

BEWARE THE HARDENED HEART
HEBREWS 3



T. M. Moore

A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

Beware the Hardened Heart: Hebrews 3
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Hebrews 3: Introduction

We must all be vigilant in our walk with the Lord, lest, yielding to some temptation, we begin to drift from Jesus.

Unbelief – failing to trust God and His Word – can lead to a hardened heart, and a hardened heart cannot love Jesus as fully as is necessary to bear up under trials. Faith is a matter of focusing on Jesus, listening to the Word of God, and holding fast our confidence in the Lord.

In chapter 3, the writer of Hebrews earnestly warns his readers against lapsing into a hardened heart of unbelief. It's a message we all need to hear.

We're pleased to make this resource available for personal or group study at no charge, and we hope you will find this series helpful in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

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1 The Heavenly Calling

Introduction

We have a heavenly calling, a calling that comes *from* heaven, leads *to* heaven, and immerses us *in* heaven in between. Perhaps the writer's first readers had forgotten this?

Meditate on Psalm 95.

Read Hebrews 3.1.

Think it through.

1. Twice in this chapter the writer will use the word *partaker*. The Greek is “μέτοχος: one who shares with someone else as an associate in an enterprise or undertaking – companion, partner” (Louw & Nida). Here he says we are *partakers* of a “heavenly calling”. What is involved in that word *calling*? In what sense is our calling *heavenly*? Is it heavenly even now? In what ways? How are we *partakers* in this calling? Why did the writer think it was important to remind his readers of this? Jesus partook of an *earthly* calling (chapter 2) in order to imbue us with a *heavenly* calling (chapter 3). Why?

2. He addresses them as “holy brethren”. What does the word *holy* mean? In what sense are *all* Christians holy, even though they may be drifting from the Lord? How does having been *made* holy obligate us to *pursue holiness* (Heb. 12.14; cf. 2 Cor. 7.1)? What does that entail? If we are actively pursuing holiness, will we be *more* or *less* likely to drift from our great salvation? Explain.

Meditate.

“But once for all heavenly things were made accessible to humans, when one of us humans was assumed and, according to the law of human nature, died and was raised from the dead in a marvelous fashion and, because immortal and incorruptible by nature, ascended into heaven.” *Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 AD)*

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2.4-7

I have a heavenly calling, Lord, and it's not just for the then and there. Now and here I'm called to...

Pray Psalm 95.

Read through this psalm, praying the words just as they are, without changes. Pray them thoughtfully and meaningfully. Let the Spirit's words in this psalm become your words as you pray.

Psalm 95.1-11 (*Tidings: O Zion Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*)

Come, let us sing with joy to God, our Savior!
Let us with joy to Him, our Rock, bow down!
Come now before Him, grateful for His favor;
Let joyful psalms break forth from all around.
Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;
Worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

Great are You, Lord, a King above all nations.

All of earth's depths lie hidden in Your hand.
Yours are the mountains, Yours the sea, You made it;
You by Your hands created the dry land.

Refrain

You are our God, we are Your sheep, Your people:
Speak, Lord, and let us hearken to Your Word.
Let not our hearts grow hard through sin, and feeble,
As when our fathers sinned against You, Lord.

Refrain

Long years You loathed that wicked generation,
Who in their hearts, rebelled against Your path.
Them You forsook, and kept from Your salvation;
Them You subjected to Your fearsome wrath.

Refrain

2 Consider Jesus

Introduction

Having told us that we must look to Jesus for the model, motivation, and power to resist drifting from our callings, the writer now exhorts us to *consider* Jesus. He'll do this again in chapter 12, so it must be an important concept. Let's linger on it a bit.

Meditate on Numbers 12.5-8.

Read Hebrews 3.1, 2.

Think it through.

1. The Greek verb used in verse 1 is *κατανοέω*, and it means “to give very careful consideration to some matter – to think about very carefully, to consider closely”, and “to come to a clear and definite understanding of something - to understand completely, to perceive clearly” (Louw & Nida). The focus in this verb is on *detailed examination* and *thoughtful reflection*, and *sound conclusions*. How should we do this? What are we doing while we're doing this? How much does thoughtful reflection and detailed examination of Jesus factor into your spiritual life? To what conclusions does it bring you concerning Jesus? The writer helps us focus somewhat by describing Jesus as “the Apostle and High Priest” Whose remit has to do with “our confession”. How does this help to focus our consideration of Jesus?

2. The objective of considering Jesus is to strengthen us in faithfulness. We should see, as we consider Jesus as the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, that He was faithful in all He did and said. He was *sent* to be faithful, even to the point of suffering and death (chapter 2). Meditate on John 20.21. Since Jesus was sent to be faithful, how should this guide us? What does it mean to be faithful like Jesus was faithful? Were the first readers of this epistle in danger of forsaking such faithfulness? Explain. Moses was faithful, too, as the first readers of this epistle would understand. Why does the writer introduce Moses at this point? Are there similarities between the faithfulness of Moses and that of Jesus? Explain.

Meditate.

“After having in this fashion completed the comparison with the angels, he makes a parallel with the mighty Moses, greater than all the prophets, so that after showing the difference to be infinite, he may show at the same time the contrast between the covenants, the promises and of course the priests. Once again he mingles exhortation with the comparison lest he seem to be doing it on purpose rather than under pressure of a kind of necessity.” *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4.1, 2

Help me to be faithful, Lord, to follow You and live for You as I ...

Pray Psalm 95.8-11.

Linger over these words, asking the Lord to show you any areas of your life that may be keeping you from being faithful to Him in all your ways.

Psalm 95.7-11 (*Tidings: O Zion Hasten, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*)

You are our God, we are Your sheep, Your people:

Speak, Lord, and let us hearken to Your Word.

Let not our hearts grow hard through sin, and feeble,

As when our fathers sinned against You, Lord.

Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;

Worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

Long years You loathed that wicked generation,

Who in their hearts, rebelled against Your path.

Them You forsook, and kept from Your salvation;

Them You subjected to Your fearsome wrath.

Refrain

3 More Glory than Moses

Introduction

During His earthly sojourn, Jesus was often pitted against Moses by those who, vaunting their association with the great Hebrew leader, sought to put Jesus down. Apparently, that was still going on when the writer of Hebrews took pen in hand to address these drifting Jewish believers. Would they turn from Jesus to Moses, just to get the pressure off themselves? Even Moses knew that was a wrong turn.

Read Deuteronomy 18.15-19.

Read Hebrews 3.3-6.

Think it through.

1. The writer has no intention of demeaning Moses. Moses was a great man, but his greatness is best understood when put in the proper context – the whole grand scheme of redemption and of our great salvation. Verse 3 mentions Moses having glory. To what does this likely refer (cf. Exod. 34.29-35)? Our writer says Jesus was more deserving of glory than Moses, and we see this, for example, on the Mount of Transfiguration (cf. Mk. 9.2-7, and refer to Deut. 18.15-19). How is it evident that Jesus is “worthy of more glory than Moses”? Paul picked up on the account Moses’ glory and compared it with the glory we may know in Christ in 2 Corinthians 3.12-18. What was his point? Our writer likens Moses to a house worthy of praise and honor, and Christ to the builder of that house. The builder has more honor than the building. Explain. How was the writer trying to help his readers at this point?

2. The image of a house continues in verses 4 and 5. Ultimately, God is the Creator of all things (v. 4). Thus, if we want to understand anything about anything, we need to consult with the Creator, looking to Him to guide us. If the first readers of this epistle would have looked to God, speaking in His Word, rather than to the intimidating voices of their Jewish contemporaries, what would they have learned about Moses and Jesus? Moses is not to be discredited, but to be *properly* credited, and looked to only for what he was faithful in doing. Moses’ work and writing were “for a testimony of those things which would be spoken *afterward*” (v. 5). What does that mean? Did not Jesus say as much (Jn. 5.39-47)? In what ways did Moses’ work and writing point to Christ? The writer says that we are the house of Christ. What does this imply? To *whom* does this apply? What does it mean to “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of hope”?

Meditate.

“As great as is the difference between creature and creator, he is saying, so great is the difference between Moses and Christ.” *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

“For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?” John 5.46, 47

All Scripture is about You, Lord Jesus. When I read Your Word, therefore, I need to ...

Pray Psalm 95.1-6.

As you pray these words, especially verses 4 and 5, let your vision of Jesus expand. “See” Jesus and “consider” Him as Maker and Upholder of the vast cosmos, and let your praise flow accordingly.

Psalm 95.1-6 (*Tidings: O Zion Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*)

Come, let us sing with joy to God, our Savior!
Let us with joy to Him, our Rock, bow down!

Come now before Him, grateful for His favor;
Let joyful psalms break forth from all around.

Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;
Worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

Great are You, Lord, a King above all nations.
All of earth's depths lie hidden in Your hand.
Yours are the mountains, Yours the sea, You made it;
You by Your hands created the dry land.

Refrain

4 Beware, Brethren

Introduction

Here the writer felt the need for more direct exhortation and admonition. This is one of those “if the shoe fits, wear it” challenges that encourage folks to examine themselves accordingly. The writer draws from Israel’s past to remind and refocus his readers.

Read Psalm 95.

Read Hebrews 3.7-12.

Think it through.

1. Let’s begin by focusing on the unspoken objective these drifting Hebrew Christians were pursuing. The pressure was on them to renounce Christ and return to the Jewish fold. The writer of Hebrews wants to check that drift by refocusing them on the excellency of Christ. The readers were seeking peace. What did the writer of Hebrews point to instead of the temporary respite from hassle they were seeking (v. 11)? What is that? By seeking *rest* from persecution, these believers were in danger of missing the *rest* of God. What can cause us to drift this way (v. 8)? Give some examples. What is the antidote to such drift (v. 7)?

2. What “works” of God did Israel’s fathers observe in the wilderness (v. 9)? What works of God should we be paying attention to in our daily walk with the Lord? Those who do not listen to the voice of God, in His Word and in His world, betray a condition of heart and mind, which the writer summarizes in verses 10 and 12. Can people afflicted with this condition really be Christians? Explain. We cannot look into the hearts of other people to know what’s really going on there. But we can know our *own* heart, and that our heart is always tempted to seek *rest* and *peace* and *wellbeing* in places other than the Lord. How can believers help one another recognize this temptation and prevail over it?

Meditate.

“Because the argument from the future is not so persuasive as from the past, he reminds them of the history in which they had lacked faith. For if your fathers, he says, because they did not hope as they ought to have hoped, suffered these things, much more will you.” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3.13, 14

Search my heart, O Lord, and know me, as You only, Lord can do! Let my heart and mind be ...

Pray Psalm 95.8-11.

Call on the Lord to search your heart and mind, so that you may love what you should and know what you must.

Psalm 95.7-11 (*Tidings: O Zion Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*)

You are our God, we are Your sheep, Your people:

Speak, Lord, and let us hearken to Your Word.

Let not our hearts grow hard through sin, and feeble,

As when our fathers sinned against You, Lord.

Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;

Worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

Long years You loathed that wicked generation,
Who in their hearts, rebelled against Your path.
Them You forsook, and kept from Your salvation;
Them You subjected to Your fearsome wrath.

Refrain

5 Partakers Together

Introduction

Christians have a responsibility to encourage and assist one another in standing firm for the Lord. The Christian faith is not about starting well – making a clear and sincere confession of faith in Jesus. It’s about continuing and finishing well – holding that confidence fast to the end. We need to watch ourselves carefully, and to look out for one another as well.

Read *Ecclesiastes 3.8-12*.

Read *Hebrews 3.13-15*.

Think it through.

1. As Christians, we are *partakers* of our Lord Jesus Christ. What does that mean? Because we are members of the Body of Christ, we are also *partakers* of one another. Explain. For the sake of our fellow believers, each of us must keep a close watch over our heart, that our heart does not cause us to drift or depart from God. What should we be watching for in our heart as indication that we might be drifting from the Lord? What should we do if we detect signs of drift? If we drift from the Lord, can that affect other believers? Explain.
2. The writer instructs us to exhort, or to encourage, our fellow believers “daily”. Is this really necessary? Explain. What might such encouragement include? How do you practice this? What is the proof that we are true partakers of Christ? Why is mutual exhortation so important for this?

Meditate.

“Exhort one another daily,” he says. That is, even if persons have sinned, as long as it is ‘today,’ they have hope; let them not then despair so long as they live. Above all things indeed, he says, ‘Let there not be an evil, unbelieving heart.’ But even if there should be, let no one despair, but let that one recover; for as long as we are in this world, the ‘today’ is in season.” *John Chrysostom (34 AD)*

Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. 2 Peter 1.2-4

Whom can I exhort and encourage today, Lord? And what can I say to them? Help me to ...

Pray *Psalm 95.1-5*.

Do the words of this psalm suggest any ways you might encourage your fellow believers today?

Psalm 95.1, 2, 6 (*Tidings: O Zion Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*)

Come, let us sing with joy to God, our Savior!
Let us with joy to Him, our Rock, bow down!
Come now before Him, grateful for His favor;
Let joyful psalms break forth from all around.

Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;
Worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

6 Hindrance to Rest

Introduction

God's rest – His perfect righteousness, peace, and joy – awaits us in Jesus Christ. If we have believed in Him, let us continue to hold fast to and confess Him, so that we may know His rest more fully. But if we are seeking rest in any other place than Jesus, then we, like Israel of old, have wavered and are adrift. God's rest will elude us as long we continue in unbelief.

Meditate on Deuteronomy 1.29-38.

Read Hebrews 3.16-19.

Think it through.

1. The writer reminds his readers that merely professing to believe, and identifying with a community of believers, is not the measure of true faith. Unless belief is true and deep, issuing in a firm and unwavering commitment to Christ, we may lapse into unbelief and end up like that generation that died in the wilderness. That word *rebelled* is pretty strong. Is drifting from faith in Christ a form of rebellion? Explain. Can it become rebellion? God blessed and provided for His rebellious people for 40 years in the wilderness. But all the time He was caring for them, He was angry at them (v. 17). Why? Is it possible that God could be angry with our generation of believers, even as He continues to provide and care for us? Explain.

2. In Moses' day, the *rest* of God consisted in the blessings of the land of promise. Meditate on Deuteronomy 28.1-14. How comprehensive were those promised blessings? How might we express those blessings in today's terms? Unbelief – in the form of rebellion against God – kept an entire generation from knowing the rest of God. Is it possible to be in the grip of unbelief and not realize it? How might we know when unbelief was creeping into our soul and beginning to undermine our confession of faith in Christ? How can believers help one another in such a situation (Heb. 3.13)?

Meditate.

“They died, for they could not enter the promised land. They merely looked over toward the land of promise, but they could not enter it. The Jews beheld the promised land but could not enter it. They died in the desert... We, their children, under the leadership of Jesus, have come to the Jordan and entered the promised land.” *Jerome (347-420 AD)*

But as God is faithful, our word to you was not Yes and No. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us—by me, Silvanus, and Timothy—was not Yes and No, but in Him was Yes. For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. 2 Corinthians 1.18-20

Lord, I will find my only true and lasting rest each day in Jesus. Help me to begin and end each day in Jesus, and throughout the day to ...

Pray Psalm 95.

Thank the Lord for the rest you have obtained in Jesus. Seek Him concerning how you may know that rest throughout the day, and help your fellow believers abide in the rest of our Lord.

Psalm 95.1-11 (*Tidings: O Zion Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*)

Come, let us sing with joy to God, our Savior!
Let us with joy to Him, our Rock, bow down!
Come now before Him, grateful for His favor;

Let joyful psalms break forth from all around.

Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;
Worship our Maker: Father, Holy Spirit, Word.

Great are You, Lord, a King above all nations.
All of earth's depths lie hidden in Your hand.
Yours are the mountains, Yours the sea, You made it;
You by Your hands created the dry land.

Refrain

You are our God, we are Your sheep, Your people:
Speak, Lord, and let us hearken to Your Word.
Let not our hearts grow hard through sin, and feeble,
As when our fathers sinned against You, Lord.

Refrain

Long years You loathed that wicked generation,
Who in their hearts, rebelled against Your path.
Them You forsook, and kept from Your salvation;
Them You subjected to Your fearsome wrath.

Refrain

7 Beware!

Introduction

Immature, unimproved faith in Jesus Christ can be a slippery slope. So slippery, in fact, that it may prove to have been a false footing all along. The slightest challenge to our faith, or the merest suggestion of opposition or disapproval of our faith on the part of someone in our life sphere, and, if our faith is not maturing, we can begin to slip away from the Lord, drift into rebellion, and end up forfeiting our rest. The writer of Hebrews strongly warns us to beware of this becoming the case.

Read Psalm 95.

Read and Meditate on Hebrews 3.

Think it through.

1. Chapter 3 begins with the writer talking about those who were “partakers of the heavenly calling,” and it ends reminding readers of those “whose corpses fell in the wilderness.” One of these knew *rest*, while the other preferred *rebellion*. But both of these groups identified themselves as God’s people. Were both right? Both of these groups had *heard* the Word of God (v. 16; cf. Heb. 2.1). Is merely *hearing* the Word of God sufficient for knowing the rest we have in Jesus? Explain. What is the rest we have in Jesus?

2. Having warned of the very real danger of drifting from Christ in chapter 2, in chapter 3 the writer insists that we must resist every such tendency. How (vv. 6, 7, 8, 12, 13)? How would you counsel a new believer to be alert to the tendency to drift from Christ, and to resist that temptation whenever it arises? What role should the Scriptures play in this? Why is it important to consider Jesus in resisting the temptation to drift?

Meditate.

“From hardness comes unbelief. As in bodies the parts that have become callous and hard do not yield to the hands of the physicians, so also souls that are hardened yield not to the Word of God. For it is probable that some even disbelieved those things which had already been done; hence he says, “Take heed” *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ... Ephesians 4.17-20

Help me to learn Jesus, Father, so that my heart will not be hardened against Your will, but instead ...

Pray Psalm 95.

Ask the Lord to show you how to keep from lapsing into a hardened heart of unbelief, and how to help those who have.

Psalm 95.1-11 (*Tidings: O Zion Haste, Thy Mission High Fulfilling*)

Come, let us sing with joy to God, our Savior!
Let us with joy to Him, our Rock, bow down!
Come now before Him, grateful for His favor;
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Refrain v. 6

Come let us worship, kneel to our Lord;
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All of earth's depths lie hidden in Your hand.
Yours are the mountains, Yours the sea, You made it;
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Refrain

You are our God, we are Your sheep, Your people:
Speak, Lord, and let us hearken to Your Word.
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Refrain

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Them You subjected to Your fearsome wrath.

Refrain

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

1. What is a hardened heart? How does a person's heart become hardened, even as he continues to profess faith in Jesus?
2. How much does "considering Jesus" factor into your relationship with the Lord? How might you improve in this discipline?
3. What is God's rest? Why should we want to enter His rest? What can keep us from doing so?
4. In what sense are believers *partakers* of Jesus Christ? How do we do that? What difference does it make that we do?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

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Thank you.