

Hebrews

Hebrews 3:12-13 – Part III

December 7, 2008

- I. Overall Emphasis since **Hebrews 1:1** – Listen to Jesus! The current emphasis is: Guard against falling away – which is the result of not listening to Jesus. And the fruit of falling away is sin, disobedience, and unbelief – all of which are synonymous with each other.

A. **Review:**

1. In **Hebrews 3:1-6** God is telling us that the validation of saving faith is a life that listens to and submits to the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, living Christianly to the end of our days here on the earth is the natural and only rational outcome of saving faith. And saving faith is equal to listening to and obeying Jesus. Anything less than listening to and obeying Jesus is less than saving faith.
2. The next section of **Hebrews 3** takes in **verses 7-11**. In this section, God further prepares us for His warning against falling away by using Israel as an example of unbelief, and as an example of how He deals with unbelief. The basic point of **Hebrews 3:7-11** is: **Look at Israel! Learn from their mistakes!** When God speaks, listen and obey. To do otherwise is to set yourself against God, to set God against you, and to set yourself up for dire consequences.
3. **Hebrews 3:12-13** contains God's specific warning to us. In these two verses, God warns us individually and corporately against unbelief and disobedience on our part.
 - a. And let me remind us all that unbelief is not the result of an inability to understand the truth or an inability to touch the living God. It is an unwillingness to trust – an unwillingness to put ourselves into God's hands and give Him control.
 - b. In other words, it is the human will, not our intelligence that drives unbelief.
 - c. Finally, God concludes this section (**Hebrews 3:12-13**) by appealing to the church as a whole to work together in helping each other persevere in living by faith to the end of their days.

B. Prayer

II. **Hebrews 3:12-13** . . . Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. [13] But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

A. As you may recall, the last time I taught on **verses 12-13** I focused on the primary cause of falling away – which was having an evil, unbelieving heart resulting in falling away from the living God. At that time, I pointed to God's twofold solution – (1) be on guard ourselves, and (2) work as a team to help each other live by faith – especially when someone among you is being tempted to live in unbelief.

B. Today, I want to focus again on those two verses – but this time I want to talk about the driving force behind an evil, unbelieving heart. God reveals this driving force at the end of **verse 13** where we read these words, “. . . **be(ing) hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.**” In examining this driving force, I want to answer three questions: (1) What is sin? (2) How does sin deceive? (3) How does the deceitfulness of sin harden?

1. **What is sin?** God tells us in **I John 3:4** that sin is lawlessness. Lawlessness in relation to God is the refusal to be ruled by God. Therefore, sin begins with a refusal to submit to the rule of God over us. It is a refusal on our part to live according to the will and word of God.

a. Now if sin is lawlessness, and if lawlessness is a refusal to be ruled by God, then sin is, first and foremost, a state of mind or a condition of the heart.

(1) It is true, the outward manifestations of sin are words and deeds, but the inner source of sin is a state of mind.

(2) We are sinners first in our rebellion against God – or as God has been saying here in Hebrews, in our distrust of God. This is inward. Then, we are sinners in our words and deeds.

b. Other scriptures put it this way:

(1) **Proverbs 24:8-9a** . . . One who plans to do evil, men will call a schemer. [9] The devising of folly is sin . . . And where does scheming and devising take place? Within.

(2) **Romans 14:23b** . . . and whatever is not from faith is sin. And where does faith begin? Within.

- (3) **I John 5:17a** . . . All unrighteousness is sin . . . And where does unrighteousness begin? Within.
- c. So what is sin? Sin is, at its root, a mindset or heart condition of rebellion against God. This mindset of rebellion reveals itself through the outward manifestation of attitudes, words, and deeds that are opposed to or the opposite of God's will and word.
 - (1) In relation to sin hardening our heart and producing unbelief so that we fall away from the faith, I am not talking about rebelling against God and committing sin on an isolated, single-sin basis.
 - (2) Rather, I am talking about an obvious pattern of rebellion against God demonstrated by the practice of some sin or group of sins. As we saw in our study of **I John**, God makes it clear that no one born of God practices sin. Why? Because the nature of God has been placed in the born again Christian, and the presence of God's nature within us has such an impact on our values, desires, beliefs, and thinking that we cannot tolerate the ongoing practice of any sin (**I John 3:9**).
 - (3) Therefore, according to what God is saying to us about falling away here in **Hebrews 3:12-13**, we want to be on guard against any unchallenged, settled, accepted, ongoing unbelief – for the best such unbelief can do is produce the unchallenged practice of settled and accepted sin.

2. **How does sin deceive?** There are three common ways:

- a. **First**, sin deceives by immediately rewarding sinful thoughts, attitudes, words, and deeds with some form of gratification while at the same time, keeping the cost of sin out of sight so it is out of mind.
 - (1) Take note: the devil, the world, and even our flesh **advertize and promote sins benefits** while **hiding or blocking out sins disadvantages and unavoidable costs**.
 - (2) Using the serpent's temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden, we see that the devil **advertized sins benefits** by pointing out the wisdom and benefits of selfishness and

self-rule and the disadvantages of loving God and submitting to God's rule.

(a) **Genesis 3:1-5** . . . Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" [2] The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; [3] but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.' " [4] The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! [5] "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

(3) In order to **hide sins disadvantages and unavoidable costs**, the devil works hard at getting us to ignore, forget about, or be blinded to eternal realities about sin such as:

- (a) reaping what we have sown,
- (b) repeating the same sin soon enslaves us to that sin,
- (c) choosing sin is choosing to openly rebel against God,
- (d) sin results in a broken relationship with God,
- (e) repeated sin means we cannot be a vessel for honor,
- (f) and the ultimate cost of sin is eternal separation from God.
- (g) (*EXAMPLES: Pinocchio in growing ears and a tail + using our wealth to buy our way out of sin's natural / earthly consequences*)

- b. **Second**, sin deceives by promising a quick and easy path to personal happiness, a satisfying life, fame, riches, personal freedom, easily accessible pleasures, and power. (*EXAMPLE: Christ's three temptations in the wilderness – see Luke 4:1-13*)
- c. **Third**, sin deceives by feeding or reinforcing our fears and nurturing the idea that we must act in our own best interests (*i.e., self-serving interests*) because God is either unwilling or unable to adequately protect us. (*EXAMPLE: Israelites facing the challenges of taking the Promised Land*)

3. **How does the deceitfulness of sin harden?**

- a. Sin is designed to deceive us into believing God is in some way flawed – and because God is flawed we must either protect

- ourselves against His flaws or act in our own interests in order to do for ourselves what He either will not do or cannot do.
- b. When we accept the lie that God is flawed,
 - (1) we thicken our ear drums so that they are not as sensitive to the voice of God,
 - (2) we toughen our hearts so as to make us numb to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit,
 - (3) we stifle our conscience so that it no longer reacts as God created it to react to foolish and sinful thoughts, words, and deeds,
 - (4) we treat God's word (or at least parts of it) as if it did not apply to us,
 - (5) we grow accustomed to treating God as if He were not present – even though He is.
 - c. This is how the deceitfulness of sin hardens us.

III. Conclusion

- A. To apply this truth to us as a church, I want to take us in two directions.
 - 1. **First**, it is possible for any of us to give way to the deceitfulness of sin and in time build such distrust for God that we fall away from God so as to be prevented from entering His rest.
 - a. It is this problem that God is directly addressing here in Hebrews. He does not want to lose any of His children. He wants all who are His to enter His rest. And so He warns us against falling away – and calls the entire Church body to work as a team in doing what they can to prevent any single member from falling away so as to miss out on God's rest.
 - b. Therefore, we are being called by God to individually and corporately fight against the powerful temptation of unbelief. And one of the primary ways to war against unbelief is to commit ourselves to encouraging one another to faith, love, and good deeds.
 - 2. **Second**, though most of us may never fall away from God so as to miss out on entering His rest, this passage can still speak to us.
 - a. You see, we can go on and on in the Christian life as weak, immature believers who allow obvious unbelief to remain in our hearts and obvious sin to be an unchallenged, ongoing part of our lives.

- b. Though this condition may not prevent us from entering God's rest, it is disastrous to our souls, to our relationship with God, and to the life of the church.
 - (1) Accepting such a mediocre level of Christian living as our standard level stifles the work of God in us as individuals and in our church,
 - (2) it stands in the way of our personal growth in Christian maturity, godliness, and intimacy with the Father,
 - (3) but it also pulls down the collective spiritual maturity of our fellowship and sets a poor example for our young people,
 - (4) And as if that were not bad enough, such mediocrity in our Christian living – as individuals and as a church – establishes abnormal Christianity as the new normal.

- B. The church life is a corporate life. The faith life, though very much a matter of the heart, is also a corporate life. May we walk this path together –
 - 1. helping the weak in faith to grow stronger,
 - 2. encouraging the fainthearted to run from fear and embrace confidence in God,
 - 3. and praying for, reaching out to, and calling back any who are showing signs of ongoing unbelief and the practice of sin.