

Perseverance is congregational

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[0 : 0 0] chapter 10, Hebrews chapter 10, and we'll begin at verse 19.

Hebrews 10, beginning at verse 19. Now hear God's word. Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 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. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as it is the habit of some, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay.

And again, the Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Amen. Let me pray for us as we come to God's Word this evening, that we would hear God.

Father, we pray that the point of the message would be the same as the passage that we have just read, that what is of man would disappear and what is of you would remain. Give us ears to hear and hearts to receive your Word, for we understand the seriousness of what we have read, but unless it beats in our heart as a living and active Word, then Father, that we are soon to be people that will forget it. Father, allow this not to happen to us, but to live with your living Word in us, where we guard it and keep it in our hearts, fresh always on our mind, that we may be the people that you have called us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen. I want to begin this evening with the end of the message and then go back to the beginning as we continue in this series of the perseverance of the saints.

Last Sunday evening, we began with the message to start this series of the perseverance with that God is the one who first perseveres, that God is the one who shepherds, who loves, who gives eternal life, that God is the one who speaks and we're the ones who follow. It's really the foundation for our perseverance. In other words, if God were to stop, then we would stop. And the only reason why we ultimately, and I say ultimately because I know what's coming next, persevere in the faith, is because God is always persevering with us, is always drawing us close to Him, is always faithful. I once had to explain how the faithfulness of God works to a young couple when I was pastor of a previous church, and I said, I know for a fact, because this is why we're having the conversation, that you've had that moment on the settee. And I said, you're a little bit closer than you should have been. You were disobeying the rule that says nothing below the forehead, and even that's too far. And you got yourself in a position that could have gone elsewhere. And then I said, all of a sudden, you have this car that drives past the window, and you sit up as the lights shine in. And I said, you stop what you're doing for a moment. And when it's all clear, you get back to doing something that you shouldn't have been.

[5 : 3 9] I said, those car lights through the window were the faithfulness of God. That God always provides a way of escape from doing the things that we shouldn't be doing.

The trouble is, however, that as Christians, we don't grow in our knowledge of the Word, and therefore, we don't grow in our ability to be discerning. And so, car headlights passing the window can either be interpreted as somebody else's or my parent's parent, when actually, it can equally be interpreted as the faithfulness of God to stop you from doing what you ought not to be doing.

If God stopped persevering in that way, then we would be in an awful amount of trouble as Christians.

It is by the very fact that God continues to persevere faithfully with us that we are kept faithfully for Him. Now, this is where we're going to finish up this evening.

I've got a brother who absolutely loves gadgets. It was the same brother where we had that conversation about 10-year guarantee or lifetime guarantee, and I said, whose lifetime? The lifetime of the product or your lifetime? You know, we must never assume that when it says lifetime guarantee, it's talking about a person's lifetime. It could be the toaster's lifetime, which could only be two years. And he got this gadget once, and I said to him, what can it do? He says, it's just amazing.

[7 : 25] It can do about 200 functions, and it can do it simultaneously. I said, that's incredible. I said, so what do you use it for? He says, I just use it for a couple of things.

And I've met other people like that that get these absolutely superb mobile phones, but all they ever do is make a telephone call now or a text message, and that's, well, that's pushing the boundaries. But they have this gadget that can do about 200 other things beyond that, but they only ever use it for a couple of things. Or a watch. You get this watch that can go to 500 meters deep. When are you ever going to go to 500 meters deep? But it can tell the time? What happens is that all the other functions seem to be wasted on you. I think the church, God has designed this beautiful thing called a church that can perform multiple functions, but in which Christians only ever use a couple of them. And the rest just seem to be wasted on us. It's as if we've never really learned exactly what God has given us. We use it for what we want to use it, but the rest, well, that's for a Christian who's perhaps more interested. No, it's actually for you.

This evening, we're going to be looking at the subject of our own perseverance. Last Sunday, we looked at how God perseveres with us, but tonight we're going to look at our own perseverance. Now, when theologians write books, they will write books, say, like a systematic theology. And a systematic theology is simply all the teaching of the Bible put in a particular order, and they call it a systematic theology. But it's nothing more than all the teaching of the Bible put in order so that you can understand it logically and it flows and everything. When they get to the bit about what they call the perseverance of the saints, that needs to be explained. And it's explained this way, that by perseverance of the saints, it is simply shorthand, okay, shorthand for saying that all true believers can be distinguished from false believers by the fact that they will continue in faith.

Okay? All true believers can be distinguished from false professors of the faith by the simple fact that they will continue faith. Now, as I said last week, and I won't be saying tonight, but I'll say it further down the line, but what about the prodigal son? What about those who fall away? Well, as I said, the son returns. And by the fact the son returns, he comes back. He does actually continue to the end, and we'll get to that another time. Now, when you continue faithfully in your faith, it is then that you have the assurance of eternal security. It is then that you have the assurance that you have eternal life. But anyone who continues in sin and even continues in sin deliberately does not have that assurance, not even for a moment. And it would be wrong to somehow see another fellow believer deliberately sinning and then say, it's okay, you are still a child of God. That's exactly the opposite from what is being said here in Hebrews. In verse 26, it says that anyone who goes on sinning deliberately does not have any assurance of faith whatsoever, but only the fearful expectation of judgment. So, this idea of continuing, of persevering, is extremely important simply to convince you that you do actually belong to God. Okay, so by the fact that you continue in the faith, that's God's way of convincing you that you are his. Make sense? By the fact that you continue in the faith, that is God's way of proving to you that you are his. Theologians call this the perseverance of the saints. I'm going to give you a definition that's at least 400 years old and has been agreed upon by thousands of Christians since. This is their explanation. By perseverance of the saints, they mean that we believe that such only are real believers as endure unto the end, that their persevering attachment to Christ is the ground mark which distinguishes them from superficial professors, that a special providence watches over their welfare, and that they are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. In other words, they understood how important it is to be able to distinguish the difference between what is genuine faith and what might be a false profession of faith.

[13 : 05] And the distinguishing mark is that the true believer continues to hold to the faithfulness of God. He continues to live faithfully. Now, of course, they have to base it on scripture. They have

to get it that from somewhere. And here's one verse that they get it from. Jesus speaking.

If you continue in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. So, Jesus is saying, as he said last week in John 10, my sheep hear my voice, and they follow me. How do you know that you are a sheep that belongs to the good shepherd? Well, one, you hear the word of God, and two, you follow the word of God. That's what distinguishes you from other people, and that's what defines you as a child of God, by the very fact that you listen and follow. John Murray, the late John Murray, a Scottish theologian, said this, that Jesus has set up a criteria by which true disciples might be distinguished, and that criteria is the continuance in Jesus' word. So, why is it so important to make this distinction? Why do we have to be so clear that we are clear on what is a genuine believer and what is not a genuine believer? I think the first reason is this, because if you're not sure what makes a genuine believer a genuine believer, then you can't really have any assurance of faith. You can't really have any assurance of eternal security, and that is the very thing that God wants you to have. God wants you to know that you are eternally secure. He wants you to be absolutely certain so that you do not go through this world saying, am I in or am I out? I just don't know. I just don't know. I've got a confession to make that, you know, I've been teaching God's word for 17 years, 15 years full-time as a pastor, and there are even times where I've had serious doubts, even when I've got into the pulpit, where I've wondered myself. God doesn't want any of us to have that. I have no trouble believing it for anyone else, but boy, do I struggle it with myself sometimes. I think the second reason is this, that can there be any worse illusion to live under, to somehow believe that you belong when actually you don't? I've got family members who live under that illusion. I've been a good person and God's going to let me in. I think that's a terrible position to be in, because what it does, it leaves no room for change. It actually, you're effectively saying, I don't need to change. I'm okay. When I get to that end, when I get to that day, it's going to be okay. It's not going to be okay. And sometimes the hardest conversations that you have with people when explaining the gospel is explaining what we mean by perseverance of the saints, by explaining that true believers live this way. And when you explain how true believers live, when you explain what a true believer is, suddenly it should dawn on people as to whether or not they really are in the faith. Not to cause doubt, not to make people stumble in their faith, but to give assurance to those who really are believers and to shake those out of their grave who aren't. But I can understand why people stay away from it, because it can somehow make you feel as though you've been incredibly judgmental, when actually you're being the very opposite. You've been incredibly merciful to unbelievers who live under an illusion, and incredibly encouraging to fellow believers because you're assuring them of their faith in Christ Jesus.

Last week, we learned that Jesus speaks, and we're to listen. Hebrews begins the final revelation, that everything that God has had to say and finishes saying stops with Jesus, that Jesus is the final revelation. And I don't know if you've ever read the book of Hebrews all the way through, but there are four things, or one thing that stands out in four places all the way through the letter.

[17:54] And in every single instance, it's calling on believers not to turn their back on Jesus, not to turn their back on the faith. So in chapter two, the writer warns his readers from drifting away.

In chapter three, he warns his readers from turning away. Then in chapter six, he warns his readers of the very danger of apostasy, that is, falling away to such a distance that you can never get back again. And then in chapter 10, he warns his readers, and he considers himself in this warning, verse 26, for if we, so he's speaking of himself, not just to these people, but he's including himself as a fellow believer. And he says, if we, or let's make it personally, if I go on deliberately sinning, then I don't have any assurance of faith. I only have the fearful expectation of judgment.

So these are serious warnings. And the warning prompts us away from danger. I don't know if you've ever gone walking. I can't say that I have all that much, but I've seen pictures.

And on clifftops, on clifftops, you get these signs that say, danger, stay away from the edge. Well, I don't need to do the walk to understand what that means. That means that if I've gone that far, don't jump the fence. Rather turn and go in a different direction. I understand the purpose of the warning. I understand that when Jesus turns over the tables in the temple and he dries out the moneylenders and all of that, that it's not so much an act of judgment as it is of providence to say, look, if you don't change your ways, this is what's coming. Understand how warnings work. So the writer of the Hebrews is not a pessimist. He's not trying to put a downer on your Christian faith, but he understands that we have an incredible ability to wander off the way that we are meant to follow.

And so we don't just need the direction to go in. We need a constant warning behind us to never turn around, to never go another way. It's not enough for believers just to point out the right way. The writer has to point out the wrong way as well. We just don't seem to be able to learn our lesson just to be told what is true. We also have to learn our lesson by also being taught what is false.

[20 : 35] We can't seem to learn one-sided. We can't seem to learn effectively by only learning the positives. We have to know the negatives as well. It's not enough to say to a child, don't touch that or you'll burn your hand. Okay, we have to say that if you touch that, you will burn your hand. We just can't seem to develop a way of teaching anybody without emphasizing the negative side as well. We seem to be a people much more tempted to go in the wrong direction than we find it easy to walk in the right direction. As we come then tonight to the perseverance of the saints, the writer takes us from thinking that this is an individual issue into us realizing that it's actually a congregational issue. You don't realize, or perhaps you don't yet, but you will do by the end of the evening, just how incredibly this is important that you're all meeting together tonight. Let me tell you how important it is that by meeting together tonight, you're keeping each other from committing a particular sin at this minute out in the world. That by meeting together tonight, singing together and praying together and listening to God's word together, you are encouraging one another that each of you actually believes the same thing about God, hopefully. That you're encouraging one another that this is where you ought to be and this is the very thing that you ought to be doing tonight. That this is really where you're meant to be. So I don't know how many times I've had people come up to me and say, well, the Bible doesn't say anything about attending church. Actually, the Bible says a lot about attending church. It's called fellowship. It's called congregational life. It's called, as he says here in verse 25, not neglecting to meet together as it is the habit of some. And so already in the early church, there are people who say, well, I'm only going to go in the morning or I'm only going to go in the evening or I won't go this week. Okay. Now, is the issue church attendance? He's got nothing to do. Is the issue bums on seats?

Who cares? The issue is that the only place that sheep are safe is in the fold. And the church is God's fold for sheep. Who can so easily get lost? That's how important it is. He begins verse 22 by saying, let us draw near with a sincere heart. And he uses us because he's speaking of himself. Verse 23, he says, let us hold fast to the confession of hope without wavering. Verse 24, let us consider how to stir up one another in love and good works. And so all of these exhortations can only actually ever happen if we're together. I can't stir you up in your faith unless you're in this room this evening.

I can't encourage you in your faith unless we're together. You might say, well, you can do it in the home. Maybe, but that's not where God designed it to happen. God designed it to happen in the church.

God designed it to happen when we are together. God designed it to happen when we sing, when we pray, when we love one another. Here, this is how you love and encourage one another, by gathering together in the faith under the word of God in prayer and singing to him. This is where it happens. This is one of those functions that we don't use. We are not to neglect meeting together as it is the habit of some. But, but, but, verse 25, encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near. In other words, what the writer is saying is that perseverance is not an individual issue.

In other words, I'll look after my own walk and you look after yours. No, perseverance in the faith is a congregational issue. Okay? Perseverance happens in the fellowship of God's people. That is how we persevere in the faith. In other words, when we look out at each other this evening, we know where we are.

[25 : 15] We hopefully know what each other are thinking. We certainly know what each other are listening to or ought to be listening to. And we certainly know what each other is seeing. But now think of a loved one who's saved, who's not here or in any church.

What are they doing? What are they singing? What are they thinking? Where might they be going? And suddenly you begin to see that it dawns on you that actually when you're away from the fold, you are in the world. And the world has its own message and its own way of encouraging God's sheep into a different field.

Okay, so don't ever think that church is about attendance. It's about safety. It's about persevering in your faith. It is a sign of assurance that you belong to God.

Now, if I stand here this evening, which I am, and you look at me, you could probably take a pretty good guess that I'm a Christian. Okay? It's a fair assumption. But if I look the way that I do, and I was in Asda, and you didn't know me, you would never naturally come to that conclusion that I was a believer. But by the very fact that we are not neglecting to meet together, and we are meeting together, somehow we're now identified. We're identified as the people of God.

This is how God designed his church to be, by the coming together of his people. So church isn't an individual issue, and persevering in your faith is not an individual activity. You are not to think of yourself as some kind of Christian island, whether you like it or not. You know, we're going to be together if we belong to Christ, which we do, for eternity. Can you imagine that? That we're going to know each other forever. There's going to be an opportunity where you can sit next to anybody you like and fellowship with them. Perseverance is not an individual thing. Perseverance, Christian perseverance is a community endeavor, a Christian community endeavor. It is not an individual pursuit alone. It is more important than an individual pursuit. It is a congregational pursuit.

[28 : 01] And so the way you go wrong is actually by pursuing your individual agenda, where Christianity becomes your individual thing. And you serve Jesus the way you want to serve Jesus, and you listen to Jesus where and when you want to listen to Jesus. The trouble is, is while you can sit at home and perhaps listen to a sermon over the internet, click on the WHBC and you can do it there, you can read your Bible and you're still going through all the motions. The trouble is, however, you're only using a couple of the functions.

You're missing some of these other functions like not neglecting to meet together. Meeting together is God's people and what that actually does for you. Well, after the writer has said all of this, after he has said, draw near to God with a sincere heart, make your confession of hope sure, and confession, he's not talking about the confession of sin. He's talking about your declaration that you belong to God and you have a future to look forward to. And after he has said all of that and how to love and consider one another, and after he said, look, make sure you're together, don't neglect meeting together, he goes straight from that into verse 26, that if you go on sinning deliberately, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment. I mean, that's incredibly worrying.

By deliberate sin, he means that you've received the truth, that is, you've had God's word, you've had God's word explained to you. It's the Sermon on the Mount, you have received the truth.

The trouble is, however, is that sin is incredibly deceitful. Do you remember how I said a few weeks ago, probably a few months ago now, that sin has this wonderful ability of getting you to commit sin by telling you before you commit the sin that you can be forgiven for it after you've done it.

So the way sin plays with your mind is, go ahead, you can ask for forgiveness afterwards. And that's how sin gets you to sin. It's incredibly deceitful.

[30 : 27] Really savvy in a worldly, sinful sense. Back in Hebrews chapter 3, the writer's already warned his readers just how deceitful sin is, and how it hardens the heart of believers.

And now he says that when a believer deliberately sins, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, and by that he means, you really do know that you ought not to be doing this.

You really do know that this is wrong. It doesn't matter how deep down in your conscience it is. It doesn't matter how far back in your mind it is. You know it's wrong.

And yet you've gone ahead and done it anyway. And here's what I've got to say to you. You no longer have any assurance of faith, any assurance of eternal security.

The only thing you've got to look forward to is the fearful expectation of judgment. Because you've sinned deliberately.

[31 : 34] You've done something that God didn't want you to do, knowing that God didn't want you to do it. But, I'm repentant.

And then you're back. Because repentance is a sign of a faithful believer. You wouldn't repent if you didn't care. You wouldn't repent if you weren't convicted of your sin.

And if you're, I've said this before, but it's one of those things that I feel that I need to keep saying, because I just don't think people believe it. If you've committed a sin back in the day, that you feel is so bad that God can't forgive you, it's not that sin you need forgiving of.

It's the sin you're committing right now. Okay? If you've committed a sin back in the day that's so bad, okay, so embarrassing, that you would never ever want anybody to find out about, and the people who know about it, you wish that they didn't.

And you hold on to this thing that says, you know, I can't forgive myself, and it's just, I don't even think, it's a stretch for God.

[32 : 56] That's not the sin you need forgiving for. It's the sin that you're committing right now. And that is not believing that God actually has forgiven you for that sin.

And yet, many Christians live with that type of scenario in their life, where I did it deliberately, and they think, whoops, there's now no way back.

No, there is a way back, but it's the way back that you passed on the way. You have to go back to Jesus. That's why the writer says, for if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving a knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

In other words, there's nothing after Jesus that can forgive you but Jesus. Okay, there's nothing beyond Jesus that can forgive you but Jesus. So your repentance is, yes, I did what was wrong, and now you're having to go back to Jesus like you did in the beginning when you became a Christian.

So if you're wondering tonight, that you have this sin that you're somehow not forgiven of, that's not the sin you need to be repenting of right now. The sin you need to be repenting of right now is your unbelief that God has actually forgiven you.

[34 : 20] That's the deliberate sin you're committing right now, because God has told you he has, that everything is made perfect in Christ Jesus. So don't repent for the wrong sin.

Repent for the right ones. Well, for all of them, but in that situation, make sure you understand. So don't ever think that as you get beyond Jesus, that I need something else to atone me for this sin, that I need something other than Jesus to take away this guilt.

No, there is nothing beyond Jesus. There is no sacrifice beyond Jesus. There's only Jesus, and Jesus is sufficient to cover every sin that you have ever committed in the past, and any sin that you'll commit in the future.

You've got to remember that even your repentance is imperfect. That's why you have to keep doing it again and again. My repentance is imperfect. The reason I have to repent more than once is because I didn't mean it the first time.

And so I have to repent of my repentance. Deliberate sin is embarrassing for the Christian, because you know better.

[35 : 40] I'll illustrate it for you. You'll remember when Jesus is brought before Pilate. It's the famous incident where most Christians will say all sin is the same. All sin is not the same.

There is ignorant sin, there is deliberate sin. There is little sins, and there are big sins. You read the Old Testament. Even eternal damnation has levels of judgment depending on the sins that were committed in the life.

So all sin is against God. That's true. All sin leads to death. That is true. The wages of sin is death. That is true. But telling a little white lie is nowhere near as serious as pedophilia.

Nowhere near as serious. Both are sins. But God's judgment is worse on one than it is for the other. And Jesus points this out to Pilate, and he says, greater is the sin in him who brought me to you. Well, who brought Jesus to Pilate? Judas. And why was Judas' sin worse than Pilate's sin over Jesus?

[36 : 46] Because Judas knew better. He spent three years with Jesus, heard his teachings, followed him. It was a deliberate sin after receiving a knowledge of the truth.

Does that make sense? And once you've gone beyond that, there remains no longer a sacrifice for sins.

My sheep hear my voice. In other words, they listen to Jesus and they follow him. However, if you go on sinning deliberately, there's no assurance if you go on sinning deliberately, and you just keep going on and on and on and on, there doesn't seem to be any kind of conviction, any kind of remorse, any kind of feeling guilty or sorry, and you just go on sinning and sinning.

Then there's no assurance of eternal security for you. The only thing that you have to look forward to if you go on sinning again and again and again is a fearful expectation of judgment.

Well, as we conclude, let's draw this to a couple of the points that he wants to bring home to our hearts. The first is this, that we are created to worship God and we worship God by having our sins taken away from us.

[38 : 10] That means we can draw near to God with a sincere heart. We're able to do that. We're able to come into the place where very few people had been before. Only once a year was the high

priest allowed into the Holy of Holies.

But now, because of Jesus, we have this access to God that is free and that we can just be with God all the time. We can draw near to God. Then we're to hold on to our confession.

The confession is that we belong to Jesus and we have this hope for the future and so we're not going to turn back. And then, of course, we have the consideration of others, all of which are important for continuing in the faith.

Now, here's an illustration. I want you to imagine this as we draw it to conclusion. You've just heard this message and you go into a prayer meeting next week. Is it going to affect the way that you pray?

Is it going to affect, more importantly, the way that you pray for others, bearing in mind that we're to love and consider others? That's how we persevere in the faith. Well, let me put it in the form of a question.

[39 : 15] I want you to cast your minds back. Have you ever prayed for someone that they may be well if they are ill? That they may be well if they are ill?

And that's quite a common prayer. That tends to fill up quite a good chunk of the praying life of the church. I'm not saying it's right. I'm not saying it's wrong. I'm just saying that when you listen to people pray, one of the ways I think people find it easier to demonstrate their love for other people is to pray that they get well if they're ill.

What I'm trying to point out here is that if you're not praying for them to be kept from sin, you only want to be specific in your love.

So here you have, you've prayed for a person a lot and you've prayed for this person over and over again that they'd be well because they've been ill, that their body's not just quite right or that their physical makeup isn't quite working as it should do.

And after you've prayed this, they've got well or they're well for a while and then not necessarily straight away but a month down the line or a year down the line or perhaps five years down the line, that person that you have prayed for for almost everything else has fallen into deep sin or has at least begun to change their mind over something that they knew to be true but are now moving beyond the knowledge of the truth.

[40 : 49] They, you know, yes, I used to believe this but I think a little bit differently now. And you begin to realize that it's a sinful thought progression. I'm fond of saying that nothing happens all of a sudden.

Nothing happens all of a sudden. The things that happen you can often see happening a long way off. Not always but sometimes you can. But here we have this person that you have prayed for so often for health and they've got better or you pray for them for a whole number of other things and they've got better but now they have fallen into sin or they're falling into sin rapidly through sin's deceitfulness.

Here's the follow-up question. In your perseverance, in your congregational perseverance, did you ever pray that that person would be kept from the deceitfulness of sin?

I'm guessing most of us haven't. And it's just another one of those examples where we use two functions. of something that can do 200 things.

That we've just limited the church down to a few specific things that we like to do because they're easy or we can do them well. But we forget about all the other things that we have been called to do.

[42 : 15] And so someone else's continual perseverance of the faith has fallen by the wayside partly because it's I've not prayed that they not succumb to the deceitfulness of sin.

I'm not going to take full responsibility for them falling into sin but I am going to put my hand up that when anybody falls into sin in this church it is partly my fault.

And it is partly my fault because the Bible tells me that I have a God-given responsibility as a member of the body of Christ to love and encourage which includes praying for the continual perseverance perseverance of the saints.

So as I said I think one of the reasons why believers can go away on Christian missions or go away on the mission field or go away to Christian conventions and then come back to the church and say I think we ought to do this and I think we ought to do that and I think we ought to do that.

I think one of the reasons why that happens is because the church is effectively this wonderful thing that they only use two parts of. Where what the writer of Hebrews is saying and in fact the whole of

the New Testament is effectively saying is that the church can do many things simultaneously.
[43 : 39] But Christians because they have not grown in their knowledge of the Lord and in faith because they have not grown in their discerning of the word stick to the two things that they've always used and they've never moved beyond that.

So the church is this wonderful thing but we're only dialing numbers. This church is this wonderful thing but we're only sending text message. Yet it can do so much more and it is built to do so much more for the people of God.

But we have limited it to the things that we don't want to move beyond. We've limited it to the area of our own comfortable level.

because we don't want to move beyond. Perseverance in the faith is a congregational issue and we've only touched the surface this evening.

So church attendance even tonight's attendance I do not consider as bums on seats. I'm not the sort of person I used to be when I first came into ministry because I was educated by a few ministers that said just get the people in it looks impressive and they'll think you're a good minister.

[44 : 54] I really couldn't care after a while once I'd read the Bible properly. Church attendance has nothing to do with bums on seats. It does have everything to do with sheep being in God's fold where they're safe.

the reason I want people to attend prayer meetings the reason I want people to attend Bible studies the reason I want people here is not because it looks good it's because you're safe here.

You're safe here. When you're out there you're safe here. That's why we have three meetings a week. A morning and evening and a midweek meeting.

Okay. It's not because we couldn't figure out how to do it any other way. We do it because it keeps you safe. Amen.