

6. Understanding the Danger of Unbelief

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that Christ is much greater than Moses. Moses was a faithful servant in the house of God but Christ is the One who built that house. As a result, Christ is much greater because He is the builder of the house while Moses served as a faithful servant in the house. Today, we are going to see that the writer of Hebrews went on to warn the Jews about the danger of unbelief.

In Hebrews 3:7-11, we read, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: ‘Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, “They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.” So I swore in My wrath, “they shall not enter My rest.”’” Here, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit is the source of all Scripture. 2 Peter 1:20-21 says, “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.” As a result, the Holy Spirit was the source of the Scripture quoted in these verses.

This quotation came from Psalm 95:7-11. Verse 7 begins that section by saying, “For He *is* our God, and we *are* the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice.” The Hebrews who had placed their faith in Christ recognized that Christ was their God. They understood that they were His people and the sheep of His hand. However, the writer of Hebrews knew that there were many Jews who had not placed their faith in Christ. Those people were still trying to come to God through their own efforts. Those efforts included the keeping of the Levitical laws. As a result, the writer quoted from Psalm 95 to remind the Jews of an earlier rebellion against God.

The Lord had spoken to the people of Israel through Moses during the forty years that Israel wandered in the wilderness. They had not listened when God spoke to them because they had hardened their hearts. In fact, the people had tested God for the entire forty years that they were in the wilderness even though they saw God perform many miracles to provide food and water for them as they traveled through the wilderness. Numbers 14:22-23 says, “Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.” God was angry with that generation and allowed all those who rejected Him to die in the wilderness.

God here used the writer of Hebrews to give that same warning to the Jews who were failing to trust in Christ in the time of the New Testament. God said that those who had rejected Him in the Old Testament did not enter into His rest. The word “rest” is used in the New Testament to speak about the heavenly blessing that we will experience as Christians. That word is used nine times in the New Testament; eight times in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4, and the ninth time in Acts 7:49-50. Those verses say, ““Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? says the LORD, or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?””

Stephen quoted these verses from Isaiah 66:1-2 to show that God was greater than the temple and they were rejecting God. As a result, they would experience the results of rebellion. That same warning is given here in Hebrews in these chapters.

Hebrews 3:12-15 goes on to say, “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. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said: ‘*Today*, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’” Here, we see that the writer of Hebrews recognized that there might be some Jews who claimed to be Christians who were only professing Christians but still had a heart of unbelief. Today, we still have many who claim to be Christians who have never repented of their sin of unbelief and so do not have a true faith in Christ.

Such people still have an evil heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “‘The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked; who can know it?’” Then, Christ said in Matthew 15:19-20, “‘For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are *the things* which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.’” We see that a professing Christian who still has a heart of unbelief will depart from the living God. Sometimes, you will meet people who say that they tried Christianity and it did not work for them. Some may be very weak Christians who never had anyone help them in their spiritual growth. However, many of them probably still have an evil heart of unbelief. As 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord does* not *see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’” God looks at the heart.

Since there is the danger of a person having a heart of unbelief, we are to encourage one another daily as Christians. The word translated “exhort” means *to beseech, to encourage or to strengthen*. Here, we see that the writer of Hebrews was reminding the Jewish Christians that they needed to encourage each other daily. Some Jews were returning to their Old Testament system. Today, all Christians need to continue to encourage each other daily. If there are some who have not truly repented of their sin of unbelief, such encouragement may draw them to true repentance and faith in Christ. Otherwise, their hearts may become hardened. Hebrews 4:7 says, “Again He designates a certain day, saying in David, ‘*Today*,’ after such a long time, as it has been said: ‘*Today*, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’” We see that statement is made a total of four times in Hebrews chapters 3 and 4. As we have seen, sin is very deceitful.

The word translated “partakers” means *to share in something*. Here, we see that we have shared the life that is in Christ if we have made true decisions for Christ. For all those who have shared this life in Christ, our confidence can be steadfast. The word translated “steadfast” means *to be stable or firm*. Hebrews 6:18-19 says, “That by two immutable things, in which it *is* impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before *us*. This *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence *behind* the veil.” God has promised that all who have true faith in their hearts

can be steadfast. We can know that this hope is like an anchor to our soul.

God wants every true follower to rest in that assurance of the future blessing that we will experience when we are in the presence of the Lord for all eternity. That is true whether we are Jews or Gentiles. That is why Titus 2:13-14 says, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.” True Christians can know that Christ has paid the price to redeem us from every sin and lawless deed that we have committed. He has purified us for Himself and made us His own special people. He has given us a great desire to do good works that are pleasing to Him instead of the evil works that show that a person still has a heart of unbelief.

The possibility of that heart of unbelief is why Hebrew 3:16-19 warns again, “For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.” God said that those who heard in the time of Moses chose to rebel against God. There were many who had followed Moses out of Egypt that still had an evil heart of unbelief. As a result of that unbelief, they experienced the anger of God.

God continued to remind the people of Israel of their unbelief throughout the forty years that they were in the wilderness. Every day, there were people who died and their bodies were buried in the wilderness. Exodus 32:19-20 shows one of those times when the people showed their unbelief. Those verses say, “So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf *and* the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder; and he scattered *it* on the water and made the children of Israel drink *it*.” Exodus 32:28 says, “So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day.” Each time the people rebelled, additional people died, as well as those who were dying day by day.

God said that those who did not believe would not enter into His rest. That was true of the Hebrews in the wilderness. That is still true for every person today that has an evil heart of unbelief. God looks at their hearts and not their words. The Lord wants us to show our physical and spiritual children how to warn each person today of the choice that he or she must make. Those who have a true belief in their hearts will enter into the eternal rest that God has prepared. Those who still have an evil heart face eternal judgment and need to be warned of the danger of unbelief. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain the danger of a heart of unbelief.