

“Encourage One Another”

Hebrews 10: 10-25

10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice (or offering) of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (RSV has it “and it is by the will of God that we have been consecrated, or made holy {set apart})

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; (TEV reads “Every Jewish priest performs his services every day and offers the same sacrifice many times;”) again and again He offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away our sins. 12 But when this priest (The REB has “Christ”) had offered for all time once sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time He waits for His enemies to be made His footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice He has made perfect forever those who are being made holy (who are being consecrated or set aside for God’s purposes).

15 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First He says: 16 “This is the covenant I will make with them

After that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.

17 Then He adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

18 And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. (TEV puts it more simply, “an offering to take away sins is no longer needed.”)

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, 21 and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful. (the TEV reads: “Because we can trust God to keep His promises.”) 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds (The Revised English Bible has the ending of that verse “show love and active goodness.”) 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (NIV)

If you have your own personal Bible with you today please underline or highlight that last verse, Verse 25.

People will try just about anything in the search for healing and wholeness. The letter to the Hebrews reminds us that in the temple of Jerusalem, people hoped that the blood of bulls and goats would take away their sins and relieve their guilty

consciences. But the sacrifices were never done, never complete. “Every priest stands day after day at his service,” says Hebrews, “offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins” (Hebrews 10:11). Day after day the priests would stand throughout their whole shift and slaughter animals, wave offerings, etc. standing in the gap between men and God. At the end of the day, knowing that the next day would be exactly the same, there was no foreseeable end.

There had to be a better way. And fortunately, Christ “offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins,” says Hebrews, giving his own body and blood on the cross to bring us forgiveness and new life (v. 12). “As a priest, Christ made a single sacrifice for sins, and that was it!” says the translation of the Bible called *The Message*. “It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people.” You and me. [NOTE 1]

We need this, don’t we? As imperfect people, we can be perfected only by a perfect sacrifice, offered by a perfect person. And Jesus has made this sacrifice for us. His offering is a huge improvement over the bulls and goats of the temple priests and a greater advancement than that of modern medicine. The blood of Christ is a perfect sacrifice, one that removes any need for temple sacrifices. It is such an enormous gift “Therefore, my friends,” says Hebrews, “since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus” — yes, that’s right, walk right in “and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (vv. 19, 21-22). [NOTE 2]

That sounds good, doesn’t it? Confidence to enter the sanctuary. A true heart. Full assurance of faith. Hearts sprinkled clean. Bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews is talking about a spiritual makeover, made possible by Jesus. The author of Hebrews’ main point in the first part of this passage of Scripture is to contrast the priests and sacrifices with Jesus Christ and His one eternal sacrifice. When Jesus, on the cross cried out, “It is Finished,” It really was Finished! No more sacrifices. Obedience was the only true sacrifice, nothing but obedience could open the way to God; disobedience set up a barrier that no animal sacrifice could ever take away. That is why Jesus Christ was the perfect, one, sacrifice because He was totally obedient, even unto death. By Christ’s sacrifice on the cross His people have had their consciences cleansed from guilt. By it they have been fitted to approach God as accepted worshipers. By Christ’s sacrifice they have experienced the fulfillment of what was promised—a new covenant—brought into perfect

relation to God and hence given eternal life. The quote from Jeremiah in verses 16 and 17 tell us that God's laws are implanted on our hearts and minds. It also tells us that we can be assured that all our sins and failures have been eternally blotted out, forgotten. As far as the east is from the west.

When satan approaches us with past sins and holds them up to our faces in taunting ridicule, when he seeks to make us remember how rotten we are, to make us feel again the guilt of past mistakes, the Holy Spirit quietly but firmly says this, "The Father says He has forgiven that sin and forgotten it; tell satan to take his accusations, depression, guilt and shame somewhere else. You are forgiven and free my child!"

[NOTE 3] Every church should be a place where people experience this kind of renewal. Since Jesus has shed His blood for us, we can enjoy forgiveness of sin and healing in body, mind and spirit. In everything we do together, we should "hold fast to the confession of our hope, our confession of faith, without wavering, for He who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (vv. 23-25).

[NOTE 4] This is the mission of the church, according to Hebrews: Holding fast to our confession. Provoking one another. Meeting together. And encouraging one another. Unfortunately, churches don't always get the job done. Yes, the Christian community should be a place where people can talk freely about their struggles, be assured of the forgiveness Christ offers, and receive guidance and encouragement. We are on the front lines of the struggle for mental, emotional and spiritual health. We shouldn't wait for people to fall apart before we intervene.

The letter to the Hebrews gives us an excellent blueprint for what intervening looks like, how to be the church God calls us to be. First, we encourage people to confess their sins and receive the gift of forgiveness, since Christ "offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins" (v. 12). We do this in our services of worship when we say a prayer of confession together. We also do it in small groups of trusted friends, where we admit that we have wandered from God's path. "We need to recognize and accept that we have done wrong," writes Presbyterian pastor Lewis Galloway. "We have sinned against God, others, and ourselves. We cannot repair the wrong or remove the guilt ourselves." Fortunately, Jesus has offered a single sacrifice for sins. He has taken our guilt on himself and died to bring us forgiveness and new life. All we need to do is trust him and accept the gift He offers.

Galloway tells a story from childhood to illustrate this. “One of the pleasures of summer was swimming at the lake,” he writes. “After a long swim, it was fun to flop on a raft, forget everything, and drift in the hot sun.” But after lying on the raft for a while, he would suddenly rise in a panic, discovering how far he had drifted from the shore.

[NOTE 5] We know what that feels like, don’t we? To suddenly discover that we have drifted far from our morals, far from our aspirations, far from where we know we need to be. Fortunately, Jesus is available to help us, forgive us, turn us around, and get us back to shore. He does this because he sympathizes with our weakness and wants to save us. “Faithful Christian living is not about trying harder,” concludes Galloway. “It is about trusting more.”

Next, we “provoke (or encourage) one another to love and good deeds” (v. 24). We need the support of other people to live a faithful Christian life, so Hebrews challenges us to “provoke” one another. Normally, we use the word provoke in a negative way, describing actions that cause anger or resentment. But it can also mean to stir a person to action, and this is why Hebrews asks us to “provoke one another to love and good deeds.” To encourage one another means to stimulate, to stir them up, to provoke. Commentator William Barclay writes, “One of the highest of human duties is that of encouragement.” It is easy to laugh at people, it is easy to pour cold water on someone’s enthusiasm, it is easy to discourage others. But we have a Christian duty, yes, a command, to encourage one another. Point other people toward Jesus Christ by your example and you will encourage one another. A kind word awakens kindness, an honest word provokes thoughtfulness, a bitter word stirs up bitterness. If we do nothing else in 2023 let us be good encouragers. Let’s make a concerted effort at Doster Community Church to be encouragers. Let us encourage one another, let us encourage the people of our community. I encourage you to think about what that might look like for you. What opportunities might you have in the next week to encourage others!

[NOTE 6] We should provoke/encourage each other to get regular checkups. Provoke each other to seek counseling when troubles arise. Provoke each other to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. Provoke each other to welcome a stranger, mentor a teenager, or participate in a short-term mission project. There is nothing negative about provoking one another, if it is **to or toward** greater love and good deeds.

Finally, we need to “meet together” in ways that involve “encouraging one another” (v. 25). These gatherings can include services of worship, small group

Bible studies, youth group meetings, mission teams, musical groups, Life Groups or Discipleship Groups. The point is that we meet together as a community in ways that encourage one another. In this last verse we have two commands: Encourage one another and do not give up meeting together. They are the keys to being the church God calls us to be, or He wouldn't have commanded it.

[NOTE 7] Remember how discouraging it was to be quarantined at home during the pandemic, unable to attend worship services or gatherings of any kind? Yes, two-dimensional online meetings were better than nothing, but not nearly as uplifting as the opportunity to see one another in three dimensions. We had no public gathering at Doster Church for almost 3 months. When we finally met together for an outdoor worship service the Sunday after Memorial Day, when the worship service was done, when I finished the Benediction and sending song you stood up and clapped, not because of anything I had done, but because you/we were so glad to be back together, meeting, fellowshiping, spending time together again!! The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*, which means an “assembly or congregation.” This is a reminder to us that gathering is an essential part of the life of the church. We must trust the Lord to forgive us, provoke one another to love and good deeds, and meet together in ways that are encouraging to one another. — *Henry Brinton and Carl Wilton contributed to this material.*

Keep meeting together and spur one another on to love and good works. Apart from anything else, to go to church is to demonstrate where our loyalty lies. Are we on God's side or the world's side? There is no in between. Here is another quote from Commentator William Barclay: “there is no person who can live the Christian life and neglect the fellowship of the Church.” Dwight L. Moody, famous evangelist and preacher once called on a leading citizen in Chicago. His purpose, to persuade him to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It was Winter and coal was burning in the fireplace. The man objected that he could be just as good a Christian outside the church as in it. Moody said nothing, but stepped to the fireplace, took the tongs and picked out a red hot ember from the fire and set it off by itself on the hearth. In silence the two men watched it turn black, smolder, and then go out. I see,” said the man. (pause) Encourage one another. Spur one another on to love and good deeds, and don't give up meeting together. Let's pray ... AMEN

Sermon Notes for “Encourage One Another” based on Hebrews 10: 10-25
Given at Doster Community Church on February 12, 2023

- I. As imperfect people, we can be perfected only by a perfect sacrifice, offered by a perfect person. And Jesus has made this sacrifice for us. Jesus was that perfect person and He was the perfect, one, last sacrifice.
- II. When Jesus, on the cross cried out, "It is Finished," It really was Finished! No more sacrifices. Obedience was the only true sacrifice, nothing but obedience could open the way to God; disobedience set up a barrier that no animal sacrifice could ever take away. Jesus was totally obedient , even unto death
- III. Every church should be a place where people experience this kind of renewal. In everything we do together, we should "hold fast to the confession of our hope, our confession of faith, without wavering, for He who has promised is faithful.
- IV. This is the mission of the church, according to Hebrews: Holding fast to our confession. Provoking one another. Meeting together. And encouraging one another.
- V. "Faithful Christian living is not about trying harder," concludes Galloway. "It is about trusting more."
- VI. If we do nothing else in 2023 let us be good encouragers. We should provoke/encourage each other to get regular checkups. Provoke each other to seek counseling when troubles arise. Provoke each other to feed the hungry and shelter the homeless. Provoke each other to welcome a stranger, mentor a teenager, or participate in a short-term mission project.
- VII. We must trust the Lord to forgive us, provoke one another to love and good deeds, and meet together in ways that are encouraging to one another. Now what are you going to do about it? What is your "I will ..." statement for this week. Please take a minute to write down one thing that you will do this week to encourage someone else. We need one another.