

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Searching For The Truth

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Number: 05

Topic: Do Not Harden Your Hearts!

Bible Verses: Hebrews 3:7-19

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The vital question of how people lose their faith, and fall into unbelief, through the gradual hardening of their hearts, is addressed at length in Hebrews chapter 3. However we have to understand the spiritual situation and background of the epistle before we can fully understand this extremely interesting passage of Scripture:

- a) They were Hebrew-speaking Christians who had formerly been Jews and were confused about the distinctions between law and gospel and the difference Old Testament sacrifices and Christ's work on the Cross.
- b) They had endured persecution, were real believers and had even seen the spiritual gifts in operation (see Hebrews chapters 6 and 10).
- c) However, no they were tired and discouraged, and some of them wanted to go back to being Jews as that would mean less persecution (Judaism was a legal religion in the Roman Empire). So the author (probably Paul or Barnabas) is encouraging them to remain firm and is showing them the superiority of the New Covenant.
- d) The question of falling away is taken with the utmost seriousness.
- e) Just belonging to the community of faith is deemed to be insufficient; personal living faith and personal holiness are seen as absolutely essential.
- f) They were tempted to give in to sin and discouragement, to give up on the revelation of Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord, and to harden their hearts.
- g) Thus this chapter is addressing people who were already Christian believers and is telling them not to harden their hearts.
- h) One question Hebrews addresses is the: "aren't all religions the same" question. By saying that they could not go back to Judaism and by pointing out the superiority of Christianity the author is saying that salvation is in Jesus alone, and that by abandoning Jesus, they were abandoning God altogether!

Hebrews 3:7-19 *Therefore, just 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 testing in the wilderness, 9 Where your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, and saw My works forty years. 10 Therefore I was indignant with that generation, and said, 'They go astray in their heart; and they did not know My ways.' 11 So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.' " 12 Take heed, brothers, lest there be in any one of you a wicked heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but encourage yourselves every day, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if indeed we hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm until the end, 15 while it is said: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." 16 For some, having heard, did provoke: but not all who came out of Egypt through Moses. 17 And with whom was He indignant those forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His rest, except to those who disobeyed? 19 And we see that they were not able to enter on account of unbelief.*

1. "Today" is the day we hear God's voice. It is the moment of revelation, when God's quick and living Word is obvious to us and to our conscience.
2. "If you hear His voice" – the personal voice of God directly spoken to us, His own voice, not the sophisticated ideas of the philosophers and theologians.
3. "Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion" – the command "do not harden" is a command and we can obey or disobey it. It is a direct injunction. We are capable of cooperating with God and listening to His revelation!
4. "The day of rebellion" – the Israelite disobedience in the wilderness despite that clear miraculous evidence of God, His works, His law, His provision and His direct daily guidance with cloud and fire. Rebellion is direct defiance of a command of God or a murmuring against His authority.
5. "They go astray in their heart" – they continually make wrong spiritual choices and choose the wrong paths in life even when the right path is made very clear and obvious. We stray in our hearts before we stray with our feet!
6. "Did not know My ways" – God's ways were obvious at an intellectual level, and indeed they might have passed an exam on them, but they did not "know" them by experience. They did not try living by them. Or if they did try they soon gave up. God's ways are to be walked in (not just studied).
7. "They shall not enter My rest" – the spiritual rest from religious works of merit. Not just the Promised Land, but the place of rest in God that David was speaking of! Unbelief separates us from all the benefits of grace.
8. "Take heed lest there be in any one of you..": It is possible to end up like this! Watch out, there is danger ahead!
9. "A wicked heart of unbelief": Unbelief is not neutral, it is wicked and it is located in the heart, which is where people make their true life decisions. An unbelieving heart has a negative and defiant reaction to God's revelation when it hears His voice on the day called "Today".

10. "In departing from the living God": – if we stop listening to God, we start entering into unbelief, then we begin to stray and after straying, we depart! When we depart from the living God, we depart from the very source of life and enter into death.
11. "Encourage yourselves every day": We are to live in an encouraging community of grace, urging one another on to faith and good works and caring for one another in love. This is to be regular, and even daily!
12. "Lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin": Sin deceives us, and once we are deceived by sin we find it difficult to receive the word of God. So bit by bit we are hardened. As a pastor I can tell you that any unrepentant adulterer is full of sinful rationalizations! They fool themselves first. But sin deceives them before even that! The deceived sinner then violently disagrees with God's Word on the matter and eventually is hardened. (And this applies to many different kinds of sins).
13. "For we have become partakers of Christ, if indeed we hold fast the beginning of the assurance firm until the end" – Jesus held fast until the end and if we are to fully partake of His nature, then we shall also endure until the end and not give away our faith. Endurance for Christ matures us.
14. "Those who sinned... those who disobeyed.. because of unbelief" – the three final reasons why the Israelites did not enter the promised land. Unbelief led to sin, and sin resulted in disobedience, and disobedience resulted in judgment.

On the question of "falling away": We enter into the Christian faith through faith alone and we exit the Christian faith through unbelief alone!

A single sin alone normally does not disqualify us from Heaven. We can soon repent and get back on track. However repetitive unrepentant sin hardens our heart, and that eventually produces unbelief and so we fall away and cannot enter in. The sign of this unbelief is angry rebellion against God's clear commands.

Take the sin of envy and resentment. A single instance of envy and resentment can be noticed and repented of, however if envy and resentment become established, they will lead to hatred and this hatred will subsequently develop into an angry and murderous heart, and this in turn will lead to moral darkness, and to stumbling, and eventually to unbelief, for no murderer has eternal life abiding within him.

The cure for this disaster is: a) encouraging one another and thus avoiding discouragement and b) being alert about our own spiritual responses so that we refuse to harden our hearts but instead joyfully receive and obey the word of God.

So the next time God speaks to you, don't grumble and argue, instead shout Hallelujah and rise up and obey Him!

Blessings,

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