

Sharpening One Another in Christian Fellowship

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Bible Text: Hebrews 10:24-25; Proverbs 27:17

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We turn in scripture to Hebrews 10. Hebrews 10 and we'll also read. Proverbs 27:17 as part of the text, but our main focus will be Hebrews 10 and we'll read verses 11 through the end of the chapter. Hebrews 10, starting at verse 11.

11 And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: 12 But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; 13 From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. 14 For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. 15 Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, 16 This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; 17 And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

Especially verse 17, he adds, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

18 Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. 19 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; 21 And having an high priest over the house of God; 22 Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) 24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. 26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. 28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath

counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. 32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; 33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. 34 For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. 35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. 36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. 37 For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. 39 But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

So far we read God's holy and infallible word.

The text is verses 24 through 25. We will be looking at verses 19 through 25 so it will be profitable to keep our Bibles open, but the text is verses 24 and 25,

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: 25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

And then I would also like to read for you Proverbs 27:17, a well-known Proverb. Proverbs 27:17,

17 Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, these passages, Hebrews 10:24 and 25 and Proverbs 27:17, are the passages that the elders have chosen for this upcoming family visitation season. It's not my intention this morning to explain to you the good tradition and practice we have of family visitation. I think we all know the profit and the joy of family visitation. In family visitation, we get to see in a very particular way the love and the care of the elders for the members of the church. In family visitation, we get to see, in a sense, how the elders themselves are heeding the calling of the text considering one another to provoke unto love and to good works, and that's one of the main purposes of family visitation, for the elders to visit with the members of the church to tend to their souls, to encourage them, and to provoke you unto love and to good works.

Well, when we now look at this passage, it's important for us to know where this passage fits in its context, in the letter as a whole. And as you know, with many of the letters of the Apostle Paul, there are two main sections to a letter. The first section of the letter we often refer to as the doctrinal section, the teaching section, where the apostle gives instruction; and the second section of the letter a more practical section where the apostle now applies what he said in the first half of the letter in very practical ways to the members of the church. To a lesser degree, that's also the case here with the book of Hebrews. I say that's true to a lesser degree because when you read through the whole book of the Hebrews, you see that the the writer makes exhortations and warnings throughout the whole letter so it's very practical throughout, and that's true with with all of Paul's letters as well. But it's still generally true if you were to divide the book of Hebrews into two main sections, a more doctrinal section and then a more practical section, the division would take place right here in chapter 10, right between verses 18 and 19. In fact, in my Bible, I've drawn a thick line between verses 18 and 19 to mark that progression from the first half to the second-half of the letter.

So throughout the entire book of Hebrews, the writer is giving instruction and now here in Hebrews 10:19 through 25, we really have a nice summary of the book of Hebrews up to this point, and we have the significance pointed out to us of everything that's been said. So in Hebrews 10:19 and 20 and then in verse 21, the writer summarizes the two things that he's been emphasizing so far in the book, verses 19 and 20, "Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus." That sounds like Hebrews 4. We have boldness to approach the throne of grace to find mercy and help in time of need. That's one thing he's been emphasizing. We have direct access to God through Jesus Christ, and we can have boldness. And then verse 21, "And having an high priest over the house of God," that is, having Jesus as our constant and perfect intercessor and mediator even in heaven, who is a living priest, who has made the full satisfaction for all our sins, who is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament types and shadows. Having these two things, having Jesus who is the Christ, the writer now goes on and says in verses 22 and 23 and 24, "Therefore." That's how verse 19 starts out, having therefore these things, and now there's three things that come as a result. Verse 22, "Therefore let us draw near unto God. Let us draw near unto God with sincerity, with confidence, with peace, and with holiness." Verse 23, "Therefore let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." And he's writing that because these Hebrews to whom he's writing to are suffering persecution and they are wavering. They are burdened down with the pressures to turn back to the old ways of Judaism. And then verses 24 and 25, "Therefore having Jesus as the Christ, our high priest, therefore let us also consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the day approaching." And then as you proceed through the rest of the book of Hebrews, you see these three things being emphasized again and again. Let us live by faith, let us live by hope and let us live by love. Those are the three things he's emphasizing here. Faith, hope and love. And now it's really that third exhortation, verses 24 and 25, that we're going to focus on in family visitation this year. Live by faith. Approach God boldly. Live by hope. Don't waver. And live by love. And the way to love, beloved, is by being with each other and enjoying Christian fellowship together, just as we read that in verse 25.

So that's what we look at and that's what we're going to focus on in family visitation this year. We take as our theme "Sharpening One Another in Christian Fellowship," and we look at three things this morning. First, the calling, verse 24; second, the manner in which we carry out that calling, the first part of verse 25; and then the reason, the last part of verse 25.

So let's work through this together. In verse 24 we read, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." And as I just said, this verse is intimately connected to everything that's gone before it. It's connected, first of all, to verses 19 and 20. Because we have direct access to God through Jesus Christ and therefore we don't need the Jewish high priest who's making sacrifices at the temple right now, we don't need the physical temple in Jerusalem anymore, we don't need those Old Testament sacrifices anymore. In summary, because we already have a full and free redemption in Jesus, who is the promised Messiah, let us therefore live together as the one body of Jesus Christ in love and unity, and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works.

But saying that, this verse, this text verses 24 and 25, is also connected to what is implied in verse 23. It flows out of verse 23 as well. Because we are also experiencing persecution at the hands of the Jews, and because our faith needs to be strong in the face of persecution, and because we're all united in one faith and as one body, in a sense, we all stand together and we all fall together, therefore, considering what we know of Jesus Christ and who we are in our present circumstances, therefore let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. That is, we need each other. The members of the church in the face of great opposition need the love and the support and the encouragement of one another as they live as Christians in the midst of a hostile and difficult environment. If as a church as a whole, we are going to continue in the faith and not be swept away by the influences of the world and the pressures of persecution and the discouragements of sorrow, we need to be looking out for one another. We need to consider one another in our various situations, our temptations, our dangers, our needs, and we need to be stirring up one another unto love and to good works.

Well, what do these words actually mean when we now look at these words in detail in verse 24? Well, the word "consider" in verse 24 simply means to think, to think about someone else. It means to fix your mind on someone else and think about them. And the word "consider" in the text really has this idea, keep on thinking about one another. Keep on considering one another. You're doing it and now don't stop. Don't stop doing it but keep on doing it.

The word "provoke" in verse 24 means to stir up. Oftentimes we can think of the word provoke in a negative sense, right? "Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath," as if provoking as something negative, but all that the word means is to stir up, to incite or to stimulate. Members of the congregation provoke, that is, stir each other up unto love and good works. Another word for the word "provoke" is the word "sharpen." Let us consider one another to sharpen unto love and to good works. In fact, that's exactly how the old

Dutch translation puts it, and let us think on one another in order to sharpen in love and good works, and that's where we get the theme for the sermon and the theme for family visitation, sharpening one another. In Proverbs 27:17 you have that same language, "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." And the point is this, friends in Jesus Christ sharpen each other and build each other up and strengthen each other when they fellowship with each other and when they have godly conversation with each other. If you see your fellow Christians struggling with persecution, if you see your fellow Christian struggling with doubts and temptations or despair, or he's struggling with his calling, or he needs comfort, or he needs to see afresh the riches of God's grace in Jesus Christ, then think about him. Take the time to think about him. Go to him and cheer him up and encourage him with godly and encouraging conversation that he might continue to live in joy and continue to live rightly for God's glory.

This kind of idea comes out all the more clearly when you consider the last part of verse 24, "let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." The writer says stir each other up so that others might have a greater love for God and a greater love for Jesus Christ, and a greater love and a greater enjoyment of the blessings of salvation found in Jesus Christ. Help each other. Serve each other so that despite the persecution, despite the hard trials in life, they might and you might together see just how blessed you truly are. May our interactions with each other tend to the increase of our faith and of our hope and of our love and to live before God in all good works, producing those works of thankfulness and obedience, knowing what we have in the deliverance we have through Jesus Christ, our high priest and our mediator. That's the idea of verse 24.

Well, practically speaking, what does this calling the carrying out of this calling look like? What is the writer to the Hebrews telling them to do? Well, first of all, and maybe I already said this, what the text commands us to do is to take a lively interest in the lives and the affairs of the other members of the church. The Christian is one who looks out for the other members of the church. He loves his fellow church member. He cares for his fellow church member. His fellow church member is, oh so precious to him. I think of Cain and what Cain said to God when God spoke to Cain and God said, "Where is Abel, thy brother?" And Cain said, "I know not. Am I my brother's keeper?" He didn't care about his own brother Abel, obviously because he murdered his brother. But congregation, the point is we are our brother's keeper and that means we must give thought to how we can be of help to our fellow believers and to serve one another.

We think about other members in the church and we ask, 'Is this person discouraged? Is this person doubting? Is this person struggling in one way or another? And how can I help?' It doesn't mean that we pry into other people's affairs or that we try to be busybodies, but it does mean that we think of ourselves as servants of each other, and we look at how we can help each other in our Christian walk. I think I said this a few weeks ago, but I think it's very apt, I think it's very important maybe Sunday morning as you're sitting in church waiting for the service to start, you begin to see everyone walk into church, you see the other Christians gathering for worship and sitting down, and maybe, as you look at them, you're not focused on what they are wearing, you're not focused on how their hair looks this morning, but you're asking yourself the question, "How is that

person doing? Spiritually, emotionally, is there some way I can help to encourage that person in his or her situation?" And then maybe after church or during the week, I make a point of staying around or reaching out to them to talk to them. I can imagine that the elders on family visitation might ask this very question. In fact, I would encourage them to ask this question, "In what ways do you have a love and a care for the other members of the church? And in what way are you showing that love and care for the other members of the church?" Right, not just my own family clan, not just the Sunday coffee that I've had for the last 20 years with the exact same people. After all, I think there are many here in this congregation who don't have that kind of thing. No, the question is with this body that God has put together, with this congregation in view, in what ways are you showing this love and care for the other members of the church? Oh yes, perhaps the elders might ask this question also, "Do you feel the love and care of the other members of the church for you?" And maybe the elders could also ask, "How can the church here take steps in order that we, as the local congregation, may be more diligent in stirring each other up unto love and to good works?" But the question that the elders could also be asking is this, "How are you showing love and care for the other members of the church? How are you functioning as a member of the body of Christ? How do you fit," because you do have a place, "How do you fit into the body of Christ here at Grace?"

And then we must not be nervous about that kind of question being asked of us should the elders ask that kind of question, because there are so many ways in which we are thinking about others and provoking others to love. I think of those who are volunteering on the Helping Hands Committee. What a wonderful way, maybe even anonymously, but what a wonderful way to show the care and concern for the other members. I think of those who are volunteering, who volunteered in the last month for all kinds of committees and who are busy, maybe even organizing activities throughout the year. You see on the bulletin table there's a need for nursery attendants and there's all kinds of names already on the list. That's wonderful. That's real. Considering one another in church. Maybe you are writing letters to those who are away from us for a time. Katie's address is in the bulletin. We've had others whose addresses have been in the bulletin. And there's all kinds and we're sending cards and letters of encouragement showing that these saints are not forgotten.

I think of those who maybe have just read a good book and now after church they're talking about it and they're sharing book recommendations with each other and they know that others will benefit from it. There are so many ways in which we do this, having others over for coffee, making those visits to the elderly, having the Sisters of Grace. And then I think also of those on the receiving ends of all these things who are on the receiving ends of the Helping Hands, those who are aged, those who are bowed down with infirmities, and they are a blessing simply by having an outlet for us to think for each other and to care for each other, and to exercise these things, and who are blessing simply through their godly speech and their continual witness of God's sufficient grace and God's goodness even in the midst of heartache and discouragement. And oftentimes when you are considering others and you're provoking them to love and to good works, what so often happens? You know it by your own experience, you visit with someone thinking that you are maybe performing a service for them, bringing them food or a card,

or just stopping by for a visit, and what you realize at the end of the visit is this, they have been the ones who have been ministering to you, and God has used them even for an encouragement and a blessing to you in your own circumstances. And you weren't looking for that, but that's how the Lord used that. You see, that's exactly the idea of the passage. That's exactly the idea of the word "sharpen." When you yourself sharpen others, that's how iron sharpens iron, you yourself are edified.

So first of all, the text commands us to take a lively interest in the lives and the affairs of the other members, and then second what the text implies is this: that no Christian as a true Christian is an individualist. Now we are so inclined to think only of ourselves, aren't we? This is the spirit of the age, if there is a spirit of the age, or at least we think first of ourselves. The world has become so individualistic. Everyone is so focused on themselves, their own rights, their own freedoms, their own pursuit of happiness, so that we might even be inclined to ask, "Well, how are others serving me?" Or, "How have others done me wrong?" And it's really a sickness in the whole culture and we can't be naive to say that the church isn't influenced by it. And the emphasis on the text is this: we do these things together. Let us, let us, let us. Three times over, we all have the calling to think about each other and serve each other's good.

Just think, what do I have if I don't have you? I don't have anything if I don't have the church and God's people. That's real. That's real when you go without it. That's true. That's true in the church, first of all, for example, we're talking here about the Christian is not an individualist. For example, in attending Bible studies, sometimes you you can hear this from people, "I don't get anything out of Bible study and so I don't go. After all, what's the point?" But what if I would look at Bible study not focused on myself but, in fact, focused on others, and how it would profit others if there was another member there at Bible study? Then if I have that approach, then we might have a different way of thinking. How enjoyable Bible study is not only during the study itself but even afterwards when the conversation about the passage maybe flows over into snack time, or maybe we're still talking about it a week later into Sunday afternoon discussions. Or people share their insights. Sometimes they're very doctrinal insights. Sometimes they're very practical insights and and it builds each other up. And then maybe afterwards you get home and you can think about the discussion a little bit more or maybe you talk about the discussion with your spouse and you sharpen each other. And I hope we can do that on Sundays, too, with the preaching. So we don't just listen to the preaching, but we we take it home and we talk about the word preached in our homes and we can make the most of it and use it to encourage and build each other up. That's exactly what the preacher is talking about when he says iron sharpens iron, fellow believers building each other up as they discuss spiritual things together.

But if that's true in the church, first of all, then that's also true in our own homes and in our families. The Christian in his own home and in his own family is not an individualist either. That's why Christian families make a point of it to eat together, and they read the Bible together, and they sing together, and they pray together because then they can fellowship together and they can keep up-to-date on how the other members of the family are doing. And that's love, because I love you and I want to show that love and grow in

that love. And then we know how we can better stir each other up to love God better and live in good works. And the parents do this so that they can provoke their own children to love and to good works, and the children themselves are learning from a young age not to be so individualistic but maybe you need to be quiet at the supper time and others can talk so that we can remember to listen to how others in the family are doing as well. Congregation, don't be surprised if on family visitation, the elders emphasize the importance of spiritual fellowship within the family unit, parents and children talking together about spiritual matters matters, sharpening each other in Christian fellowship because if it's not taking place in the home, how can we expect it to be taking place in the church? We can really sum up the calling this way: simply live the life of the covenant. That's what we love, the doctrine of the covenant. Live with God. Live with each other in a relationship of friendship and fellowship.

Well, when you look at it from that point of view, then it's no wonder what the writer to the Hebrews goes on to say in verse 25, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the day approaching." Now here the apostle writes about the manner of how we are to sharpen one another, and that manner is this: by fellowshiping together. This is how we sharpen each other, by fellowshiping together. Just think of it, children, you understand if there is only one piece of iron, can that piece of iron sharpen itself? No, you need two pieces of iron. And just as an ax grows dull if it's not sharpened with a sharpening stone, so the Christian grows dull, spiritually dull if he does not have Christian fellowship and for the Christian to be sharpened, God uses his fellow Christians.

And the language that's used here in verse 25 is very significant because it's talking very explicitly about church attendance. It's talking very explicitly about meeting together as members of the church for worship as a body and for fellowship. That's what worship is. Right here, right now, this is part of our worship. We are expressing the unity of the body of Christ and we are fellowshiping together right now. We're not just an audience. We are very active. We are fellowshiping together. Even when I walk into church and I see the church, that's a witness and an encouragement to me. We're fellowshiping with the Lord together as like-minded believers. Even in our very presence here this morning we are stirring one another up to love and to good works.

To help see this, just think about the Hebrews. Right, these Hebrews, these Jews who had converted to Christianity, who saw Jesus and were given the faith to see Jesus as the Christ, and they were now suffering persecution. Imagine what kind of a witness it was to each one of these Hebrew Christians to see the body of Jesus Christ gathering together on Sundays to worship together in one faith. A week of persecution by your own family members, your own relatives, and you're looking forward to Sunday and now Sunday comes and you see everyone else who's going through the same experiences striving to confess Jesus Christ before men in the face of hardship and persecution. That itself, seeing that itself would have stirred up the members to love and good works. Seeing how others were willing to publicly confess Jesus Christ before men and they were willing to suffer the shame and persecution and they lived the life of self-denial because of it. And then afterwards, after they worshiped and they saw Jesus from the scriptures, they could

converse with each other, they could discuss together what they had heard under the preaching and how it was comforting, how it was encouraging to them in their Christian walk for the next six days that was before them, reminding them of how blessed they were to be Christians.

That's what he's doing in this whole sermon. The book of Hebrews, some say it's actually his sermon and what he's doing is showing them the blessings they have as Christians. And then the calling, "Don't waver. Don't draw back unto perdition but persist, persevere unto the saving of your souls." But now imagine, imagine what kind of pain and discouragement these same Christians felt when they saw that there were individuals and there were families who were giving up this practice of church attendance, and who were so quickly becoming weak in their faith and falling away. That's what the writer says is happening. This is the manner of some. They're not heeding the call to come and worship whether on Sundays or during the week. How discouraging that empty seat in church is. And these things are just as true today as they were back then. Our church attendance is just as important for others as it is for us. You see, gathering together in Christian fellowship is part of the joy of the Christian. It's part of the joy of the church as a whole. This is part of my very life as a Christian, right? This is what heaven is going to be. This is what I'm hoping for and this is what I get a taste of when we gather together under the call to worship. How strange, how detrimental to one's soul for a Christian to keep himself willingly from that fellowship. Really, how selfish for the person who is only concerned about himself, who thinks he does not need the church or be a member of the church because, "I can worship God at home by myself." How can anyone say that he loves God, that he loves the Bible, and that he loves his brother but he does not want to meet with his brothers and sisters in Christ when the opportunity presents itself and he's able to? Jesus Christ is glad, Jesus Christ looks forward to Sunday to gather with his people. Should not the believer who has Christ in him have that same kind of perspective?

I sometimes hear criticism against Reformed churches that goes something like this, and this is those who are holding fast their traditions, truly Reformed churches, and that criticism goes something like this. "You do not live the life of Christian joy. You're not living as deeply in the Holy Spirit as God intends Christians to live. You're not as full of hallelujahs and outbursts of passion." They might even just say this, "You do not enjoy a personal relationship with Jesus as you ought to." And maybe you've heard it too, I've heard it, and perhaps they say that because of our controlled, orderly worship service, perhaps they say that because they've been influenced by a kind of Pentecostalism which says that, you know, everyone should be having his own private vision and his own private revelation from Jesus Christ, perhaps they say it partly because it's true. And yet, from my own experience and now I acknowledge this, this is my own experience, but from my own experience I hear this kind of language from the same people who make light of church attendance, who don't care for two worship services on Sunday, who are not jealous over it, who make light of fellowshiping with God's people, who sometimes neglect to go to church because I'd rather go to the cottage. And what you see is this, you see just how individualistic their thinking must be, how self-serving, how self-centered

they actually are. They evidently do not see the importance in stirring up the other members of the congregation unto love and to good works.

And if they go to church their thinking is this, this is real, their thinking is this, "Church is for me, right? For me to be fed. For me to be served so that my needs are met so that I feel happy, so that maybe I'm entertained or instructed by the minister and learn something new, or so that my relationship with Jesus grows. I come to church, I sneak in the back door right before the service starts. I sit down, I receive the church's service. I get up, I walk out the door, I immediately go to the car and I go home and I'm good for the week, right? I've met my obligations. I've gotten my fix and the focus is on me." And even the manner of some is that they entirely forsake the assembling of themselves together with God's people and the danger is there for us, beloved. The danger is there for us to act that same way so that we simply don't fellowship with each other.

Now to be sure, we come to church to make use of the means of grace. We do come to church to be refreshed, in a sense, to be served by Jesus Christ after a weary week of living the Christian life, and the preaching is there to feed us every week. This is the place where Jesus has promised to meet us and to take care of us, but we must also come to church simply because we love it. We love the church. I love God's people, and sometimes I forget how much I love God's people until I actually show up at church and I see just how precious they are, right? And we love Jesus who dwells in the midst of the church and here it is in church where I am sharpened by my fellow brothers and sisters, where I am learning to care for others, where I enjoy the mutual blessings of active life among God's people. In the church, I see God's people once again, and as I see them I'm also reminded I'm not alone in my own particular burdens and trials either so that I'm taken over by self-pity. But I see their needs and their trials and that gives me opportunity to consider them and pray for them and then to approach them and stir them up to love and to good works.

The members of the church are one body. Their health is determined by the health of the body put together. The members of the church are like climbers who are all climbing up a very high mountain, and they're all roped together as they're climbing up that mountain. And as they climb then they really need to be carrying out for the other members who are roped together. The members of the church are like soldiers who are standing in that line together on the battlefield, and as they fight the good fight of faith, they work together, they need to watch out for each other and defend each other and spur each other on. And then they even take different formations, right? If you study even ancient warfare, they take on different formations, the turtle formation, right? They're working together so that they can make progress in the battle.

And that's part of the idea of the word "exhort" in verse 25, "but exhorting one another." And that's what we're doing together as we together support the preaching of the gospel, and the preaching comes with the exhortations, right? All of this goes together, encouraging one another, comforting each other, standing up for each other, strengthening each other. How important that is when we have new members in the congregation. We're getting new members, that's a time for leaping for joy and this is the

time to welcome them, to make a point of sharpening them, to get to know them so that we can know how to provoke them in their own particular way unto love and to good works. That's the manner, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is but exhorting one another.

Well, what's the reason for all of this? Why is this command given us? Well, there are a number of reasons. First, as I've already mentioned, this is following on 9 1/2 chapters in which the writer is talking about Jesus and who Jesus is as better than the angels, better than Moses, better than the Aaronic priesthood. He is better. He is better than the sacrifices because he's the fulfillment of all the Old Testament types and shadows. He is the one who has made a new and living way, not a dead way, but a living way, because he himself is alive. And he is the one who's even right now at the right hand of God making intercession for us. He's the one who's made the complete atonement for all our sins. And now we, together as believers, have been engrafted into Christ, and this is the joy and the privilege we have in Christ. Knowing what I have in Jesus Christ, I am compelled to love the saints. I love Christ and I love his body and out of thankfulness to Jesus and simply with the desire to enjoy these blessings, to enjoy the body of Christ, we seek this out, fellowship and sharpening one another in fellowship. This is the blessings, part of the blessings that he purchased for us through his death on the cross. Let us love God all the more and the other members of the body of Christ. This is our reasonable service. This is what's reasonable after putting before you who Jesus is.

Second, as has been implied all along, we are one body. The church is one, and that means we depend upon each other in a very real way, and these Hebrew Christians, these new converts, very keenly understood that, and maybe as we go into the last days as we are in the last days, God will cause his people to experience that more and more that we need each other.

And then third, the reason for all of this is also, as you read at the end of verse 25, I just kind of made allusion to that, the day is approaching, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves as the manner of some is but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the day approaching." And that day is the day of Jesus' Second Coming. Enjoying fellowship with God's people, keeping the Sabbath day holy is of utmost necessity for the health, for the perseverance of God's people as a whole and for our own personal spiritual health as we draw closer to the end. And beloved, we are there. If these Hebrew Christians at the dawn of the New Testament were there in Hebrews 10, then we certainly are there as well. And how many of us don't feel the pressure of the world just as the Hebrew saints were feeling? How much more then shouldn't we be considering one another and making these things my priority? The Lord is sharpening us even through all these things, to get away, put away the fluff and get to the brass tacks, get to what you need, considering one another to provoke unto love and to good works. The more difficult life gets for the Christian, the more he needs the communion of the saints.

Well, congregation, may this be our experience as we meet and fellowship together each Sunday. May this be our experience as the elders come into our homes in this upcoming family visitation. The elders do not come to interrogate you. Not at all. But the reality is

the elders also have this calling to consider one another. They lead by example. And we're working on it. That's why we picked this passage for family visitation. We have this as our aim. As you welcome us into your homes and we open the scriptures together, may our fellowship result in the sharpening of one another, provoking one another unto love and good works, more love towards God, more love towards each other, and may that serve for the spiritual health and prosperity of our homes and families and the church as a whole. May it serve for the strengthening of our faith and our hope and our love. And may it bring forth those good works that redound to the glory of our great and glorious God. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father, we thank thee that this kind of passage is in scripture because it reminds us that we are no different than thy glorious saints who have fought the battle before, and just as they needed that word in the midst of their hard circumstances, so we humbly need to hear this word too. And we thank you for it and we pray that thou wilt use it to truly shape our hearts and shape our lives that we might see Jesus and the glory and the hope that is ours in Jesus, we might see his body, the church, and we might truly be filled with the mind of Jesus towards one another. Bless family visitation season as it begins again this year. Bless us in the life of the church. And bless us that we might see each other as truly precious and as those whom we need as brothers and sisters in Christ to care for what others might refer to as the least of these, my brethren. Lord, give us all that attitude of humility that truly loves and seeks to do good. Help us all and bless us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.