

## Am I Provoking Others?

Scripture Text: Hebrews 10:19–25

### Introduction

Discipleship! We have been learning about being disciples of Jesus Christ and making disciples of Jesus Christ. If we say we follow Jesus Christ, then that implies we follow His teachings. Disciples are learners and they learn from their master. We have learned many things from our Master, Jesus Christ, through His written Word, the Bible. We have learned that disciples need to know who God is, who they are, and they need a genuine relationship with God. They need to earnestly long for God. They need to find their satisfaction and joy in Him and not in anything else. Disciples need to also be students of God's Word. They also need to pray often. Prayer is an essential part of having a deeper relationship with God. We cannot have a real relationship with God without a fervent prayer life. Prayer should never be just an item on a spiritual to-do list. It is not a religious task, but an essential and natural ingredient of our relationship with God. Today, I would like to take us back to the beginning of our study on discipleship.

If you recall, we started this journey by looking at what God had to say about us, the Church. People have different opinions about the Church and different expectations for what it means to be a part of a church or to worship with a church. For some, it is enough to gather with a church once a week and spend an hour or two worshipping God together. For some, it is enough to sit in a pew, sing with others, give an offering, hear a message, and then go home. For some, they expect gathering with a church on Sunday to be a feel-good, non-confrontational, peaceful, maybe emotional, but certainly positive experience. They do not want any controversy or anything that will distract from their personal worship experience. That all sounds nice, doesn't it? Wouldn't we all want that? The thing is, being a part of a real church is messy. Do you know why? Because you are messy? The last time I checked, the Church is made of sinners who are saved by the grace of God. Do you know what happens when you get a bunch of individual sinners together? They sin together! Sometimes we forget that in our search for bliss.

### The Mission Revealed

One of the things we have learned is that the Church is the new Temple of God. God is building this new Temple with living stones (you and me) upon the chief cornerstone of Jesus Christ. God's people are *being built together* upon Jesus Christ. They are *growing together* in Christ as they follow Him together. We connected this truth to our specific mission statement which says: *"At Good Hope Baptist, we are Sharing the good news about Jesus, creating a Loving place, where His people are Discerning the work He has called them to do, and where His people are Equipping one another to do His work."* If you are a member of this church then you have committed to that mission. You have agreed to share God's Word, to help create a loving place, to help us discern together what God wants us to do, and to equip one another to do that work. Our mission is to be disciples of Christ who help others become disciples of Christ. This is like building a house, which takes work and time. Discipleship is work, and sometimes it is messy.

## Two Reasons to Not Give Up

One pastor described the book of Hebrews as being written to a group of first-century Christians who were in danger of giving up. Maybe you have felt like giving up. Maybe you have grown tired of the work or the challenges in building and growing a church. Maybe you just want to throw up your hands and say, “I quit”. God is saying, “Do not give up.” After spending much of the book exalting Christ, the writer of Hebrews compared the old sacrificial system and the old covenant with the new and better covenant in Christ. Earlier in chapter ten, the writer mentioned that the old Jewish sacrificial system could never save us, but a perfect sacrifice had now been offered on our behalf. We are saved and sanctified through the Jesus’ sacrifice *once for all* (Hebrews 10:10), and we now receive God’s forgiveness through Christ. Now that we have a perfect High Priest who is also the Perfect Sacrifice to save His people, we should have confidence and not ever give up. Look at the following verses.

**Hebrews 10:19–21** <sup>19</sup> *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,* <sup>20</sup> *by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,* <sup>21</sup> *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,*

In these verses, the writer gave us two reasons to not give up. These two reasons result in three things the Church ought to do. The first reason is that we have confidence to come before God. This confidence is not based on anything we do or have done. We cannot have confidence in ourselves, but we can have confidence in a Savior. Earlier in Hebrews 4:16, the author exhorted the Church to have confidence because of a great high priest who has ascended into heaven and who was tempted in every way, but did not sin. For those reasons we can have confidence to draw near to God and to receive mercy and grace in time of need. Now we have another reason for assurance: *Jesus has opened the way to access God*. He has made a way for us to come before God. Our confidence in coming to God is based upon Jesus’ saving work, by the blood He shed on the cross. As the old covenant priest had to pass through a veil to enter the Holy of Holies, the new covenant people of God enter His presence via the sacrificial death of Christ. The second reason to not give up is that we have a great priest over the house of God. This “great priest” is of course Jesus and is the same as calling Him “high priest”. Because Jesus is our perfect high priest, we can do the following three things.

## Draw Near to God

Since the priestly work of Christ has given us access to God, the author exhorted the Church to do three things. Three times, the author wrote, “Let us”. We should not overlook the simple meaning of those two words. Each one of these three exhortations is a call for “us”, the Church, to do something. We are to do these things together. They are for “us”, not “me” or “I”. This is a team effort. Those who follow Christ, ought to approach God faithfully, they ought to firmly maintain their confession of hope, and they ought to find ways to encourage one other. I will briefly mention the first two commands, and then spend a little more time on the third one. Look at the following verse.

**Hebrews 10:22** <sup>22</sup> *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*

The first command is “let us draw near”, which we can understand as drawing near to God. The phrase “draw near” occurs frequently in Hebrews. We are to draw near to the throne of grace (4:16), we are to draw near to God through Christ (7:25), and later in chapter eleven, we are told that it is impossible to draw near to God *without faith* (11:6). Here, since Jesus has made a way for us to access God, and because He is our perfect High Priest, we ought to draw near to God with confidence. This access to God is unlike the Old Testament system where God’s people were restricted from God’s presence. Only the high priest once a year was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. Now that the veil has been torn and through the shed blood of Christ, we have full access to God. God has granted us access and has made it possible for us to draw near to Him with a sincere heart and full assurance from faith. Through Christ, God has cleansed us at the moment we believe. At the moment you turn from your sin and turn to Christ as your Savior, that is the moment when Jesus’ blood cleanses you of guilt and the moment you receive God’s forgiveness of sins. Therefore, you can draw near to a holy God.

### **Hold Fast to Our Confession of Hope**

The second “let us” command the writer mentioned in this passage was to urge the Church to persevere. Remember, the early Church was facing persecution and it was tempting for many of them to turn away from the faith. It may have been easier to just give up and not face the persecution for following Christ. The same is true for the Church today. There are places in the world today where it is dangerous to follow Jesus. There will come a day, and maybe soon, where it will be dangerous to faithfully follow Christ in America. What will you do when that day comes? The writer of Hebrews tells us to not give up, to continue in our faith, no matter the cost. Look at the next verse.

**Hebrews 10:23** <sup>23</sup> *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

The second exhortation of this passage calls the Church to have a faithful, unwavering hold on the confession of our hope. This means to hold on to the Church’s teachings about Christ and His work. Our confession to the Church’s teachings are not based on some man-made doctrine. It is not some fanciful or wishful thinking. Our confession is based on the sure Word of God. Our hope is like an anchor for our souls in the midst of turbulent seas. There is a strong incentive to persevere in faith because the God we serve is absolutely faithful. The reason we can be confident in our hope is due to the object of that hope — Jesus Christ. We have hope because God is faithful. We have hope in what God has said and promised because of He is trustworthy. God has never failed us and He will never fail us; therefore, hold on to the confession of your hope.

### **Provoke One Another to Love and Good Works**

The third and final exhortation in this passage calls for us to seriously consider how we can stir up other Christians in their love and service. We could read this as provoking each other to these things. Do you like to be provoked? Do you like to provoke others? Maybe you will not admit you like it, but you might be pretty good at doing it. Husbands and wives know how to push each other's buttons pretty well. Typically, provoking is a bad thing, but here, it is used in a way to produce something good in others. We are to carefully consider how we can help each other love like Christ and do loving acts of kindness as Christ. Look at the next verse.

**Hebrews 10:24** <sup>24</sup> *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*

The writer wrote, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works." The verb "let us consider" conveys the concept of careful consideration, thoughtful attention, and deep concern. This is not some careless thought, but an intentional plan for how we can keep on caring for one another. As followers of Jesus Christ living together in a community of faith, we should take seriously our responsibility and commitment to one another. We should take seriously our love of Christ and our love for each other. The goal of carefully considering how to provoke one another is to get each other to love and out of that love, do good deeds. Love is expressed in outward tangible good works for others. What some might call "random acts of kindness" are not random at all in the Church. God encourages His people to love and do good works out of love for others. Related to these acts of love is the very act of gathering together. We cannot do church very well by staying separated from one another. And yet, so many people try to do just that. The command to consider how to provoke one another to love and good works is further described in the next verse.

**Hebrews 10:25** <sup>25</sup> *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.*

Verse twenty-five reveals to us how we are to go about provoking one another to love and good works: *by not giving up meeting together and by encouraging one another.* Provoking one another to love and good works requires being together. It requires community. That some were neglecting this duty may have been one of the motives for the author's warnings throughout this book. It was not the time for the Church to neglect meeting together. The Church was growing. The Church was persecuted. The Church needed to stay together, growing in love and good works together. The Church has the same needs today, and yet, so many neglect gathering with other believers. Some think other Christians will just get in their way. Some think other Christians are just hypocrites. Some think organized church assemblies are just a waste of God's resources. And yet, God's Word tells us to come together. To forsake our fellow believers shows unconcern for Christ Himself. The Church is the Bride of Christ and He died to save her. Thus, when we forsake the other members of His Body, we are essentially forsaking Christ.

Christian perseverance is thus a community endeavor. If we are going to persevere in this age, we need to do so together. The writer also added that we ought to encourage

one another. Encouraging one another is tied to our meeting together. It is the reason we meet. When the early Church began, it was severely persecuted. Others sought to destroy God's work. Many Christians were imprisoned or killed. They needed to meet together to encourage one another and to strengthen one another. The same is true today. We need to meet and encourage one another. Our times of meeting together ought to be times of encouragement. God has brought us together to be an encouragement to one another. We are to do this all the more as "the Day" approaches, probably meaning the coming day of Jesus' return and judgment.

We cannot get through this life without one another. That is how God designed this thing called "Church". Yet, some of you may not feel encouraged by meeting together with the Church. Some of you may feel like the Church has lost its meaning. Maybe you are discouraged by some events or some things going on. Let me encourage you to reconsider what the Church actually is. Remember what we learned so far. Church is a living, growing entity. It is composed of flawed people, just like you, who are saved only by the grace of God. God has sovereignly brought us together in order to help one another to grow in Christ, to encourage one another in our spiritual walk, and to even tell each other when we are straying from the path God has chosen for us. That requires commitment. That requires love. That requires work. It is not easy, but it is worth it. God is building a beautiful Temple with each one of us as living stones, and He is even using us to help put it together. That is the Church and that is discipleship. Are you stirred up?

## **Conclusion**

In closing, are you provoking one another to love and good works? Are you fully committed to the Church, even in the midst of messy business? You might say, "I do not want to commit or I do not want to work. I just want to come to church, sing some songs, hear a message, get spiritually recharged and then go home. The problem is that ain't the Church. God's idea of Church is a living organism that is drawing closer to Him, that is holding on the faith in the midst of persecution, and that is strengthening one another and encouraging one another all the more as the Day of His return draws closer. We know that Jesus is coming soon, therefore, we need to be encouraging one another all the more. We need each other and we need to be working together all the more. That is good news. Thanks be to God. Amen!