

The Second of Five Warning Passages to the Hebrews

Hebrews 3:7-19

Hebrews 3:7-19 - ⁷ Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

⁸ Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,

In the day of trial in the wilderness,

⁹ Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,

And saw My works forty years.

¹⁰ Therefore I was angry with that generation,

And said, ‘They always go astray in their heart,

And they have not known My ways.’

¹¹ So I swore in My wrath,

‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

¹² Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³ but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, ¹⁵ while it is said:

“Today, if you will hear His voice,

Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

¹⁶ For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? ¹⁷ Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹ So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Background Notes

Hebrews 1 and 2 taught that Christ is superior to the prophets and superior to the angels, and the first half of chapter 3 taught that Christ is superior to Moses. In addition, at the beginning of chapter 2 there was a strong warning to the readers of this epistle to make sure of their salvation, and not to drift away by neglecting so great a salvation. Hebrews 2:1-3: *“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.”*

In the second half of chapter 3 there is a second warning regarding unbelief, and the possibility of falling short of the “rest” of God. This warning carries right through to verse 13 of chapter 4.

As we read these chapters, the obvious questions that come to our minds are, “What’s the problem? Why is the author belaboring the fact that Christ is greater than the prophets and greater than the angels and greater than Moses? Everybody knows that!” And, “Why is the author constantly warning his readers? Isn’t this letter addressed to Christians?”

Once again, the answer to these questions is the audience that the author was addressing in this epistle. They were primarily Jewish people – Hebrews - who had left Judaism and have become (at least professing) Christians. Because of their background in Judaism, and because of the emphasis in Judaism on Moses and the prophets and angels, the author emphasized the fact that Christ is superior in every way.

By the way, if you think this teaching doesn’t have any relevance or application for today - it certainly does! There are many religious cults today that elevate man to the status of “a god” or even God. And there are many cults that lower Jesus Christ to the level of a human prophet or angelic spirit. These mistaken people need to read Hebrews 1-3.

The reason why the author was warning these people who had come out of Judaism was that some of them were not truly committed Christians. They all professed to be Christians, but it seems that some of them had just “jumped on the band wagon” of Christianity. In fact, some of them were in danger of going back to Judaism. In Judaism, you could escape both the reproach of being a follower of Christ, and you could escape being persecuted for the sake of Christ. And let’s face it, the rituals of Temple worship appealed to the aesthetic senses of some of these professing believers. Christianity did not have a beautiful Temple or sacred rituals, as did Judaism.

So the author warned his audience about the dangers of “drifting away” and “falling back.” These warnings indicate that some of the readers had never really committed their lives to Christ. Their “faith” was only an outward expression of faith. True faith perseveres to the end! That’s why verse 6 says, *“Christ is a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.”* The endurance doesn’t save us - but endurance and perseverance are **evidence** of true saving faith.

Doctrinal Points

1. Professing Christians can fall away from the living God.

Verse 12: *“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.”*

The Greek word that’s used here for “depart from” or “fall away from” is the word from which we get the word “apostasy.” This word means “to turn away from a position or profession of faith that was once held.” The readers of this epistle were warned that “departing” was a possibility.

Right now you may be thinking, “But I thought we couldn’t lose our salvation! I thought the Bible taught ‘once saved, always saved.’” Well, it does! However, it’s possible to profess to be a Christian, but not be a true or genuine believer. It’s possible to say you’re a Christian - but have an evil heart of unbelief.

Why, then, were they addressed as “brethren” in verse 12? It’s precisely because they were all *professing* believers. As I teach this lesson, I’m addressing all of you as “brethren,” as I do in every congregation of the Lord’s people. Yet it’s possible that some of you here today are not true believers - only “professing” to be Christians.

As an example, the author of Hebrews quoted Psalm 95:7-11 – a description of the rebellion of the children of Israel during their 40 years in the wilderness. (You can read about that rebellion in the book of Numbers.) The author used them as an illustration because those people in the wilderness were all “professing believers.” They had all followed Moses out of Egypt: *“For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?”*

But they provoked the Lord by their rebellion and disobedience over the course of 40 years. This was evidence that their true hearts were “evil hearts of unbelief.” Because of unbelief they did not enter the “rest” of the Promised Land. Only Joshua and Caleb got into the Promised Land; the rest of the people were not able to enter in because of unbelief. Verse 19: *“So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”*

What an illustration or picture of professing Christians today! People who only profess to be Christians can fall away from the Living God. True and genuine believers cannot fall away - because “once saved, always saved.” But ***saving faith proves itself to be genuine by endurance and perseverance.*** Faith is the root of salvation; endurance is the fruit of salvation. Verse 14: *“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”*

Listen to the words of 1 John 2:19 about professing believers. *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”*

So these verses in Hebrews 3 are definitely a warning. Professing Christians can fall away from the living God.

2. It is possible to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Verses 12-13: *“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called ‘Today,’ lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”*

Sin is deceitful! Over time it dulls the conscience to the point where sin is tolerated - and even accepted! Take, for example, the sin of coveting - the strong desire for more than what you have. One of the Ten Commandments is: *“Thou shall not covet.”* In our country today, we’re so desensitized to the sin of coveting and greed that even Christians excuse themselves for being involved in this sin by saying “it’s just part of the American culture”!

Over the course of forty years, the children of Israel became desensitized and hardened to sin, and that generation fell short of entering Canaan. In the same way, the author of Hebrews warned his readers that it's possible to become desensitized to sin - and thus hardened to the truth.

Some of his readers were saying, "What's so bad about going back to Judaism? It would ease family pressure, and it's safer from persecution. Plus we miss the beautiful Temple and the rituals!" Their hearts had become desensitized and hardened to the point where they were thinking it was not a big problem to turn away from Christ.

In the same way, the deceitfulness of sin can harden people today to the truth of their lost condition. These people may play with Christianity, or flirt with Christianity, but the deceitfulness of sin can harden their hearts. It can cause people to be hardened to the doctrine of hell. They begin to think that the doctrine of hell may not actually be true at all. They've been hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Be warned! We need to exhort one another daily (v13)! It is possible to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Practical Application

Do you have a "high view" of the inspiration of Scripture

In verses 7-11, the author of Hebrews quoted parts of Psalm 95. Who wrote Psalm 95? If you look at the beginning of Psalm 95, the author's name is not given as part of the title, as it is in many of the psalms. Hebrews 4:7 may be an indication that David wrote it - although the "*in David*" phrase in Hebrews may just be a reference to the book of Psalms in general.

In any case, if you have a "high view" of the inspiration of Scripture, you believe that the **ultimate Author** of Psalm 95 is the **Holy Spirit!** The author of Hebrews clearly had a high view of Scripture. Look at the beginning of verse 7: "*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says...*" - and then the author quoted from Psalm 95. **The ultimate Author of every verse in the Bible is the Holy Spirit.**

That's why our Lord Jesus said: "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God*" (Matthew 4:4). The Bible is not man's words about God. **The Bible is God's Word to man.**

That's the high view of the Bible the Lord Jesus had. That's the high view of Scripture that the author of Hebrews had. What about you? Do you have a high view of the inspiration of scripture?