

How to Help Others Remain Faithful to Christ Part I

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some [is]; but exhorting [one another]: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

We have adopted a private Christianity that is only good Sunday morning, but no good anywhere Monday morning. Interdependence among fellow members of the Lord's body is not practiced by most. Individualism has gripped the thinking of many in our churches. We come running to church on Sunday, slipping late into a service already in progress. Immediately following the final amen, we shoot out of the gates like a high-strung, nervous thoroughbred, running to our favorite restaurant to get ahead of the Sunday noon rush, wondering all the while why the church doesn't seem friendly anymore. We've no time for brotherly interaction with fellow believers in Christ.

Although "rugged individualism" has been idolized in America by over sensationalized movies, portraying larger-than-life heroes who take on armies single-handed, the Bible teaches that greatness is determined by an entirely opposite standard called humility. The mentality that says, "I don't need anybody" is castigated by Scripture as the way of a fool. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26). Humility is that rare ability to become transparent even at the risk of rejection. This is what the Bible models as greatness.

Have we forgotten the time worn proverb, "Confession is good for the soul"? Like many other things that have been around for a while, it appears this proverb has lost its usefulness. Perhaps we've heard these words so many times that they no longer seem significant, or we have forgotten their meaning. It's easy to take for granted something that we are very familiar with. The Church no longer takes this wise axiom seriously. We have cast it off as an old tattered garment that would embarrass us if worn.

Such willingness to confess and acknowledge our weaknesses and failures is mocked by the present world order as a character flaw rather than a strength. Consequently, most church members have adopted this human perspective of self-assertion rather than the godly perspective of self-abasement. Thus, personal accountability to other Christians, which includes confession of sin to one another, is shunned and avoided. "Confession can't be any good," we reason, "because then they'll know all about us, and upon learning our weaknesses they may not like us." And what

about the confidence thing? Can we really trust anyone anymore not to take what he or she knows about us to the printers? Therefore, we choose what we deem a safer trail. The safe trail is where one bears his own burdens, handles his own pain, tends his own hurts, faces his own temptations, grieves through his own failures all by himself the best he can. This safe trail is truly a “trail of tears.” The truth is this safe trail is not really all that safe. Perhaps it is safe in the fact you don’t make yourself vulnerable to others, but this untrusting precaution is actually the ruin of many a soul.

This can be seen in the dramatic ministries of two notable preachers of the eighteenth century. With the exception of the apostles, no two men have impacted more lives in their own generation than contemporaries George Whitefield and John Wesley. They both attended Oxford at the same time and were both members of the “Holy Club” that birthed early Methodism. First Wesley, then Whitefield, served in Georgia as Anglican missionaries. Both were converted about the same time. Both preached the gospel of justification by faith at a time when much of the church world had drifted into a cold formalism. Both were used dramatically to lead thousands upon thousands to saving grace. Both men were tools of God to start and lead the first Great Awakening in America and England’s unparalleled revival.

But with their similarities they took two totally diverse roads in theology and organization. Whitefield stressed the sovereignty of God in the conversion of souls, whereas Wesley stressed the responsibility of man in salvation. Since this is not a study on either position, I will not comment further on them, except to say I would concur with Mr. Whitefield on the matter of theology. However, when it came to organizing and discipling the new converts, Wesley far surpassed his contemporary. Whitefield had little structure nor paid great attention to the spiritual maturity of the newly converted. Wesley labored greatly to not only bring men into the fold, but also to grow them in their new-found faith.

John Wesley often quoted an early church proverb, which became his motto, “The soul and the body make a man; and the spirit and discipline make a Christian.” He designed “classes,” “bands,” and “societies” to care for and nurture his disciples. He realized the structure of the traditional church did not provide for this. The hallmark of these organized structures was that they provided discipline and accountability; a place where people could confess their faults and needs without fear of repercussion or reprisal. But those who were affected by George Whitefield’s ministry had very little discipling at all. There were no fellowships, nor were they taught to watch over each other’s souls. They may have entered into the membership of a local church, but again the local church service structure did not then and still does not provide for what is needed. If one fell into sin or began to drift, he had no one to encourage him. Even Whitefield acknowledged to some friends, “that he had much sorrow and heaviness in his heart, on account of multitudes who for a time, ran well, but afterwards ‘draw back into perdition.’” It can be expected that not all who profess faith in God are genuinely converted, but in Whitefield’s case “A vast majority had entirely turned back.” Although many drew back, we must not assume that all of this crowd were unconverted souls, but rather many never had the structure of fellowship, teaching, and accountability that would cause them to grow in Christ. Hence, they lived a dwarfed

Christianism that a vast majority of Christians today are suffering from. All because the modern church has purposely or ignorantly forgotten the Biblical command for personal accountability to one another.

This sermon is to help us first recognize the biblical principle of believers being accountable to one another as well as to the Lord Jesus. Therefore, much of our discussion will be providing the Scriptural defense for such. Second, this sermon will give a detailed approach on how to implement what the Bible calls fellowship, which includes accountability, caring for another, praying for one another, confession of sin, and ministering to one another according to our individual gifts. Much of this instruction will go against the tide of worldliness and even some modern church traditions; nonetheless, if it be God's Word, "let God be true, but every man a liar."

It is my firm conviction that many Christians struggle today because they do not have within their local churches the framework to provide much growth. The traditional format which churches employ does not provide all of the essentials for spiritual maturity. Three songs, an offering, a solo, and a sermon has become the junkie's fix for the week, and just as habit forming. Without them (and in the order listed) we would not believe we had been to church. But the truth is, that's not all there is to being a church. Don't misunderstand, do not eliminate worship, giving, and preaching, but just don't forget to include the rest! What's the rest? The rest is when you're hurting so bad and you don't know how much more you can take, that you can share your pain with brothers and sisters who will come along side of you and carry you through. When do we have time for such, in our traditional service?

The rest is when you are struggling with sin's temptation, you can call on others to band together with you in prayer so that you would resist sin's attraction. The rest is when you fail to resist, you can confess your fault without reprisal and experience restoration and refreshment.

The church is a place where believers wearied by the struggle of it all can come and be spiritually energized. Our idea of meeting people's needs, however, is an aerobics or ceramics class, in other words, meeting entertainment needs rather than spiritual needs. To walk in to church on Sunday is more like walking into a Broadway musical than into God's house. We are catering to the flesh and not really ministering to the maturation of God's people. We must ask ourselves some really tough questions and have the courage to follow through with honest answers. Are we actually being accountable for each other's growth in Christ and providing the necessary Biblical environment for such growth? If so, thank God. If not, when? When will we with courage face the truth that we are not and do something about it?

Today, our text demands we courageously confront this issue. We cannot dodge it. If we try to do so, our dodging should not be understood as ignorance of what is expected, but defiance against truth. No matter how painful it is to relinquish cherished traditions, we must, if they prevent us from obeying the Lord.

Our text tells us we need to be gathering or assembling together as we are doing here this morning. It is right that we are here to worship. But this text is not necessarily supporting all we do when we assemble. It by no means endorses everything we do as being Scriptural. I have before shared with you that I have come to believe that the early church functioned like two wings of a bird. One wing was large corporate gatherings, like this morning, to celebrate Jesus and listen to Bible exposition or preaching. The other wing was breaking up into smaller groups and fellowshiping. Now without two wings, a bird doesn't fly. And without these two functions occurring in a local church, the church doesn't fly. A lot of churches are like a bird with only one good wing. They flap their one wing and make a lot of motion but they go nowhere.

Now beware of this word "fellowshipping." It does not mean visiting after church in the parking lot. Nor does it mean potluck luncheons. I think there are some Baptists who believe you can't get into heaven without bringing a covered dish. That is all fellowship means to some people—food.

The New Testament word for "fellowship" means much more than eating together. It means to hold something in common with someone else and to delight in it together. In the New Testament it was Christ and His grace. This was the common bond in which they encouraged each other when they met. You certainly can do that when you have a potluck or meal, but, on the other hand, it doesn't guarantee it. Christian fellowship means the sharing and delighting in what we hold in common, and that is Christ and being members together in His body.

The idea of this text is not so much the large corporate assembly, but rather, the small intimate groups of brothers and sisters holding each other accountable and ministering to one another. In other words, the writer of Hebrews is saying, "consider one another in order that you may stimulate one another to love and good works and don't quit meeting together in the small groups as some have." Now why do I say the emphasis is on the smaller groups and not the larger worship service where we all gather in one place? Because it is almost impossible to facilitate a large crowd to ministry and accountability. And, besides the logistics problem of how you do that, there is the humility and trust factor. It is much easier to be transparent in front of 10 than it is 100.

In the days of the New Testament the churches came together more in houses than they did in one place. They were by the nature of the times forced to meet in smaller groups rather than meeting all together in one large place. The church in Jerusalem began meeting outdoors or in the temple to hear the apostles preach and teach, but when persecution began and the church was scattered, this became a much more difficult thing. Therefore, when Paul writes to the church at Ephesus or to the church at Corinth, he is writing to one body divided up into several homes across that city.

Oh, how blessed they were to not have the problem of denominations that we do today. We have been so splintered by pride, jealousy and divisions. Today, there are so many different convictions and doctrines that we cannot come together as one body. Theirs was a day before de-

nominalism choked life out the church. They experienced a glorious thing in being one body even though location may have prevented them all meeting together. Today, we have facilities, or we could build them, that would house all the believers in Paducah, but because of the spirit of pride, prejudice, and unwillingness to open the mind and heart to learn from one another, we are a divided people. The early saints of the New Testament were often prevented from meeting together as one large assembly, and yet, they were one body undivided.

Having said this, I must hasten to my point that the church of the New Testament for the most part did not meet in one place at one time. Therefore, the idea that the author of Hebrews has to have in mind is a much smaller group where there was a format or structure that provided mutual stimulation of and accountability with one another.

Another reason I believe the writer of Hebrews is thinking smaller groups is because he was talking to each individual member of the church or churches he was writing to. Each member is to encourage, exhort and stimulate someone. He says, "exhort one another." Again, I do not see how this can easily take place in our structured corporate worship services. Now for all my life I have heard this text used to remind people they need to not "forsake the assembling" of themselves in a church worship service. Certainly we can make that application since one of God's foremost methods of encouraging and exhorting is the attentive listening to Christ-centered preaching. But in this format, only one man is considering how he may stir up a whole crowd to love and good works, and that is the pastor. We need another type of format that will facilitate the instruction of these verses. We need a structure that will provide you the ability to exhort one another.

YOU CANNOT CONSIDER CHRIST WITHOUT EVENTUALLY CONSIDERING OTHERS

Throughout this book the author has repeatedly told us to consider Christ. The Biblical method to fight discouragement and doubt is not as complicated as many think. It is simply to meditate and mull over the excellencies and promises of Christ. But now our author is telling us we need to consider someone else. He says,

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works (Hebrews 10:24).

We need to consider one another. You cannot consider Christ without eventually considering others. It cannot work any other way. The love of Christ will so fill your heart that you will begin to love others in a more effectual way. You do remember that when Christ gave us the Great Commandment of loving God with all our being, He added a second law that He said was like the first. It was to love our neighbor as ourselves. You just cannot love God as you should and not love your neighbor as you should. It is the love for God that is the motive for our loving others. That is why John makes a big deal about loving the brethren. The beloved apostle said, "if you don't love your brother then the love of God is not in you." So we can say under this heading that:

Loving God Produces Love for Others

The more you love the Lord, the more you delight in what He has done. Even the things that we find difficult, if not impossible, to understand, we with time begin to delight in more and more. We see God in those things, and we trust His wisdom in each one of those circumstances and events. We understand that He has a master plan, and that whatever God does is perfect and good. When it appears, my friend, that the Lord has laid His hand upon you and seems to be pressing you hard, you can rejoice. You can rejoice because faith whispers, “My God is too good to be unkind and too wise to be mistaken.” You can rejoice because you can trust Him. When my chiropractor lays his hands on my back and presses, sometimes it hurts, but I trust he knows what he is doing and immediately I feel the relief it brings. If human hands can press us hard and bring good, why, I would think that divine hands must be better.

Thus we can rejoice in every thing God does, and the more you consider Jesus and delight and value Him, more then you will also begin to delight and love whatever He has created, which includes people. Do you want to be a more loving person? Then first love God with all your heart, considering or meditating on what you know about Him. You will eventually begin to see people differently. Instead of seeing all their faults and poor qualities, you will begin to see each one as a unique creation of God. Each person is a creative act of God, created for His good pleasure. How then can we withhold love from one of our Great Love’s creations? Loving God produces love for others.

REMAINING FAITHFUL TO CHRIST REQUIRES OTHERS

Although we are taking the paragraph of verses nineteen through twenty-five and dividing it up into multiple sermons, we need not forget that these verses are all related around a basic idea, which is, drawing near to God and staying there.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (Hebrews 10:22-23).

Last week we discussed what we each should do to keep our profession of hope without wavering. Essentially, we taught on how to remain faithful to Christ. The author of Hebrews goes on in verses twenty-four and twenty-five and gives us more requirements for remaining faithful. But now, instead of the focus being what we can do for ourselves, we are to focus on others. Why? Because being faithful to Christ requires others. It requires others in two ways.

You Need to Consider Others so that You Might Help Them to Remain Faithful to Christ.

Considering one another is your calling. This is your calling and you need it. Please understand that you are commanded to think about others in order to help them be faithful to Christ. This

is not an option. Failure to do this results in disobedience. Ladies and gentlemen, I would not want you to pass over this too quickly and miss the import. You are commanded to be your brother's keeper. And who is your brother? Every born-again believer that God puts into your pathway. You are commanded to be involved in the well-being and growth in Christ of every Christian that you see here today. Let me, without apology, say you cannot do that coming to church on Sunday morning only. In fact, you can't even do it if you attend all three services. You need to interact with each other, and that takes time and a structure different from a regular church service. More about this later. But suffice it to say this is the calling of God for each of us and every born-again child of God.

Considering one another prevents aimlessness. Life can be like a leaf in the backyard. The wind blows and the leaf flies to one side of the yard, and then it blows again and drives the leaf in another direction. For many of us, this is the way we live life. We are always in motion but without purpose, always on the go but aimless in our activity. How many Christians live their life by simply doing what has to be done? Something other than the goal God has given you controls you? It has been called the "tyranny of urgency." But if your purpose in life is to simply put out the fires that someone else sets, what kind of life is that? Frankly, it is living far beneath what God intended for you. Life naturally drifts downward into aimlessness. Therefore, our Lord has invented a means to prevent yours and my life from drifting downward to the aimlessness. I want to you to see, under this section, that considering one another to help them remain faithful to Christ prevents aimlessness.

There is a higher purpose for you and me than to get up every morning and live without a higher motivation than ourselves. If we just focused on verse twenty-three which tells us to "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," we still would not have the focus God wants us to have. For all practical purposes, you can consider Jesus and drink in His glory and never get out of bed. But if you did, you would still drift into aimlessness. God intends for us to do something with our lives, and that is to take what we receive from Him and share it with someone else. "Freely you have received, freely give," is the method of purposeful Christian living.

How many of you would admit your life lacks a focused intensity? You feel you have no purpose? In verses twenty-four and twenty-five the Lord has provided you with the goal and purpose that is crystal clear and will promote the greatest joy in your life if you will simply obey. It is to promote His glory in others by stirring them up to love and good works. That is to be our chief aim. Instead of getting out of bed without purpose, get up and ask, how can I encourage someone today to love God and let Him live through him or her. Your life will change. Instead of dreading getting out of your bed every morning because you're so consumed with your own problems, start getting up with ideas how you're going to use the day the Lord gave you to touch another brother or sister with hope. Otherwise, you are going to pickle in your own vinegar. You will have lived your life and made no lasting imprint on eternity. And as the tides of the ocean wash away footprints, so will death erase any evidence that you were here.

Hear me, this is what God created you for! Don't miss it! You will discover a satisfaction that will literally feed you physically. Remember, what the Lord Jesus said to the disciples after conversing with the woman at the well. He had earlier sent the disciples to purchase food for they were hungry, and they returned with dinner. Yet, having been hungry, He refused to eat because He was so spiritually satisfied that He was physically satisfied. He said to them, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

To consider others requires thoughtful intention. Our text commands us to "consider". God does not want careless "shooting from the hip." Careful and deliberate forethought and reflection is to go into how we stir up others to love and good works. Some of you may suggest that you are doing this every chance you get. But basically what you mean is, if the opportunity arises, you seize it. I commend you, and this is very good. We must seize those unexpected opportunities that the Lord puts in our way. But this verse is talking about something other than the occasional unplanned opportunity. It is dealing with executing a premeditated plan to minister to someone.

Let's look at some practical suggestions on purposefully thinking about what you can do to exhort others and be an encouragement to them. First, as we have already alluded to you, must stop living engrossed in your own concerns and problems. Such will lead to aimlessly wasting your life and energy. Second, you need to make a habit out of being "others conscious." The Bible says, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). In Romans chapter twelve and verse ten it says, "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." This is a radical mindset and will require a radical deliberateness on your part to implement.

Third, you must begin to get involved and interact with people. You cannot go through life uninvolved with people and fulfill this God calling. Some people live like hermits without ever leaving society to live in a cave. They go to work. They do their jobs. Come home. Watch television. Go to bed. But they haven't interacted with people. You may be the introverted type, and I have just described your life to you. You have got to lay down the pride that keeps you afraid of rejection and start interacting with people or you will never know what others need.

You may say, "But I'm not a hermit. I am around people all day." You can be in a crowd and lonely at the same time. And in the same way, I have discovered, you can interact with people and still not interact on a deeper level. They may be hurting and you not know it. Communication with others never goes beyond the superficial. Are you a superficial person? Are you afraid of depth, afraid you may get over your head? What a waste to live a superficial life. You must get out of the shell you hide in and open up your heart. For some of you your shell is a very outgoing personality. You joke and throw out witty remarks right and left, and folks laugh. But the truth is you use humor to hide behind. You're afraid to be serious and get involved in someone else's life.

Fourthly, you should prayerfully consider what the Lord would have you do to encourage your brother and sister. You must consider your brother or sister, think about them, study them, in

order to first know how they need motivation, and of course, how to provide the motivation. Hopefully, these few suggestions will begin the process of turning your life around from aimless living to fulfilling your call from God to encourage one another.

God's plan for church is so much more than an hour and a half worship service. He designed and constructed His body to work like the human body. Each part interconnected with the whole. He crafted it in a way that not one man but every man, woman and young person be involved in stirring up others to love God, to love others and to demonstrate that love in action. For too long we have ignored the magnitude of this verse by interpreting it in light of how we do church today. Thus too many people have experienced heartache, ruin and some even destruction because of our faulty exegesis (interpretation). In our next message from Hebrews we will look at the dynamics of the smaller groups as well as at how we can do what these verses are commanding us. But before we end today, let me share with you this brief anecdote.

A family had gone to the movies, and on the way in, the young man of the family stopped by the refreshment stand to pick up some popcorn. By the time he got into the theater the lights were already dim. He scanned the theater and evidently couldn't find his family. The lady who tells the story says she watched him pace up and down the aisles searching the crowd in the near-darkness. As the lights began to go down even further, he stopped and asked out loud, "Does anyone recognize me?"

I used the story for two reasons. First, to suggest that often we feel estranged, separated from our spiritual family and in the dark. And all we need is some to recognize us and recognize our pain. At one time or another, I will need someone who will care more about my hurt than their health, care more about my pain than their pleasure. And don't forget that the someone I need is you.

Second, I use this story to suggest that as visitors come into our church they are looking for family and companionship. And often they stand neglected in our church foyer, or on the parking lot after service—in the deepest recesses of their hearts they are crying out, "Does anyone recognize me?"

Folks, the answer is very simple. Focus your eyes first on Jesus. Look full into His wonderful face. And not only will the things of life grow strangely dim, but you will begin to see not only Christ in your line of sight, but others will enter the picture. Brothers and sisters whom God will show you how you can encourage to keep on keeping on. And, oh yes, in the picture will be unsaved folks whom God will lay on your heart to share the greatest love with their loved-starved hearts. This is your calling. Heed the call! Amen.