

Every Single Day

Hebrews 3:7-19

Sunday AM

4.11.2021

Introduction: I want to start this morning by wading into a centuries-long theological debate. How's that to get your attention?!? The debate regards the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. And in particular, how these relate to the assurance of our salvation. For some reason, we as humans are prone to extremes, which applied to this debate means that we tend to overemphasize one particular biblical truth to the neglect (or to the diminishing) of another. We are also, particularly in the current culture, quite unaccustomed to nuance, meaning that it's far easier to caricature the other side (in order to easily defeat their position) than it is to understand exactly what they are saying, to carefully point out where there are differences, and to see if the other perspective might uncover a blind spot in my personal view.

So, what about the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man as they relate to assurance of salvation? Let's look at a few verses as an example:

- John 10:28-29 – Jesus says of his sheep: “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.”
 - John 10:27 – “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and *they follow me.*”
- Phil 2:12 – “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”
 - Phil 2:13 – “...for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

So, both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are affirmed in Scripture with regards to the security of our salvation. And our views should never emphasize one so much that the other is neglected (though certain biblical passages do emphasize one more than another). And this brings us to one of the warnings in the letter of Hebrews, where we are exhorted to *guard ourselves* against an unbelieving heart.

Context/Structure: You might remember (from 2 weeks ago) that the verse where we left off, Hebrews 3:6, was itself a kind of exhortation to hold onto our faith: “And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope” (Heb 3:6). V.7 (the start of our passage) looks back to that verse with the word “therefore” and will go on to encourage us to guard against a hard heart while instructing us on *how* to do that. The middle verses (12-15) are the heart of this passage (main point!). Before those verses (7-11) is an illustration from God's people in the past. After those verses (16-19) is an ending explanation. So, we'll look at the verses in order while emphasizing the central verses. (p.1002 in Bibles in the book rack)

Hebrews 3:6-11 – “6 And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. 7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you hear his voice, 8 do not

harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, 9 where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. 10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.' 11 As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"

1. The Start: An Illustration (of God's People in the Past) (7-11)

Explanation: The first thing I want to point out about these verses is how v.7 begins. This is something that we could just gloss over, but it is too significant to skip. It starts, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says..." and then goes on to quote from Psalm 95. We might have expected it to say, "as David says" like Hebrews 4:7 does when it quotes from this same Psalm. But here it says, "the Holy Spirit says."

Application: This verse clearly says that the Holy Spirit is the author of Psalm 95, thus teaching us that God is the author of Scripture. Every passage of Scripture was written by a human, but in such a way that it remains the very Word of God. (2 Peter 1:21 – "For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.") Where Scripture speaks, God speaks. And further, God STILL speaks through His Word. Hebrews came centuries after Psalm 95, and yet this verse tells us that God is still speaking through Psalm 95 to his people.

Explanation: And this is exactly the point of this quote. Look at how the quote from Psalm 95 starts: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..." In fact, this first phrase ("Today, if you hear his voice") was not originally written as a condition ("**if** you hear his voice..."). It was written as a wish or desire. So, a better translation would be what the NET Bible has: "Oh, that today you would listen as he speaks!"

Application: This is our same prayer as God's Word is opened every week here: "Oh, that today you would listen as he speaks!" Every week that we hear God's Word, we will respond. We must respond. Indifference is a response. We will respond in indifference or joy or anger or changing the way we think or live. We need this weekly preached word. This time is not inconsequential. And we should not think better of ourselves for just showing up, as if merely sitting in a building and listening to someone talk from God's Word does us any spiritual good. If we sit under God's Word weekly, and yet we leave indifferent to it, letting it have no effect in our hearts, then we are worse off than if we had never heard it at all. If you want some proof of this, then read Matthew 11:20-24, where Jesus connects the amount of light we have received to our responsibility to respond. Brothers and sisters, let me urge you not to harden your hearts to God's Word or the conviction that he brings through His Word.

Illustration of Israel: He goes on to give an illustration of what it looks like to harden our hearts to God's Word. His example is the nation of Israel in the wilderness, again, quoting from Psalm 95. In this Psalm we are reminded of the Israelites who turned away from God in two particular ways (both in v.10): (1) they always go astray in their heart and (2) they have not known my ways. This is the path for those who fall away from God: their hearts wander, unchecked. And they do not know God's ways. They do not have a continuing, active, experiential knowledge of

who God is and what he has done that grounds them in truth when their hearts begin to wander.

Application: One of the earliest indications in the lives of personal friends of mine who have begun to fall away from the faith is that they begin to care less and less about God's Word (and usually begin to care more and more about the words of men). They've often been readily willing to admit this, sometimes even acting as if this is a virtue. Is it any surprise that choosing to avoid the good and gracious words of God will cause a chasm to grow in our relationship with God?! This would make complete sense to us in any other relationship. "They always go astray in their heart. They have not known my ways." When our hearts begin to wander, the answer is to know God, to know his ways. When our hearts wander and begin to be deceived, we need to return to what we know is true, what God has revealed to us. This is why it's so important for us to continually fill our minds with who God is and with his ways. Our daily pursuit of God is not a checkbox. Pursuing God even when I do not feel like it is not hypocrisy or legalism. We do it because we NEED it and because he is WORTHY of my personal worship. (*Illustration:* Very often my first words when I pursue God in the morning are, "God, help me to see my *need* of this. And help me to *want* to spend this time with you!") We need to keep reminding ourselves of the truth of God's Word.

Corporate Worship Application: To just emphasize this a bit more, the quote here is from Psalm 95. This is a Psalm of corporate worship. It's often called an invitation to worship. This is kind of interesting isn't it, that Psalm 95, an invitation to corporate worship, includes this kind of warning? Ps. 95 starts with "Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!" Then it praises God for all of his amazing works. And then it transitions to encouraging God's people to not harden their hearts. (**PAUSE**) And this teaches us something very important about corporate worship. Corporate worship is one of the primary places in which we are equipped for battle against our stubborn, easily-deceived, and often-straying hearts. ***Corporate worship is where we cement truths in our mind (through prayers--some of which are sung--and preaching and testifying) that will help guard us and guide us through the temptations that we face throughout the week.*** Do not think lightly of the songs that we sing. They are not chosen lightly, nor merely to fill time. These songs are battle plans, meant to stay in our heads to help us do battle against the attacks of the Evil One that we face from the moment we scatter until the next time we gather to reaffirm them again.

Example: Or when I'm in the hospital or in my home facing the final days and moments of my life, I begin meditating on these words from "Hallelujah for the Cross":

And when I breathe my final breath,
I'll have no need to fear that rest.
This hope will guide me into death,
Hallelujah for the cross!

Our corporate worship (among other things) equips us for battle during the week. Uncle Fred leads us week by week in what he calls expository singing, meaning that the truths of the songs

that we sing rise up from the texts that we preach. I can't say emphatically enough (first) how blessed we are for this reality and (second) how much we need to take these songs with us as we leave our gatherings.

Transition: The conclusion of this example is sobering (v.11): "As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" The adults who were delivered from Egypt by amazing signs and wonders were not able to enter into the wonderful land that God had promised them because of their unbelief. Therefore, we go on to read in vv.12-15...

Heb 3:12-15 – "12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 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. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. 15 As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'"

2. The Center: An Exhortation (to God's People in the Present) (12-15)

Explanation: These verses include two corporate commands. Do you see them? (1) "Take care" (This is a verb that means, "to see." One translation says, "See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has an evil unbelieving heart...".) (2) "exhort one another every day..." We might tend to think of the command in v.12 as an individual command and the command in v.13 as a corporate command. (v.12 - you all individually make sure you don't have an unbelieving heart.) But this is not the case. Both of these commands are plural commands, to us as a church as a whole.

(1) Take Care: The first command is that we as a local church do whatever we can to make sure that not even one of us ends up having an evil, unbelieving heart, leading us to fall away from the living God. That's a command to us corporately. Think of the implications of this! If you are a member of HPBC, this is your job. This is why in our Member Covenant we say: "We will promote the spiritual growth of one another by participating in the worship, ordinances, and discipline of our church..." Our corporate worship is part of this. We do this also by attending and participating in our Members' Meetings. Do you know that one of the purposes of the process of church discipline, which we practice in our Members' Meetings, is to warn one another about the dangers of having an unbelieving heart?! (*Bylaws:* "Church discipline is intended to...warn other members about the dangers of sinful behavior and teaching...") If you are a member of our church, I can't say this strongly enough: you NEED to be at our Members' Meetings, for the sake of your soul.

What about Doubts: Someone might wonder here, "What about doubts?" Does this mean we should never have doubts? Or that it is sinful to have doubts come into your mind about what you believe? No, I do not believe that is what this text is saying. Notice he says, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." This is different from saying, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you any doubts..."

Good Doubts: You see, there is a kind of questioning (even doubt) that comes into the minds of believers that leads them to pursue to know God and his ways more fully. This can happen through conversations with friends, through personal study, or through counseling. It happens in the context of the church. The response to the doubt is one of faith: to know God and his ways more.

Bad Doubts: But there is another kind of doubt...this kind of doubt comes from a heart that doesn't care to know more about God's ways because it arises in the heart of someone who thinks he knows better than God. This person doesn't care to know more about God and his ways but rather seeks "truth" outside of God's Word, more to confirm his/her doubts than anything else. This person's doubts are more like "dislikes." It is this kind of cynical, careless, truth-less, worldly unbelieving heart that we are to guard against.

Doubts: Put simply, certain doubts and questions arise from a heart that desires to know God more and that desires to submit itself to God's Word, wherever it leads. Other doubts arise from a heart that thinks it knows better than God and doesn't have any time for a God who does not conform himself to its ways.

Application: So, brothers and sisters, take care lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. Don't think "doubt = bad." Rather, when a doubt comes, work through it in community, with your church, on the foundation of God's Word. And watch out for one another. When you see something concerning in this way in someone's life, point it out to him. Have a conversation.

Contrary Point: Some might say, "Oh, you just want to shut people up and not ask any hard questions!" That couldn't be further from the truth. As Christians, we should welcome any of the hardest questions about life, sin, God, how we relate to God, evil, suffering, etc. The difference between us and the cynical person who make the accusation that I just mentioned is that we are going to pursue our answers to hard questions in the truth of God's Word. We are going to submit ourselves to the God whose ways are higher than our ways and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts. We are not going to feebly attempt to make God submit his thoughts to ours.

(2) Exhort One Another: The second command gives us somewhat of the positive side of the coin in relation to vs. 12. V.12 says to guard against something negative. V.13 says to pursue something positive. And the thing that we pursue in v.13 directly helps us in guarding against the unbelieving heart in v.12. V.13 says to exhort one another every single day. This, I believe, is the heart of this entire section (Heb 3:7-19). Here is what we are to do as believers: exhort one another every single day. And there is a reason we are to do this. Look how v.13 ends: "that [you could insert here the words 'in order that,' this is giving us the purpose] none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

Application: Here is the reality: we are going to experience pressures from our surrounding culture to give up our faith and quit believing. People will say we are stupid for what we believe. You may be called a “Bigot” or “backwards” for believing what the Bible says about human sexuality or the sanctity of life or any other area. But not only that, the Evil One will use our own flesh and our own temptations and sin-bents to try to make us give in and give up. And this is why we NEED other people who love Jesus and us to commit themselves to exhort us every day so that we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. We do this exhorting corporately and individually (and we need both).

Corporate Application: Let me just start by talking about how we do this corporately. And let me preface this by saying that I’ve been a bit fearful to even go here...because some here are not going to like what I’m about to say and could take it the wrong way.

But I cannot get away from the fact that I believe this is simply a faithful application from this text and from the letter of Hebrews in general: ***the general rhythm of a church member’s life should be to gather when his church gathers altogether.***

Why? Because this is the primary way that we (as a church) are seeing to it that no one has an evil unbelieving heart. And it’s the primary way that we are equipping our church members to exhort one another every day so that none of us are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. So, the issue isn’t whether we as individuals feel we need 1 or 2 services a week or one every other week. Rather, this local church at this location has decided to fulfill our corporate task in this particular way together, for the time being.

Let me try to connect this to the text even closer: our gatherings are extremely important because every single whole-church gathering is aimed at this: exhorting one another and equipping us to exhort one another every day so “that none of [us] may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Our Sunday evening gathering is the primary time when we pray and beg God that this be the case with our church family. (*Illustration:* Just like a soccer player would be at a distinct disadvantage in knowing his team well and knowing how the team is trying to function if he misses half of the practices... ***There is no doubt that you lose out on a significant part of what it means to be a part of Hampton Park Baptist Church if you never gather to pray those things with our church family.*** It’s just a fact.) And please don’t hear this as a legalistic, check-the-box-if-you-want-to-be-spiritual, argument. We pursue these things because we NEED them. We NEED to hear our brothers and sisters beg God to guard our church from sin and from members falling away from the faith. We NEED to have the joy of seeing Jesus build his house as members are baptized into our church. We NEED to hear the warnings that come from faithfully working through the process of church discipline (in our Members’ Meetings).

Why are we as a culture so quick to be sure that we never miss a game of our favorite sports team or an episode of our current Netflix show or the practices/games of our children’s sports teams or fine arts pursuits (because we see those as important and

clear things out of our schedules to prioritize them), but we are so quick to dismiss half of the gatherings when our church family is being encouraged and equipped to build meaningful relationships? Should we not rather give up a practice or an episode or a game (to clear out free time in our week for other things) so that we can prioritize the various kinds of things that God wants us to do as a church family?

Positive Perspective: Let me now state this positively: My prayer is that more and more members of our church will see the eternal value of praying together for our church family and hearing testimonies of God's grace in other church members and getting to know our gospel partners better and seeing new believers baptized and added to the church (these kinds of things happen during our evening gatherings). I further pray that more and more members of our church will see the eternal value of participating in the adding of new members to our church and the removing of members who have transitioned elsewhere and the discipline of those whose lives are no longer aligned with their profession and knowing how the money invested here is being stewarded and in helping affirm those who will be non-staff pastors and deacons and in knowing what's going on in various ministry areas of the church (these kinds of things happen during our Members' Meetings).

Mini-transition: These things are all a significant part of what we are doing here corporately to “exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Let me just say here that certain seasons of life might make it more difficult to be at all of your church's gatherings. That's understandable. But, ***I think a good, faithful application of this verse is that the general rhythm of a church member's life should be to gather when his church gathers altogether, BECAUSE these gatherings are aimed at exhorting us not to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and equipping us to exhort one another in the same way.***

Individual Application: We are exhorted weekly, AND we are equipped weekly to do this every single day of the week. So, let me just ask you to think through how you are actively working to help other people in our church persevere in their faith so that they aren't hardened by the deceitfulness of sin? Yes, this can happen through LGs, Bible studies, or other official groups of the church. But it should also happen throughout the week via text, phone calls, lunch meetings, coffee meetings, play-dates, through hospitality, etc. The most common prayer I pray for us as a church as I work through our names in the member prayer directory is that, “this member will develop spiritually encouraging relationships with other members of our church...and that this member will develop spiritually encouraging relationships with other members of our church.” With whom do you have spiritually encouraging relationships?

Exhortations Centered on God's Word: And here is where we connect God's work and ours in this area of holding fast to Christ. What is the content of our exhortations to one another? Yes, we are the ones exhorting one another, but we are pointing each other to God, His Word, and His promises. We are exhorting each other so that we do *not* forget

God's ways (as did Israel). We pray regularly on Sunday nights that it will be a normal thing for members of our church to encourage each other with Scripture. So much of our exhortations to each other is reminding each other of the words we've heard preached, of the words we've sung, of the words we've believed.

Transition: V.14-15 highlight the importance of these things: "For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'" This middle section of verses reminds me of when we studied Jude at the beginning of last year. You might remember this exhortation in Jude 20: "You, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God." We have an active role in helping each other "hold our original confidence firm to the end." **Yes, God in his power is the one who keeps us. And yes, we have a part in that as we exhort one another every single day, pointing each other back TO HIM!** Well, the writer of Hebrews ends by connecting the first two sections in this way...

Heb 3:16-19 – "16 For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief."

3. The End: An Explanation (of the Connection between the Two) (16-19)

Explanation: A whole generation experienced God's wonders in the Exodus and the events that followed and yet rebelled against God! Here's what I think we should learn from this: the amount of exposure you have had to God's amazing wonders and works does not determine your response to it. Just showing up (once or twice on a Sunday) doesn't keep us from unbelief. The writer uses several rhetorical questions to emphasize this point. It was those who were delivered from Egypt by the miracles and wonders that God performed through Moses who ended up in unbelief. Plagues, Passover, Red Sea (deliverance from Pharaoh). These were the ones who were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. This is astounding. What more did God need to do to show them that he was committed to them?!

Application: And yet we need to ask ourselves that same question. What more does God need to do to show us that he is completely committed to us and that we can trust all of his promises in order for us to sell all that we have, take up our cross, and follow him, wherever that might lead?! What greater love does he need to show us for us to listen eagerly to His Word each week as it is preached and respond in obedience and joy?!

Conclusion: Unbelief doesn't come in a moment. It's a slow process. It begins in our thoughts. Seeds of unbelief. (Deceptive thoughts like: I don't need this Word from God. OR I don't need anyone else's help.) Signs of unbelief are usually recognized by our Christian friends. But sometimes we feel too awkward to say something, for fear of how it will affect the relationship.

Whatever you are experiencing in your life right now, you can be sure that the Evil One would love nothing more than to try to use it to sow seeds of unbelief. If you are comfortable, he'll try to make you believe that things in this life will truly satisfy your soul. If you are experiencing a trial, he will try to make you believe that God is distant and doesn't care about you. If you've sinned, he will try to make you think that it's not a big deal or that God could never love a sinner like you. This is why we need to be grounded in truth, the truth that we hear preached, and the truth that we sing each week:

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blessed assurance control:
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate
And has shed his own blood for my soul.

Don't give up, brothers and sisters. Don't quit believing. And know that God in his grace has give you many brothers and sisters here to help you persevere in your faith. And God has given you to them! Who are your spiritually encouraging relationships in our church? Who are you exhorting every single day, as long as it is called today, in order that they may not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin? Who are you pointing to Jesus every single day?

I want to finish by quoting this again: Oh, that today we would listen as he has spoken.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do God's sovereignty and man's responsibility relate to the assurance of our salvation? Can you think of any Scripture passages that emphasize both?
2. What is the main point of Hebrews 3:7-19?
3. Psalm 95, quoted in Hebrews 3:7-11 is a Psalm of corporate worship. What does this teach us about the value of our church gatherings for corporate worship? How does our corporate worship (praying, singing, preaching) help us persevere?
4. What are the two main commands in 3:12-13?
5. Does the command in v.12 mean that it is sinful to have any doubts about our faith? Why or why not?
 - Can you share a time when you had doubts about some aspect of your faith and how you worked through it in community?
6. What external pressures do we face as Christians that could cause us to be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin? What internal pressures do we face?
7. How do we "exhort one another every day" corporately (in our all-church gatherings)? What are the three main all-church gatherings where we do this?
 - Specifically, how do each of our three, regular all-church gatherings (Sunday AM, Sunday PM, and Members' Meetings) uniquely equip us to exhort one another every day so that we are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin?
8. What do "spiritually encouraging relationships" look like in the church? What kinds of things would they include from day-to-day, week-to-week?

- Have you experienced a meaningful, spiritually encouraging relationship in our church?
Could you describe it (you can leave out some details if you need to)?

9. Pray with each other:

- That God would increase the spiritually encouraging relationships among our members.
- That not even one of the members of our church would have an evil, unbelieving heart, leading them to fall away from the living God.