

Hebrews

Hebrews 3:7-19 - Holy Spirit speaking...

Part 12 was about who we are to Jesus: “we are his house,” **Hebrews 3:6**. We are the place where Jesus hangs out, the place he calls “home.” We are also members of the same royal family and royal household as he is, and as much the “royal house of Jesus” as the royal family of Britain is the royal house of Windsor. We are also his bride in training being prepared to join him in restoring this sorry world back to the glory God intended for it in the first two chapters in Genesis.

So, what we’ve found out in Hebrews so far is who Jesus is in relationship to the Father, who Jesus is in relationship to us, and in Hebrews 3 who we are in relationship to Jesus. In relationship to his Father Jesus is God’s Son, “the radiance of his (Father’s) glory.” In relationship to us he is our Apostle and High Priest, and in relationship to him we are members of his family, whom he cares for dearly.

It is with all this in mind, then, that in the next verse, **Hebrews 3:7**, “the **Holy Spirit says**: Today, if you hear his voice.” And that merits a quick pause already, because all of a sudden we have the Holy Spirit entering the picture for the first time, speaking very directly and very personally to us in the next few verses.

We’ve had a lot of speaking like that in this book so far too, because in **Hebrews Chapter One** we have God the Father speaking directly to us, and we actually get to hear his voice and what he says - with quotation marks too - in **verses 5-13**. We then get to hear Jesus’ voice speaking to us very directly and very personally too, and also with quotation marks, in **Hebrews 2:12-13**. And now we have the Holy Spirit speaking to us with quotation marks in **Hebrews 3**. Not only, then, do we have evidence of God being three persons here - who are all capable of speaking independently and separately - we also see this “three person” God as wanting to communicate very directly and personally with us in voices that we can hear.

We understand, of course, that all the quotations of them speaking here in Hebrews are words that were already written down in Scripture, so it isn’t new words we’re hearing in an audible voice. But it’s still God communicating with us directly with words we Christians need to understand and grasp “**Today**.”

Hebrews very nicely, then, summarizes what **all three members** of the God family want us to grasp, and especially if we're Christians who are having trouble staying motivated - both then and now - in a world that's constantly wearing us down. We need our "courage and hope" recharged and given a booster shot (Hebrews 3:6), and that's what these words from all three members of the God family are designed to do. And all three, take note, are involved in this together. They all want to get in on the act of speaking to us, with what's on each of their minds.

And this time, in **Hebrews 3:7**, it's the turn of the Holy Spirit. And what's on the Holy Spirit's mind is us hearing what all these voices in the **Old Testament** are saying to us, and not "hardening our hearts" against them, **verse 8**. Clearly, then, this is a problem we Christians face today - as much as it was a problem for the Israelites after they left Egypt. And the problem is serious too, because they "rebelled during their time of testing in the desert."

And for 40 years the Israelites never stopped rebelling, **verse 9**, which really "tested and tried" God, because - as he says - they "saw what I did" and all his amazing miracles on their behalf, but rebellion is what those "heart-hardened" Israelites did in return. Which merits another brief pause, because something really severe must have poisoned those Israelites' minds against God, and it's something we Christians need to watch out for too, because we're just as susceptible (verse 12). And if we don't think we're as susceptible as the Israelites, then why would the Holy Spirit be bringing this up in Hebrews, in a message to Christians?

So what exactly is the Holy Spirit saying to us Christians in these verses? Well, first of all, in **verse 10**, he's telling us that God was "angry with that generation" of Israelites," because their "hearts were always going astray."

God doesn't mince words here. The Israelites had justified hardening their hearts against him, but God was having none of it. We see that back in **Exodus 14:11-12**, when the Israelites complained bitterly to Moses for leading them out of sure death in Egypt only to starve to death in the desert instead. And, what's more, **they felt totally justified in complaining too**. But what was God's reaction? He tells Moses to "Tell the Israelites to move on," **verse 15**. In other words, "Quit moaning, do what you're told, and trust me."

But they never did, did they? And why didn't they? Because, as the Holy Spirit goes on to say in **Hebrews 3:10**, "they have not known my ways." And that, according to the Holy Spirit, is what can so easily turn the hearts of us Christians against God too: it's because we simply don't understand him.

It's in not understanding, for instance, why a loving God would allow horrible things to happen to innocent people, and why he doesn't stop children being sexually abused, or why he doesn't stop cruelty to animals, or stop natural disasters, or prevent the likes of Hitler, that our minds as humans can so easily become poisoned against God, and even as Christians too.

Well, in response to that the author of Hebrews doesn't mince words either. In **verse 12**; he comes out of his corner fighting too: "See to it, brothers," he writes, "that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God."

The problem, in other words, isn't God, it's us and our "sinful, unbelieving heart." We blame God in our pompous moral superiority and opinionated hypocrisy for all our troubles, when it wasn't HIM who caused this mess we're in now, it was US. From the very beginning, starting with Adam and Eve, we rebelled against his instructions, we failed a simple test of loyalty to him, we didn't trust him, and we listened to a lying serpent instead.

And if we today feel it isn't fair that the penalty of Adam and Eve's rebellion should be passed on down to the rest of us who didn't have any choice or say in the matter, the Holy Spirit has a blunt and simple answer for us in Hebrews: it's "**Learn from Israel.**" This is why the Old Testament is so important, because this is where we "hear God's voice" speaking to us "today" (were 7). And what God is showing us through the history of Israel is that, even when God offered to bless the Israelites with every blessing they could wish for - for simply obeying and trusting him - they still rebelled. And if we think, "Oh well, that's because they didn't have the Holy Spirit," then look what we've done as the Christian church that **does** have the Holy Spirit.

We're just as guilty of outright rebellion against God and hardening our hearts against him in our Christian churches today too, as we see in so many of our churches openly supporting same-sex marriage. We're actually witnessing Christians thumbing their noses at God and his clear instruction from the beginning - confirmed by Jesus himself in Matthew 19:4-5 too - that marriage is only between man and woman.

So, listen up, folks, because God is answering back here in Hebrews, and he isn't mincing words either. He says he's angry, because, **verse 10**, it's OUR "hearts that are always going astray," not his heart, and it's because WE (including us Christians) have not understood "his ways." So neither the Holy Spirit or the author of Hebrews is taking this lying down.

Isn't it about time, then, we asked the question: "What might we Christians be doing that could be making God angry at us too?" He loves us, yes, but Romans 11:22 also tells us that God is both kind and stern.

Well, again, learn from Israel, because that's the answer given by the Holy Spirit here in Hebrews. And what we're supposed to learn from Israel is HOW their hearts became hardened against God, and why they blamed God for their troubles and held him accountable.

The answer is right here in **Hebrews 3:13**: it was "**the deceitfulness of sin**" that did it. It is crucial, therefore, as **verse 14** says, that we who "have come to share in Christ hold firmly till the end the confidence we had (in Christ) at first," and "encourage one another daily," **verse 13**, to not let OUR hearts be hardened by "sin's deceitfulness" too, because that, the deceptiveness of sin, is where the danger lies.

And that danger is just as real for us in the Christian Church today. As Christians we say we "share in Christ" - meaning in context, **verse 1**, that we "fix our thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess." By "apostle" it means fixing our obedience on what Jesus taught, just as the first Christians "devoted themselves to the APOSTLES' TEACHING" (Acts 2:42). And by "high priest" it means fixing our trust in Jesus because "we are his house," **verse 6**. Jesus is the one who cares for us as head of the great household of God, and we trust in him to do that for us daily.

Well, Israel should have fixed their thoughts on him for their obedience and trust too. We can say that because we know from 1 Corinthians 10:4 that "the spiritual rock that accompanied Israel was **Christ**." So the constant test Israel faced was obeying what they were being taught by Christ through Moses, and trusting where they were being led by Christ through Moses. Obedience and trust were the two "ways" of God (**verse 10**) they were supposed to learn "during their time of testing in the desert" (**verse 8**).

Their desert experience, however, also taught them that their brains could **justify not obeying and trusting** God's leadership through Moses. And this was the "deceitfulness of sin" at work. It "turned them away from the living God," **verse 12**. They couldn't see a "LIVING God" was with them, or grasp that they always had an active, personal God leading them every step of the way. As soon as something didn't make sense to them "the confidence they had at first (when they left Egypt)" evaporated and they resorted instead to anger, frustration, complaining, blaming, and bitter accusation. And that can so easily happen to us today too.

The Holy Spirit is making the problem very clear, then, when he says in **verse 15**, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as the Israelites did in the rebellion.” Well, we’re “hearing his voice” right here in Hebrews, through the lesson of Israel’s 40 year trek through the desert, that they lost their confidence in God, and their minds became infected by “unbelief,” **verse 19**.

And what that unbelief creates is seeking other sources, other than God, for guidance, leadership, teaching, care and help instead. The Israelites, for instance, made a golden calf, a replica of the cow god of Egypt, and looked to that instead of God’s care and direction through Moses. The Christians in Hebrews, meanwhile, were drifting back to Moses as the one to obey and follow, not Jesus, and needed to be reminded in **verse 3** that “Jesus has been found worthy of greater honour than Moses,” and for obvious reasons. Under Moses the Israelites had never been able to obey and trust God. “Their hearts were always going astray,” **verse 10**.

And that’s meant to capture the attention of us Christians “Today.” But why? I mean, so what if the Israelites lost their confidence in God? Why should that matter to us now? Because, quoting Psalm 95:11 in **Hebrews 3:11**, God “declared an oath in his anger, that ‘**They shall never enter my rest.**’”

So there was a clear consequence to not obeying and trusting. And that consequence was stated with considerable anger on God’s part too, as we see in **verse 18** as well, when the Holy Spirit asks, “And to whom did God swear that the Israelites **would never enter his rest** if not to those who disobeyed?”

This is serious stuff, because according to the Holy Spirit this is just as relevant for us Christians today as it was for the Israelites back then. So what on earth does “entering (or not entering) God’s rest” mean?

(Continued in Hebrews 4 next time...)

. But it's an old, old story of loss of confidence in God ,and rebellion that goes back to Israel who "heard" God's ways, **verse 16**, "but rebelled" against them.

Oh, they heard all right, because for a while the Israelites did everything God told them to do, and they totally trusted him. And when they trusted him they had that magic word "REST" in **verse 11**. They felt safe and secure in God's care and direction. But any time God did something that didn't make sense to them it took a little chunk out of their confidence. They didn't trust God like they had when he'd rescued them from Egypt. And that angered God, to the point, **verses 17-19**, that he swore an oath that "they would never enter his rest, because of their unbelief."

It all came to a head when the Israelites reached the promised land and they refused to enter it as ordered to by God, because they heard it was inhabited by giants. But hadn't God already freed them from the giant-sized grip of a genocidal maniac back in Egypt? God was a giant-killer, then, right? So, of course they could trust him, and what more could he have done to prove it? On faith, then, they should have marched right into the promised land as he'd told them to do. But they didn't. It was pathetic, and enormously frustrating for God too, so for the next 40 years he let them wander in the wilderness, and all those who rebelled died there too (verse 17).

But remember what the Holy Spirit said? - that "Today, if you hear his voice, harden not YOUR hearts," **verse 15**, so all this was meant as a personal message from the Holy Spirit to us Christians too.

But how does it apply to us? Well, let's compare the Israelites to us. They'd happily accepted God's way of salvation to begin with. They'd killed a Passover lamb, sprinkling its blood over their doorposts as God had instructed, and because of it they were saved, or were kept safe, when the angel of death killed the first born son in every household. And didn't we accept God's way of salvation to begin with too, by trusting totally in Jesus shedding his blood for the forgiveness of our sins? So far so good, therefore, for both us and Israel.

We then accepted God's way of salvation in baptism too. For Israel it was being "baptized" in the Red Sea (1 Corinthians 10:2), and for us a baptism by immersion in water. Again, so far so good. We then set out, just like the

Israelites, eager to do whatever God wanted. We came up against a few tests, yes, but we were totally focused on doing all the things we thought Christians should do, just as the Israelites told God at Mount Sinai in **Exodus 19:8**, “We will do everything the Lord has said.”

Which wasn't surprising, because God had totally provided for their needs. He'd fed them with manna in Exodus 16 and protected them from the Amalekites in Exodus 17. So they'd already experienced God intervening for them, enabling them to continue safely on their way through that hostile desert to “the promised land.”

So the Israelites had every good reason for trusting God, as did we. Didn't God meet our needs too in those early years of our Christian lives? We were filled to the brim with “confidence” (verse 14) that we'd “hold firmly till the end” and “enter his rest.” But **Hebrews 4:1** then says, “Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let US (Christians now) be careful that none of you (or none of us) be found to have fallen short of it.”

Whatever this “rest” is, then, it is possible to fall short of it, or not enter into it. And the reason for that is given in **Hebrews 4:2**, “For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard it **did not combine it with faith.**”

It is hugely important to God, then, that we trust him, because he's given us every good reason to trust him. We “had the same gospel preached to us” that was preached to Israel, meaning that we too are God's “treasured possession,” **Exodus 19:5**, and we too are his “kingdom of priests and a holy nation,” **verse 6**. Peter confirmed that for us Christians in **1 Peter 2:5**, when he writes, “you too are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood,” and in **verse 9**, “you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God,” if, that is, we obey God and trust him (verses 7-8), because “**the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame,**” **verse 6**.

The gospel message preached to both us and the Israelites, therefore, is clear, but it is only of “value,” **Hebrews 4:2**, if we “combine it with faith.” To “enter his rest,” therefore, and not fall short of it, it boils down to us trusting God, no matter what “giants” we find ourselves up against too.

Because there are, and will be, giants, and it's how we tackle those giants that determines if we enter God's rest, or not. And that may bring to light a bitter truth, that for all the years we've attended church, and all the communion bread and wine we've taken, and all the hymns we've sung, and all

the Christian discussions we've taken part in, and all the Christian doctrines we've conformed to, and all the good deeds we've done, we can easily lose our confidence in God and have our hearts harden against him when something about him doesn't make sense, which is exactly what was happening to those Christians in Hebrews. They'd come up against a giant of a problem that had paralyzed them. And they found themselves not only drifting away from God but actually hardening their hearts against him as well.

When the test finally came and they stood on the borders of the promised land, they were given the word of the Lord through Moses to advance and take the land. But they held back because they were afraid of the giants that inhabited the cities of that land. When they were asked to face the giants and, **by the principle of faith, overcome them** and enter into the rest of the land, they refused to do so. They turned back and for forty years wandered in the wilderness. The test came when for the first time they were asked to come to grips with the thing that could destroy their life in the land, the giants, and their failure to do so revealed the bitter truth that they never had any faith. They had never really believed God. They were only acting as they did to escape the damage, death, and danger of Egypt. But they had no intention of coming into conflict with the giants in the land.

The Word of God is pointing out to us that we may profess the Lord Jesus, we may take our stand in some outward way at least upon the cross of Christ and claim his death for us, we can profess to have been baptized into his body

and say so by passing through the waters of baptism ourselves, we can enjoy the fatherly care and providence of God and see him working miracles of supply in our life, and even find in the Scripture much which sustains the heart, at least for awhile. Yet, when it comes to the test, when God asks us to **lay hold of the giants in our life which are destroying us**, those giants of anxiety, fear, bitterness, jealousy, envy, and impatience and all the other things that keep us in turmoil and fret and make us to be a constant trouble to our neighbors and friends -- when we are asked to lay hold of these by the principle of faith, and we refuse to do so, the writer says we are in danger of remaining in the wilderness and never entered the promised rest.

Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 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. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. (Hebrews 3:12-14 RSV)

We share in Christ if that faith which began continues to produce in us **that which faith alone can produce**, the fruit of the Spirit. This is the second warning of this book. The first one was against drifting, the danger of paying no attention, of sitting in a meeting and letting the words flow by while our minds are occupied elsewhere. The peril of letting these magnificent truths which alone have power to set men free, to drift by, unheeded, unheard.

But this second warning is against the danger of hardening -- of hearing the words and believing them, understanding what they mean, but of **taking no action** upon them. The peril of holding truth in the head, but never letting it get into the heart. But truth known never does anything; **it is truth done which sets us free**. Truth known simply puffs us up in pride of knowledge. We can quote the Scriptures by the yard, can memorize it, can know the message of every book and know the whole book from cover to cover, but truth known will never do anything for us. It is truth done, truth acted upon, that moves and delivers and changes.

The terrible danger which the writer is pointing out is that truth that is known but not acted on has an awful effect of hardening the heart so that it is no longer able to act -- and we lose the ability to believe. This is what the Lord Jesus meant when he said to his disciples, "If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe though one should rise from the dead," Luke 16:31).

A man said to me not long ago, "If we only had the ability to do miracles like the early church did, then we could really make this Christian cause go. If we could perform these things again, and had faith enough to do miracles, we could make people believe." But I had to tell him that after thirty years of observing this scene, and studying the Scriptures, I am absolutely convinced that if God granted us this power, as he is perfectly able to do, so that miracles were being demonstrated on every hand, there

would not be one further Christian added to the cause of Christ than there is right now!

At the close of Jesus' own ministry, after that remarkable demonstration of the power of God in the midst of people, how many stood with him at the foot of the cross? A tiny band of women and one man, and they had been won, not by his miracles, but by his words.

This is why God says, "I swore in my wrath, 'They shall never enter my rest.'" That is not petulance. That does not mean God is upset because he has offered something and they will not take it. That is simply a revelation of the nature of the case. When truth is known and not acted upon, it always, on every level of life, in any area of human knowledge, has this peculiar quality: It hardens, so the heart is not able to believe what it refuses to act on.

Now we come to the sign of reality. **What is it that unmistakably marks the one who has genuinely become part of God's house?** What is the rest of God, the mark of reality?

Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest remains, let us fear lest any of you be judged to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them; but the message which they heard did not benefit them, because it did not meet with faith in the hearers. (Hebrews 4:1-2 RSV)

That does not mean the message did not meet with belief. When the Israelites stood at the borders of the land they had no doubts at all that the land was there, they believed in it. Nor was it that they did not believe there was honey

and milk in the land, the fullness of supply awaiting them; they believed it. There was a species of belief, but there was no faith, for **faith is more than belief**. Faith is activity upon that belief! There was belief, there was even strong desire to enter the land, but they did not enter because there was no faith. They would not act upon that which had been given.

The writer says the same gospel was given to us as to them; we have the same good news, the same possibility of entering into a life of rest.

These words must be taken seriously. The Word of God knows nothing of the easy believism that is so widely manifest in our own day. We think we can receive Jesus as Savior, raise our hand to accept Christ, and that settles the matter. We will go to heaven and there can never be any doubt about it from then on, though there is no change in our life. But the promise of Christ is that when he comes into the human heart there is a radical change of government which must inevitably, in the course of its working, result in **a revolutionary change in behavior**. Unless that takes place, there has been no reality to our conversion. The goal of his working in us is rest. Now what is this rest?

In Verse 3 we learn it is pictured for us by the Sabbath:

For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said,

"As I swore in my wrath,

'They shall never enter my rest,'"

although his works were finished from the foundation of the world. (Hebrews 4:3 RSV)

Here is a rest that has been available to man ever since man first appeared on earth. It was available from the foundation of the world.

For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way, "And God rested on the seventh day from all his works." And again in this place he said,

"They shall never enter my rest." (Hebrews 4:4-5 RSV)

You know the story of creation. On the seventh day God ceased from his labors, he rested on the seventh day, intending that to be **a picture of what the rest of faith is**. It has been available to man since the beginning of the world. The Seventh Day Adventists and other legalistic groups have focused upon the shadow instead of the substance and have insisted that we must observe the Sabbath Day much as it was given to Israel; that this is what pleases God. But God is never pleased by the perfunctory observance of shadows, of figures.

Here is one of the great problems of Christian faith. We are constantly mistaking shadows for substance, pictures for reality.

A teenaged girl told me recently, in an anguish of repentance, that she had gotten up from a communion service, and gone out to engage in some very wrong activities. When I said to her, "How could you do this? How could you leave a communion service to do this?" She replied, defensively, "Well, I didn't partake of communion."

And I said, "What difference does that make?" That was a mere shadow. **Communion pictures the sharing of the life of the Lord Jesus, and if we deny that in our activity but are scrupulous about its observance in the shadow, in the mere picture, it is an insult to God.**

This rest was figured in the Sabbath and anyone who learns to live out of rest is keeping the Sabbath as God meant it to be kept.

It was also prefigured in the land of Canaan, yet in Verse 8, it says,

...if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak later of another day. (Hebrews 4:8 RSV)

If the figure had been enough God would not, later on in the Scriptures, have recorded the words,

...there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God. (Hebrews 4:9 RSV)

Obviously, Canaan, too, was nothing but a figure, nothing but a picture, a shadow. **Then what is the real rest?**

We come to it in Verse 10; it is most clearly stated:

...for whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his. (Hebrews 4:10 RSV)

Here is **a revolutionary new principle of human behavior**, on which God intends man to operate, and it was his intention from the beginning. It is from this that man fell, and it is to this, now, in Jesus Christ, he is to be restored. Unless this principle is operative in our life, we can have no assurance that we belong to the body of Christ. This is the clear declaration of this writer throughout the whole of the book.

We all have been brainwashed since birth with a false concept of the basis of human activity. We have been sold on the satanic lie that we have in ourselves what it takes to be what we want to be, to be a man, a woman, to achieve whatever we desire to be. We are sure we have what it takes, or, if we do not have it now, we know where we can get it. We can educate ourselves, we can acquire more information, we can develop new skills, and when we get this done we shall have what it takes to be what we want to be.

For three and a half years, the Apostle Peter tried his level best to please the Lord Jesus by dedicated, earnest, sincere efforts to serve him out of his own will, and he failed dismally because he could not be convinced that he did not have what it takes. When the Lord Jesus told him, "You will never have what it takes until the cross comes into your life," he would not receive it. He said, "Lord, don't talk to me about a cross. I don't want to hear anything about that." And the Lord Jesus said, "Get behind me Satan, you are an offense unto me. You do not understand the things of God, but only the things of men," Mat 16:21-23). And it was not until that wonderful day, the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit opened his eyes to the full meaning of the cross, and all the Lord Jesus had made available to him by his indwelling life became part of Peter's experience, that he realized what the Lord had meant. Not till then did he realize what it took to be a Christian.

We repeat: It takes Christ to be a Christian, and it takes God to be a man. **When you put Christ back in the Christian, you put God back in the man.** This is God's design for living, this is the new principle of human activity -- to stop our own efforts.

We do not have what it takes, and we never did have. **The only one who can live the Christian life is Jesus Christ.** He proposes to reproduce his life in us. Our part is to expose every situation to his life in us, and, by that means, depending upon him and not upon us, we are to meet every situation, enter into every circumstance, and perform every activity. We cease from our own labors.

This is the way you began the Christian life, if you are a Christian. You came to the place where you stopped trying to save yourself, did you not? You quit trying to be good enough to get into heaven. You said, "I'll never make it, I'll never make it." You looked to the Lord Jesus, and said, "If he has taken my place, then that is all I need." Thus, receiving him, and resting on that fact by faith, you stopped your own efforts, you ceased from your own work, and rested on his.

Now, Paul says in Colossians, "As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him," (Colossians 2:6 RSV). As ... so -- in the same way. As you have received him, so **live in dependence upon him to do all things through you.** Step out upon that, and what is the result? Rest! Wonderful rest! Relief, release, no longer worrying, fretting, straining, for you are resting upon One who is wholly adequate to do through you everything that needs

to be done. He does not make automatons of us, he does not turn us into robots. He works through our thinking, our feeling and our reasoning, but our dependence must be upon him.

Notice the word that is stressed throughout this whole section, *today*. **This is God's design for living *today***. It is not inactivity, but it is freedom from strain. It is the principle upon which he expects everything to be done: your work, your schooling, your studies, your play, your responsibilities in the home, at the shop, wherever you are. All are to be fulfilled out of reliance upon this new principle of human behavior. "Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of [by the authority and ability of] the Lord Jesus," (Colossians 3:17).

Now one final word on how.

If you have never yet entered into this principle in any degree and yet have been truly born of God by the Holy Spirit, this study will find you asking the question, "Lord, show me how. I want to enter into this rest, I want to know what this is." Then look at the instrument by which we enter in, the Word of God.

Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, that no one fall by the same sort of disobedience. For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:11-12 RSV)

In order to enter into this new principle we must repudiate the old. But the problem is, the old basis of activity is so

ingrained in our thinking that we automatically respond to old thought patterns, along old lines of reaction. Thus, though the new life of the Lord Jesus may be in us, we find ourselves repudiating it and responding along old lines, reacting in bitterness, impatience, anger, frustration, anxiety, worry, fear, trepidation, uncertainty and inferiority. We do not know how to recognize the old in its practical appearance. What will help us? The word of God! This living, marvelous word becomes an instrument in the hands of the Holy Spirit with a two-edged action. It strips off the false. If we seek to obey it, as we read it we shall discover that it exposes the entrenched power of the flesh in our life, and strips off all pretense. It is not only the Bible which is meant by the phrase "the word of God." It is the truth of God, whether it comes by sermon, by Scripture, or by some confirmation of life. It is the truth that strips off the false. It can be utterly ruthless, moving in on us, backing us into a corner, taking down all our fences and facades, worming its way right into the heart of our nature, discerning even between the soul and the spirit.

I watched this week the book of Esther in the hands of the Holy Spirit take a group of people and strip off their pretenses and expose them to themselves. For the first time they saw, with horror, that they really were under the domination of this sin principle, the flesh.

But the Word has a two-fold action. It not only strips off the false, but it unveils the true. When we come to the place where, like Jacob, we are ready to take a good look at ourselves, then there comes the marvelous, healing,

wholesome, comforting, sweet, delivering word that sets us on our feet again, and shows us, in Christ, every provision for every need. We need no longer to go on doggedly, wearily, fighting a battle that is already lost, but we can step out each fresh, new day into the glorious experience of a victory that is already won.

And what is the final outcome? Look at Verse 13:

And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. (Hebrews 4:13 RSV)

We come at last to the God of reality.

Remember when Adam sinned, that he hid from God. He hid because he realized he was naked and he was ashamed and clothed himself. When all pretense is stripped off, and we see ourselves for what we are, and by faith have appropriated what Christ is; when we believe that he not only died for us, but **rose again to live in us**; when we realize that we **not only need him for what he did, but also for what he is; then we can stand again before God exactly as we are, naked without need of facades, masks, or pretenses.**

We are exactly what we are, that is all, just men, just women, just sinners saved by grace, with nothing to defend, nothing that need be hidden, nothing that cannot be fully exposed to everyone. We discover a wonderful lifting of burdens, a wonderful freedom, a wonderful release -- we have entered into rest. The fences come down between us and our friends and neighbors, we do not try to hide anything any more. Because we are what

we are before God, we can be exactly what we are before men.

Perhaps some of you have been in the wilderness a long, long time -- too long. Normally, as this book will make clear as we go on, it is expected that a Christian who comes to know the Lord Jesus will be led into the experience of rest within a few years after his conversion. It may take no longer than a few months. But even if you have been living in the wilderness of self effort for many years it is yet possible to die to your unbelief, as that old generation died, and to leave the carcass of unbelieving self-sufficiency behind, and like the new generation born in the wilderness, follow your heavenly Joshua into the land. You cannot crucify the flesh; that God has already done, but you can agree to it. And when you do, you will discover this priceless gift of peace -- of rest. But if you refuse, knowing what to do but not willing to do it, the living death that marks your fruitless, crabbed, self-centered, so-called "Christian" life, will be the tombstone of a phony faith, a faith that never really was, a house built upon the sand, which, when the floods and storms of life strike it, is swept to destruction.

**pierce even the joints and the marrow,
discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart.
Thank you for this wonderful surgery that sets
us free. We rejoice that there is a rest remaining
into which we can enter.**

“Warning From The Wilderness”

Hebrews 3:7-19

In the first six verses of Hebrews 3, the supremacy of Jesus over Moses is presented. He is shown to be superior to Moses not in faithfulness, but in His person and service. Moses was a servant in the house of God, but Jesus was the builder of the house and serves as the Son over the house. In verse 6, the writer affirms that "WE" are the house of Christ. Of course He is referring to the church, which Paul says in 1Tim. 3:15 is the house of God. In Eph. 2:11-22, Paul says that in Christ Jews and Gentiles are "members of the household of God," and that together with the faithful saints of old (including Moses) we are now "fellow citizens" in the commonwealth of Israel. And yet our status as the "house" is conditional. Verse 6 says, "whose house we are if we hold fast" So we have to hold fast "the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."

This need for steadfastness, or faithfulness, explains the exhortations found in this letter. We saw it in the first exhortation in 2:1-4 with regard to "The Danger Of Drifting." And now we come to the second exhortation regarding "The Danger Of Departing From The Living God" in 3:7-19.

This section seems to follow three trains of thought:

"The Example Of Israel In The Wilderness" (vs. 7-11).

"The Danger Of Departing" (vs. 12-14).

"The Example Of Israel In The Wilderness" (vs. 15-19).

The first thing we need to understand about Israel in the wilderness is that Israel hardened their hearts. The quotation found in vs. 7-11 is from Psa. 95:7-11, where the Holy Spirit warned Israel not to be like their fathers in the wilderness. And the writer to the Hebrews found this warning to be just as necessary in his day.

In the wilderness, the Israelites hardened their hearts in rebelling against God. They tested (or tried) God with their lack of faith. And that is the reason they did not enter God's rest. God became angry with that generation in the wilderness because of their persistent rebellion (Psa. 106:13-33). And so in Num. 14:22-24 and 26-35, God swore that they would not enter His rest. Of all those over the age of twenty when they left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb entered the Promised Land. All the rest, of which there were 603,548 men, died in the wilderness. Because of their hardened hearts, Israel departed from God. They rebelled against God. And because of their rebellion, they fell short of the Canaan rest that had been promised to them.

[The Danger of Departing \(vs. 12-14\).](#)

Now, with this "Warning From The Wilderness" fresh in their minds, the writer next exhorts his brethren by warning them of "The Danger of Departing." And so, we need to BEWARE. You see, a believer can develop "an evil heart of unbelief." Back in v. 1, the recipients of this letter were called "holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling," which means that this warning against developing a heart of unbelief is presented as a real possibility! A "believer" can become an "unbeliever"! And unbelief is produced when you are "hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."

Sin is deceitful! It promises pleasure, power and prestige. And in the short term it may seem to deliver on that promise. But such things are "passing," or temporary. Later in 11:25, the writer talks about why Moses left the luxury of the palace of Pharaoh and says, "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin." John warns us in 1John 2:17 not to love the world because "the world is passing away, and the lusts of it." The rewards of sin are "passing away." They are temporary. But because sin is deceitful, it is easy for us to become "hardened," to become stubborn

and not willing to heed the Word of God. It happened to Israel, and it can happen to us! And the consequence of such unbelief is "departing from the living God." As you grow in unbelief, you drift away from God. While a believer remains in fellowship with God, an unbeliever can only depart farther and farther away from God.

So the solution is to "exhort one another daily." This is how a believer avoids becoming an unbeliever. Through mutual edification on a daily basis we can prevent the "hardening" that comes from sin's deceitfulness. And an important part of such exhortation is our assembling together (Heb. 10:24-25; Acts 20:7). But with the need for "daily exhortation," do you think that we should be content to limit our assembling to just one service a week? Don't you think that if we have the opportunity to assemble more often that we ought to? We need to "exhort one another daily."

But this passage shows us once again the conditional nature of our participation with Christ. In v. 6, we are the house of Christ "If we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." And now in v. 14, we have become partakers of Christ "If we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end." Yet someone is bound to ask, "But what about the security of the believers?" Well, the "believer" does indeed enjoy the assurance of his salvation. But we've already seen that a "believer" can develop "an evil heart of unbelief." In other words, a "believer" can become an "unbeliever." Or as the writer says in v. 12, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." And so, when a "believer" becomes an "unbeliever" all of the promises of security and salvation there are for the "believer" no longer apply to the "unbeliever." And that is why there are so many warnings to remain faithful, including that of our Lord in Rev. 2:10, where He says "be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

The Example Of Israel In The Wilderness (vs. 15-19).

In fact, the danger of departing from God is so great that the writer next returns to the example of Israel in the wilderness and another appeal is made. Quoting again from Psa. 95:7-8, the writer says "Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." Now notice that the writer applies this quotation to Christians. You see, Christians need to "hear His (God's) voice." In 1:1-2, the writer said, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son." And then in 2:1-4, he returns to this theme and says, "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? When he says "hear His voice," he means to hear with a desire to hearken, because we too can easily harden our hearts "as in the rebellion."

And so, there is the need for Christians to believe and obey. In the case of the Israelites, who was it who rebelled? It was all of those who came out of Egypt except for Joshua and Caleb. Although they had been led by Moses and delivered from Egyptian bondage, they still rebelled. And so the point is that although we may have been delivered by Christ from the bondage of sin, rebellion is still possible even for us. In the case of the Israelites, with whom was God angry for forty years? It was with all of those who sinned. And they died in the wilderness as a result of their lack of faith. So if we become hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, do you think that we will escape judgment? In the case of the Israelites, who was it that God did not allow into the Promised Land? It was those who did not obey. It was those who had developed unbelief. And so, if we disobey through unbelief, are we going to enter our promised rest?

When the apostle Paul related some of the same experiences of Israel in the wilderness, he said in 1Cor. 10:11, "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come." My friends, it is for our admonition that we have such warnings as these found in our text because the deceitfulness of sin is just as strong today. They are there because the hardening of one's heart is just as dangerous today. They are there because departing from God is just as possible today. The potential for falling short of our promised rest is just as much a reality for us as it proved to be for the Israelites in the wilderness. And that is why we need to "exhort one another daily" to remain strong in the faith and to remain strong in obedience.

Have you exhorted any of your brothers or sisters lately?

Did you ever wonder why the solemn season of Lent is 40 days long? I think most Catholics know the answer: "By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert" (CCC 540). Jesus fasted for 40 days and nights and so do we, but this still leaves the question: why 40? If we look at Jesus' temptation in the desert in Matthew 4:1-11, we find a few clues. Each time Jesus responds to the devil, he replies with Scripture. When the devil says, "Turn these stones to bread," Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3: "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

“When the devil tell Jesus to throw himself down from the temple, Jesus replies with Deuteronomy 6:16: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.

“When the devil commands Jesus to worships him, Jesus replies with Deuteronomy 6:13 (10:20): “The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.

“Deuteronomy! Deuteronomy! Deuteronomy! Could the answer to “why 40 days?” be found in Deuteronomy? The number 40 does come up in Deuteronomy in some pretty significant ways. For example, Moses twice fasts for 40 days. The first time is when he was preparing himself to receive the Ten Commandments to give to Israel at the base of the mountain (Deuteronomy 9:9-11). Curiously, Jesus gives the New Law on the Sermon on the Mount shortly after his 40-day fast (Matthew 5). The second time Moses fasts for 40 days comes immediately after he gives the law. Moses returned from the mountain to find the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. God wished to wipe out Israel and make Moses into an even mightier nation (Deuteronomy 9:14), but Moses — being a good mediator — fasted another 40 days for the sins of his people (Deuteronomy 9:18).

Afterward, God permitted Israel to continue to the promised land (Deuteronomy 10:10-11).

Once there, the people rebelled again. They doubted whether they could overcome the inhabitants, so they sent scouts to assess their chances. After 40 days the scouts returned, saying it was impossible. Their discouraging report caused people to rise up in rebellion.

Their punishment for this rebellion? Forty years in the desert. One year for each day their scouts reconnoitered the land (Number 14:34). Wandering 40 years in the desert was a period of testing, to “find out whether or not it was your intention to keep his commandments” (Deuteronomy 8:2). But during this trial, the Israelites had to rely wholly on the Lord: “...Your clothes did not fall from you in tatters nor your sandals from your feet; bread was not your food, nor wine or beer your drink. Thus you should know that I, the LORD, am your God.” (Deuteronomy 29:4-5).

Deuteronomy shows us that Jesus is a new Moses who after fasting for 40 days gives us a New Law and suffers for the sins of the people. He is also like a new Israel. Unlike the Israelites who fell repeatedly in the desert, Jesus response to temptation with the same words with which they should have responded.

By uniting ourselves with the mystery of Christ's trial in the desert, we're reminded that the 40 days of Lent are like our journey through the desert in this life. If we remain faithful, following the new Moses, Jesus Christ, we too will enter into the true promised land of heaven.

Romans 5:12-19 New Living Translation (NLT)

Adam and Christ Contrasted

12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. 13 Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break.

14 Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. 15 But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. 16 And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. 17 For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed

God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.