

First Baptist Church, Granite Falls, MN

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Introduction¹

For the history of the church, Christians have learned and repeated the “Lord’s Prayer,” the prayer that Jesus prayed when he showed his disciples how to pray:

Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. (Mat 6:9b-13, KJV)

That prayer says so much. That’s the way we should pray. Do you pray that way? I hope so. But now I have another question for you. When you pray that way, do you hope that God will give you what you’re asking him for? Do you really want it? And if the person sitting next to you is praying that way, do you want God to give him what he is asking for?

I’m going to assume that you would all say, “Yes!” When you pray that way, you really do want God to give you what you’re asking for. You really do want God’s name to be hallowed. You really do want God’s kingdom to come. you really do want God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. You really do want God to give you your daily bread each day, and forgive you your debts as you forgive your debtors. You want these things for yourself, and you want these things for the person sitting next to you who is praying for the same things.

But what about the next part of that prayer? “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Do you really want that? Do you really want God to keep you from temptation, and deliver you from evil? And when the person sitting next to you prays for that, do you really want God to give him what he’s asking for?

I hope so. But here we have to stop for a minute and think about this, because the way God answers that prayer bothers us sometimes. The way that God answers that prayer is, in large part, through the exhortation of fellow Christians in the church. When you pray for God to keep you from temptation and sin, God answers your prayer by sending other Christians into your life who can exhort you to avoid temptation and exhort you not to give in to temptation.

That’s what we’re going to see in our passage this morning, and that’s what I’m going to preach. You need to hear this, and I need to hear this, because we aren’t doing this nearly well enough, Brothers and Sisters. This is something we all need to do better, right here in this church. I sure know I need to do this better. We need to sit up and pay attention to what God is telling us this morning:

Hebrews 3:12-14 12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of

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sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

I'm going to focus on v. 13 this morning: "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." This is one of the biggest commands in the entire Bible. It changes the way we live, each and every day. It changes how we think about church, and how we think about our relationships with one another in the church, and how we talk with one another.

This puts huge demands on us – demands that are so huge that some people don't want to have anything to do with them. They don't want to exhort anybody, and they sure don't want anybody to exhort them. I think it's safe to say that there are times when all of us think that way, to some extent. But if we really mean it when we pray for God to deliver us from temptation and sin, how can we forsake God's answer to our prayer?

Let us not forsake God's answer to our prayer. If you have prayed for God to deliver you from temptation and sin, know this. God has already begun to answer your prayer by putting Christians all around you this morning – Christians who can exhort you every day, that you may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. And if you are a Christian, then God has put you right here in this church to answer the prayers of those Christians sitting right there, and there, and there, by exhorting them every day, that none of them may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Let us listen to what God is telling us here in v. 13 of our passage this morning. Verse 13 shows us:

- What we are supposed to do: Exhort
- Who we are supposed to exhort: One another
- When we are supposed to exhort one another: Every day
- Why we are supposed to exhort one another every day: That none of us may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin

I. What We Are Supposed to Do: Exhort

Let's start at the beginning. What are we supposed to do? We're supposed to *exhort*. That's the main point. That's the command. Miss this, and nothing else in v. 13 matters. But just what does it mean to exhort, and how do we do it?

A. What does it mean to exhort?

The word translated "exhort" here in v. 13 has a range of meanings. The basic idea is to persuade somebody to not have a hard, evil, unbelieving heart, but to have a believing heart. But the Greek word can mean to summon, invite, encourage, exhort or implore, from gentle advice to firm confrontation. How does the writer of Hebrews mean it here? I don't think we have to pick just one of these senses. I think every single one of those English words are good for describing what we're supposed to be doing here.

But one thing is for sure – this word "exhort" does include the idea of some kind of confrontation. We have to understand this, because our tendency is to shy away

from confrontation. No matter how much our brother or our sister needs to be confronted, we'd rather just stick to small talk, because the very thought of confronting someone makes our hearts race and our palms sweaty. If we do screw up the courage to say something, we'd rather just beat around the bush, we'd rather just sort of hint at what it is we really want to say, because we're afraid of confrontation. Now, there are times when it is perfectly appropriate to just drop a little hint now and then – not all confrontations have to be pointed. But three things jump out at me here from this letter that make me think we have to be ready and willing to do the hard thing – to actually confront somebody and firmly implore him, exhort him.

Here are those three things. First, right here in v. 13 there is a sense of urgency. We're supposed to do this "every day, as long as it is called 'today'." Those last words, "as long as it is called 'today'," are urgent. Tomorrow is coming! There is no time to waste! Second, the reason for this urgency is because the consequences for a hard heart are dreadful – either punishment in this lifetime for a believer, or eternal punishment for an unbeliever. We have to do the hard thing. We have to confront. And third, later in this letter the writer of Hebrews commands us to "consider how to stir up [provoke, prod, like spurring on a horse] one another to love and good works" (Heb 10:24).

So yes, we must be willing to confront. It's not easy, but God commands us to do it. But just how do we obey this command?

B. How do we exhort?

How do we exhort? To begin with, we can follow the example of the writer of Hebrews – after all, he *is exhorting* us right here! How is he doing it? He's quoting passages from the Bible. He's explaining them thoroughly and patiently. He's applying them to our lives. He's pointing to Jesus Christ. He's pointing to the riches of unity with Christ, and the horror of falling away from the living God. If all we do is follow his example, we would do well.

You can't do this if all you talk about is small stuff. Now there is a place for small talk. It's pretty hard to get a conversation going with immature believers without starting with small talk. But if all you ever talk about is the weather, or sports, or your job, or your animals, or your garden, you'll never obey this command to exhort. To obey this command you have to bring God into your conversation. You have to bring God's word into your conversation, and you have to bring it to bear upon the life of the person you're exhorting.

You can't do this unless you are in the Word yourself. So read the Bible, and read it not only to meet God yourself, not only to grow in your own faith, but to prepare what you are going to say when you exhort somebody else – and to prepare the *way* you are going to say it.

Paul told Timothy not to be quarrelsome, but to be kind to everyone and to correct his opponents with gentleness. If Timothy was supposed to do that with his opponents, then surely that's what we should do when we ourselves are

exhorting one another. And that's exactly what the writer of Hebrews does in this letter. Yes, we must confront. Yes, we must be firm at times. But that doesn't mean we have to stop being kind and gentle.

When you exhort, be like a good doctor. A good doctor has a good bedside manner, but he's still willing to do what he has to do to heal you, even if it hurts. A doctor who has a good bedside manner, who always smiles and treats you nice, is no good to you if he isn't willing to hurt you by picking up the scalpel and cutting out a tumor. Likewise, a doctor who is willing to heal you with that painful scalpel is no good if he is so unkind and rough with you that you stay away from him. The good doctor is kind and gentle, but still does what it takes to heal you, even if it hurts. That's how you should exhort people. Say what has to be said, even if it hurts. But be kind. Be gentle.

This is what we are commanded to do. We are commanded to *exhort*. But who are we supposed to exhort? We are supposed to exhort *one another*.

II. Who We Are Supposed to Exhort: One Another

That's what v. 13 says. But now I have two more questions. Just who is "one another?" And do we all exhort one another in the same way?

A. Who is "one another?"

Let's start with the first question. Who is "one another?" The answer is: *every single one of us here in the church*. The writer of Hebrews is talking to those he calls "brothers." He is talking to those who profess faith in Jesus Christ. We will see in chapter 10 that his readers meet together as a church. That means we here in this church are supposed to exhort each other. I'm supposed to exhort you. You're supposed to exhort me. You're supposed to exhort the person sitting next to you, whether he has been professing faith in Christ for one day or for 50 years.

Do you realize what this means? It means that it isn't just your pastor's job. It's your job too. Yes, I do some things that you do not. But when it comes to exhorting one another, we all have that job. And if you and I aren't exhorting one another, then we aren't doing our jobs.

This means something else, too. It means that our job isn't just to share the gospel with lost people out there. Yes, that is important. But that's a different sermon entirely. Hebrews 3:13 says that our job is to exhort one another in this church. We can share the gospel with 1,000 people, and we can watch them all profess faith and join this church, but if we don't keep exhorting them not to harden their hearts, we have failed them.

We have to go beyond merely sharing the gospel. We have to exhort one another to obey all of God's commandments in faith. When we get to Hebrews 6:1 we'll see that we are supposed to "leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity." To do that, you must not harden your heart. For your brother to do that, he must not harden his heart. So exhort each other to not just profess faith in Christ, but to be *disciples* of Christ.

But this brings me to my next question. Do we all exhort one another in the same way?

B. Do we all exhort one another in the same way?

To answer that question, I have to leave our passage this morning for a moment. But I think the question is important enough that we should pause a moment to consider it.

Do we all exhort one another in the same way? The short answer is *no*. The Bible is clear that there are different roles in the church. We have younger men, older men, younger women, older women, husbands, wives, fathers, and mothers. I do not have time to say everything there is to be said about each of these groups, but I do want to say a few things to each of you.

Let's start with the younger men and women in the church. You may be young, but you are still supposed to exhort the other members in this church. When you do, though, remember what Paul told Timothy, who himself was younger than many other members of the church:

1 Timothy 5:1-2 1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Young people, that means you treat your elders with the same respect you treat your father and your mother. It might be okay to walk up to someone your own age and say, "You shouldn't have done that! That wasn't right!" But when you walk up to an older man or woman, it would be better to say something like, "Sir, may I speak with you about something? I don't mean any offense, but I have a question about something that you did." You treat older people differently than you treat young people. That's what the Bible says.

Older women, you are supposed to exhort your fellow members too – especially the younger women (Tit 2:3-5). God seems to expect even more of you than the men, when it comes to exhorting younger women. And if you are wives, then not only should you be exhorting younger women, and not only should you be exhorting your children, but you should be exhorting your husbands, too.

But someone might ask, "Isn't a wife supposed to be submissive to her husband?" Yes, she is. But the Bible does permit a wife some freedom of speech with her husband. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul prohibits a woman from speaking in the assembly, but encourages her to ask questions of her husband at home (and asking pointed questions is one of the most powerful ways of exhorting somebody!). I think the principle of 1 Timothy 5:1 applies. If a son can and should exhort his very father, then a wife can and should exhort her husband. Respectfully, yes. Submissively, yes – just as a son exhorts his father.

This is so important, because there are some Christians who say that to be submissive, a wife should never exhort her husband. That's the easy way out, it is sinful, and it is unloving to your husband. I say to you, husbands and wives,

“Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

Husbands, you are not only supposed to exhort your wives, you are supposed to be able to answer their theological questions when you come home from church. That’s what the Bible says (1Co 14:35). And if you are fathers, then you are supposed to be exhorting your children “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deu 6:7) When it comes to exhorting your children, God expects more of you than anyone else in the church. Nowhere in the Bible does it say, “Fathers, make sure your pastor (not even a so-called “youth pastor!”) exhorts your children a couple times each week.” But I must move on to the next part of v. 13.

III. When We Are Supposed to Exhort One Another: Every Day

We know we are supposed to exhort, and we know who we are supposed to exhort – one another in the church. But when are we supposed to exhort one another? The answer is, *every day!*

A. Why every day?

Why every day? Because the job of exhortation is never over. Why is the job never over? Because the need for exhortation never ends. And why does it never end? Because, as God told Cain, “Sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is for you.” (Gen 4:7b) Because, Peter wrote, “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” (1Pe 5:8) Because, Paul wrote, “The desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” (Ga 5:17) I’ll say more about sin – the deceitfulness of sin – in a few minutes. For now, suffice it to say that we are in a battle, Brothers and Sisters, and that battle will never end until the day we die.

This is why Paul wrote to the church in Colossae, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (Col 3:5) Each of us has to fight this battle. But we do not fight it alone. We dare not fight it alone. And we had better not leave one another to fight it alone. God commands us to back each other up. God commands us to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”

In a battle, if you are left alone to fight the enemy, you will almost certainly die. David knew that. When he wanted Bathsheba’s husband dead, he knew how to kill him. He wrote a letter to his general, saying, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.” (2Sa 11:15b) And that’s exactly what happened. When the army drew back, just for a moment, and left Uriah to fight the enemy alone, he died. Leaving him to fight the enemy alone was an act of cold-blooded murder. Nathan told David, “You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword!” (2Sa 12:9b) It is a

terrible thing to deliberately turn your back on your brother and let the enemy kill him.

Oh, Brothers and Sisters, let us never do that to one another. Let us never turn our backs on one another in the heat of battle, not even for a moment. Let us exhort one another *every day*, constantly. But what does this look like? How does it change the way we live?

B. How does this change the way we live?

This changes the way we live with each other. It changes the way we look at each other. It changes the way we look at ourselves. It changes our whole idea of church membership.

The only way we are going to obey this command to exhort one another every day is if we are involved in each others' lives. You can't exhort somebody if you don't come in contact with him. Not only can't you say anything to him, you won't know just what to say. You won't know what his struggles are. The Bible says, "If anyone is caught in any transgression [lit. if some sin has snuck up and captured anyone], you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." (Gal 6:1) But how can you know if this has happened to someone unless you are close enough to see him? Brothers and Sisters, we must be involved with one another constantly if we are to exhort one another constantly. We dare not turn our backs on anyone and let him fight alone. Is this as convicting for you as it is for me? We must do better. I exhort you to do better. Exhort me to do better. Let us not just sit here and think, "Oh, this is good. How good it is to hear the Bible preached." Let us go out there and live differently. Let us be involved in one another's lives. It is unacceptable to remain aloof.

This changes the way we look at one another. We tend to pay attention to people when they are out of money, or when they are sick. But as long as somebody has a stable job and is healthy, we tend to stop thinking about him. Brothers and Sisters, we must not do that. The rich, healthy man needs as much exhortation, every day, as the poor, sick man – and maybe even more.

This changes the way we look at ourselves, too. When you look in the mirror, who do you see? I hope you see a believer. Maybe you also see a mother, a father, or a child. Maybe you see a homemaker, or an office worker, or a business owner. But do you also see someone who wakes up every day determined to help his brothers and sisters fight this battle? That's the way you and I need to see ourselves. We need to think of ourselves as *exhorters*. It's not enough just to do well as individuals. It's not enough just to do well as families. We need to do well as a *church*, and that means each of us must think of ourselves as vital *members* of this church who go out there every day determined to help one another to persevere.

Indeed, this changes the way we think of church membership. You don't just "go to church." You *belong* to the church. You need all of us, and we all need you. Church membership is a day-in, day-out commitment to live with and watch over and exhort one another every day, so that none of you may be hardened by the

deceitfulness of sin. But this brings us to the last part of v. 13 – the reason we are supposed to exhort one another every day.

IV. Why We Are Supposed to Exhort One Another Every Day: That None of Us May Be Hardened by the Deceitfulness of Sin

Just what is the “deceitfulness of sin,” and how does exhortation help us against being deceived?

A. What is the “deceitfulness of sin?”

Sin is deceitful in more ways than we can count. Sin deceives us as a counterfeit joy, a sordid substitute for the sublime. Satan is a viciously clever deceiver, a wicked chess player. From simple moves, like the idea that some “small sin” is not so bad, to clever moves, like the idea of some sin actually being a very good thing, he knows how to counter our moves with a sin that trades the truth for a lie. And if we do not have help from God, we will be deceived.

Sin can deceive us by seeming very small. Oh, we know all about sin: theft, adultery, murder. Not gossip. Not disrespecting our parents. Not “little white lies.” Not sloth. Not gluttony. Those things aren’t so bad. Everybody does those, right? But as Spurgeon said, “My Friends, can there be such a thing as a small sin? The point of the rapier is small and for that reason the more deadly.” And if that rapier pierces us and drives through our chests, our hearts will become hard. We begin to take sin lightly. We laugh at jokes about sin. We even tune it into our living rooms to entertain ourselves.

Sin can deceive us by seeming like it’s really some other person’s problem. If we wound someone with thoughtless words, it’s not our sin – he’s just too sensitive. If we tempt somebody by dressing immodestly, it’s not our sin – he’s just immoral. If we lust after somebody, it’s not our sin – she just shouldn’t have dressed so immodestly. If we cheat somebody, it’s not our sin – he’s just a fool.

Sin can deceive us by seeming unavoidable. If we lose our temper, it’s not our sin – that’s just the way we are. If we worry, it’s not our sin – we’re just worriers. If we despise a person, it’s not our sin – we just have a personality conflict.

Sin can even deceive us by seeming a very good thing. The Israelites in the wilderness rebelled against God while thinking they were really just being good fathers, protecting their wives and children from harm. We can gossip while thinking we are really just “concerned” about somebody. We can be selfish while thinking we are really just being good stewards of what God has given us. We can dissipate ourselves in frivolity while thinking we are really just resting up for service. We can be slothful in the Word while thinking we are really being diligent, spending our time instead laboring for the bread that perishes. We can exasperate our children while thinking we are really being good disciplinarians. We can spare the rod and spoil the child while thinking we are really just being kind and loving. Husbands can fail to exhort their wives, thinking they’re really

just helping them to grow on their own. Wives can fail to exhort their husbands or parents while thinking we are really just being submissive.

Oh, yes, sin is deceitful, so deceitful that our hearts can become hard, so that it doesn't even bother us anymore – so that we even think that it's good. So how can exhortation help?

B. How does exhortation help?

The answer is simple. Exhortation helps because it comes from somebody else. If you are deceived, if you are even *about* to be deceived, how would you ever know? Somebody else has to show you. Somebody has to bring the brilliant light of God's Word into your life to show you the lie that is hiding from your sight.

Sin threatens to deceive all of us. That's why we all need to stick together. Sometimes I'll see the lie, but you won't. Sometimes you'll see the lie, but I won't. If we don't exhort one another, we'll both be deceived. But if we do exhort one another, then we'll both see the lies, and we won't be deceived.

And here's just a thought. When I die, will this sermon, this exhortation, become useless? Will your exhortations to me suddenly become worthless when you die? If you write me a letter, if you say something to me, and then you die, will I say, "Well, he's dead now; I might as well burn the letter – no sense thinking about what he told me?" Of course not. Some of you have known people who have exhorted you for years, and they died. Do you think of those? Yes, you do.

So, how far back to we go? Is there ever a time when we stop going back, listening to the exhortations of those who have died, perhaps hundreds of years ago? Some of those can be the most powerful. If the value of exhortation is in people showing us what we can't see because we're blind, why, what if all of us are blind to something because we all live in the now? Those Christians who have gone before us, hundreds of years ago, their exhortations still stand in books – and they can bring the brilliant light of God's Word into our lives and expose things that they saw clearly but we can't anymore. Food for thought.

The deceptiveness of sin is the reason we need each other. It's not because the sin is too strong to fight by the power of the Holy Spirit. It's because it can sneak up behind us. We need to watch each others' back, every day.

Conclusion

So, Brothers and Sisters, "exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

If you pray for God to deliver you from temptation and sin, look around you. This is much of God's answer to your prayer. Your fellow members are here to exhort you. You are here to exhort them. This is God's gift. May we never turn up our noses, wishing God answered our prayer a different way. Let us thank God for this answer to our prayer!

"Exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."