

# Hebrews

Hebrews 3:1-13 – Part II

November 16, 2008

- I. We are to listen to Jesus and obey him – guarding against falling away.
  - A. **Hebrews 3:1-13** . . . Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; [2] He (*Jesus*) was faithful to Him (*God*) who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His (*God's*) house. [3] For He (*Jesus*) has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. [4] For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. [5] Now Moses was faithful in all His (*God's*) house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; [6] but Christ was faithful as a Son over His (*God's*) house – whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. [7] Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His (*Christ's*) voice, [8] do not harden your hearts as when they (*Israel*) provoked Me (*God*), as in the day of trial in the wilderness, [9] where your fathers tried Me (*God*) by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. [10] "Therefore I (*God*) was angry with this generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways'; [11] As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' " [12] 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.
  - B. **Review:** In Hebrews 3:1-6 God is telling us that perseverance and, therefore, permanence in fulfilling our “heavenly calling” is essential to experiencing the intended outcome of saving faith. Another way of saying this is that the validation of saving faith is a life that listens to and submits to the Lordship of Jesus so that we become more and more like him in how we live day-to-day. Faith produced obedience is as much a part of saving faith as believing that Jesus died for our sins.
    1. The truth is, living Christianly to the end of our days here on the earth is the natural and only rational outcome of saving faith. Anything less is less than saving faith.

2. And so in these first six verses of **Hebrews 3**, God presents His prelude to His warning about staying on course rather than pulling back in unbelief and going our own way – as Israel did at the Jordan. With this in mind, let us move on to **Hebrews 3:7-19**.

II. In **Hebrews 3:7-11**, God further prepares us for His warning against falling away by using Israel as an example of unbelief and how He deals with unbelief. And let me remind us all that unbelief, willful disobedience, and self-rule are one and the same.

A. **Hebrews 3:7-11** . . . Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His (*Christ's*) voice, [8] do not harden your hearts as when they (*Israel*) provoked Me (*God*), as in the day of trial in the wilderness, [9] where your fathers tried Me (*God*) by testing Me, and saw My works for forty years. [10] "Therefore I (*God*) was angry with this generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know My ways'; [11] As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' " (Quoted from **Psalms 95:7-11**)

1. The basic point of **Hebrews 3:7-11** is: **Look at Israel! Learn from their mistakes!** And what was their mistake? They did not respond in faith to what God said – as demonstrated by their refusal to obey what they heard.
  - a. When God **spoke** to Israel and said it was time to enter the Promised Land, Israel, from fear of the giants, the walled cities, and the well-equipped armies refused to put their trust in God and believe He would empower them for victory or protect them from harm.
  - b. Of course, the natural and only outcome of unbelief in the goodness of God is a refusal to obey what He says to do. Therefore, the direct result of Israel's unbelief was rebellion against God.
  - c. Now it is important to note here that Israel's rebellion led to anger on God's part and dreadful consequences for Israel. And what were the dreadful consequences? Because of their unbelief and resulting disobedience, they were not allowed to enter God's rest for them – which was the Promised Land.
2. Once again, the essential message of **Hebrews 3:7-11** is this: "When God speaks, listen and obey. To do otherwise is to set yourself against God – which in turn sets God against you and sets yourself up for dire consequences.

3. God is giving us this example from Israel's past to prepare us for His warning about similar unbelief and disobedience on our part. God's warning to us is contained in **verses 12-19**. But before moving on to God's word to us, I want us to consider some of the lessons we can learn from Israel's failure.
- B. Lessons from Israel's failure as stated in **Hebrews 3:7-11**.
1. **LESSON 1:** In relation to God, distrust and disobedience are synonymous. Therefore, the natural outcome of distrust of God is disobedience to the will and word of God. The reason we disobey God is because (1) we don't trust His motives in dealing with us or (2) we don't trust His intentions for us or (3) we don't trust His willingness or ability to adequately provide what we need and protect us from harm.
  2. **LESSON 2:** Hardening our heart against God and His will for us is the direct and natural response of distrust. Therefore, distrust of God and hardness of heart go hand-in-hand.
    - a. At first, we harden our hearts by convincing ourselves of the reasons and justifications for not doing (*obeying*) what we know God has said.
    - b. Eventually, we further harden our hearts by deciding it is senseless to even listen to God or take Him seriously – either on a given topic or altogether – because we have come to believe that what God says and what He does is unworthy of our trust.
  3. **LESSON 3:** We reveal just how haughty (*i.e., arrogant, conceited, vain*) we are and how low our opinion is of God when we evaluate God's worthiness to be trusted (*obeyed*) on the basis of what He allows to happen to us and how He responds to our felt-needs. In other words, we show the ugliness of our heart toward God and the extent of our distrust of Him when we judge Him based on how well we think He has handled or is handling the unwanted circumstances and hurtful people in our lives.
  4. **LESSON 4:** Distrust of God and rebellion against God begins in the heart – that place where we store our values, the principles by which we live, and things we treasure most.
    - a. **Mark 7:20-23** . . . And Jesus was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. [21] "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, [22] deeds of coveting

and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. [23] "All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."

- b. The problem we face is that our inner being (*heart*) is easily swayed toward self-interest – which means we are easily swayed toward distrust of God's will and word. This is why God goes on to tell us we must work as a group in helping each other war against our tendency to unbelief and disobedience.
5. **LESSON 5:** It is possible to know a lot about God without knowing many specifics about the ways of God. Knowing about God usually comes from reading books or listening to teachers. However, knowing the ways of God, so as to accurately predict how God will act in a given situation, comes from personal interaction with God.
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  - b. Jonah is an example of knowing God's ways – even though he did not want to use his knowledge for good.
    - (1) Jonah wanted Nineveh to be destroyed because Assyria was a growing threat to Israel. When the people of Nineveh repented after Jonah preached there, God pulled back from judging the city as He had originally intended to do.
    - (2) Notice Jonah's words to God once he realized God was not going to destroy Nineveh: **Jonah 4:2 . . .**"Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.
6. **LESSON 6:** Distrust, disobedience, arrogance, and pride on our part is offensive to God to the point of stirring up His anger.
- a. It is offensive because it unjustly maligns His character. (*i.e., It is badmouthing God when He doesn't deserve to be badmouthed.*)
  - b. It stirs His anger because unbelief in one of God's people is like a bad apple in a bushel of apples – the one bad apple causes other apples to go bad.
  - c. One more thing: angering God is about the dumbest thing we can do.

- C. Moving on to **verses 12-13**, we see that God essentially warns us individually and corporately against unbelief and disobedience on our part. He then calls us corporately to help each other persevere to the end in fulfilling our heavenly calling – that is, in living like Christ day in and day out.

III. **Hebrews 3:12-13** . . . 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.

- A. In essence, God is saying to us: Beware, watch out, be on your guard, lest any one of us show the same distrust and disobedience of God that Israel showed.
- B. However, God does not simply warn us and leave it at that. In warning us, He defines the problem and presents solutions.
- C. **The Problem:** An evil, unbelieving heart that causes us to fall away from the living God.
  - 1. The evil, unbelieving heart is an interesting phrase for it unites evil, unbelief and the heart of the Christian into one single entity.
    - a. There are only two other places in the Bible where these two words, “**evil heart**” are placed together as they are in this passage. In both passages, the words “evil heart” are preceded by the word “stubborn.” In first passage, the evil heart refuses to listen and obey – much the same as Israel did at the Jordan and God cautions us against here in **Hebrews 3:12-13**. In the second passage, the evil heart is so entrenched that the person with the evil heart feels that it is hopeless to try and change back to faith in God and obedience to His word. Let’s look at them:
      - (1) **Jeremiah 16:10-12** . . . Now when you tell this people all these words, they will say to you, 'For what reason has the LORD declared all this great calamity against us? And what is our iniquity, or what is our sin which we have committed against the LORD our God?' [11] Then you are to say to them, 'It is because your forefathers have forsaken Me,' declares the LORD, 'and have followed other gods and served them and bowed down to them; but Me they have forsaken and have not kept My law. [12] 'You too have done evil, even more than your forefathers; for behold, you are each one walking according to the

stubbornness of his own **evil heart**, without listening to Me.

(2) **Jeremiah 18:11-12** . . . So now then, speak to the men of Judah and against the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, "Thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am fashioning calamity against you and devising a plan against you. Oh turn back, each of you from his evil way, and reform your ways and your deeds." [12] But they will say, 'It's hopeless! For we are going to follow our own plans, and each of us will act according to the stubbornness of his **evil heart**.'

b. The two points that I want us to see from these two passages in **Jeremiah** and apply to our **Hebrews 3:12** are:

(1) **First**, an evil, unbelieving heart is both the source and the result of not listening to and obeying God.

(2) **Second**, we can fall away to the point that we begin to feel that repenting and turning back to God is hopeless or simply too much work. So we remain on what appears to us to be the easier path – unbelief and disobedience.

2. Falling away from the living God – notice that we are not falling away from religion or a particular denomination or even the local church. Unbelief and disobedience lead to falling away from the living God. Whatever the condition of our direct and personal relationship with God, unbelief and disobedience moves us away from that relationship. The evil, unbelieving heart puts distance between us and God. And it isn't that God moves away from us – rather it is us moving away from God. We do the falling away!

D. **The solution:** Take care, brethren, and 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.

1. **Verse 12** speaks of personal action to fight against unbelief and disobedience. It begins with these words – "**Take care, brethren.**" This means, be on your guard. But against what? Against the temptation to unbelief, against obvious areas of disobedience, or against settled areas of unbelief in your personal life.

2. **Verse 13** points to what we can do as a body of believers. In this verse God says to continue encouraging each other to a life of faith so that no one among us gives in to unbelief and ends up falling away from their commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and their relationship with God.

3. So God's solution is twofold: First, we must be on guard ourselves. And second, we are to help others live in faith when they are tempted to live in unbelief.
4. God's solution requires:
  - a. Personal vigilance against the entrance of any unbelief into our thinking, feeling, plans or decisions.
  - b. Listening to what others in the church are saying and observing what they are doing – not to condemn or demean but to encourage. Then, when we hear or see something that indicates unbelief or willful disobedience, we are to encourage that brother or sister in the Lord to see the error in their thinking or choices and turn back to faith and obedience.
  - c. It requires knowing the scripture and God's ways.
  - d. It requires growing in knowing each other and opening up to each other – not hiding our unbelief or disobedience, but even exposing it in order to gain help from our church family in overcoming unbelief.
5. Unbelief may be a badge of intellectualism for many in our age, but it has been and continues to be the tool of Satan to turn us away from God and ensnare us in a life that leads to eternal damnation in the lake of fire.

IV. Finally, for us, the word “today” certainly means right now, but it also means “while we are alive and able to choose.” For any day that we are alive is “today.” Therefore, as Christians, our daily and endless goal is to listen to and obey Jesus. Ongoing, unchallenged, deliberate and repetitive failure here is proof (1) we do not yet have saving faith or (2) that we are moving away from our conviction that God is due our trust and submission. In either case, the consequences are dire. May we run from such consequences ourselves and may we do what we can to help each other run from such dire consequences, too.