

# Privileged—Divested

Hebrews 3:15-19

*Halifax: 11 September 2022*

## Introduction:

Today in our sermon series from Hebrews, we have come to end of chapter 3—specifically, verses 15-19.

- Let's take a moment to review what we have seen chapter 3.

First, we saw the call to consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.

- We considered how He was faithful, as Moses was, but was far greater than Moses, for Jesus is the one who actually builds the house of God (out of redeemed sinners!).

Second, we looked at what it is for us to be part of that house, and how those who are truly part of His house continue to trust in Him and to desire what He promises until the end.

Third, we looked at the exhortation to us all, “Do not harden your hearts.”

- We spoke about how this happens when instead of responding to the voice of God, we resist Him. This is a true danger that we all must watch out for. It has been the ruin of entire generations of God’s people, always, of course, with a few exceptions.

Fourth, we considered how we are called to help each other by exhorting one another daily lest we harden our hearts.

- God actually uses us to keep each other on track. That is what we looked at last week.

Today, we come to verses 15-19 where we are shown how great the sin of unbelief is for those who are part of the church.

Please give me your careful attention as I turn now to the reading of our text.

- I will begin in verse 12 to give us the context.

**Hebrews 3:12-19:** Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; <sup>13</sup> but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, <sup>15</sup> while it is said: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your

hearts as in the rebellion.” <sup>16</sup> For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?* <sup>17</sup> Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness?* <sup>18</sup> And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? <sup>19</sup> So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Thanks be to God for His holy word. May He add His blessing to the reading and now to the preaching of His holy word.

- In this text, the Holy Spirit is once again using the example of Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness to warn whoever reads it against hardening their own heart.
- Therefore, in preaching from this text, I am going to directly address you. The Holy Spirit is not just giving us a history lesson. This is meant to address you.
- So I will begin by saying:

## **I. Consider what privileges you have!**

A. You have heard the voice of God.

1. That's right.

- If you are a human being, God speaks to you through the things that He has made.
- The whole creation testifies to His wisdom and power and majesty. He is the one who created the entire universe and everything in it.
- We also hear His voice through our conscience that exposes to us that we have sinned against Him and against each other.
- We see His goodness in the things that He has made, but also His displeasure with our sin in the fact that He has brought death and suffering into the world because of our rebellion against Him.
  - We see that He is holy and just, even though in our sin we often question this and even deny it.
  - Instead of being humbled by our afflictions, we charge Him with wrong.

➤ Every person has heard God's voice in this way.

2. But this is talking about hearing God in a way that surpasses even that.

- It is speaking of how Israel had God bring His word of salvation to them, promising to pardon their sins and to give them an eternal inheritance in His house if they would but look to Him to save them—to have mercy on them.
- He spoke in this way, first, through the prophets that He sent into the world and finally through His Son whose word we have just heard read today.
- The very fact that you are here today means that you have heard God's voice in this way.
  - You are privileged to be able to hear the word of God that tells you that though you have sinned against Him, He has sent His Son Jesus to redeem sinners, and that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.
  - He is ready to receive all who come to Him for mercy and that includes you. Come to Him, and He will guide you into all truth.

3. Hearing God's voice in this way is a privilege that many do not have.

- This is especially addressed to those who are part of the church.
- God has given the Bible to His people and He speaks His saving word to us in its pages.
  - Even before Jesus came and the glorious gospel was revealed in all its fullness in His person and work, Israel was said to have the great benefit of receiving the oracles of God.
  - Our Creator has spoken in His word.
    - You have heard His voice that calls you to salvation, that guides you in His ways, that tells you of His glory, that reveals Christ and His saving work.

➤ But if you are a part of His church, your privileges do not end there.

B. You have also been brought out of bondage to serve the living God.

1. You see how it says of Israel that they “came out of Egypt.”

- They were in bondage there as slaves.
  - Their king was Pharaoh, and he was intimidated by them because of their growing numbers under God’s blessing—therefore he oppressed them and sought to limit their numbers by killing their sons and by loading them with excessive work.
  - Yet, if you know history, you know that God delivered them from Egypt with a mighty hand in order that they might have the Lord Himself as their king!
  - He brought them out that He might give them an inheritance in the land of Canaan where He would govern them, protect them, and provide for them.
  - They would have the privilege of serving Him, of having God as their governor and king.
2. Now, if you are a member of the church, you are among the people who have been delivered from bondage to the world and Satan to serve God.
- You are under His government.
  - You are given instruction, protection, guidance, and strength to serve God and to bring forth beautiful fruits of holiness in His service.
  - You are enabled to lead your household after you and to come before the presence of God in worship.
  - You have the LORD as your Master and have been given life by Him so that you are no longer the slave of Satan in the world.

➤ And closely related to this is a third privilege—

C. You are now led by God’s faithful Apostle.

1. For Israel, it was Moses who led them.

- He was faithful to give them the oracles of God.
- He had access to God in prayer and often interceded for them when they sinned so that they were not destroyed.
- He corrected them when they sinned and led them in the way that they should go, guiding and directing them from day to day and leading them by example.

2. But you who are numbered with God’s people today have one greater than Moses to lead you.

- You have Jesus who never errs, who never falters, who is always faithful, for He is the Son of God who was made flesh.
- He has gone before you in the way of perfect righteousness and is now reigning in Heaven at God’s right hand.
- He has gone to the cross as your high priest to atone for your sins and He instructs you to fully trust in Him for forgiveness and grace for obedience.
- He prays for you, He corrects you, He represents you, He covers your sin, He leads you, He instructs you by His Spirit and Word, He is altogether lovely and His love and mercy are beyond measure.

- He preserves His church. He provides leaders for His church. He leads you in worship and service and supplies His Spirit to bless you in worship.
- In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and He liberally supplies them to you when you ask.
- He leads you to the Father and into His beautiful ways.
- You are immensely blessed beyond all measure to have Him to lead you.
- His goal is to bring His church into His Father's house at the last day and to present her as His bride, a bride perfected without spot or blemish to live in joyful union with Him for all eternity.
  - That is the final rest that He has for His people.
  - He will not fail in what He has promised.
  - That is the glorious inheritance that is promised to all who are numbered with His people.

## **II. You ought to be chomping at the bit to receive all that He has promised!**

- A. Oh, how you ought to cherish the inheritance that He has promised and count it as your highest joy and prize.
  - Though for now you must suffer much tribulation and endure trials and losses, He assures you that it is all for your good to prepare you for glory.
    - There is much evil that needs to be worked out of you, and He is graciously at work to do that.
  - Keep the inheritance in your eye with delightful expectation as a living hope.
    - How could it be that He has prepared a place for a sinner like you and like me? Is that not a major source of joy and motivation to you?
- B. With such a one as He, you ought to be filled with praise and confidence.
  - You can fully trust Him to do the work that He has promised to do, to keep you, if you will but lean on Him.
  - He is ever to be trusted and cannot fail.
  - He will continue His work in you until it is complete.
- C. How eager you ought to be to bear fruit that pleases Him because by Him, you can!
  - Be eager to put off the old man that is corrupted with sin and deceitful lusts...
    - Do not feed those lusts, but turn on them with a vengeance.
  - Be eager to love one another as He has loved you, and to be content so that you might give rather than be filled with grasping covetousness.
  - Nothing ought to stand in your way when you know His will—no attachment, no fear, no anger, no association—but a readiness to do what He has said.
    - Does anything stand in your way? Then what is it? Why is it so important?
  - Just think of it, you are member of Christ, a member of His household.
- D. How eager you ought to be to learn more of Him, to sit at His feet, to come to His word, to read it, to study it, to meditate on what it says of Him and how it applies.
  - Eager to hear sermons, eager to read the word and to understand it.

- Are you? Really, are you hungry?
- It should pain you to miss worship, whether in your home or in the congregation on the Lord's Day.
  - You are privileged to worship Him! You have access to Him in worship! You can call upon Him and praise Him for His glory and beauty and grace—worship Him in holiness.
  - Is this important to you? Would you be sad if God had not given you a day set apart for worship? Or is it an imposition to you to have such a day?

E. How eager you ought to be to serve Him, to lay down your life for Him.

- You, who were in bondage to sin, are now set free to serve the Most High God forever as a loving devoted bride.
  - What could be too much to do for Him?
- He has told you that it pleases Him to give even a cup of cold water to one in need. How pleased you ought to be to give cups of water or whatever else you might do to care for His people...
  - And if you say you can't do much, how eager you ought to be to find out what you can do—not reluctant but eager to do what you can for Him. Are you?
- And you fathers, how eager you should be to speak to your children of Him, to command them in His ways after you, like Abraham did; to tell them of what He has done for us,
  - to see their eyes light up when they learn of Him and His grace,
  - to see them endued with hope in His promises,
  - to see them bring forth fruit that will endure to eternal life.
  - Do you lead them in family worship? If not, why not?
    - Are your privileges of little worth in your eyes?
- And how eager you should all be to tell others of Him, both inside and outside the church, that they might know Him.
  - Yes, to talk of Him to each other and to make Him known to those who have not learned of Him, to help struggling brothers and sisters.

TRANS> He has set you free to be His forever and you should yearn to be all His now!

- You are so privileged to have His promises, His oracles, His commandments, His ordinances, His Spirit, His grace, His counsel, His correction, His help, His mercy, His cleansing—we could go on and on...
- You are so privileged to have these things.

### **III. But what is all of this in our text about rebellion, disobedience, and unbelief?**

A. That is, in fact, what this passage is about.

1. It lists all the privileges God's people have, but it lists them as privileges sinned against, privileges spurned and regarded as of little value...
  - There is horror and shock—
  - These privileges that were given to restore them to the Lord and to bring them to His sweet inheritance have been lightly esteemed.

2. Look at the words that are used to describe the rebellion of these privileged people.
  - a. In verse 16, there is the word *rebelled*, that God's people rebelled against the one who gave them all these precious privileges.
    - This word in the original means to bring bitterness—
    - It is to provoke or make bitter the gracious God who called you to be His own people and to inherit glory through His Son.
    - He is like a Father who spent all to prepare a gift for you—and it is a blessing of surpassing excellence—but instead of seeing your delight, He sees contempt for His gracious gift.
  - b. In verse 17, the word is *sinned*.
    - Sin, of course is disobedience to God.
    - You all have many sins that you commit every day, but if you are walking with the Lord and trusting in Him, He forgives you of these.
    - This is talking about those who sinned presumptuous sins—deliberate sins of defiance and rebellion—sins that break fellowship with the Lord.
    - It speaks of hardening your heart refusing to obey the voice of God, not of weakness and coming short, but of opposing Him and His ways.
  - c. In verse 18, we have the word translated “not obeyed.”
    - This same word is often translated “not believed.”
    - This word has as its root “to persuade.”
      - The idea is that they would not be persuaded either to believe or to obey God who had put them in such a privileged place as His people.
      - Appeal to them with promises, they will not hear.
      - Appeal to them with warnings, they will not be persuaded.
      - Appeal to them with the goodness of God and His delight in helping us and receiving us, they will not listen to that either.
      - Again, we see hardness and resistance to God.
  - d. And then in verse 19, we have the word that is translated “unbelief.”
    - It speaks of these privileged people who have heard the voice of God and been set free to serve Him not believing...
    - They go on as if there is no promise at all, no God who has blessed them with unspeakable blessings. Nothing here to be believed.
    - Unbelief is the root of all their rebellion.
      - It keeps them from receiving the inheritance that God has promised.
      - The golden calf could be forgiven, the murmuring could be forgiven, the adultery at Baal of Peor could be forgiven,
      - but what can be done for one who does not care to receive the promise of forgiveness and grace that they might inherit glory with God? to one who has no desire to be with God in glory? who is content to go on without forgiveness?

B. How horrendous this sin of unbelief is in those who have such privileges as we have seen—hearing the voice of God, deliverance from bondage, and being led by Christ.

- John Owen lays out the horrendous nature of unbelief.
- Unbelief raises objections to believing.
  - An unbeliever feels that he must justify his unbelief, so he comes up with objections either about God, the author of the promise—or about the thing that is promised—or about himself as the one who is called to believe.
- a. If the objection is with God,
  - It is the claim that God is not good, or not reliable, or not to be trusted.
  - It is to act as though God might not do what He has said He would do—He might be up to something—it might be harmful for you to embrace His promise.
  - Though He is presented as a God of marvellous mercy, you see Him as one who is hard and severe—unjust... Someone that you don't want to be around—certainly not someone to entrust yourself to.
- b. If the objection is with the thing that is promised,
  - Then it is that what is promised is not good or desirable... or perhaps not needed... or not suitable in some way.
  - In other words, you look on the inheritance the way Hiram looked at the cities that Solomon gave him—“What are these cities that you have given to me?”
  - You count it as of very little value, very little worth, nothing worth bothering yourself about.
    - An everlasting inheritance with Christ in glory? Deliverance from eternity in hell?
    - Nothing worth bothering about.
    - That is the way of a hardened sinner!
- c. And if the objection is with the persons who are to receive the promise,
  - then you look at it as something that is not really for you—not suitable or applicable to you...
    - Perhaps that you are not a sinner, or perhaps that you are happy in your sin and happy to go on being estranged from God.
  - Or maybe you think that the promise is too hard for you to attain,
    - not accepting that the requirement is simply to look to Him for mercy. In your pride, you are hanging on to the notion that God's blessing is received by our own merit and works. In your pride, you are holding to the notion that people can be good enough for God. That is a twisted view of God and a view that does not take sin and our sinful condition seriously. We are beyond the point of self-rehabilitation—we must cast ourselves on Christ.
  - Or maybe you think the promise is too good to be true.
    - But that is affront to God who receives glory in saving sinners.

- Or maybe you think the thing is beyond your ability to understand.
  - But that is not so—you know what it is ask for mercy, don’t you? That is what is offered here—mercy to bring you to God. Jesus came and died on the cross so that sinners can come to God.
2. Consider what a great offense unbelief is!
- Owen points out that it is a sin that many deny to be a sin at all.
  - They excuse themselves by saying, “well you see, I just don’t believe. I am not opposed to God. I am not a bad person, it is just that I don’t believe.”
  - But consider what an affront it is to God to not believe!
  - Take Israel’s inheritance.
    - God had promised them an inheritance in the land of Canaan where He would be their God and they would be His people—that He would lead them and guide them and forgive them and protect them in that land.
    - He had promised this to Abraham. He would be glorified by bringing His people into the land as He had promised.
      - To spurn that promise and to refuse to receive it is to prevent God’s glory from being seen.
      - Unbelief is an attempt to frustrate the design of God which is to bring glory to Himself by giving His people an inheritance!
  - How much worse is it to refuse to believe the gospel!
    - The gospel is designed to set forth the glory God in Christ—His righteousness and holiness, His power and wisdom, His mercy, grace and goodness, His patience and forbearance, His faithfulness and bounty in rewarding believers with eternal life.
    - If you are privileged to hear this gospel and even to be part of the church that has been delivered from bondage and to have Christ lead them and you refuse to believe...
      - You, on your part, frustrate the purpose of God to bring glory to His name by saving His church.
      - Your punishment will be great.
        - He will still save them and He will expose you as an unbeliever.

- C. You can see in our text the punishment that befits the unbelief of those who have been privileged to be called to salvation.
1. If you do not believe, you anger God.
    - Verse 17 says those who rejected God angered Him for forty years.
  2. If you do not believe, you will be cursed like those whose corpses fell in the wilderness.
    - When the word translated *corpse* is used in the Bible, it almost always refers to one who is cursed—in this case, those who fell in the wilderness in huge numbers so that they were not buried.

- It is a picture of God's rejection.
  - These that were called to the Promised Land and might have been there with God are instead corpses strewn across the wilderness!
  - Isaiah uses this word at the end of his book to speak of those who were cursed. In Isaiah 66:24, it says of the redeemed: "**And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.**"
  - You might know that Jesus picks up this phrase in His preaching.
  - Do you take this seriously—or with unbelief?
3. If you do not believe, you will not enter God's rest.
- This speaks of the great loss that you will have.
  - You surrender eternal glory in the house of God—and for what? His curse.
  - You do not get to behold His glory and His beauty, you don't get to live with Christ as your delighted husband in glory, you don't have the joy of being made whole in body and soul, of having all sin eradicated so you can be all that you are meant to be as a person—so beautiful as the image of God.
  - As John Calvin says, "Their unbelief prevented them from enjoying the kindness of God."
  - Unbelief is the great sin that deprives you of this.
    - Unbelief divests you as a church member of your glorious, promised inheritance.
    - Indeed, it is a great sin.
      - See that there is not in any of you, privileged as you are, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

**Conclusion:** People of God, you are privileged beyond all measure.

- You have the promises and oracles of God.
- You have been delivered from bondage to serve Him.
- You have Christ your Saviour to lead you to glory.
- Be not unbelieving. Embrace your privileges with joyful confidence!