



## Sermon Transcript

### July 4, 2021

## Our Life Together

### Encourage One Another!

#### Selected Passages

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on July 4, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

## Sermon Text

### **1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

<sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ. <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

### **1 Corinthians 11:27-29**

<sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:17-18**

<sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### **1 Thessalonians 5:9-11**

<sup>9</sup> For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

### **Hebrews 3:13**

But exhort [encourage] one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

## Communion: One Body

This morning I want to incorporate Holy Communion into the sermon. I actually want Holy Communion to be part of my sermon this morning. The reason I want to make it part of the sermon is because it forms the foundation for the sermon series we are starting this morning.

This summer we are going to look at several of the “one another” commands found in the New Testament. These “one another” commands tell us how we are to live “our life together” as a church family. But these commands do not stand alone. They flow out of who we are as the church. “*We who are many are one body.*” So these “one another” commands are not just commands that simply teach us how to be polite or how to treat others or how to be nice to each other. These commands are not about “common etiquette. Instead, these “one another” commands reflect what we already are: “*we who are many ARE one body.*” And so, because of who we are in Christ, we *encourage one another . . . serve one another . . . pray for one another . . . greet one another . . . love one another . . .* and so on. “*We who are many are one body.*”

So we begin with Holy Communion. The word “communion” is interesting and instructive for us. Why is what we are about to do called “communion?” The word *communion* comes from 1 Corinthians 10:16. Here Paul refers to the cup and the bread that we are about to take. This is what he says about the cup and the bread, “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ.*” That word *participation* is an interesting word. It is actually the word *koinonia* which is often translated as *fellowship*. It implies that when we observe Holy Communion we are doing more than just remembering what Jesus did for us on the cross. Rather, we are *participating* with Christ. We are *fellowshipping* with Christ. We are in *communion* with Christ. Jesus is the host. I may be administering the elements, but Jesus is our present host..

It is because of Jesus and his work on the cross that we have *communion* with God. That is one of the things that is precious to us whenever we take Holy Communion. It is a sacred time for us as we receive the elements, bow our heads, pray and then remind ourselves that as sure as we hold the bread and the cup in our hands, we can be sure that if we come in faith we are in *fellowship*, in *communion* with God. That alone nourishes this weary souls who struggles week in and week out to live for Christ.

But communion with God through Christ is not the only relationship in focus when

we come to the table. Holy Communion is not an act we do in solitude. This meal is meant to be taken together. The table, Holy Communion, reminds us that through Christ we are in *fellowship* or *communion* with one another. So what we are saying when we come to the table together is that because of Jesus, we are at peace with each other. There have been times when we have ended our observance of Holy Communion by “passing the peace.” We get up and turn and greet those around us and we say, “The peace of Christ be with you.” And the response that comes back is, “and also with you.” What we are indicating with this liturgical greeting is that because of Jesus, there is peace between us. We receive the other. We forgive the other. We bear with the sins of the other. Quite frankly, there is no other way to come to this table. In fact, we experience the *fellowship* and the *communion* we have with Christ through our *fellowship* with each other.

This gets to the heart of what Paul is warning us about when he tells us to not come to the table *in an unworthy manner*. In fact, he tells us to *examine ourselves*. I am afraid we often miss the point of these instructions. We often turn this call to examine ourselves into a time of introspection to see if there is any sin in us that makes us unworthy to come to the table. You are usually given about fifteen seconds to take this personal inventory. But that is not the point. Quite frankly, none of us are worthy in ourselves to come to this table. In fact, it only takes about fifteen seconds of self examination to discover that. We all come to the table by the mercy of God expressed to us in the body and the blood of Jesus—the cross.

The issue that we are being asked to examine in this passage is whether or not we are at peace with one another. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:29, “*For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*” When he calls us to *discern the body* he is calling us to make sure that as much as it is dependent on us, we are a peace with one another. Otherwise, we are not coming to this table in a manner worthy of what it represents. “*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*” This table represents that in Christ we are one and so we need to come as one.

In many ways, Holy Communion sustains our *fellowship* and our *communion* with God and with each other. That is why we do it over and over again. This is sacred because it is our oneness in Christ that demonstrates to the world that Jesus is indeed the Son of God. This is why the word “one another” is mentioned one hundred times in the New Testament. Our fellowship with “one another” is that important. A third of those one hundred commands deal with how the church gets along with “one

another.” This is not incidental. It is vital to our witness as followers of Jesus.

But before we look at our first “one another” we want to first come to the table and taste of the communion we have through Christ with the Father and with one another. We want to hold the elements in our hands that point us to the body and the blood of Jesus—the cross—and proclaim that in Christ we are at peace with God and we are at peace with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

We read in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: *“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ. Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”*

Hymn: O Sacred Head Now Wounded

The night our Lord was betrayed, he took the bread and he said, “This is my body which is for you, as often as you eat of it, do it in remembrance of me.” Eat all of it!

That same night, our Lord took the cup and said, “This is the blood of the new covenant which is for you, as often as you drink of the cup, do it in remembrance of me.” Drink all of it!

Leader: The Peace of Christ be with you.

Congregation: And also with you.

### **Encourage One Another**

Now we are ready to begin looking at some of the “one another” commands of the New Testament. They help us understand how we are to live life together as the church, the body of Christ. These are the things we do to reflect and maintain the peace and oneness that we already have in Christ.

Just to let you know where we are going, here are the “one another” commands we are going to look at this summer. Encourage one another. Love one another. Greet one another. Accept one another. Fellowship with one another. Serve one another. Speak truth to one another. Show hospitality to one another. Pray for one another.” These are just nine of fifty-nine “one another” commands. I am sure we will be challenged and encouraged by each one of these commands.

We begin this morning with “encourage one another.” It is a “one another” that speaks to the power of our words. Words have power. We all know that and we have all experienced that. We are all very acquainted with the fact that our words have the power to create and they have the power to destroy. There was a Jewish Rabbi who said, “Words are singularly the most powerful force available to humanity. We can choose to use this force constructively with words of encouragement, or destructively use words of despair.”<sup>1</sup> Our words can either help or harm. They can heal or hurt.

Proverbs 12:18 captures the power of our words to be used for good or for harm. It says, *“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts.”* That would hurt! Gary Chapman uses a more contemporary metaphor. He says that our words can be like “bullets.”<sup>2</sup> Sword thrusts. Bullets. They can injure and they can kill. But then, Proverbs 12:18 tells us that the opposite can be true. *“But the tongue of the wise brings healing.”* Our words have the power to lift up and to encourage. Gary Chapman likens these words to “seeds” planted. They have the power to bring forth life.

Here is the challenge for us. Words are flowing out of us all day long. Dane Ortland says that there is “a hurricane of words that make up any given day.” For example, “Passing another and saying hello in the hallway at work, chatting over lunch, greeting our spouse at the end of the day, tucking a child in with a good night story, speaking with a salesperson at the store, talking on the phone while driving. We also use words without employing our larynx: emails, tweets, Facebook comments, handwritten notes stuck on the fridge . . . Are they bringing life?”<sup>3</sup>

The context of these “one another” commands is squarely placed in the context of the church. These commands are commands for how we conduct ourselves with each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Now that doesn’t mean we can be careless with the way we talk to people outside of the church. Of course not. But these “one another” commands are designed to govern how we live at peace with one another. Paul captures the power of our words in the life of the church when he says in Ephesians 4:29, *“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion.”* To what end should we use our words in the church? Listen to what he says, *“that it may give grace to those who hear.”* It is interesting to me that the next verse talks about not grieving the Holy Spirit. It grieves the Holy Spirit when our words fail to bring grace to one another. Therefore, the opposite is true as well. It honors the Holy Spirit when we encourage one another with or words.

And so there are several places in the New Testament where we have been given the

command to use our words to encourage one another. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:18, *“Therefore encourage one another with these words.”* The very next passage concludes with the same command. He says in 1 Thessalonians 5:11, *“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”* And then Hebrews 3:13 adds, *“But exhort one another [it is actually the same Greek word for “encourage”] . . . So, encourage one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today.’* I want to take these three verses and make three observations about the ministry of encouragement in the life of the church.

### Everyone needs encouragement

One of the characteristics of the “one another” commands is that we each find ourselves on either end of the command. All of us need encouragement and all of us are called to bring encouragement. That is the beauty of the body of Christ. That is particularly what we find in the context of 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5. In 1 Thessalonians 4:9, Paul praises this church for the way they are demonstrating brotherly love towards each other. In fact he says to them that they don’t need him to teach them anything about this because they are already doing it. He just encourages them to *do this more and more*. Keep showing brotherly love to one another. Keep encouraging one another. Why? Because we constantly need it. There are things constantly challenging our faith and life itself is hard . . . and so we constantly need encouragement from one another.

Paul then brings up two issues that this church is struggling with and where they need encouragement. The first issue has to do with grieving over the loss of loved ones. Death! This is a very deep and personal loss. The issue at hand was the uncertainty of what happens to those who die in Christ before Jesus returns. This church lived with an expectancy that Jesus would return quickly, but what about their brothers and sisters in Christ who die before Jesus returns? What will happen to them? And so Paul assures them that when Christ returns, the dead will be raised and we will meet them in the air. *“Therefore encourage one another with these words.”*

This immediately leads to another issue where they needed encouragement. Looking at *the times and the seasons* of life and the challenges of living in a difficult world where history is moving to the eventual return of Christ, we know things won’t be easy for God’s people. So what do we do as things get difficult? We do what we talked about last week. We keep doing the ordinary things. *“But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.”* We live by faith. We love. We have real hope. So what do we do? We serve one another. Michael Holmes says that when it comes to thinking about the return of

Christ, Paul doesn't talk about it to get us to “speculate” when it will occur. Rather, the purpose of talking about the return of Christ is to encourage us to keep “serving” one another.<sup>4</sup> Why? Because we know that because of Christ we will be with him. *“Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*

And then in Hebrews 3, where we are told to *encourage one another every day* it is in the context of dealing with temptation. Temptation is always around us. Our struggle with sin is constant. We need daily encouragement to help us stand against the various temptations that are common to all of us. Whether it be personal loss, the challenge of living out our faith in a difficult world, or just dealing with our own junk and our own struggle with temptation, we all are in constant need of encouragement. In fact, I like how Paul says it after calling us to encourage and build up one another. He adds, *just as you are doing*. It implies that this ministry is ongoing. It is powerful.

There is a great example of the power of encouragement in the New Testament. There was a man by the name of Barnabas. He had a nickname. Do you know what his nickname was? Son of Encouragement. That is a great nickname. He was known for being an encourager. Barnabas was Paul's companion on his first missionary journey. With them was a young man by the name of John Mark. Now they were not very long into this missionary journey when John Mark bails on them. It says in Acts 13:13 that John Mark left them and returned to Jerusalem. We don't know why he left them, but we do know that Paul was not very happy about it. In fact, when Paul and Barnabas are getting ready to go on their second missionary journey, Barnabas suggests that they invite John Mark to join them again. “Let's give him a second chance.” But Paul was having none of it. He didn't want to run the risk of being deserted again. It says in Acts 15:39 that their disagreement over the matter was so sharp that Paul and Barnabas went their separate ways and Barnabas took Mark with him. I am not suggesting that Paul was wrong or Barnabas was right. In fact, there may have been good reason for Paul to hold his ground on this issue. But the ministry of encouragement by Barnabas was life changing for John Mark. The last letter we have from Paul is 2 Timothy. He is about to be executed and he knows it. Near the end of the letter he asks for John Mark to come to him. He says to Timothy, *“Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.”* (I find it interesting that Timothy was the young man Paul picked up on his second missionary journey—the one who replaced John Mark.)

I wish we had the story of how Barnabas spoke encouragement into John Mark. But this one thing we do have. The evidence of the power of encouragement. He became “useful” to Paul and to you and to me. He went on write the Gospel of Mark.



### Encouragement in Christ

There is another observation I want to make about the kind of encouragement we offer one another in the body of Christ. Yes, our words have power to encourage and give life. But Christian encouragement is more than telling someone how much you like their potato salad or how nice their haircut looks. Those are fine things, but not the essence of Christian encouragement. We have more than “our” words to share with each other. We have God’s Word to share with each other. We have Scripture at our disposal.

That is what we see with Paul in his words of encouragement in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5. When he encourages those who are struggling with grief and wondering what will happen to those who die in Christ before Christ returns, he assures them that when Christ returns, they too will rise. This is the hope of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul spends a lot of time in a very long chapter assuring us that because Jesus rose from the dead, we too shall rise from the dead. He said that Jesus is *the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*. I speak these words of hope when I commit the body of a brother or sister in Christ to the grave. “In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our brother or our sister . . .” That is why Paul says that when you encourage your brother or sister who is grieving loss, *“encourage one another with these words.”* What words? God’s words. God’s promises. God’s truth.

It is what Paul uses to encourage those who are uncertain over the timing of the return of Jesus. He says, look, you need not fret over that. It may be in your lifetime or it may be long into the future. Either way, we have been destined for salvation through Jesus who died for us. So if we die before Jesus returns or if we are alive when he returns, this one thing we know. We will live with him! *“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up.”* With what? God’s Word!

Now I am not suggesting you get “preachy” with people. But what I am suggesting is that you prayerfully use Scripture to encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul tells us in Colossians 3:16 to *“Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly.”* So I think to do this well, we need to be in God’s Word. We need God’s Word to be speaking to our hearts. But from the overflow of God’s Word in our lives, we have opportunity to encourage others. In fact that is the result of having God’s Word dwell in us richly. Paul says that we can then *teach and admonish one another*.

So if you are writing a note of encouragement, or calling someone up to encourage them, or meeting them for coffee . . . or, find yourself in an unplanned spontaneous

conversation with someone—which happens so often—ask the Lord to give you a verse from Scripture to speak into their hearts for encouragement. You will be amazed at how often God lays on your heart exactly what that person needs to hear.

### Encouragement is Intentional

Finally, I think we need to become far more intentional with this ministry of encouragement. The call to *encourage one another* is a call for us to be proactive. Why? Everyone needs it! I was taken back by that verse in Hebrews that calls for this kind of ministry “*every day.*” That verse says, “*as long as it is called ‘today,’*” we need that ministry of encouragement.

Let me give you five steps you can take to become intentional and proactive in your ministry of encouragement with the body of Christ here at WEFC.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Pray for God to make you an encourager.* Ask God to give you a heart that loves others and for creativity to know how to show it. Ask God to help you die to your self-centeredness and to grow in a desire to build others up. God loves to help his people who want to follow his commands, and so the Holy Spirit will teach you how to bless others for his glory and their spiritual good.
2. *Make encouragement a daily discipline.* For some people encouragement comes naturally, for others, not so much. You can put a reminder on your calendar or on your phone to send someone an encouraging note, email, text, or phone call.
3. *Pray for God to show you who to encourage.* Ask God to bring someone to mind that you should reach out to and then reach out to them. You will be surprised when you discover why God put that person on your heart and your faith will grow as you see how God uses your word of encouragement.
4. *Use Scripture if you're able.* Nothing encourages us like the promises of God's Word. Perhaps you can draw from something you read that day or you can start collecting a list of passages you find to be encouraging so that you have something to draw from when you offer a word of encouragement. But don't forget how Paul says, “*Encourage one another with these words.*” Encourage others with God's words.
5. *Get Started!* Don't overthink it! Who can you encourage right now? Who has recently blessed you that you can thank? What verse can you share with them?

If we are all being intentional with this ministry of encouragement, God's people will be strengthened as we deal with the griefs of life, the challenges of the times and the seasons and our own battle with temptation. Most of all, we will give evidence to the peace that Jesus forms in us and to the peace we acknowledge when we come to the table.

## Conclusion

*"We who are many are one body."* So let us encourage one another. We all need it. We have God's Word at our disposal and it is able to give life. So get started! Be an encouragement to each other this week. See what God does through you.

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<sup>1</sup>Rabbi Yuhda Berg quoted in Dr. Hyder Zahed "The Power of Spoken Words" [www.huffpost.com](http://www.huffpost.com) Dec. 15, 2014

<sup>2</sup>Gary Chapman, *ibid*

<sup>3</sup>Dane Ortland "Encourage One Another" [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org) July 1, 2013

<sup>4</sup>Michael Holmes *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) 173

<sup>5</sup>Garrett Kell "Encourage One Another: Giving Grace with Your Words" [www.9marks.org](http://www.9marks.org) Sept. 24, 2014

