**The Care Of and Caution For the Church**

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

In our first message on fellowship, we considered from **Acts 2:42-47** that the early church was a church to model. From that passage we saw that the church, while it wasn’t perfect, was a gathering church, it was a generous church, it was a glad church, and it was a growing church. Those are the characteristics of a church where a desire for a genuine relationship with God is the focus. Love God as you should and you will love others as you should.

Today we are going to look at **Hebrews 10:24-25**. It is no secret that church attendance across the nation has been steadily declining and not just because of COVID. Statistics show that many people who say they belong to a church only attend once a month and less families attend church together every week. The reasons vary. What does going to church mean to you? Why do you attend?

Let’s be clear that it was God who instituted the church. He understood the value of a corporate gathering as a place to connect with others and worship Him together. But church isn’t just a place for worship and learn and grow in our walk with Christ together. As we will see in our passage today, church is a place where we can also serve and encourage one another. It is a place to be involved.

Church is not a box to check off as a task on the to do list, it’s not a meeting to ease an otherwise guilty conscience, and neither is it a place to earn favor with God. Christians aren’t consumers, we’re contributors. It’s not a place to be entertained. It is a place engage together, give together, sacrifice together, pray together, encourage and yes, exhort one another. We do life together. That’s the model from the early church. The church needs you and you need the church. It can make a difference in your life, in your marriage, in your community. It is essential. Yet more people are finding it less relevant or maybe I should say less important. So how do we curtail the slide of absenteeism so that people realize they are missing something? Let’s see if our passage can give us some pointers as we talk again about the importance of fellowship and the benefit of our gathering regularly. I have two points to address this morning from this passage.

**The consideration for the church**

**The care of the church**

In the context of the chapter, the author gives a call to the believers to persevere. They were facing persecution without and doctrinal challenges within. Some were waffling in their faith wondering if it was worth all the trouble. So the author gives the believers what I’ll call a tossed salad approach to hanging on in tough times. They are foundational ingredients in persevering in the faith and include three types of “let us”. I will briefly speak to the first two with our focus coming from the third.

Look at **verses 19-23**.

In **verses 19-22**, the author notes that Jesus is our High Priest. His sacrifice on the cross opened up the way to enter into the presence of God. The veil or curtain that was torn at the crucifixion was a picture of Christ’s body, broken for us, giving us direct access into God’s presence. His sacrifice gives us confidence to boldly come into God’s presence. Because of the confidence we have in the sacrificial work of Christ, the author says **“let us draw near to God.”** He then gives us four conditions for drawing near.

You may recall after their exodus from Egypt when Moses went up to meet God, God told Moses to tell the people that they were to stay away from the mountain, neither man nor animal could step even one foot on the mountain or they would die. When the Tabernacle was built and then the Temple, only the High Priest could enter into God’s presence and then only once a year. Everyone else had to stand back and rely on their representative to meet God.

But now through Christ, we are invited to draw near to God and He is only one way that we can approach God and it’s by faith through Christ. We will never gain access to God’s presence based on our own merit: our character, our good works, our giving, our religiosity. It’s only through Christ. Jesus said as such when He told the disciples in **John 14:6** that no one can come to the Father except through Him. And that’s what this author is saying. In the Old Testament, only the High Priest could enter into God’s presence but now because of what Christ did in His sacrifice on the cross and because He is now our High Priest, we have direct access any time through our faith in Him.

How are we to draw near to God? **Verse 22** tells us the first way.

1. **Let us draw near with a sincere heart**

The word sincere means genuine, pure, without deceit, straightforward, honest, without hypocrisy or ulterior motives. It comes from the root word for truth, so our heart is to be true or dependable, not deceitful when we draw near to God. I take it to mean that we give God our complete allegiance, that we aren’t divided in our affection.

Jeremiah spoke about the hypocrisy of Judah in coming to the Lord. They had ulterior motives and God knew it. **Jeremiah 3:10 “‘Judah did not return to Me with all her heart, but rather in deception,’ declares the Lord.”** They weren’t sincere, fully committed to Him.

A little bit later God said there would be a time when they would have a changed heart.

**Jeremiah 24:7 “I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the Lord; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.”**

If we are going to draw near to God with a sincere heart, it is important that we confess sin, that we search our heart to make sure it’s not with ulterior motives that we are coming to God. Is your heart sincere when you approach God?

1. **Let us draw near with a full assurance of faith**

James tells us not to double-minded which makes us unstable in all our ways. My Dad was training a dog to hunt rabbits. He took her out to the field and let her loose. With nose down and tail up, she found a scent and began to follow it. But then she found another scent and followed that one. She hadn’t learned yet how to stay on one scent. She was double-minded.

Our faith is to be singularly fixed on Christ so that we trust and follow Him in all our ways without getting distracted by the things around us in the world. We don’t deviate or waver from His commands or the course He sets out for us to follow. **“This is the way, walk in it.”**

There is a story about the famous playwright, Channing Pollock who was working with another writer on a play late one night in his apartment. Prompted by something they were working, the friend asked Mr. Pollock if he had ever read the New Testament. He admitted that he had not as they continued working on the play. The friend left in the wee hours, but Mr. Pollock could not asleep. Bothered by what his friend had said, he got up and searched his apartment until he found a New Testament and began to read. After reading the Gospel of Mark, he got dressed and walked the streets until dawn. Later on he told a friend that when he returned home, he found himself on his knees, passionately in love with Jesus.

We must draw near to God with a sincere heart, one that has a full assurance of faith in Christ.

The third way the author says we are to draw near to God is with hearts sprinkled from a guilty conscience.

1. **Let us draw near with hearts sprinkled from a guilty conscience**

Paul put it this way in **Romans 8:1-2 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.”**

Christ’s sacrifice cleanses us from a guilty conscience. That doesn’t mean we will no longer feel guilty when we sin, but it does mean we don’t have to let the guilt hang over us making us walk around with a ‘woe-is-me, I’m no good, it’s no use’ complex. The sacrifice of Christ makes us holy and cleanses us from all our sin.

John MacArthur writes “Conscience condemns us and reminds us of our guilt; and the guilt cannot be removed until the sin is removed. When Jesus died, His blood removed our sins, and when we embrace Him by faith, our conscience becomes free from guilt – we are cleansed from an evil conscience. We do not condemn ourselves anymore.”

The author then gives one more condition when drawing near to God.

1. **Let us draw near with bodies washed with pure water**

This isn’t speaking of baptism, but of the picture baptism presents of our sin being washed away through faith in Christ. **Titus 3:5** refers to it as the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that occurs at salvation. In short, He makes us a new person inside. In the Old Testament, the priests went through a ceremonial cleansing before they could perform their duties in the Tabernacle. This is referring to the inner cleansing that takes place in the believer at the time He confesses sin and trusts Christ for salvation for the first time.

Unless and until we first draw near to God, nothing else we will talk about today matters. When we draw near to Him, He will sustain us in our tribulations.

The author gives a second “let us” to help us persevere in our difficult times. It’s in **verse 23**.

**“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”**

That means we hold on without doubt or hesitation. There was pressure on some to return back to Judaism, so the author is encouraging them to hold on to the hope they had in Christ. If our faith in Christ is genuine, then we can’t help but have hope because all that He says is true and will happen. Let me point out that the best Greek manuscripts have the word hope vs. the word faith as it’s translated in the KJV. When we have hope in Christ, the evidence of that hope is seen in our lives.

Yes, there will be times when we get discouraged and doubt and fall into sin, but the believer holds on to this hope in Christ until the end. Why can we hold on with confidence? Because the one who promised is faithful to keep His word.

There is a third ingredient for sustaining faith.

Let us draw near to God.

Let us hold on unwaveringly to hope.

Let us consider how to stir up one another.

If you notice, it is the combination of faith, hope and love.

I have purposely taken the long way around the barn to get to **verses 24-25** but, it helps set the context for why the author says what he does in these verses. Without faith or hope, without drawing near to God or having unwavering hope, this third ingredient has no basis or foundation, no reason or motivation to practice this principle. Where the first two are directed toward God, this third one is directed toward each other. The kind of relationship we have with each other is directly helped or hindered by the kind of relationship we have God. So what do we see in these verses about fellowship?

First of all, notice the care of the church.

1. **THE CARE OF THE CHURCH – v. 24**

The author begins by giving us something to think about. Consider means to pay close attention, to perceive clearly, to understand fully, to observe, take notice, or to contemplate. Here, the word strongly implies that the attention paid to the object of what is being considered is intense and thorough resulting in complete understanding of the object that is being observed.

In **Job 1 and 2** Satan has presented himself to God to give an account of his activities. In their conversation God asked Satan if he had considered His servant Job that there was none like him in all the earth. God described His servant as blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. Then in **chapter 2** even after God allowed Satan to strip Job of all his earthly goods and family except his wife, God describes Job the same way, but adds that even though calamity had fallen on him, he still retained his integrity. “In your wandering around, have you taken a close look at My man Job? There isn’t anyone like him. He’s a one-of-a-kind true God-worshipper in character.”

In **Psalm 31**, David is talking to God about all his hardship and states in **verse 7** that God had paid close attention to all his troubles and knew the anguish of his heart.

In **Daniel 7**, the prophet had a vision of a great beast with 10 horns. **Verse 8** says he was giving careful thought to the horns when another horn popped up.

Then in **Luke 12**, Jesus asked His audience to pay close attention to the lilies and the ravens to see how God clothed and cared for them and then said that God would do the same for them.

Paul advises those who are spiritual to consider their own actions and motives when talking with someone caught in ongoing sin so that they don’t fall into the same temptation (**Galatians 6:1**).

In our text, the author is urging us to pay close attention to others in the church. It’s the same idea Paul spoke about in his letter to the Philippians that we look on the needs of others (**Philippians 2:3-4**).

The author then tells us what we are to consider. We are to pay close attention to how we are to provoke one another. In this context, the word doesn’t have the same meaning we normally associate with the word provoke. That word can mean to be angry, to irritate or annoy. Paul tells fathers not to irritate or make their children angry by pestering and riding them. If you had a sibling, growing up you knew which buttons to push to irritate them. We call it getting under their skin.

Our text isn’t saying that we should go around irritating fellow believers so that feelings are hurt or people are offended. Instead, the word means to stir up or stimulate, to spur on or encourage. It means to excite to some action or feeling. In this case it’s encouraging an action and a feeling.

Here's the bottom line. When we are together, we

are to pay close attention to others so we can know how to spur them on in their own walk of faith.

You can spend a lot of time with someone and think you know them only to find out stuff you never dreamed that person did.

Even after knowing Jerry Legan for more than 15 years I learned things about him I never knew.

I never knew that he had his pilots license and flew to different places including California.

I never knew that he was a scuba diver and enjoyed diving old shipwrecks.

I never knew that he liked spelunking, the sport of caving.

In our hanging out together as the body of Christ,

we are to give special attention to one another so that we can know them and in turn spur them on or motivate them in two areas. The first way we are to spur one another on is toward love.

1. **Care For One Another By Spurring Each Other On To Love**

This isn’t romantic love.

This isn’t friendship love.

This is unconditional love. It’s the kind of love God has for us. It’s love without exception. It’s love that isn’t earned or even deserved. It’s love because that’s who God is and how He acts toward each of us. It’s the love He showed by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us so that by our belief in His finished work on the cross we can have eternal life.

What does that kind of love look like for us? How do we make that kind of love practical?

Paul told husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church?

He was caring.

He was forgiving.

He was serving.

He was tender.

He was compassionate.

He was faithful.

He was joyful.

He brought peace and calm in stressful situations.

He offered comfort in times of trial and loss.

All the things Christ is in character as He loves us is how we are to exhibit in loving others.

Jesus was asked once to define the greatest commandment. He answered that loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, in essence every part of your being – mind, will and emotions was the greatest commandment. Simply put love God with all you have. He then gave the second greatest commandment – love your neighbor as yourself. In essence, He took the 10 commandments and condensed them down into two – how you treat God and how you treat others.

The man wanted to corner Jesus and asked who his neighbor was. Is it the person who lives next door or across the street? Is it the guy I borrow tools from or who borrows them from me? Are they the people I invite over for a backyard barbeque or who I let my kids hang out with, or the ones on my bowling team or who I play cards with each week? Is my neighbor the people I like or who like me?

To reshape the man’s thinking about neighbors, Jesus told a story about a good Samaritan. We read about him in **Luke 10:25-37**. Jesus’s answer wasn’t what the man thought. Jesus made it clear that it doesn’t matter who the other person is, everyone is a neighbor and we are to love them just the same.

As the church, we are all bought with the same blood of Christ and united into the same body of Christ as joint heirs and because of that we are to encourage each other to love one another.

Unforgiveness, hatred, envy, jealousy, resentment, bitterness, evil speaking have no place in the body of Christ. We are to act like Christ toward others. He gave His life for us. And here’s the hard part – no matter how they treat us.

My Mom once shared about a teen that worked for her in the kitchen at camp one week. She did a lot of things to try and provoke my Mom and my Mom just loved her all the more. No matter what, Mom continued to demonstrate kindness and love to her. At the end of the week, the teen came and told my mom she was sorry for her behavior toward her. She told my Mom that she did what she did because she wanted to see if she was as kind as everyone said she was. Motivate others to love by loving them no matter what the situation.

Let’s remember that loving others is a command, but one that comes with the promise that when we let the Holy Spirit do His work, He will develop the fruit of love in us. This kind of love will happen no other way than through the Holy Spirit.

What are we doing to encourage love toward one another?

We are to care for one another by spurring on to love.

Second, we are to care for one another by spurring on to good works.

1. **Care For One Another By Spurring Each Other On To Good Works**

This isn’t just doing something for someone, it is doing something with someone. It is actively engaging with others in some act of good deeds by helping others in need. Last week we referred to

**Galatians 6:9-10**, which says we are to do good works to all people especially those who are part of the body of Christ. We can be so focused on helping others outside the church that we neglect those inside the church.

Good works is the evidence of a vibrant faith, a living faith, a joyful faith, a serving faith.

In a recent newsletter from Todd and Jen Janes, they shared how Jen and some others from their church got together to clean out the apartment of another member.

Steve will remember a number of years ago, the fun we had taking a bunch of teens on what we called rake and run. We went to the homes of some church folks where we would dash in, rake up, and drive off. No one knew we were coming. We just showed up and went to work.

Good works are loving acts of service and it’s not just left to those with the spiritual gift of serving. Each of us is commanded to serve one another in some way. We all know what a fireplace poker is. It stirs up the embers to keep the fire going. Let’s be fireplace pokers and stir each other to love and good works.

What are we doing to encourage good works toward one another in our fellowship?

How are we caring for one another in the church?

The author then describes the caution for the church.

1. **THE CAUTION FOR THE CHURCH –**

**v. 25**

There is first a caution around our meeting.

1. **A Caution Around Our Meeting – v. 25a**

It’s a warning: don’t forsake assembling together as some are in the habit of doing. The word forsake means to leave helpless or stranded, or to abandon. An abandoned building or car is something that is no longer taken care of. It’s left to rot or rust. The author is saying that we aren’t to leave others when the going gets tough.

For a variety of reasons, there was a defection happening among some of the people. Maybe they lived in fear because of increased oppression. Perhaps it was indifference to the faith. It have been ignorance on their part regarding how to live in faith and hope in the promises of God. They might have felt the weight of sin and didn’t want to face what it might mean to confess. Self-centeredness could have been the issue – no one pays attention to me, or maybe they felt ignored or not accepted because of cliques in the church. They may have lost hope because Jesus hadn’t returned yet. Whatever the case, some were choosing to leave the church and the author is exhorting them not to leave and abandon the others who were still there.

Keep in mind that this was a difficult time for the church. They needed each other to keep their faith strong and to serve one another in this difficult time. Assuming there is no doctrinal issue, people leave the church today for many of the same reasons. Someone offended me. The pastor didn’t greet me. They didn’t sing my favorite hymn. It's all too easy to just go down the street rather than work things out. If that’s the case, the church isn’t encouraging one another to love.

We are cautioned not to forsake our meeting together.

We need each other and we glorify God when we meet together for the purpose of loving and serving each other. As I said last week, how we treat each other is a testimony to the watching world to see if we practice what we preach. They believe more of what they see than what they hear.

Second, there is a caution around our motivation.

1. **A Caution Around Our Motivates – v. 25b**

We are to encourage one another because Christ is coming back soon. We don’t know when that day is, but every day is one day closer. The author is telling the church to remind each other that the imminent return of Jesus is not far off, so hang in there, encourage each other to have strong faith in the promises of God, because He is faithful to keep them. Don’t lose hope. Don’t think that just because He hasn’t come back yet, that He must have forgotten or that He somehow changed His mind. Don’t let the difficult circumstances around you derail your faith putting you in a position where you choose to abandon meeting with other believers. The Lord’s return is one day closer than when we first believed.

This verse gives us the great imperative and the great incentive. The imperative is not to forsake assembling with other believers. The incentive is because the Lord is returning soon.

Warren Wiersbe says “In referring again to the second coming of Christ, the writer left the impression he was concerned that genuine believers might cease to hope for the Lord’s coming and be tempted to defect from their professions of faith in Christ. They must treat their future expectations as certainties (since He promised to be faithful).”

Let’s not give up meeting together. Instead let’s meet so that we can be an encouragement to each other as we worship the Lord together and as we grow in our love for God and each other and as we serve one another in the body of Christ.

Let me leave you with this thought from Warren Wiersbe who writes, “It is interesting to note that the emphasis here is not on what a believer gets from the assembly, but rather on what he can contribute to the assembly. Faithfulness in church attendance encourages others and motivates them to love and good works. One of the strong motives for faithfulness is the soon coming of Jesus Christ.”