

## *What about Hebrews 10:24-25?*

Although the New Testament knows nothing of what is commonly known as ‘public worship’, this does not mean that there is no new-covenant call for believers to assemble. Quite the opposite! Indeed, it could be argued that the precise meaning of *ekklēsia* is ‘the called-out ones in assembly’. Of course believers assemble – this is entirely new covenant – but not for a ‘time’ of ‘worship’; certainly not for ‘public worship’!<sup>1</sup>

So why do believers assemble? In a word, for their edification, their mutual edification; and through this, of course, the glory of God.

And that takes us to Hebrews 10:24-25, the passage which is so very often misunderstood and misapplied. In keeping with this subject as a whole, as a result of such misunderstanding most believers end up in the wrong place – ‘public worship’ – failing to reach the right place – mutual edification under the priesthood of all believers.

### ***The lead-up to the verses***

As we have seen, when he was poised to write Romans 12:1-2, Paul made it clear that what he was about to say depended absolutely on all that he had taught in the preceding chapters. The same goes for the writer of the Hebrews when he came to write Hebrews 10:24-25. Alas, most believers are only too eager simply to wrench the verses off the page, paying – at best – scant attention to how the verses depend on the previous nine and half chapters of the book, and how they lead into what follows. While I cannot quote all that material here – although it is vital to bear it in mind – I can at least set the verses in their entire paragraph:

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<sup>1</sup> Contrary to popular belief, Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 11:2,17-18,20; 14:26; Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16; 1 Tim. 4:13; Heb. 10:24-25 do *not* refer to gatherings of believers for ‘worship’, let alone ‘public worship’.

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Brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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 (Heb. 10:19-25).

This is the cardinal passage in Hebrews for the new-covenant gathering of the *ekklēsia* in a congregational sense; indeed, it is the key passage in all Scripture. Notice at once that the word ‘worship’ is nowhere in sight. Even so, ‘worship’ is absolutely fundamental to what is really being said here – as it is throughout the book. And what is the underlying point of the book? Clearly, it is the consequences of the discontinuity of the old and new covenants; specifically, the consequences of the contrast between them, with the new covenant being the ‘better’ covenant (Heb. 7:19.22; 8:6,13) – on my count the word ‘better’ appears a dozen times in the book. Getting down to brass tacks: the writer argues that in Christ old-covenant ‘worship’ has come to an end – its shadows having been abolished – with ‘better’ ‘worship’ – new-covenant ‘worship’ – now firmly established.

Peterson:

Hebrews presents the most complete and fully integrated theology of ‘worship’ in the New Testament. All the important categories of Old Testament thinking on this subject – sanctuary, sacrifice, altar, priesthood and covenant – are taken up and related to the person and work of Jesus Christ [being fulfilled in him, he being the eternal verity of those shadows – DG]. More than any other New Testament document, Hebrews makes it clear that the inauguration of the new covenant by Jesus means the fulfilment and replacement of the whole pattern of approach to God established under the Mosaic covenant... [Christ having abolished, rendered obsolete, set aside the old covenant – DG].

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The ministry of Christ – past, present and future – is portrayed in Hebrews as the only basis on which we can relate to God and offer him acceptable ‘worship’... Christians are liberated from cultic<sup>2</sup> obligations in any earthly sense, to ‘serve’ God in a new way.<sup>3</sup>

Again:

The whole burden of Hebrews is that the high priesthood, sacrifices and sanctuary of Judaism find their fulfilment in the person and work of Jesus Christ, not in the activities of the church or Christian ministers (Heb. 4:14; 8:1; 10:19-21).<sup>4</sup>

Just so! And this must govern our understanding of Hebrews 10:24-25. Whatever the passage teaches, that teaching is based foursquare upon the fundamental fact that the old-covenant shadows are all fulfilled in the new covenant in and through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ is all (Col. 3:11). In other words, our view of Hebrews 10:24-25 must flow directly out of the writer’s teaching up to this point.

Let me give a brief summary of the pertinent teaching of the chapters leading up to the verses in question.

In the plan of God, sin was to be removed for the elect – not elect angels, but elect men; Christ, therefore, had to become a man under the law in order that he, as a man under the law, could atone for sinners:

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<sup>2</sup> I repeat an earlier note: The word ‘cultic’ can be used by way of criticism – for instance, when referring to a (probably) extreme religious group. *That is not the way it is used here.* Rather, it speaks of: ‘...the way religious experience is expressed in a service performed by a congregation, almost certainly conducted by one or more appointed officials, in set forms, and usually in a special place’ (see Peterson p30). So, for example, a typical church ‘service’ with the usual hymns or songs, prayers, sermon *etc.*, led by a minister, pastor, elder or whatever, is, in the terms of this book, a cultic performance.

<sup>3</sup> Peterson pp228-229. For his full exposition of all this invaluable material, see Peterson pp228-260.

<sup>4</sup> Peterson p244.

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Since... the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the 'service' of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people (Heb. 2:14-17).

As Paul put it:

God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons (Gal. 4:4-5).

Having become a man, Christ accomplished redemption for the elect once and for all through his work as the one and only high priest who offered his blood as the culminating sacrifice of his life of perfect obedience to his Father under the law:

When Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:11-12).

Believers can say:

By [God's] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:10-14).

So:

After making purification for sins, [Christ] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3).

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In short: the old, temporary covenant (Gal. 3:23-25) has gone; the permanent has come.<sup>5</sup> This means that the endless, old-covenant circular motion of repeated sin followed by ineffective sacrifice (Heb. 7:18,28; 10:1-11) has been done away with (Heb. 8:13); the one, perfect, finished, completed and effective sacrifice has been offered and accepted. Everything has been accomplished; the work is complete (John 19:30). The veil which barred access to God has been torn down by Christ's work – from top to bottom (Matt. 27:50-51). Thus, 'worship' has been transformed; the old, ineffective ministry, performed by sacerdotal priests in an earthly building on behalf of the children of Israel, has been superseded by a new and effective 'worship' in the heavenly realm by the one great high priest; he has opened a 'new and living way' (Heb. 10:19-20) by his one offering (Heb. 10:14) for believers to enter into that realm to 'worship' with and by him as royal priests; believers – all believers:

In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were [spiritually]<sup>6</sup> baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise (Gal. 3:21-29; see also Rom. 3:22; 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:11).

Thus, now – in the days of the new covenant, the better covenant (Heb. 7:19,22; 8:6,13) – believers, as sons of God, spiritual priests and kings in Christ (Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10), are seated with Christ in heaven (Eph. 1:3; 2:6; Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 12:22-24). What a contrast with the old covenant, when:

...gifts and sacrifices [were] offered that [could not] perfect the conscience of the 'worshipper' (*latreuonta*) (Heb. 9:9).

But now:

...the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, [has purified] our conscience

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<sup>5</sup> See my *Three*.

<sup>6</sup> See my *Infant; Baptist*.

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from dead works to ‘serve’ (*latreuein*) the living God (Heb. 9:14).

Christ is all (Col. 3:11). Christ is the one and only ‘minister’ (*leitourgos*) of the real ‘sanctuary, the true tabernacle, set up by the Lord, not by man’ (Heb. 8:2). He has a ‘ministry’ (*leitourgia*) which is superior to that of earthly priests (Heb. 8:6) since they could ‘serve’ (*latreuousin*) only ‘at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven’ (Heb. 8:5). In contrast, believers can say with confidence: ‘Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf’ (Heb. 9:24), and, consequently, ‘we have... a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek’ (Heb. 6:19-20). Christ accomplished all this by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and intercession;<sup>7</sup> he is the ‘minister’ of the new covenant, and the ‘place’ of his present ministry is heaven, not earth.

Hence the writer’s powerful appeal:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. 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... Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:19-23).

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<sup>7</sup> See my *Imputed*.

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In telling believers to ‘draw near’ (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:9-23), the writer, of course, does not mean them to go to ‘church’, take part in ‘a service’, and so ‘worship’ God. Not at all. The writer is urging believers, day in, day out, to appreciate, enjoy and experience to the full, the glories of what they possess in Christ. He is encouraging them to have a lively sense of their position in Christ, and to move them, in light of their position in Christ, consciously to live each moment of every day ‘serving’ God, ‘worshipping’ God, through Jesus Christ, doing so in the heavenly sanctuary, entering right into his presence:

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel... Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable ‘worship’ (*latreuōmen*), with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:22-24,28).

It surely does not need saying that the writer is not arguing that all his readers literally, physically, have travelled to Jerusalem, Mount Zion!<sup>8</sup> The setting is entirely spiritual, and must be read with that understanding: we believers ‘have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable “worship”, with reverence and awe’.

While this is true in a glorious once-for-all sense in their conversion, believers must consciously and continuously remember and live this out:

Let us then with confidence draw near [better, keep on drawing near] to the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16).

And that takes us full circle to the passage in hand:

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<sup>8</sup> See my ‘The Two Mountains’ and ‘On Which Mountain Are You Living?’ on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page.

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This must not be institutionalised or desiccated into ‘going to church to take part in a time of worship’. Those who argue in that way are showing that they have failed to grasp the magnificence of the writer’s extended and detailed argument thus far.

Moreover, just as Romans 12:1-2 leads to the rest of Paul’s letter to the Romans – dealing with everyday life, including the assembly of believers – so the writer to the Hebrews moves to a life of faith in Hebrews 11, followed by: ‘Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...’ (Heb. 12:1 and on). In turn, this leads to Hebrews 12 and 13. ‘The race’, please note, does not refer to an hour or so in ‘a worship service’. (Echoes, surely, of ‘walking the Way’ – see the previous chapter). Take the men and women of Hebrews 11. Clearly, even in the days of the old covenant (and before) they were ‘worshipping’ God – not in meetings but in living out their lives of faith, trust, obedience and good works.

Let Peterson sum it up:

Hebrews is truly essential reading for those who will establish a Christian theology of ‘worship’. The writer takes up a number of Old Testament themes and shows how they remain an essential foundation for our thinking [or ought to – DG]. In a variety of ways, he demonstrates that acceptable ‘worship’ is only possible on God’s terms and in the way that he makes

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possible. God initiates and maintains a relationship with his people on the basis of the covenant he makes with them. His chosen sanctuary [in Christ in heaven – DG] is a focus point for that engagement, but genuine ‘worship’ will be offered in every sphere of life. A God-ordained priesthood, authentic sacrifices, and effective cleansing and sanctification must be provided for those who draw near to God and ‘serve’ him.

The writer also shows us, however, how these foundational Old Testament themes must be reinterpreted in the light of their fulfilment in Christ. *Indeed, our understanding of the person and work of Christ can be greatly enriched by viewing the central truth of the gospel in terms of transformed ‘worship’ categories.* The perfect sacrifice of Jesus provides the basis for relating to God in the new covenant. His high priestly work secures a once for all [time] atonement for sin, the cleansing of our consciences and continuing right of direct access to God. Expressed in other terms, this means participation by faith now in the joyful assembly of all God’s people in the heavenly Jerusalem. The certainty of access to God in the present is the guarantee of literal participation in the coming kingdom or city of God. In other words, Hebrews uses the language of ‘worship’ to emphasise the realised or inaugurated aspect of Christian eschatology.<sup>9</sup>

With his:

...Indeed, our understanding of the person and work of Christ can be greatly enriched by viewing the central truth of the gospel in terms of transformed ‘worship’ categories...

Peterson is putting in a positive way what I was referring to when I said that ‘public worship’ diminishes Christ.

As the writer to the Hebrews approached the end of his letter, he specified the 24/7 sense of ‘worship’ with crystal clarity:

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

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<sup>9</sup> Peterson p253, emphasis mine.

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Thus the context of Hebrews 10:24-25 shows that the verses do not mean what they are usually taken to mean; they speak of something far richer and far more spiritually embracing than ‘public worship’ ever could be. Why do believers assemble? Having got rid of the negative – not for ‘public worship’ – which so grievously diminishes the biblical import of the passage, what of the positive?

### ***The biblical import of the verses***

While we know, spiritually speaking, that when we are ‘drawing near’ to God through Christ we are seated with him in heaven, believers still have to assemble in a physical sense; and it is not only a matter of duty – they want to meet; having the Spirit, it is ‘spiritually natural’ for them to assemble. For what purpose? What need is the meeting of believers designed to satisfy?

The gathering of believers (in an earthly sense), while it is not meant for ‘public worship’, is designed by God for the spiritual benefit of the believing community (Heb. 3:12-15; 10:24-25). The intention is that, by the exercise of their mutual ministry (Heb. 5:12) as members of the priesthood of all believers, they might encourage each other, urge each other by ‘word of exhortation’ (Heb. 13:22) to hold ‘firmly to the end’ their original confidence (Heb. 3:14), to heed the warnings to persevere in the faith and grow to maturity, and to watch over and care for one another (Heb. 5:11 – 6:12; 10:19-23; 12:1-29), doing this as often as they meet – even (possibly) daily (Heb. 3:13). This is the context of Hebrews 10:24-25.

Coals on a fire will die if kept apart; bring them together and they will glow in warmth.

There is, however, more to it than that. Today, ‘to encourage’ is commonly taken to mean ‘to compliment, praise, or be nice to, be sweet to, to cheer up, to egg on, to boost’. But ‘to encourage’ in its biblical sense – *parakaleo* – is far richer, far deeper. It has the thought of ‘to instruct, exhort, warn, rebuke, strengthen, admonish, implore, even to the extent of saying things the other does not want to hear, and all for each other’s edification’ (1

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Cor. 14:24-25; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Heb. 4:12); colloquially, ‘to put backbone into each other’.<sup>10</sup>

‘Each other’ – yes, indeed. Note the use of ‘one another’ in Hebrews 10:24-25; it appears twice: ‘Let us consider how to stir up *one another* to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*’. Saints are to assemble not *merely* (do not miss the emphasis) to listen to one man delivering a monologue – certainly not to a man giving them yet more and more facts; rather, they meet to engage in mutual, spiritual encouragement or edification. Moreover, this is something active, not passive; it involves speaking, teaching, and doing so, as it were, horizontally, not merely downwardly from pulpit (or platform) to pew (or cinema seat).

This, of course, does not in any way rule out preaching and teaching as it is commonly understood – far from it; hence my use and stress of ‘merely’ – but Hebrews 10:24-25 goes far deeper and far wider than that. Nevertheless, it definitely includes it. We know (Eph. 4:7-16) that elders should train the saints to nurture themselves and then one another.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, we have the apostolic pattern to hand. Paul was teaching the Romans when he wrote Romans 12 and on! It was in light of his teaching in Roman 12:1-2 that he appealed for the exercise of mutual ministry within a lifetime of ‘worship’. Jesus was teaching when he told the woman at the well that believers ‘worship’ in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). And surely the writer to the Hebrews had something edifying to say to his readers!

But what about 1 John 2:20-21,27? Does John not rule out the need for teaching? Not at all! Clearly, whatever John meant he

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<sup>10</sup> I am reminded of an illustration Spurgeon used. He saw a notice on the gate of a glue factory: ‘Bones Wanted’. Yes, he thought, and mostly backbones!

<sup>11</sup> See my *Pastor*.

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was not ruling out the need for a teacher;<sup>12</sup> after all, he was teaching when he told believers:

You have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it... The anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you (1 John 2:20-21,27).

The truth is, the teacher is knocking at an open door. All believers have the Spirit – who enables them to receive spiritual teaching whether directly, through the word, or by means of a teacher, all under the word in the power of the Spirit.

But what is the teacher's task? Teachers in the *ekklēsia* are not there merely to impart information – which, to judge by their discourses, a growing number of teachers seem to think is the sum total of their responsibility.<sup>13</sup> Believers do not assemble under a preacher merely to be given information; they need instruction, yes, but they need a good deal more than mere facts. This incessant call for facts! This endless doling out of facts – PowerPoint, sermon notes, and all! Thomas Gradgrind put it as well as any. Under the heading: 'The One Thing Needful', this is what (accommodated by me) the schoolmaster, spelling out his philosophy of education, had to say:

Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these [saints and sinners – DG] nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life... You can only [edify saints and convert sinners – DG] upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them... Stick to Facts, sir!.. In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See the following chapter for more on this point.

<sup>13</sup> See my *Preaching; Secret*.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Dickens: *Hard Times*. Gradgrind actually said: 'Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!; nothing but Facts'.

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Contrary to Gradgrind, preachers and teachers must speak to the heart, to the feelings, the will, to persuade and move – addressing heart and life, not merely head.<sup>15</sup> Of course facts are essential, and of course truth enters through the mind, but the heart is the citadel that must be stormed (Rom. 6:17).

Above all, all preaching and teaching should be centred on Christ. ‘Christ is all’ (Col. 3:11), and he must be preached (1 Cor. 2:2; 9:16; 2 Cor. 4:5) as the very heart of preaching. As Peterson put it:

Preaching about Christ must be at the heart of the Christian theology of ‘worship’. As in the Old Testament, the word of the Lord is central to a genuine encounter with God. Those who are concerned about God-honouring ‘worship’ will be concerned about the proclamation of the gospel in the world and in the church, in public teaching and private dialogue. If ‘worship’ is an engagement with God on the terms that he proposes, and in the way that he alone makes possible, preaching Christ is key<sup>16</sup> to that engagement. Acts points to the proclamation of the heavenly rule of Christ, with all its implications, as the means chosen by God to draw people into relationship with himself, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s great act of redemption in Christ is the basis of the call to enter into and enjoy the blessings of the new covenant. ‘Worship’ in New Testament [that is, new-covenant] terms means responding with one’s whole life and being to the divine kingship of Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

And this must be done in order to keep reinforcing the vital principle that the stated ministry is designed by Christ, not to produce a spoon-fed dependency, but to produce believers able to edify themselves, and then to edify each other. Note Paul’s words to the Romans: even though he was an apostle, he wanted to visit Rome, not only to be a blessing to the Romans, *but because they would also be a blessing to him*:

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<sup>15</sup> See my *Preaching; Sowed; Secret*.

<sup>16</sup> Original ‘is a key’. Preaching Christ must be key.

<sup>17</sup> Peterson p144. See my ‘Thoughts on the Kingdom’ on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page.

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I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong – that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith... My brothers... you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another (Rom. 1:11-12; 15:14).

Why, even in the context of Romans 15:16,<sup>18</sup> note the apostle’s emphasis on the all-body ministry (Rom. 15:14-17; not forgetting Rom. 12:3-8).

This is where Hebrews 10:24-25 comes into its own. We can only experience the manifestation of the spiritual priesthood of all believers within the local assembly of God’s people – in each particular *ekklēsia*, in every separate *ekklēsia*. This is what Christ intended and set up, and why. Every believer, therefore, has a privileged part, an essential part, to play in this local expression of the communal ‘priesthood of *all* believers’ – each believer being a living stone in the temple and, at the same time, one of the priests sacrificing within that temple. What is more, each believer is at the same time part of the sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). And all of it is ‘living’ – ‘living’ stones, a ‘living’ sacrifice, in the temple of the ‘living’ God, the *ekklēsia* of the ‘living’ God, in the city of the ‘living’ God, serving the ‘living’ and true God, all through a new and ‘living’ way, founded on Christ the ‘living’ stone (Rom. 12:1; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 3:15; Heb. 10:20; 12:22; 1 Pet. 2:4-5). Living! We are not talking about an organisation, an institution, but an organism, a living body. And the priesthood of all believers plays an integral part, a vital part, a *living* part, in it all. This concept of *ekklēsia* life is written large across the New Testament; namely, the total involvement of believers in glorifying God in the mutual edification of each other, Christ himself being present (Matt. 18:20). He wants them to assemble in order to engage in the mutual ministry of the priesthood of all believers as members of

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<sup>18</sup> ‘On some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God’ (Rom. 15:15-16). On the apostle’s use of ‘priestly’ here, see my *Pastor; The Priesthood; No Sacerdotalism!*.

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the body of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 12:12-27), members one of another (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25). This is the express purpose of their gathering – so that they might encourage, stiffen and put backbone into each other, especially in the testing days leading to the final judgment. This is part of the exercise of their privilege as members of the priesthood of all believers. Christ stipulates that *all* his people must be wholly involved in it all. I am not suggesting that all are able to address a congregation, but no child of God is without some ability to pass on a word of experience, encouragement, instruction, comfort or reproof to a fellow-believer.<sup>19</sup>

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Since the priesthood of all believers has such an important role to play, I need to say a little more about it – and that takes us to the next chapter.

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<sup>19</sup> See my ‘Through a Glass Wall’ on my [sermonaudio.com](http://sermonaudio.com) page.