

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Introduction

We come now to reflect on Hebrews 10.24-25 part two. We noted last time that this text is not what it is usually thought to be: a text *mainly* about church attendance. Church attendance is a subordinate point in the text, but the main point is the duty that we have to stir up one another to love and good deeds.

We also noted last time that we need to be like a fabric of intertwined roots for mutual strength. We become a fabric of roots not only by considering how to stir each other up to loving good deeds but also *by actually engaging regularly in mutual encouragement*. Thus, the writer calls us to the practical duty of **encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near** (10.25b).

Today, we will spend some time on this subject: “Practical Duty that goes with Stirring up Love.” We have already opened this door to practical application, but we can swing it open more widely. Surely, the pastor does not mean that we are to ponder, study, and meditate to show much study. If we study, that is good. That is one step and a very important step, but consideration implies application. Our question then is how can we take up this duty in practice? Two things in the text will guide our answer: improvement and urgency.

1A. Improvement

Note the words “all the more” in verse 25: **encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near**. The writer is telling us that fulfillment of the duties he is emphasizing should be all the more in evidence and manifest in our lives. This means that we have to keep studying one another in mutuality in order to make meaningful steps of *improvement* more and more (all the more).

How can we do this? One way, that I want to emphasize, is that we think about, engage, think some more, and improve in practicing the Christian grace (virtue) of hospitality. This is not something we can outline on a piece of paper with a list of rules. Still, it is something that pastors ought to teach.

Remember that hospitality is having people in your home for dinner, but it is much more: centrally it is a welcome, to your home, to your life, to your person. It is a matter of friendship, being friendly, embracing others without abrasiveness (**Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt**, Col. 4.6). In a sense, we show hospitality at church by giving all a welcome to make them feel at home. You show hospitality by kind greetings, welcoming conversation, and exuding a welcoming spirit. The welcome is hospitality as a seed; having people in your home for dinner is hospitality full grown. We can say three things about hospitality in order to fill out the idea of improvement from our text: it is important, challenging, and realistic.

1B. Hospitality is important

Hebrews 13.2 calls us to the duty of hospitality though it has its own context: **Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares**. We will deal with the particular context later, but we can note the “a fortiori” argument for our purposes presently. If God calls us to the duty of hospitality to strangers, then so much more, must the duty of hospitality apply to one another in family love (that we **entertain** family though it may be strange).

Hospitality is something that we should not neglect. Part of my job is to spur you in the direction of hospitality.

The first step is the difficult one of *figuring out* how to find the time to do it. How do we get down to earth and improve in the matter of having people in our homes for dinner, coffee, and fellowship? That is an important question because showing hospitality is important. It is a

spatial thing (having people *in your home* for dinner or being present with others) but being in the same approximate space is only a beginning.

2B. Hospitality is challenging

Part of the perspective here is to recognize the challenge. Then, you submit to Christ to restructure priorities and make time for hospitality. That is challenging. You all have to figure out how to do this because some of you are single, some are married, some of you are working wives, some do not have Christian spouses, and some of you do not have your own homes. No one can give you some simple steps that make this easy. So the challenge is that you give much consideration regarding how you can meet with other believers to stir up love and good deeds by conversation on the things of God. Clearly, the duty belongs to all of us.

However, difficult as that may be to actually do (it is difficult to improve in any area), the real guts of the thing is to work hard at cultivating conversation on the things of God, on the gospel of the sixty-six books and their relevance to daily life. You may feel somewhat out of your comfort zone to do this, but you can only make headway by engaging in it. Some suggestions may help bring realism to this discussion. That brings us to our next point.

3B. Hospitality is realistic

Say, you have not shown hospitality for a long while and there are many challenges to doing it, and the neglect is very understandable. Well, the best “consideration” is not to decide on having someone over from the church every week for the rest of your life! That goal is too massive and unrealistic. There is too much too soon. You cannot break any habit by attacking it unrealistically. You must include in your considerations the wisdom of little steps to inch your way into it. That means that you decide to have someone for dinner as soon as you can; just make a one point plan. You put one practical effort into place. You do it prayerfully that it be a good beginning. You cross one bridge at a time.

My wife and I face the same challenges that you face of work, family, house maintenance, and so forth. We all have full schedules. Some of the solution is prioritizing and good planning. Some of it is godly wisdom to know how to do what the Lord tells you to do. Some of it is just having the drive to do the work it takes to show hospitality.

Of course, if you seek improvement more and more, then your goal will be to have some kind of regular hospitality built into the fabric of your life. You get there by cultivating it as a good habit (opposite the bad habit mentioned in our text, 10.25). You discipline yourself for it. Perhaps, you may get to a place where you can set a meal aside every month for hospitality.

We all get tired, and we may not feel like giving up an evening (may need to limit the time). Many things are such that in forethought they look unappealing and they feel more draining than beneficial. However, in doing them the negative feelings disappear. To establish a good pattern of exercise, there are times when you just do not feel like it, but you go and feel better for going. This is true in the matter of hospitality because *the promise in the big picture is that there will be a stirring up*; there may even be some sparks flying due to iron sharpening iron.

In practice then, questions can get the ball rolling. But, realistically, they can also be intimidating because they can expose our ignorance. I might ask my wife on Sunday afternoon: what did you take away from the sermon today? She sometimes replies: “help me out, I can’t remember the sermon.” I could get upset and say or think, “Don’t you listen,” but I find that if I mention the text and start to review, she chimes in with substantive thoughts and shows careful listening. We do forget much. Questions are not tests of brilliance that have the design of either puffing up our egos or deflating them. They are thought provokers that can play a helpful part in the give and take of one anothering love.

Asking a question is one side of the conversation: the “giving out” side. There is the important “taking in” side also. Some people can “dish it out” but not take it in. How do you receive questions, even if they have the potential of putting your ignorance on the table? Is it not

best to simply use your ignorance on some particular topic as a beginning point to further discussion and discipleship learning? Thus, you might counter reply: “I do not know what to do with that, so, what text of Scripture gives help on it? Fill me in on things.” There is a pungent answer to one of the questions in the children’s shorter catechism that we can all give. “Q: Why do I need Christ as my prophet? A: I need Him as my prophet because I am ignorant.” That is pungent, plain, vital, and realistic.

Receiving another person’s sharing has its pitfalls too. We can be envious of the blessing of others. We could try to “one up them” (you were blessed x, well, let me tell you, I was blessed x plus). Three things are supremely important to giving and taking in an up-building way. 1) We all need both; we cannot simply be the one who tells everyone else what is right and what to do. 2) We all need to manifest a charitable spirit. Whether giving or receiving, we are to practice charity and its fruits. 3) We all must do battle with sin in our thoughts, words, and deeds because healthy conversation can lead to various levels of exposure. This will challenge our pride and many other graces of the Christian walk.

Then, one might say, “Come on be real this is too challenging to engage, hospitality gets into my space. If you think that way, you are letting yourself go down the path God tells you to avoid. He says, “Do not neglect meeting with others,” but you are avoiding the path God tells you to follow. He says, “Keep good company and do so to stir up love and good deeds, to stir up sanctification, to prompt growth in holiness, and to stimulate better knowledge of your great high priest.” His way is definitely the right way. Can we realistically question what He commands?

2A. Urgency

There is emphasis on the Day: **and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (10.25)**. The “Day” is the last day, the day of Christ’s return when the present age will end and our Lord will establish the eternal kingdom with a new heaven and a new earth.

Because we do not know the day or hour of Christ’s return, then we must live watchfully with a sense of imminence. The time between His comings is the end time, the last days, and the last hour. Wherever we may be in the time between, we are to live as the people of the last hour who know that Christ is standing at the door: **7 Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains. 8 You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. 9 Do not grumble against one another, brothers, so that you may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing at the door (James 5.7-9)**. Instead of grumbling at one another, we are to stir up one another to love, and hospitality helps us do it.

Stirring up love and good works by hospitality takes on a special urgency in light of the imminence of the Day. Our sense of urgency will intensify as a sense of imminence increases. Motivation comes from seeing the Day approaching.

You have to understand some things about the dawning of the new day that has already occurred; cf. especially v. 12: **(Romans 13:10-14 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. 11 Besides this you know the time, that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. 12 The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires)**. Additionally, you need to orient your thoughts to the fact that the high noon of the day that now has dawned is nearer now than when you first believed, cf. v. 11..

So fix your mind on the things of God. Set your heart on the better hope that God promises in Christ, your risen and enthroned Sabbath king. As you keep these thoughts of the great future in mind, you will find strength to continue the work of improving your *life* for love and good works. And we should add: improving your *lives* in family mutuality.

Conclusion (in three thoughts: serious need, golden duty, and promising opportunity)

1) Serious Need

Let us not forget the context in Hebrews of concern with the deceitfulness of sin: ¹² **Take care, brothers...exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.** The deceit has to apply to how we harden our hearts when we grumble, complain, quarrel and oppose authority because this conduct matches the rebellion in the wilderness (3.15).

Sin is difficult to face and hard to see; we hide ourselves behind our backs (Augustine). The solution is imperative: we must face the battle with sin in a joint way helping one another. Sin is tricky, so, we need honesty in facing it. Thus, we need an objective outsider to help us see more clearly. We need the help of others. In astoundingly simple terms, *the solution to this profound problem is mutual exhortation: exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today"* (3.13); **let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another (10.24-25).**

2) Golden Duty

Considering how to stir up loving mutuality is like the golden rule that has a "list making" step: make a list of whatever you want others to do for you. That is something we can all do and perhaps do happily. It would be nice if someone would be friendly to me and mean it. I want people to encourage me along in my work. I want encouragement in my Christian walk, and so forth. But making the list is totally insufficient before our Savior. We are to make the list (think about what we want others to do for us) with the clear purpose of doing those things for them. Action for others is the key to the golden rule. Likewise action is the key to stirring up of love by poking and encouraging one another. The duty is to consider, think, figure then act! Hospitality is an excellent way. Hospitality is a golden duty because it realistically applies the golden rule.

3) Promising Opportunity

There are three "let us" exhortations in Hebrews 10.19-25. Notably, the third one (our text today) has the context of the other two. Figuring out how to stir up love and good deeds has the context of prayer seeking holiness (10.22, let us draw near in the holy of holies) and holding fast (10.23, let us hold fast our confession). Prayer and appropriation of what you confess, God's word of hope, go with considering how to stir up love.

Furthermore, prayer and serious consideration about the matter of practical love leads to hospitality. Hospitality is particularly relevant in this context because it brings us together and *affords the opportunity to prompt one another forward* on the narrow path. Wonderfully, it *promises a stirring up of things*. It adds spice to the Christian life. Therefore, we all ought to give consideration to hospitality, and in its practice, we have an outstanding opportunity to encourage one another in ways that poke each other along on the path of love and good deeds. Should we not do this kind of thinking, figuring, and considering? Should we not do this "all the more as we see the Day approaching"? If we consider Jesus, then surely this duty will rest on our hearts and stir us up to hospitality, love, and good works for His honor and glory.

To Him be all glory now and forever, amen.