

October 11, 2020

# Encouraging One Another for the Glory of God

Hebrews 10:24-25

## What is encouragement?

What is encouragement? The Greek word for “encouraging” in **v.25** παρακαλέω *parakaleō*—two root words *para*, meaning near or next to; and *kaleo* meaning to call. So *parakaleō* or encouragement is drawing near to someone *by calling or speaking to their heart*. The word encouragement is literally *putting courage in* to one’s heart: *en* - as in “put in”; and *courage* which is that quality which empowers a person to face danger or difficulty with firmness, with resolution. When Joab and his brother Abishai had to fight the Syrians and the Ammonites, Joab *encouraged* him “Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good” (**2 Samuel 10:12**). In 1553, Calvin wrote to the five prisoners of Lyons that were near to be burned at the stake for being Protestant. Calvin *encouraged* the five young men: “Since it pleases him to employ you to death in maintaining his quarrel, he will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain...your death [shall] resound more powerfully, so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby... And seeing that he employs your life in so worthy a cause as it the witness of the Gospel, doubt not that [your life] must be precious to him [also].”<sup>1</sup> Calvin wrote four letters to these young men encouraging them all the way to their death. He knew that above all other things, they needed encouragement. We may not fight in a physical battle like Joab, or be burned at the stake like those five men. But we have brethren who do face these things. We have precious saints facing cancer, isolation, constant pain, depression, and imminent death. Furthermore all

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<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Selected Works, Vol. 5*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, Reprint 1983), pg. 406-407. See pg.404-5 footnote two for how these young men met their end.

of us have enemy that that prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking to devour us. (1 Peter 5:8). Don't you see? God has given us the means of encouragement so we can help each other play the man as face all these things.

### Encourage for the glory of God

And this is one of the chief ways that we can bring glory to God. Encouragement is not flattery. Flattery is the world's corrupted version of encouragement. No. Godly encouragement is God-centered because it recognizes that God alone supplies our needs. "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me" (Psalm 50:15). Biblical encouragement recognizes that any good in you and any good me is there because God is actively working it in us. **Philippians 2:13** "...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." Therefore we must encourage one another, not only because it is a way to love each other, not only because it helps us play the man, but because God's glory must be seen. That is the purpose of the universe. Loved ones, are you an encourager? Will you be God's instrument for putting courage in someone's heart? Will you draw attention to the glory of God?

### *The Big Idea...*

God has given us the gift of encouragement so that we can love one another and bring glory to His name, therefore encourage one another

- ☆ We Gather for the Sake of Encouragement
- ☆ We Encourage as a Means of Loving Others
- ☆ We Encourage Others for the Glory of God

## I. We Gather for the Sake of Encouragement

### The challenges of the early Jewish Christians

First we need to understand why the book of Hebrews was written. The Jewish Christians face three very difficult challenges. **First** and foremost, because these Jewish Christians trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ and believed that He was the Messiah whom the whole OT spoke of, they were excommunicated from Jewish life. **John 9:22** says "...the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue." So they were alienated from their community because of this Jesus. **Secondly**, because Jesus is the fulfillment of all they hoped for, the Church laid aside all the ceremonial law of the Judaism. But these Jewish Christians were tempted to return to these things. Therefore the main argument in this book is to show how Jesus is superior to all. He's superior to angels (ch. 1); to Moses (ch. 3); Jesus is the final rest we enter into (ch. 4); Jesus is the true and better High Priest (ch. 5); Jesus is the once-for-all sacrifice (ch. 10). Therefore to return to the ceremonial law was to deny the Christ they said they believed in.

### The battle of Jew and Gentile in the Church

**Thirdly**, the Church was no longer larger composed of mostly Jews, now Jews and Gentiles composed of Christ's body. **Ephesians 2:14-16** "For he himself [Christ] is our peace, who has made us both one [Jew and Gentile] and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." There was hostility between Jew and Gentile *before* Christ came. There was no two people groups more different than they were. One author has said:

“The differences between the two groups are vast and can be seen in what they ate, how they dressed, how they washed, how they worshipped, and what their art, academics, language, and social customs looked like. Even their architecture was different.”<sup>2</sup>

### **The splitting of the Church**

Because of these historical differences, some Jewish Christians began to split the Church. They were dividing themselves because “those people are different than us.” These Jewish Christians were trying to erect that wall that Jesus had already torn down in His body, thus dividing up the body. I believe that this is one of the things that is happening in the book of Hebrews. Look at **v.25** He tells us that it was the habit of some to neglect meeting together: “...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some.” Why had some stopped meeting? Well no doubt there were multiple reasons. Perhaps the dread of persecution, or the reality of false conversions, or backsliding, etc.<sup>3</sup> But we must include that some neglected to meet together because the thought of having to be with people so different than them was more than they could bear. Trying to unite Jew and Gentile into the same body was like trying to unite fire with water.<sup>4</sup> It was a reproach. Peter the Apostle struggled with this very thing. In Acts 10 when God was giving him the vision of the sheet being lowered from Heaven with all the “unclean” food on it. God was teaching him that He was uniting Jew and Gentile in one body, so He told him in the vision to “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” (**Acts 10:14-16**). Peter realized God has accepted both Jew and Gentile, and he was not to reject them

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <https://drivethruhistory.com/jews-and-gentiles-in-the-gospels/> Accessed October 10, 2020

<sup>3</sup> Or, perhaps like in our time, a type of easy-believism that check marked the box of believing in Jesus and wrongly dismissed the necessity of the gathering.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries Vol. XXII*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books 2009), pg. 239

(v.28-29). Now this was *not* a lesson that every Jewish Christian learned immediately.<sup>5</sup> Peter failed to practice this truth consistently. We see this **Galatians 2:11-12** “But when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.” Peter the apostle divided along party lines. And so did many of these Hebrew Christians. They neglected to meet together because those people are so different.

### **1st principle: whatever gathers us together gets the glory.**

So we arrive at our first principle: *whatever gathers us together gets the glory*. We will always be tempted to neglect the gathering of the Church because people are different than us. Why must our Author exhort us not to neglect the gathering of ourselves? I mean that is strange. Do you need to be exhorted to pursue happiness? No, you will do that naturally. We don’t need to be exhorted to do things we love doing. But we need to be exhorted not to neglect the gathering. Why? Because it is so easy to do so. Our sinful nature is so full of self, and so empty of love for others.<sup>6</sup> And we see the differences between ourselves, and conclude that it’s like not worth the time. Isn’t it amazing that we still have the same problems today, except for with infinitely smaller things? We think that our differences in the modern church in America are so big—marrieds vs. singles, white people vs. brown or black people, young vs. old, theological vs. non-theological, baptists vs. presbyterians, confessional vs. non-confessional, old hymns vs. contemporary music, and a million other trivial things are nothing compared to the differences that existed between Jew and Gentile. Jesus united them, and commanded them to gather in one body. Why? Why is Jesus in the business of uniting fire and water? Why is He so interested in putting a hodge podge of incredibly different people together? **Ephesians 3:10** “...so that

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<sup>5</sup> This was such an unbelievable thing that when Peter returned to Jerusalem, he was criticized sharply. **Acts 11:2-3** “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

<sup>6</sup> See ch.2 and ch.16 in C.S. Lewis’s *Screwtape Letters*

through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.” God wants His wisdom to be displayed to the universe. His wisdom is on display when He demonstrates that He has solved the puzzle of how to unite such different people together. It’s through the blood of His Son. The cross that tore apart Jesus’ physical body, is what has forever united Jesus’ spiritual body—the Church. And so whenever we divide those things that Christ has put together, we are drawing attention away from the wisdom of God. We are saying, “No God is not wise enough to unite us together.” Loved ones, whatever gathers us together gets the glory. Just like the Jews of old—when they divided along lines of their Jewishness, it was their Jewishness that got the glory, not Christ. Likewise if we gather *merely* because other people are like us, then it’s that thing that gets the glory. Loved ones, do you pursue people who are different than you in this congregation? It’s not wrong to like brothers and sisters that are similar to you. That’s very natural *and good*. But it’s *supernatural* when you pursue those who don’t look like you. That puts the wisdom and grace of God on display.

### **The opposite of neglecting to meet is encouraging one another**

So then how do we how do we do this? What is the glue that holds a bunch of weirdos like us together? Encouragement. Carefully notice the logic of our passage. **v.25** commands us not to neglect meeting together. Logically what would be the opposite of *not* meeting together? Meeting together right? But that is not what he says. He assumes we will, but he doesn’t make our meeting together the opposite of *not meeting*. Rather, **v.25** the opposite of neglecting to meet together is ‘encouraging one another.’ Isn’t that fascinating? We gather for the sake of encouragement.

### **Macro encouragement**

Now let’s make a distinction between macro-encouragement and micro-encouragement. **Macro encouragement** is what happens when we hear the Word of God preached to us. We all come here as spiritually hungry beggars

looking for bread, and Jesus—*through the preaching of the Word*—gives us the true Manna from Heaven. This is the chief part of our encouragement, that every Lord's day, as we gather we to hear our Father speak to us, we hear Him address us as His adopted children, as those whom His soul loves. We hear about His Son who was by His side when He created the heavens and the Earth; It was this Son who though He is eternal, infinite, and immutable, He came down and put on flesh so that He could be Immanuel "God with us." We hear how He became a servant for our sake, how He was born of a woman under the law so that He could redeem us from the curse of the law. We hear about how He bore our sins on the tree; about how He merited a perfect righteousness that He voluntarily exchanges with us for our unrighteousness. We hear about how He was cruelly put to death, but that it was our sins that drove the nails into His hands and feet. It was our sins that pressed the crown of thorns onto His brow. But He loved us to the end. Though all His disciples abandoned Him, just like we would have done if we were there, He remained faithful until He could say "It is finished." We hear about how when Christ was crucified we were crucified with Him so that just as He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. We hear about how when He ascended into Heaven, He did not leave us as orphans, but sent us the Holy Spirit, our Counselor, our Helper, our Comforter. We hear about how since He began a work in us, that He will complete it, that He will never forsake the work of His hands. We hear how nothing—not politics, not plague, not persecution, not death, or demons, or depression can ever separate us from the love of God because of Jesus Christ our Lord. We hear how Christ is preparing a place for us, and that He promises to come again and take us to myself, so that where He is we will be also. So that we know that in all things, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. That's **macro-encouragement**: the gathering together to hear the Word of grace that is able to build us up.

### **Micro-encouragement**

**Micro-encouragement** is not *only* when we do that with each other—not only when we gossip about the gospel with each other—but it also is a very specific speaking of God’s grace to each other’s personalities and circumstances. One author defines it like this: “...encouragement [is drawing attention to the<sup>7</sup>] evidences of God’s grace in the gospel *OR* in...others<sup>8</sup> to the glory of God.”<sup>9</sup> That’s where we are going in our next two points. But our **first point** is this: *God wants us to gather together so He can encourage us*. He doesn’t gain anything by our gathering here. We don’t increase His worth. No. He wants us to gather because He loves us, and longs to put courage in our heart so that we can make it all the way home.

## II. We Encourage as a Means of Loving Others

### How do we love one another?

Scripture tells us to love one another. The difficulty is that we often don’t know what that looks like. What does it mean to love one another? One often overlooked way is through encouragement. Look at the logic of our verses. In **v.24** we read “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” That is the *general part* of the command. We give our children general commands all the time. A mother says to her young daughter “Go clean up your room.” The little girl may ask her mom “Mommy what do I need to do?” And then the mom will give her the specific parts: “Honey, you need to make your bed, pick up your toys, put your dirty clothes in the basket, etc.” Then the little

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<sup>7</sup> Original—“means highlighting the”

<sup>8</sup> Original—“a gospel-centered person.” The reason why I changed this here is because I’m convinced by Sam Crabtree that there are ways that we can affirm the grace of God in unbelievers without dishonoring God. cf. Sam Crabtree, *Practicing Affirmation: God-Centered Praise of Those Who Are Not God*, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2011), pg. 14, 21, 33, 103, 121, 129-130, 134

<sup>9</sup> Source: <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/encourage-one-another-2/> Accessed October 10, 2020



girl will know *how* to clean her room. The general is made clear by the specific. Likewise here, our author doesn't leave it general when he tells us to stir up one another to love and good works. He gives the specific way to accomplish that. Look again. **v.24** is the general command "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works." **v.25** specifies what this means "but encouraging one another..." In other words we love one another (general command), *by* encouraging one another (specific application).

### **Encouragement is not flattery**

So then what is encouragement? **First**, what encouragement is not. Encouragement is not flattery. Flattery is the affirming of someone in order to gain something for one's self—either favor, or influence or whatever. David's son Absalom was a flatterer. He would sit by the city gate and intercept those going to the king to settle a dispute. **2 Samuel 15:3-6** says that Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice." And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgment. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." Prince Absalom would flatter the people with the affections he lavished upon them, in order to steal the kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

When King Herod made a speech to the people of Tyre and Sidon, they wanted peace with him, so after he finished speaking they cried out "The voice of a god, and not of a man!" **Acts 12:22**. Herod blasphemously allowed this to

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<sup>10</sup> It was flattery that Jesus' enemies constantly used against Him. **Mark 12:13-15** "And they sent to him some of the Pharisees and some of the Herodians, to trap him in his talk. And they came and said to him, "Teacher, we know that you are true and do not care about anyone's opinion. For you are not swayed by appearances, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? Should we pay them, or should we not?" They flattered Him in order to ruin Him. **Proverbs 26:28** "A lying tongue hates its victims, and a flattering mouth works ruin." **Proverbs 29:5** "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet." So we must never flatter. It is the language of the Devil, because it's only aim is self.

be spoken about him, and the Lord struck him down. The people of Tyre and Sidon murdered Herod with flattery.<sup>11</sup>

### What encouragement *is*

So then what is encouragement *positively*? If encouraging others is one means of loving them, then what is it? **Encouragement** is drawing attention to the evidences of God's grace in the gospel *OR* in others to the glory of God.<sup>12</sup> Since we already focused on the first part of that definition, I want to focus now on the second part—"encouragement is...drawing attention to the evidences of God's grace in others to the glory of God." Of course I'm not saying there are not other ways to encourage the saints. Praying for each other is a powerful means of encouragement. A number of you have told me that you pray for me on Saturday because that is the day after my studying throughout the week that I write the message. My anxiety has shrunk considerably, and so I am greatly encouraged by your prayers. We can encourage one another through hospitality, through the ministry of presence, though meeting each other's needs. There's many ways we can encourage one another. But I think the specific type of encouragement in **v.25** is this encouragement of our speech towards each other. That seems to be a reoccurring theme in Hebrews. In **Hebrews 3:13** we read "But exhort [same word *parakaleō*—or encourage] one another every day,

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<sup>11</sup> cf. Crabtree, pg. 107 to see the comparison of flattery to fornication. "Godly encouragement is a free gift with no strings attached and trust God to bring about whatever good harvest he wishes to bring from the seed planted, flattery is a bribe, and a direct return is expected—soon. Godly affirmation approves of Christlikeness and disapproves of anything contrary, whereas the flatter approves anything—Christlike or not—that may achieve the desired response." Crabtree, pg. 108

<sup>12</sup> So we can encourage others by turning their attention specifically to the gospel, *or* to how God is working in them both to will and work according to His good pleasure (**Phil. 2:13**).

as long as it is called ‘today’...” It is specifically something we do with our speech, it’s Godly affirmation.<sup>13</sup>

### Jesus the Affirmer

Jesus regularly practiced this kind of affirmation. He praised the Canaanite woman begged Him to heal her daughter. She would not give up and so Jesus finally said “O woman, great is your faith!” (**Matthew 15:28**). He praised the woman who poured out the costly alabaster flask of ointment on Him. **Mark 14:6** “Leave her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.” He praised John the Baptist to the other disciples, **Luke 7:28** “I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John.” He praised the generosity of the widow who threw in her two mites, **Luke 21:3-4** “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.” What is Jesus doing in each of these places? He’s drawing attention to the evidences of God’s grace in others.

### A man named Onesiphorus

Now the question is, how does this type of encouraging, this affirmation, stir up one another for love and good works? That’s what our passage says “... let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works [by] encouraging one another.” So how does this work? Please turn with me to **2 Timothy 1:16-18**. Paul is recounting to Timothy how all who encountered him in Asia had turned away from him when he was in prison. Here Paul was possibly at the lowest of lows, in prison, awaiting his execution. What did he

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<sup>13</sup> John Piper gives three reasons why the absence of this type of affirmation is a kind of sacrilege. “First it is disobedience to God’s command: **Proverbs 31:30** says “A woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.” Certainly this applies to men, women and children. “Second [a lack of affirmation] demeans Jesus as though he were stooping to do something unworthy when he says, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (**Matthew 25:21, 23**). If [Jesus] says it, should we consider it beneath us to say it [to others]? Third, all the works of God are worthy of praise. And there is no good in anyone but by the work of God.” **Philippians 2:13** “...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” **1 Corinthians 15:10** “But by the grace of God I am what I am...” Crabtree, pg. 8

need? Encouragement! Look at **v.16-18** “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me—may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!” Notice the five different persons in this text. **1)** The Lord; **2)** Paul—who’s receiving encouragement; **3)** Onesiphorus—the encourager; **4)** Onesiphorus’s household; and **5)** Timothy whom Paul is writing to. Let’s take those one at a time. **First** we have the Lord. How is the Lord active in this text? He is refreshing Paul through Onesiphorus’s words, and He’s giving mercy to Onesiphorus for refreshing Paul. Amazing! God is in this stinking prison cell pouring out grace to both the recipient and giver of affirmation alike. **Second**, we have Paul. He said that Onesiphorus “refreshed me” in **v.16**. I hope it’s clear that this was encouragement. Onesiphorus wasn’t breaking him out of jail. He couldn’t change Paul’s external circumstances. But he could effect Paul’s inner man. He refreshed Him with words. *Refresh* in the Greek means to cool off—to recover from the effects of heat. Or it means to recover your breath—to be revived. It’s the same word that Moses uses in **Exodus 23:12**<sup>14</sup> to speak of what happens on the Sabbath. “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, *may be refreshed*.” When Onesiphorus encouraged Paul, it was as if he cooled down his soul on a summer day; it was like he helped Paul recover his breath so he could continue to run the race that God plotted out for him; it was as if he gave Paul a sabbath in his cell, a rest from all his labors. Paul was stirred up by Onesiphorus to more love, more good works. He was refreshed by encouragement so he could continue his labor for the Lord. **Thirdly**, consider Onesiphorus.<sup>15</sup> Nobody knew where Paul was in massive the metropolis of Rome. He was lost in the prison system, abandoned by those in Asia. **v.17** says “when he [Onesiphorus] arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me.” Why? Because he knew how much Paul needed to be

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<sup>14</sup> In the Septuagint

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, Onesiphorus means “profit-bringer”

encouraged. Paul was so touched by this that he called down a benediction on the man! **v.18** “...may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that day!” Clearly Onesiphorus was already saved by mercy. Paul was calling on the Lord to grant him more—to grant him more mercy, that is, more *undeserved* reward, more *undeserved* blessing. **Proverbs 11:25** “...those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.”<sup>16</sup> **Fourthly**, consider Onesiphorus’s household. Paul calls on the Lord to bless them too! **v.16** “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus...” We don’t know if they participated at all, and yet God is going to refresh them as well. Crabtree says here “Those who live with us are in a better (mercy enriched) environment when we...refresh others.”<sup>17</sup> **Fifthly**, we have Timothy. He has a front row seat to all of this. The point is that “Onesiphorus (the person giving the encouragement) is being watched”<sup>18</sup> by others.

### Experimental affirmation

Loved ones do you realize that you are being watched by others? Do you realize that—through the power of God working in you—you have the power to refresh others with your words? That you can grant others an inner Sabbath rest; that you can help them catch their spiritual breath; that you can be the cool breeze to their parched souls? Do you realize there is reward in this for you? More mercy! Do you realize that encouraging others not only dispenses grace to others (**Ephesians 4:29**); not only does it build others up (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**); but encouraging others is how we and others fight against sin. **Hebrews 3:12** “But exhort (parakaleō) one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” *that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*” When Abigail encouraged David, she prevented him from killing Nabal (**1 Samuel 25:23**). When Mordecai encouraged Esther, he prevented her sinning by her silence (**Esther 4:14**). Will you help others fight against sin by your encouragement?

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<sup>16</sup> NLT

<sup>17</sup> Crabtree, pg. 40

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

Don't you realize that by encouraging others, you can help shape their destiny? My dad helped shape my destiny by encouraging me. I was driving on the freeway, 20 years ago or so. We were talking about Scripture, I don't even remember what it was we were talking about. But I remember exactly where I was, because he stopped talking about the subject at hand and started to pour courage into my heart. He said, "Josh I think God is making you a teacher, I can see His work in you, and it is good." Those words shaped my life. Those words had eternal impact. Thank you dad. Loved ones, here's my plea to you, don't wait to start encouraging others. Do it today. Our text is urgent. **v.25** says "...encourage one another, *and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*" Do you feel the urgency? This age is soon going to end. John Owen puts it like this: "The time is short and the days are evil. Let us be convicted that we have neglected so many previous opportunities...of doing good to one another. Let the rest of our few and evil days be spent in living for him who died for us."<sup>19</sup> Let the rest of our days be spent loving others by encouraging them. That's our **second point**: how do we love others? By encouraging them.

### III. We Encourage Others for the Glory of God

#### **Penultimate vs. ultimate**

Our text tells us that encouraging one another is the way we stir up one another to love and good works. But what is the purpose of love and good works? That the glory and honor and majesty of God would be displayed. Concerning love, Jesus said "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*" (**John 13:35**) Jesus is made known when Christians love each other. The world cannot help but see Him. Concerning good works, Jesus said "...let your light shine before others, so that they may

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<sup>19</sup> John Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship: A Manual For Church Members*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), pg. 54

see your good works *and give glory to your Father who is in heaven*" (**Matthew 5:16**). Good works which are stirred up by encouragement causes unbelievers give glory to God. Pen-ultimately we are aiming at building each other up through encouragement (**1 Thessalonians 5:11**)<sup>20</sup> But ultimately we are aiming at the glory of God through our encouragement.

### **Praising God through non-gods & the vital rule**

Sam Crabtree puts it like this: one "...way to praise God, [is] to praise those who are not God."<sup>21</sup> We admit that the heavens are not God. Yet they declare the glory of God (**Psalms 19:1**), and when we see them, if we have eyes to see, we will praise Him who made them. Likewise a person's character, though it may appear at times to be like a shattered mirror, still reflects Heavenly light. And oh we should praise that, because in praising that we are praising God from whence it came. Just remember this vital rule: "If anyone does anything that pleases God [that we can affirm] it happens because God is already at work in that person: "for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (**Phil. 2:13**). With this rule in mind, can you see how it could be sin to see something praiseworthy in someone but fail to praise it? To fail to praise someone for the reflection of God they display is to make the same error of those who yawn at rainbows, or are indifferent to exploding volcanoes, or who never proclaim the beauty of a sunrise. In both cases God is not receiving honor for His handiwork.

### **The danger of puff**

At this point, someone may ask, but won't this kind of people praising puff them up? Flattery puffs people up. Godly encouragement does not because it is pointing to God as the source. We contribute the broken mirror. God contributes the light that seen in spite of the shards. "Affirmation that points to the attributes of God can't be done too much. The solution isn't to affirm less,

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<sup>20</sup> "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

<sup>21</sup> Crabtree, pg. 23

but to affirm differently.”<sup>22</sup> What does Paul say constantly when he praises the churches? “I thank God for you!” **Romans 1:8** “*I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world.*” **Ephesians 1:15-16** “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, *I do not cease to give thanks for you...*” **Philippians 1:3-5** “*I thank my God* in all my remembrance of you...because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”

### Approval addicts?

But if we praise people like this, won't we turn people into approval addicts? Loved ones, we already are approval addicts. “Seeking approval is what human hearts do.”<sup>23</sup> God made us that way—He built us so that we would long to be approved by Him, He created us to long to hear those words: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”<sup>24</sup> But sin has twisted that longing so that we lust after approval for self-centered ends. So our problem is *not* that we are approval addicts, the problem is that we are self-addicts. But Godly encouragement helps cure that deadly disease. It cuts the root off the root of selfish because it says “You are who you are by the grace of God.”<sup>25</sup> Loved ones, God is the one who is glorified when we praise people *rightly*.

### What does Godly encouragement look like?

So then how do we do this? Godly encouragement resists generic or ambiguous praise. Of course that doesn't mean that you can never just tell others “good job.” But the question is, are you encouraging others in more Christ targeted ways? Can you hunt down Jesus in the person and draw

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, pg. 120

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Matthew 25:21, 23

<sup>25</sup> Look how Crabtree answers the opposite objection: ‘Won't praising others make us idolaters?’ cf. pg. 14, 91-92



attention to Him?<sup>26</sup> The aim is to affirm Christ's image in people. If one of your children is creative, you can affirm them by saying something like "Wow God is really helping you create beautiful things, praise Him that He is working alongside of you!"<sup>27</sup> You can praise people for forgiving others, helping them see that forgiveness is one of the choicest works of the Trinity. You can encourage others when you see them practicing hospitality, helping them see that they are walking in the footsteps of Jesus who is right now preparing a place in Heaven for us. The key here, is look for sightings of Jesus in the person in front of you, and then speak to their heart. Tell them that you see God working in them.

### **Can I take pleasure in being pleasing?**

How then do you receive this type of affirmation? How do we stop pride? How do we pass the compliment on to God?<sup>28</sup> C.S. Lewis offers some help here:

"Pleasure in being praised is not Pride. The child who is patted on the back for doing a lesson well, the woman whose beauty is praised by her lover, the saved soul to whom Christ says 'Well done,' are pleased and ought to be. For here the pleasure lies not in *what you are* **but** in the fact that you have pleased someone you wanted (and rightly wanted) to please. The trouble begins

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<sup>26</sup> "Imitating Jesus pleases God, assuming that the imitation stems from a reproduction of the life of Christ being imaged forth from the transformed one in whom he resides by faith. I am not saying that imitating Jesus pleases God when it comes from outward checklist maintained in mere human effort. That's death and deadly." (Crabtree, pg. 134). This seems then to argue against ever "praising" unbelievers. But there is a passive way and an active way that people can show forth the characteristics of Christ. Believers do it actively. Unbelievers, I think, more passively. And the Bible still affirms unbelievers though they do it passively. cf. Daniel 2:37-38

<sup>27</sup> "You are Christlike [in some specific way], and I want to be like you in the way you are like Jesus." Crabtree, pg. 69

<sup>28</sup> Not a small question! Proverbs 27:21 says "The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise."

when you pass from thinking, ‘I have pleased him; all is well,’ to thinking, ‘What a fine person I must be to have done it.’”<sup>29</sup>

Lewis’s point is that it is good when people are so pleased in what they see in you, that they praise you. That doesn’t dishonor God. You should be pleased that people are pleased in God’s working His will and work in you. You can respond by saying “Thank you, I’m so glad God is working in me.” You can pass the compliment on to God in a number of different ways. Paul said “It is... the grace of God that is with me” (1 **Corinthians 15:10**). “Corrie ten Boom said that when people would honor her, she knew that God was really the one who deserved all the glory and credit, so she would imagine each honor as a huge bouquet of roses. She would picture herself taking in their scent and savoring it for a moment before handing it up to Him, the rightful recipient. Smell the roses and hand them up.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Affirming Unbelievers to the glory of God**

What about unbelievers? Can we affirm them to the glory of God? Yes we can. Paul said in **Romans 12:14** “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” The word bless in the Greek is where we get the word eulogize, it’s a verb that means to praise highly in speech or writing. “Matthew Henry says ‘Speak well of them. If there be anything in them commendable and praiseworthy, take notice of it, and mention it to their honor.’”<sup>31</sup> So let me just address unbelievers here this morning. Dear friend, no doubt you have qualities that are excellent and admirable. You are a valuable human being. Do you know this about yourself? But do you also know that everything good about you is good because it reflects the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He made you the way you are. And if you want His approval, if your heart wants to hear

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<sup>29</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Complete C.S. Lewis Signature Classics*, (New York, NY,: Harper Collins, 2002), pg. 71

<sup>30</sup> Crabtree, pg. 127-128

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, pg. 103

Him say to you “Well done, good and faithful servant” then you must turn to him in repentance and faith. Repentance means turning away from your sin and rebellion in putting yourself first in life. Faith means you receive Him as the most valuable object in the universe: as your Lord and Savior. Jesus said that if you receive Him and believe on His name, He will give you the right to become a child of God. And then you will be approved by Him.

### **Change the world?**

Dear congregation, seize upon this moment. The command is simply to encourage one another. God’s not commanding you to change the world, or start a revival. But the truth is, that encouraging one another to the glory of God can in fact be an instrument of those very things. So encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.