

Hebrews 10:24-25

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[0 : 00] Hebrews chapter 10, I'll begin reading in verse 19. Let's pray together.

Father God, we thank you for your visible church. I thank you that you are at work amongst us, and that a great display of Christ's work sits in this room together today.

And I pray, Father, because of your great love for your church, you will add your blessing to the study of your word this morning, for your glory and our good. And we pray this in the precious name of Christ.

Amen. So please grab a seat. As I do the same, I'm going to dispel some notions that you may have about me.

And I recognize that these might be very deep-rooted beliefs that you have about who I am as a person, really right down in the midst of you. And I just apologize.

[1 : 35] I'm going to shake you up a little bit this morning, because I have to tell you that I'm not the strongest guy you know. I know many of you think that, and it's just not true.

Wes and I took a group of students from Truett McConnell caving and rock climbing this weekend, and I am in so much pain right now, which is why I'm sitting down, not because I'm cool and preach from a stool, but because I hurt.

I don't think I can stand for 30 minutes. The second notion you may have about me is that I'm the smartest guy you know, which is also not true at all, because I took a bunch of young people caving and climbing and thought I could hang with them in that act.

So I'm not the strongest or smartest person you know, which is evidenced not just in this morning, but in a number of things. So we've been working our way through this text that I read to you this morning, in Hebrews chapter 10, verse 19 through 25, and we came to it with the intended purpose of talking about the vision of Christ's family church.

How is it that Christ's family church, which we believe exists to experience, proclaim, and display the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things, does that? How is it that we experience, proclaim, and display the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things?

[2 : 52] And I've told you that we kind of like to use an analogy of ministry about the activity of a church, and we use this picture of a tree that we're to have roots that are firmly and deeply founded in the word of the living God and branches that exalt Christ in our congregational worship and prayers together, and fruit that the action of loving one another and the world through service and through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so I kind of began in this process of wanting to kind of preach a little series, so to speak, and God brought me to this text, which contains all of these truths and not quite as neat a format.

But we've been working our way through it, and this will be the last sermon in this text. Verse 24 and 25 will be our focus this morning. So let me read just those two verses to you again to kind of bring us in a bit on what we're going to focus on today.

The writer of Hebrews says, 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.

And we saw, beginning in verse 19, we saw these privileges, two privileges here. Certainly there are some beyond that, but two privileges here that have been bought for us are granted to us by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 20] And they were, number one, unlimited accessibility to God. And we see that in verses 19 and 20, that because Christ, because of his sacrifice on our behalf, the sacrifice once and for all for our sins, we now have full access, easy access, not once a year access like the Jews had one guy one time a year to enter in the presence of God, but we have full, unhindered accessibility to God.

And number two, the second great privilege was great advocacy with God, because Jesus is now our great high priest. And even now, as I speak at the right hand of the Father, interceding for me and the preaching this morning, and interceding for you and your hearing of preaching this morning. And so we have these great privileges granted to us by the gospel. And the writer of Hebrews goes on, as a result of that, to give us three exhortations, three encouragements to us in light of these two privileges.

And these exhortations, these encouragements, were called by the Puritans, ways of improving upon these privileges. Not that we make the privileges greater, but our practicing of them is an improvement upon these privileges.

And the first two that we saw, number one was, let us draw near to God. Christian worship, the act of coming together, let us as a congregation come together with hearts and minds engaged upon who God is.

[5 : 55] And number two, we are to hold fast, verse 23, the confession of our hope, or the one who is our hope, without wavering. This morning we're going to talk about the third way we're exhorted to improve upon these privileges, which is there in verse 24 and 25.

So, he begins by saying, let us consider how to stir up one another. And you may have a different translation of that. That Greek word has been translated a number of different ways. Stimulate, spur on.

But I think my favorite is incite. Let us consider how to incite one another to love and good works. Colin Round, who is probably the most renowned contemporary linguist, has translated this word affectionate incitement.

So, it's not just the strong word of let us figure out how to command one another to love and good works. Let us affectionately incite one another to love and good works, which are authentic displays of Christianity.

So, if we're to incite each other to something, stir up each other to something, authentic displays of Christianity, which the writer of Hebrews simply says, love and good works.

[7 : 18] Love, which is affection, which desires the greatest good of its object. And good works, which is just the tangible outworking of that affection. Is it not? So, love and good works is what we're to incite one another to.

And we could easily call this the ministry of affectionate incitement. And I want to give you four points to that end. The ministry of affectionate incitement.

Number one is the responsibility of all of us. The ministry of affectionate incitement is the responsibility of all of us.

And I pointed out to you before, I'm going to do so again, the pattern the writer of Hebrews is using here. In verse 19, we see plural pronouns. We have confidence.

Verse 20, open for us. Verse 21, we have a great priest. Verse 22, let us draw near. Our hearts sprinkled clean.

[8 : 13] Our bodies washed. Verse 23, let us hold fast. Verse 24, let us consider. Right? The ministry of affectionate incitement is the responsibility of all of us.

If you are in Christ, this ministry has been given to you. I would say, not only is it a privilege, but it is a duty to serve in this way.

1 Peter 1, 22 and 23. Peter writes, having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Why? The beginning of verse 23, since you have been born again. Love one another because of who you are.

You are children of the Most High God. Therefore, love one another will be another way of saying that. 1 John 4, 10 and 11. John wrote, in this is love.

[9 : 20] Not that we have loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Right? He's talking to the church. Right? In this is love that Christ has died for us.

Then He says, Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. It's a response to who we are because Christ has purchased us.

John 13, 35, Jesus says, By this, all people will know that you are my disciples. By what? By Sunday morning participation?

By the t-shirts that we wear? By the things we claim to hate and be against? Mm-mm. If you have love for one another. This is the defining characteristic.

Are there other things that you characterize as followers of Christ? Absolutely. But if we had to say one that trumps them all, this is the one. Our love for one another.

[10:26] So this is a ministry that belongs to all of us. There aren't people specifically called to be inciders of love and good works. This is something that is responsibility laid on all our shoulders.

Number two, the ministry of affection and incitement is the fruit of intention. It is the fruit of intention. Verse 24 begins, let us consider. And as has been the pattern over these past couple of weeks, the let us is not actually found in Greek, but it's implied in the Greek word.

So it's actually one word here. Let us consider is one Greek word, plural, present active. It's a very strong word, this word consider.

it means to consider attentively, to fix one's mind and gaze upon. It's the very same word used in Hebrews chapter 3, verse 1, where the writer says, fix your eyes upon Jesus.

[11:39] The idea there is not that you glance at Christ, but that you fully set your gaze on Christ, right? intently staring at who Christ is, his person and his work.

The same word used there, very strong word, consider attentively, fix your mind upon this. It's not going to happen just because.

This is something we're going to have to work at. Not everyone here needs to be incited in the same way. We all have different experience.

We're all going through something differently today. All of us have different home situations. All of us have struggled with various sins in the past and in the present.

If we are to be about the ministry of incitement, it's going to take intention on our part. We're going to have to pay attention to those around us and their needs.

[12:48] We're going to have to get to know each other a little bit, aren't we? It's also regular and ongoing. I mentioned that it's present active tense. This is not something that you do one time.

It's not a checkbox on your list of Christian duty for the week and you check it off once and you say, incited, I'm done, it's good. This is a constant, engaged activity that we are to be about.

Leads us to number three. The ministry of affectionate incitement necessitates consistent togetherness. Necessitates consistent togetherness.

We see that in verse 25. Now, I don't know how your translation may render verse 24 and 25, but upon an initial reading, it seems as if verse 25 is a fourth exhortation.

That it's yet another thing we should do in light of what Christ has done for us. However, really it could be read, verse 24, and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, verse 25, by not neglecting to meet together.

[14:00] So, let us consider how to do this by meeting together. He says it in the negative first, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but the implication is meeting together and encouraging one another.

And all the more, as you say, this day drawing near, probably this book was written just prior to 70 AD, we don't know exactly when, but probably so.

It was rather early in the Christian church, and it would seem that already, Christians had gotten out of the habit meeting together had already become a challenge in the church.

This book written to Jewish believers in Rome had already begun to drift apart and neglect their gathering together.

We don't see in this text why. He doesn't get to that, but we know historically there are documents outside of Scripture that talk about what was going on and the varying reasons that people were potentially not meeting together.

[15:07] Fear of persecution from the Romans, embarrassed by the size of their small congregation compared to the large gathering at the Jewish synagogues, business possibly.

Until the fourth century, this was a day of work, the first day of the week. The Lord's Day was a day of work, and they met in the evenings, early Christians did, on the first day of the week.

So that's potentially spiritual laziness. Not really another way to put that, just spiritual laziness would have caused them to neglect to meet together.

As I said, none of these things are in the text, but the reason for that, I believe, is that none of them really matter. It doesn't give us a way to wiggle out of this.

If we have a ministry that we've all been called to, that's going to take intention, we ought to meet together. We ought not neglect meeting together.

[16:11] Some people will say, you don't have to go to church to be a Christian. Many of you may know people like that. You may be one of the people that would say that, whether you'd say it out loud or not.

You don't have to go to church to be a Christian. And I agree with you. You also don't have to go home to be married. But if that's the attitude that you cherish in your heart, there's something seriously wrong in both cases.

Because of the privileges bought for us by Christ, we ought to want to be together. I'm not being legalistic.

There are things that take us away, and that's okay. I wouldn't begin to say I expect you all to be here every single time we gather together.

There are circumstances that take us apart. Next week, I won't be here. I'm taking a forced vacation. Chris has told me that I have to take a week off this fall before I die.

[17:13] And so I'm doing that next week, and I won't be here next Sunday. However, if I don't long to be here next Sunday, if it's not the place I would ultimately love to be, there's something wrong with my heart.

I will miss you guys next Sunday. I know that for a fact. Sam and I are going to go spend the Lord's Day with her family. Her father is a pastor, and we're going to visit his church. I've only been there once, and all the time I've been married to Sam, so we're going to go do that.

But I'm going to sit there the entire time wishing! I was with you, because you are my church, and that ought to be the attitude of our hearts. So, don't mishear me, I'm not being legalistic.

I'm talking about your heart, not the activity so much, but where do you long to be? Young people, when you're up here for school, come and be with us. When you go home for the summer, I hope you miss us.

I hope you can't wait until school starts back in the fall. So it necessitates consistent togetherness. How are we going to know one another if we don't spend time together?

[18:23] Inciting one another to love and good works, encouraging one another as the day draws near, is not something you can do if you're a church hopper. How will you possibly know how to encourage a person if you don't know anybody at the churches you go to?

Speaking particularly to you young people, pick a group of people. No church has it all right. We're all a mess because we're made of people. Go to a church and get involved and love the people. Fall in love with people, not programs. Certainly there are attributes that make a godly church. We can talk about those later. But just be sure you're not worshipping a show, serving your ends, but you're going to serve a group of people.

number four. The ministry of incitement expresses itself in encouragement.

It expresses itself in encouragement. This is how we incite one another to love and good works. He concludes verse 25 by saying, as you see the day drawing near, and this is my belief, this is my presumption that he includes that because he believes that things are going to get tougher for these people.

[19:48] Things are going to be more difficult for them. We see at the end of chapter 10 that they've already endured suffering. He knows that more is coming. As the final day of judgment comes, persecution will rise in the world, and they'll need this even more than they need it now.

This encouragement, this word, this Greek word, encouraging, is a very elastic word. It can mean lots of things.

It can mean to exhort, to comfort, to help, to urge, to appeal to, to admonish, to strengthen. It can mean all these things.

There are a number of others that it can also mean. But its emphasis, the word of emphasis, is verbal. Emphasis is verbal.

So this kind of encouragement can come in the form of a sermon, can come in the form of a piece of music performed, or led, can come in the form of a letter.

[20:54] Actually, at the end of Hebrews, the writer calls his letter words of exhortation or words of encouragement. Same word there. Words of encouragement. But since this ministry has been given to all of us, it also must express itself one-to-one.

On a one-on-one basis. It must, right? I can't be the only one this morning that's going to be an encourager. But we must be expressing this one-to-one.

Have you ever considered that the part you play in us coming together is to come and encourage somebody else? Have you ever thought about that? We might show up before 1030 if we realize that.

We might come looking for an opportunity to encourage somebody in our setting. We might stick around a little bit beyond our formal gatherings together.

We might look for opportunities beyond the organized times we meet together to get with members of the church. church. Have you considered that?

[22 : 08] You play an important part in our meeting together. You're not merely a spectator. You might ask me, how do I do this?

How do I encourage? I don't find myself to be a particularly encouraging person. I don't really feel that I'm equipped to counsel somebody or minister to them in any way whatsoever.

I'm not a very knowledgeable person. I feel theologically weak. I feel like I fail so much in my own sin and I just don't have a lot to offer to anybody to think through processes.

How is it that I'm meant to encourage the church? Let me tell you how you can encourage me. Talk about Jesus Christ.

Talk about the great work He is doing in your life. And that will move me to do the same to you. this becomes a cyclical ministry in the church.

[23 : 07] You encourage somebody with a great work of the gospel in your life and it's going to motivate them to do the same. Love and good works. It begins to build like a snowball amongst us.

That is the way you minister to those around you. Somebody here may have a wayward father. Feels a lack in their life.

life. And you may not have ever experienced that. There is no way I'll ever have all of the life experiences shared in this room. Praise God, that would be a lot of a mess, wouldn't it, for me? handle. But the gospel of Jesus Christ ministers to all of those situations. So minister to one another with the gospel. Encourage one another with what God is doing in your life.

I hope and pray that God is doing something in your life worth sharing this week. If not, let's get busy. Right?

[24 : 07] Let's imagine if all of us, the few of us that there are here, but if all of us came this morning with a thought in mind, I'm not coming here to serve myself, I'm coming to corporate worship to praise God and to encourage the church.

That's what you had. You got up this morning with that on your mind and prepared yourself for it. All of us came together for that activity. Can you imagine what a different group of people we would be?

I do not want Christ Family Church to be known for the distinctives on our website. Those are good things. Those are important things. We're reformed, Southern Baptist, missional, family integrated, good things.

I don't want to be known for those things. If that's all we're known for, we're just another flavor. We're just another type of church. I want people to know us for our love for one another.

I want somebody to say to you, someday, I want them to say, what church do you go to? You say, oh, Christ Family Church, and in their minds they go, of course, those people really love each other.

[25 : 26] That's the kind of thing we should be known for. Not buildings and signs and programs, but how much we love one another. Can you imagine what that would look like?

Briefly, I want to talk about four things that hinder this kind of ministry amongst us. Four things, quickly. Number one, self-sufficiency.

Self-sufficiency. You were not saved simply for yourself. In the 70s, I've harped on this a couple of times in the past, in the 70s, a little bit of language entered into Christendom.

That phrase, personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and I think it was birthed out of good motivation, but why we think that when we mess with biblical language, it won't have some negative side effect is beyond me.

Gospel presentation should be repentant belief, not personal relationship with Jesus Christ. God saves individuals, but he saves them to the church.

[26 : 37] You are not self sufficient. You were saved to a community of believers. God's graces come through the church. John Wesley once said there's nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian.

There is nothing more unchristian than a solitary Christian. Number two, formality. formality. Having certain expectations of our time together, our liturgy together, and a belief that our time together does not extend beyond our organized time together.

That coming, walking in the back door, sitting down, going through the motions, getting up and walking out, is the extent of your Christian participation. Formality will get in the way of the ministry of incitement.

number three, bitterness. As I've said before, we are an imperfect group of people. I won't always say the kind words you need to hear.

I pray that I always do, but I won't. I won't always walk in here with the best attitude. I won't always call you when you feel you need a call.

[27 : 54] don't let a root of bitterness form in you toward members of the church. We are all imperfect. We are all on a progression towards perfection, but we fail a lot.

Don't make being here about you. Think about serving others. Don't let bitterness get in the way. And number four, elitism.

Elitism is the creation of cliques based on exclusiveness. J.I. Packard called elitism a satanic counterfeit of true fellowship.

A satanic counterfeit of true fellowship. The ministry of incitement involves you getting involved in people's lives of varying backgrounds and demographics from you.

don't allow yourself to become a clique that excludes others from your group. You never know who may need to be in your group both for their benefit and for ours.

[29 : 04] It's worth noting that if we have a love like this that expresses itself properly, this love and good works, that this kind of affection, us being known for our love for one another, this kind of affection is going to spill outside of our borders.

I believe that if I'm encouraged the way I should be encouraged in this meeting, the encouragement I can give back, I'll have too much of it. I won't be able to give it away.

And it's going to spill outside of the borders of this meeting time to our communities, places we live and work and play, that ultimately there will be not just fruit of love within our church, but fruit of love to the world.

We won't be able to contain the goodness of Christ, which is experienced here amongst us. And it's my deep prayer, and I realized as I was looking over my notes this morning that I'm not shy to try to coin phrases.

And I say try because if you actually coin a phrase, people begin to use it, exchange it as currency. They actually understand what it means. And I tend to say things and just continue to say them and nobody has a clue what I'm talking about.

[30 : 15] So let me tell you when I say it's my deep prayer. Deep prayers for me come out of deep conviction. An understanding of what church should look like is not just something that God's put in my head, but it kind of is sitting down here in my gut.

I long for our church to look like this. I desire not just a small group of people that understand and engage in what community, what church is actually meant to be about, but a large group of people that get this.

that put down the consumerism of American Christianity, understand that Christianity is relational. It's a fellowship. First, vertical, and second, horizontal.

It makes me hurt to think about how bad I want to see this happen. And that's what I mean when I say it's my deep prayer. Christ Family Church will be a church that so greatly appreciates the privileges bought for us by Christ, understands them, really knows what's been granted to us by Christ, this unlimited accessibility to God and our great advocacy with God, that will actively and continually be about the work of improving upon these privileges, and that will do so by drawing near to God and God centered, frequent, corporate worship that will hold fast to the one in whom we have hope through a deep understanding of His redemptive work, and that fixing our gaze on mutually encouraging one another will be known for love and good works.

I hope that the analogy of the tree now has become glaringly, abundantly clear to all view, roots, branches, and fruit.