

November 30, 2014  
Sunday Evening Service  
Series: Hebrews  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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**DISOBEDIENCE IS REBELLION WHICH FORFEITS  
GOD'S PROMISED REST  
Hebrews 3:7-19**

The more I study this letter to the Hebrews, the more it sounds like God wrote it yesterday. How up-to-date the warnings and instruction are. Regularly we read in the news about lawbreakers and rebels. We know that there are a lot of people who break the law and sometimes they are actually apprehended and incarcerated.

However, if you have been alive for a long time, you realize that things have changed in our culture. It is quite clear that what once was considered to be breaking the law is now, not only acceptable, but popular. And if you still think it is lawbreaking, the politically correct people will mock you, call you a Neanderthal and maybe persecute you and possibly even prosecute you.

I have good news for you. God, our Creator, the Ruler of the universe forever, still does not tolerate disobedience and rebellion. Oh sure, He is long-suffering and allows sin to proliferate. But as sinners dig their pits of sin deeper and deeper, they are piling up more and more of God's anger against themselves. One day they will realize too late that there is no hope at all for them to enter God's eternal rest in heaven.

The Old Testament Israelites illustrated this principle beyond question. The author who wrote to his contemporary Israelites challenged them to wake up and pay attention. He challenges us to do the same.

**Don't Respond to God Like the Forefathers Did (vv.7-9).**

This is an invitation from the Holy Spirit for the readers to guard their response (vv.7-9). The original readers were Jewish converts to Christ, or at least distant followers of Christ. We are the readers today. The invitation is, "If you hear God speaking . . ." *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice" (v.7).* How does God the Holy Spirit speak? Sometimes God spoke audibly. Often God spoke through prophets. How did that work? It seems that there were times that God gave the prophets intuitive messages. At other times, He spoke by dreams and visions. Maybe God spoke to them in ways we cannot understand. But we know from the opening words of this letter that God spoke to His people in times past through the prophets.

The letter also reveals that there were times when God sent messages through angels. But most certainly, God speaks through the Bible, the writing of which was under the guiding power of the Holy Spirit. Peter was absolutely certain that *knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20-21).*

The Old Testament was part of that Scripture the Holy Spirit spoke. Therefore, the following four verses are a quotation from Psalm 95, which is the Old Testament, which is the Hebrew's Bible, which are the words the Holy Spirit spoke. *For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest" (Psalm 95:7-11).*

This letter highlights the fact that it is entirely possible that you might hear God speak in such words. The phrase *if you hear* can mean, on the one hand, that God speaks clearly through evidences of common grace. That is what David meant when he wrote, *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his*

*handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy (Psalm 19:1-5).*

On the other hand, God is not obligated to speak to any sinner particularly, nor is He especially required to draw a sinner with saving grace. When God speaks specifically, it is most typically through His Word since faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17). By this means, God speaks to our conscience which responds to truth. But if we resist God's truth long enough, our conscience no longer responds nor can it identify God's truth. Paul warned Timothy about this awful condition. *Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons (1 Timothy 4:1).* He offered the same warning to Titus. *To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled (Titus 1:15).* If we hear from God, it is a wonderful expression of His grace. Don't presume He is obligated to speak to you.

If you do hear from God, guard your response. Don't respond like some of God's people in the past did. The writer put it like this: *Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness (v.8).* God kept giving His people tests to prove their faithfulness and trust and they kept failing the tests. All the time the people were in the wilderness, God was testing them. The problem was that the people could not pass the test because they would not listen. They could not listen because they hardened their hearts in rebellion. To harden is to make stubborn, to stiffen the neck. The Greek word gives us the English word *sclerosis*, which is the hardening of tissue or other anatomical parts.

Therefore, hardening the heart is a matter of choice. You make your heart hard against God because you are in rebellion against God. Rebellion is our natural condition which we got from our father Adam who got it from Satan. So the challenge is that when God is gracious enough to speak to us, we are responsible not to rebel.

By way of example, the writer pointed out that in the past the recipients of God's blessing put Him to the test. He wrote that we must not harden our hearts like they did in the wilderness, *where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years (v.9).* The day of testing was forty years long. It was a sad process to see. God would do amazing miracles (starting with ten plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea), and the people would express faith in Him for a few days. Then they would resort to complaining against God and falsely accusing God and the leaders He appointed. In fact, the people would turn the test around and put God to the test, as though God needed to prove that He trusted them and that He would be faithful to them.

Common sense is aghast with such brazen arrogance. But do we realize how easily we do the same thing? We make demands on God and then get disappointed or accusatory if God doesn't work according to our plan or timing. Too often we expect God to approve of our will so we can call it God's will.

God was displeased with the forefathers' response just as He will be displeased if we respond the same way (vv.10-11). The writer pointed out that God was provoked with the rebels. *"Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways'" (v.10).* God's wrath was stirred against the people He delivered from bondage. In the original text in Psalm 95:10 we read, *"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" (Psalm 95:10 NASB).* The word reveals that God had a continual feeling of loathing toward His own people. The English word loathe means, to feel intense dislike or disgust for; to hate, detest, abhor; to feel repugnance toward. Try to imagine God holding that kind of attitude toward you!

God was angry with that generation because they had witnessed so much of God's mercy and grace but continued to have the trait of wandering away from God. As David put it, *They always go astray in their hearts.* Something was constantly deceiving them. More precisely it was the deception of the fleshly desires, Satan, sin, and false teachers (even among themselves). And so in their hearts, the seat of the intellect, the will, and the emotions, the people made wrong choices.

They made wrong choices because *they have not known God's ways*. The people had never come to know God's ways through experience. In spite of being the recipients of so many of God's blessings, they were still strangers toward God's ways. Though they lived in the larger environment of "the people of God," the individuals had no meaningful relationship with Him. This is the issue addressed several times in this letter. We will read that *those who formerly received good news failed to enter God's rest because of disobedience* (4:6). The writer points out that *it is impossible to restore those who have fallen away* (6:4-6), and *if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins* (10:26).

This is an issue that must be addressed in the modern age of cheap Christianity. Many are the people who profess to be followers of Christ because they made some kind of decision when they were younger. But their lives are characterized by the same traits as sinners. God warns that disobedience to Him in every age or any age results in His wrath against the sinner.

Because God loathed those people who hardened their hearts against His word, God swore that they were hopeless. "*As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest'*" (v.11). Yes, it is clear from this text that God made an oath. In His oath, God determined forever that the people would not enter His rest. The "rest" God promised to the forefathers was the Promised Land. But because of the people's persistent disobedience, God chose to keep them out of His rest, away from His promise.

God didn't just decide but made an oath to that end. Rather, He took this unusual step in spite of the fact that He made an oath earlier that He would put the people in the land. Moses reminded the remnant who was left, *In spite of this, you didn't trust the LORD your God, who went ahead of you to find places for you to camp. He appeared in a column of fire at night and in a column of smoke during the day to show you which route to take. When the LORD heard what you said, he was angry and took this oath: "Not one of these evil people will ever see the good land that I swore to give to your ancestors"* (Deuteronomy 1:32-35).

Notice that God was angry when He made the oath. In the Hebrew text in Psalm 95:11, the word *wrath* is the very descriptive

word that speaks of anger that causes *flared nostrils*. God does not look lightly on disobedience and rebellion. That God responds to rebellion with anger should be obvious in a generation that despises God, rejects His Word, and attempts to undo all laws that reflect God's character (though that is impossible). Because your generation despises God, there is to be no retaliation by God-ordained authorities against rebellion and disobedience. All rebellion is supposed to be met with patience, toleration, and passive acceptance. God is long-suffering, but, ultimately, He is angry with the sin of our world, our generation, and our culture. One day everyone will understand how angry. In fact, God's wrath is even now being poured out against all unrighteousness (Romans 1:18).

From this point on, there was no way possible for those people to get into the Promised Land. They wanted to persist in their disobedience. When God swore an oath to prohibit them from the Promised Land, He virtually turned them over to their rebellion. Even feigned repentance after that is short-lived and insincere. And so it is still true that rebels are not sorry for their sin, they are sorry they get caught in their sin.

Hereafter we are going to run into the term "brothers," which causes us to wonder to whom the warning is addressed. "Brothers" is most likely a reference to fellow Jews in this case. Therefore, it would be to religious sinners who have heard the truth, often make decisions about the truth, but remain unregenerated. Yet on a certain level, there is also warning to genuine believers who choose to sin in disobedience to God. Following is the application of the foregoing warning.

### **We are Responsible to Respond to God Correctly (vv.12-15).**

The warning is for people who are familiar with the Bible and God-kind of stuff to guard against an unbelieving heart. The danger is that it is possible for "brothers" to have evil, unbelieving hearts. *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart* (v.12a). The challenge, *take care*, is a serious warning because of the attending consequences. All members of the local assembly were supposed to see to it that neither they personally or their fellow Christians had an evil, unbelieving heart.

An evil heart is an intellect, will, and emotion that is in bad condition. The word often describes a rebellious or disobedient spirit. That kind of spirit comes about from failure to trust God. That is what *unbelieving* means. Religious people are quite satisfied to do religious stuff, but they fail to trust God's perfect plan for salvation. Religious pride often looks like very serious dedication to God; but in reality, it is dedication to an organization, a creed, or a person. Such dedication is still unbelief, which God considers to be evil. Sadly this condition probably defines the majority of professing Christians in America. We must take care to ferret out an evil heart that is not believing God.

Furthermore, it is possible for "brothers" to fall away from the living God. The unbelieving heart is *leading you to fall away from the living God (v.12b)*. To fall into the pit of an evil and unbelieving heart is to fall away from God. For the unsaved person, that is to lose all hope of receiving God's grace unto salvation—they don't get into the promised "rest."

That is why we need to challenge each other. The text states that to prevent unbelief, we need to be exhorting each other. *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today" (v.13a)*. We are to keep calling each other alongside or, more exactly, encourage others to take a stand alongside the Bible. Encourage them to stand with you who ought to be standing on the truth of God's Word. The act of exhorting is often viewed as "preaching" in the New Testament. Therefore, in light of this command, we conclude that it is not best to preach in order to make all attendees comfortable, happy, and satisfied with themselves. It is always best to call people alongside the standard of the Bible and let God do the necessary work in the hearts of the hearers.

We need to be faithful to do this while it is called "today." The day will come for every person in the world when there is no longer opportunity to respond. Someone once said there will be no soul winning in heaven and obviously none in hell. Also, before a person hardens his heart to the point of no return, exhort, exhort, exhort! Why? Mutual exhortation prevents hardening of the heart. The reason is so *that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (v.13b)*.

It is not only possible, but likely, that hearing the good news without humbly believing it will result in hardening of the heart. At some point, a hard heart cannot accept truth which is like good seed landing in the middle of the road—it isn't going to take root. A hardened heart is the result of it being deceived by sin. Satan, the author of sin, convinces people that sin is not so bad. After awhile, the sinner believes that sin is even acceptable. Finally, he or she concludes that sin is right and begins calling evil good and good evil.

You live in a culture where the hearts of millions of people have been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Therefore, do not expect most of our political leaders to make decisions that honor God. And do not expect our justices to draw biblical conclusions. Almost without exception, they will make decisions contrary to God's truth because their hearts are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Our leaders do what they do because they are helplessly deceived by sin.

But not us! We who truly follow Christ are to remember our confidence. We are already sharing Christ. We have already gained a share at some time in the past. As the author put it, *For we have come to share in Christ (v.14a)*. We do not have hard hearts, and we are not deceived by sin. Rather we have become sharers of Christ. Therefore, we live in a most intimate relationship with Him. It is almost as though we have drunk His blood of His sacrifice and eaten His flesh given to us (John 6). More than that, He is indwelling us right now in the person of the Holy Spirit.

The reality that we truly are sharing Christ is revealed in our perseverance. *It is if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end (v.14b)*. This sharing is true for every person who does not turn back. Many are the people who have enjoyed some kind of special religious experience, maybe even for a long time. They heard the word of Christ, they concluded that it was true, they embraced it for their own. But when the trials of life and temptations to sin came along, they changed their mind and turned back into the world. True followers of Christ cannot, will not do that. We hold our confidence in Christ's promise to save us and indwell us forever. Continually holding that confidence is proof that we are born again.

Therefore, **if** you hear God's voice respond correctly. *As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in*

*the rebellion*” (v.15). “If you hear God’s voice” is also a warning because it means that not everyone does. Though God speaks loudly and clearly, many people deny it is God speaking in the creation or speaking in the Bible. They purposely harden their hearts and try to deceive themselves into believing that the Bible is just a collection of myths and creeds, and the creation is a process of evolution and amazing intergalactic accidents. To be consistent, these people must also believe that if a Hummer and a Volkswagen collide on the highway, the result will be, not two crumpled piles of metal, but a shiny new Hummer that gets 35 mpg. Failure to hear God’s voice is the result of rebellion against Him when you did hear Him.

### **A Wrong Response to God Reveals Rebellion (vv.16-19).**

The writer answers several questions that he himself posed in this last verse of our text. Who heard and rebelled? Whoever it was, heard but rebelled in spite of what they heard. *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled?* (v.16a). The people of Israel heard God. “No, they didn’t,” someone might protest. “They heard Moses.” The people knew that God spoke through Moses. And when they chose to rebel against Moses’ instruction, they rebelled against God’s word.

They rebelled in spite of God’s deliverance. Answer to the previous question: *Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?* (v.16b). Those people experienced amazing works of God through Moses. But it doesn’t matter what you experience if you fail to believe God.

Who provoked God? God showed much patience for the rebels. Nevertheless the question is asked, *And with whom was he provoked for forty years?* (v.17a). God put up with the rebellion for forty years. God was angry for forty years. The hardening unto hopelessness was a long and slow, but inevitable, process. God finally judged the rebels. Again the answer: *Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?* (v.17b). As God promised, everyone died in the wilderness except Joshua and Caleb. That God was angry with the sinners became undeniably clear in time.

Who didn’t enter God’s promised rest? The people didn’t enter God’s rest because He swore an oath that they would not. The writer questioned, *And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his*

*rest?* (v.18a). Again we learn that God judged them because they were disobedient. It was none other than *those who were disobedient* (v.18b). Disobedience always leads to judgment . . . even for the Christian who God chastens. But when God swears an oath against a disobedient person, that person is hopeless.

Finally, we learn that the root to rebellion is unbelief. *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief* (v.19). Refusal to believe God is rebellion, which looks like disobedience. The Bible is full of such examples like Adam and Eve, Cain, Kings Ahab and Manasseh, and a host of others. Indeed it is true of all sinners at some point that we do not believe what God says. The ultimate consequence of that unbelief is eternally serious. Unbelief will keep you from God’s promised rest. “Oh! But I believe God,” you protest. Does your obedience to God prove that you believe Him? God refuses to let disobedient rebels into His eternal rest. Disobedience is clear proof of disbelief.