

Do Not Harden Your Heart

Hebrews 3:7-11

Halifax: 28 August 2022

Introduction:

After being away for a couple of weeks, I want to resume our sermon series in Hebrews.

- Today we come to chapter 3, verses 7-11.
- Here we have a strong prohibition from God's Spirit that pertains to every age:
 - "Do not harden your heart."
 - That is in verse 8.

I want to begin by reading our text.

- I will include some review of what we have looked at in previous weeks in expounding this text.
- And just a comment for you if you are new.
 - Expounding the scriptures involves explaining them and showing how they apply to us today.
 - We do this because God gave the scriptures to His church to instruct us in what to believe about Him and how to live in this present world that is fallen into sin. He reveals His salvation in the scriptures.
 - He used men to write them who were so guided by His Holy Spirit that what they wrote is the very word of God, without error and with all that we need to know for life and godliness.
 - He has actually told us in the scriptures to gather each week to worship Him, and that in that worship, the men who are appointed are to preach the word.
 - He promises to use this to call sinners to repentance and to bless and guide His elect people that they might know Him and grow in His ways.

So listen now as I read to you the portion of scripture I will be expounding to you today.

- It is from Hebrews 3, beginning in verse 7. This is the word of God.

Hebrews 3:7-11: 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.' "

May God add His blessing to this reading as we consider what the Lord has said to us here.

- You can see what I already told you—that the central instruction here is found in verse 8... God says to us, "Do not harden your hearts."

I. "Do not harden your hearts." What is this taking about?

A. It arises in response to what we have looked at in previous sermons.

- Verse 7 begins with the word "therefore."
 - That shows you that what follows has to do with what was said before.
 - And what was that?

1. We saw that we have a wonderful Saviour who makes a house for God out of people.
 - a. He is the very Son of God, and therefore, He was able to make a house for God out of people who are sinners—which we all are—
 - to make a house from people who are taken out of this ruined fallen world to be saved from their sins, both forgiven and transformed to be holy.
 - b. We saw that the Son of God came from heaven where He had dwelt with the Father to become the head of the people that He was to bring into God's household.
 - As our head, He had to obtain our flesh and be made like us, and then He had to go and suffer on the cross to atone for our sins.
 - He calls all people everywhere to come and trust in Him to save them—to look to Him for forgiveness and eternal life in God's house—to make us sons to God who live in God's house as part of His family forever.
 - c. This is excellent.
 - By His grace, we who are otherwise desperate and hopeless sinners become God's household.
 - What a change this is—
 - If we are left in our sin, we are left to be condemned forever—to be punished and excluded from God.
 - What a grand thing to have a Saviour who makes us part of His very own family—the very house of God!
2. But we also saw that we have only truly become a part of God's house if we continue to look to Jesus to save us.
 - It tells us in verse 6 that we are only part of His house: **if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.**
 - If you have been a Christian for very long, you know that there are people who start out trusting in Jesus to give them eternal life in God's house and who rejoice in the hope of being in God's house but do not continue.
 - They stop putting confidence in Jesus and they stop rejoicing in the hope of living in God's family forever.
 - The assertion of our text is that this happens when those who profess Christ harden their hearts.
 - It's not talking about the people who never professed to trust in Him.
 - For example, the ones who have never heard the gospel. They never had any confidence in Jesus or rejoicing in the hope of His salvation because they don't know about His salvation.
 - Or those who heard it, but have never received it.
 - Even though they heard that they could be part of God's household, they never trusted in Jesus or rejoiced in that hope.
 - We pray that they will, but they never even got started.

- Verse 6 does not refer to such persons.
- It refers to those who professed for a while and then either lost confidence in Christ as the only Saviour or lost interest in being a part of God's house altogether.

TRANS> Can this really happen?

- Can a person profess Jesus, rejoice in the hope of salvation, and then turn away?
 - Yes, they can.

B. Turning away is a real danger for professing Christians. You need to see that.

1. If it were not a real danger for those who profess, God would not warn us about it the way He does here.
 - He would not say, "Do not harden your heart" if it never happens.
 - Nor would He tell us, as He does in verse 6, that we are only truly a part of the house that Jesus makes for God if we continue.
2. To impress upon us the reality of the danger, the Holy Spirit uses the example of Israel in the wilderness... what is called "the rebellion."
 - Look at verse 7.
 - **"As the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion...'"**
 - And then the Spirit goes on to refer to this time called the rebellion when nearly the whole church rejected God and His salvation.
 - We read about it in Numbers 14.
 - This rebellion makes it clear that professing believers can and do depart from God's salvation.
 - It is not merely theoretical—it is has happened and it has happened on a very large scale.
3. The Holy Spirit uses this example of "the rebellion" of Israel rejecting God's salvation in the wilderness repeatedly.
 - He used it centuries after it happened, in the time of David, when He gave His people the 95th Psalm to warn them not to harden their hearts and rebel like their fathers did.
 - That is the Psalm that is quoted here in Hebrews.
 - And you see, here in Hebrews, the Holy Spirit again uses the example of this rebellion of Israel in the wilderness to warn these Hebrew believers in the first century not to harden their hearts.
 - This warning is meant to be used in every generation of believers.
 - Dare I say that, today, it is being used by the Holy Spirit to warn you as He uses His word in your lives right now.
 - Yes, rejecting Christ and His salvation is a real danger for professing believers today.

- It is true that once we have truly trusted in Christ, we will not reject Him, but it is also true that there may be many among us who, though they profess to trust in Him, have never yet truly done so.
- In every generation of believers, there are many who turn away.
 - Does Paul not express grave concern about this in His epistles when he sees professing believers wavering?
 - Does Jesus not express grave concern about this, even so much that we are told that when people saw His miracles and believed He did not entrust Himself to them because He knew what was in them?
- Yes, it is a real danger that you will harden your heart.
 - Are you aware of this danger?
 - Do you guard yourself against this danger?
 - That is what you are admonished to do with these words in our text, "Do not harden your hearts."

TRANS> Our text shows us when we are especially in danger of doing this.

- Let's consider that next.

II. When are we especially in danger of hardening our hearts?

A. We are in danger of hardening our hearts whenever we hear God's voice.

1. As fallen sinners, it is natural for us to resist when we hear God's voice.
 - In fact, if we are left to ourselves, that is exactly what we will always do.
 - The Holy Spirit must work in us to enable us to receive and embrace what God says.
 - Isn't that pitiful?
 - We are so contrary by nature because of our fall into sin that even when God comes with gracious words of salvation, of forgiveness and life through His Son who has so graciously loved us, we resist.
 - The fact that we do this unless the Spirit works in our hearts in no way changes the fact that it is still our duty to respond instead of hardening ourselves.
 - Of course it is!
 - It is positively wretched to reject the salvation of our God.
2. But what does it mean to hear His voice? How does that happen?
 - A lot of people will tell you that they wish they could hear God's voice, but that they never have.
 - That is actually not true.
 - They have never received God's voice, but they have certainly heard it.
 - a. God speaks to every single person through His creation. The Bible tells us this.
 - We sang Psalm 19 earlier. It tells us that **the heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament** [where the stars are] **shows His handiwork. Day unto**

day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

- God reveals Himself to every single person through His work of creation.
 - Romans 1 teaches that His eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen in this way so that we are all without excuse unless we worship Him...
 - But we don't.
 - It doesn't come naturally to us.
 - Instead of worshipping as creation reveals Him to be, we make idols—distorted versions of Him—and worship them, or we reject Him altogether and worship the creation itself as if it made itself.
 - What blindness! What folly!
 - In other words, our natural tendency is to harden our hearts to God's revelation through creation.
 - This is wicked.
 - This is inexcusable.
 - We actually suppress and resist what is clearly revealed to us!
 - That is called hardening your heart!
- But in Psalm 95 and in our text from Hebrews, the Holy Spirit is addressing those who have heard God's voice not only through creation, but in a much more powerful way.
- b. God has spoken to professing believers through what theologians call special revelation.
- Hebrews opens with the words (Heb 1:1-2): **“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;”**
 - As we saw at that time, God first spoke by visions and prophets and then brought His final redemptive revelation through His Son, Jesus Christ, when Christ came into the world and became flesh.
 - Special revelation includes redemptive revelation in which God tells us that He wishes to be gracious and save sinners; and in which He promises that whoever wishes to be reconciled to Him and who trusts in His provision (Christ crucified) will be saved.
 - He gives us full revelation of who He is, what He has done, how we are to worship Him, what our duties are to Him and to others, how we fell, how He works in us to save us, etc.
 - To hear God's voice through His special revelation is a great privilege.
 - It is a great abuse of a great privilege to harden our hearts to this revelation.
 - To begin to doubt what God has promised, to ignore what He has commanded, to set aside what He has appointed...

- This revelation is not private—it is given to His people as a whole—but it is personal—we are each to obey it.
- c. In this way, we may say that God speaks to us personally as He applies His special revelation to us day by day.
 - Day after day, we either respond to His voice with submission, or we put up resistance to it.
 - Many times, we have personal application of things that we know we ought to do—perhaps to shore up our prayer life, perhaps by setting a time for it; to be more faithful in leading our wives, maybe defending her in a particular situation; to reach out to the lost more, perhaps to a particular person; to control a gossiping tongue; to honour our parents, perhaps in a specific chore; to be more faithful in our giving; to submit to our husbands, perhaps in a particular way that we have been resisting.
 - When we put up resistance to these promptings, we harden our hearts—whereas we cultivate godly responsive hearts when we yield to them.
 - The danger is that in these little ways, you can establish a pattern of resistance that hardens your heart to the point that you no longer care about the Lord and His salvation.
 - You become callous and grow worse and worse unto you repent.
 - But the good thing is, that by God’s grace, you can establish the opposite pattern in which you respond to God’s voice.
 - Then you grow in holiness, in the knowledge of the Lord, in assurance of His salvation, in joy, and you maintain a clear conscience.
 - God has been gracious enough to let you hear His voice.
 - Are you resisting or submitting?
 - Are you becoming more tender and holy, or more callous and hard?
 - If you are born again, God will so work in you that you will continue, repent when you harden your heart, and turn back to the Lord for His salvation.

TRANS> Yes, there is a danger that you will harden your heart when you hear His voice.

- See that you do not continue to do that.

B. We are also in the danger of hardening our hearts when we are tested.

- As our text says, “in the day of trial in the wilderness.”

1. God tests us as His people.

- We have to endure hard things in our service to Him.
- We are not exempt from things like bereavement—the death of our children or our spouse at a young age or in dreadful circumstances—perhaps the death of a loved one who is outside of Christ; poverty and deprivation; persecutions, even from those we love or from those who are great oppressors; difficult

sicknesses or painful injuries that go on and on; personal failure; loneliness; not being appreciated; the apostasy of loved ones...

- We need such testing to expose the sin that remains in us so that we can deal with it and grow.
2. In such times, our temptation is to say, “Why should I continue serving God when so much is going wrong?”
- We can begin to question what we have learned about God—the things that He has revealed to us.
 - When we do this, we turn things around backwards.
 - God is testing us because we still have much corruption in our lives and in our hearts that needs to be exposed.
 - God uses testing to expose us so we can, with His help, purge the corruption and grow in our love and service to Him.
 - But we turn it around so that we start testing God.
 - Is He really gracious? Is He really trustworthy and wise? Is He really powerful and able to deliver us? Is He even good and just?
 - We begin to ask, “Why should I obey Him when so little good comes from it? Why should I obey Him when it is hard to obey? Why not take it easy? Why not take a break from Him? What’s the use?”
 - This is rebellion!
 - By entertaining these hard thoughts about God, we harden our hearts. If we don’t repent, soon we will be hardened in unbelief.
3. A great rule for trials is this: Never doubt in the darkness what you knew in the light.
- The time of trials is a time to cling to what God has revealed to you.
 - That is how you deepen your faith and your communion with Him.
 - That is how you grow in holy joy.
 - We are told that even Jesus Himself learned obedience through the things that He suffered.
 - Submission is learned best when submission is hard.
 - God will meet you with His grace and you will grow if you will cast yourself upon Christ, clinging to what God has revealed to you—what you already know to be true!
 - You don’t sort out what is right and wrong in the time of temptation—you obey what you have already learned.

TRANS> There is a third time of danger that we need to watch out for.

C. We are in danger of hardening our hearts when our brothers and sisters are hardening theirs. As our text says, in the day of rebellion.

1. This is what happened in the wilderness.

- God was testing them to teach them to trust in Him, but they begin to complain and mumber.
 - They began to doubt and question if God could really provide for them.
 - They began to say that it had been better for them in Egypt.
 - They began to say that what God had asked them to do was unreasonable.
 - Some do this very openly, others do it in more subtle ways that can be even more dangerous—they say, “I know God is good, but why is this happening?”
 - “Surely God did not mean that?”
 - “Surely He does not expect to serve Him if we might lose our job or destroy our family?”
2. Such conduct is highly contagious. It is like a cancer that spreads.
- We need to take the part of Joshua and Caleb who refused to give way to the doubting and complaining.
 - It can be difficult when everyone is doing it.
 - Their complaints can start to sound reasonable—it is a time of great danger.
 - You must guard your heart lest you join with the crowd.
 - Don’t just be passive, but declare openly what is true about God and what He has said, what He has commanded, what He has promised.
 - By His grace, you will grow stronger, not weaker in such times.
 - We are in a time like this presently in North America and in our congregation.

TRANS> So you see that the time of danger is when you hear God’s voice, when you are tested, and when those around you are resisting God and His ways.

- You cannot be neutral in such times.
- If you are neutral, your heart will be hardened, but if you turn to the Lord, your heart will become more tender, you will become more holy, more full of love for Him and trust in Him.
 - We see how people like Joshua and Caleb, and people like Moses and Paul and David cultivated tender hearts in the time of testing.
- The Lord knows that serving Him in this world is not easy.
 - In Hebrews 2:17-18, we saw some weeks ago how Jesus is especially understanding because of all that He had to suffer in carrying out His duty to God—which involved submitting to the cross.
 - He is ready to help you if you will turn to Him.

III. He gives us several things in our text to dissuade us from hardening our hearts.

- A. He dissuades us by removing the fallacious notion that His revelation is insufficient.
1. That is a tired excuse that is thrown up against God by those who are rebelling.
 - That He has not made His revelation clear, that it is not convincing, that there is not enough evidence, that there are too many questions, contradictions, etc.
 - This is nothing more than a foolish evasion of deceived hearts.

2. Israel's rebellion is a powerful illustration that the problem is not inadequate revelation but hard hearts.
 - Consider well
 - They saw the ten plagues on Egypt, each prophesied by Moses before it happened.
 - They saw how Pharaoh, as obstinate as he was, was finally forced to let them go, just as Moses had said.
 - They saw the Red Sea open to let them cross and then close again over the Egyptian armies.
 - They drank water from dry rocks and they ate bread—manna, a bread they did not know—that came down from the sky for forty years.
 - They heard the voice of God from the mountain.
 - They received statutes and ordinances and commandments that were righteous and they were given promises of redemption and mercy that were without parallel.
 - They saw the pillar of fire by night and of cloud by day.
 - They saw God's judgment against their sin when large groups fell under the wrath of God through plagues, fire, the ground opening, and so on.
 - They experienced immediate forgiveness.
 - They did not reject the LORD because He had not made Himself known.
 - They rejected Him because they hardened their hearts.
 - That is what we are warned against.
 3. The revelation we have is even more complete than what Israel had.
 - In the scriptures, we have all the history of God's dealing with His people.
 - We have the prophecies that told of the coming of Christ and how the nations would turn to Him for salvation when He came.
 - That is exactly what happened, even though it did not look like it would happen.
 - Even more than that, we have the marvellous way of salvation revealed.
 - That God saves us through Christ crucified.
 - This way is beautifully consistent with what we know through creation, providence, and conscience of the character of God and the need of man.
 - It solves the problem of human sin in a way that screams truth.
 - When God opens our hearts, we see it clearly; when we harden our hearts, we make ourselves blind to what should be plain and obvious.
 - The reason Israel did not know God's ways was because they always went astray in their heart—they hardened their heart to what they might have known and would not receive it.
 - The reason people do not know the truth today is the same.
 - They go astray in their hearts.
 - Do not harden your hearts!
- You cannot justify such behaviour by saying that God's revelation is insufficient.
- The second way He dissuades us is quite different:

B. He dissuades us by revealing the extreme punishment that falls on those who harden their hearts.

1. In verse 10, the LORD says that He was very angry with the generation of His people that did this.

- Rightly so.
- It is so very unjust to have a gracious Saviour who goes all out to reveal His saving grace to bitter enemies that they might be pardoned and restored to Him as sons and then to have those wretches harden their hearts to that revelation!
- They ought to gladly embrace it with extreme joy and hope, but instead they suppress it.
 - This is extreme wickedness.

2. In verse 11, the LORD swears that those who have hardened their hearts will never enter into the rest that He initially promised them.

- They turned away from Him, from His gracious salvation, from delight and joy in the hope of being beautifully reconciled to Him—pardoned and fully transformed by His saving work to live godly and holy lives forever.
- Those who come to Him for this salvation will receive it, but those who harden themselves against it will get what they deserve.
 - How much worse shall their punishment be who have known the truth and then rejected it than if they had never known it.

3. What fool would harden their heart when the outcome is eternal condemnation under God's extreme wrath?

- Don't harden your heart.

C. He dissuades us by showing us that hard hearts prevent us from having communion with Him.

1. See the words, "They have not known my ways."

- We were made to know Him—our hearts yearn to behold His glory and to live in communion with Him.
 - Here is the beauty without which we can never be satisfied.
 - Without it, we are empty and our lives have no meaning.
- When we respond to Him, we begin to grow in our knowledge of Him and of his wonderful gracious ways.
 - When we harden our hearts, we begin to see Him in a distorted and twisted way and to look at His ways as hard and oppressive, as unreasonable and unjust.

2. Do not harden your heart—else you will miss out on the glory you were created to promote and enjoy forever.

- How wretched are those words, "they have not known my ways."

Conclusion: Don't harden your heart the way Israel did in the wilderness.

- You have no good reason to oppose and resist our gracious LORD.
- You have every reason to respond to His voice with delight.