

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS:
7. “Second Warning Passage: Do Not Choose Unbelief!”
Hebrews 3:7 – 18

Introduction:

We are studying of the Book of Hebrews when I am sharing God’s Word with you on Sunday mornings. This awesome work was written to first century Hebrew-speaking Christians, people who had come to know and follow Jesus. They were in grave danger **Falling Away** from their sincere faith walk with Jesus by His Holy Spirit! He writes with passionate heart-cry to the readers, to remain steadfast in their faith in Jesus Christ.

As He walks us through the Book of Hebrews it is on the Lord’s heart for us to fix our eyes on Jesus and His once and for all sacrifice for sins on the Cross. The **Saving Action** of God Almighty always originates in heaven in the heart of God, and not on earth in the human arena and what we do for God.

What these Hebrew-speaking Christians were doing was bringing their salvation experience into the human arena and what they had done and were doing for God: **Human Works Righteousness**. They were in danger of turning away from the one act of God, the Cross of Jesus that actually could save them and were thinking about how they could earn God’s favor by what they did for Him.

Our obedience to God must be motivated by something more than human duty. Our **Obedience** to God must be **Motivated** by the **Love** of God poured out into us by His Spirit. Our doing good works must always be a loving response to what Jesus has done for us in setting us free from sin’s power to enslave us! The author wants His readers to remember the truth Jesus taught to His followers very carefully so they would remember what He said.

John 14:15 – 17a *“If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – the Spirit of Truth.”*

John 14:18a – 21 *“Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*

Paul reminds us in Romans 5:5 *“And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.”*

In order to get his readers to think clearly about the movement of the saving action of God in Jesus Christ our Lord on the Cross, deliverance from sin and to inner victory, the author of Hebrews employs imagery in the third and fourth chapters that would have clearly connected

with his readers. It is something many first century Christian thinkers employed when explaining the wonderful work of God in Christ Jesus for us all on the Cross and in the empty tomb.

He writes these two chapters using the backdrop of their Israelite history under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. He used the analogy of their deliverance from bondage to Egypt, the walk through the Red Sea and their entrance into the Promised Land as an analogy of their deliverance from sin and into the spiritual victory of Holy Spirit-led living!

This is the same backdrop for what Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians in I Corinthians 10:1 – 13. He reminds his readers of the story of Israel's Exodus from slavery to Egypt and points to their wicked sinful patterns of not believing the God who was among them, falling dead in the desert and not entering into the provisions of God in the Promised Land!

1. Their historic deliverance from bondage to **Slavery** in **Egypt** analogous to Jesus delivering us from bondage to **Slavery** to **Sin**. He relates their exodus from Egypt and the Christian's exodus from a life dominated by sin.

Jesus told His followers in front of the religious leaders, John 8:34 *"I tell you the truth; everyone who sins is a slave to sin."* Paul warned his readers in Romans 6:6 *"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin."*

2. Their historic **Walk** through the **Red Sea** after they came out of Egypt is seen as analogous to **Baptism** of the **Believer** who has chosen to leave their life of willful sinning to know and walk with Jesus. It signified their leaving their old life of bondage to Egypt behind them as baptism signifies the believer's desire to leave their old life of bondage to sin behind them!

I Corinthians 10:1, 2 *"For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the Red Sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the Sea."*

Romans 6:1 – 5, The Message: *"So what do we do? Keep on sinning so God can keep on forgiving? I should hope not! If we've left the country where sin is sovereign, how can we still live in our old house there? Or didn't you realize we packed up and left there for good? That is what happened in baptism. When we went under the water, we left the old country of sin behind; when we came up out of the water, we entered into the new country of grace—a new life in a new land!*

That's what baptism into the life of Jesus means. When we are lowered into the water, it is like the burial of Jesus; when we are raised up out of the water, it is like the resurrection of Jesus. Each of us is raised into a light-filled world by our Father so that we can see where we're going in our new grace-sovereign country."

3. Their historic **Entrance** into the God-blessed life in their Promised Land is analogous the followers of Jesus choosing to follow the lead of God's Spirit into the God-blessed life, no longer living as slaves of sin! It is **Inviting** the Holy Spirit to **Live** in us, giving us the gift of new

life, power to live a life motivated by the love of God, holy, self-emptying, other-oriented love. The backdrop of their history of leaving Egyptian bondage and entering into God's Promised Land is marred by the **Wicked Sin** of **Unbelief**. That is what is in our author's mind as he uses this analogy of their history here in Hebrews 3 and 4.

The sad truth about their exodus from Egypt is **the first generation did not choose to go into the land with God but chose to rebel against His will in unbelief. The succeeding generations that did go into the land with God did not believe Him to lead them to be victorious over the evil inhabitants of the land.** Because they allowed people to live in their midst who did not love and obey God those people became a snare to them and led them to the sin of idolatry!

The Lord had clearly warned them, again and again, do not permit those wicked people, their idolatrous living, their wicked ways to live among you. Believe me to drive those people out before you. Yet when you read Joshua and Judges you see time and again they did not believe God. They left the inhabitants live among them, married them, and became like them, turning away from following God in His desire to bless them and make them wholly His possession!

Their failure to enter into all of the God-blessed life He had for them is analogous to our permitting the presence of **Sinful Self-Interest** to remain in us unacknowledged and unchallenged! When the Holy Spirit comes to live in us at our salvation, He brings with Him the nature of God, holy, self-emptying, other-oriented agape love of heaven poured into our hearts!

The presence of His love dwelling in us is the exact opposite of what is inherent in our humanity, sinful, self-interest. His love motivates us to **Live in Radical Love** for God and others. His love is powerfully transformative. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us will confront us relative to which nature we will follow as we choose to live our lives: Our human and sinful nature or the nature of God's Spirit who has come to live in us.

His Spirit's presence living in us invites us to **Choose** to **Believe** Him to confront and reject living solely by our human loves and appetites as our way of life! His love shed abroad in and burning in our hearts changes the way we see God, people, things, appetites, and the choices we make in lifestyle down to how we spend our money!

This is what is on our author's heart and mind as he writes these two chapters to his Hebrew speaking Christian brothers and sisters. He is inviting them to think through this powerful analogy from their past generations as he prepares to warn them about what happens to the followers of Jesus who choose to embrace a **Sinful Heart** of **Unbelief**.

I. Aspect 1 of the Warning: The State of Our Hearts!

Hebrews 3:7 – 11 *“So, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation and I said, ‘Their hearts are always going astray and they have not known my ways.’ So I declared on oath in my anger, ‘They shall never enter my rest.’”*

Our author is sounding a call that all of the voices recorded in the Bible, who spoke for God, including our Lord Jesus have carefully sounded for thousands of years. Each believer in Christ Jesus is responsible for the **Contents** and **Character** of what we cherish in our hearts. We have as much faith and love for Jesus burning in our hearts as we choose to have as we relate to Him in our devotional lives, read His Word and seek Him in prayer.

Solomon wrote a verse I so wish he would have paid more attention to in his own heart and life. Proverbs 4:23 “*Above all else guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.*” In Scripture your heart is not always referring to the muscle that pumps blood through your veins. It is often referring to the seat of your desires and affections, the central place from which our decisions in life flow!

The level of faith you combine with the Word of God as you read and hear it, the ability of your heart to **Receive** and **Believe** the Spirit of God desires to use that word from heaven to transform you on the inside, changing your thought processes and desires, is your choice and mine! We choose whether to be soft and pliable to God’s leadership in our lives or hardened and closed to His voice of direction and conviction!

The repeated warning in this text is, **when you Hear the Voice of the Spirit of Jesus** do not listen to that voice with a heart that has been hardened by codling sin and the roots of sin in self-interest. When the Holy Spirit who lives in you takes the initiative to speak to you about something that you are permitting to live in your life that displeases Him, get to the Cross of Jesus and deal with it!

Jesus spoke a parable to us about the contents and character of our hearts, how we choose to embrace or reject God’s Word. He spoke the parable of the sower to potential followers, which is recorded by Matthew in chapter 13, Mark in chapter 4, and Luke in chapter 8 of their Gospel messages. The point of that parable they recorded for us is the seed that is sown is the Word of God and the soils that receive the seed represents different kinds of hearts that hear the message.

Jesus said the seed of God’s Word received in a **Good** Heart that is soft and teachable to God **will produce a great harvest righteous fruit in that life.** The seed that falls on a **Hard** heart or a **Shallow** heart or a heart **Cluttered** by material things and gaining more wealth in life will fail to produce the fruit God so desires for that life. The choice of what kind of heart you and I have this morning has been made over the past 100 days as the Spirit of God has bidden us to get alone with Him reading and thinking about His Word and in prayer conversation with Him.

II. Aspect 2 of the Warning: An Unbelieving Heart Turns Away from God’s Will:

Hebrews 3:12, 13 “*See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.*”

The Hebrew author bids us to make the choice to have a heart that is soft, pliable in the hands of the Spirit of Jesus, that is teachable as He brings the Word of God to us. Notice with me that he says **having an Unbelieving Heart is Sinful.** Unbelief is not just having “no faith” or having

“little amounts of faith.” Unbelief is a choice that a person makes. The author clearly says it is a choice made by those who hear God’s Word and that choice itself is sin!

He says: “*See to it brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.*” The sinful and unbelieving heart **hears the voice of the Holy Spirit calling it to forsake sin and sin’s power rooted in our self-interest, but it chooses to not listen to the voice and embrace the message!**

The author is gently reminding the readers that the Lord God is immensely patient with our doubts and struggle to believe and receive God’s Word more deeply. The Lord Jesus was infinitely patient with His doubting follower Thomas who did not believe Jesus was really risen from the dead until he saw the risen Jesus for himself. The Holy Spirit is infinitely patient with you and me when we struggle to believe Him.

But when we make the choice to stubbornly **Refuse** to **Believe** His voice of conviction and direction, that is when we make the choice to embrace the wicked sin of unbelief. That is when we grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom we were sealed for the day of redemption. When He strives with us about an issue of our inherent sin, as we lean into His heart and seek Him for His cleansing power He works in us.

He tells us to encourage each other to be soft in heart before God! He encourages them to hang out with people who are encouraging them to be a man or woman of God, not those who will mock or harpoon your faith walk with Jesus!

But when He strives with us and convicts us again and again, and we choose to turn a deaf ear to His voice of conviction, turning again and again to that sinful behavior of which He has been convicting us, we can be on the dangerous ground of being hardened by sin’s deceitful desires, and we have made the choice to **Embrace** living in the wicked state of **Unbelief**.

III. Aspect 3 of the Warning: The Believing Heart Remains Steadfast in Christ Jesus:

Hebrews 3:14, 15 “*We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. As has just been said, ‘Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.’*”

The author is pleading with his present-day Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ **to Not Follow the Example of unbelief that was set by their ancestors** all of those generations ago. He pleads with them to learn from their history and not to repeat it today. When they were with Moses in the wilderness they chose the sin of unbelief and did not go in to the Promised Land. Forty years later when they did enter the Promised Land, they chose the sin of unbelief in removing the sinful influences from the land.

He reminds them their Christian walk began when they invited the Lord Jesus to redeem them, to cleanse them with His precious blood shed for them on the Cross. He reminds them that beginning well in the journey of faith in Jesus is a wonderful thing but there is a life to be lived

after we have been redeemed and that is of equal importance to beginning well. This is not a sprint it is a marathon race of faith over hills and through valleys in life.

He has just shown them in Hebrews 3:1 – 6 the fresh revelation of the **Person** and **Power** of God to save us, which we received in Jesus is **Superior** to the revelation of Moses, as He is superior to the revelation of the Law and of angels. If Jesus is superior and is the consummate voice of the love of God shed abroad in the human heart, then Jesus deserves to have our Absolute Obedience to His will for our lives.

That is what he is so carefully arguing for in the first three chapters and that is why he so carefully reminds them that they must **Hold Firmly to the end the confidence in Jesus Christ which they had when they began their journey with Him.** He passionately pleads with them to follow Jesus and to not be hardened by sin's deceitful promise of passing pleasures!

IV. Aspect 3 of the Warning: The Permanent Fruit of Choosing Unbelief:

Hebrews 3:16 – 19 *“Who were they who rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest, if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.”*

This powerful example for Israel's history remains a teaching tool for the people of God who would long to know and walk with Jesus more intimately than we presently do. It is absolutely integral that we **Choose** to **Feed** our **Faith** on the living and enduring Word of God. Faith comes from hearing the message in our heart, mind, soul and hearing comes by the Word of Christ Jesus.

To choose to live otherwise, is to permit sin's deceitfulness to grow three fruits in our lives, fruit that none of us ever willfully desire to having growing in us once we meet Jesus personally. These three things become part of the life of the person who chooses the **Sin** of **Unbelief**:

Sinfulness – as a way of life. Rather than defeating the desire to sin which we receive as we fellowship with Jesus, sin defeats us. As surely as those children of Israel were defeated by the wicked sins of the people they permitted to remain in the land, we will be defeated by sin's power to enslave us again!

Rebellion – This is the other side of the same coin. The life that is dominated by sin becomes a life that rebels against the living and enduring Truth of Jesus. God views rebellion as a very great evil, as the sin of witchcraft, Samuel told King Saul!

Disobedience to God's Will – This third fruit is the result of choosing to harden our hearts and walk away from the convicting work of the Spirit of Jesus as He bids us to the Cross, to deal with sin victoriously. When we choose not to walk with Him we choose disobedience to His will for our lives!

The author's point is left to our own human striving to obey we will end up exactly like the children of Israel ended up in the desert wanderings. **The truth is the self-life, self-interest is simply too cunning and clever for us to master it by our human grit, will and determination!**

Remember that often in the Bible sin is personified as an "it!" Speaking to Cain, God refers to sin: *"It desires to have you but you must master it."* To deal with the essence of our sin, our self-life with its insidious self-interest requires **Repeated Engagement** with the Son of God at the Cross where all sin dies in Him, sins we did and the motive to sin, self-interest!

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS:
7. "The Second Warning: Do Not Embrace the Sin of Unbelief!"
Hebrews 3:7 – 18

Introduction:

We are in a study of the Book of Hebrews! The author writes with deep love and heart-cry to a people who were in danger of **F**_____ **A**_____ from their sincere early devotion to know and follow Jesus.

He writes to show people the superiority of Jesus' once-and-for-all sacrifice originated in heaven in the heart of God and not on earth in human hearts.

These Hebrew Christians were bringing their salvation experience into what they were doing for God: Human **W**_____ **R**_____!

Our obedience to God must be motivated by more than human duty. Our **O**_____ must be motivated by the **L**_____ of God poured out into us by His Spirit. John 14:15 – 17a and 18a – 21, Romans 5:5

The author employs imagery from their history they would all have been very familiar with and receptive to: Their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, walk through the Red Sea, and entrance into the Promised Land.

1.) Their deliverance from **S**_____ in Egypt is analogous to our deliverance from **S**_____ to **S**_____ in Jesus' redeeming action!

John 8:34, Romans 6:6

2.) Their historic **W**_____ through the **R**_____ **S**_____ is analogous to the **B**_____ of the **B**_____ in Jesus who desires to leave his/her sinful life behind them. I Corinthians 10:1, 2, Romans 6:1 – 5 MSG

3.) Their historic **E**_____ into the God-blessed life of the Promised Land is analogous to followers of Jesus **I**_____ the Holy Spirit to **L**_____ in us giving us the gift of His love and life living in us!

Hebrews 3 and 4 are built on the truth that their entrance into the Promised Land of God is marred by the **W**_____ **S**_____ of **U**_____. The first generation didn't go in at all and the succeeding generations did not obey God's will to remove the sinful people from the land!

--Their failure to enter in is analogous to us permitting the presence of **S**_____, **S**_____ -**I**_____ to live in us unchallenged!

--The Holy Spirit living in us calls us to live a life of **R**_____ **L**_____ for both God and the people in our sphere of influence.

--The Holy Spirit invites us to **C**_____ to **B**_____ Him confronting and rejecting living solely on our human loves and appetites.

This is the basis for our author's second warning: Don't sin in **U**_____!

I. Aspect 1 of His Warning: The State of Our Hearts: Hebrews 3:7 - 11

Each believer in Jesus is responsible for the **C**_____ and **C**_____ of what we cherish in our hearts! Proverbs 4:23

The level of faith we combine with hearing God's Word puts the heart in a place to be able to **R**_____ and **B**_____ His truth!

When we hear the **V**_____ of Jesus speaking to us do not be hardened by codling sin with its roots in self-interest! In the parable of the sower Jesus said God's Word received in **G**_____ **H**_____ will produce fruit.

II. Aspect 2 of His Warning: An Unbelieving Heart Turns Away from God's Will: Hebrews 3:12, 13

He writes having an U_____ heart is S_____. He says it is a choice made by the hearers.

When we consistently make the choice to R_____ to receive His voice of conviction we have made the choice to have an unbelieving heart.

When the Spirit strives with us and we turn repeatedly to sin ...

III. Aspect 3 of His Warning: The Believing Heart Remains Steadfast: Hebrews 3:14, 15

The author exhorts the reader to N____ F_____ the E_____ of their ancestors' wicked sin of unbelief! He reminds them and us the same faith that began their journey with Jesus will draw them to run with patience the marathon race of faith before them!

In Hebrews 3:1 – 6 he has shown them and us the P_____ and P_____ of Jesus' redeeming love is S_____ to all things in salvation history. He exhorts them to H_____ F_____ to the end!

IV. Aspect 4 of His Warning: The Permanent Fruit of Choosing Unbelief:

Hebrews 3:16 – 19

Three things remain in a life that chooses the S_____ of U_____

1. S_____
2. R_____
3. D_____ to God's W_____

The self-life rooted in self-interest is too cunning for us to defeat it by our best grit, will, and determination. Sin is often referred to as an "it" in the Scriptures. Dealing with our insidious self-interest requires repeated E_____ with Jesus at the Cross!

Discussion Starter Questions for Home Groups

1. As you think about our Christian journey, what are some present-day dangers we face, causing believers to “turn away” from following Jesus in life?
2. Why is it so important for us to always be sure to do our acts of obedience to the Lord from a heart of love, instead of being motivated by duty?
3. Have you thought about Israel’s deliverance from slavery to Egypt, passing through the Red Sea, and entrance into the Promised Land as analogous to our salvation in Christ Jesus today?
4. Do you think people today really understand the part of the analogy of entering into the land and removing the evil influences, as analogous to us permitting the Holy Spirit to lead us to deal with inward sin and self-interest?
5. Why is the state of our heart, the contents and character of what we cherish in our hearts so important to the Lord God? Why are we to guard our hearts?
6. The author warns the readers about embracing the sin of unbelief. Why is unbelief a sinful thing in the eyes of God? Why does it break God’s heart?
7. Have you thought about your Christian journey as a marathon race of faith over hills and valleys in life, and the importance of finishing well?
8. Why is it important for us to combine faith with hearing the Word of God? What role does our faith play in receiving and believing God’s Word?
9. Read together aloud Romans 4 and discuss insights you have about Paul’s use of the word faith fifteen times as he discusses the life of Abraham man of faith.
10. What are some things the Lord God spoke to your own heart and life as you heard the message today? What are some ways your spiritual life alone with the Lord daily that you can strengthen your faith walk with Jesus? Do you have people in your life who encourage you to do the right things in your decisions?