

“The Christian Community”
Hebrews 3:12-13
(Preached at Trinity, December 3, 2023)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Who are members of God's household? How do you know if you are a part of God's household? They press on until the end.
Hebrews 3:6 NAU - "whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end."
2. From **Verse 7** to the end of the chapter we find warnings against the person who does not continue. Many in this Christian community were paying a high price for their commitment to Christ. They were experiencing persecution firsthand. Some were being tempted to drift back to their former life. The author is calling their attention to the multitude in the wilderness who were not allowed to enter into the Land of Promise because of their unbelief.
Hebrews 3:19 NAU - "So we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief."
Hebrews 3:12 NAU - "Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God."
3. There is something uniquely significant, however, in the Book of Hebrews. Yes, they were suffering and many were being tempted to turn back. But they were not suffering alone. The Book of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of the Church, of God's household. They were part of a family. He addresses them in **Verse 12** – "Take care brethren . . ." – He is addressing them as part of a family.
As members of God's family we are to love one another. These Christians were to encourage one another as they journeyed to their rest.
Hebrews 3:13-14 NAU ¹³ But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;"
4. We'll see this again when we come to **Chapter 10**:
Hebrews 10:23-25 NAU - "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."
5. The New Testament places Christianity in the context of a body, a fellowship of faith – the Christian community.
Acts 2:41-42 NAU - "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. ⁴² They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Acts 2:46 NAU - "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart,"

6. We have a duty to care for one another, to pray for one another, to admonish one another. There are several points we need to consider.

I. Every true believer is filled with love for his fellow Christians.

A. This is an absolute, unwavering truth.

1. The Bible stresses it over and over.

John 13:34-35 NAU - "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

1 Peter 1:22 NAU - "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,"

2. The early church shared a particular bond of love and commitment to one another. They shared with those who had need.

Acts 2:45 NAU - "and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need."

3. They enjoyed being together. They took every opportunity to assemble together to worship, to pray, and to enjoy fellowship with one another.

Acts 2:46-3:1 NAU - "Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

B. Every believer has the responsibility of sharing in the life of a local church.

1. Most of the problems that exist with the church and most of the divisions that tear at our unity are due to the lack of understanding concerning the local church.

2. Most people see the church as something they pick out according to their needs – something they attend – something non-essential that has little significance in their lives.

3. Few see the fellowship of the local church as absolutely essential to the Christian life. The reality is that being a part of a church is a reflection of our union with Christ. We are engrafted into a body where we become one with each other. A community. Each member has the responsibility of building up the other members.

Ephesians 4:15-16 NAU - "we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

4. We need one another. We need Christian companionship as we go through the Christian journey.

In John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* he describes by allegory the Christian journey of the main character who goes by the name Christian. Christian always had companionship. One brother was named Faithful. Upon meeting him Christian declared:

"My honoured and well beloved Brother Faithful, I am glad that I have overtaken you; and that God has so tempered our Spirits, that we can walk as Companions in this so pleasant a path (p.72)."

Faithful was sadly martyred at Vanity Fair. Soon after, Christian met another brother by the name of Hopeful. Bunyan writes:

"Now I saw in my dream, that Christian went not forth alone: for there was one whose name was Hopeful, who joined himself unto him, and entering into a brotherly covenant, told him that he would be his companion."¹

Both of these brothers profited greatly from the companionship of the other, watching over one another, warning one another, and helping one another on their journey to the Celestial City. This is the nature of the Christian life.

In death we read of the doubts and fears of Christian, but of the encouragement of his brother, Hopeful.

"*Christian* was much in troublesome thoughts of the Sins that he had committed, both since and before he had began to be a Pilgrim. 'Twas also observed, that he was troubled with apparitions of Hobgoblins and evil Spirits; for ever and anon he would intimate so much by words. Hopeful therefore here had much ado to keep his brother's head above water, yea sometimes he would be quite gone down and then e're a while he would rise up again half dead. Hopeful would endeavour to comfort him, saying, Brother, I see the Gate, and Men standing by to receive us . . . Be of good cheer, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: And with that Christian brake out with a loud voice, Oh, I see him again! And He tells me, When thou passest through the Waters, I will be with thee; and through the Rivers, they shall not overflow thee."²

- II. As members of a local church we have a duty to watch over and encourage one another.

- A. We see this reflected in this passage.

Hebrews 3:12-13 NAU - "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another day after day"

1. These were difficult times. Already, some had fallen away. Each member needed to stay on the alert.

The phrase "take care" is from a single word meaning "beware, take heed, watch out!" It stresses this must be a high priority because it is a great danger.

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Reprinted from the edition of 1895, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009) pages 72, 110.

² *Ibid.*, pages 182-183.

2. They were to give careful attention to their own lives. They had to stay on the alert against any cooling of their passions for Christ.
3. The text also emphasizes their duty to care for others in the church. They needed to stay on the alert for others who were drifting away.
4. They needed to encourage one another to press on, even in the midst of trials. They needed to give unceasing attention to one another.
Hebrews 3:13 NAU - "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

B. This is the nature of Christianity.

1. We are a part of a body and each member of the body is charged with caring for the rest.
1 Thessalonians 5:11-14 NAU - "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. ¹² But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³ and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another. ¹⁴ We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."
Galatians 6:1-2 NAU - "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; *each one* looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ."
2. We need one another. We need to watch out for one another.
Calvin wrote: "Unless our faith be now and then raised up, it will lie prostrate; unless it be warmed, it will be frozen; unless it be roused, it will grow torpid. He would have us then to stimulate one another by mutual exhortations, so that Satan may not creep into our hearts, and by his fallacies draw us away from God."³
3. Watching over one another is one of the duties of belonging to Trinity Baptist Church. Joining this church involves making a pledge to care for one another. Our covenantal duties include:
That, we will exercise a Christian care and watchfulness over each other, and faithfully warn, exhort, and admonish each other, as occasion may require;
4. We can also see this reflected in our By-laws - In the Trinity Baptist Church Constitution, Article I (Membership), Section 3 (Conduct of Membership) we read that the duties of membership include:
 - a. To love one toward another without offense or hypocrisy,
 - b. To labor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
 - c. To endeavor for the edification and spiritual benefit of the whole body, that they may grow up to be a holy temple in and for the Lord.
 - d. That they all watch over one another for good.
 - e. That they do pray with and for one another.

³ John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentary*, Vol. 22, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003) page 88.

- f. That they neglect not the assembling of themselves together, for the celebrating of divine worship, and so promote one another's spiritual benefit.
 - g. That they unanimously contend for the Faith and Truth once delivered to the saints, in the purity thereof, according to the Holy Scripture
5. To invest yourself in this degree of watch-care demands that you truly care. That you are willing to invest yourself in the lives of your brothers and sisters.

Conclusion:

1. Christians are a part of a common family – the family of God—God’s household. The local church is a beautiful expression of that family.
As Christians we are bound together in union as the body of Christ.
As members of a local church we are bound together by way of covenant. We are a Covenant Community.
2. We are to express family affection.
 - a. Family members care for one another, defend one another, and are mindful of the needs of one another.
 - b. Christian family members pray for one another. We are patient with one another. We are forbearing, patient, forgiving.
3. Families help one another in their weaknesses. The Christian family is engaged in a fierce battle. We must come to one another’s defense.
 - a. The author puts a level of urgency to it. We must not delay.
Hebrews 3:13 NAU - "But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today,"
"so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."
The idea is, if we delay our brother may be overcome by sin.
 - b. This is the day of testing. This is the day we are being tempted. We must help one another while we are on this side of eternity.
Simon Kistemaker writes: “The moment will come when God will cease to warn sinful man. When that moment arrives, the day of grace has changed into the day of judgment. Therefore, while there is still time, we are obligated to encourage one another daily, so that no one falls into the deceitful trap of sin.”⁴

⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Hebrews*, vol. 15, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 95.