

# Hebrews 10.24-25 / FBCO / 12.31.17

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## Introduction

- † [1: Title] *Prayer + handout*
- † [2: Teaching] I taught college economics for about ten years. I never had a single student who was there because he or she wanted to be. That was depressing! They always were taking the class because they had to for their major and many were only in college because their parents made them go. Nobody wanted to be there, except me.
- † As an adjunct lecturer, I earned about \$2/hr, but I loved it. I loved showing how ignorant most politicians and journalists are about economics! I loved hosting a game show night using material for the test! I loved making big beautiful graphs using six colors of chalk. I used fat sidewalk chalk, which made clouds of dust. When I washed my face, it would pour off green, red, and blue.
- † I put comic strips on my tests. Students get stressed about tests, and after four pages of my ten page essay and graph test they could get hysterical, so I put a comic or two in there to calm them.
- This worked well. So I tried another kind of humor. I put a gray box on the test, with instructions, “Erase the box to see how many free points you get.” This was just a photocopied sheet of paper, they were supposed to smirk and move on, but there were my students, erasing that gray box until they ripped through the paper. The next time, I tried it a different way. I glued a business card on every test with instructions to “lift the flap to see how many free points you get.” When you lifted it, it read, “Ha! No free points for you! Get back to work!” I thought this was funny, but I had students say some inappropriate things to me.
  - I really did my best to help the students enjoy the class. I used lots of humor. I told them stories about how the government and Federal Reserve function, or dysfunction. I used lots of illustrations from newspaper articles to make the class relevant. I even sang them songs I wrote in graduate school about economics! I did have some students who said they enjoyed the class, but still... I was the only one who *wanted* to be there.
- † I assume things are different today, right? I hope all of you are here because you *want* to be. So why did you come? what do you hope to get out being a part of this church? Our passage today is Hebrews 10.24-25, which will help us see the value of being an active member in the church.
- [3: context] Let me give you some context while you turn to our passage in your Bibles. In the verses leading up to our passage, the author explained that Christ’s sacrifice is good forever, there is no need for more sacrifices to get right with God. Through Christ, we have God’s grace and forgiveness, and direct access to God himself.
  - In v.23 [ESV] the author says, “**Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.**” If we trust Christ and have his promise of grace and salvation, forgiveness, and direct access to God, then we can persevere in hope, no matter what happens in our lives, because we know that we have God’s love and eventually God will deliver us into Heaven and resurrect us to eternal life without sin or suffering on a renewed Earth.
- † [4: 10.24-25] Now our text. **Hebrews 10.24-25 ESV:** [based on our hope founded on those promises,] **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.

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### Hebrews 10.24

† **[5: Good Works]** Let's take v.24, and see what each part of it means, so we can understand what God is telling us. Let's start at the end, the easy part: What would God think is a good work or a good deed? Someone tell me a good deed you know someone else recently did...

- We can see a pattern, that good deeds usually involve helping someone else. I would say a good deed also could be worshipping God directly. I think coming here today was a good deed.

† **[6: Love]** The next word in our English text is "love," in the Greek text, ἀγάπη. The New Testament originally was written in the common Greek language of the day, called κοινή, so we will talk a bit about Greek words today. There is nothing complicated about ἀγάπη: it means love. As we study the Bible, however, we see that God's conception of love differs from ours.

- First of all, love in the New Testament is not an emotion, it is a decision. In any relationship, the emotions of love come and go, even in a good marriage, but we can be consistent, unwavering in our decision to love someone, even when they seem unlovable.
- You know, before you were born, God knew every sin you would ever commit and he chose to love you anyway. This is encouraging, because when you screw up later today, while you might feel God's anger, you can know this won't change his love for you. His love is unwavering.
- We also see in scripture that God's kind of love is sacrificial: Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins, to take our punishment, he sacrificed for us.
- And we find that God's kind of love is unconditional: it is given without requiring anything in return. We cannot earn or deserve God's love, it is a gift of grace. So ἀγάπη is God's unwavering, sacrificial, unconditional, amazing kind of love.

† **[7: Football]** [PROP: FOOTBALL] How many of you like football? If you don't when I say "football," you can substitute what you like, books, music, woodworking, whatever.

- I am a big fan of football. But this ἀγάπη love has to mean more than when I say, "I have a love for football," right? I mean that probably isn't a good use of the word "love" even in English. In verb form, I say, "I love football" and then I say "I love my wife" [repeat] ...
- Now in some households, this might be a problem, trying to determine which love is greater, for the wife or for football, but not in my house; I mean, I do have a love for football, in the sense that we commonly use the word, but not like I feel love for my wife; this is just sloppy language.
- This problem would be brought out even more clearly in biblical Greek. It would be ludicrous to say I feel ἀγάπη for football... it just doesn't make sense. If you can honestly say, "I have an unwavering, sacrificial, and unconditional love for football" or books or music or woodworking, or whatever, then you need to get some counseling!
- The only other place this noun ἀγάπη is used in the book of Hebrews, is in v.6.10, where it talks about believers having love enough for God that we represent him by doing ministry, by doing good works; so it is very appropriate that ἀγάπη goes with good works in our passage too. Love is the attitude we choose to have and good works demonstrate and live out that attitude.

- † Sometimes, when you translate a Greek word into an English one, some of the meaning is lost, because the Greek word has more depth of meaning than the English word, like with ἀγάπη: we have devalued the word “love” in English to the point where it doesn’t connote the full meaning of ἀγάπη. In theory, as you move from a word-for-word translation like the ESV to a thought-for-thought translation like the NLT, more meaning can be brought out because you are elaborating.
- **[8: Outbursts]** So whereas a word-for-word translation like the ESV says, “**stir up one another to love and good works,**” the original NLT said, “**encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds.**” I think “outbursts of love and good deeds” better reflects the magnitude of God’s kind of love. I was sad that the second version of the NLT replaced “outbursts of love” with “acts of love.” It just doesn’t have the same impact.
- † [PROP: SANDWICH] What would be an outburst of love and good deeds? It’s got to be more than you are walking along, munching on a sandwich, but you’re getting’ kind of full, and the sun’s beating down, making you sort of queasy, and you are beginning to have doubts about the mayo anyway, so you decide get rid of the sandwich, but just then you see a homeless guy, so you give it to him.
- I mean, that’s not sacrificial, right? You wanted to get rid of it. And it might not even be a good work/deed if you are all germy or the mayo is bad, you might make the guy sick. But even if it were a good deed, it wouldn’t be an *outburst* of love and good deeds, right? because you’re just giving this guy the chewed up dregs of a spoiled sandwich that you wanted to get rid of anyway.
  - That’s not an *outburst* of love and good deeds, that’s not an example of ἀγάπη love! Neither was when I donated my car to a homeless ministry or when I gave a stove to the Salvation Army; those were not sacrifices, I wanted to get rid of those things. An outburst of love is sacrificial, unconditional, and so amazing that people know you are either God-driven or crazy!
  - So what is an example of ἀγάπη love? How about the early church, who gave more than old stoves, they sold their good things to give to the needy; we look at that and think they were crazy! but we know they were God-driven. What about missionaries who give up the comforts of our culture to spend twenty years on a remote island sharing the gospel with an unreached people group? They must be both God-driven and crazy! How about when you pray for your enemies today? Unwavering, sacrificial, unconditional, amazing love...
- † **[9: stir up]** The author says we are “to stir up one another” to this kind of love and good works. That’s a good translation, “stir up.” They might have translated it even as “incite” ... not insight, like you know something, but incite, like you incite a riot!
- The Greek word is παροξυσμός, and the only other place in the New Testament that the same Greek word appears, in Acts 15.39, it talks about two friends, Barnabas and Paul, who had such a sharp disagreement that they parted ways and went on separate missions! παροξυσμός is like a provocation. We are to *provoke* each other to these outbursts of love and good deeds!
  - Why should we be provoking each other? Let’s be honest with ourselves... without the encouragement of others, we probably would be pretty lazy compared to what God asks of us. How many of us are self-motivated enough to turn off the tv and go spend time with an elderly shut in? How many of us wake up on the weekend eager to go help at a homeless ministry or to mow our neighbor’s lawn? The truth is, my hand doesn’t belong up either; the truth is we need the provoking, the encouragement and exhortation from each other, to rise up to the level of love God desires for us, to go out and do these *amazingly* loving good deeds.

- This provocation will be good for us: it will get us out following Christ, doing what he did; it will work on our hearts as we experience helping others; and it will give us the opportunity to experience God's love and power working through us to bless others.

† **[10: Consider]** Not only are we to stir up one another to love and good works, we are to *plan* how to do it! The first command in Greek is κατανοέω. It means "to consider" or "think about."

- Most of us get used to turning our brain off, watching television, playing video games; even now some of you have tuned me out to daydream about nicer things than provoking each other in church, but you need to come back and realize that God will not accept mediocrity in our lives or our ministries.
- We are instructed to think of ways to provoke one another into amazing, God-driven, God-revealing, good works of sacrificial and unconditional love!
- This week, start thinking of ways we can stir up one another to really shine God's light, to really glorify Jesus' name, by sharing God's amazing love. When we get consistent at this, we'll make an impact in our neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and families; and this church will grow.

### Hebrews 10.25

† **[11: meeting together]** In v.25, the author exhorts us to not neglect our meeting together. In his day, believers sometimes avoided meeting together to avoid persecution. In America today, we do not face the same level of persecution, but we often strive to look no different from our non-believing culture, and sometimes we get so comfortable in the secular culture that we no longer consider full participation in the Christian community to be important.

† In scripture, we find many reasons why we should meet together. Here are four of them.

- First, Christian fellowship is necessary for obedience: we are commanded to love one another, accept one another, serve one another, be devoted to one another; there are over forty "one another" commands. We can do these "one-anothers" only if we share time with one another.
- Second, Christian fellowship is necessary for our health: God gave us dozens of "one another" commands because we need those things from each other to stay emotionally and spiritually healthy. We cannot fully understand the depth of God's grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness until we experience them in the physical realm through God's people. And it is the isolated sheep who is vulnerable to the prowling lion.
- Third, Christian fellowship facilitates outreach: amazing love among our group will shine God's light out in the greater community, making Christ attractive to those who do not yet know him.
- Fourth, Christian fellowship facilitates spiritual growth, especially if we are praying for one another, working through our emotional and relational issues together, and discussing how the Bible can be applied to our daily lives.
- So we need to gather. And I pose you the question, can we accomplish all we have discussed in a large group meeting on Sunday morning? or do we need times of more intimate fellowship? I think we need more intimacy, whether in small groups, mentoring relationships, accountability partnerships, at least intentional Christian friendships which regularly encourage your faith.

- † **[12: But Encourage]** You see the “but” in v.25? The author draws a contrast with the word “but”: we should be “**not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but** [rather we should be] **encouraging one another...**” When we do meet, we should encourage each other.
- † The word translated “encourage” here is παρακαλέω. By Bible times, παρακαλέω could mean anything from “I urge” all the way to “I speak in a friendly manner.” What does it mean here?
- **[13: 13.19, 22]** Let’s look how this same author uses the word in other places in the letter. παρακαλέω appears twice in Hebrews 13.19, 22, where it usually is translated, “I urge”; the ESV has “urge” in v.19 and “appeal to” in v.22. In our verse, even if the meaning is not as strong as “to urge,” I think there definitely is an aspect of calling someone to action.
  - The original NLT said, “...let us *encourage* and *warn* each other.” I like that, because it gives us both sides of the one activity of helping each other walk in faith.
- † **[14: 3.12-13]** παρακαλέω is used earlier in Hebrews, let’s read those verses: **Hebrews 3.12-13 ESV: Take care, brothers** [these are believers in the church], **lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God** [this can happen to believers in the church!]. **But** [the verb παρακαλέω] **one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin** [he says this to believers in the church!].
- The NLT translates παρακαλέω as “you must warn” here, but even in translations like NIV or ESV, which say “you must encourage” or “you must exhort” respectively, there is an obvious warning aspect: we are to exhort or warn each other about being deceived by sin and hardening our hearts, which will lead us to fall away from God.
  - **[15: Encourage]** From these uses of the word παρακαλέω, we can discern what 10.25 means: we are to encourage each other in faith, meaning encourage each other in the things that help us draw closer to God and warn each other about the things that can take us away from God.
- † Please understand, there are only two paths you can take at any given moment. You can be walking with God, in his light, following Christ, or you can turn from God to go your own way, pursuing your own goals, using your own methods. In the moment you choose your own path, you are turning away from God’s ways, thus committing sin!
- **[16: Sin]** Hebrews 3.13 says we should warn each other about sin. While sin does not cause us to lose our salvation, we are in that moment turning away from our relationship with God; and now who are we following? not Christ... we are following Satan in his rebellion against God. The New Testament teaches that there are many repercussions of personal sin in the believer, including becoming so deceived that we harden our hearts against God.
  - So we should warn each other if we see drug use, embezzlement, adultery or spousal abuse... But the truth is, in a group like this, the smaller sins might be a bigger problem: little white lies, pirating music or movies, lustful looks, pride, disobeying civil authority by speeding on the highway... I have done some confessing after car trips.
  - You might be saying, “Come on! These are so small, nobody gets hurt, everybody does them, they are culturally accepted!” but God doesn’t see it that way. To God, you are either obeying his revealed Word, walking with him, or you have turned away in active rebellion against him!

- **James 1.22 ESV: But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.** Let's not deceive ourselves into thinking small sins don't matter. If you deny the importance of small sins, you already are deceived by sin and hardening your heart against God!
  - Jesus said in **Luke 16.10 ESV: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much."**
  - The truth is that even a little sin can do damage in our hearts and draw us away from God. So we need to warn each other when sin is present.
- † **[17: Distraction]** We also should warn each other about distractions. My nephew likes sports and my niece likes to dance. Those are good hobbies. But if they start investing several hours a day on their hobbies, I would feel compelled to ask whether they thought they might be distracted by good things such that they were missing out better things that God has for them.
- If we see *anything* in a friend's life that is becoming too important, too time consuming, then we should warn him/her lest it distract from God's purposes.
- † Do we need this accountability? Should we accept such warnings from each other? The Bible says that without each other's help, we cannot stay on the right path with God, we are too vulnerable to our corrupted flesh deceiving us and leading us down the wrong path. Just as we could not raise our hands to say we would go out and do outbursts of love without a little provoking, so too we have to admit that we need a little help in walking by faith and obedience.
- **[18: Carson]** Let me read an opinion from theologian D. A. Carson, from his book, *For the Love of God* "People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated."
- † **[19: Deception]** If you were deceived by sin right now, would you know? You would not, that's the nature of deception! You would not know it until someone told you the truth. So we should warn each other about any deception, not just sin. I encourage you to go to your friends in this church and give them permission to come to you when they feel a need to warn you about something.
- If you warn someone else, do it in an gracious and loving way. You want to build them up in Christ, not tear them down; you want to turn them back to God's grace, not bring them guilt.
  - If someone warns you, accept it graciously. I know it is hard. When someone warns me, I don't want to hear it, but if it is my wife or a close friend, I trust their motives, I know they genuinely are concerned, so I pray about what they said. Usually God has shown me they were right! Then I repent and am grateful that someone cared enough to help me take this step of growth.
  - **[20: Repent]** For clarity, let's define repentance. Our concept comes from the Hebrew [שוב], which means to turn back, to return to God. So when you are in sin, turn back to God: stop sinning, confess your mistake to God, and return to obediently walking with him in grace.
- † **[21: Encourage]** Let's switch to the positive: We should encourage each other in what helps us draw closer to God.

- First, encourage each other to pursue ways of learning about God: encourage each other to study the Bible, to go to church and Bible study groups, and to apply sermon principles to life.
- Second, encourage each other to pursue ways of connecting to God: encourage each other to worship, to pray, to seek God through spiritual activities like reflection or being out in nature.
- Third, encourage each other to pursue ways of servicing God: encourage each other to active obedience to the positive commands such as to witness, to love, and to serve.
- Fourth, encourage each other to pursue ways of healing by God: encourage each other to confess to and pray for each other; to experience relational and emotional healing, and to find answers to life's problems in the Bible.

† **[22: the Day]** There is one last clause of our passage: “**all the more as you see the Day drawing near.**” Jesus is coming back. That is the great hope of all believers.

- From this letter, it seems evident that God had revealed to the author that there soon would be a judgment on Israel in the year AD70, when God would allow the Romans to destroy Jerusalem, and even the Temple. The author advised his readers to identify with Christ – the Messiah-savior sent by God – to avoid the judgment on that generation of Jews who had rejected him.
- It is possible the author hoped this judgment would be the time when Jesus would come back. Today, we identify with Christ to avoid the judgment of the world when Christ does return.
- We don't know if Jesus is coming back today or twenty centuries from now, but it doesn't matter: the point is that we know who Jesus is [he is the divine Son of God, the promised human Messiah, God's chosen King], we know what he has done for us [he paid the penalty for our sins through his death on the cross], we know what he is doing for us now [he is our resurrected High Priest, interceding for us and supporting our efforts], and we have hope because we know what he will do for us in the future [he will take us to heaven and someday resurrect our bodies for eternal life on a renewed Earth].
- We strive to follow Christ, because of the transforming love he has shown us and our desire to identify with him and be a part of what he is doing in our community. It is because we know Christ will return to complete our salvation and give us eternal life on a renewed earth that we strive so hard now to live for him, live like him, and help others do the same. Because of his transforming love and the hope we have, we consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, meeting together regularly so as to encourage one another in faith.

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## Conclusion

† **[23: summary]** Let's wrap up with some action points:

- First, form strong friendships with other Christian believers and spend time with them.
- Second, during that time, encourage each other in faith and hold each other accountable, to stay in a healthy relationship with God.
- Third, think of ways to provoke each other into amazing acts of love, and do them together!

† This week, consider why it is important for you to be a part of this Christian community and how you can make these verses come alive in this fellowship, so we can see the name of Jesus lifted high in this church, and radiate his light out to those who need to know him. Let's pray. . .