



SPURING EACH OTHER ON

Text: Hebrews 10:23-25

By: Rev Dr Leo Douma

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A commentator I read, made the remark "*A person trying to make it on their own as a Christian is an accident waiting to happen.*" That makes you sit up doesn't it! In our strongly individualistic culture we see faith as personal, and our culture encourages us to keep it to ourselves. There can be a tendency not to share too much of our joys and struggles with others. But that is not the way it is supposed to be. John Wesley who started the Methodist church said "*The Bible knows nothing of a solitary religion.*" He instructed his church "*...to watch over one another in love.*" Wesley organized small groups where the believers were accountable to each other about how they were living as Christians. So they had to be very open and willing to be changed. It has been found that the supportive small group is one of the most powerful ways for people to feel they belong and learn and grow. Rick Warren, in his book 'The Purpose Driven Life' says "*Life is meant to be shared. God intends for us to experience life together. The Bible calls this shared experience fellowship...Real fellowship is much more than just showing up for services. It is experiencing life together. It includes unselfish loving, honest sharing, sympathetic comforting and all the other 'one another' commands found in the New Testament.*"

This is what the writer to the Hebrews is getting at in our text. He has explained how Jesus' one sacrifice on the cross is better than all the Old Testament sacrifices. Then in verse 19 he draws his conclusion: note the word "*Therefore*". He brings in two summarizing statements ("*since*") and then draws out five practical applications ("*Let us*"). Note (19) "*Therefore, since (1) we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Christ, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body, and since (2) we have a great high priest over the house of God-*" There we have the summary statements. As Christians we have the way open to God

because Jesus, as our high priest has opened the way for us by his death and resurrection. Now the practical implications. (22) "Let us (1) 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." Since Jesus has made the way open we can actually have a very close, very deep personal relationship with God. All our sin is forgiven. Nothing stands in the way. (23) *Let us (2) hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful*". Because Jesus has risen from the dead and is our great high priest, he guarantees that all God has promised will occur for us. Eternal life with God, the hope of the new creation, it's all ours. It will happen because God is faithful. That hope is what motivates us. It drives us on, for no matter how tough life can be, the best is yet to come! Now so far, all that has been said could be seen in the sense of a personal faith- some thing between God and you. We could interpret this through our individualistic world view. But the next verses, dispel that thinking. (:24) "*And let us (3) consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us (4) not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us (5) encourage one another- and all the more as to see the day approaching.*"

Let's focus on these verses. Notice carefully, it is not what you might expect. It is not consider how to love each other and do good deeds. That would be right too. But it is different. "*Let us consider how to spur one another (stimulate each other) to love and good deeds*". The focus is on helping others to become loving people. The aim is to stir others to do good deeds. Of course the implication is that if others need stirring we do too. So we are to be together with the aim that we act and speak in ways where we stir each other to be loving and do good. Now there is something interesting here in the Greek that is hard to bring over into the English. The word 'consider' is used one other time in this letter in chapter 3:1 where the writer says "...*consider Jesus*..." The NIV translates it "...*fix your thoughts on Jesus*...". That means look at Jesus, think about him, focus on him, study him, let your mind be occupied with him. 'Jesus' is the direct object of the verb 'consider'. Now here in our text, in verse 24, the grammar is the same: "*consider one another*". A direct translation of the Greek would be "*consider one another to the spurring on of one another toward love and good deeds*." That's not good English so the NIV translates it "*Let us consider how we may spur one another on*..." The point of me telling you this is to get the nuance of the Greek so you feel the force of this. On a daily basis, just as our aim and focus in

life is to focus on Jesus ('consider Jesus'), so we are to focus on each other ('consider one another'). Literally this is God's call on us to look at one another, think about one another, focus on one another, study one another, let your mind be occupied with one another. And the goal of this focus on each other is to think of ways of stimulating each other to love and good deeds.

Now you can work out why that stress is there can't you? This is what the first quote was about *"A person trying to make it on their own as a Christian is an accident waiting to happen"*. If you think that being a Christian is something you can achieve on your own you will come unstuck. How will you get the courage and insight to be distinctly Christian at work or school in a culture that is no longer Christian, where you are supposed to keep your faith to yourself. It is so easy to let your faith slip. Many a Christian is not even regular in their personal devotions let alone standing up for Jesus at work or evangelizing. We need each other to *"spur one another on to love and good deeds."* The words "spur on" are very strong words. Like a jockey digging in the spurs to really get his horse going. The words imply 'prodding, inviting, urging, earnestly appealing, inspiring another to act'. Without this prodding, this spurring, without one another, we will easily slip in our Christian life, as too many do.

Now verse 24 gives the focus and aim of 'considering one another'. Verse 25 gives us the instructions how: *"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another..."* Note the two things there. First, don't neglect to get together. Second, encourage one another. The word 'encourage' is also rich in meaning. It suggests 'supporting, assisting, inspiring, consoling, comforting, increasing hope, urging on.' It is the work of the Spirit. The Greek word for 'encourage' comes from the same root as 'counselor' and 'comforter'. It is used by Jesus in the Gospel of John to describe the Holy Spirit. This verse has often been used as an argument for regularly coming to church. As the King James Version says *"Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together"* - that is, come to church each week. And that is definitely part of the application of the text. One of the most important kinds of encouragement that we get is from the preaching of God's Word. It is so encouraging to be in worship when we are all together in praise of God. It can be quite discouraging when there are few in church. The irony is though, that if we only stress attending a worship service, then we can, if we are not careful, actually encourage individualism again. In a worship service there is only one person talking

and the rest of us can take to heart as much or as little as we want. There is no direct accountability. But this text is not actually about attendance at worship. In the context the kind of coming together in view is one where the members *"encourage one another"*. Verse 25 is clear: come together and encourage one another. The 'one another' implies that there is something mutual going on. If you ask what corresponds in our church I would say it is the small groups where we study the Bible and pray together. It is about maturing, growing in passionate spirituality together in community. It is about getting into the Word together and encouraging, prodding, challenging each other. Now I value the importance of good preaching. But I have no illusions that preaching is enough in the life of a believer. When you go through the New Testament, and especially this letter to the Hebrews, you see it calls us again and again to a kind of mutual ministry that involves believers encouraging each other. There are over 50 'one another' references in the New Testament. Let me challenge you to think about this: where are you in relation to the challenge of verse 25. It says there are two groups. Those who encourage each other when they come together and those who have formed the 'habit' of not gathering. See that little phrase in the verse *"...not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing..."* Because of our very busy lives, because of our acceptance of individualism and stress on our own personal faith, many Christians have developed a 'habit' and lifestyle of not meeting together. Now our church has been going through a period where it has been difficult to get small groups together or meet regularly. I know the pace of life makes it tough. But real spiritual growth is not possible on our own. We are in real need of each other to spur each other on. As one commentator writes 'we are to develop the habit of meeting together. A habit is something you do with frequency, not occasionally. You have to spend time with people, lots of time, to build deep relationships. This is why fellowship is so shallow in many churches; we don't spend enough time together, and the time we do spend together is usually listening to one person speak.'

So the question this raises is, where are we with our personal commitments to the lives of others in our church family? We can identify four levels of fellowship in the typical church. As I go through the four levels, think about where you are with this. The first level is 'membership'. This happens when we have made the decision that we want to belong to a church. This is the most basic level since it involves simply finding the church family where we get connected. The second level is 'friendship'. This happens when we deepen our commitment by getting to know others in the church and

beginning to share our lives with them. Developing true friendships takes time and the willingness to risk opening up to others that we don't yet know very well. 'Partnership' is the third level. This involves doing our part. We recognize that that God has gifted each of us with abilities that we are to use for the benefit of others. Each of us has an important role in the body of Christ. Each of us has a contribution to make that is vital to the healthy functioning of this congregation. Level four is 'kinship'. Kinship means having a level of relationship with other Christians that is so deep that you love them like your own family. The word for this level of fellowship in the Bible is the Greek word 'koinonia'. It means that our commitment to each other is right up there with our commitment to our Lord Jesus Christ. As one commentator says this is where we have true community, '...masks come off, conversations get deep, hearts get vulnerable, lives are shared, accountability is invited, tenderness flows and people really do become brothers and sisters'. That is koinonia. That is the deepest and most pure form of Christian fellowship. That is the kind of fellowship that Jesus was talking about when he said, "*Greater love has no one than this – that he is willing to lay down his life for his friends*" (John 15:13). The deepest level is the commitment to love other Christian believers as Jesus Christ has loved you. Can you identify the level of fellowship where you are right now? To do so might be the most important thing that you do this Sunday. It could be God's way of gently prodding you to go deeper in his church. True fellowship has the power to transform our lives. It is a deeply significant part of God's work in us. That's why the small group ministry in our church is so important.

Which leaves one last question: What kind of encouragement stimulates others to "*love and good deeds*"? Well, the key is given back in verse 23: "*Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.*" The key to love, in the New Testament, the kind of love that magnifies God and not people, is hope rooted in the faithfulness of God. Embrace your hope! Cherish your hope! Because God is faithful. He keeps his promises. Without this kind of hope, sustaining you day by day through all the frustrations and crushing disappointments, you would not have any strength or energy or joy to 'spur on' anyone else "*...to love and good deeds*". But if you bank on God, not on yourself, you always have something encouraging and hope-giving to say, namely, 'God can be trusted. I have no strength, but God can be trusted.' We each belong to Jesus, and thus by the one life of the Spirit we belong to each other. So let's inspire hope and obedience in each other. Let's spur each other on to love and good deeds- living for Jesus in all that we do. Let's not neglect getting

together, but encourage each other, often, constantly, - because "*the Day is approaching*". Christ is coming.