

Does your church insult God?

By Richard Palmquist

Let's learn how to avoid insulting God, from Hebrews 10:14-29

Heb 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Heb 10:15 The Holy Spirit also assures us of this. For he said,

Heb 10:16 "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts and will write them on their minds,"

Heb 10:17 and, "I will never again remember their sins and their lawless deeds."

Heb 10:18 Now where there is forgiveness of these sins, there is no longer any offering for sin.

Heb 10:19 Therefore, my brothers, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus,

Heb 10:20 the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh),

Heb 10:21 and since we have a great high priest over the household of God,

Heb 10:22 let us continue to come near with sincere hearts in full assurance of faith, because our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies have been washed with pure water.

Heb 10:23 Let us continue to hold firmly to the hope that we confess without wavering, for the one who made the promise is faithful.

Heb 10:24 And let us continue to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

Heb 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another even more as you see the day coming nearer.

Heb 10:26 For if we choose to go on sinning after we have received the full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Heb 10:27 but only a terrifying prospect of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God

Heb 10:28 Anyone who violates the law of Moses dies without mercy "on the testimony of two or three witnesses."

Heb 10:29 How much more severe a punishment do you think that person deserves who tramples on God's Son, treats as common the blood of the covenant by which it was sanctified, and **insults the Spirit of grace?**

God (through the writer of Hebrews) does not want us to "insult" His Spirit of Grace. Grace is the attitude that produces a gift that is not deserved. You don't deserve the gift, and you know you don't deserve it – but there it is, a gift you are asked to receive. Let me illustrate.

What if, out of pride, I sat at a birthday celebration table and told the person who showed me unconditional love, "I see your gift, but I am not going to unwrap it. Whatever it is, I want you to take it back. Return it! I don't deserve it. I don't want it." That attitude would turn smiles to frowns, turn the "Happy Birthday" song to groans, and end the party. The party is over. But what if I gladly accepted the birthday gift, then went up to the person who gave it to me and begged, "Please give me a birthday gift." I didn't spoil the party. Worse. I insulted the gift giver. I was given a thoughtful gift, once and for all. Yet I acted as though I had not seen it at all.

How much more do we insult God when we trample on His unconditional gift of redemption from sin that was won for us by Jesus' death on the Cross! Yet, we may hear the congregation pray on Sunday morning, "Forgive us our trespasses" Others go to the confessional booth and beg, "Forgive me father, for I have sinned." Churches, both Protestant and Catholic live in the unreal world of repeatedly requesting a gift that has already been given.

Let's go to the passage from Hebrews and try to describe what the atmosphere should be in the ideal New Testament church. We will learn that the church that glorifies God is fun.

"For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified." Hebrews 10:14

What did Jesus do? "He has perfected us?" Could this be true? We read in I John 1:9 that "If we say we have not sinned the truth is not in us. . ." If we are honest, we know that we have sinned. John writes that we are to confess our sins. But John does not write that we are to confess and confess and confess and confess our sins. E. Stanley Jones wrote, "What gets your attention gets you." We are

not to attach our attention upon sin. If we do, it will bite us. The writer to the Hebrews tells us God has perfected us. Of course, this perfection is from God's point of view, because he sees us only in Christ and the death of Christ took care of our sins. So, that's what the atmosphere of our church should project – WOW! God accepts us as we are! He sees us as perfect. “Red and yellow, black and white, we are perfect in His sight.” Celebrate. The sin problem has been solved.

“The Holy Spirit also assures us of this. For He said, “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts and will write them on their minds,” Hebrews 10:15-16

So Christians meet together under the provisions of a one-way contract. When humans meet to do business, they write up two-party agreements and call them contracts. When God's people meet, they meet under a one-way contract: a covenant crafted in God's mind. Does that covenant say, “I will beat them into submission”? No. “I will clobber them with the stone tablets of Moses”? Not that either. Instead, He has written His laws upon your heart and mine. Because Jesus rose from the dead, He now comes to live inside us and brings with His Spirit the power to work out His purpose through our lives. What a gift! When believers meet, they should thank Him for His gift.

“and, ‘I will never again remember their sins and their lawless deeds.’” Hebrews 10:17

Many ministers intone, “Our sins are ever before us, Oh, Lord. We ask you to forgive us today for our many transgressions.” Talk about insult! The God of the universe says there is something He cannot **do**: He cannot remember our sins and lawless deeds, past present and future. Read the verse again: ***“I will never again remember . . .”*** What a gift! What should be our response? We should forget those sins too. If we want to be “like Jesus,” and if we are concerned about “What would Jesus do?” then the first thing on our list should be to forget what He has already forgotten. In church services we should bow before our great and gracious Lord and, with hearts devoted to Him, assure our fellow believers that we are surrendered and yielded totally to Him. We turn toward God; we do not turn away from sin. The man who cleansed his house of demons swept it clean, and when he returned there were more demons living there than before. The “House of God” needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit, not with the recollections of the demons of our lives.

“Now where there is forgiveness of these sins, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, my brothers, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great high priest over the household of God, let us continue to come near with sincere hearts in full assurance of faith, because our hearts have been sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us continue to hold firmly to the hope that we confess without wavering, for the one who made the promise is faithful.” Hebrews 10:18-23

Where did we get the idea that church is the place where you have “confession of sins” and where you “examine yourself to see what evil way lies within you?” In church thanking the Lord should be at the center of our worship. If we confess anything, we should confess our human weakness, confess our servanthood, and tell Him again that we want Him to fill and use us.

“And let us continue to consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,” Hebrews 10:24

Here is what we should do in church. In the context of serious Bible study, we should

challenge each other to tell stories of victories during the past week. Who visited the sick? How many business people met with a young person during the last week to hear of his dream for starting a business? How many homeless were taken off the streets of our community during the past week by the love of the Lord Jesus. Celebrate the way the Lord is working through His body.

“not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another even more as you see the day coming nearer.” Hebrews 10:25

Who would neglect a church where the upbeat celebration of victory over the world is the drumbeat of the meeting? Who would have anything but the habit of regularity if the church service were conducted in the enjoyment of the glory of God? When we find a source of encouragement, we move toward it. Church should be encouraging – anything but dull and boring. We should share stories of new victories in every meeting.

“For if we choose to go on sinning after we have received the full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but only a terrifying prospect of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who violates the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Hebrews 10:26-28

If we go on living in our sin – that is, constantly thinking about it, asking over and over for forgiveness for it, centering our lives upon it, stubbornly ignoring the fact that God has forgotten it – then we have “fallen away” in the words of Hebrews 6:6. To “fall from grace,” is to fall into law. We fall from grace when we cause our life to turn from the joy of sins forgotten. The pit of the law's condemnation is ready to receive those who fall like this. Here the writer of the letter to the Hebrews cuts a clear choice for us to follow when we meet in church. He says, if you are going to turn your back on the grace of God, if you are going to insist upon centering your attention upon sin, refusing to forget it, if you are going to keep on asking God to give you the gift you have already been given, thus insulting him, then you had better be prepared to live a spotlessly perfect life in conformance with all the commandments of God. Of course, this is impossible, and the writer to the Hebrews knew it was impossible, but he threw down the gauntlet: “celebrate God's gift of forgiveness or live an impossibly perfect life.” The problem with putting the church under the guilt trip of the law is that God's standard is really high. He tells us in Isaiah 64:6 even the good things we do are “filthy rags” in His sight.

“How much more severe a punishment do you think that person deserves who tramples on God's Son, treats as common the blood of the covenant by which it was sanctified, and insults the Spirit of grace?” Hebrews 10:29

The spirit of grace is insulted wherever believers meet in the arrogant belief that they must “try to do better” or “live the way Jesus would live” or “behave better.” Any slogan, any verbal whip that would cause the people gathered to experience guilt, is an insult to God who has forgotten our sins. What better gift could be given! We are to celebrate the Glory of God when we assemble. The word “glory” has many meanings, but the central thought is joy. If God looks down and watches us allow Jesus to live through us to do His will, God enjoys Himself. When He experiences that joy He must be in His glory! Thus, He shares that enjoyment with us.

When we meet, if it is FUN to celebrate God's unconditional love for us, that's worship!