

Hebrews

Hebrews 3:12-4:13 – Part I

January 4, 2009

- I. Overall Emphasis since **Hebrews 1:1** – Listen to Jesus! The current emphasis is: Guard against falling away – which is the result of not listening to Jesus. And the fruit of falling away is sin, disobedience, and unbelief – all of which are synonymous with each other.

A. **Review:**

1. In **Hebrews 3:1-6** God is telling us that the validation of saving faith is a life that listens to and submits to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, living Christianly to the end of our days here on the earth is the natural and only rational outcome of saving faith. And saving faith is equal to listening to and obeying Jesus. Anything less than listening to and obeying Jesus is less than saving faith.
2. The next section of **Hebrews 3** takes in **verses 7-11**. In this section, God further prepares us for His warning against falling away by using Israel as an example of unbelief, and as an example of how He deals with unbelief. The basic point of **Hebrews 3:7-11** is: **Look at Israel! Learn from their mistakes!** When God speaks, listen and obey. To do otherwise is to set yourself against God, to set God against you, and to set yourself up for dire consequences.
3. **Hebrews 3:12-13** contains God's specific warning to us. In these two verses, God warns us individually and as a group of believers against the kind of unbelief and disobedience that leads to falling away.
4. This brings us to our study for today – which takes us to **Hebrews 3:14-4:13**. We will not be studying this portion in minute detail – that could take weeks. Yet neither will we cover today all I want to teach us from this portion. Therefore, my intention today is to teach on just one of three topics found in these verses that I feel are very important for us to consider. We will study the other two topics in the future.
 - a. The three topics of importance found in this portion of Hebrews:
 - (1) What the scriptures teach about falling away from the faith.

- (2) Why God speaks of fear and diligence as necessary to prevent falling away.
 - (3) The two kinds of “rest” spoken of in Hebrews and what they mean for us today.
- b. Today, I want us to give careful consideration the matter of falling away from the faith as presented in the entire book of Hebrews – and as presented in selected scriptures found outside of Hebrews.
 - (1) I have tried to make today’s study easier for you by providing you with an outline of **Hebrews 3:12-4:13**, and by giving you the list of scriptures I’ll be using to show what the Bible says about falling away from the faith.
 - (2) On the down side, I feel the need to give lots of explanations and qualifiers in presenting this material today. Why? Because of the general sense among today’s Christians that God is a god of love, that His grace covers all sin and every sinner, that His wrath is exaggerated, that salvation by faith is easy, and that the narrow path is really quite broad. To teach otherwise in today’s religious atmosphere is to be branded a heretic or legalistic or a teacher of works based salvation.
 - (3) However, notice that the scriptures put no qualifiers or lengthy explanations with its statements about falling away.

B. Prayer

- C. **Hebrews 3:12-19, 4:1-13** . . . Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. [13] But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. [14] For **we have become partakers of Christ**, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, [15] while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me (*God*)."
[16] For who provoked Him (*God*) when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? [17] And with whom was He (*God*) angry for forty years? Was it not with those who **sinned**, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? [18] And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who were **disobedient**? [19] So we see that they

were not able to enter because of **unbelief**. [4:1] Therefore, **let us fear if**, while a promise remains of entering His rest, any one of you may seem to have come short of it. [2] For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but **the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith** in those who heard. [3] For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "As I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world. [4] For He has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: "And God rested on the seventh day from all His works"; [5] and again in this passage, "They shall not enter My rest." [6] Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them **failed to enter because of disobedience**, [7] He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." [8] For if Joshua had given them rest, He would not have spoken of another day after that. [9] So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. [10] For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. [11] Therefore **let us be diligent to enter that rest**, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. [12] For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. [13] And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

II. Outline of **Hebrews 3:12-4:13**

- A. **Hebrews 3:12** – Warning from God about falling away from faith in and relationship with living God.
- B. **Hebrews 3:13** – Exhortation from God about working together as a group of believers to keep anyone among us from falling away.
- C. **Hebrews 3:14-15** – Those who don't fall away are those who remain believers in Jesus Christ and obedient followers of Jesus Christ until the end of their lives. In other words, when Jesus/God speaks, they listen and act according to what was spoken instead of hardening their hearts and doing something other than what was spoken.
- D. **Hebrews 3:16-19** – Israel (God's chosen people) used as an example of unbelief. God's response to Israel's unbelief used to show us how God feels about our unbelief.

1. (vs.16) Unbelief in response to hearing God speak provokes Him (arouses or incites God to action – usually of a negative, angry or exasperated nature).
 2. (vs. 17) Unbelief leads to sin against God, which angers Him (a strong feeling of displeasure and even hostility as a result of being wronged).
 3. (vs. 18) Unbelief, which inevitably leads to disobedience, brings God's judgement – a judgement that prevents the unbeliever from entering His rest.
 4. (vs. 19) Summary: It is the settled condition of unbelief that prevents you from entering God's.
- E. **Hebrews 4:1-11** – How should we respond to God's warning? Be afraid (vs. 4:1) and be diligent (vs. 4:11)
1. (vs. 1) First response to God's warning: **Be afraid** of falling away. Respond to this fear by remaining vigilant (being on constant guard) against falling away – both for yourself but for every one of your brothers and sisters in Christ.
 2. (vs. 2-5) The basis of fear leading to constant vigilance against falling away is the fact you have heard God's message of good news (concerning salvation) just as Israel had God's good news given to them (concerning the Promised Land). However, hearing is not equal to obedience any more than knowing is equal to faith. Faith in God is proven by hearing coupled with obedience. This is the faith that is rewarded by being able to enter God's rest.
 - a. (vs. 3-4) This is the first clue that the "rest" spoken of here in Hebrews for us today is something greater than the rest offered to Israel in the Promised Land (*"His works were finished from the foundation of the world"*).
 - b. (vs. 5) God's provides one more affirmation that unbelief and disobedience keeps us from entering His rest.
 3. (vs. 6-10) Building on the fact that God has a "rest" for His children today that is greater than the "rest" He offered the Israelites in the Promised Land, the writer points out that God's "rest" is still being offered to anyone who will listen to and obey the voice (words, inner conviction) of Jesus.
 - a. (vs. 7) Clearly, the time to enter God's rest is "today." Currently, "today" is any moment in time when you have the mental ability to respond in faith to what you hear Jesus speaking to you.

- b. (vs. 8) God further proves His point about His “rest” for us today being greater than the Promised Land by pointing out that even though Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land, he was unable to lead them into a rest without labor and eternal in nature.
 - c. (vs. 9-10) God moves from speaking about a strictly eternal rest to one that you can begin experiencing today. This is the Sabbath rest – a rest that can be enjoyed now and through out eternity. This is the rest of salvation, and the labor that ends is the labor of earning our salvation or trying to perpetually appease God so as to be granted salvation.
- 4. (vs. 11) Second response to God’s warning: **Be diligent** to enter that rest. Without diligence, some are likely to miss out on God’s rest just as a whole generation of Israelites missed out on the Promised Land.
- 5. (vs. 12-13) Why be afraid and why be diligent in making sure you don’t fall away from entering God’s rest and that none of your brothers and sisters in Christ fall away?
 - a. (vs. 12) Because you cannot hide your unbelief and disobedience from God’s word. The word discerns you as you really are – from the inside out.
 - b. (vs. 13) Because you cannot hide your unbelief and disobedience from God’s sight. He sees well beyond your outward appearances.

III. What do the scriptures teach about falling away from the faith?

A. Is it once saved always saved, or can we lose our salvation?

- 1. I am not saying today that falling away happens as a result of committing one sin or even several sins during a given day. Falling away, according to the scriptures, is a matter of an ongoing mindset, a settled behavior pattern, our treasures, and what we consistently love the most. It is the predominate condition of our faith leading up to and including that moment when we pass from this life to the next.
 - a. If it is our consistent goal to live for Jesus and no longer live for self; if we long to see more of our sin so we can get rid of more of it; if it is our practice to confess sin soon after realizing we’ve sinned; if we repeatedly get back on the narrow path after stepping off; if we prepare to face each day with the expectation of submitting to God, resisting the devil, and

drawing ever nearer to God; if we hunger to be more and more like Christ; if we can see progressive and measurable spiritual growth in ourselves year after year; and if we persevere to the end of our days here on the earth in this way – than we can know without a shadow of doubt that we are saved and that upon our passing from this life to the next we will be with God in His eternal kingdom for ever.

- b. However, if we sought salvation for the self-serving reason of escaping hell; if we do not move beyond self-interested religious beliefs to living for God and loving Him supremely; if we treat God as if He were our servant rather than His; if we allow known sin to remain a part of our lives month after month and year after year; if we assume on the grace of God to cover our unwillingness to throw off the old ways of the flesh; if we present ourselves as spiritual in certain settings while our family or co-workers or friends continue to see another side; and if we trust God in some areas while withholding trust in other areas so as to live contrary to God's will and word in those areas of distrust – then it is questionable if we are saved at all. And if we are saved, we are in serious jeopardy of taking that step of unbelief that treats God as if He were a marginal or utilitarian part of our life – a step of unbelief that results in falling away from the faith.

B. Look at **Hebrews 3:14** . . . For **we have become partakers of Christ**, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end . . .

1. What does it mean to be a partaker of Christ? It means to be his companion or partner – which surely includes receiving him by faith into your life. In other words, it is to be a Christian, a born again believer, a saved one.
2. Therefore, who is the Christian according to **Hebrews 3:14**? Those who remain committed to what they started when they first repented of their rebellion against God and sought for reconciliation with God by putting their faith in Christ for salvation from the penalty, power, and practice of sin. In other words, Christians are those who trust in Christ, who submit to Him, who live according to His will, and who love Him **to the end of their days**.

- C. Our problem today with this truth is twofold:
1. First, we live in an age where the common teaching in the church dumbs-down Christianity to a level that makes falling away impossible.
 - a. For example, popular teaching today implies that putting our faith in Jesus for salvation from the penalty of sin so that we can spend eternity in Heaven is the single requirement for becoming a Christian.
 - b. And though such things as repentance and sanctification are mentioned in most churches, they are never spoken of as required elements of salvation.
 - c. Therefore, falling away seems improbable since entering in requires so little faith.
 2. Second, we have exalted and taught about grace to the point where the common Christian fears a serious call to holiness more than he fears the practice of sin. Today, we fear the psychological and emotional impact of teaching too strongly about holiness more than we fear the psychological, emotional, relational, and spiritual impact of practicing sin.
 - a. Is it not true that today's Christians have any number of negative labels for those who take holiness seriously? Do we not hear such labels as legalistic, works based salvation, self-righteous, trying to earn salvation, and the like?
 - b. Yet at the same time, those who continue to knowingly practice sin after being saved are labeled as missing the mark, immature, Carnal Christians, or as having a weakness or a flaw in their personality.
 - c. What we don't hear are the labels God uses about sin and sinner – especially sinner in the church – such as adulterer, enemy of God, rebellious, being hostile toward God, unbelief, loving the world, and hating God.
- D. Returning to **Hebrews 3:14**, whether you call the “**IF**” a condition of salvation or a proof of salvation – it comes to the same end.
1. If we turn away from God to go our own way on the matter of living by faith so we can enter God's rest – as Israel did in the wilderness – we incur God's judgement.
 2. As I have stated, this is not a matter of being perfectly sinless. It is a of taking God, holiness, repentance on our part, and living for God seriously. And how seriously we take salvation is shown by the

direction of our life. Either the direction of our life is toward, God, godliness, serving God, submitting to the will of God, and the pursuit of intimate fellowship with God or it is toward self, selfishness, and the pursuit of personal happiness – regardless of our religious affiliations and practices.

3. With these things in mind, I want to turn our attention to the entire book of Hebrews and what it has to say about falling away. If we have time, we will look at some of the scriptures related to this topic found outside of Hebrews.

IV. Scriptures Concerning Falling Away:

- A. **Hebrews 2:1-3a** . . . For this reason **we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it.** [2] For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, [3] **how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?**
- B. **Hebrews 3:6** . . . but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, **if we hold fast** our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.
- C. **Hebrews 3:14** . . . For **we have become partakers of Christ, if** we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,
- D. **Hebrews 6:4-12** . . . For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, [5] and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, [6] **and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance,** since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame. [7] For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; [8] but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned. [9] But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. [10] For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints. [11] And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, [12] so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators of **those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.**

- E. **Hebrews 10:19-36** . . . Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, [20] by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, [21] and since we have a great priest over the house of God, [22] **let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith**, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. [23] **Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering**, for He who promised is faithful; [24] and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, [25] not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. [26] **For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, [27] but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. [28] Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. [29] How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? [30] For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." [31] It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. [32] But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, [33] partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. [34] For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. [35] **Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.** [36] **For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.**
- F. **Hebrews 10:39-4:2** . . . But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those **who have faith to the preserving of the soul**. [4:1] Now **faith is the assurance** of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. [2] For by it the men of old gained approval.
- G. **Hebrews 12:15-17** . . . **See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God**; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; [16] that there be no immoral or godless

person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. [17] **For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected**, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

- H. **Hebrews 12:25** . . . See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.
- I. **Ezekiel 18:20-24; 30-32** . . . "The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself. [21] "But if the wicked man turns from all his sins which he has committed and observes all My statutes and practices justice and righteousness, he shall surely live; he shall not die. [22] "All his transgressions which he has committed will not be remembered against him; because of his righteousness which he has practiced, he will live. [23] "Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live? [24] **"But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness, commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that a wicked man does, will he live? All his righteous deeds which he has done will not be remembered for his treachery which he has committed and his sin which he has committed; for them he will die.** [30] "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct," declares the Lord GOD. "Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. [31] "Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? [32] "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies," declares the Lord GOD. "Therefore, repent and live."
- J. **Ezekiel 33:10-16** . . . "Now as for you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, 'Thus you have spoken, saying, "Surely our transgressions and our sins are upon us, and we are rotting away in them; how then can we survive?"' [11] "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?' [12] "And you, son of man,

say to your fellow citizens, 'The righteousness of a righteous man will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he will not stumble because of it in the day when he turns from his wickedness; whereas a righteous man will not be able to live by his righteousness on the day when he commits sin.' [13] "When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die. [14] "But when I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and he turns from his sin and practices justice and righteousness, [15] if a wicked man restores a pledge, pays back what he has taken by robbery, walks by the statutes which ensure life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not die. [16] "None of his sins that he has committed will be remembered against him. He has practiced justice and righteousness; he shall surely live.

- K. **Romans 11:17-24** . . . But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree, [18] do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. [19] **You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in."** [20] **Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited, but fear;** [21] **for if God did not spare the natural branches, He will not spare you, either.** [22] **Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.** [23] And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. [24] For if you were cut off from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these who are the natural branches be grafted into their own olive tree?
- L. **Galatians 5:1-6** . . . It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. [2] Behold I, Paul, say to you that **if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.** [3] And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law. [4] **You have been severed from**

Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. [5] For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love.

- M. **Colossians 1:21-23** . . . And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, [22] yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach— [23] **if indeed you continue in the faith** firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.
- N. **I Timothy 4:16** . . . Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for **as you do this you will ensure salvation** both for yourself and for those who hear you.
- O. **I John 3:7-10** . . . Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. [9] **No one who is born of God practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] **By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious**: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother.
- P. **II Peter 2:19b-22** . . . promising them freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved. [20] For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. [21] For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. [22] It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A dog returns to its own vomit," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

- Q. **James 5:19-20** . . . My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, [20] let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.
- R. **I Corinthians 9:26-27** . . . Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; [27] but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, **I myself will not be disqualified.**

V. Conclusion