

# Living in Christian Community

Devotional Reading: Hebrews 1:1–6

Background Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1–12; Psalm 122:1–9;  
Hebrews 10:19–25

## Matthew 28:18–20

<sup>18</sup> Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. <sup>19</sup> Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

## Hebrews 10:22–25

<sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. <sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.



## Key Text

*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.* —Hebrews 10:23

# Social Teachings of the Church

## Unit 3: Fulfilling Our Obligations to God and Society

Lessons 9–13

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the facets of worship in these Scripture passages.
2. Evaluate whether these facets are present in the learner's life.
3. Make a plan to encourage fellow believers to live out their faith.

### Lesson Outline

#### Introduction

- A. Privileges and Responsibilities
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Building the Church (Matthew 28:18–20)

- A. Jesus' Authority (v. 18)
- B. Jesus' Command (vv. 19–20a)  
*Go and Teach . . . All Neighbors?*
- C. Jesus' Presence (v. 20b)

#### II. Living as the Church (Hebrews 10:22–25)

- A. Approaching Rightly (v. 22)
- B. Holding to Faith (v. 23)
- C. Encouraging One Another (v. 24)
- D. Gathering Together (v. 25)  
*The Monastic Life*

#### Conclusion

- A. Life in the Kingdom
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Privileges and Responsibilities

My teenage children have household chores assigned to them. It is a way they contribute to our family responsibilities. Some days, my kids exceed all expectations for their tasks. On other days, however, I must remind them to complete their chores. Often, they ask, "Do we have to?"

My children's response creates the opportunity to talk about reliability, trustworthiness, and the importance of family. These chores are not just busywork. Each task, when completed, supports and strengthens the entire family. Each person's contribution is vital to the health of the whole.

Belonging to God's family also includes specific responsibilities to God and other believers. Today's lesson illustrates examples of these obligations. As we fulfill our commitments in obedience to God and our Christian brothers and sisters, we discover that life in God's family is full of challenge, meaningful work, and relationship-building. Life in community offers fulfillment and eternal hope.

### B. Lesson Context

Today's lesson comes from two New Testament texts. The first is Matthew 28, which describes events following Jesus' resurrection. Mary discovers the empty tomb, brings the news to the disciples, and Jesus appears to them (Matthew 28:1–10). Religious officials pay off Roman soldiers to tell a different story (28:11–15). These events take place in and around Jerusalem. When we pick up with our text, however, the disciples are on a mountain-top in Galilee (28:16). Jesus gives them instructions for continuing ministry (28:18–20).

The second text comes from the book of Hebrews. Its unnamed author draws significantly from the Old Testament, quoting or referencing it nearly 30 times. The book's use of Old Testament passages strengthens its claims regarding Jesus and the new covenant. In particular, the author emphasizes Jesus' superiority (Hebrews 1:5–2:18), priestly status (4:14–5:10), and eternal sacrifice (9:1–10:18).

The verses just prior to today's lesson establish that believers have access to the presence of

God because of the work of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 10:19–20). Jesus serves as the “great priest over the house of God” (10:21). Through Jesus, believers may approach the very throne of God (see 4:16). Hebrews describes God’s house in new, spiritual terms (3:6). Jesus is not the priest of a physical building, such as the temple in Jerusalem. Instead, he is the priest over the very people of God (Ephesians 2:21–22). As members of God’s family, “living stones” that make up his house (1 Peter 2:5), we host God’s Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16). God calls believers to live faithfully in community, to respond to him, and to serve each other.

## I. Building the Church

(Matthew 28:18–20)

### A. Jesus’ Authority (v. 18)

**18. Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.**

The ancient Greek word *authority* in this passage is translated as “power” in other contexts (example: John 19:10–11). We often think of “authority” as the *right* to do something, while “power” refers to the *ability* to do something. The two concepts are closely related, with slightly different connotations. Jesus has both authority and power in an absolute sense. He asserts his power and proclaims the dominion given him as a precursor to his right to pass influence and authority on to his disciples. The word *all* appears throughout this section of Matthew 28, indicating that nothing is partial or half-hearted here!

The heavenly Father, who sent the Son (Galatians 4:4), grants the Son all power and authority (John 3:35; 13:3; 17:2). No place *in heaven* or *on earth* falls beyond the reach of Jesus’ divine sovereignty. During his earthly ministry, Jesus exercised power over disease, natural elements like the wind and waves, and ultimately, death (Matthew 4:23–25; 8:23–27; John 11:43–44; etc.). His resurrection is definitive proof of his claim (Matthew 28:6). Jesus has possessed all power and authority from the very beginning (John 1:1–3). His resurrection confirms it (Philippians 2:8–11), and his authority will remain true forever (Revelation 1:18).

### What Do You Think?

In what ways can your choices in the coming week demonstrate that Christ is the ultimate authority and power?

### Digging Deeper

How can those choices also challenge popular alternative “authorities”?

### B. Jesus’ Command (vv. 19–20a)

**19a. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,**

Having established his authority and power, Jesus commands his disciples to *go*. They are empowered through their relationship with him (compare Matthew 10:1, 7). The disciples’ task is to *make disciples* by teaching others about the resurrected Christ. Jesus’ commission in this half-verse presents non-Israelites (Gentiles) as a new mission field for the disciples. Gentiles are included by his use of the phrase *all nations*. We now refer to the directives in this verse as “disciple-making.”

During his three-year earthly ministry, Jesus focused primarily on Israel (see Matthew 10:5–6; 15:21–24). He also indicated, however, that his kingdom will be inclusive, welcoming people from all backgrounds (8:11; Luke 13:29; see lesson 3). This expansion fulfills the promises of Old Testament prophets (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; Jeremiah 3:17; Daniel 4:17; Micah 4:2; etc.). The inclusive nature of Jesus’ kingdom fulfills God’s promise to Abraham that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:3; compare Galatians 3:8).

### What Do You Think?

What is one step you can take in the coming week to help share the gospel with a nation other than your own?

### Digging Deeper

What distractions might divert your attention from this goal, and how will you address these distractions?

### Go and Teach . . . All Neighbors?

When I was ten years old, I was determined

to follow Jesus' Great Commission. I wasn't old enough to become a missionary to all nations, but I wanted to do something concrete. With my brother's help, I started a Bible club for the kids in our neighborhood. I worked hard to prepare the "lessons" for each meeting. The "nations" might have to wait, but the kids in my neighborhood couldn't!

The club lasted only a few weeks, but I fondly remember the experience. It was a ten-year-old's imperfect way of obeying Jesus' command to teach the gospel.

Even as an adult, I find sharing the gospel with "the nations" intimidating. My neighbors feel more accessible. How can you love your neighbors and "make disciples" of them? It may not look like a weekly Bible club, but you could host events with your neighbors to share the gospel. Is there a first step God has placed on your heart for the upcoming week? —B. R.

### 19b. "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

Making disciples includes *baptizing them*. Baptism signifies entry into the community of God and identifies a person as being "in Christ" (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Colossians 2:11–12). Baptism is accompanied by repentance and the gift of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2:38; 19:4–6). Through baptism, believers stand in solidarity with Jesus and publicly identify themselves as a part of God's people.

In this verse, Jesus does not explain every aspect of baptism but says it should occur *in the name* of the triune God: *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit*. This threefold guidance became the standard formula for the baptismal practices of the early church (compare the noncanonical Didache 7:1–3). Jesus'

guidance also recalls his baptism, during which the presence of God the Father and God the Spirit was evident (Matthew 3:16–17). Becoming a disciple means identifying with Christ and learning to walk in his ways.

### 20a. "and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Jesus' disciples are to teach what they learned from him. Jesus' words shift the disciples' role from that of students to mentors and guides. They move from *disciples* to *disciple-makers*. This change does not mean that their learning, growth, transformation, or development are over—these things continue forever in the life of a disciple—but it does shift their responsibility. They've had Jesus as their teacher, and now he gives them his authority to do the *teaching*.

It is not enough to know Jesus' teachings; he also calls believers to *obey everything* he has taught. Observing Jesus' commands means putting them into practice. Discipleship requires a lifelong commitment to both learning and obedience. Christ is the foundation of our faith (1 Corinthians 3:11). As disciples receive teaching, we come to accept Christ as Lord and learn to "walk" in him (Colossians 2:6–7). His "yoke is easy," and his "burden is light" (Matthew 11:30). Jesus invites his followers to "learn from" him, for he is meek and humble, a safe and restful place for our souls (11:29).

Believers do not graduate from discipleship. We must learn to follow Jesus through every stage of life. Following him will look different depending on the season—teenager, adult, spouse, parent, grandparent, widow(er), etc. However, being a disciple of Jesus informs each transition and provides us opportunities to present the good news to others. Disciples become disciple-makers in an everlasting cycle of learning, growth, and outreach.

## How to Say It

Amos	Ay-mus.
Galatians	Guh-lay-shunz.
Gentiles	Jen-tiles.
Hebrews	Hee-breus.
Jeremiah	Jair-uh-my-uh.
Zechariah	Zek-uh-rye-uh.
Zephaniah	Zef-uh-nye-uh.

### C. Jesus' Presence (v. 20b)

### 20b. "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Matthew begins his Gospel with the birth of Jesus as the fulfillment of prophecy: "They will call him Immanuel . . . God with us" (Matthew 1:23; quoting Isaiah 7:14). In this half-verse, Matthew concludes his Gospel with the promise that Jesus

will always be *with* his followers. There is no place we can go from his presence (Psalm 139:7–10).

The phrase *end of the age* refers to Christ's physical return to earth and the subsequent judgment of both the righteous and the wicked (see commentary on Hebrews 10:25, below; compare Matthew 13:39–49; 24:3).

## II. Living as the Church

(Hebrews 10:22–25)

### A. Approaching Rightly (v. 22)

**22. let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.**

The following verses from the book of Hebrews feature three exhortations that guide the actions of believers. Each starts with the words *let us*. The first is in this verse: Christ-followers are encouraged to *draw near to God* (compare Hebrews 4:16). Direct access to God is available to every believer since the inner curtain of the temple was torn at Jesus' death (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). We now have "confidence" to freely approach God by the blood of Jesus (Hebrews 10:19; compare 1 John 5:14–15). The book of James promises that God "will come near" to those who "come near" to him (4:8).

The author connects having a *sincere heart* with the *full assurance that faith brings*, meaning that we are to approach God filled with complete confidence in his fidelity. The genuine center of our person must trust in God's promises. Believers can have this kind of faith because he has proved his faithfulness to those who have walked in faith before us (Hebrews 11:1–12:3).

This verse includes imagery of a worshipper entering the temple. The phrase *hearts sprinkled* recalls the practice of sprinkling sacrificial blood upon the altar to cleanse both the people and the implements of the temple from impurity (Exodus 24:6–8; 29:16–21; see Hebrews 9:13, 18–22). God promises to "sprinkle clean water" and to give "a new heart" and "a new spirit" as part of his new covenant (Ezekiel 36:25–27; compare Hebrews



Visual for Lesson 13. *Display this visual as you ask the Discussion Questions associated with Hebrews 10:24.*

8:7–13; 10:15–18). The cleansing in question is *from a guilty conscience*, which is characterized by unbelief (see Hebrews 3:12).

In contrast to the sacrifices outlined in the Law of Moses, Jesus "offered for all time one sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:12). As a result, we no longer need a ceremony involving physical blood, as we benefit from the purifying effects of Jesus' atoning blood. This is the perfect and eternal "blood of the covenant" (Hebrews 9:20; compare Luke 22:20).

We also must approach God's throne with *bodies washed with pure water*. The author may be referencing the ritual cleansing that occurred before entering the tabernacle (see Leviticus 16:4). Another possibility is that the author alludes to water baptism (compare 1 Peter 3:21; see commentary on Matthew 18:19b, above). Scripture describes baptism as a washing of the person who has come to faith (Acts 22:16). It is more likely, however, that this text reveals a more significant picture, one in which baptism is only a part. Believers experience spiritual cleansing through the blood of Christ (Hebrews 9:14) and sanctification through the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:11).

### B. Holding to Faith (v. 23)

**23. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.**

This verse includes the second *let us*. The work of Jesus, which grants us access to God the Father, is trustworthy and may be boldly declared. The

author encourages us to do so *unswervingly*. This message undoubtedly speaks to those considering abandoning the Christian faith to return to the Law of Moses. But these words also encourage those who are enduring periods of discouragement.

Our circumstances do not determine our faithfulness. Believers are called to remain faithful because God is *faithful* (1 Corinthians 1:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:24; 2 Timothy 2:11–13). He has been faithful to his promises in the past (see Hebrews 6:13–18; 11:11), and he continues to be faithful to us through his Son, Christ Jesus, “the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (12:2).

#### What Do You Think?

How does trusting in God’s faithfulness help you remain steadfast in your faith?

#### Digging Deeper

Can you share a time when you experienced God’s faithfulness?

### C. Encouraging One Another (v. 24)

**24. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds,**

The third *let us* encourages believers in relationships. The word *consider* means to think about something attentively. The idea pushes us outside of our personal faith lives and into a place where others gain our attention and understanding. The author exhorts believers to influence *one another* in attitude and action. Our lives should stimulate *love* among our Christian brothers and sisters (see Galatians 6:10). This is more than a gentle nudge; our lives are to motivate and incite each other toward something *good*. Christian love is not just a theoretical idea but a demonstrated act. Loving *deeds* should flow from our salvation.

In other words, our faith needs to make an observable difference in the lives of others. James reminds us that faith without works is dead (James 2:17, 26). The author of Hebrews provides specific examples of behaviors that show Christian love. These behaviors include practicing hospitality, caring for those who are suffering, maintaining purity in relationships, and contentment with material possessions (Hebrews 13:1–5). Lov-

ing actions should naturally emerge from trust in our loving God (compare 1 John 3:18).

#### What Do You Think?

In what practical ways can you encourage others in your community to live out love and good works?

#### Digging Deeper

What challenges might you face in this process, and how can you overcome them?

### D. Gathering Together (v. 25)

**25. not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.**

The author calls God’s people toward regular *meeting*. The intensity of this message is revealed by the author’s using the negative. Instead of saying, “Meet together,” the author urges believers to *not* forsake gathering *together*. He further reinforces the directive by admitting *some* have stopped attending gatherings.

It is unclear whether the author of Hebrews refers specifically to weekly worship services or more informal gatherings. The text does not specify the reasons for these absences, but the lack of regular commitment from some puts the entire community of believers at risk. First-century culture was hostile to Christianity, and our current culture is not much different. Regular gathering in the name of Jesus to worship, fellowship, and learn helps us function healthfully as the body of Christ (see Acts 2:42).

The *Day approaching* likely refers to the future day of judgment when Christ will return (see 1 Corinthians 1:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:1–3; 2 Thessalonians 2:1–4; 2 Peter 3:10). Expectations of judgment and redemption are rooted in Old Testament prophetic texts (Isaiah 2:12–21; 24:21–23; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18–20; 8:9–14; Zephaniah 1:14–18; Zechariah 14:1; etc.). Anticipation of this day adds a sense of urgency to the need for believers’ obedience and their commitment to the community (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:1–8). The author again

emphasizes the importance of assembling by urging them to gather *all the more* as time passes.

### What Do You Think?

Why do you think gathering as a community of faith is vital for spiritual growth?

### Digging Deeper

How has your experience of Christian fellowship strengthened your faith?

## The Monastic Life

A group of monastics from the third century AD lived in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine. Church history calls them the Desert Fathers and Mothers. They embraced lives of poverty, self-denial, and prayer. Their commitment led them to isolation from the broader world to focus on obedience to Christ. Their example made me wonder whether a life of solitude and silence would result in an easier spiritual life.

God does not call all of us to monastic orders. Most of us are called to lives filled with noise, distraction, and multi-layered relationships. We have dependents—jobs, friends, and families. Devout followers serve and obey God wherever he guides us, whether in a quiet, monastic community or a bustling environment among crowds.

The writer of Hebrews urges us to encourage one another in faith. Do you strengthen others? Or have you isolated yourself? How can you serve as a vital and vibrant part of a faith community? How can you uplift those within your sphere of influence?  
—B. R.

## Conclusion

### A. Life in the Kingdom

Life in God's kingdom is not a solo journey but a family endeavor. We fill various roles throughout our lives, as learners, proclaimers, mentors, guides, encouragers, worshipers, and those who serve. We participate in various activities to enhance and develop our faith. Matthew's Gospel urges disciples to participate in kingdom building by proclaiming the gospel, baptizing new disciples, and teaching

the way of King Jesus. It is a call for ongoing obedience to him, commitment to one another, and care for humanity. The facets of worship presented in Jesus' Great Commission point believers toward preaching and teaching, sacraments, public declarations of faith, and personal relationships with other believers through apprenticeship or mentoring.

The book of Hebrews provides clear instructions on how believers are to behave within a Christian community. Unity in this community is anchored in the hope we have through faith in Christ (Hebrews 6:19). Worship elements highlighted throughout today's passage include drawing near to God in confident faith, remembering our cleansing through Jesus' blood, holding onto hope with steadfastness, encouraging one another in good works of service, and regularly meeting for worship and fellowship.

Although today's texts don't use the word *worship*, a holistic life of worship is outlined within them. They pave the way for a comprehensive life as a disciple of Christ. Worship naturally occurs when God's people gather and faithfully uphold his commands. Together, we remember Jesus' sacrifice and person, celebrate his resurrection, and band together to make new disciples. We faithfully teach what Jesus taught, support one another, and urge each other toward actionable love. The people of God need one another as we follow King Jesus—the one who will one day return to judge the living and the dead (2 Timothy 4:1). Is there a facet of worship outlined in these texts that is missing from your personal practice? Have you taken an active role in both faithful discipleship and disciple-making?

### B. Prayer

All-powerful God, through your Son, you invite us to participate in building your kingdom. Empower us through your Spirit to make disciples. Strengthen us to live faithfully in light of your promises. Show us how to love and serve one another as we wait for Christ's return. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Christian community obeys God, loves others, and gathers faithfully.