

**HEBREWS 3:7-19**  
**Don't Be Hard Hearted**

If you're over 17 you've probably heard about or been warned about heart disease. It is the leading killer in the USA. (2017)

**Arteriosclerosis** is the stiffening or hardening of the artery walls. It is a form of **Atherosclerosis**. This is a buildup of plaque in the walls of the arteries that may eventually severely block the artery, causing the death of the tissue supplied by the artery, for example, heart attack or stroke.

The key part of the word is the **sclerosis part = hardening**. ( it comes from the Greek word used in this passage)

You don't want to have hardened arteries and you don't want to be known as a hard-hearted person, such as Scrooge, nurse Ratchett, or Mr. Bumble who runs the orphanage in Oliver Twist.

7 Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
8 DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME,  
AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,  
9 WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*,  
AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS.  
10 "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION,  
AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART,  
AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS';  
11 AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH,  
'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'"

12 Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,  
15 while it is said,  
"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,  
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME."

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

Short summary:

**The author shows that there are two options for those who claim to know Christ:**

**-Press on toward maturity**

**-Drift slowly into dullness and apathy and destruction.**

The author compares the Hebrews tempted to return to Judaism to the people in Ex 17.

Don't be like them. They didn't believe and follow God to the end.

If you follow their practices and example, then you may well end up like them. If you turn from Christ to go back to the beliefs and practices of the OT then you're moving to unbelief and disobedience.

This is a big story illustration to exhort the readers to stand firm – reference to Ps 95; Ex 17

## The setting of catastrophic unbelief.

Moses delivered the people from Egypt, BUT THEY rebelled – described as “sin, disobedience, hardened hearts” and God was not pleased.

God is not a disinterested bystander when it comes to His people. He is zealous for us.

This serves as a warning to the audience of Hebrews and US...

Today I want to focus on an exhortation and some specific ways to avoid dangerous expression of unbelief.

### **DON'T BE HARD-HEARTED... v.8, 13**

Verses 7-11 give the warning based on the example of the Israelites. Their example is described as “hardening your hearts, provoking God, testing God, going astray in their hearts, sinful disobedience, unbelief.” HEED THE WARNINGS: Ex: sign on river before water fall

We might say, “Well this is addressed to those in Exodus 17, right?” Yes and no. In Hebrews we see that it was for them and by extension for us “TODAY”.

### **“TODAY” IS STILL today.**

Note that the words are coming from THE HOLY SPIRIT. This means that we must take heed to what is being said. We need to listen to scripture with its promises and its warnings. The warnings are meant to give us positive instruction for living the Christian life.

The author of Hebrews is not trying to unsettle sensitive and sincere Christians who are engaged in the normal fight with sin in the Christian life. If you are in the fight of faith, then you're not in the camp of unbelief. If you're concerned about the fight against sin, then it is a good sign.

### **...BUT INSTEAD LEARN TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER**

**13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is *still* called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,**

Encourage so you won't be hardened (parakaleo) = exhort, entreat, call on. This involves a key relational dynamic of personal engagement with one another. It's something that is best done in person, not online (except when necessary). We all need encouragement and we all need to learn to be encouragers.

The opposite of encourage is to discourage through criticism, sarcasm, accusation, griping, etc.

If you get close enough to be together day after day, then you will rub against each other – in marriage, family and friends.

This is where hardening can come in along with contempt. WATCH FOR IT. Avoid it, Hardened = skleruno (sclerosis)?? i.e. of the liver or arteries – IT HAPPENS GRADUALLY. That is why you get regular check-ups. (Worship and Communion are regular heart check-ups)

### **\*\*\* APPLICATION**

Now for an approach to the trickier issues where there can be polar opposite views on hot topics where scripture is not clear. Either way, scripture should guide our response.

The question to be addressed is “How can we discuss those things in a healthy way?”

Here are some ideas:

Think of a political / social / religious belief you oppose so strongly that you can't imagine how someone else could hold it. How do you relate to those who hold that view?

By way of application of Hebrews 3, there is a connection between the unbelieving heart mentioned in Hebrews 3 and the way people relate to one another in person or on social media. So, if we tee off on each other in social media or in person, we really need to stop and evaluate our hearts and ask, "Are we getting hardened?"

Because responding towards others in that way is a lack of love. Angry attacks are signs of a lack of love and of a heart that is hardened, i.e. a heart coming under the deceit of unbelief. This is what Heb 3 warns against – a deceived, evil, unbelieving heart that is falling away from God.

How we treat others, especially those we are prone to think of as political or social enemies is an indicator of whether we are living by faith or whether we are deceived by unbelief.

Don't think you can harden your heart against your enemies without having a heart that becomes, or is already, hardened towards God.

Rather than thinking of someone as a social, political, emotional, or relational enemy, think of him or her as a fellow victim of our shared broken human experience. Try it. It will lower your blood pressure and open doors for a more godly relationship, especially if you pray for them.

NEXT, ask YOURSELF some questions:

Is it possible that someone can have a different perspective and still be a divine image bearer?

Can I agree that both of us may actually want what is best for people, even though we may disagree on what "the best" is, or what the best approach is?

Do I know people, whom I generally trust, who hold the opposite view?

Might there be value in asking questions about how he or she came to those conclusions?

Have I ever had a different view on that issue? If so, why did it change?

Those questions could provide a path for serious honest discussions that allows for an opportunity to encourage one another rather than becoming hardened towards one another.

**SIN IS DECEITFUL** – we don't see it when we are being hardened, but others see it. Often it shows through our words. We are the easiest person for us to deceive. We lie to ourselves more than we lie to anyone else. That is partly true because we talk to ourselves more than we talk to anyone else. We must always remember that we are the most influential person in our own lives.

Luther – "It is rightly called the deceitfulness of sin because it deceives under the appearance of good."

Bad is called good – EX: the current language regarding abortion. It used to be "make it safe, legal and rare". Today state government assemblies stand up and cheer a bill that allows for abortion and infanticide. And they think they are doing a good thing. Sin is deceit, whether it is on a large scale like that or the "small" things in our own lives – "no one will know; no one will be harmed, it's only this one time, everybody else is doing it, ..."

Prov 3 – **5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart And do not lean on your own understanding.**

**6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.  
7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the LORD and turn away from evil.**

The letter to Hebrews is written to a professing Christian congregation, so the reality is that self-deception can happen to anyone. Maturing Christians know that.

Hebrews has sobering warnings. They don't intend to discourage the believer who is fighting sin and concerned about his/her walk with God.

One thing to note about the book of Hebrews is that the author lives in a tension between affection and encouragement for the readers and warning with very sober terms and pointing out the peril of spiritual danger. For this letter to make any sense in for us to get anything out of it we have to be willing to live with that tension.

The author encourages the people to contemplate Jesus and also to review themselves. One truth to keep in mind is that experience does not lead to wisdom; evaluated experience leads to wisdom. If we don't monitor ourselves then what happens? What will be the trajectory of our lives? The heart is deceitful above all things and it will fool us to the point where we will not consider Jesus.

#### **IDEAS HAVE CONSEQUENCES AND BAD IDEAS HAVE VICTIMS**

Verses 12 13 we must note that the warning is to the church body is a whole but also it is very individual. Lest anyone of you find you have an evil unbelieving heart. There is a corporate and a very individual personal dynamic to this. Lest any one of you be hardened verse 13. An important resource for withstanding the enticement to turn from God is mutual admonition and exhortation.

EX: Super marathoners who have running buddies for stretches of 10, 20, 30 miles

**The story of Israel in the wilderness – Ex 17 may have been different if instead of mutually inciting rebellion, they had sought to encourage one another in trusting the God who had recently delivered them from Egypt. – (Philip E. Hughes – paraphrase)**

It's not just that everyone is important as in the collective group, but that every individual is important in terms of the health of the group.

EX: An overall healthy body with a broken foot is greatly hindered. An infectious disease can spread quickly from just one person.

**Christianity is communal and collective. It is not an individual activity.**

Is there anyone who can speak into your life? Does your lifestyle build in time for it?

If we are not intentional about building relationships, they will not happen. We do not drift into relational intimacy and relational growth.

If we don't have people who have a green light into our lives who have a free fire zone in our lives, then we will drift, and our hearts will harden because we will deceive ourselves.

We all know how negativity can be contagious. We drift toward criticism and complaining and not toward encouragement.

**HYPOTHETICAL TEST: ignore God's Word, the fellowship of corporate worship, and a walk of repentant faith for 3 months –**

DO YOU THINK you'll be a more joyful, encouraging, loving, spiritually minded person or a more critical, demanding, ungrateful, self-centered person??

Remember Heb 3:1..."Consider Jesus"

We can't really consider Jesus on our own. Because knowing Jesus means being part of a body and a family

COME TO THE TABLE for a heart check-up.

Are there areas or relationships where hardening is taking place?

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