

Hebrews 3: 7-19; “Today, If you will Hear His Voice”, Sermon # 14 in the series –
“Holding Fast Our Confession”, Delivered by
Pastor Paul Rendall on July 1st, 2012,
in the Morning Worship Service.
(A Communion Sermon)

We can see from the way that verse 7 is worded, that the Holy Spirit speaks with the voice of the written word of God to the hearts of those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, “Today if you will hear His voice”. The voice of God is heard by your having been given spiritual ears to hear the word of God; receiving it, believing it, and obeying it. The context of these verses is verse 6 where we are told that we are “of Christ’s house” if we “hold fast our confidence in Christ”. That is, as we believe in the gospel of Christ and hold it fast, we can have the assurance that we are a true Christian and part of the true Church of Jesus Christ. If we continue believing in Christ and keep trusting in Him as being the only Savior of our souls, and the only Lord of our life, we shall assure our hearts before Him. Some of the Jews whom Paul was writing to were in danger of placing Moses on the same level as Christ. They were in danger of going back to the law instead of pressing on to know the Lord. But Christ has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, because He is the One who is building this great house – His Church. To hold fast our confidence in Christ is to continue to exercise faith in Him, not only in our receiving the free gift of God, but also in all the various situations of our life; situations which will come to test our faith. This, the vast majority of the children of Israel of that generation did not do, and therefore they could not enter in to God’s rest. Since this is a Communion Sunday, I would like to speak to you 1st, about God’s anger, from verses 7-11. Then I would like to speak to you 2nd, about the dangers of unbelief in verses 12-15. And then as we gather up front, before we partake of the Supper, I would like to speak to you about the disobedience of unbelief. All of these points will be shared in the context of Christ’s finished work on the cross.

1st of all – Let’s consider together the subject of God’s anger. (verses 7-11)

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested Me, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.” “Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, “They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.” “So I swore in My wrath, they shall not enter My rest.” These verses are an almost word for word quote of Psalm 95, verses 7-11. God is described there as being angry with a whole generation of Israelites; that is, the whole generation who came out of Egypt under Moses, and who, because they did not believe that God was doing good things for them, were forced to wander in the Wilderness for 40 years, during which time God was “grieved with them” it says in Psalm 95, and there were many of them who physically died under His earthly judgments of wrath. He swore in His wrath that they would not enter in to His rest. They would not enter in to the land of Canaan. But we need to ask further, whether all of those who He was angry with, perished eternally because of what is termed here, their “rebellion”? I believe that they did, because there is no indication at all that they repented of their rebellion against God. There is no indication that they believed in God, so that they prayed and asked God to show them His ways; that they actually wanted to learn His ways. Instead, it says, they hardened their hearts in the day of trial in the wilderness. It says that they actually tested God when God was in the process of testing them. They tested Him and tried Him, even though they had seen His works for 40 years. “Therefore”, it says in verse 10, “God was angry with that generation”.

It will be important for you and I who are here this morning, to distinguish between the different ways that God demonstrates His anger and wrath. First, we want to think about the

wrath of God which is upon all unbelieving people because they are born into this world as sinners. Adam, the first man of our race, and the representative head of our race, was given one commandment by God to keep. Adam was placed on a trial of obedience for a certain time, which was only known to God. If during this “day” of trial he kept God’s one good commandment, not to eat of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, he would stand in his original righteousness, and be confirmed in it forever, and thus be eternally blessed. And if he did not keep it, he would spiritually and physically die, and pass on to every descendant of his, the guilt of his sin, and a sinful nature which does not love God or is willing to serve God on God’s terms. The tree of life was also there in the garden, and had Adam eaten from that tree he would have lived forever. But Adam found that he could not stand in his original righteousness. He listened to the voice of his wife, after she was deceived by the serpent Satan, and he ate. Romans 5: 12 says – “Therefore just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned....” Because of Adam’s sin, we are all constituted sinners in the sight of God. If we are an unbeliever in God and Christ, we confirm our sinnership each and every day, by living our lives according to our own fallen understanding and our fleshly desires and thoughts of how we can establish our own earthly peace and prosperity, our own earthly greatness and glory. We end up committing many sins which make God angry. Because God is patient many fallen people who are sinners in God’s sight, do not see themselves the way that God sees them. They do not understand that He is angry. They think that God is favorable to all men because He made them. They do not understand that God is angry with them unless a Christian, who has read the Bible, tells them. But let us take notice of it; God is angry with all sinners outside of Christ.

Let’s apply this truth in this way. Every person who has not yet believed in Christ, needs to understand that because of their fallen human nature in Adam, God is angry with many of the ways that they think and many of the things that they do, because they practice the sin of not believing in Him or in His word the Bible. They do not want Christ to rule over them and they do not want Him to guide their lives. As such they are God’s enemies. “The carnal mind is enmity with God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be.” “So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8: 7 and 8) God does not yell or explode in anger, as some people do. He holds His anger, and will judge the unrepentant, unbelieving person, later. If a person does not repent, they are storing up wrath and anger for the time in which God will judge. All who are unbelieving are seen by God as wicked people, even though they do not see themselves this way. The people of that generation of Israel, it says in our text, were “always going astray in their hearts.” That is a good definition of what sinners are like in their depravity; always straying from God’s will and His ways. Often, in our society, people will see themselves as pretty good people who are able to take care of themselves and occasionally help others. They think that this is the essence of true religion.

This is often why people want to come to church for the wrong reason. They often think that salvation is obtained by good works. They would like to be known as good people, (humanly speaking) who want to do good things. They do not see or understand the wickedness of their own heart. Wickedness is the sinful thoughts and actions of people who fail to acknowledge God’s right to rule their life. When things do not go the way that they want them to go in life, the wicked person will actually blame God, or they will test God. “Is God with me, or not?” This is exactly what happened in the case of the “fathers” in Israel. You can see it if you will turn over to Exodus 17: 1. “Then all the children of Israel set out on their journey from the Wilderness of Sin, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped in Rephidim; but there was no water for the people to drink.” “Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, ‘Give us water that we may drink.’” “So Moses said to them, ‘Why do you contend with me?’” “Why do you tempt the Lord?” And look down at verse 7. “So he called the name of the place Massah and

Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?' So let us have this truth firmly fixed in our minds; there are only two categories of people in God's mind; the wicked and the righteous. Those who know Him, those who receive His word and live by faith in it, are termed, "the righteous", and those who do not know Him, and who will not heed His Word to do it. They are called by God, "the wicked".

Turn with me to Psalm 7, verse 9, and you will see God's anger against the wicked. "Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the just; for the righteous God tests the hearts and minds." "My defense is of God, who saves (that is He delivers) the upright in heart." "God is a just judge, and God is angry with the wicked every day." "If he does not turn back, (that is, repent and turn back from his course of sinful independence from God) He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready." "He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts." "Behold the wicked brings forth iniquity; yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood." "He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he has made." "His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown." Now notice the difference between the wicked and the righteous which is described for us in here verse 17. "I will praise the Lord," says David, "according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High." In other words, David praises God for a righteousness which God has made and set forth, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith. This is the righteousness of Christ, whether it is a believer in either the Old or New Testament.

In verse 10, David calls God, "my defense". He was praying that God would come and test his heart and see that his thoughts were upright. But if you asked him whether this came to him naturally, or by grace, he would immediately acknowledge that it was all of grace, that he was just man. We very much need to apply this to our own heart and mind. Before I come to Jesus Christ, God is angry with me every day. This does not mean that we feel or sense this anger. But it is a fact that even though He shows me much goodness and kindness, which are intended to lead me to repentance, still He is holding this anger. But praise be to God for the gospel. Turn with me over to John Chapter 3, verse 16. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should perish but have everlasting life." "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe in condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." And, John 3: 36: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

But when we come to Christ that anger is removed, and His love prevails over us. I believe the word of God that I, the one who has trusted in the finished work of Christ, will not come into judgment. I have passed out of death into life. As I continue to hold fast to Christ, I come to have a greater assurance. I come to realize that He by His grace, chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. He has loved me with an everlasting love. He has, and He is, lavishing the riches of His love and kindness upon me, the one who does not deserve the least of His mercies. His goodness and mercy are following me every day of my life. I dearly desire that he show me this kind of loving care, and convince my soul of it. Indeed, I find that I cannot live without it. "Thy Lovingkindness is better than life." "My lips shall praise Thee, thus will I bless Thee, as I lift up my hands unto Thy name." (Psalm 63, verses 3 and 4) You should know that there is an anger of God which may be experienced by the Christian at the time that he strays from the path of righteousness. It is, however, the anger of a Father who will chasten His child because He loves them. It is a very short lived anger when repentance is seen by God. Believing men and women, I am saying, sometimes might experience this. They are made to feel the

displeasure of God. Their sin is surely atoned for, when repented of. The guilt is removed by Christ's death; His broken body on the cross; His shed blood which is given for the remission, for the paying of the debt of sin. Psalm 30, verses 1-5: "I will extol you, O Lord, for You have lifted me up, and have not let my foes rejoice over me." "O Lord my God, I cried out to You, and You healed me." "O Lord, You brought my soul up from the grave; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit." "Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name." "For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning." Remember this as you come to the Lord's Table this morning. Christ has turned the wrath of God away from you, O believer.

2ndly - I would like to speak to you about the dangers of unbelief. (verses 12-15)

"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." "For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end, while it is said, 'Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'" Notice the wording. It is "an evil heart of unbelief" that is being warned against. Paul addresses those to whom he is writing to with the name of "brethren". But he is asking them to examine themselves and to see if they are in the faith. The warnings of the Scriptures are given to the true believer to give them notice of spiritual danger, so that they can take action, and not depart from the living God. An evil heart of unbelief develops in a person, when they cease to see the importance of looking outside of themselves to Christ. In the case of an unbeliever it leads to apostasy. In the case of the believer, they by grace are in spiritual danger, but Christ will rescue them. In both cases the person who falls into unbelief, is more interested in being ruled by their feelings, than by being ruled by the discipline of diligently searching the Scriptures for promises which will save them or strengthen their faith.

As time goes by, the unbeliever begins to greatly doubt that they really need to keep coming to Christ for grace every day. They get tired of "the same old manna" of the word of God and they wanted some different spiritual food. They cease to get alone to pray to God so that they will be strengthened to do His will, and live the life of faith. They are hungering and thirsting, but it is not for righteousness, but more for of the things of the world. Then begins the slow but sure hardening of the heart by the deceitfulness of sin. They still want to be religious and so they go back to a more sacramental view of salvation and go back to attending a church which teaches that false way of observing ceremonies as being the way to know God. In the case of the Israelites in the days of Moses, they wanted to go back to Egypt, the picture of the world. Those whom Paul was writing to, thought that observing the ceremonial law and circumcision were enough to bring salvation. In the past, didn't they have Moses and the Law of God? Surely that must be enough. They begin to wrongly think – Surely it must be enough to keep the commandments outwardly without believing that I am so helpless that I need Christ's grace in everything that I do and say. Surely I do not need to be examining my heart every day and confessing my sins, and repenting of them from my heart before God. But the evil heart of unbelief thinks that sacrifice and offering are enough. They will not rend their heart or repent of their sins. They have been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

This is why we need to turn over to 2 Corinthians Chapter 12, verse 19. The Apostle Paul says to the church at Corinth: "Again, do you think that we excuse ourselves to you?" "We speak before God in Christ." "But we do all things beloved for your edification." "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest, when I come again, my god will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness,

fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced.” “This will be the third time I am coming to you.” “by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.” “I have told you before, and foretell as if I were present the second time, and now being absent I write to those who have sinned before, and to all the rest, that if I come again I will not spare--since you seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, who is not weak toward you, but mighty in you.” “For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God.” “For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.” “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith.” “Test yourselves.” “Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.” “But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified.” What would disqualify them? Their not repenting of their sins, and their not continuing to believe that they need the grace of Christ, both for forgiveness and to be able to live a more holy life.

Remember those wonderful words of verse 4, “You also are weak in Christ, but you shall live with Him by the power of God toward you.” This you know if you have come to Christ; your desire to change and be a godly person came to you only when you first believed in the finished work of Christ for you. And even now, you may say to me, that you feel weak in Him in terms of your making progress in holiness as you desire to do. But remember the power of God will give you the strength to learn, and to do, what is right. He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. You, dear believer, are crucified with Him. It is not longer you who live, but Christ lives in you, and the life that you live, you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you. So let us gather down front now and renew the covenant of faith with Him; faith in His death and His resurrection power; to save us, to keep us, and to help us to learn to do everything that pleases Him.

3rdly – Before we partake of this Supper, I would like you to think with me about the disobedience of unbelief. (verses 16-18)

“For who, having heard, rebelled?” “Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?” “Now with whom was He angry forty years?” “Was it not with those who sinned whose corpses fell in the wilderness?” “And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey?” “So we see that they could enter in because of unbelief.” We have come here to this table again today to remember what Christ has done for us, and what we have been able to receive by faith in Christ. Christ has kept the law where we have not kept it. The perfection of His work of obedience is imputed to us by faith. Christ loved us so much that he went to the cross and died there, a sacrifice for our sins. We receive this atonement by faith. It says here that most of the children of Israel were not able to enter God’s rest because they did not obey. In the next line it says that their disobedience came about because of their unbelief. That is, that even though the Lord had done all these things for them; delivering them from Egyptian bondage, destroying Pharaoh’s armies, giving them manna to eat and water from the rock, yet they would not believe. If we were to look at Chapter 4 we would see that they had a gospel which was preached to them, just as we have had the gospel preached to us. Theirs was to enter into the Promised Land by trusting that God would provide for all of their needs, both physically and spiritually. There were 12 men who went to spy out Canaan and 10 of the 12 brought back a bad report. There were giants in the land and Israel would not be able to take them. But Joshua and Caleb brought a good report and said that they should by all means go up and enter the land that was before them. The Lord would give their enemies into their hands. They should not fear. Their enemies would be bread to them. But they spoke of stoning Joshua and Caleb. This kind of unbelief is the ultimate disobedience against the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 10: 1 it says, “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.”

“for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.” But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.” In verse 9 it says that some of them “tempted Christ and were destroyed by serpents”. The text says that we should not tempt Christ either. We tempt Christ when we take ourselves into situations of temptation where we might fall into sin. This we should not do. Instead we need to do what it says in 1 Corinthians Chapter 11: 28 – “But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” This is what you and I ought to do now before we partake of this Supper. Let us examine ourselves and see if there is some way that we might be tempting Christ, if there is some way that we are cultivating unbelief in our heart, if there is something in our life that God may not be pleased with. And let us confess our sins where we find them in ourselves, not at all doubting but that Christ’s sacrifice will be sufficient to cleanse us from all sin. Let us ask Him for the grace to change where we need to change and to learn to obey God’s Word by faith.