

That spoken of in Hebrews 3:12 is a heart that abides in unbelief because it desires to retain its evil. "And this is the judgment that light is come into the world and men love the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil." And what is the result? Falling away from the living God. Little by little, day by day, from God, whose presence and power had been known, they fall away.

Unbelief is not inability to understand but unwillingness to trust, for trusting God puts the creature in God's hands. It is the will, not the intelligence that is involved. The unbeliever chooses to remain in his own hands. Also the unsurrendered, unspiritual believer will suffer great loss, though he may be saved. He would like eternal bliss, of course, but God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ, whereas the unbeliever chooses to remain Lord of his own life. It is not for a lack of evidence that unbelief exists. Every heartbeat, every breath, tells man he is nothing but a creature, utterly insufficient in himself for a moment's existence; and his conscience says, There is a God, and the creation under his feet and above him, witness to it. But an evil heart of unbelief says, I want to live for myself, which is the essence of evil, of sin. There is a character of unbelief, an essential character not always emphasized. That is the attitude of neglect or forgetfulness of God, a treating of the ever-present Gracious One as if He did not exist, a forgetfulness of past blessing that is inexplicably fathomless.

The attitude of the disciples in Mark 8:1-4 will illustrate. Some little time before in Mark 6 Christ had fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. And they had been rewarded with a basketful of fragments apiece. But when a great multitude came together again and had nothing to eat and the Lord said, I have compassion on the multitude because they have nothing to eat, His disciples answered Him, Whence shall one be able to fill these men with bread here in a desert place? Exactly the same circumstances, precisely the same need and the Lord of glory taking them into partnership with His infinite power, for He asked them, "How many loaves have ye?" and they said, "Seven," but utter blindness on their part. He took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, He brake, and they set them before the multitude. And they had a few small fishes; and having blessed them, He commanded to set these also before them. And four thousand men were filled and seven baskets of fragments taken up. No wonder our Lord sighed deeply in His spirit and asked the searching questions, "Have ye your hearts hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? And having ears, hear ye not? And do ye not remember? Do you not yet understand?"

The Israelites did not deny the past. They would have told you with flashing eyes the wonderful story of deliverance. But they did not trust God's love and wisdom. They did not rely on His repeated promises that He would most certainly bring them in as He had already brought them out. They did not find in the past a guarantee that He would not fail nor forsake them. Our heavenly Father knows that we have need of all these things. At Mara they should have said, He gave us manna. Surely He can supply our thirst. At Paran they should have said, God has promised to give us the land. And so, though the Canaanites are strong and their cities walled to heaven, we will dare believe in Him and go in. As we pass through life, we should carefully store our hearts with the memory of God's great goodness and fetch from past deliverances the assurances that He will never leave, neither forsake. Has He conveyed us across the Atlantic to leave us to drown in the ditch? Has He been with us in six troubles to desert us in the seventh? Has He saved and can He not keep, as He redeemed us from hell, and can He not bring us to heaven?

His love in time past, forbids us to think
 He'll leave us at last in trouble to sink,
 Each sweet Ebenezer we have in review
 Confirms His good pleasure to help us right through.

There's no prayer that a Christian needs more frequently to present than, Lord, increase my faith. Deliver me from an evil heart of unbelief. All apostasy from God, whether partial or total, originates in unbelief. To have his faith increase, to have more extended and accurate and impressive views of the truth, as it is in Jesus, ought to be the object of the Christian's most earnest desire and unremitting exertion. Just in the degree in which we obtain deliverance from the evil heart of unbelief, are we enabled to cleave to the Lord with full purpose of heart, to follow Him fully; and in opposition to all the temptations to abandon His cause, to walk in all His commandments and ordinances blameless, to prevent so fearful and disastrous a result as apostasy from the living God. The apostle calls on them to strengthen each other's faith by mutual exhortation and thus oppose those malignant and deceitful influences which have a tendency to harden them in impenitence and unbelief.

Because of the present condition they have not entered into His rest. In the heart unbelief begins to churn up actively, a fighting against the truth.

The reason Israel murmured at Meribah was because there was no water. They were occupied with their circumstances. They were walking by sight. The crisis that they then faced only served to make manifest the state of their hearts; namely, an evil heart of unbelief. Had their trust been in Jehovah, they would at once have turned to Him, spread their need before Him and counted on Him to supply it. But their hearts were hardened. A most searching warning was this for the Hebrews. Their circumstances were most painful to the flesh. They were enduring a great fight of afflictions. How were they enduring it? If they were murmuring, that would be the outward expression of unbelief within. Ah, it is easy to profess we are believers but the challenge still rings out, "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and has not works?" (James 2:14).

I am reminded of JEHOSHAPHAT as he concludes his prayer:

2 Chronicles 20:12

O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you.

v.13 But keep on encouraging one another every day, as long as it is still called "today," lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

In verse 12 we have the PRESENT IMPERATIVE telling us to "Keep on taking care."

Here in verse 13 we have the PRESENT IMPERATIVE "KEEP ON ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER."

In verse 12, "lest there should be in any one of you,"

and here in verse 13 "LEST ANY ONE OF YOU BE HARDENED BY THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN."

In verse 12 we have the COMMAND to look out for OURSELVES personally,

and in verse 13 we have the COMMAND to be looking out for OTHER BROTHERS AND SISTERS who need a word of encouragement along the way.

PARABLE OF THE DROPPED VASE

One Sunday near the end of a service, a pastor asked for help in moving an urn of flowers from the platform. A young lady came to the front and waited for him to hand her the lovely vase filled with roses. Just as she reached up, he dropped the container and it broke in a hundred pieces. Surprised at his apparent carelessness, she returned to her seat. Requesting the audience to stay a moment longer, the pastor said, "I can replace this vase with another just as beautiful, but there are some sacred and holy things which can never be restored. For weeks many of us have worked and prayed to get a certain young man to attend our church. Last Sunday he came and sat behind a member of our congregation who whispered and laughed all during the service. The youth declared he would never come again because he could see that the fellowship and the message meant nothing to some who attended. By her disturbing actions she shattered an opportunity in that young man's life and has destroyed something which can never be replaced."

(From InfoSearch 3.5)

DYING FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

When an accountant for a certain business committed suicide, an effort was made to find out why. The company's books were examined, but no shortage was found. Nothing could be uncovered that gave any clue as to why he took his life--that is, until a note was discovered. It simply said: "In 30 years I have never had one word of encouragement. I'm fed up!"

Many people crave some small sign of approval. They need a word of recognition, a caring smile, a warm handshake, and an honest expression of appreciation for the good we see in them or in their work.

(From InfoSearch 3.5)

I was the son of an immigrant. I experienced bigotry, intolerance and prejudice, even as so many of you have. Instead of allowing these things to embitter me, I took them as spurs to more strenuous effort.

--Unknown

Admonish your friends privately, but praise them openly.

--Publius Syrus

(From InfoSearch 3.5)

(Acts of Love: The Power of Encouragement by David Jeremiah)

Throughout my years of preaching, I have often mentioned the name of Joseph Bayly. Joseph was a bold and creative writer who made a great contribution to his generation by courageously addressing the subjects of suffering and death. His personal qualifications for such written assignments are unmatched by any author about whom I have ever heard.

Joseph Bayly buried three sons--an eighteen-day-old infant, a five-year-old victim of leukemia, and an eighteen-year-old, who had hemophilia complications after a sledding accident. His books, The View from a Hearse, The Last Thing We Talk About, and Heaven grew out of his bitter exposures to death.

Shortly before Joseph's eighteen-year-old son died, he was engaged to a very godly young woman. After his death, in the midst of her own sorrow, this young woman was deeply concerned about the sorrow of Joseph Bayly and his wife. So she gave them a poem which had meant a great deal to her, a poem written by German pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer entitled "Next Year--1945." Bonhoeffer had written it for his own fiancée just three months before he was taken by the Nazis and executed at the age of thirty-nine. He wrote the poem while in jail during World War II. The poem was delivered to his fiancée after his death. She was responsible for its being published. Two of the seven stanzas read as follows:

Should it be ours to drain the cup of grieving,
even to the dregs of pain, at thy command,
we will not falter, thankfully receiving
all that is given by thy loving hand.

While all the powers of Good aid and attend us,
boldly we'll face the future, be what it may.
At even, and at morn, God will befriend us,
and oh, most surely on each new year's day!

When Joseph Bayly wrote his book on heaven, he included this poem in his book. Then, thirty years after Bonhoeffer's death, twelve years after the death of Joseph's oldest son, the Baylys received a letter from a young pastor in Massachusetts. This pastor told of visiting, over a period of time, a woman in a Boston hospital who was seriously ill. One day, to minister to her, he gave her a copy of Joseph's book Heaven. The woman stayed up all night reading it. The next day she told of the comfort and help it had brought her. Within a few days, she died.

This woman had immigrated from Germany shortly after the war. Her name was Maria Von Wiedermeier. At the time when Bonhoeffer was imprisoned and executed, she was Bonhoeffer's fiancée. From Bonhoeffer to Maria, from Maria to another grieving fiancée, from this fiancée to the parent of the one she loved, from one of his books to other hurting people, then through a friend of his back to Bonhoeffer's Maria as she lay dying in a Boston hospital. Ecclesiastes says, "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days" (11:1).

My friend, when you give away encouragement, you start a process. You never know what will happen with that kind word, that written note, that warm touch you give a grieving, hurting person. You could start something that will never end.

pp. 36-38

"Oh give me a church
 Where the folks
 in the lurch
 Are encouraged and
 healed from above,
 Where seldom is heard
 A discouraging word,
 And the truth is
 modeled in love."

--Charles R. Swindoll

(to the tune

"Home on the Range")

p. 191

This contemporary song has always reminded me of my personal responsibility to be a source of encouragement wherever I go:

Two doors down one rocking chair is rocking
 She sits there all alone, her husband dead and gone
 The best years of her life they spent together
 He was always strong, but now she's on her own.
 And the telephone never rings,
 No one laughs, No one sings,
 It's quiet there, Does anyone care?
 A knocking at the door breaks the silence
 She looks out to see, the little boy from down the
 street
 She cracks the door surprised that he came over
 Flowers in his hand, like a little gentleman
 He said I picked these just for you,

Hope you like the color blue
 I could stay awhile, I love to see you smile

It only takes a little time
 To show someone how much you care
 It only takes a little time
 To answer someone's biggest prayer.

Light your world
 Let the love of God shine through
 In the little things you do
 Light your world
 And though your light may
 Reach only two or three
 Light your world.

pp. 201-2

(The Tribute by Dennis Rainey with David Boehl)

At the end of the program I asked Crawford if he'd like to give a verbal Tribute to his dad for what he'd meant to him. By the time he finished, I was crying with him. Here's what he said:

Dad, I love you, and thanks for the sacrifices of working over thirty years at the A&P warehouse. Thank you for choosing not to get paid triple-time on those Christmases and other days when we needed the money living in that small apartment in Newark, because you wanted to spend time with your kids.

Thank you for not buying new cars until after we were grown because you wanted to have money for vacations and you wanted to show us things. Thank you for teaching me and telling me that I'm a man and standing with me during hard times.

Everything I am today is because of you, and nobody may ever know who you are. You never made a big splash of it and you never blew your own trumpet, but you quietly did the deed. Thank you.

p. 71

Acts 4:36, 37

And Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

What a great nickname to be called the "Son of Encouragement"--to be a blessing to others by helping them get a positive perspective on the things that are going on in their lives and how they can be victorious in the midst of all their circumstances.

Hebrews 10:24, 25

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

"BUT BE ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER DAILY, AS LONG AS IT IS STILL CALLED 'TODAY.'"

Because the Christian life is a moment-by-moment experience, the challenge here is to be encouraging one another daily as long as it is still called today.

The Lord teaches us to pray:

"Give us this day our daily bread."

In speaking of discipleship in Luke 9:23 he says:

"If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me."

In Lange's commentary Starke is quoted:

Let every one see to it that he rightly avail himself of to-day, i.e., of the present time; for this alone is ours, since the past is already gone, and the future is still uncertain. Besides, if the present is properly employed, it brings with it a blessing for the future.

p. 81

G. Campbell Morgan says:

In the midst of this passage there is a word which our translators have arrestingly and helpfully spelled with a capital letter, the word "Today." It occurs in a quotation from a Psalm. It speaks of hope, and the possibility of recovery, even though there may have been failure. If for any reason we have been disobedient to the voice of the Son, and if the callousing process has begun, it is still called "Today." "Today" is God's day of love, God's day of grace, God's day of the possibility of pardon and renewal.

p. 51

"AS LONG AS IT IS CALLED TODAY" is taken from Psalm 95:7 and would mean "while you still have opportunity."

The word "TODAY" occurred back in verse 7:

"Today if His voice you hear,"

and here again:

**"AS LONG AS IT IS STILL CALLED 'TODAY,' LEST ANY ONE OF YOU BE
HARDENED BY THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN."**

It is our purpose to explore for a few moments 2 KEY WORDS in the remaining part of verse 13 which reflect the character of sin:

1."HARDENED"

2."DECEITFULNESS."

SIN IS ACTIVE.

MAN IS PASSIVE.

Hewitt says:

It deceives the sinner, exaggerating the satisfaction that can be gained from sin, then blinds his mind to spiritual truth and also to the certainty of God's retribution. It is possible that sin had already deceived some of the readers by giving them a romantic faithfulness to the past and by blinding them to the dangers so clearly brought out in this Epistle.

p. 84

The "DECEITFULNESS OF SIN" can certainly be seen in:

The story of the PRODIGAL SON and the dire straits he finds himself in until he comes to his senses and returns to his father and home.

ACHAN as he stole the garment and articles from Jericho and buried them in the floor of his tent.

You can see it in ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA as they lied about a real estate deal.

You can see it in the life of DAVID as he got involved in adultery and murder.

You can see it in Elisha's servant GEHAZI as he chases after Naaman's chariot to get some personal remuneration for the miracle that had taken place. He ends up a leper.

The word "DECEITFULNESS" has in it the thought of "to trick" or "fraud."

MacArthur says:

When a person becomes spiritually hardened, he rarely is aware of it. He can hear the gospel of Jesus Christ time and time again and not respond. My father often used the well-known expression, "The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay." If your heart is not melted in faith, it will be hardened in unbelief.

p. 93

Pink says:

This deceitfulness of sin should serve as a strong inducement to make us doubly watchful against it, and that because of our foolish disposition and proneness of nature to yield to every temptation. Sin presents itself in another dress than its own. It lyingly offers fair advantages. It insensibly bewitches our mind. It accommodates itself to each individual's particular temperament and circumstances. It clothes its hideousness by assuming an attractive garb. It deludes us into a false estimate of ourselves. One great reason why God has mercifully given us His Word is to expose the real character of sin. By the deceitfulness of sin the heart is hardened.

p. 181

Montefiore says:

Sin is regarded in this passage almost as a person tricking men into its power. It is probably right to see a reference here to the primal sin wherein Adam and Eve were deceived by the serpent (cf. I Tim. ii. 14).

p. 78

Lange says:

A man can easily be hardened if he does not take knowledge and care of himself, and take to heart the admonition of others.--Sin is a powerful and deceitful thing; powerful in evil desires, by which one is very easily swept away when he does not, with the grace of God, set himself against them; but deceitful when by the plausible assurance that a thing is right, allowable, and free from peril, it ensnares the man, seduces him into sin, and, unawares, gets the mastery of him. Ah, let everyone be on his guard against it.

p. 81

Bruce says:

Where the right path lies clear before the eyes, a disinclination to follow it can be reinforced in the mind by many beguiling lines of rationalization; but to surrender to them results in a hardening of the heart, a reduced sensitivity of conscience, which makes it more difficult to recognize the right path on a subsequent occasion. But in a fellowship which exercised a watchful and unremitting care for its members the temptation to prefer the easy course to the right one would be greatly weakened, and the united resolution to stand firm would be correspondingly strengthened.

p. 101

Owen says:

. . . the habitual deceit that is in indwelling sin, whereby it seduceth men and draweth them off from God. The design of the apostle is to prescribe a duty unto them, whereby they might be preserved from being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

p. 57

J. Vernon McGee says:

We as believers need to beware of the deceitfulness of sin. We can actually come to the place where we feel our lives are satisfactory to God although we are leading a wilderness life. For example, a believer can be dishonest and yet say that his conscience does not condemn him! Then he should condemn his conscience, because it has become hardened through continuance in sin. I know men in the ministry who have been totally dishonest; they have been found to be liars, yet they can get down on their knees and pray the most pious prayers I've ever heard. And their conscience does not condemn them. Of course it doesn't condemn them, because it has become hardened; they are permitting sin in their lives.

p. 529

Stedman observes:

We share in Christ if that faith which began in us continues to produce in us that which faith alone can produce, the fruit of the Spirit. This is the second warning of this book. The first one was against drifting, the danger of paying no attention, of sitting in a meeting and letting the words flow by while our minds are occupied elsewhere. That is the peril of letting these magnificent truths, which alone have power to set men free, drift by unheeded, unheard.

This second warning is against the danger of hardening: of hearing the words and believing them, understanding what they mean, but taking no action upon them. The peril of holding truth in the head but never letting it get into the heart. Truth known never does anything; it is truth done which sets us free. Truth known simply puffs us up in pride of knowledge. We can quote the Scriptures by the yard, can memorize it, can know the message of every book and know the whole Book from cover to cover, but truth known will never do anything for us. It is truth done, truth acted upon, that moves and delivers and changes.

p. 47

James 1:13-15

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

1 Timothy 4:2

By means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.

They are individuals who have a CAUTERIZED CONSCIENCE.

Mark 3:5

And after looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

Ephesians 4:18, 19

Being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

Sin has a progressively deceptive and hardening effect. There is gradual movement and control into the believer's life, which may be imperceptible in the early stages. In the context there is pictured a desire for avoidance of suffering and maintenance of security. Allowed to go far enough, it can lead to leaving both the ministry and the church.

What is sin? Sin is lawlessness.

He spake of the creature's inner refusal to divine control. Sin is that departure from the creator which follows a will of its own. So it was with Satan in Ezekiel 28. The end of such a course is seen in Isaiah 14:12-15:

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

When Adam willed to eat the fruit, he departed from God into what is called sin. How does sin deceive? Sin deceives in many ways. It has every advantage. It has pleasures; it invites with charms and false glamour.

SIN is a great promiser of all earthly successes. It:

- 1.blinds the eyes,
- 2.stifles the conscience,
- 3.hardens the heart,
- 4.dulls the ear

5.corrupts the mind. . .
and says, All shall be well.

Its prophets keep promising sinners liberty, promising them liberty while they themselves are bond-servants of corruption. Most of the people you meet are hardened and blinded by some form of sin, which is a terrible thought. The creature is most forgetful of unpleasant warnings. The creature has self-confidence unlimited.

How does the deceitfulness of sin harden? Because of delayed judgment, because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily. Therefore, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. God's longsuffering is therefore despised. Thousands around about the sinner keep sinning and are not immediately stricken. Thus comes false peace. Sin deceives by appearing harmless, promising good or enjoyment, by the fact that its victims think others are doing it, by taking advantage of ignorance of the word of God so that the victim listens to the voice of false teachers who say, You are all right if you are sincere.

All sin is deceit. Its promised pleasures are all a lie. There are some sins that are open and unmistakable. There are others that are especially deceptive, where the sanction of the Christian world or the force of habit and custom or the apparent insignificance of what we do makes us think little of the sin. It has a terrible power to deceive the professing Christian. And through this deceitfulness of sin, be it worldliness or unlovingness or pride or want of integrity, hearts are hardened and become incapable of hearing the voice of God.

John Brown in his exposition of the epistle to the Hebrews says:

But how is such a sin as this calculated to deceive them; and by deceiving, to harden them, to make them careless, unbelieving and disobedient so that they depart from Christ; and in departing from him, depart also from the living God. It is natural for man to wish to stand well with himself. Self-condemnation is one of the most intolerable of all feelings.

When a man has, from whatever motive, done something that is inconsistent with the law of Christ he naturally sets himself to extenuate, to excuse, and if possible, to defend his conduct. There is, perhaps, an attempt made to convince the mind that there is really no violation of the law of Christ, that the ordinary way of interpreting that law is unduly strict, or that if there was a violation, it was in his circumstances, scarcely avoidable; and if not justifiable altogether, yet deserving of but very slight blame. In this state of mind doubts of the reasonableness of the law he has transgressed and of the authority to which it lays claim, present themselves to the mind; and instead of being immediately dismissed, meet with a welcome reception. These naturally lead to a repetition of the act of violation of the law of Christ or to other violations of the law of Christ. Just as the backslider proceeds in his downward course, the process of thought above described is apt to become more and more habitual to him, till at last it becomes completely hardened against the claims which the word of Christ has on his attention, faith and obedience, and finally makes shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.

The deceitfulness of sin and the precariousness of time are considerations which greatly strengthen each other. As time wastes, the sinner hardens. Not only is the season passing away, but the work is becoming more difficult. It is plain that the duty here enjoined on the Hebrew Christians is from the nature of the case obligatory on Christians in all countries and in all ages. So long as there are evil hearts of unbelief in professors of Christianity, so long as they are exposed to the fascinating influences of an evil world, and the endlessly varied devices of the crafty old serpent, so long will they need to be exhorted daily, lest they be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

(Reality and the Vision by Philip Yancey, Editor)

Pondering the complexity of sin, Augustine cries out, "Who can disentangle this most twisted and most inextricable knottiness? It is revolting; I hate to think of it; I hate to look at it."

p. 84

(Holiness by J. C. Ryle)

I fear we do not sufficiently realize the extreme subtlety of our soul's disease. We are too apt to forget that temptation to sin will rarely present itself to us in its true colours, saying, 'I am your deadly enemy and I want to ruin you for ever in hell.' Oh, no! Sin comes to us, like Judas, with a kiss, and like Joab, with an outstretched hand and flattering words. The forbidden fruit seemed good and desirable to Eve, yet it cast her out of Eden. The walking idly on his palace roof seemed harmless enough to David, yet it ended in adultery and murder. Sin rarely seems sin at its first beginnings. Let us then watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation.

p. 7

(Heaven Came Down: Jesus Shows Us How to Treat One Another by Lynn Anderson)

Dean Martin comments on the way he has seen the glitz of Hollywood impact American culture: "Everything is a sham, a racket, from sex to singing to cultural respectability. You're born, you die, and in between you somehow delude yourself into thinking some of it means something."

p. 126

(When God Whispers Your Name by Max Lucado)

Reminds me of the golfer about to hit his first shot on the first hole. He swung and missed the ball. Swung again and whiffed again. Tried a third time and still hit nothing but air. In frustration he looked at his buddies and judged, "Man, this is a tough course."

p. 132

In the book Amazing Grace Kenneth W. Osbeck talks about the hymn "Hold the Fort." The words and music are by Phillip P. Bliss.

Only hold on to what you have until I come.
(Revelation 2:25)

God's call to each believer is to be obedient and faithful--not to seek a life of earthly success. Difficulties and defeats are a normal part of every Christian's life. Our response to negative situations can either shatter us or they can intensify our perseverance and confidence in a sovereign God. It has been said that a mark of a champion athlete is not how he/she responds to a victory, but how a difficult loss on a previous day has been met.

As was true of so many of Philip P. Bliss' gospel songs, this stirring hymn was inspired by an illustration used by Major Whittle, an officer in the American Civil War, while addressing a YMCA meeting on the text from Revelation 2:25. Major Whittle's illustration was about a small Northern force of soldiers in charge of guarding a great quantity of supplies. They were being hard-pressed by greatly superior Confederate forces. Finally, the Confederate general, General French, commanded the Federal troops to surrender. At that moment the troops saw a signal from their leader, General Sherman, on a hill some miles away, which said, "Hold the fort, I am coming. Sherman." The story so captivated Bliss' interest that he could not retire that evening until he had completed both the text and the music for this rousing gospel song. It later became a great favorite in the Moody-Sankey campaigns both in Great Britain and in the United States.

We too have a commander now in heaven who has promised to return for us. Victory is certain! Our responsibility is to faithfully "hold the fort" and to "occupy till He comes" (Luke 19:13 KJV).

Ho, my comrades, see the signal waving in the sky!
Reinforcements now appearing, victory is nigh.

See the mighty host advancing, Satan leading on;
Mighty men around us falling, courage almost gone!

See the glorious banner waving! Hear the trumpet blow! In our Leader's name
we triumph over ev'ry foe.

Fierce and long the battle rages, but our help is near; Onward comes our great
Commander--cheer, my comrades, cheer.

Chorus: "Hold the fort, for I am coming," Jesus signals still; wave the answer
back to heaven, "By Thy grace we will."

p. 325

v.14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if indeed we hold firm the original confidence steadfast until the end;

One of the evidences of relationship is the unconditional commitment to STAY BY THE STUFF.

Here in this verse we have the STATEMENT OF THE REASON why the previous admonition was given to be "encouraging one another daily as long as it is still called 'today,'":

"FOR WE HAVE BECOME PARTAKERS OF CHRIST."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

This exhortation is still completely pertinent to any local congregation at the present time, where the hardening tendencies of sin can often be counteracted by truly concerned fellow Christians.

We are partners with the Christ.

We will share in His dominion.

We are destined to rule.

This role is contingent on continuing fidelity.

We are in possession of salvation as is evidenced by a continuation of our faithfulness.

This partnership with Christ demands faithfulness. We can only remain partners if, indeed, we hold firm till the end the confidence which we had at the start. It is not uncommon for converts to begin with an initial flush of enthusiasm, only to:

FLAG,

FALTER,

and FAIL to persevere.

McGee points out:

We prove that we are members of Christ's house, that we belong to Him, "if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end."
p. 529

Roy Hession points out:

Obviously, if Canaan means being made a partaker of Christ, and if it is only by continuing to hold fast our confidence in grace that we continually partake of His life and fullness, then we shall have to be those who continually qualify for that grace by being willing continually to see sin as sin, as the Lord may show it to us. To illustrate, I once found in the flyleaf of my first wife's Bible a little sheet with a list of words one under another, such as bossiness, nagging, worry, tenseness, lack of caring for others, reserve, and other such. I asked her what this list meant. She said, "They are the things that God has from time to time shown me in my heart to be sin and I keep the list there to check as to whether I am still seeing them as sin." . . . In other words, was she holding the attitude with which she began steadfast to the end? There may be some people, of course, who feel they have got beyond the need to repent of things they have once seen as sin; they do not feel they are bothered by them now and it is a long time since they had to repent. But could it be that these things are there all right, but they are not seeing them as sin, as they once did, and therefore are not holding fast to the end that attitude of repentance and faith in grace with which they began?
pp. 34-35

Perhaps the inability to enter into the rest described here in the book of Hebrews can be likened to the believer who prefers to live under the Law on a performance basis in the relationship, or who in turn is content to try to be made holy through the flesh. These two practical problems in Christian maturity can certainly create many of the difficulties described here in this section.

Pink points out:

To hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end is to furnish evidence of the genuineness of our profession, it is to make it manifest both to ourselves and others that have been made "partakers of Christ." Difficulties in the path are presupposed, severe trials are to be expected: how else could faith show itself? Buffetings and testings do but provide occasions for the manifestation of faith, they are also the means of its exercise and growth. . . . To "hold fast the beginning of our confidence" signifies to "continue in the faith, grounded and settled" (Col. 1:23). It is to say with Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." p. 184

"FOR WE HAVE BECOME PARTAKERS OF CHRIST, IF INDEED WE (and the author identifies himself with the recipients of his letter) HOLD FIRM THE ORIGINAL CONFIDENCE."

Phillips translates that:

"The trust with which we began." Or we could say, "the confidence we had at first."

1 John 2:19

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.

A. T. Robertson quotes Jonathan Edwards:

Jonathan Edwards once said that the sure proof of election is that one holds out to the end. pp. 358-9

Lenski says:

The idea is that of the true and noble beginning and of an equal end. p. 121

Griffith Thomas says:

Once more the believers are reminded of the need of patient continuance if they are to enjoy the fellowship of Christ. It is not enough to commence the Christian life; it must be continued "firm" unto the end. This does not mean the loss of salvation, but it undoubtedly signifies the certain loss of spiritual blessing if we are unfaithful, and do not "hold fast" the beginning of our confidence.

p. 45

Delitzsch says:

He proceeds to confirm his exhortation to incessant mutual watching and guarding against the sin of apostasy, by reference to the greatness of the loss which would be thereby incurred.

p. 177

Starting from the fundamental notion of a firm position, taken under something else, it acquires the ethical meaning of steady persistence, hope, or courage under discouragements or difficulties.

p. 178

Hughes says:

The Israelites had no lack of confidence just after the Exodus, but it faded quickly a few days into the wilderness.

New converts typically have few doubts. But years of living and learning often soften their confidence. I have heard Christians say, "I wish I didn't know so much, it would be easier to believe" as they indulge in an elite, self-congratulating agnosticism. To be sure, all Christians go through times of doubt as their faith grows. A faith that never doubts is perhaps not real, because real faith involves the fallible mind. But for Biblically literate "Christians," with some years of living under their belts, to mouth such consciously self-exculpating phrases for their unbelief is so much bunk! We had no doubts when we met Christ, and we should not have any now. Moreover, we must consciously strive to "hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first."

p. 104

Lane says:

The readers are reminded that perseverance until the time of the actual realization of the promise and entrance into the eschatological rest prepared for the people of God is required of those who are "partners with Christ." The community is called to expectant waiting.
p. 88

Hewitt says:

The Greek word here translated confidence, hupostasis, is different from the word translated 'confidence' in verse 6. It denotes the 'sense of assurance' which comes from the realization that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is true.
p. 84

MacArthur says:

If we really believe the gospel, if we have committed our life to Jesus Christ, then at the end of the day, the end of the year, the end of life, our commitment will still stand. The greatest proof of salvation is continuance in the Christian life. The true believer stays with Christ. "If you abide in My word," Jesus said, "then you are truly disciples of Mine" (John 8:31). When someone departs from the gospel, backs away from the faith, we can only conclude that this person never believed.
p. 93

Pink says further:

"Firm unto the end." This is the test. At the beginning of our Christian course, our confidence in Christ was full and firm. We knew that He was a mighty Saviour, and we were fully persuaded that He was able to keep that which we have committed unto Him against that day. But the roughness of the way, the darkness of the night, the fierceness of the storm into which, sooner or later, we are plunged, tends to shake our confidence, and perhaps (much to our sorrow now) we cried, "Lord, carest Thou not"? Yet, if we were really "partakers of Christ" though we fell, yet were we not utterly cast down. We turned to the Word, and there we found help, light, comfort. In it we discovered that the very afflictions we have experienced were what God had told us would be our portion for "we are appointed thereunto" (1 Thess. 3:3). In it we learned that God's chastenings of us proceeded from His love (Heb. 12). And now, though we have proved by painful experience to have less and less confidence in ourselves, in our friends, and even in our brethren, yet, by grace, our confidence in the Lord has grown and become more intelligent. Thus do we obtain experimental verification of that word, "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof" (Eccl. 7:8).
pp. 184-5

Montefiore says:

It is not uncommon for converts to begin with an initial flush of enthusiasm (cf. x. 32), only to flag, falter and fail to persevere. Our writer regards this not as a distant danger, but as a present possibility (cf. iii. 6). His readers' confidence, instead of developing from its initial impulse (the Greek phrase here means literally 'the beginning of our confidence'), is now in real danger of wavering.
p. 79

Owen says:

Persistency in our confidence in Christ unto the end is a matter of great endeavour and diligence, and that unto all believers. It is true that our persistency in Christ doth not, as to the issue and event, depend absolutely on our own diligence. The unalterableness of our union with Christ, on the account of the faithfulness of the covenant of grace, is that which doth and shall eventually secure it. But yet our own diligent endeavour is such as indispensable means for that end as that without it it will never be brought about.
p. 58

Bruce says:

To begin well is good, but it is not enough; it is only those who stay the course and finish the race that have any hope of gaining the prize. The Israelites made a good beginning when they crossed the Sea of Reeds and praised God for their deliverance; but the good beginning was not matched by their later behavior.

p. 101

(The Pleasures of God by John Piper)

John Wesley, the great evangelist, wrote to Wilberforce to strengthen his hand in God. He said,

Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils, but if God be for you who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary in well doing. . . .

p. 264

(For Better, for Worse, for Keeps: Renewing Your Marriage in the Tough Times by Robert Moeller)

Sigmund Freud said, "Someday, given enough time, we will look back on our lives and discover the most difficult moments have become the most precious to us."

p. 164

Let us walk for a moment with JOB as he travels through this great valley of difficulty in his life:

Job 1:21, 22

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." In all this, Job did not sin in charging God with wrongdoing.

Job 13:15

Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;

Job 19:23-27

Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes--I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

Job 23:10

But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

Job 42:2

I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.

Song of Solomon 8:6, 7

Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned.

(Over The Top by Zig Ziglar)

After the cheers have died and the stadium is empty, after the headlines have been written and after you are back in the quiet of your own room and the Super Bowl ring has been placed on the dresser and all the pomp and fanfare have faded, the enduring things that are left are: The dedication to excellence; the dedication to victory; and the dedication to doing with our lives the very best we can to make the world a better place in which to live.

Vince Lombardi

p. 266

Eartha White--the granddaughter of a slave and one who was successful in all areas of life and finished well--said, "Every day all of us should do all we can, where we are, with what we have." That's good advice.

p. 271

(When Heaven Is Silent by Ronald Dunn)

I am reluctant to say this because it is something I'd rather not hear and something I do not want to acknowledge, but *the greatest works God has done in my life, He has done against my pleasure--and against my will*. We wrestle against the very things God sends to bless us. Like Jacob, we often try to throw away our blessings.
pp. 34-35

We're big on escaping but not much on enduring. Well, of course we're not. Who wants to endure when you can escape? Propelled by that very feeling we have tried to turn Christianity into a religion of escape. But as a follower of Jesus I must remember that He chose to endure rather than escape. He could have escaped but didn't; we can't, but we die trying. And the more we anticipate escaping, the less strength we have to endure.

And so I say that faith is not necessarily the power to make things the way we want them to be; it is the courage to face things as they are.

Remember when the disciples and a sleeping Jesus ran into a storm on the sea? (Mark 4:35-41). They shook Jesus awake, crying, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" Jesus awoke and did two things: He stilled the storm and rebuked the disciples for their lack of faith. But He didn't rebuke them because they didn't have enough faith to still the storm. He rebuked them for not having enough faith to stay calm in the storm--especially with Jesus on board.
pp. 38-39

(Exit Interviews by William D. Hendricks)

The late Ray Stedman is reported to have said that when you boil down the Christian life, one virtue proves decisive in whether one ever arrives at spiritual maturity: perseverance.
p. 25

v.15 while it is being said, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion."

This takes us back earlier in the chapter to:

Hebrews 3:6, 7

But Christ is faithful as a Son over His house whose house we are, if indeed we keep the confidence firm and the boast of our hope firm until the end. Therefore just as the Holy Spirit is saying, "Today if you hear His voice.

We have a repetition of 2 WORDS from verse 13. The words:

1. TODAY
2. HARDEN

J. Vernon McGee says:

The quotation concludes with a quotation from Psalm 95, which we have already seen in verses 7 and 8. Obviously he repeats it to remind the reader that these truths are not for yesterday only, but for us today.
p. 529

Pink points out:

"When we hear God's voice--and, oh, how clearly and sweetly does He speak to us in the person of His Son Jesus, the Word incarnate, who died for us on Golgotha!--the heart must respond . . . By this expression is meant the centre of our spiritual existence, that centre out of which thoughts and affections proceed, out of which are the issues of life, that mysterious fount which God only can know and fathom. . . . God's voice is to soften the heart. This is the purpose of the divine word--to make our hearts tender. Alas, by nature we are hard-hearted; and what we call good and soft-hearted is not so in reality and in God's sight. . . . When we receive God's word in the heart, when we acknowledge our sin, when we adore God's mercy, when we desire God's fellowship, when we see Jesus, who came to save us, to wash our feet and shed His blood, for our salvation, the heart becomes soft and tender. For repentance, faith, prayer, patience, hope of heaven, all these things make the heart tender: tender towards God, tender towards our fellow-men" (Saphir).
p. 185

Hughes says:

Brothers and sisters, if we hear his voice, we must do something now!
p. 104

Psalm 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."

Isaiah 30:21

Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you,
saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

1 Samuel 3:10

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then
Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

2 Corinthians 6:2

For He says, "At the acceptable time I listened to you, And on the day of salvation I
helped you;" behold, now is "the acceptable time," behold, now is "the day of salvation"-

Phillips says:

Today! Again and again he rings out the word. God never promises us tomorrow. Now is
the time to get eternal matters settled. The issues are too important and the pressures too
urgent to tolerate delay.
p. 72

Wiersbe says:

People with hard hearts know the truth but resist it and refuse to obey it. They know that God chastens disobedient children, but they almost defy God to act. They think they can sin and get away with it. The first step toward a hard heart is neglect of the Word of God (Heb. 2:1-4), not taking it seriously. It is either "hearing" or "hardening." Take your choice (Ps. 95).

p. 815

Barclay says:

The writer to the Hebrews says to his people, "Beware lest you show the same disobedience and distrust of God that your forefathers showed, and that you do not for that reason lose the blessings you might have had, just as they lost them." In effect he says, "While there is yet time, while you can still speak of 'to-day' give God the trust and the obedience that God must have." Of course for the individual person the word "to-day" means "while life lasts." And the writer to the Hebrews is saying, "While you have the chance, while life lasts, give God the trust and the submission you ought to give. Give it to Him before your day closes, and before for you 'to-day' is for ever gone." There are certain great warnings here.

p. 28

Lange's commentary on this 15th verse points out:

--Labor with earnestness against thine own hardening [of heart]. The chief points of this labor are:

1. honest self-examination;
2. . . . mutual, . . . [brotherly] admonition;
3. diligence in looking back over the grace which we have received [from His hand].

p. 83

(Holiness by J. C. Ryle)

They have tasted by bitter experience the feelings of the dying statesman who cried aloud in his last hours, 'The battle is fought; the battle is fought; but the victory is not won.'

pp. 62-63

(God Works the Night Shift by Ron Mehl)

Some time ago, a friend of mine spoke to a gathering of Christian youth. During a prayer time, he asked them to kneel and pray. As my friend prayed, he noticed that behind him, to his left, he heard sobbing. He looked back and saw a lovely young woman. Her face was buried in her hands and she rocked gently back and forth as she wept and prayed for the salvation of her lost friends. He couldn't help listening as this girl prayed on and on, and he was moved by her passion and tender expression of love to Christ.

When the service was over, he asked the pastor about the young woman, pointing her out as she talked with her friends.

"Who is she?" he wondered.

The pastor smiled. "Oh, there's a great story, there," he said. "That's Sherry. She was a 'motorcycle momma' for three and a half years. She was passed around from gang member to gang member, used up like so much trash. She committed sins that are unspeakable. She sold her soul to pleasure and was stripped of every bit of innocence a young woman should have. If you could see sin on a person, it would have been caked on her two feet thick. When she came to us, she was a sad, guilt-ridden girl."

The pastor paused, eyes half closed, remembering. "But then she received Jesus Christ, and you should hear her get up in front of the group and talk about God's grace! Her weeping --that's a sign of joy. She knows where she's come from, and how the Lord has forgiven her past."

The Lord saw the mess she made of her life, and let the beauty of His forgiving love fall upon her. Like snow that washes clean. Like snow that hides the twisted path behind. Like snow that covers all and opens a fresh, inviting world.

Sherry went from being a Hell's Angel to a snow angel. She learned that when God forgives, He does much more than simply cover up our sins. Lots of ugly things get covered up in the winter snows, but then, when spring melt-off comes, there they are again, as ugly and offensive as ever. No, when God forgives, the sin is gone! He takes it away and forgets it forever.

pp. 102-4

v.16 For who when they heard, rebelled? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?

There are 6 QUESTIONS that are used in verses 16, 17 and 18 that bring the truth to the surface as to why there was a problem in Israel with regard to entering into the land that God had promised.

QUESTION #1:

"FOR WHO WHEN THEY HEARD, REBELLED?"

QUESTION #2:

"INDEED, DID NOT ALL THOSE WHO CAME OUT OF EGYPT LED BY MOSES?"

Westcott says:

The succession of thought is significant. The very people whom God had rescued provoked Him (v. 16). They sinned and met with the fatal consequences of sin (v. 17). They disobeyed and received the sentence of rejection (v. 18). Unbelief (comp. v. 12) made them incapable of that rest towards which they had started by faith (v. 19).
p. 86

J. Vernon McGee says:

They had had faith enough to come out of Egypt, but that was as far as it went.
p. 530

(A Dance With Deception: Revealing the Truth Behind the Headlines by Charles Colson with Nancy R. Pearcey)

The idea became widespread in America through the counterculture of the 1960s. Recall that the sexual revolution went hand in hand with social activism. Sex, alcohol, drugs--whatever you did in your personal life was your own business. But great moral energy was poured into the peace movement, the civil rights movement, and the environmental movement.

That's why Kennedy's confession is so significant. Whether heartfelt or not, the fact that he felt constrained to make it reveals a crack in the old liberal code. It's a step in the direction of realizing you can't have social morality without personal morality.

You see, the man who will cheat on his wife will cheat in his professional life. The man who has no self-restraint in his personal life will have no restraint in his political life.

It's a matter of character. That's why Jesus said that the one who is faithful in small things will be faithful in big things.

Wouldn't it be ironic if Senator Kennedy--albeit unintentionally--were to bring America back to that great moral truth?

December 18, 1991

p. 145

1 Corinthians 10:1-5

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

v.17 And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

QUESTION #3:

"AND WITH WHOM WAS HE ANGRY FOR FORTY YEARS?"

It was that generation that turned back from Kadesh-Barnea and refused to trust God and go into the land.

He answers his own question with yet another question:

QUESTION #4:

"WAS IT NOT WITH THOSE WHO SINNED, WHOSE BODIES FELL IN THE WILDERNESS?"

Corpses strewn in the wilderness, evidences of divine disqualification.

The landscape of the Scriptures is scattered with the corpses of those who did not finish well.

(A Dance With Deception: Revealing the Truth Behind the Headlines by Charles Colson with Nancy R. Pearcey)

This is the real story behind the "Code Blue" report and the Dan Quayle debate: that Americans have lost the very language of moral discourse. We talk about rights and lifestyles and health needs, but we do not talk about morality and virtue.

Why? Ultimately because a moral law implies a Law-giver to whom we are morally obligated. And that's precisely what so many people are reluctant to acknowledge.
p. 11

(Whatever Became of Sin? by Karl Menninger)

Sin is transgression of the law of God; disobedience of the divine will; moral failure. Sin is failure to realize in conduct and character the moral ideal, at least as fully as possible under existing circumstances; failure to do as one ought towards one's fellow man (Webster).
pp. 18-19

"What was the sin that no longer exists?" I mean any kind of wrongdoing that we used to call sin. I have in mind behavior that violates the moral code or the individual conscience or both; behavior which pains or harms or destroys my neighbor--or me, myself. You know--and Time knows--what wrongdoing is, and if a better word than sin is available, use it.
p. 17

(The Complete Book of Zingers by Croft M. Pentz)

To sin is human; to persist in it is idiocy.

A little sin will add to your trouble, subtract from your energy, and multiply your difficulties.

You can choose your sin, but you can't choose the consequences.

Sin causes the cup of joy to spring a leak.
p. 285

(The Victorious Christian Life by Dr. Tony Evans)

Cancer is a dreaded disease. It begins when one cell no longer wants to go along with the body's program and decides to go solo, to do its own thing. Not only does this cell begin to act independently, it also begins reproducing its own kind. One rebellious cell begets a whole new family of Benedict Arnolds, producing a lump in some part of the body, which instead of contributing to the body begins to rob the body of its strength. As if this weren't bad enough, these traitors then decide to metastasize, spreading their influence to other parts of the body.

Like the Mafia, they silently, yet violently, penetrate vital organs to establish their own cronies and sabotage each organ's effectiveness. If undiagnosed or left untreated, this army of rebels brings death and destruction to the whole body.
p. 55

(Perilous Pursuits by Joseph M. Stowell)

How did our hearts become such a toxic waste dump of personal and relational corruption? We know that we were created for a significance that finds its source in God. We also were given the intrinsic energies of pleasure, pride, and passion so that those compelling forces might drive us toward full satisfaction in an unhindered relationship with God, in whose image we were made. Originally, our significance was found in a relationship with Him, our pleasure was in and from Him, our pride was focused on Him, and our passions longed for Him. This stimulated our lips to praise and our hearts to humility. From such a platform we could spontaneously declare God's glory.
p. 46

v.18 And to whom did He swear that they should not enter into His rest, but to those who were disobedient?

QUESTION #5:

"AND TO WHOM DID HE SWEAR THAT THEY SHOULD NOT ENTER INTO HIS REST?"

QUESTION #6:

"BUT TO THOSE WHO WERE DISOBEDIENT?"

The Bible Knowledge Commentary points out:

. . . the sinful generation . . . was permanently excluded from taking possession of their inheritance in Canaan.

Barclay says:

But to obtain the blessings of God two things are necessary. (a) Trust is necessary. We must believe that what God says and God offers is true. We must believe that what God says He can do God will do. We must be willing to stake our lives on the fact that God's promises are true. (b) Obedience is necessary. It is just as if the doctor were to say to us: "I can cure you if you obey my instructions implicitly." It is just as if a teacher were to say: "I can make you a scholar if you follow my curriculum with absolute fidelity." It is just as if a trainer were to say to an athlete: "I can make you a champion if you never deviate from the laws of discipline that I lay down." In any realm of life success depends on obedience to the word of the expert. God, if we may put it so, is the expert in life, and real happiness in life depends on obedience to Him.
pp. 28-29

Wuest says:

The word used is more descriptive of the character of the generation that refused to enter Canaan. They were of that non-persuasible type that will not listen to reason, stiffnecked, obstinate.
p. 82

Why was it so? Why did they not go in? The reason they did not was because they formed a COMMITTEE and failed to move forward on the basis of God's promise.

I have a little plaque in my office that says:

"God so loved the world that He didn't sent a committee."

(The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make by Hans Finzel)

Breathing Room and Flexibility

One of the best ways to take the wind out of the sails of visionaries is to send their ideas to a committee. Here are some good definitions of committees:

An elephant is a horse designed by a committee.

A committee keeps minutes and wastes hours.

The best committee has three members--with two of them out of town.

A committee is made up of the unfit trying to lead the unwilling to do the unnecessary.

A committee is a collection of individuals who separately do nothing and together decide that nothing can be done.

pp. 74-75

(The Mature Man: Becoming a Man of Impact by David DeWitt)

Part of what makes hell hell is that those who are there "have no rest day and night." Part of what makes heaven heaven is that those who are there "rest from their labors." Since rest is a characteristic of heaven and the lack of rest is a characteristic of hell, we can be sure that godly rest is good and the lack of it is bad.

p. 70

(They Walked with God by James S. Bell, Jr.)

MacLaren says, "If you waste your youth, no repentance will send the shadow back upon the dial, or recover the ground lost by idleness, or restore the constitution shattered by dissipation, or give back the resources wasted upon vice, or bring back the fleeting opportunities. The wounds can all be healed, for the Good Physician . . . has lancets and bandages, and balm and anodynes for the deadliest; but scars remain even when the gash is closed."

God forgave Moses and Aaron for their sins, but both suffered the penalty. Neither one was permitted to enter the promised land. Jacob became a "prince of God" at the ford of Jabbok, but to the end of his days he carried in his body the mark of the struggle. Paul's thorn in the flesh was not removed, even after most earnest and repeated prayer. It lost its sting, however, and became a means of grace.

Perhaps that is one reason God does not remove these penalties of sin. He many intend them to be used as tokens of His chastening. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." And if the temporal consequences were completely removed we would be liable to fall back again into sin. The penalty is a continual reminder of our weakness and of the need of caution and dependence upon God.

D. L. Moody

10/2

v.19 And so we are seeing that they were not able to enter because of unbelief.

In the words "SO WE ARE SEEING" is the TRIUMPHANT CONCLUSION to the writer's argument.

J. Vernon McGee says:

I suggest that you underline this verse in your Bible. This is what is robbing you and me of many blessings--unbelief.
p. 530

Delitzsch says:

This was the reason why it became for them impossible, despite all striving and longing, to reach the promised goal. What a solemn sermon lies in this fact for the redeemed under the New Testament--for the church of Christ!
p. 184

Richards says:

With whom was God angry? These very people who sinned--and whose bodies ultimately fell in the wilderness, never to know the rest of entering the Promised Land. And who does God declare can never experience His rest? Those whose untrusting attitude leads them to disobey, rather than respond to, God's voice. No one who disobeys God can ever enter His rest.
p. 34

DeHaan says:

Oh, believer, in the light of the Judgment Seat of Christ, will you arise, turn about, and leaving behind all doubt and disobedience, claim the land of victory and find a rest and peace you never knew before? The way is clear; honestly judge everything in your life which cannot bear the examination of your Saviour, confess it and forsake it.
p. 63

Draper says:

They did not enter into the promise God had prepared for them. They did not miss out on it because God was not able to deliver it, or because God went back on his word. They missed out on it because they did not believe God.

p. 84

Griffith Thomas says:

The trouble in Israel's case has been seen to be unbelief. They were unwilling to take God at His word, and the result was that God could do nothing with them in the way of progress, and had to condemn them to nearly forty years wandering in the wilderness. Whenever we do not believe God's Word, the inevitable result is that we doubt His power and love.

p. 46

Phillips says:

Therefore they were condemned to ceaseless wanderings in the wilderness, until they were overtaken at last by death. Unbelief triumphed. They were saved, but they never enjoyed Canaan. They settled for less than God had for them. A people who had trusted God to bring them out of Egypt simply refused to trust God to bring them into Canaan. As a result they lost, not their salvation, but the joy, the peace, and the rest God intended for them in the promised land (3:18-19). This Old Testament disaster is now used as the basis for an appeal to the Hebrew believers.

p. 72

Bruce says:

The moral must have been plain enough to the recipients of the epistle. For they too had experienced the redeeming power of God; they too had the promise of the homeland of the faithful to look forward to; but one thing could prevent them from realizing that promise, just as it had prevented the mass of the Israelites who left Egypt from entering Canaan--and that one thing was unbelief.

p. 102

Hewitt says:

God's grace had opened the way to rest, God's purpose was that some should enter, yet God's power alone enables the believer to accomplish this. But this power cannot operate in an evil heart of unbelief. Such a heart was found in the Israelites; it was found also at Nazareth where our Lord could do no mighty works. The warnings already given suggest that there was evidence of the evil heart in some of the readers. And since the same evil heart is found in many today, the warnings are still applicable.
p. 85

Lane says:

The hearers are left with the overwhelming impression that unbelief would expose them to the same precarious situation as Israel at Kadesh.
p. 89

The fundamental failure of the desert generation was their refusal to believe that God was actually present among them, directing them through his word. Refusing to acknowledge his presence and voice, they forfeited the possibility of entrance into God's rest. In calling attention to their fate, the writer warns the community not to lose faith in the presence of God with them that is celebrated whenever the word of God is read or the gospel tradition is proclaimed.
p. 90

The condition for the fulfillment of the divine promise remains active faith, expressed through obedience and adherence to the Christian confession.
p. 91

There are 4 KEY HOT WORDS in these last 4 verses--1 word in each verse:

1. REBELLED in verse 16

"For who when they heard, rebelled?"

2. SINNED in verse 17

"Was it not with those who sinned,"

3. DISOBEDIENT in verse 18

"but to those who were disobedient?"

4. UNBELIEF in verse 19

"they were not able to enter because of unbelief."

Andrew Murray points out:

Their faith was but for a time. They had faith to leave Egypt. They had not faith to enter Canaan. Among the Hebrews there were Christians who were in the same state. They had begun well but had been hindered. Some were standing still. Some had already turned back. And even so, there are many Christians in our churches who never come further than the initial faith of conversion. They say they know God has saved them from Egypt. They rest content with the thought of having been converted. There is no hardy desire, no earnest purpose to press on to a life of holiness, no readiness at any sacrifice to go up into the promised land of rest and of victory.

When Israel was about to enter the land of Canaan, Moses used the words, He brought us out from thence, that He might bring us in to give us the land. It is to be feared that there are many Christians who put asunder what God has joined together. They would fain be brought out from the land of bondage. They are not ready to go all the length with God to enter the land and conquer every enemy. They would fain be made happy in being delivered from bondage. They long not to be made holy in a life of separation and service to the voice that calls to enter into God's rest. They harken not but harden their hearts.

It is not in Egypt. Let us note this well. It was on the very borders of Canaan that the men God had begun to save hardened their hearts. It is among Christians who profess conversion, who have not only begun the Christian life but even made some progress in it, that the hardening of the heart is now still found. The call to holiness, the call to cease from the life of wandering and murmuring, and enter into the rest of God, the call to the life of victory over every enemy, into the service of God in the land of promise is not obeyed. They say it is too high and too hard. They do not believe with Caleb, We are well able to possess the land. They fear the sacrifice and cling to the carnal life. In not harkening to God's voice their heart is hardened. God has sworn, They shall not enter in His rest.

These circumstances in the history of the ancient Hebrews were well fitted to excite in the minds of those to whom the apostle wrote a holy fear of unbelief and disobedience. Jehovah is the same yesterday, today and forever. If unbelief and disobedience offended Him in them, they will offend Him in us also. If unbelief and disobedience to the will of God as spoken by Moses brought down on our fathers such judgments, what may we expect if we are unbelieving and disobedient when He makes known His will to us by His Son. Death in the wilderness, exclusion from Canaan, will be found but very feeble figures of the evils in which unbelief and disobedience to Him will involve us.

John Brown points out:

The point of verse 16 then is that the very ones who had been delivered from bondage and started out for the promise land by faith were the ones who missed the life and land of rest because of unbelief. The rest is not of salvation but that which belongs to the child of God; that is, a life of faith.

The SUMMARY POINTS of the argument in these last verses of the chapter are seen in the following 4 STATEMENTS:

- 1.The very people God rescued provoked Him (v. 16)
- 2.They sinned and suffered its consequences (v. 17)
- 3.Disobedience brought the rejection (v. 18)
- 4.They could not reach the rest that they started for by faith because of unbelief (v. 19)

Delitzsch points out:

A fresh exhortation, based on the preceding doctrine, not to harden the heart against a messenger of God so much greater than even Moses, and this in order not (like the generation in the wilderness) to lose an entrance into God's rest.

p. 165

M. R. DeHaan points out:

Canaan is God's picture of the life of victory. Canaan is not a picture of heaven. Canaan represents the abundant victorious life of the believer here and now. Canaan cannot represent heaven, for Canaan had to be possessed by conquest. Canaan was a land of fighting, and Israel must battle fiercely to possess it, gaining the victory but also even suffering temporary defeat. Canaan cannot be heaven, for in heaven, thank God, we shall not have to fight to get the victory. The Israelites were completely out of Egypt, but came short of reaching the land of the abundant life, the Canaan of victory.

pp. 60-61

Page points out:

And when the crisis hour arrived, the people said no to God instead of yes. The answer of God was, they shall not enter into my rest. They said, We will not. And God said, You shall not. Humanly speaking, our attitude is the determining factor.

William R. Newell points out:

Their business was to exercise faith in and obedience to the merciful Jehovah God, who had not only brought them out of Egypt's bondage by blood redemption and brought them through the Red Sea, swallowing up their enemies, but had sustained them right up to the border of Canaan; defending them despite their murmurings from Amalek and from all their enemies. Their business, I repeat, was to go forward gladly in faith. Caleb and Joshua did this and entered Canaan. Others entered not into God's rest. They were disobedient. They were not able to enter in because of unbelief. Today, for them, is over. The ten evil spies, leaders in unbelief and rebellion, died of the plague, and the people were told they must go back into the wilderness where their dead bodies should fall. Presumption the next day was not faith. They were not able to enter in. To multitudes of those whose bodies fell in the wilderness, the solemn words of

A. B. Simpson apply:

"They came to the gates of Canaan
But they never entered in.
They came to the land of promise
But they perished in their sin.

And so we are ever coming to the place
Where two ways part
One leads to the land of promise
And one to a hardened heart."

We are told that those who committed the disobedient sin were unable to enter on account of unbelief. This prepares the ground for a similar warning to the readers. The disobedience arose out of unbelief, instead of realizing that the same God who brought them out of Egypt could bring them into Canaan, but their faith failed.

(From Our Daily Bread, October 14, 1994)

Phillips Brooks, former minister of Boston's Trinity Episcopal Church, is perhaps best known as the author of "O Little Town of Bethlehem." He was a very busy pastor, yet he always seemed relaxed and unburdened, willing to take time for anyone in need.

Shortly before Brooks died, a young friend wrote to him and asked the secret of his strength and serenity. In a heartfelt response, Brooks credited his still-growing relationship with Christ.

He wrote, "The more I have thought it over, the more sure it has seemed to me that these last years have had a peace and fullness which there did not used to be. It is a deeper knowledge and truer love of Christ. . . . I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know Him. It is the most real thing in the world. And every day makes it more real. And one wonders with delight what it will grow to as the years go on."

What a testimony to the strength and serenity our Savior can provide! What a motivator for all of us who know Him as Savior to cultivate daily a closer, deeper fellowship with Jesus! Only that relationship can bring abiding peace and delight.--VCG

I bless the Christ of God;
I rest on love divine;
And with unfaltering lip and heart
I call this Savior mine.--Bonar

Peace floods the soul
When Christ rules the heart.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: "Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth" (Psa. 26:2, 3).

LESSON #2: It is our responsibility to be continually checking up on ourselves and our spiritual condition.

LESSON #3: It is our responsibility to keep on encouraging one another every day.

LESSON #4: We only have the guarantee of today. Yesterday is gone and tomorrow may never come.

LESSON #5: There is a deceitfulness of sin because we never do really see the consequences before we get involved.

LESSON #6: One of the evidences of a genuine relationship with Christ is the unconditional commitment to "stay by the stuff."

LESSON #7: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb. 3:15).

LESSON #8: The failure of the Israelites is seen in four words: (1) they rebelled; (2) they sinned; (3) they were disobedient; and (4) they were filled with unbelief.

LESSON #9: The reason more do not experience His rest is because of unbelief.

LESSON #10: Have you entered into the rest of the total adequacy of Jesus Christ?

Draper says:

Life's greatest moment is before us when we hear the voice of God speaking to us. If we will hear it, we can enter into the blessing of God in our life. If not, we cannot. It boils down to this--we have a choice. We are confronted by the voice of God. We hear God's voice. Our soul stirs as God is dealing with us. We have only one choice. Whether we will say like Pharaoh, "Who is the Lord that I should listen to him?" or we will say like the prodigal son, "I will arise and go to my father." We must make our own choice when we hear God's message. "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."
pp. 84-85

(The Complete Book of Zingers by Croft M. Pentz)

A pastor's prayer: "Do something for us today that isn't in the bulletin."
p. 149

(The Victorious Christian Life by Dr. Tony Evans)

It's like the story told of an Indian who had become a Christian. As his brothers began to observe how different his lifestyle had become, they asked, "What has caused such a change?" The new Christian looked on the ground and found a worm; then he put it on some leaves and set them aflame. Just before the fire got to the worm, he reached down and took the worm out of the flames and held it before his friends. "Me--worm," he said.

That is what God did for each of us. He reached down to sinful men, who deserved the fire of judgment, and just in the nick of time, delivered us up from the flames so we might live a life pleasing to Him.
pp. 21-22

(31 Days of Praise: Enjoying God Anew by Ruth Myers)

And I praise You that You are greater than any or all of my failures . . . that as my Potter You are able to mold and remold me, as I submit to Your wisdom and skill . . . that as the Master Artist You are able to take the dark threads of my life--my wounds, my scars, my blotches, the messes I make, and even my sins--and blend them into a beautiful design, to the praise of the glory of Your grace.
p. 99

(When God Whispers: Glimpses of an Extraordinary God By an Ordinary Woman by Carole Mayhall)

Her face held a sweetness--almost a radiance--as she told our small group, "I'm having open heart surgery next Wednesday. If the operation is a success, I'll be free of the shortness of breath and have the energy I used to have. If it isn't"--a bit of God's glory was in her smile--"if it isn't, I'll be with Jesus." She hesitated, then added softly, "Either way I win."

We remembered her words with comfort a week later when our dear friend, Carol, entered the gates of Heaven.

She won. Long term.

p. 89

Matthew 11:28-30

"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 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. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

(Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions by Kenneth W. Osbeck)

JESUS, I AM RESTING, RESTING
Jean Sophia Pigott, 1845-1882

In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength. (Isaiah 30:15)

John Wesley, the flaming evangelist of the 18th century, once stated that Christians must "learn to live with a slack rein." If that were true then, it is even more necessary in the hectic pace lived today. We all need times of relaxation, rest, and renewal. Even Christian workers can experience "burn-out" while engaged in worthwhile activities for God.

Resting in Jesus is an important development in our Christian maturity. It is something we must learn to practice daily regardless of life's pressures and circumstances. It must be in the present tense, not a nostalgic memory from the past. Although this principle is easier stated than practiced, we must consciously learn to relax and enjoy God's presence; to allow God to absorb our inward worries and conflicts; to allow Him to energize us with His love and power.

The author of this thoughtful text, Jean Sophia Pigott, was born and lived in Ireland. She wrote this text in 1876. The composer, James Mountain, was an English Baptist minister, writer, and musician. He is best remembered today for several of his surviving hymn tunes.

The story is told of Hudson Taylor, missionary statesman to China, in the terrible days of the Boxer uprising there. As one report followed another of mission stations being destroyed and missionaries massacred, Taylor remained quietly at his desk, singing softly these words that he loved so dearly:

Jesus, I am resting, resting in the joy of what Thou art; I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart. Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, and Thy beauty fills my soul, for by Thy transforming power Thou hast made me whole.

Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, I behold Thee as Thou art, and Thy love, so pure, so changeless, satisfies my heart--Satisfies its deepest longings, meets, supplies its ev'ry need, compasseth me round with blessings. This is love indeed!

Ever lift Thy face upon me as I work and wait for Thee. Resting 'neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus, earth's dark shadows flee. Brightness of my Father's glory, sunshine of my Father's face, keep me ever trusting, resting; fill me with Thy grace.

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