

HEBREWS

Message 20

Date: 2022-12-10

Words: 5574

Reading: Hebrews 3:14-19

INTRO: We are in chapter 3 in the book of Hebrews. We have had the second section of teaching in verses 3:1-7, and now in 3:7-4:16 we have the warning drawn from this teaching. The essence of the warning is in 3:7-15. The warning was illustrated from Israel's failure in the wilderness. Here is what happened: The first generation passed away and they were not allowed to enter the land because of their lack of faith. The failure was unbelief. If one believes God, one will obey Him.

Then the writer applied this to these Hebrew Christians in verses 12-15 which says this:

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."

What is the warning? If the first generation of Israelis that came out of Egypt could not enter the land of rest because of unbelief, neither will these Hebrews enter God's promise of rest for them, if they fail to trust the Lord. Their unbelief would bring about their fall. So, these Hebrews were called to be aware, lest there was in any of them an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

Unbelief leads to a hardening of the heart, and a hardening of the heart opens the door for the deceitfulness of sin to enter. And the deceitfulness of sin leads one into a fool's paradise from which there is no escape but repentance. And in order for repentance to take place, one's sin must be exposed.

When we have sinned, whatever shows us up for what we are, as God through Nathan exposed David; then repentance must take place or the darkness grows deeper and deeper until there is

nothing but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation from God and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. So, we have seen the content of the exhortation for these Hebrews to beware. And now we come to two reasons for this exhortation.

b. The reasons for this exhortation (14-19)

1) Reason # 1: (3:14-15)

We begin then with the first reason for the exhortation for Christians to be aware lest an evil heart of unbelief enter. It is found in verses 14-15 like this:

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."

Why would the writer exhort these believers to be aware lest there was in any of them an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God? Well, first and foremost, because true believers have become partakers of Christ. How unthinkable then, to depart.

Note first the verb "have become." It is a perfect tense verb. The question is, why is the perfect tense used here? It won't mean much to many but let me just say for those for whom it might, I view this as an Extensive perfect. Some translations, like the ESV translate it as a present tense like this: "For we share in Christ..." They see it as an intensive perfect.

What is an extensive perfect? It emphasizes a completed action of an action that happened in the past (Wallace 577). If I am correct, it means that these people have become Christians with abiding results. They are faithful Christians to the end, so

they have believed with abiding results. So, the perfect tense is used, as I see it, because if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast right to the very end, then we have become partakers of Christ once for all. The completed action is in view because the beginning of one's confidence has been held steadfast to the end. We could put it like this: "We have become partakers of Christ once for all if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end." Negatively we could put it like this: "We have not become partakers once for all if we do not hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

The little word "if" means we may or may not hold our confidence steadfast to the end. If we do not, then we have not become permanent partakers of Christ. We only endured for a while. Well, one does not have to be a Christian long to learn that some do not hold the faith steadfast to the end.

Now we must ponder the words "partakers of Christ." What is a partaker of Christ? The word "partakers" is someone who shares in or partakes in something with another. For example, look at Hebrews 2:14. It says:

*14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise **shared** in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,*

The Lord Jesus Christ "shared" or "partook" of flesh and blood just like the rest of us have! He became one of us! We have flesh and blood, and He shared in the same with us. He partook of the same. But now in our verse, the Lord does not become partaker with us, we become a partaker with Him!

How can we be partakers with Him? Turn to Romans 6. The question now is, in what way do believers become partakers with Him? How?

We begin in verse 1:

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?

2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?

4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection,

6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

7 For he who has died has been freed from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him,

9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him.

10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God.

When we get baptized, we identify with Jesus Christ in His death, His burial, and His resurrection. We share in all of that with Him. It is the union of the believer with Christ. He shared with us in flesh and blood and we share with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection! So, if that is true, how can we continue to live in sin?

We have only become partakers once for all with Christ, perfect tense, when we have held the faith steadfast to the end. We might partake for a while, and then drop out, giving heed to the pleasures of sin. It is possible to drop out. If these were only professing believers, professors of the faith cannot drop out. They have never been in Christ. Only true believers can drop out.

Consider now, then, the word "confidence." What is this confidence? The word confidence used here is different than in some other passages. Here it is the word "hupostasis." It is that upon which our faith is founded. It is the foundation of our faith, and that is the Gospel.

Note second that it is not just our confidence. It is the beginning of our confidence. Well, how was it with these Hebrews at the beginning of their confidence? Let me show you this in the life of these Hebrews at the beginning. We go to chapter 10:32-35:

32 But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

33 partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the

plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

Wow! In the beginning of their confidence, they had great struggles and sufferings. They had stood with other believers and it brought them much trouble. They had identified with the writer, and here the writer sounds like Paul because it says he had been in chains.

There are a good many of the Hebrews who started out well and then, when their expectations that Christ would come soon and set up His kingdom did not materialize, an evil heart of unbelief was beginning to enter. The confidence of these Hebrews, who once gladly suffered the plundering of their goods, is waning. And now they are in danger of apostatizing.

This confidence must be maintained to the end. So, we ask, to what end? I believe it is the end of one's life here on earth or until the Lord returns. Matthew 24, speaking of the tribulation believers says, "He that endures to the end will be saved." The clear implication is that he that does not endure to the end will be lost. They have not become partakers of Christ with, perfect tense, abiding results.

Now let me read verses 14 and 15 once more:

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."

When do we need to respond to God? The day we hear His voice. Whenever He speaks to us about something that needs attention, that is the day we need to obey. Verse 15 says, "while it is said: 'Today.'" While anyone is alive and he hears the voice of God, in that day if you will hear His voice, hasten to obey. Whenever we hear His voice, that day is today. How easy it is to procrastinate when the Lord has spoken to us.

Now notice the word "if." We are to respond today, if we hear His voice today. When God speaks to us about any wrong doing, it is a voice we do not like to hear. But do we realize how great the privilege is to be able to hear God's voice? Oh, it feels anything but like a privilege. But what a sad day when we cannot hear His voice. Many, many, unbelievers in our land cannot hear His voice. They are buried under layers of sin. They can be told spiritual things as plainly as it can be said and they cannot hear. There are enough times when we as Christians cannot hear.

I cheated on an assignment in Bible school many years ago. I can say I did not purposely cheat. But I could have been kept from graduating because of what I did. And one day I overheard from other students that we were not to use helps on a certain assignment and fear washed over my whole being. I had done so and the assignment was already handed in. Oh, I struggled and when the struggle reached the level where I did not care any more about the outcome I went to the teacher of the class, and he was one of two teachers I had I never wanted to tell something like this. Well, he saw the sincere repentance and accepted what I said and I left with a great release. Oh, I know about conviction. I know about hearing God's voice. But thank God I heard His voice and obeyed. Let me say this, if we do not hear His voice, we will never get

saved. If we don't hear His voice as Christians when we have some sin, it will have bad consequences.

I have pondered sometimes how God speaks. Some time ago a person came to repent to me about a certain matter and I pondered in my heart, "Lord how did this person not get convicted about this, or that other thing?" But they didn't. If they had they would surely have taken care of it because the thing they took care of was no easy thing to take care of. You see, it is when we hear HIS voice. We must let God be the speaker. We are good at trying to be a helpmeet for the Lord but He knows best.

Well, that day we hear His voice is the day to hear, or obey. And when we don't our hearts grow harder. So, verse 15 warns the believer to not harden his heart as in the rebellion. The word used here has the idea of to provoke. Israel provoked God.

The internet gave this definition of to provoke:

-stimulate or give rise to (a reaction or emotion, typically a strong or unwelcome one) in someone.

-stimulate or incite (someone) to do or feel something, especially by arousing anger in them.

-deliberately make (someone) annoyed or angry.

Now we might say, "Well, I would never do that deliberately to God." But how do we provoke Him? By unbelief or disobedience. Do we do that?

2) Reason # 2: (3:16-19)

The second reason given for the exhortation of the previous verses is found in verses 16-19 like this:

*16 For who, having heard, rebelled?
Indeed, was it not all who came out of
Egypt, led by Moses?*

We come now to a rather difficult verse. The way the verse is written it says that all who came out of Egypt rebelled against Moses. And that raises this question: Did all those who came out of Egypt rebel? There is a NT verse that would seem to contradict this reading. It is 1 Corinthians 10:5. Here Paul speaks about this same time like this:

5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Paul says that God was not well pleased with *most* of them. That indicates He was well pleased with some of them. According to this passage it was the majority of those who came out of Egypt rebelled against Moses.

The translation then, of our verse is important. I won't give the various translations and just give you the one I think is right. It comes from "Young's Literal Translation." This translation was done in 1862. That is 160 years ago. I'll read verses 16-17:

*16 for certain having heard did provoke,
but not all who did come out of Egypt
through Moses;*

*17 but with whom was He grieved forty
years? was it not with those who did sin,
whose carcasses fell in the wilderness?*

The certain ones mentioned made up the majority of those who came out of Egypt.

Joshua and Caleb were among those and they were faithful followers of the Lord. The NKJV says, "For who..." Young's says, "certain." The word is "tis." It occurs 448 times in the NT. The KJV translates this word "certain" (meaning certain ones) 104 times and "some" 103 times. It never translates this as "who" as the NKJV does.

Verse 17 of Hebrews 3 bears witness with the understanding that it means "certain ones" or "some." It says:

17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?

This verse does not indicate that it was with all those who came out of Egypt. It was with those who sinned. To say that all those who came out of Egypt rebelled does not do justice to the doctrine of the remnant. There has always been a remnant. Even today, of all of mankind, only a remnant is truly saved.

Here is what we can learn from this. When the majority go wrong, the minority that do not go wrong suffer with the majority.

Verse 18:

18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?

To whom did God swear they would not enter His rest? To that first generation who came out of Egypt. However, the next generation did enter that rest. Now this rest is a very difficult subject as anyone who studies it will find. We will be studying it more later but it caused me many hours of research and I want you to not just accept what I say without thinking critically about it. I will just say I am

giving you my view and be careful to take it as that.

But I want you to notice that here, for the first time, it is called "His rest." This is God's rest he is talking about, and the believer can enter God's rest. The question is, can we enter it now, or do we enter it when we die or when the millennial kingdom comes?

So, we must ask, just what is God's rest? Tell me, where does God first speak of His rest? When God had was finished with creation, which was the first six days, He entered His rest. Listen to Genesis 2:1-3:

1 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.

2 And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.

3 Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

As I see it, there is God's rest. And how do we enter that rest? All throughout history Israel has waited for the Messiah to come and set up His kingdom. This kingdom we know as the millennium. God rested on the seventh day. I think it may well be that this rest that the believer can enter is the rest of the seventh cycle of one thousand years. The Jews have always expected that kingdom to come at any time. But millions of true Christians have died.

Here is what I propose. When anyone dies a true believer, they enter a rest; a rest from their labors here on earth. But they do not enter God's rest until the millennium comes. At that time, they are

resurrected and they enter God's rest, the millennium.

So, I take it that those who are true believers who die before the millennium enter their rest at that time. But they do not have resurrected bodies nor are they on earth. But they will be resurrected, and at the end of the tribulation they will enter that final time that is called the rest of God. If these Hebrews would fall away from Christ, they will never enter God's rest.

Twice in chapter 4 this rest is spoken of as "His rest." That means God's rest. We will come to those passages and will look at them in later messages.

Anyone who enters the rest experienced after death has ceased from his labors. All those who enter the millennium enter God's rest. Now I have read numerous writers who think this means the true believer can enter God's rest here in this life-time. The idea is that the true believer who has learned to live by faith has ceased from his own works and has entered God's rest. I used to think that, but I'm not sure one can make that work systematically.

Let me show you that Christians do enter a rest when they die. It is interesting when you read the headstones in a cemetery that many will say something like, "Rest in Peace." That is because they have ceased from their works.

Turn to Revelation 6 to see this referred to as a rest.

9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

The people referred to here are those who die during the tribulation time. They enter

where all enter heaven. I believe the judgement seat of Christ happens right here when they enter heaven. It is after this that they are given white robes. We read on:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

11 Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

They now are told to rest a little while. Why a little while? These people entered heaven during the tribulation and most of these die in the second half of the tribulation, and so their rest until they enter the millennial rest is 3 ½ years or less. That is a little while.

Revelation 14:12 speaks of that second half of the tribulation and it says this:

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

Why are those who die from here on blessed? Because this is the most horrendous time of persecution for believers that will ever happen. And as soon as they die, they rest from their labors. They have ceased from their works as God did from His. In a short while they will be resurrected and enter God's rest, the millennium.

Verse 18 of Hebrews 3 said:

18 *And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?*

Unbelieving Israel provoked God to anger. They stimulated God to anger. They incited Him. They saw miracle after miracle, and yet when they came to a new trial they failed to believe, they disobeyed. They saw the ten plagues in Egypt. They saw the waters open before them at the Red Sea and they saw those same waters fall back over the Egyptian army. They saw the bitter waters made sweet. Every day they received manna from God. They saw God give them meat when they cried to Him. They saw Israel win in war as long as Moses' hands were held up. They saw God bring water out of a rock and then at Mount Sinai they worshipped the golden calf. Yet they incited God to anger. And God swore, "You will not enter My rest." This meant they would not enter the promised land. The picture of this land, as I see it, is the millennium.

Now, all of this great deliverance out of Egypt and into Canaan is a picture. Deliverance out of Egypt is a picture of salvation. It pictures death, burial and resurrection with Christ. I suggested in the previous message that I see Canaan as a picture of the millennium. I think it cannot picture heaven, in that there is still sin. It is suggested by many that it also pictures the believer entering the rest of faith. There are some more references in chapter 4 to rest and some of them cause me to doubt that view. I would be happy for suggestions. It is a most difficult question and we will be looking at it more in later messages.

Five times in this passage we have the word "Today." Today, if you hear His voice. In all the time from creation until the end of the millennium, there is a day called "Today." We are in that day. Now we might

apply this word, "Today," to unbelievers meaning that today is the day of salvation. And that is not wrong. But the original intent is for believers who are sliding back. Israel had come out of Egypt. That pictures initial salvation, or justification. And now they were in the wilderness and on the way to Canaan.

How many times does this life seem like a wilderness? How many times are we at the end of ourselves and we do not know how to move forward? I marvel again and again what pleases God. He has chosen that the just shall live by faith. We read the Psalm a while ago that said His way is in the sea. Before us stretches the trackless sea. Which way should we go? And here is the way: Move forward by faith. When Israel stood before the Red Sea, Egypt was catching up behind them. Before them was the sea. They could not go to either side and get away from Pharaoh. Behind them was Pharaoh. Which way should they go?

And in Exodus 13:15 God said to Moses: "Why do you cry to Me anymore? Tell the children of Israel to go forward." But how will they go forward? By faith. And when they got to the water Moses stretched out hand, and the sea opened and they crossed over. They had to commit to the impossible.

The generation that came out of Egypt has died off. God had said they would not enter His rest. And as they stood before the Red Sea 40 years ago, in Joshua 3 they once again stand before a water. This time it is the Jordon River. They are now ready to cross Jordon and it is flooding. How do you take a million people over a river that floods its banks this time of year?

Well, they had to cross over by faith. They had to put their feet in the water by faith, and then the river opened up. When you consider it, faith is one of the

central subjects of the entire Bible. I have come to this conclusion: All of salvation is by faith. Justification is by faith. Sanctification is by faith. Even election and predestination are by faith. Romans 9, one of the key chapters for Calvinism has one thread that runs right throughout the chapter. It is this: Faith! Israel failed, not because they were not elect but because they failed to believe.

Turn to Romans 9 for a moment. When you read this chapter, it is easy to come to the conclusion that God chose some and rejected the most, and there is nothing you can do about it. But check it through. It all has to do with faith. For example, verse 16 says:

16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.

But what is the answer to such verses? Salvation is not by works. It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs. It is of God who shows mercy. And to whom does He show mercy. To those who live by faith!

So, look now at verses 30-33. Here is the conclusion to the chapter. It says this:

30 What shall we say then? That Gentiles, who did not pursue righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness of faith;

Why did God turn from the Jews to the Gentiles? Because the Jews failed to exercise faith, but the Gentiles did.

Verse 31:

31 but Israel, pursuing the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness.

Israel did not attain to the law of righteousness? Why not? Verse 32:

32 Why? Because they did not seek it by faith, but as it were, by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumbling stone.

You can find that all throughout the NT. They stumbled. Why? Verse 33:

33 As it is written: "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame."

They stumbled over Jesus Christ? Why? They failed to believe in Him. Faith is what the whole chapter emphasizes. And why could that first generation out of Egypt not enter Canaan? Verse 19 of Hebrews 3:19 says this:

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

I have wondered what most preachers would say to this statement: Before one can get saved one must please God! You see, the Jews sought to please God by their own doings, or as we call it, works. But when we try to accomplish anything with God by doing some works, we despise Him.

Why could that first generation not enter Canaan? Because they did not please God. So, verse 19 says they could not enter in because of unbelief. Listen to Hebrews 11:6, the faith chapter of the Bible:

*6 But **without faith** it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*

Unless we learn to put our feet in the water, we cannot please God. There are

three kinds of works. There are good works. These are works done by faith. They are done out of pure motivation. They have none of self in them. Then there are bad works. All sin is done without faith. Then there are dead works. Look at Hebrews 6:1. It says:

1 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

It is my view that dead works are those done to gain some merit with God. Baptism is not bad. But if one gets baptized because it will help toward one's salvation, it has become a dead work. The writer is speaking to Hebrew Christians who are thinking of going back to Judaism. Notice that the doctrine of baptisms is plural. In the NT there is only one baptism. It is when we are baptized upon our faith in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

So, what is this doctrine of baptisms? If they would go back to Judaism they would be baptized over and over again. The Jews had mikvehs, and they would be baptized many times for various different reasons. To lay the foundation of repentance is the initial repentance to get saved. Foundational repentance takes place when we get saved. We do not do this over and over again.

But, to the dead works, if they should go back to Judaism and practice it and go through all the sacrifices and baptisms, those are what I would call dead works.

In Christianity, for example, if one gets baptized to be saved or one gives to the poor or those in need in order to gain favor with God, those are dead works.

Verse 18 says, "To whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey." It was not because they were not elect. It is because they did not obey. Now look at verse 19:

19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

From the last part of verse 18 and verse 19 we note that disobedience is simply a lack of faith. If I sin, I am failing to believe God.

CONCL: So, we conclude. We have only become permanent partakers of Christ when we have persevered to the end. Why should we beware lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God? Because we have become partakers of Christ. How horrible then, to depart from the One who saved us? How horrible to have been as filthy as a sow, be washed, and then go back to muck in the mud? We are then exhorted to hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

If we hear His voice speaking to our heart, that is the day we are to obey His voice. That first generation in the OT heard His voice and refused to obey, and thus they rather provoked God. With whom was God angry those 40 years? With the unbelieving Israelis. That is the same fate that awaits the believer who turns away from God.

The end result is that they will not enter God's rest, and we'll see more of that in chapter 4.