

Hebrews

Chapter Three

Leon Combs, Ph.D.

Heb 3:1-4 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession. ²He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. ³For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. ⁴For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.

The word “therefore” means that what has preceded in this letter now brings us to this conclusion. Since Jesus has taken on our form and suffered for our sake He is worthy of all praise and of greater standing than anyone who came before Him. He calls the recipients of the letter “holy brethren”, which is a tender term meaning that they are special to him and to God. They can only be called holy because they are called by God. They can only be called brethren because of what the author said in: *Heb 2:17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

He uses a Greek word translated “consider”, which means to give what follows close attention and continuous meditation. The total concept of who Jesus is should be occupying our mind all the time. The author then tells the recipients to consider two particular aspects of Jesus. This is the only place in the NT where Jesus is called the Apostle. He is called the Apostle because He was sent by God on a particular mission. Saying that Jesus is the High Priest testifies to His sacrificial mission from God and He can be the High Priest of our confession because He has completed His mission on behalf of our particular needs before God. Because Jesus completed His mission we are saints before God. All of our sins were placed on the account of Jesus and the righteousness of Jesus was placed onto our accounts before God. Nobody can be any more righteous than those for whom this double imputation was completed. Christians are spiritual brothers of Jesus Christ as seen in Heb 2:11. Of course Christians are not holy in their walk in the world so the process of sanctification must be addressed throughout life as they continuously lose their sin nature and make their Christ nature more prominent in all that is done, thought, and said. He then is our High Priest as we confess to Him our daily sins in our walk in the world: *1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Christians have no need for legalistic rituals because we have access to the spiritual reality of Jesus Christ, the Apostle and High Priest. Jesus told us to learn **from** Him and **not about** Him: *Matt 11:29 Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls.* Our study and consideration of Jesus is not just an academic pursuit but the way to live as He would have us live.

In verse two, the author says that Jesus was faithful to the Father who appointed Him for this mission. Moses was held in great regard by the Jews and the author of this book does not bring up any of his failures but just lifts up his life as one dedicated to obeying God in his mission. Moses could be considered an apostle since the word means “sent one” but he was not a High Priest. Jesus brought a better covenant than Moses and He was the sacrifice for the covenant. When using the word “house”, he is meaning the group of people to whom Moses was given charge. The author is quoting from:

Numbers 12:7 "Not so, with My servant Moses, He is faithful in all My household;

Moses was only a part of the total household of God but Jesus is the author of the salvation for that household. Moses should be the recipient of considerable honor and to the Jews he was held in very high regard, but Jesus is worthy of much more honor. All OT believers were members of that household and Moses was the steward for it. God is the builder of everything (Gen 1, 2) and all glory should be for Him. Jesus is the head of the church, which consists of all of God’s chosen people from all ages:

Eph 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, ²¹in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord ²²in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Eph 5:23 For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.

Heb 3:5-6 Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; ⁶but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

He says that Moses was a faithful servant and the Greek word used for servant is *therapon*, which indicates the person is far above the position of slave but still a servant. The emphasis is then upon the subordinate but very honorable service of Moses. Saying that the work of Moses was a testimony of something to follow is probably pointing out that the service of Moses pointed to the far greater mission of Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant without the New Covenant is only the shell or shadow without the substance as we will see clearly when we study Heb 10:1. The author then says that Jesus is the Son who was faithful in His mission for the household of God. Those of us for whom Christ died are members of that household. However not all who profess such a position actually occupy it. Those who persevere are the saints who have been called for such membership and they will also remain faithful. Only those who are truly called will have the confidence in that calling that will sustain them throughout a difficult life on earth.

The Christian hope is a surety rather than the way people today routinely use the word. That hope will be a cause of boasting because it is not of our doing. God has given us the hope. Of course everyone reading this should be sure that they are real Christians: *2Cor 13:5 Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?* Then, if we know that we are Christians, we should keep our focus on Jesus continually as we learn **from** Him.

Heb 3:7-11 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "Today if you hear His voice, ⁸Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, ⁹Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me, And saw My works for forty years. ¹⁰"Therefore I was angry with this generation, And said, 'They always go astray in their heart; And they did not know My ways'. ¹¹As I swore in My wrath,' They shall not enter My rest.' "

In these verses the author draws a contrast between the “house” of Moses and the “house” of Jesus. He urges those who hear the message of the mission of Jesus Christ not to harden their hearts to that message. He is uncertain who in the congregation has been born again and repented to serve Jesus as Lord. The author then quotes from a Psalm probably written a thousand years before the writing of the book of Hebrews. Two thousand years later the warning is still valid. *Psalm 95:7-11 For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice, ⁸Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness; ⁹"When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work. ¹⁰"For forty years I loathed that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. ¹¹"Therefore I swore in My anger, Truly they shall not enter into My rest."*

The writer of Hebrews begins by stating the inspiration of Scripture as he says that the Holy Spirit says what follows. He uses the word “today” not to indicate a twenty-four hour period of time but to emphasize the urgency of the matter. It may be that since it had been 40 years since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the author was pontificating on that correlation. The Israelites rejected God for 40 years while they wandered in the wilderness and now it was about 40 years since their descendents had rejected Him. The destruction of the temple was about 40 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Interestingly I have been born again for about 40 years! The number 40 is the Biblical number for testing. The Israelites had seen many miracles of God during their escape from Egypt and in their travel since that exodus. But they continually rejected God and so revealed that their hearts were hard. God then rejected them by destroying them: *Jude 1:5 Now I desire to remind you, though you know all things once for all, that the Lord, after saving a people out of the land of Egypt, subsequently destroyed those who did not believe.* The rest of God is that place where all children of God long to be and it is used here as a symbol for completed salvation. It is a place of relief from all stress and uncertainty and a place where His children can relax in His existence and bathe in the purity of His presence. As long as we

live here our sanctification will not be complete and so our rest will not be complete. When we enter that final rest we will be entirely holy as He is holy since our Adam nature will be totally gone. God's wrath is a horrible thing to contemplate and awaits all who have a hard heart:

John 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

Heb 3:12-13 Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God. ¹³But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Just as we can never be sure that someone else is truly a child of God, the author points out that he also cannot be sure that everyone to whom this letter is written has been regenerated and justified by the work of Jesus Christ. He continues to call them brethren as he hopes (in a human way since he cannot know their heart) that they all are brothers of Christ and thus with him. However the word "brethren" refers to racial brothers. In verse 3.1 he used the term "holy brethren" as he was including those redeemed people. But all of them should search their hearts to make sure that they do not have an evil, unbelieving heart. The falling away is not from some dead doctrine but from the living God. The Jews might respond that they had faithfully served the same God as the Christians but by rejecting Jesus they are rejecting God even though they might work to follow on their own merit the commands of God as stated in their many laws. The heart refers to their mind and their will to act for man's natural heart is evil:

Gen 6:5 Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Gen 8:21 And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.

2Chronicles 12:14 And he did evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord.

Proverbs 6:18 A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil,

Proverbs 12:20 Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy.

Jesus also referred to the evil heart as the source of all evil:

Matt 12:34 "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.

Matt 15:19 "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

Luke 6:45 "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.

The author places a high priority on Christian fellowship involving encouraging each other. If we see a fellow member of our Christian fellowship sinning we should interact with him as proposed by Jesus:

Matt 18:15-17 "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. ¹⁷"And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer.

When he says that people should encourage each other day by day he means continually for “today” does not last forever and nobody knows when the day of death will come and then it is too late for repentance. Sin is certainly deceitful and it usually begins without the appearance of gross evil. James also gives us a similar warning:

James 1:14-16 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. ¹⁵Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren.

The author will give a similar warning later also: *Heb 13:9 Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefited.*

These Jewish Christians would be tempted by their Jewish friends to add to their belief system some of the ways of the Jews such as required circumcision and forbidding of eating some foods but such are attempts at formulating a false gospel and will lead one astray from the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Heb 3:14-15 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end; ¹⁵while it is said, "Today if you hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me."

To be a partaker of Christ is to be “in Christ”, which is often used in the NT to refer to those who have been born again and have the righteousness of Jesus Christ put into their account by God. Those who are truly partakers of Christ will hold fast to the assurance of salvation until they die or Jesus comes again (the “end” can have either meaning). When we were first justified our assurance was firm and it is only as we continually walk in the world that our assurance may fade a bit. However as we worship God properly and grow in our Christian stature our assurance should be strengthened. Verse 15 has already been stated in verses 7-8 so the author is just reasserting his warning and his exhortation to remain firm in the faith. Jesus also warned people to abide in Him: *John 8:31 Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;*

If our faith does fail us then it was never true faith for Jesus is the author and perfecter of true faith:

Heb 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Heb 3:16 For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did He swear that they should not enter His rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹And so we see that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

The author then poses five redundant questions. Every one of the people who were saved from slavery in Egypt and then wandered in the wilderness except for Joshua and Caleb were judged to have hard hearts and prevented from entering God's rest (not just the physical land of Canaan). The ratio of saved to lost people in this group was about 2/2,000,000 and that is a very small percentage! Similarly every church body in the world should be so warned. The first question shows that all heard God but did not apply the words to their hearts and minds and so provoked God. The second question shows that these people were led by Moses but indicates that they were just following a man and not devoted to following God. Many people today are led by men in churches but not partakers of Christ and will face the same judgment of God that fell upon those Israelites. Those who only follow some teacher and even do mighty works will have their true heart revealed at the last judgment:

Matt 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

The third and fourth questions affirm that the people who received the wrath and judgment of God on their bodies were the people who sinned during the 40 years of testing. The fifth question states that those who were denied His rest were those who refused to obey Him. These people went their own way rather than obeying God and such a dire statement is due a lot (maybe most) of the people living today, even those professing to be following Jesus.

These people were not able to enter the rest. Faith is the enabling power of God and these people never received that faith. The author is emphasizing to all who read this letter that slipping away from the Christian profession is a fatal error of unbelief with eternal consequences.