

Helping Each Other Continue with Jesus

Hebrews 3:12-15

Halifax: 4 September 2022

Introduction:

Last week, in Heb. 3:7-11, we saw the command of our Lord, **“Do not harden your heart.”**

- We saw that this was much more than a mere theoretical danger.
- It happened to an entire generation of the church, and it was with the very generation that saw before their eyes the continual manifestation of God’s mighty power.
- Unbelief is not due to a lack of evidence, but due to a rebellious heart that refuses to accept the truth when it is presented to us.
- So again, last week, we saw the command: **“Do not harden your heart.”**

Today, in Heb. 3:12-15, we see His command to help one another *lest* we harden our hearts.

- Please listen carefully as I read today’s text to you because as always, it is from the holy word of God—it is His voice speaking to us.

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

Thanks be to God for His holy word. May He add His blessing to our hearing.

I. The first thing we see here is that we are to be on the lookout for unbelieving hearts among us.

- **“Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.”**

A. “Beware brethren.”

1. This is a clear call to be on the lookout for an evil heart of unbelief.
 - The word *beware* means *see...*
 - There is no place for sluggishness—we are to be alert and energetic...
 - We are to watch out for an evil God-resisting heart...
 - the way you’d watch out for vipers in a jungle that was known to be infested with them...
 - or the way you’d watch out for suspicious characters in a parking garage where there had been multiple attacks by a serial killer.
 - Even worse is to see and pretend you don’t...
 - Like the man that sees his neighbour struggling to get his car out of a snow drift and pretends not to notice...
 - Or like a parent whose child misbehaves and the parent quickly distracts himself because he doesn’t want to deal with it.

- We are to be ever on the lookout for an evil heart.
 - It is the source of ruin to many a soul.
 - We are to care about it.
2. And note the word *brethren*.
- We are not looking for evil heart of unbelief among outsiders—those outside the church, but among those within the church.
 - Is there an evil unbelieving heart among any of us?
 - Not that we don't care about unbelievers outside the church—of course we want to reach out to them.
 - But that is not what this is calling us to do... this text is calling us to lookout for an evil heart of unbelief among our brethren...
 - Among those who profess to believe and follow Jesus Christ.
 - We are to be on the lookout for an evil unbelieving heart among ourselves...
 - We are called *brethren* because we profess, not because we are necessary true sons of God—but because we profess to be such.
 - We have seen that not everyone who professes to believe believes.
 - The very people that God brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm had wicked unbelieving hearts so that they perished in the wilderness.
 - We are not to be unconcerned or indifferent about this most serious of all dangers. It is a danger not just to the body but to the soul forever and ever.

B. See how this unbelieving heart is described.

1. It is said to be an evil heart.
- Jeremiah tells us in Jer 17:9 that the heart of man is deceitful about all things and desperately wicked.
 - We all have such a heart by nature unless the Lord, by His grace, takes away our stony heart and gives us a responsive heart...
 - Unless He takes our heart that is spiritually dead and cannot respond to Him and makes it alive...
 - Until He circumcises our heart.
 - It is a heart that hates its own Maker and rejects Him.
 - Nothing is more wicked than that.
 - Every unbeliever has such a heart, no matter how nice they may appear to be. They are war with their Creator.
 - It is a depraved heart.
 - On the day of judgment, sinners will be turned over to their own way without restraint and we will see clearly what they are rejecters of God.

- If we are those who have been renewed by Christ, we will see clearly that we were no better—
 - We will marvel that God should care to forgive us and renew us and that He had forgiven us and transformed us while we were on the earth.
 - But there may be among those who profess to be saved but who are not, and who have an evil heart of unbelief.
 - We need to beware that such a heart is not in us or in our brethren.
2. This heart of unbelief is also said to be a heart that departs from the living God.
- The Greek word here is the word that we get the word apostasy from.
 - Here is one, you see, who outwardly has come to God and been reconciled to Him.
 - This is one who had taken his place among the redeemed and the sanctified... he professed to believe on the Lord Jesus for salvation...
 - But there he is, departing from Him—from the one true and living God!
 - To use the language of the Old Testament, God says,
 - **Jer 2:13: “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water.”**
 - What a wretched thing and what a foolish, stupid thing it is to walk away from the living God in whom alone blessing and eternal life!
 - Who would do that?
 - Think of it!
 - God also says in Jeremiah: **Jer 2:11: Has a nation changed its gods, which *are* not gods? But My people have changed their Glory for *what* does not profit.**
 - You hear of desperate people in North Korea who are defectors.
 - That makes sense.
 - But how is that anyone could be a defector from our gracious Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ?
 - Yet, it happens and we are to be on the lookout for it.
 - We are to be alert to it.
 - Remarkably, this is something that even true believers do at times.
 - They will not utterly depart, but they will begin to depart.
 - If they do not stop departing, it shows that they were never true believers.
 - But at first, their departing looks just like the departing of the one who is in fact an unbeliever.
 - The truth is that if they do not repent, they will perish.

- The difference is that the true believer has the see of new life and the Spirit of God in him so that he will repent.
- The unbeliever will only repent if he becomes a believer.

TRANS> But here is the thing. We don't know if our brother who is departing is a believer or an unbeliever. But we are to do what we can to stop him.

II. Our LORD commands us to exhort each other daily so as to keep each other from departing.

- You can see what He says about that in verse 13:
 - **v. 13: but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**
- A. You can see the goal—it is to keep each other from being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
1. If you have been a Christian for long, you have had the heart breaking experience of seeing a brother who once walked with you depart.
 - Perhaps you have asked yourself, "What might I have done to prevent him from doing that? What might I have said?"
 2. You would like it very much if I told you that there is nothing that you could have done.
 - You would like it if I explained that your brother has to answer for himself—which is true. Ultimately, he is responsible and though he might try to blame his former brethren, he is the one who departed from the living God, and his punishment will be most severe—much more severe than if he had never professed.
 - You would like it if I entirely excused you from all responsibility concerning your brother.
 3. But this text will not let me do that.
 - It will make me ask you if you did what God here tells you to do lest your brother should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
 - If you were in a position to do this and you did not, then you bear blame for that.
 - You are not the cause of your brother's defection, but you are to be blamed for not doing what you ought to have done to prevent it.
 - So lets examine what the Lord tells us to do lest our brother be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
- B. He tells us to exhort one another daily.
1. This is how we are to continually conduct ourselves toward each other lest any of us should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.
 - It says that we are to do this daily—even while it is called today.
 - Today—as long as we hear the voice of God...
 - As long as we have His word of so great a salvation that at first was spoken by our Lord and that was then confirmed by those who heard Him.

2. What does it mean to exhort one another?

- The word translated exhort is a very comprehensive word.
 - It is the word *parakaleo* in the original.
 - *Para* means *beside* and *kaleo* means *to call*.
- So the picture here is of one who comes to your side to speak to you...
 - It can be to plead with you, to urge you, to beg you, to comfort you, to rebuke you, to encourage you, to rebuke you, to instruct you, to warn you, to correct you, to admonish you, to exhort you...
 - always with a view to helping you—of speaking into your life what will benefit you.
- The one who does this is called a *paraclete*.
 - In John 14-16, the Holy Spirit is called the paraclete that Jesus sends to us.
 - Some versions translate it comforter, some translate it helper.
 - He tells us what we need to hear.
- So you see, if your brother is doing well, you are to encourage him;
 - If he is ignorant, you are to instruct him,
 - If he is in danger, you are to admonish him and warn him,
 - if he troubled by the death of a loved one, you are to comfort him;
 - if he is sinning, you are rebuke him;
 - if he is weary, you are to support him.
 - And you see, in particular, if he is departing from the Lord, you are exhort him.
 - You are to seek to prevent him from hardening his heart.

III. Our gracious LORD tells us that by exhorting each other daily, we really do keep each other from being hardened.

- It says to do this, “lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.”
 - These words help us to understand how our exhortations can help when our brother is being hardened.
 - It says that he is being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

A. Think again about how hardening works (we looked at this last week).

1. It happens when you hear God’s voice and resist it and then deceive yourself.
 - His word comes to you in thousands of applications and you harden yourself by resisting it—and you do deceive yourself that what you are doing is not that bad.
2. Let’s look at some everyday examples.
 - a. Perhaps your daughter breaks out in an angry rage against her little brother.
 - You see it and you know you ought to correct her—God’s voice says so, His word tells us to correct our children—but you resist.
 - You have just hardened your heart.

- And because we all like to feel good about ourselves, you begin to justify yourself.
 - Instead of repenting, you begin to rationalise and say that you need to give your child some space—that you don't want to be overbearing or to damage your relationship with her.
 - Maybe you add that you are tired and need to relax because it's been a hard day—and your tiredness might make you respond wrongly.
 - You are deceiving yourself that what you did was good and acceptable.
 - You are hardening yourself through the deceitfulness of sin.
- b. Or perhaps you are a student at university.
 - In your classes, you constantly hear that sex between any two consenting adults is perfectly acceptable...
 - whether they are the same or different genders, whether they are married or not.
 - And this seems to be the view of all your fellow students—you hear them harshly criticizing anyone who would have a different opinion.
 - You know that what you have believed is not just your opinion, it is what the Bible says, but you start to entertain the lie that is just your opinion.
 - You want to fit in. You don't want to have the tension.
 - You become “confused” about what the Bible teaches on this and start to explore alternative interpretations and to doubt what God's word plainly says.
 - You have just hardened your heart and deceived yourself.
 - Hopefully, someone will be able to wake you up.
- c. Now let's take an entirely different situation.
 - You are tired and feeling sorry for yourself after a hard day at work.
 - You come in, and the kids have made tents with furniture and blankets and cushions all through the house and you blow up at them and get in a fight with your wife when she tries to restrain you.
 - You know you have sinned,
 - but instead of repenting, you start to think about how you really needed to speak strongly to them—
 - they have not been listening to you.
 - they need to be corrected with a firm voice—Jesus got angry at the money changers in the temple...
 - And besides, you have had a hard day and they need to respect that and make allowance for you.
 - You are deceiving yourself—as if you have done no wrong.
 - You have just hardened your heart through the deceitfulness of sin.

B. What happens when you see your brother hardening himself and you exhort him?

1. By God's grace, you, by your words, cause the light of God's word to shine on him.
 - You expose his sin to him.
 - He may resist you and oppose you and argue with you at first.
 - You may have to wait and try again.
 - But once he yields, you have gained your brother!
 - You have brought God's light into his life.
 - He is able to respond to God's voice instead of continuing to harden himself.
- Do you see how this works?
2. God uses us to wake each other up—to shine His light so that we can see what is true and can be delivered from our deception.
 - Sometimes, you can be guilty of doing something that is quite wrong—
 - And you have been justifying it to yourself.
 - That is clearly what David did when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and then tried to cover it up by putting her husband in harm's way before Israel's enemies.
 - He needed to hear Nathan say, "You killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword of Ammon and took his wife to be your wife."
 - As soon as another person brings it up, you can see how wrong you have been and how you have deceived yourself.
 - Often there is great relief when that happens.
 - You can repent and return to joyful communion with the Lord.
 - You realise what you have been missing and what a fool you have been.
 - Go to your brother when you see him in error.
 - You have the power to wake him up.
 - God tells you to go and exhort him—to speak into his life.
- Again, there are thousands of illustrations that we could employ,
 - but the point is that
3. You are not to leave your brother to continue hardening his heart and deceiving himself.
 - Don't let him use his excuses and rationalisations.
 - You will be tempted to do that—to be polite in a way that you ought not...
 - To allow him to minimise his sin and to make excuses for it.
 - Remember, that is how sin works to deceive him.
 - Your role is not to make him feel better by letting him hold on to his deceptions—you can agree that he was in a hard place, but you must insist that there is no excuse for sin.
 - You are there to bring God's light to him—to remove the deception that he has fallen under so that he can respond to God's voice again.
 - Exhort him from God's word.
 - Bring the truth to bear upon him and don't let him worm his way out of it.

- This passage has made me see that I have been lax in doing that sort of thing, and I want to rectify that.
 - We are not be harsh, but neither are we to compromise.
 - Do we want to leave our brother with a heart that is departing from the living God?
 - He may not listen to us, but we need to at least do the best we can to turn him from his sin.
 - James concludes his epistle with these words:
 - **James 5:19-20: Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.**
 - Is this not what Nathan the prophet did to David in our reading from Samuel?
 - Is this not what parents need to do with their children?
 - Is this not what we all need to be doing with each other?
- C. What a wonderful thing it is that the Lord uses us to keep each other from departing from Him.
1. We certainly take note of the times when we have exhorted someone and it has failed.
 - But are there not many more times when it is has succeeded?
 - When the person you spoke to heart you and turned from their destructive way?
 - Have you not helped those who were being drawn into to sin to avoid it?
 - And have you not also helped those who have become entangled in sin and its deception to escape from it?
 - What a wonderful thing it is that we can make a difference.
 2. Verse 14 reminds us that that if we truly are partakers of Christ, we will continue in our confidence steadfast to the end.
 - This means that for those who are truly in Christ with saving faith will not utterly depart from Him.
 - They know there is no other Saviour, no other truth than His truth, and no other salvation than His salvation.
 - Our exhortations may or may not have any good effect on one who is not a true partaker of Christ—not truly in Christ...
 - Sometimes God will use us to actually lead them to salvation—they will actually come to know the Lord in a true saving away.
 - But in the case of those who are true partakers of Christ,
 - even if they resist you at first, you will have a part in restoring them.
 - God will use your exhortations along with other things to eventually bring them back—even if it is years later.

- That should be a grand motivation to exhort one another daily while it is called today—while God’s voice can still be heard!
3. We need to act quickly, before hardening is complete and they are shown to have been unbelievers all along.
- Verse 15 says we are to do it **“while it is said, ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’”**
 - You are to do it before the day of opportunity is past.
 - Satan will make every effort to keep you from going.
 - Don’t let him succeed in stopping you.
 - If you don’t go, you become part of the problem because now you are also resisting the voice of God.
 - How else do you think it is that entire churches can become like some of the mainline churches today?
 - How can they deny the miracles in the Bible, and have pastors that deny the resurrection or that live in shameful immorality?
 - Resisting the voice of God is a community thing...
 - But so is responding to the Lord and following Him faithfully.
 - Are you resisting God’s voice or responding to it?
 - **Exhort one another daily while it is called today lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.**
 - God has given us churches and commanded us to be an active part of them, not to pull each other down by justifying ourselves and making excuses to deceive ourselves,
 - but to build one another up in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.