to have taught us is that ceremonies are only shadows! Did Old Testament signs and symbols do nothing but point to **more** signs and symbols?

¹ note 5:12

² 6:2

- *Bodies washed is not a reference to water baptism*

- *Picture language for total cleansing – the fulfilment of Old Testament ceremonies*

No, the 'water' is not baptism. It is the **fulfilment** of the Old Testament ceremonies. The **fulfilment** is a sense that we are meant to have of being totally clean so as to be ready to go into the presence of God! Our writer is using imagery – picture-language. The holy of holies and the curtain are not physical any more (although of course the symbolism was physical). Nor is the sprinkled blood a physical matter. We do not literally become covered with blood (as did the people mentioned in Hebrews 9:19). Nor do we literally become wet with water on our bodies (as Aaron and his sons did in Old Testament ceremony¹). The fulfilment of the Old Testament ceremonies is not more ceremonies but conscious spiritual experience. The priests under the law were to wash before they went into the presence of the Lord. We do something similar but it is not a matter of constant rebaptism! It is more a matter of honesty of heart and humility in

¹ Exodus 40:12

confessing sin.

2. We are to hold fast the confession of our hope

• A future aspect to this faith of ours

• Hope is faith looking forward and expecting to be rewarded in events that are still to come

• A persistent hope for the future is maintained by approaching God boldly

2. **We are to hold fast the confession of our hope.** The letter to the Hebrews speaks several times of the way in which the readers have ‘confessed’ their faith. They have told people that they have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus – says our writer – is the ‘high priest of our confession’^{□1}. He wants us to hold fast to the confidence we have said that we have in Jesus. He says there is a **future** aspect to this faith of ours. We are to ‘hold fast...our boasting in our hope’^{□2}. ‘We hold our first confidence firm to the end’^{□3}. We ‘hold fast our confession’^{□4}. We ‘show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end’^{□5}. He will say much the same thing again in 10:35, ‘Therefore do not throw away your confidence...’. Our writer repeats the thought in the light of the ‘reason for boldness’ that the Christian has in the blood of Christ. ²³*Let us hold fast the confession of hope without wavering, for he who gave us promises is faithful.* Once again he refers to something that has already happened in their lives. They have publicly let it be known that they have come to faith in Jesus. They have ‘confessed their faith’. Again our writer wants them to persist in this faith, only now he speaks of hope. Hope is faith looking forward. It is faith expecting to be rewarded in events that are still to come. Our writer knows that God gives us promises: promises of usefulness to others, promises of achievement in the kingdom of God, promises of enablement despite weakness, opposition or delay. It is because of the boldness by which we may come to God that he reckons we shall be able to maintain persistent hope for the future. The God we get to know is one who gives promises and is faithful to what he says to us. Our hope for the future grows by bold acquaintance with the throne of God’s grace.

- 1 3:1
- 2 3:6
- 3 3:14
- 4 4:14
- 5 6:11



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