

# Do Not Harden Your Heart

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Date: 16 January 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to specifically be looking at Hebrews chapter 3, verses 7-19.

! And I'm going to read that section to you right now.! Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

Therefore, I was provoked with that generation and said, they always go astray in their heart. They have not known my ways, as I swore in my wrath.

They shall not enter my rest. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

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.

[ 1 : 29 ] For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

For who are those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He provoked for forty years?

Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. Throughout the Word of God, both Old and New Testaments, we find warnings issued by the Almighty.

These warning signs were given by God as an act of grace so that people might avoid sin and not fall under God's wrath.

[ 2 : 51 ] God tells us in the Old Testament that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. When we get to the New Testament, the same God tells us that He does not want anyone to perish, but instead wants everyone to come to Him in genuine repentance.

The passage I read to you this evening out of Hebrews is one such warning. This warning is given to a Hebrew congregation made up of recently converted Jews and others who have not yet been saved, but have some level of interest in the Christian faith.

And the warning contained in this passage is an effort by God to bring those who are merely intellectually interested in Christ all the way to genuine saving faith.

This congregation, and no doubt others like them, had many unconverted people who were merely interested but uncommitted.

Churches in the 21st century are in the same predicament. Many listen to gospel preaching, sometimes for years, but neither accept what is being preached or obey it.

[ 4 : 22 ] The Scriptures are clear on this. To hear and at some level know the truth without obedience brings with it a greater judgment and condemnation.

So the question is, why would people sit under the preaching of the gospel but never positively respond to it with saving faith?

And undoubtedly there are many reasons. Probably the most flagrant reason is a person's love for sin. We see this in this passage, the great concern the Holy Spirit has for people who hear but do not commit themselves to Christ.

Utilizing an as yet unidentified human author, the Spirit gives an illustration of Israel to this Hebrew church. Now obviously they would readily identify with the example of Israel and be most willing to accept such an illustration.

These were recent Hebrew converts. The illustration he uses is found, I read is in Hebrews 3, verses 7 to 11, but that is actually a quote with a few words thrown in from Psalm 95, verses 7 to 11.

[ 6 : 01 ] The psalm was probably written in the time of David, but it's speaking about the time of Moses. This is a warning about disbelief.

It was valid when it was written in the Psalms. It was valid when it was repeated in the Hebrew church. And it is valid for the church today as we read these passages and study them.

The Holy Spirit addresses those in the congregation who may be nearer to Christ than they ever have been, but remain uncommitted and therefore unsaved.

That is why God tells them, don't harden your hearts. Don't do what the children of Israel did so long ago after they left Egypt and got out into the wilderness.

In verse 7 of our passage today, it's interesting how the Spirit of God begins. He says, Today, if you hear His voice.

[ 7 : 15 ] Those six words are really an affirmation of the divine inspiration of the Word of God. The words from the book of Psalms are written by God, spoken by God, just as the words from the book of Hebrews were.

It is a dangerous thing to deny the absolute inspiration of the Scriptures. Every word originated with God, but this is true, because this is true, all of us are exhorted to obey God's voice.

I have people all the time say to me, well, if God would just speak to me, well, pick up your Bibles. Genesis to Revelation. When you get to the maps, it's no longer inspired.

But Genesis to Revelation. When the Scriptures are taught accurately and listen to attentively and reverently, the voice of God is being heard.

And I think by using that word today, the Holy Spirit is conveying a sense of urgency in the presentation of the Gospel. I have said this many times, say it again, tomorrow never comes.

[ 8 : 43 ] We talk about tomorrow, there's no such thing as tomorrow. When it gets here, it's today. The Apostle Paul speaks to this issue quite well, and why shouldn't he?

As he conveys the words of the Holy Spirit, he does so in this passage found in 2 Corinthians 6, the second part of verse 2.

Behold, now is the favorable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation. Remember, tomorrow never comes.

Today. is that day. The story that is often repeated by evangelical pastors occurred in 1871.

Very early in his ministry, the great Dwight L. Moody preached a message of salvation to the assembled hearers of the Word. He then told his audience something rather remarkable in a way, or strange maybe.

[ 10 : 00 ] He told the audience, I want you all to retire to your homes and think about what has been preached here tonight. And if your hearts are stirred, he urged his listeners, I want you to return tomorrow night and receive Christ as Lord and Savior.

So you're dismissed. So you're dismissed. Go home and think about what I said tonight. And that night, to this day, is known as the Great Chicago Fire.

It swept through the city, killing at least 300 people, destroying 17,000 structures.

It left 100,000 people homeless. Now, I don't know if O'Leary's cow kicked over a lantern or not.

That may be part of the tradition. But among the dead were dozens of people who attended Moody's service that night.

And Moody said, Never again would he preach Christ without asking people to receive Christ.

[ 11 : 14 ] For all the people who died that night, tomorrow never came. As part of the warning being issued in our passage tonight, there are sober words from the Spirit of God in Hebrews 3.8, the very first part of that verse.

It says, Do not harden your hearts. That's a message from God. Do not harden your hearts.

That is a reference to how the people of Israel had done just that. And what an interesting time when the people of Israel hardened their hearts.

they had been graciously removed from the bondage of Egypt some 430 years of bondage.

The whole quote goes like this, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years.

[ 12 : 29 ] After suffering greatly from the bondage of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, God miraculously removed them. You know that.

I mean, you've seen The Ten Commandments by Cecil B. DeMille. We all know how that works. Charlton Heston was Moses. God graciously and miraculously removed them.

Now in the midst of their escape, Pharaoh had a change of heart. And he sent the Egyptian army in pursuit of the Hebrews.

And when the army tried to charge after them, once the Red Sea had parted, the army of Egypt were all drowned.

I always remember what Josh McDowell said about a debate he engaged in with an atheist. Not only has Josh written about this, but I had the opportunity to speak to him personally at dinner one night with Dr. Piper out at Oklahoma Wesleyan University, the three of us.

[ 13 : 44 ] The atheist was debating Josh McDowell and the atheist said, there was no miracle with the parting of the Red Sea. Due to the tides, the sea was only one or two inches deep and it made it appear the Hebrews crossed over on dry land.

Well, it was time for Josh to speak and he said, I've never heard of such a fantastic miracle. God drowned the entire Egyptian army and their horses in a couple of inches of water and it brought the house down.

I think that guy left the debate. So how did Israel provoke God after their escape from Egypt?

There's a favorite word in the Old Testament that covers all this. they begin to murmur against God. We don't have enough water. We don't have enough food. We only have one thing to eat. We need a variety of food.

[ 14 : 55 ] We don't have the directions as to our destination. We don't know where we're going. And it boiled down to the fact that the Hebrews that had come out of Egypt did not trust God.

They did not trust His promise to deliver them to the promised land. And some of them even began to cry out, it would be better if we return to Egypt under bondage of the Pharaoh than to keep going forward with God and Moses.

Unbelief never has enough proof. You show me God that doesn't believe and you can't give Him enough proof. Well next, let's examine the penalty for their unbelief.

Hebrews 3.12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

The author of the book of Hebrews is making an appeal to this church based upon the example of Israel in the wilderness.

[ 16 : 20 ] The appeal is do not follow their example. a lesson for us is to do not reject the truth of God that has been revealed.

Same truth was revealed to Israel and to the Hebrew congregation. There are many sins in this world but surely none are more serious than unbelief.

It is not only a serious offense against God it brings the unbeliever into condemnation.

Absent genuine repentance the condemnation brought about by unbelief will last for eternity. The unsaved in this Hebrew congregation were very close to Christ.

but remained so very far from Him because their hearts were not right. Undoubtedly many were comfortable that they were believers.

[ 17 : 27 ] They thought well I'm a believer I'm sitting here with other believers I must be a believer. They probably based their beliefs on church membership and attendance.

The truth is those will not get you anywhere absent a real relationship with the Lord. The Puritan informers had a favorite phrase I like it they used to say you must close with Christ to be saved. You got to close with Christ. Without this many will ultimately reject the Lord. It is not a rejection of religion it is a rejection of the living God.

So how can we even in the 21st century be on guard against someone in our midst turning away from the Lord? Well that's covered in the next verse.

Verse 13 But exhort one another Okay well should we set one day aside a year? No it says exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

[ 18 : 51 ] The Greek word there exhort used here is from parakaleo which is the word most frequently used by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels to describe the Holy Spirit.

Its meaning here is that we should come alongside a struggling brother or sister if it's a sister I recommend you bring your wife with you a struggling brother or sister and help them with encouragement encourage them.

In the Hebrew church we are studying the true believers were being admonished to come alongside unbelieving members and encourage them do not harden your hearts against Christ.

It's a heady thing. The Holy Spirit also uses this phrase the deceitfulness of sin and that word deceitfulness by the way means trickery.

a lost person that is a frequent church attender can literally be tricked into believing that they are in a right relationship with God through Christ.

[ 20 : 08 ] The old nature is all too ready to suggest that our sins are just not as bad as they might seem. the evil one will whisper that in your ear.

They're really just not that bad. How many people are ready to say my life can use improvement but not salvation? I've settled that issue.

I took care of that when I was nine years old. I've heard a lot of people tell me that. What would God say about this attitude? Well, he's already said it.

And we're going to study this in the future when we get to Hebrews chapter 10, but we're a ways off. But let me read to you Hebrews 10 verses 38 and 39.

But my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

[ 21 : 12 ] But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. That's why Hebrews is such a great book.

There's gems on every page. What proof can we offer that we are saved and secure in Christ? I want to make some brief comments anyway about the greatest proof there is in the Word of God, that you're one with Christ, that you're saved.

greatest proof. Hebrews 3 14. For we have come to share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Hold it to the end. What is this verse telling us? He who continues to the end shall be saved.

The greatest proof of salvation is continuance in our Christian walk. What happens if you fall off the trail? Don't worry, God will pick you up, dust you off.

[ 22 : 24 ] He might tap you a couple times on the fanny and say get with it for the true believer. But the greatest proof is continuance. the true believer stays put with Christ.

Listen to how Jesus put it in John 8 31. If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples. That's pretty plain.

Abiding in the words of Jesus speaks to the continuance of his followers. The true followers of Christ continue in the faith.

I've said this before, please mark this down in your mental file. You are not saved because you continue. You continue because you're saved.

Big difference. You continue because you're already one with Christ. You continue because being one with Christ, you want to continue. God plants that in all his children.

[ 23 : 40 ] Now, what can we say about people who depart from the faith? And, you know, I've known people in this church going back, I started here in 1980.

So, that's quite a ways back. What is that, 42 years? 42 years this month. And some of you are already here when I joined.

What can we say, though, about people who depart the faith? They may be with us a few weeks.

They may hang around a couple of months. They may be a few years or maybe some decades.

But, eventually, absent the Spirit of God leading them and prompting them, they depart. Is there something in the Scriptures that is definitive about that?

Well, there is. It comes from the pen of John in his first epistle, chapter 2. They went out from us. Why?

[ 24 : 46 ] Because they were not of us. For if they'd been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that it might become plain that they all are not of us.

They depart. 1 John 2.19. Great passage of Scripture. They went out from us. There are many people who grew up in church.

God prospers them. they get grown, they get married, they make some money, and they buy a lake house and a pontoon boat.

And where do you find them on Sunday? At the lake house on the lake in the pontoon boat. And I'm actually saying this with a person in mind. I wouldn't dare mention his name.

He grew up in this church. His family, his parents were long time members. They're both dead now.

And that very thing happened to him. Got him a lake house over at Grand, nice boat, and we've never seen him except for his father and mother's funeral.

[ 26 : 06 ] Only two times we've seen him in 30 years. And he grew up here. He grew up here. There's a lot of people like that.

they're depending on things that they shouldn't. Well, like one guy told me, when I was nine years old, my well-meaning mother drug me down to the front of the church and she said, shake the pastor's hand and tell him you want to be baptized.

So he shook the pastor's hand and said, I want to be baptized. And everybody was happy. The kid was happy because he didn't have to listen to his mother about salvation anymore.

The mother's happy because she's now convinced that his son's going to go to heaven. Preacher's happy because he's got another scalp on his belt. No reflection on anyone in here.

I was trying to think of a pastor's name that I got that from. He was at Nickels Hills. Real famous. He's dead now. Good guy.

[ 27 : 12 ] The church is happy because they can report a new convert to Nashville or to Oklahoma City. We had a baptism. Just how important is staying with the Lord?

There's a major difference between professing the Lord and being possessed by the Lord. If you've got to choose one or the other, go for possession, that Jesus would possess you.

My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. The issue comes down ultimately to belief or unbelief. Believers continue.

Unbelievers often do not continue. They fall away. I remember a guy once that said, well, I just put up with it.

My wife nags me and I go to church. Years later I ran into him and I said, does your wife still nag you? He said, no, I got a new wife. We don't go anywhere.

[ 28 : 29 ] Let me close with this. Hebrews chapter 3 starting in verse 15. As it is said, today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.

You get the impression that's important to God? He keeps repeating it. Old and New Testament. For who were those who heard and yet rebelled?

Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked, that's God, for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Unbelief's a killer. It's an absolute killer. I mean, the very word for saving faith in Greek is pistou. it's one of the most important words in all the word of God.

[ 29 : 43 ] Saving faith. Again, the Holy Spirit appears to the Hebrew congregation and specifically to the unsaved in that church. And we're going to be coming back to them periodically.

They were no different than those who heard and still rebelled in the wilderness after God delivered them from bondage in Egypt. God's delivered this Hebrew congregation and that there are still some that are rebelling against him just as their brothers did back thousands of years earlier in the wilderness.

The key is belief. Now, we've been talking much and we will continue this talking about coming to Christ for salvation. As a Reformed Baptist church in some respects, or many respects, we believe salvation is of the Lord.

And these two concepts are not in conflict with each other. Charles Spurgeon, arguably the greatest Reformed Baptist preacher that ever lived, probably said it best.

He preached a message entitled Salvation, God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility. God is absolutely sovereign.

[ 31 : 08 ] He elects, He chooses, He saves His people. He's so certain of it, He wrote their names down in the Lamb's Book of Life before the creation of the universe, before the foundation of the world.

Wrote it in stone with a finger. power. But that doesn't relieve us from the responsibility to believe. We are to believe. If we don't believe, we're not saved. I swear I wasn't going to use this example because I've used it so much I think Mike Dursham gets mad, but he's not here.

And the others of you have probably heard it said by me, and you haven't gotten mad yet, but I tell the story of the guy out in the country and he told his wife, I think I'm one of the elect of God.

I'm going to go out in the pasture every day and sit on that stump and see what God does. And he went out there for the next 30 years and he sat down on that stump and he died and went to hell.

[ 32 : 13 ] And people said, why? He didn't believe. He didn't do anything in an exercise of belief. Not even the bare bones. He just sat on a stump.

Where's that in Scripture? You know? If we do not believe, we cannot be saved. We must believe. That's the word pistou. Have faith or trust.

Not to trust the Lord with belief is absolutely fatal to salvation. The Israelites learned that. The Hebrews in this congregation, some of them learned it.

people are learning it every day when they die. Even in the great passage, and I won't go piece by piece, but in Matthew 7, remember that Lord, Lord, have we not done the following?

He looks at me and says, I never knew you. They didn't have belief. If you read that passage closely, they were believing in self. and they had a whole list for Jesus that said, have I not done the following?

[ 33 : 24 ] Well, that's salvation by works. And it doesn't work like that. If it does, I'm in big trouble. Unbelief is fatal.

fatal.