

• 3 more responses to what God has done

3. We are to accept the responsibility for encouraging others

• We will be at our best as Christian people if we care for others and others care for us

• Jacob illustrates this well

• We are to support others in their weakness – not criticise them

4. We are to spend time together

• Small groups

• Larger public meetings

Because of our assurance that we can approach God, we may confidently be drawing near to God. We may and must hold on to our expectation that God will work for us in the near future. A third point is found in verse 24. *And let us consider one another to encourage one another to promote bursts of love and good deeds.*

3. **We are to accept the responsibility for encouraging others.** The commands of verses 22–23 ('Let us be drawing near...Let us hold fast the confession of hope') could be interpreted in an individualistic manner, as if the writer were dealing only with our one-to-one relationship to God. But actually the theme of assisting others in persistent faith is an important one in this letter. Christians are 'holy brothers and sisters...holy partners in a heavenly calling'¹. So the plea comes to us: Take care, brothers and sisters [we note the reference to the community], lest there be in any [we note the reference to individuals] of you an evil, unbelieving heart... We are to take care of each other. We will be at our best as Christian people if we care for others and others care for us. Our writer has made this point several times before². He has said, 'Let **us** strive so that **no one may fall...**'³. We are to draw near to God and maintain our expectation of God's ever-imminent fulfilment of his promises. But at the same time as we do this for ourselves, we keep our eye on every other Christian around us. We are all to make progress together.

We may remember at this point how Jacob cared for the whole of his people. 'The children are frail, and the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me', he said. 'If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die...I will lead them on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir'¹. He attended not only to himself but to all under his care and took steps to ensure that everyone came along with him at their own pace.

So Christians are to consider each other carefully. It involves taking note of what are the special weaknesses of each one. It involves not reproaching each other or moralizing each other (You should be ashamed of yourselves...!). We are to encourage each other to 'outbursts' (*paroxysmoi*). Not outbursts of anger (as in Acts 15:39 – 'And there came an **outburst** so that they separated from one another'). Not outbursts of fevers (as the word is sometimes used in Greek writings). But enthusiastic outbursts of love!

4. **We are to spend time together.** The writer develops his third 'let us...': ²⁵*and let us not be forsaking the times we gather together to meet each other, as is the habit of some...* It is God's will for us that we who are Christians meet together often to help each other. Sometimes we do it in small groups. Whenever there is spiritual revival and awakening it leads to Christians meeting often in small groups, for spiritual talk and prayer. Then the larger public meetings are important as well. When Christians abandon meeting together in this way they will soon be in deep spiritual trouble. It had happened already to some who once had been among 'the Hebrews' to whom our author is writing.

¹ 3:1

² see 3:13; 4:1

³ 4:11

¹ Genesis 33:13-14

5. We are to live a life of encouragement towards others

• *The day of Jesus' second coming is drawing near*

• *Encourage each other by praying, gently warning, telling of answers to prayer*

5. We are to live a life of encouragement towards others.

One of the greatest tests of our spiritual understanding, our godliness, even the soundness of our doctrine, is whether it has an encouraging impact upon the lives of others. It is a severe and strenuous test! Our writer continues: *but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near.* It was obvious that the day of Jesus' second coming was getting nearer. What makes it obvious? The progress of the gospel! The nations will be reached. The Christians could see it happening in their day and it made them know that Jesus' coming might well be near. Of course the 'nearness' of the second coming of Jesus is a spiritual mystery. It is always 'near' even though thousands of years go by! What this means is: (i) it may well be nearer than we think, and (ii) if the end of the world does not come literally something will happen that is **like** the end of the world. In one way or another the sudden intervention of God is always near! This is why we take the trouble to give each other spiritual help.

How do we do it? We pray for each other. In very friendly ways we warn each other and remind each other of the dangers and encouragements that are to be found along the pathway to heavenly glory. Sometimes telling the story of how God helped us helps someone else. Maybe we tell other Christians of answers to prayer – but we do it in a way that is not boastful, that does not promote jealousy, and that is without boring self-centredness! This is where Christian biographies and the story of the church are so inspiring. There is nothing so encouraging as to see the mighty works of God that were done in days gone by. Joshua was told to build a monument so that the people might never forget that the hand of the Lord is mighty¹ (Joshua 4:20–24). We too must find ways of reminding each other that the hand of the Lord is mighty!

¹ Joshua 4:20-24



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