



GRACE

Reformed Baptist Church

Soli ♦ Deo ♦ Gloria

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

Sermon Notes

Do Not Harden Your Hearts, Part 2

Hebrews 3:13-19

March 22, 2009

¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵As it is said,

“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”

¹⁶For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

- I. **We Must Exhort One Another**
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- V. **The Cure for Unbelief and Sin is the Word of God**

- ❖ At 1:40 p.m. on May 2, 1946, Bernard P. Coy, a convicted Kentucky bank robber, along with Joseph Paul Cretzer, a convicted murderer and bank robber, overpowered a prison guard and took control of the gun gallery at Alcatraz Island Federal Penitentiary, sparking what has become known as the Battle of Alcatraz.
- ❖ Coy and Cretzer, along with 16 other convicts held several prison guards hostage, and began opening fire throughout the prison.
- ❖ Within two hours of the rebellion, Navy and Coast Guard vessels began circling the island ensuring no prisoner would escape.
- ❖ Ultimately, the Marines were called in to put down the rebellion.
- ❖ The Battle of Alcatraz lasted from May 2-4, 1946. In all, two guards and three inmates were killed, along with 11 guards and one inmate who were injured.
- ❖ This type of rebellion is quite common. Convicted prisoners often rebel for the purpose of escaping, in order to taste, even for a moment, the precious freedom they have lost. And, to a great degree, this type of rebellion is understandable.

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- ❖ However, consider for a moment another type of rebellion that is far more common.
- ❖ Sinful man rebelling against his Creator. After all, this is exactly what sin is – active rebellion against Almighty God.
- ❖ But also consider the foolishness of this rebellion. Ultimately, what is the intended outcome of such rebellion? What is our purpose in our rebellion? Do we *truly* believe that we might possibly be successful in “escaping” the sovereign rule of God? Do we know of any successful attempts at doing so?
- ❖ Yet, this is exactly why sin is so foolish.
- ❖ Recently, I heard a definition of sin that I have never heard – one that I believe captures the essence of sin better than any definition I have ever heard. During a Bible Study at Northeast Christian Academy, Mike Thompson said that “Sin is insanity.”
- ❖ Indeed, it is. For, sin, being a form of active rebellion against God, would be like a single individual charging head-on all the assembled armies of the world with a water pistol. Yet, even this would not even begin to compare to the utter foolishness – insanity – of man rebelling against the Infinite Creator of the cosmos.
- ❖ And so, the author of Hebrews warns us against sinning, applying the account of the wilderness wanderings to the contemporary reader.

I. We Must Exhort One Another

- ❑ In **Verse 13**, the author of Hebrews writes, “But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called, ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”
- ❑ It is here that the author of Hebrews demonstrates that he is concerned with the spiritual well-being of his readers.
- ❑ Not only this, but he, once again, is teaching us how to read the Old Testament. For, he applies the *today* of Psalm 95 to the *today* of his readers. Thus, he is showing the applicability of the Psalm to his readers. Notice, this application is only possible because his readers “have come to share in Christ” (**Verse 14**) – and it is to Christ that the Psalms point.
- ❑ Yet, the main purpose of the author in **Verse 13**, is to emphasize the significance of the community of faith.
 - In fact, the Greek word translated “exhort” is *parakaleo*, is derived from the prefix *para* meaning “to come alongside,” and *kaleo*, meaning, “to call out.”
 - In other words, the author of Hebrews is urging his readers to act in a way that is fundamentally different from the Israelites in the wilderness and “come along side” their fellow believers and “call one another out” of sin and into a walk of faith and obedience.
 - Simon Kistemaker writes, “Believers have a corporate and an individual responsibility to care for the spiritual well-being of their fellow men. They must consider this responsibility a holy obligation and exhibit utter faithfulness.”

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- ❑ Unfortunately, modern evangelicalism has become highly individualized. With our tremendous emphasis on a *personal, individual relationship with Jesus Christ* (which is important and good), we seem to have lost the corporate nature of the Christian walk.
- ❑ Yet, the author of Hebrews is quite concerned with the individual believer and his need for corporate accountability.
- ❑ In fact, his point is clear: **Mutual accountability among brethren is a safeguard to the deceitfulness of sin.**
- ❑ There seems to be a certain pattern, that the author of Hebrews is warning against.
- ❑ Consider a pattern that is far too common among even Christians when it comes to sinning. In fact, it was this very pattern that occurred in the Garden of Eden when Eve sinned for the first time: (1) Isolation; (2) Rationalization; (3) Hardening; (4) Desensitization; (5) Deception; (6) Sin.

II. Isolation Leads to Deception and Sin

a. Isolation

- ❑ The first pitfall we as believers must be mindful of is isolation.
- ❑ Both men and women are susceptible to this, and must guard against it (men at times may be slightly more vulnerable, but we all fall into it). If we are not careful, we can begin to isolate ourselves from the Body of Christ. We can do this, even while in a local body. We put up thick walls around ourselves, effectively isolating ourselves from the Body of Christ. We often do so under the guise of “not trusting”; yet, this is not how God intends for us to live our Christian lives.
- ❑ Consider that when Satan first tempted Eve, he isolated her from Adam (Genesis 3:1).
- ❑ As a result, Eve, individually, began to doubt the truthfulness of what God said, without Adam’s accountability.
 - F.F. Bruce writes, “In isolation each [Israelite] was prone to be impressed by the specious arguments which underlined the worldly wisdom of a certain measure of compromise of their Christian faith and witness; in the healthy atmosphere of the Christian fellowship these arguments would be the more readily appraised at their true worth, and recognized as being so many manifestations of ‘the deceitfulness of sin.’”
 - Donald Guthrie concurs, “It is certainly easier for individuals to be misled in isolation from other Christians than when sharing in fellowship with others.”
- ❑ Furthermore, when we are surrounded by fellow believers, we are continually reminded and exhorted of the importance of focusing on Christ and His Word.
- ❑ We must be continually told the truth of the Gospel. This truth is not something that we can simply know on an individual level (although it definitely has an individual application). The Gospel must be known within the context of the community of faith.
 - John Calvin also commented, “As by nature we are prone to fall into evil, we have need of various helps to help us in the fear of God. Unless our faith is repeatedly encouraged, it lies dormant; unless it is warmed, it grows cold; unless it is aroused, it gets numb. [The writer of Hebrews] therefore wishes them to stimulate one another by mutual encouragement, so that Satan will not steal into their hearts and by his falsehoods lead them away from God.”
- ❑ Furthermore, when we isolated ourselves from the exhortation and accountability of the Body of Christ, we begin to view the works of God as **highly individualistic**.
 - We begin to view God’s plan of salvation and redemption as being ultimately for our own individual comfort, happiness and pleasure.

- God is then, no longer viewed as the Sovereign Creator who works all things for His glory; but, rather, God is reduced to a cosmic genie that exists to grant us whatever our hearts desire.
- We then, in isolation, do not see ourselves as ones who are to conform to God's desires and commands; rather, He is to conform to what we want.
- This is exactly what occurred in the wilderness among the Israelite camp. The moment that things became somewhat difficult, and their own comforts were not what they thought they should be, they rebelled.
- Rather than exhorting one another, they became a million individuals looking out for their own individual desires.
- And if we are not careful, we isolate ourselves, we begin to only surround ourselves we individuals who will tell us what we want to hear.
- Yet, as believers, we are to exhort one another in the truth of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ – a truth that is not always in accordance with our selfish desires and wants.

b. Rationalization

- The next phase in the road to sin is **Rationalization**.
- When we are isolated, we then begin to rationalize our sin in such a way that to us, individually, sin is not viewed as vile rebellion against our Righteous Creator.
- Richard Phillips rightly states, “Sin advertises pleasure but delivers pain.”

In fact, in isolation it is amazing what types of sin seem to be acceptable.

- In isolation, the **standard** or **canon** as to what constitutes sin often begins to change, becoming highly subjective and dependent upon our ever-changing feelings and emotions.
- Consider, again, the situation with Eve in Genesis 3:6. When she “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise” she ate of the fruit. No doubt, she rationalized, “Why would God make such a tree if He *really* did not want us to eat from it?” And so she did.
- Yet, had Adam been there, he would have (possibly) said, “No. God said not to eat.”
- However, in isolation, Eve rationalized and compromised.

c. Hardening

- ❑ Then, after **Isolation** and **Rationalization**, we often become **Hardened**.
- ❑ It is like a abrasion on our body that keeps getting rubbed until eventually it hardens, becoming calloused.
- ❑ The tragedy of this hardening is that the “sting” of sin no longer exists, and we are often grateful of that – for our “pain” is reduced.

d. Desensitization

- ❑ Yet, with the **sting** of sin gone, we become desensitized.
- ❑ It is here, that sins that would have previously been repulsive and unthinkable, become completely acceptable.
- ❑ Our hearts are hardened. We no longer feel shame, remorse, or guilty for the sins we commit.
- ❑ We no longer feel a need to repent, for we do not see our sinful actions as offensive to God.

e. Deception

- ❑ It is at this point that we are most deceived.
- ❑ The reason for this is that we no longer believe we are sinning. We become so hardened, so calloused, that we rationalize all of our action in such a way that we honestly feel that we are justified in doing whatever we so choose.
- ❑ Imagine the Israelites in the wilderness. It hadn’t been four months since they had been delivered from Egypt, through indescribable signs and wonders, and they were creating a golden calf to worship...and, no doubt, they felt justified in doing so (“After all,” they likely thought, “we are simply wanting to see the god who delivered us from Egypt.”)

f. Sin

- ❑ Finally, this deception leads to a pattern of sin that is deadly.

III. God will Punish Sin

- ❑ The author of Hebrews uses graphic language to describe God’s judgment of the Israelites in the wilderness: (**Verse 18**): “Was it not with those who sinned, whose **bodies fell in the wilderness**? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?”

- There appears to be no question that God will punish sin.
- This is not a popular statement to make. It is also one that many isolated professing believers deny and rationalize as *unfair* and *overly-harsh*. Yet, it is the biblical truth.
- In his classic *Knowing God*, J.I. Packer explains, “This is *righteous* anger – the *right* reaction of moral perfection in the Creator towards moral perversity in the creature. So far from the manifestation of God’s wrath in punishing sin being morally doubtful, the thing that would be morally doubtful would be for Him *not* to show His wrath in this way.”
- May we never forget that God is a righteous judge and will punish all sin, and may this keep us from sinning.
- In his commentary on the Book of Hebrews, Leon Morris states, “The Bible is clear that God is not impassive or indifferent in the face of human sin. He is a ‘consuming fire’ (12:29), and his inevitable reaction to sin is wrath...God does care, and he did not allow the sinning Israelites to enter the rest.”

IV. Unbelief is the Root of All Sin

- The author of Hebrews ends this section by making a rather interesting statement in **Verse 19**, “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”
 - In other words, he does not say that they were unable to enter the Promised Land because of their *sin* (although it would be a true statement if he did).
 - Rather, he says it is because of unbelief.
- Consequently, we may declare to the world that we have faith in Christ; yet, when we sin, we demonstrate otherwise.
- At the moment of sin, we reveal that we truly do not believe what God says in His Word regarding the nature of our sin or the very nature of God Himself.
- And, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, this is what makes sin all the more heinous. For, Christ has paid the penalty on our behalf. He has suffered the full wrath of the Father for all of our sins. Therefore, when we sin, we demonstrate a complete disregard for the work of Christ for us. We reveal that we have no understanding of the horrible effects of our sin and that Jesus Christ, the Righteous Son of Man, paid everything for us.

V. The Cure for Unbelief (and Sin) is the Word of God

- So, knowing that **unbelief is the root of all sin**, what is the cure for **unbelief**?

- ❑ The Bible makes it quite clear that “...faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (**Romans 10:17**)
- ❑ However, we must realize that, although the Word of God is the instrumental cause of our faith, it is ultimately a gift from God (Philippians 1:29).
- ❑ Notice, for a moment, what did *not* bring about genuine belief in the Israelites:
 - Miraculous Signs and Wonders
 - Emotional Experiences
 - Receiving what they wanted
- ❑ Richard Phillips comments, “But none of us will ever have an experience as vivid as that which this generation of Israelites had, yet their good beginning still could not take the place of daily trusting in the Lord in a long walk of faith.”
- ❑ In other words, Christ and Christ alone is the only cure for our unbelief.
- ❑ May we never forget that:

Christ was our substitute; yet, Christ has no substitute.
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- ❑ We must always remember that the God-ordained means for us to know Christ (and subsequently the Father) is through the Word of God.
- ❑ Therefore, the Word of God must be central in the life of the believer.
- ❑ But, not only is the Word of God the instrumental cause of our faith (thus, helping our unbelief), but it is also the means of our perseverance.
 - The author of Hebrews writes, “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”
 - The idea here is clear: our perseverance in faith is evidence of our “sharing in Christ”, that is, our salvation in Christ.
 - Therefore, everyone who perseveres is a genuine believer in Christ.
 - Yet, again, it is through the instrument of the Word of God that God preserves us that we might persevere in faith in Jesus Christ.
 - Donald Guthrie writes, “[The writer of Hebrews] is illustrating from Israel’s past the impossibility of winning through by any other means than faith and obedience [through the Word of God]...”

- ❑ God will preserve all of His children. However, may we never forget that His Word, within the context of the community of faith, is His ordained means of accomplishing is predetermined ends of our perseverance in faith in Christ.
- ❑ May we consider the 1707 Isaac Watts Hymn “Broad is the Road”:

Broad is the road that leads to death,
And thousands walk together there;
But wisdom shows a narrower path,
With here and there a traveler.

The fearful soul that tires and faints,
And walks the ways of God no more,
Is but esteemed almost a saint,
And makes his own destruction sure.

Lord, let not all my hopes be vain
Create my heart entirely new;
Which hypocrites could ne'er attain,
Which false apostates never knew.

“Deny thyself, and take thy cross,”
Is the Redeemer's great command;
Nature must count her gold but dross,
If she would gain this heav'nly land.