

HEBREWS

Message 19

Date: 2022-12-04

Words: 5537

Reading: Psalm 51:1-10

INTRO: There is one matter that makes me question whether it was someone other than Paul that wrote this letter. It is that the great catching up is not mentioned, since it occurs before the millennial kingdom. So, I look forward to what I might yet learn in this book.

The book of Hebrews is a book of warning. There is always a section of teaching and then a warning follows. Chapter 1 was 14 verses of teaching and then 18 verses dealing with a warning. Now we have 6 verses of teaching and 29 verses of warning. This warning begins in verse 7 and verses 7-11 are a quote from Psalm 95. The warning begins like this: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

The writer then shows that all those who came out of Egypt could not enter the land of rest. I have viewed the land of Canaan, not as picturing heaven, but picturing the millennium. The Hebrews had started their faith in Christ on fire for the Lord. They had suffered the plundering of their goods and persecution. They were looking for deliverance, just like the children of Israel were longing for rest. But Israel of old failed through disobedience, which is nothing but a lack of faith.

Now the writer warns these Hebrews that they too may fail of entering the kingdom they were waiting for. They longed for deliverance from the dominion of Rome. But the writer is warning that if they go back to Judaism, they will not enter that coming kingdom either. So he said, "Today, if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." And because of their rebellion God ended up saying, "You will not enter my rest." And so, they did not.

2) As applied to the Hebrews (3:12-15)

Having given this example from the OT, the writer now applies this warning to Israel. In the first warning the writer said this in 2:1-3a:

1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward,

3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation,

The warning is this: We must not drift away because the word spoken through angels in the OT proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation. And the answer is: If they did not get away with it, neither will we, the NT believer.

And now the writer has given an example from the OT of the Israeli's who failed God in the wilderness. Here is another OT example which serves as a warning to the NT believer. And so, we go now to verse 12 and before we do that let us read verses 12-15:

12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;

We begin with the words, "Beware, brethren." The word translated "beware" is among the first words I learned in Greek. It was simple. It just means "to see." It has this idea of being aware, seeing where one is going. If one doesn't, soon one may stumble.

Then note this is addressed to brethren. Who is that? Well, we say, it refers to Christians, of course. But if one holds to OSAS or to Calvinism, this cannot refer to Christians, because then an evil heart of unbelief can grow up in Christians. So how is this handled by those Bible teachers?

John MacArthur deals with it by saying this book is addressed to three groups of people. There were first weak believers. Then there were two groups that were not saved. The first of these were those who were intellectually convinced of the Gospel. They believed the truth, but only intellectually. That is, they give mental assent to the Gospel, but they never really become Christians.

Then there were those who had not been convinced at all. Now you can check when you read the book of Hebrews to see if you ever find two separate groups, never mind, three. I do not find three groups. I find one group, and they are discouraged believers. MacArthur gives three groups to keep his Calvinism intact by making room for the warnings in the book. If Calvinism is true, why warn believers?

So, the brethren mentioned in verse 12, according to these teachings, are for those who were not true believers. How does he explain this? Like this; he says:

"Many people claim the entire book of Hebrews is addressed to believers since the author uses the word "brethren." However, "brethren" is sometimes used in the New Testament to refer to unsaved Jews (eg., Acts 2:29; 13:38). When the writer of Hebrews wished to make clear he was speaking to believers, he used the term "holy brethren." End quote. So, when it says "holy brethren" then it refers to true believers. Only believers are holy brethren, since they are Christ's brethren (Heb. 2:11). Therefore, this passage is addressed to Christians.

When we come to verse 12, they are just called brethren. So, what is the explanation that they could be addressed as brethren if they are not truly Christians? The answer is that these were brethren

because they were Jews, not because they were Christians. But my question is this: if they were not Christians, how could they beware lest there was in any of them an evil heart of unbelief. If they were not Christians there was already an evil heart of unbelief in them. There is then no use giving this warning to them.

Let me make this note here; the writer addresses his audience as "brethren" 8 times in this book, and only once are they called "holy brethren." So, is only Hebrews 3:1 written to true Christians? In 2:11 the writer says this:

*11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them **brethren**,*

Since it does not say "holy brethren" does that then mean they were Jesus' Jewish brethren? When one has a wrong teaching, one must do many fancy twistings and turnings in Scripture.

The clear warning here is that believers can let an evil heart of unbelief grow within them. These Hebrew Christians had once been on fire for the Lord. How could they grow an evil heart of unbelief? By disobedience. They were setting aside Jesus Christ and giving in to Jewish teachings about angels bringing in the kingdom. They were giving up on Jesus Christ and wanting to go back to Judaism. They were backsliding and here they received warning after warning.

Since a true believer will never depart from the faith, in MacArthur's view he says:

"People always say to me - and we preach this so many times, but it's all over the Bible. People say to me, 'What about so-and-so? He used to come to church. He

used to say he believes and now he's gone.' I say to you, 'That's proof pudding that he never was saved to begin with, because the Bible says that if you're for real you stay there.' 'If you keep My commandments, then are you My disciples for real.'"

"...And when somebody departs from the faith, when somebody backs away from the faith, I quote you what the Bible says in reference to them in 1 John 2:19. It says, 'They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out that they might be made manifest they were not of us.'"

This is a most misunderstood verse. For those who might be interested, we have a message on sermonaudio/mecl called, "They Went out From Us." 1 John 2:19 is used by the Calvinist and the OSAS as evidence for their doctrine. There are some very crucial verbs and verb tenses that explain that verse and it has nothing whatever to do with those doctrines.

Then consider further that these Hebrews were warned not to grow an evil heart of unbelief by departing from the living God. Now if this is spoken to those who have never truly believed, how could they depart? They could not depart from the faith because they had never been in the faith. And furthermore, if they were unbelievers and did not depart, would they then be safe?

The truth of the matter is that it is the believer that is warned here to beware lest there be in any of them an evil heart of unbelief. When unbelief sets in, in the mind, then one begins to depart from the Lord.

Now note that this departure is from the living God. There is only one living God. All other gods of the imagination are not

alive. Here is an important attribute of God. He is alive; He lives.

Turn to Psalm 114. Here we get a look at what gods are like that are not alive. There is no life in them.

Verse 1:

1 Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, But to Your name give glory, Because of Your mercy, Because of Your truth.

2 Why should the Gentiles say, "So where is their God?"

3 But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.

Let me add here that since God is also entirely good, therefore only that which is godly, just, right, and good pleases Him.

Verse 4:

4 Their idols are silver and gold, The work of men's hands.

5 They have mouths, but they do not speak; (Why not? They are not alive) Eyes they have, but they do not see; (Why not? They are not alive)

6 They have ears, but they do not hear; (Why not? They are not alive) Noses they have, but they do not smell; (Why not? They are not alive)

7 They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat.

8 Those who make them are like them; So is everyone who trusts in them.

Let me quote here from my notes on the doctrine of God on the attribute that He is the living God:

"So now we want to consider that our God, the God of the Bible is a living God! I should say, He is THE living God! You see, He does not only exist, as the earth or the universe exists. He is alive!

"So, before we go on, we must consider the word 'life'. Since God Almighty is a living God and all other gods do not have life we need to explore the meaning of life. Augustus Strong, in his comprehensive systematic theology says, "Life is a simple idea, and is incapable of real definition." If you want to tax your brain power, try to define the word 'life'. For years I have used Funk & Wagnalls College dictionary. Let me give you their first definition of life. Life is, "The form of existence that distinguishes animals and plants from inorganic substances and dead organisms, characterized by the properties and functions of protoplasts as manifested in metabolism, growth, reproduction, irritability, and internally initiated adaptations of individual organisms to the environment." Well, that's a bit hard to digest so let me reduce that definition to English. *Life is the opposite of death and is characterized by such things as reproduction and growth.* That is about as useful as saying darkness is the absence of light.

"After some years of pondering this topic I would define 'life' like this: **Life is continual, successive, active, productive, and energetic existence.** Now such lifeless things as rocks have continual, successive

existence, but it stops there. Their existence is not active, nor productive nor energetic. Even an unconscious person's body is active and productive. If it were to cease to be actively productive, the body would immediately set about dying."

Let me just add here before I continue the quote that there are two kinds of life mentioned in the NT and it helps to understand them. So, I continue the quote now:

"Now the NT speaks of two kinds of life. There is physical life for which the word 'bios' is used. We get our word 'biology' from that word. Then there is spiritual life. It is zoe, and whether rightly or wrongly, we get our word 'zoology' from it. When we say God is the 'living God' it is the word zoe that is used.

"Now let me explain bios and zoe life briefly. Let us start with bios life. We find it used in 1 Peter 4:2 which says, "...that he no longer should **live** the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the desire of God." The verb is the word *bioo*, of which the noun form is *bios*. "In Acts 26:4 Paul says, "My manner of **life** from my youth..." He is talking about his physical life. So I define physical, bios life, as the continual, successive, active, and productive physical existence.

"But God does not have *bios* life. He does not have a body. He has zoe life. Listen to John 5:26, For as the Father has life (zoe) in Himself; so He has granted the Son to have life (zoe) in Himself." Now that life is not *bios* life. It is spiritual life. It is the kind of life we get when we get saved for the phrase 'eternal life' is

aionios zoe. Maybe you have wondered about verses like this: John 11:26, "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die..." Now that is not bios life. It is physical or zoe life. It spiritual life, the kind of life God has. So I would define spiritual life as continual, successive, active, and productive spiritual existence.

"Now let me make a few points from these two kinds of life. We all know that we must maintain our physical life or die physically. It is maintained by the intake of the right mixture of air, food and water. It is also maintained by remaining in an atmosphere conducive to physical life. For example, if one should not be dressed for -40 weather, such as we have around here, our life would stop in a short time. So, physical life is continual, successive, active, productive bodily existence. The body consumes things and produces things, thus maintaining the unity of body and spirit, and thus, physical life.

"Now, the very moment we get saved, we are given by grace through faith, *aionios zoe*, which is usually translated 'eternal life'. This life is not bios life but zoe life and must be maintained as well. And how is this spiritual life maintained? Well, this spiritual life is both gained and it is maintained by faith. It is maintained by continuing to believe, present continuous sense, in Him. So, John 5:26 means, "Whoever continues to live in and continues to believe in Me shall never die". You see, eternal life, or *aionios zoe* is gained by faith and maintained by faith." End quote.

It is a great consolation to us that our God is a living God. Think of how great the

sin of departing from the living God is. If one departs, that means one has been with Him. We only begin to be with Him when we get saved. Think of having known the living God and then departing from Him. Does it happen?

I had a note from a pastor one time that said, "Give me one example of a person in the NT that became lost." I wrote back one word, "Judas." And I didn't hear back. Let one sin go and it will lead to another and another, until finally a point is reached where one decides one way or the other. And when one makes the wrong decision there, then there is no turning back. So, Hebrews 6:4-6, in brief says this: "It is impossible for those who once experience salvation, if they fall away, to renew them to repentance. There comes a cut off line and when that has been passed there is no turning back."

One of the things young believers should be aware of is that a commitment to Jesus Christ by faith is a very serious commitment. Three times in Hebrews this commitment is called the believer's confession.

How serious is it to depart from the living God? Hebrews 10:26-31 goes on to tell us. It says:

26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

29 *Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?*

30 *For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."*

In light of our topic of the living God, look at verse 31:

31 *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Why is this book so very serious for all believers? Because in every believer is the potential to depart from the living God and when that happens, it is forever too late.

We come now to verse 13. It says this:

13 *but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

The verse begins with the word, "but." It introduces a contrast. Instead of having an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, believers are to rather exhort one another. The word translated "exhort" can mean to exhort or admonish or beseech or to console or to comfort. In the context, the meaning is to exhort. An exhortation is to strongly encourage to do something where one sees another going astray.

In the context we have the warning not to let an evil heart of unbelief grow within us. The exhortation then would mean that when we see another becoming weary, we ought to exhort them and they in turn ought to exhort us if they should see us slipping. The instruction is to do this

daily. It needed to happen daily because these Hebrews were at the danger point. A little more slippage and some of them may be gone.

So, believers are exhorted to exhort one another while it is called "Today." How long is "Today"? It is either until we have sinned away the day of grace, or as long as we are alive. The day called "today", was for all those who lived from Adam until today, for as long as they were alive. "Today" will be for all those who live in the tribulation until they die. Today will be for all those who are born and live in the millennium until they die. When that time is past, there will never be another today for all those who are lost. It will then be forever too late. Today, for every person, is a life-time.

We might think, well that is a long time. But for everyone alive, it is never a long time. If one grows to be 100 years old, that is not a long time. We are given three score years and ten if all goes well. That is seventy years. I am almost 2 years past that. When you are my age, 70 years seems very short. If you are 35, you are halfway there.

We are to respond the day we hear the Lord speak to us, and the last part of the verse says, "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." When we do not respond when we hear God's voice, we become hardened. And when hardening begins, our danger of dropping God altogether becomes more and more possible.

The OT uses many metaphors. Listen to this one, "a hardened heart." Now we know the heart is the mind. What is a hardened mind. The word for hardened is "skeeruno". When the mind is hardened it becomes obstinate and hardened.

What is the difference between a hard mind and a soft mind? Listen to James 3:13-18.

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.

15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.

There is a picture of a hard heart or mind. Bitter envy and self-seeking pictures a hard heart. All our thinking, our wisdom, that comes out of a mind like that does not come from above. It does not come from the Lord. It is earthly, sensual, and demonic. And what happens from this kind of a mind? Verse 16:

16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.

So how does a soft heart differ? Verses 17-18:

17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

A mind filled with wisdom is first pure. It is uncontaminated. It is clear. It does not hide things. Then it is peaceable. There is no sharpness. There are no hidden agendas. Then it is gentle. Oh, to have a soft heart. Then it is willing to yield. A hard mind does not want to yield. It is right. But a soft mind is so very different. It is full of mercy. It is full of good fruits.

It is impartial. It is without hypocrisy.
It bears fruits of righteousness.

Our text says, "Exhort one another while it is called, "Today." How often do we do that? When I have sinned and I am miserable I tend to blame others. If I am out of fellowship with God and life is miserable and I blame others I have been led by the deceitfulness of sin into a place I cannot come out of until I discover that I am in the wrong. That does not mean someone else has not done wrong but their wrong cannot take me out of fellowship with God.

We think sometimes that unbelievers must be the most miserable people. Well, if they come under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, that may be partly true. But there is no more miserable person than a Christian who comes under the conviction of the Holy Spirit over some sin. Oh, the deceitfulness of sin!

Now note carefully the words of our passage, "the deceitfulness of sin." This is the only time this phrase occurs in the Bible. It means sin deceives. And what is deception? Here is what is the most dangerous thing about deception: I am led to think I am right when I am wrong. I am led to think I am going the right direction, but I am going wrong. And when I am deceived, I will be adamantly thinking I am right.

Let me ask you, how deceitful is sin? The deceitfulness of sin is two-fold. First, sin lures me in. It lures me to do something that it tells me will be fulfilling. Let me give you the example of King David when he took Bathsheba. He was lured in until all resistance was gone. Sin works in myriads of situations. Let us say I resent someone. It may be almost impossible to keep from drawing attention to that person's weaknesses in order to get

others to think bad things about them. And there is something satisfying when I can get others to think bad things about them.

So, consider king David. He sinned. Sin had deceived him. It had promised so much, but now sin's deceitfulness had only begun. Now he got news from Bathsheba that his sin would be discovered. Now what does sin do? It says, "You must cover your tracks. Nobody, but nobody must know what you have done."

That is the voice of sin. And we very willingly submit to that voice when we have sinned. We must cover our sin. But what does the Lord say? Listen to Him in Proverbs 28:13:

13 He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

When I have sinned, what is the last thing I will naturally do? The last, the very last thing will be to confess it. He who covers his sin will have misery. He who confesses and forsakes his sin will have mercy. God becomes brass to those who cover their sin. He opens like a flower to the sun to the one who confesses and forsakes it.

Well, David did what we all naturally do. Sin deceived him into doing wrong, and when he had done wrong it deceived him into thinking he had to cover his tracks. He could not be exposed. He was the king of Israel. How could he confess? And now sin deceived him into covering his tracks. What is better at covering our tracks when we are wrong than our own deceitful heart? Our mind will lead us into a maze in a wilderness we cannot find our way out of. Nothing will deliver us until we are brought to admit our own sin and oh, how hard we come to that point. That is what

revival does. It brings us to see, not someone else's sin, but our own. And we will dig in our heels and skid along over a very bumpy trail until we bend and say, "I have sinned."

Consider David. He had sinned. Now he had to cover for himself. How will he cover for himself? As long as his heart can deceive him. Here is the deceitfulness of sin: "Oh, David. You could bring Bathsheba's husband home from war under some pretense. He will go home to his wife and it will look like the child is his." There is the deceitfulness of sin. First, he was deceived into sin by the promise of pleasures. Now he is caught and he is led by the deceitfulness of sin to cover his sin.

Someone has said if you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging. Well, David was digging. Well, he brought Uriah home. Now I want you to note who Bathsheba's husband is. You see, he is not Uriah the Jew, he is Uriah the Hittite. He has been converted from false gods to the true God and he has changed his name from whatever it was to "Jehovah is my light." That is most certainly not a Hittite name. Now he is called home from the war, but he does not go to his wife. He can't. His comrades are at war and he feels it is not right to enjoy the pleasures of home when his comrades are fighting Israel's enemies.

Do you know how desperate David now is? Sin said, "David, you could get Uriah drunk. Then he will do things he wouldn't otherwise do. Just rob him of his mind, of his sensibilities and he'll go home." There, is the deceitfulness of sin. If you do this, your sin will be covered. But the Bible says that he who covers his sin will not prosper.

Do you know how sin deceived David even further? When he saw he could not cover his sin by using Uriah, he gave Uriah a letter for his commander. And in the letter, Uriah carried his own death warrant to the battlefield. He never opened it. He could have said, "David is acting very weird. There is something going on here." But he faithfully delivered the letter, and when Joab got the letter, he put Uriah in a place where he would die, and he died.

David? Well, he may have rejoiced to hear of this death but he still has a problem. Oh, sin is a deceiver. And when David's conscience was not enough, the Lord stepped in. And then the Lord speaks to the prophet Nathan and Nathan goes to David. Do you know what the Lord did? He uncovered David's sin to a man of God. And the prophet went to David and he took all the covering over David's sin off and he showed David the ugliness of his sin. And now David is exposed. If we do not break here we will never break.

Oh, how we fight against being exposed. We will do anything to come out of such a mess smelling like a rose. But sin stinks to high heaven. And only when we break and confess do we find freedom. And if there is no exposure there will never be true freedom again.

The devil has a big tool box. He can use anything deceptive and evil. But I think the most common tool is deception. Lies are deception. He is the father of lies. And lies and deception work as well today as they have in the past. It was the very first sin mankind was led into. It happened to Eve. And she told the Lord later, "The serpent deceived me and I ate" (Gen. 3:13).

So, our text says, "Today, if you hear the Lord's voice." Listen to this little poem:

It's easy to procrastinate
And leave good deeds undone,
But such a course will bring regrets
When life's short race is run. -Anon.

Why does our text say, "Today?" Tomorrow today will be yesterday! Tomorrow today will be gone and we may never get another today.

CONCL: So, we conclude with this word: "Beware brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." The living God is the only true God by nature there is. The others are all imagined.

R.A. Torrey: There is not a more solemn warning in the Bible than this. There is not a more timely warning in the Bible than this. All around us we see men and women who are being "**hardened** through the deceitfulness of sin." Three times in this one chapter God pleads with men, "**Harden not** your hearts."

Thomas Watson - A hard heart is a dwelling for Satan. As God has two places He dwells in—heaven and a humble heart; so the devil has two places he dwells in—hell and a hard heart.

Warren Wiersbe - You can't convince unsaved people that they are in bondage, because they think they are free. This is part of the deceitfulness of sin. Sin promises freedom but always brings slavery. Sin promises joy and ultimately brings pain. Sin promises success, but ultimately it brings failure. The prodigal son wanted to be free. He wanted to get away from his big brother and his father, so he went out into a far country. He thought he was free, but he discovered his freedom soon turned into bondage. Not only did he become a slave of a Gentile taskmaster, but he became a servant of the pigs....It's impossible to sin without being bound. One of the deceitful things about sin is that it promises freedom but only brings slavery. "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" ([John 8:34, NKJV](#)). "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" ([Ro 6:16, NKJV](#)) The cords of sin get stronger the more we sin, yet sin deceives us into thinking we're free and can quit sinning whenever we please. As the invisible chains of habit are forged, we discover to our horror that we don't have the strength to break them. Millions of people in our world today are in one kind of bondage or another and are seeking for deliverance, but the only One who can set

them free is Jesus Christ. "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" ([John 8:36, NKJV](#)).....Even the bondage that sin creates is deceitful, for the people who are bound actually think they are free! Too late they discover that they are prisoners of their own appetites and habits.

<https://www.preceptaustin.org/deceitfulness-of-sin>