

Belonging (Why We Need the Church)
The Church is a Place to Give and Receive Encouragement
Hebrews 10:23-25

October 2, 2011

Dr. Steve Horn

Introduction: We have learned that we need the church because it is the place where we:

1. Encounter God through Worship.
2. Exercise our spiritual gifts.
3. Invest in eternal things.

Now we learn that we need the church because it is the place where we give and receive encouragement.

Text: ²³ Let us hold on to the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. ²⁴ And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works, ²⁵ not staying away from our meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

Introduction: You never know who may need to be encouraged. In the Library of Congress, there is a box that contains the items found in Abraham Lincoln's pockets on the evening of his assassination. Among other things, there were nine newspaper clippings mostly concerned with the great deeds of Lincoln. One of the clippings was a reporter's account of a speech made by British statesmen, John Bright, in which Bright called Lincoln, "one of the greatest men of all times." The world acknowledges that now, but in 1865 many Americans shared a different opinion about Lincoln. Perhaps it is that the President carried these clippings around to encourage him in some of his most discouraging times.¹

The church ought to be that kind of place where everyone of us can find encouragement for discouraging times. We have turned to the book of Hebrews this morning to underscore that principle. I believe that it is a powerful book from which to communicate this message.

Many consider the book of Hebrews to be one of the most complex books in the New Testament. Our unfamiliarity with the Old Testament sacrificial system is probably one of the issues that makes this a difficult book. We can make the book much easier to understand if we consider the context of the original letter. The Book of Hebrews, written by an author unknown to us, was written to encourage Christians to persevere in their faith in the midst of persecution. Even though the recipients of the letter were victims of persecution, the call of the author is for them to persevere in their faith. Nothing, even persecution, should detract them from following Christ. Salvation through Christ is and was so superior to every aspect of their former religion that they would be fools not to persevere in their commitment to Christ. The leaders of the early church knew of the incredible importance of encouragement if believers were going to withstand the pressures of the world around them. Nothing has changed two thousand years later!

¹ Chuck Swindoll, *The Quest for Character*, p. 61-63.

The Reasons Encouragement is Necessary

1. Commanded—The first reason that we must be a place of encouragement is because this is a command of Scripture. The command to encourage is in a series of three commands. (Let us draw near {to God} and Let us hold to the confession are the first two)

2. Concern for fellow believers.

¹³ But encourage each other daily, while it is still called today, so that none of you is hardened by sin's deception. (Hebrews 3:13)

3. Challenges of the world.

Ancient writers of the first century world used this same term that we translate “encourage” when referring to rallying the troops. So, we gather on each occasion in part “to rally the troops.”

The Requirements of Encouragement

1. Thoughtfulness—Let us consider is the translation of some at this point. True encouragement involves a bit of thought.

2. Togetherness—Joining together is a requirement of encouragement.

A friend of mine relayed this story of encouragement to me. My friend Scott, at the time a doctoral student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, was taking his written examinations. Written examinations come half-way through your doctoral program—a grueling three-day test of perseverance. This three-day period can be a very lonely experience. Another friend of ours knew that Scott was taking these tests. He arranged with the professor to put a note in Scott's test packet. The note simply read, “Scott, here's a dollar. When you have your break today, buy a drink on me. I'm praying for you.”

The city of Boston goes all out for the annual Boston marathon. The citizens of Boston, some 500,000 line the streets to shout encouragement to the runners. Bands play, Signs wave—all for people unknown. As I think about that—I think, “Dear God, if people can encourage others whom they do not know how much more should we encourage those we do know.

The Results of Encouragement

1. Love among the believers

2. Continuation of Good Works

The Book of Acts tells us about a man named Joseph, but the apostles gave him a new name—Barnabas—which means “Son of Encouragement.” In Acts 4, we meet him, because he sold a field he owned. The implication is that the money was used to help those in need. A great testimony of real encouragement! In Acts 9, we meet him again. Saul has been saved and given a new name—Paul. No one in the church trusts Paul. “Isn't this the one that goes around killing Christians?” is the general attitude about Paul. The disciples of Jesus were not believing that Paul was a real disciple of Jesus. Acts

9:27 says, “Barnabas, however, took him and brought him to the apostles and explained to them how, on the road, Saul had seen the LORD, and that He had talked to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. Our prayer ought to be, “God, make me a Barnabas—make me an encourager!”

The Resources of Encouragement

Our resources for encouragement are limitless.

However, perhaps our greatest resource is the tongue.

- ²³ A man takes joy in giving an answer;
and a timely word—how good that is! (Proverbs 15:23)
- ³⁰ Bright eyes cheer the heart;
good news strengthens the bones (Proverbs 15:30)
- ¹¹ A word spoken at the right time
is like golden apples on a silver tray. (Proverbs 25:11)