



Talmid תלמיד a Hebrew word that means “a true disciple who desires to be what the Rabbi Jesus is.”

Whoever claims to live in Him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:6 (NIV)

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STUDY TO SHEW THYSELF APPROVED UNTO GOD, A WORKMAN THAT NEEDED NOT TO BE ASHAMED, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH. 2 TIMOTHY 2:15



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The Doctrines of Grace

Christ’s Purposeful Atonement (Part-5) *(Continuation from last month)*

The primary axiom of all Reformed theology is this: “Salvation is of the Lord.” Salvation is a divine work. It is designed and ordained by the Father, accomplished by the Son, and applied by the Holy Spirit. All three persons of the Trinity are in eternal agreement on the plan of redemption and its execution.

On the distinction between Reformed and Arminian theology, J. I. Packer has

written:

“The difference between them is not primarily one of emphasis, but of content. One proclaims a God who saves; the other speaks of a God who enables man to save himself. One view presents the three great acts of the Holy Trinity for the recovering of lost mankind—election by the Father, redemption by the Son, calling by the Spirit—as directed towards the same persons, and as securing their salvation infallibly. The other view gives each act a different reference (the objects of redemption being all mankind, of calling, those who hear the gospel, and of election, those hearers who respond), and denies that any man’s salvation is secured by any of them. The two theologies thus conceive the plan of salvation in quite different terms. One makes salvation depend on the work of God, the other on a work of man....”

Table 5

The Tulip’s Third Petal

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| 1. Total depravity | Humanity’s radical corruption |
| 2. Unconditional election | God’s sovereign choice |
| 3. Limited atonement | Christ’s purposeful atonement |
| 4. Irresistible grace | The Spirit’s effective call |
| 5. Perseverance of the saints | God’s preservation of the saints |

In the same essay **Packer says the Arminian concept**, as debated at the **Synod of Dort in 1618**, declares that **“Christ’s death did not ensure the salvation of anyone, for it did not secure the gift of faith to anyone (there is no such gift); what it did was rather to create a possibility of salvation for everyone if they believe.”**

The question answered by the doctrine of limited atonement is this: Is Christ a real Savior or merely a “potential” Savior? The doctrine of limited atonement, the **L** of **TULIP**, is probably the most disputed term of the five. The idea that the atonement is **“limited”** provides the crux of the controversy.

To state the question in another way: **Did Christ die to atone for the sins of every human being, or did he die to atone for the sins of the elect only?**

The atonement of Christ was clearly **limited** or **unlimited**. There is no alternative, no *tertium quid*. If it is unlimited in an absolute sense, then an atonement has been made for every person’s sins. Christ has then made propitiation for all persons’ sins and expiated them as well.

It seems to follow from the idea of unlimited atonement that salvation is universal. The vast majority of **Arminians**, **Dispensationalists**, and other **semi-Pelagians** who **deny limited atonement**, *however*, **reject universalism**.

Historic Arminianism embraces **particularism**: *not all people are saved, only a particular number of them*. That particular group of people who are saved **are those who respond to the offer of the gospel with faith**. Only those who believe appropriate the benefits of the saving atonement in Christ. The person who fails to embrace the saving work of Christ with faith is ultimately left without the expiation of his sins, the propitiation of the cross, and the satisfaction of God’s justice.

In this view faith is not only a condition for redemption, but also one of the very grounds of redemption. If the atonement is not efficacious apart from faith, then faith must be necessary for the satisfaction of divine justice. Here faith becomes a work with a vengeance because its presence or absence in a sinner determines the efficacy of Christ’s

work of satisfaction for this person.

I can hear the howls of protest from the Arminian camp. They steadfastly abhor the idea that human faith adds any “value” to the finished work of Christ or to the efficacy of Christ’s work of satisfaction. **The formula they normally use is that Christ’s atonement is *sufficient* for all, but *efficient* only for some.**

Reformed theologians do not question that the value of Christ’s atonement is sufficient to cover the sins of the whole fallen race. The value of his sacrifice is unlimited. His merit is sufficient to cover the demerits of all who sin. We also agree that the atonement is efficient only for some, an idea that is integral to the doctrine of limited atonement.

When we speak of the sufficiency of the atonement, however, we must ask the question, Is it a sufficient satisfaction of divine justice? If it is sufficient to satisfy the demands of God’s justice, then no one needs to worry about future punishment. If God accepts payment of one person’s moral debt from another, will he then exact payment of the same debt later by the person himself? **The answer is obviously no.**

This means that if Christ really, objectively satisfied the demands of God’s justice for everyone, then everyone will be saved. It is one thing to agree that faith is a necessary condition for the appropriation of the benefits of Christ’s atoning work, for justification and its fruits.

It is quite another to say that faith is a necessary condition for the satisfaction of divine justice. If faith is a condition for God’s justice to be satisfied, then the atonement, in itself, is not sufficient to satisfy the demands of God’s justice. **In itself the atonement is not “sufficient” for anyone, let alone for all**. Full satisfaction is not rendered until or unless a person adds to the atonement his faith.

Again Arminians will protest that they do not, in fact, make faith a work of satisfaction. Faith is a necessary condition, they say, not a work of satisfaction. But the question remains, **Is divine satisfaction effected without faith?** If so, then no satisfaction is left to be imposed on unrepentant sinners. If not, then faith is clearly an element necessary for satisfaction, an element that we supply.

The great Puritan theologian John Owen said this:

“First, if the full debt of all be paid to the utmost extent of the obligation, how comes it to pass that so many are shut up in prison to eternity, never freed from their debts? Secondly, if the Lord, as a just creditor, ought to cancel all obligations and surcease all suits against such as have their debts so paid, whence is it that his wrath smokes against some to all eternity? Let none tell me that it is because they walk not worthy of the benefit bestowed; for that not walking worthy is part of the debt which is fully paid, for (as it is in the third inference) the debt so paid is all our sins. Thirdly, is it probable that God calls any to a second payment, and requires satisfaction of them for whom, by his own acknowledgment, Christ hath made that which is full and sufficient?”

Let me consider the benefit of Christ’s atonement for me. I am presently a believer in Christ. Today I enjoy the benefit of an atonement made for me centuries ago.

Did that atonement satisfy the demands of God’s justice on all of my sins?

If it did, then it satisfied the penalty for the sin of my previous unbelief. Was that sin paid for before I believed?

Or was Christ’s atonement not complete until I came to faith?

Did his death cover my unbelief or not?

If it did, why then does his atonement not cover the unbelief of unbelievers?

It covers my former unbelief but not the present unbelief of unbelievers. Advocates of unlimited atonement say the sin of unbelief is not covered unless the condition of faith is met. **My faith then makes Christ’s atonement efficacious for me.**

If faith is necessary to the atonement, then Christ’s work **was indeed a mere potentiality.** **In itself it saves no one. It merely makes salvation possible.**

Theoretically we must ask the obvious question, **What would have happened to the work of Christ if nobody believed in it?** That had to be a theoretical possibility. **In this case Christ would have died in vain.** He would have been a potential Savior of all but an actual Savior of none.

“That is pure speculation,” the **Arminian replies.** The reality is that many have and do embrace Christ in faith. Christ is a bona fide Savior. People truly are saved by his work. Besides, when our omniscient God sent Christ into the world to make an atonement, he knew this would be no exercise in futility. The Father knew that not only he would be satisfied by the work of his Son but the Son himself would see the travail of his own soul and be satisfied.

This divine satisfaction, however, would be limited. If God sent Christ to save everyone, then he must remain eternally dissatisfied with the results. Though the Son may receive satisfaction from knowing that some have availed themselves of his atonement, his satisfaction must be partial because so many have not.

This raises the cardinal point in the doctrine of limited atonement. The ultimate question has to ***do not so much with the sufficiency or efficiency of the atonement, but with its design.***

What was God’s original purpose or intent in sending his Son into the world?

Was his divine plan to make redemption possible or to make it certain?

If God planned to redeem all men, did his plan fail?

Did God know in advance who would believe and who would not?

Was the faith of believers part of his plan?

Our answers to these questions all depend on our understanding of God’s character, of his sovereignty and omniscience.

GOD’S WILL AND REDEMPTION

The Bible says God is **“not willing that any should perish”** (**2 Peter 3:9**).

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

What does this passage mean? There are at least four different ways to interpret it, and they cannot all be correct. The first problem is the meaning of the word willing or wishing.

The Bible speaks of the will of God in several ways. The most frequent usages refer to (1) his decretive will, (2) his preceptive will, and (3) his will of disposition.

The decretive will is sometimes referred to as God’s sovereign, efficacious will, by which what he decrees must necessarily come to pass. If God decrees sovereignly that something will happen, it will certainly take place. The decretive will is irresistible.

The preceptive will refers to God’s precepts or commands, the law he enjoins upon his creatures. We are able to violate his preceptive will. That is, we are capable of sinning, of disobeying his law. We may not do it with impunity, but we are able to do it. This is a classic case of the difference between *may* and *can*. *Can* refers to ability, while *may* refers to positive permission.

Table 6

The Will of God

Decretive will	The sovereign, defficacious will of God	Cannot be resisted
Preceptive will	The precepts, commands of God	Can be resisted
Will of disposition	That which pleases, delights God	Can be resisted

The will of disposition, referred to in Scripture, means that which is pleasing or delightful to God.

If we apply these different concepts of the will of God to **2 Peter 3:9**, **we get different results:**

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not (willing) or [wishing] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

1. God is not willing (in the sovereign, decretive sense) that any should perish. This means every person will be redeemed. No person will ever perish.

This interpretation proves more than the Arminian or semi-Pelagian wants. It establishes universalism, which puts this text on a collision course with everything the Bible teaches about particularism.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not (willing) or [wishing] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2. God is not willing (in the preceptive sense) that any should perish. This means God forbids, in a moral sense, anyone to perish. To perish is an act of disobedience or a sin.

Now surely anyone who in fact does perish does so as a law-breaker and is guilty of manifold acts of disobedience. It is possible to interpret the text in this manner, but it is a highly unlikely choice. It jars the mind to say that the text means merely that God does not “allow” people to perish.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not (willing) or [wishing] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

3. God is not willing (in the dispositional sense) that any should perish. This means virtually the same thing as other texts, for example, those that say God does not delight in the death of the wicked.

This speaks of God’s common grace and general love or benevolence for mankind. A human judge who sentences a guilty person to prison does not enjoy this

task. He takes no gleeful delight in meting out punishment, yet he performs the task in order to uphold justice.

We know that God is not full of glee when a wicked person dies, yet he still wills that death in some sense. Nor does this mean that God does something he really does not want to do. God wanted his Son to die on the cross. He ordained, willed, and commanded it. In one sense it pleased God to bruise his Son. His divine pleasure came, not from inflicting his wrath on his beloved Son, but from bringing about redemption. **Of these three options, this one fits the whole context of Scripture the best.**

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not (willing) or [wishing] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

We need to pay more attention, however, to the term any. Any can refer to (1) any person in a universal class or (2) any person in a particular class. The text apparently makes no explicit restriction to a particular class. For this reason many conclude that any refers to the unrestricted universal class of human beings (though this itself is a restriction because it excludes angels and animals).

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)

⁹The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not (willing) or [wishing] for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9 (KJV)

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

The full text, however, does include a restrictive term: **“The Lord is long-suffering to us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”** The restrictive word is us. Any refers to “any of us.” This does not solve the problem instantly, however, for us may refer to us

human beings (universally) or to a particular group of us. Since **2 Peter** is written by a Christian believer to Christian believers and for Christian believers, it is likely that us **refers to Christian believers**.

John Owen writes:

“... who are these of whom the apostle speaks, to whom he writes? Such as had received “great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4), whom he calls “beloved” (2 Peter 3:1); whom he opposeth to the “scoffers” of the “last days” (2 Peter 3:3); to whom the Lord hath respect in the disposal of these days; who are said to be “elect” (Matt. 24:22). Now, truly, to argue that because God would have none of those to perish, but all of them to come to repentance, therefore he hath the same will and mind towards all and every one in the world (even those to whom he never makes known his will, nor ever calls to repentance, if they never once hear of his way of salvation), comes not much short of extreme madness and folly.”

2 Peter 1:4 (NASB)

⁴For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

2 Peter 3:1 (NASB)

¹This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder,

2 Peter 3:3 (NASB)

³Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts,

Matthew 24:22 (NASB)

²²“Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

Owen’s point is that us refers to God’s elect, so God is not willing that any of his elect should perish. **In this case the text must refer to the will of God in the de-cretive sense.**

God sovereignly decrees that none of his elect shall perish. As a result the goal of election is assured. **All of the elect** come to repentance. **All of the elect** come to faith. **All of the elect** are saved. None of the elect per-

ish. This is indeed the very purpose of election, and this purpose is not frustrated.

God's decree of election is a sovereign decree.

It is fully efficacious. All that is necessary for the elect to be saved is brought to pass sovereignly by God.

CORAM DEO (Before the face of God)
Integrity, *Coram Deo*

“What will people say about me after I die?” Have you ever asked yourself that question? It is a question that has haunted me for years, and it is one of the most captivating questions anyone can ask himself. In truth, it would do us good to ask ourselves such questions with some frequency: “What will I contribute to the world, the church, and the kingdom of God before I die?” Such questions, the hard questions concerning death, are in fact the very questions of life. In asking ourselves questions about the reality of our lives in the eyes of the analytical world, we may in turn provide ourselves with answers that change the way we live, both before the eyes of men openly and before the eyes of God privately.

Throughout history, men, both great and small, have shaped the world around them, and wherever I travel, I am always on the lookout for the burial places of great men. The graves of history's victors and villains fascinate me to no end. And whether they were penned by friends or by foes, the epitaphs on gravestones reveal the sentiments of those who knew the departed, leaving the legacy of their opinions engraved in stone for generations to come.

A few days ago I was in England and made a brief visit to London's St. Paul's Cathedral, wherein is found the epitaph: “Sacred to the memory of General Charles George Gordon who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, his heart to God.” Truly, a magnificent legacy to which the world is able to bear witness as scores of visitors ponder the epitaph of a mere man whose character is enshrined in accordance with the opinions of mere men. And while such opinions should not be disregarded, they are only opinions, opinions of men who

cannot feel the hearts of others and who certainly cannot see the actions of others at all times and in all places.

It is only the Lord who knows us for who we truly are, and just as we cannot hide from His presence, neither can we fool Him by closing our eyes and pretending He's not there. For just as David prayed, “**As for me, You uphold me in my integrity, and set me before Your face forever**” ([Psalm 41:12 NKJV](#)) so we must earnestly seek to be men and women of integrity, not merely before the face of men but before the face of God, *coram Deo*. For what matters is not simply how men regard us after we die, but how God regards us in this life and the next.■¹

Tabletalk Magazine, September 2007: Integrity: In Word and Deed. 2007 (2). Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries.

TRUE EVANGELISM

FALSE FORCES IN EVANGELISM
(Continuation from last edition)

METHODS.—Likewise the undue emphasis upon methods in modern evangelism is almost universal. The erroneous impression exists that evangelistic effort should be confined to stated times and seasons, and that belief has led to a far more serious one, namely, that God is only occasionally “**on the giving hand;**” whereas the Scriptural forces in true evangelism depend upon the unchanging promises of God, the constant abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in the church, and His continual working through the church.

Frequent gatherings may be of unmeasured value in the life of any company of believers; but such meetings should not become the only time of soul-winning expectation. The conditions are most unreasonable when the unbelievers of any locality have come to realize that to avoid the spasmodic solicitude of the church for a period of a few days is to be free from such appeals for the rest of the year, or for, perhaps, a term of years. That unreality is one of the fruits of an evangelism that depends upon times and seasons.

Again, the false or undue emphasis on methods is disclosed in the evangelist's demand for some public action in connection with conversion, such as standing or going forward in a meeting. Great confusion has been wrought by the intrusion of such public acts into the

conditions of salvation; thereby making salvation to seem to be by faith in Christ, plus a meritorious and more or less spectacular demonstration.

These required public acts are usually justified from one or two passages of Scripture, which are here quoted: **“Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven”** ([Matthew 10:32 \(NASB\)](#)), and, **“That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation”** ([Romans 10:9-10 \(NASB\)](#)).

A careful study of the whole context of the former passage will reveal that the passage occurs in a body of Scripture which is primarily applicable to the yet future Kingdom age, and it, like all that truth, bears only a moral or secondary application to the age of the church. Confession cannot, therefore, be made a present condition of salvation from this particular passage.

The second passage quoted above ([Romans 10:9-10](#)), is perhaps more important, since it falls within the teachings and conditions that belong primarily to the soul under grace.

The force of the positive statement in [verse 9](#), **“That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved,”** is explained in [verse 10](#): **“for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”** In the latter verse the true meaning and use of the word **“confess”** is suggested. Of this word in this same passage **Dr. Arthur T. Pierson** wrote: “That word means to speak out of a like nature to one another. I believe and receive the love of God. In receiving His love I receive His life, in receiving His life I receive His nature, and His nature in me naturally expresses itself according to His will. That is confession. **Dr. McLaren** has said: ‘Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, because the candle would either go out or burn the bushel.’ You must have vent for life, light and love, or how can they

abide? And a confession of Christ Jesus as Lord is the answer of the new life of God received. In receiving love, you are born of God, and, being born of God, you cry, **‘Abba Father,’** which is but the Aramaic word for **‘Papa’**—syllables which can be pronounced before there are any teeth, because they are made with the gums and lips—the first word of a new-born soul, born of God, knowing God, and out of a like nature with God speaking in the language of a child.”

Confession, then, does not provide a reason for salvation, but rather proves its reality. It is clearly the believer’s privilege, and is of no value until Christ has been received and the new life begun.

So with the heart, or inner consciousness, man believes unto righteousness, which is the one condition of acceptance before God; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation, which is but the normal answer of the new-born soul to God.

That these passages do not demand a public act as a condition of salvation is obvious for at least two other reasons. **First**, such an interpretation would disagree with all other passages of Scripture on salvation, since it would cause grace to be no more grace, inasmuch as there was saving merit in a human deed; and it is impossible to demand confession in connection with conversion without making it seem to be meritorious, and, to that extent, a frustrating of the whole doctrine of grace. **And second**, a public confession cannot be a necessity in salvation, since an innumerable company has found fullest peace with God through Christ Jesus, who was deprived of the supposed value of any such action.

Because of satanic blindness to the Gospel of Grace ([2 Corinthians 4:3-4](#)), unregenerate man cannot comprehend the true basis of salvation, and is therefore ever prone to do the best he knows. **“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”** ([2 Corinthians 4:3-4 \(NASB\)](#)). This is to attempt to work out his own standing before God by his own efforts. It is this natural tendency to do something of merit that prompts many to respond to the evangelist’s appeal. It was an expression of sincerity that inquired of Jesus: **“Therefore they said to Him, ‘What shall we do, so that we may work the works**

of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent" ([John 6:28-29 \(NASB\)](#)).

It may be conceded that genuine results are sometimes obtained even where misleading methods are employed; but there is great harm done as well. Far too little has been said on this point. Some of these evils should, perhaps, be mentioned.

I.—A FALSE ISSUE

The leader who has accustomed himself to years of public service can hardly realize the almost impossible task that is placed before the majority of people when they are asked to do some conspicuous act. Such an undertaking, to them, is stupendous; and while they might be willing to receive Christ as a personal Savior, they often shrink from taking a public step because of their natural timidity. Thus the real issue is many times subordinated to another; and that new issue is not only unreal, but is entirely foreign to the all-important question. In this connection it is often urged that the unsaved should be sufficiently in earnest to readily comply with any method or custom that may be employed. But is it not evident, in addition to the fact that such demands are a denial of the doctrine of grace, that they are both unwarranted and unreasonable, since God has provided no enabling power whereby unregenerate people may do commendable acts for Him? A public confession is a far different task to the same timid person after he has received a new Divine Life; for he can then say by faith, and in all humility: **"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me"** ([Philippians 4:13 \(NASB\)](#)).

The one necessary step—the acceptance of Christ as Savior—can only be performed in the secret of the heart itself, by a personal choice and action of the will. This is a dealing with Christ alone, and as the time of this decision is the most critical moment in a human life, reason demands that it should be guarded from every distracting and confusing condition.

II.—A FALSE ASSURANCE

A leader with a commanding personality (and every successful evangelist must possess that characteristic in the extreme) may secure the public action of many, when the issue is made one of reli-

gious merit through some public act. Under such an impression, a serious person may stand in a meeting who has no conception of what is involved in standing by faith on the Rock Christ Jesus; or he may be persuaded to abandon his natural timidity when he knows nothing of abandoning his satanic tendency to self-help, and resting by faith on that which Christ has done for him. The basis of assurance with all such converts, if questioned carefully, will be found to be no more than a consciousness that they have acted out the program prescribed for them.

III.—“BACKSLIDING”

Careful students of evangelism have noticed that where the necessity of public action as a part of conversion has been most emphasized there has been a corresponding increase in the God-dishonoring record of so-called **“backsliding”**; and this is natural. The covenant of God is to keep eternally all who are truly saved, and there are no other provisions than the one way of salvation by Christ’s willing substitution, whereby God can be just and still be the justifier of a sin-cursed soul. To attempt to **“come to God”** on the grounds of a public performance, even with great earnestness, is but to fail, and the misguided soul who makes that attempt when his hope has proven false is the hardest, above all others, to reach thereafter.

IV.—DISCREDIT TO THE COVENANT OF GOD

As has just been stated, the essential and Scriptural doctrine of the eternal keeping by God of every regenerate soul has been brought into discredit and almost lost. This has come to pass through an attempt to reconcile His covenants with **“actual experience”** in evangelism today. It has been necessary to question this otherwise clear doctrine of Scripture to allow for the appalling percentage of failures in the ranks of supposed converts. But when it is remembered that the modification of that positive doctrine, and the forced interpretation of Scripture to that end, has been attempted only by those who have insisted on a spectacular conversion, their challenge of that glorious truth may be set aside without discussion.

Although an innumerable multitude may have been misguided by responding to false issues and have, sooner or later, returned to their own place outside Christian fellowship, the covenant of God is not involved. **“Therefore He is able also to save forever (eternally) those who draw near to God through Him (Christ),**

since He always lives to make intercession for them” ([Hebrews 7:25 \(NASB\)](#)); “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy” ([Jude 1:24 \(NASB\)](#)); And the soul that believes in Christ “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” ([John 5:24 \(NASB\)](#)). Nor can any “My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand” ([John 10:29 \(NASB\)](#)), or separate them “Nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” ([Romans 8:39 \(NASB\)](#)).

It is quite possible for a newly-saved person to so misunderstand the forces and habits of the old life and the possible power and victory of the new life as to be overtaken in sin and appear, for a time, to be **“in a far country”**; yet, if he has ever been in the Father’s house as a son, he, like the prodigal, is *still* a son, and will therefore be constantly constrained by the Spirit to arise and go to his Father.

Incalculable harm has been done to all Christendom by this widespread denial of the grace and faithfulness of God. Because of this denial, saints have been occupied with futile attempts at self-keeping to the neglect of true service for God, and intelligent sinners have feared to take the Christian’s position when reason warned them that such a position would be impossible for them to maintain.

V.—DISHONOR TO THE SPIRIT OF GOD

The aim of all public demands in modern evangelism is to terminate indifference and hesitation by a positive decision. But this is often undertaken without due regard for the whole process of preparation by the Spirit for the intelligent exercise of saving faith. Thus the all-important work of the Spirit for the unsaved has often been neglected and the Spirit dishonored in the vain attempt to hasten decisions and to secure visible results.

A true decision must depend upon the action of the will of the individual as he is moved by his own clear vision of his place in the saving work of Christ, **and that vision must be created by the**

Spirit. When this is accomplished, there will be little occasion to argue and plead, and methods which are calculated to force a decision will be found to be superfluous; and any method which is superfluous is usually resented by intelligent people. Such methods create a sense of unreality where there should be a growing reality.

To send out workers to plead with individuals in a miscellaneous congregation is not only embarrassing to the people thus approached, but is, in the majority of cases, a service which hardens and repels. Forced decisions sometimes follow such appeals. These, it may be observed, are usually premature and unintelligent decisions; for in such methods there is no waiting for the conviction of the Spirit and no definite dependence upon His leading. On the other hand, the many that have resisted the personal appeal have been hardened or driven away.

Public methods which embarrass any person or class of persons are not only useless but intrusive. There is little gained in inviting all Christians in a public gathering to stand, thus forcing all others into a conspicuous position, causing them annoyance and creating an occasion for prejudice. It is not strange that intelligent unsaved people avoid meetings where these methods are employed. By adopting such a program the evangelist or pastor is positively hindering the very work of God he is attempting to do.

Where the spectacular element in public soul-winning is eliminated there is little opportunity to count supposed results, and the test of conversion is taken wholly out of the sphere of profession and made to rest on the reality of a changed life afterwards.

The sincere evangelist who fearlessly judges, before God, every method he employs—judging them as to their exact value or possible harm in their influence on immortal souls—will find that many methods are more a habit than a necessity in evangelism, or that they have been employed in an effort to produce visible results, rather than to create a means by which sin-burdened souls may find rest and peace through a personal and intelligent faith in Christ as Savior.

Lest it seem that this criticism of modern methods in evangelism has left no possible means of bringing a whole congregation to a point of decision, the following

suggestions are offered, which have proved valuable.

The real value of public methods will be secured and many evils avoided if, after explaining the way of life and during a season of silent prayer, the unsaved are simply asked to accept Christ by a conscious act of the will, directed in definite silent prayer to God. After such an appeal, an opportunity should be made for personal conversation with any who believe they have accepted Christ by faith, or any others who may have honest difficulties. In this conversation the individual's exact understanding of the step can be ascertained and his faith strengthened. Such conversations can easily be secured in an after-meeting, or by offering some attractive literature suited to beginners in the Christian life. When it is clear that an intelligent decision has been made, confession of Christ, as a personal Savior, should be urged along with the other duties and privileges of the new life.

MESSAGES.—In considering messages as the last of the three **“false forces”** in evangelism already mentioned, it may well be restated that the ministry of the evangelist of Scripture was intended to be wider in its scope than the accepted mission of the evangelist of today. As his name implies, he is the **“bearer of glad tidings,”** and so is in marked contrast with the prophet who proclaims the great principles of morality and righteousness. He has also a far different mission than the pastor and teacher who shepherds the flock and feeds them on the Word of God.

The evangelist of Scripture is given a particular message to proclaim. That message is the **“good news”** of the Gospel of Grace; it is therefore a distinct body of truth for this age. His evangel is one of **“glad tidings,”** in that it offers freedom from the bondage of the law, with attempts at self-fitting for the presence of God, and in that it proclaims a perfect salvation by the power of God through faith in Jesus Christ and His redemption by the Cross—a salvation through which God by His power produces a **“new creature,”** able, because of the new life imparted, to bring forth fruit to His glory.

Any deviation from this prescribed message of redemptive truth is an unwarranted undertaking on the part of the evangelist, and is fraught with grave dangers. On the one hand, he may be tempted to adopt the message of the prophet, and so emphasize only moral

conduct or civic righteousness as to lower his own aim from regeneration to reformation; or he may undertake the work of the pastor and teacher and deal with matters of Christian living, and thus encumber the glorious but limited message of the evangelist. For the issue before the unsaved is not one of after-conduct. The life to be led after conversion can only be determined by the individual himself in the light and power of the new relation to Christ, Whom he has received, and the manner of that new life is a personal matter between the Christian and his Lord, **“Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand”** ([Romans 14:4 \(NASB\)](#)). Yet the questions which belong to Christian living, such as forms of amusement, or even church membership, are often discussed by evangelists, when dealing with the unsaved, and these issues may become, in their minds at least, conditions of salvation. The individual may be willing to accept Christ, but be wholly unable to see beyond that one step until that one step is taken.

Again, a message may become a **“false force”** and, to some extent, a hindrance in true evangelism, through a common tendency to depend upon it to move the unsaved to decision. **Only the Spirit of God can illuminate the vision and convict the heart of its sinfulness; and while the Spirit may use the message to that end, the work is His and His alone.** The real purpose of the message and the utter impossibility of its possessing convicting power in and of itself will be more fully stated in another section of this teaching, when dealing with the illuminating of the Spirit as one of the true forces in the evangelism of Scripture.

In considering the true forces in evangelism as they are set forth in the Scriptures, it will be seen that they, in contrast with the **“false forces”** already mentioned, depend upon the activity of the whole company of believers; that they demand an unceasing effort for their fullest realization; and that they, from necessity, must usually be carried on independent of public gatherings or special leaders. These true forces in evangelism will, for the sake of emphasis, be taken up in their reverse order; beginning with the objective, or end, which true evangelism must have in view, and tracing the successive steps backward to the real point of human responsibility.





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Hebrews 3 – Overview

Author's Note: The overview study for each chapter of Hebrews is intended to simply provide a basic understanding of some of the various key elements of each chapter and is not written as an in-depth theological treatise.

In this series one of the objectives is to provide a simple overview of each chapter and in that process to help the reader understand what should be looked for when initially studying a passage. It is generally best to gain an overall understanding of an epistle or a passage before actually delving into all of the theological details and nuances of that portion of Scripture. The rewards of this kind of approach can yield significant insight. All of the various elements of any passage are extremely important, and the more one recognizes what to look for, the more they will begin to innately and intuitively search for those elements as they study. The overall benefit is that of becoming a much better reader and ultimately a much better student and teacher of the Word of God. Anyone who teaches the Word of God must appreciate that the power of God is inherent within the Scriptures themselves. Too often, however, the actual Scriptures themselves are not carefully studied. Many preachers / teachers have a tendency to sim-

ly begin their study by reading commentaries, developing a message from the information they glean in that effort, and then preaching and teaching from those notes. The problem, however, is that in many cases the student has never studied the actual Scriptures themselves. They have not relied on what they have developed from personally meditating and laboring over the Word, but rather they have relied on the comments of others regarding the passage they are studying. The simple problem that may develop from that approach is that in the final analysis the believer is not actually teaching the Word of God, but rather teaching the comments of others about the Word of God.

Now, the purpose of this article is not to discourage researching the excellent commentaries that are available, but simply to encourage those who handle the Word of God not to begin there. There are certain elements of study that must use information from others. That is a given. Most of those who study to teach are not Hebrew or Greek scholars and must use appropriate dictionaries to determine the actual meaning of biblical words as well as Greek technical aides to understand the exact meaning of the verbs when properly parsed. And most students must also rely on other technical documents for the historical data related to the context of the passage that they are studying. However, in that process the actual Word itself must not be given a secondary role. It is the message and it is what contains the message. The individual should consider allowing their personal meditation and identification of the major elements of a text to become the basis for the initial development of their research and ultimate message. Then they can substantiate from a further study of good commentaries as to whether their assessment is correct or whether it needs some correction.

Each of the overview articles for each chapter in this series has been written from that perspective. The majority of endnotes in the chapter overviews are simply references to word study aids and not to actual commentaries. For instance, this writer has a multitude of commentaries on Hebrews and in many cases they often

have very conflicting ideas on how to approach the actual warnings of Hebrews. So, that being the case, how does a good student and researcher “choose” which commentary is correct? What hermeneutical methodology do they utilize in making their determination on what to preach or teach? If I had only one hermeneutical principle to follow, it would simply be “let the Scriptures say what they say”. So understanding such things as verb tenses and moods, appreciating the context and audience, recognizing the flow and intent of a passage, apprehending the differences between doctrinal teaching and corrective teaching, analyzing application, and identifying key words and phrases all become a critical element in being able to properly interpret a passage.

If the individual handling the Word of God does not do a proper technical analysis of the actual key verbs and words, then they are placing themselves in a position where their actual exposition may not be accurate, and in essence they are no longer actually teaching the Word of God. Every word has a very specific meaning, and it is the task of the teacher to ensure that they have that correct meaning so that they are actually teaching the Word of God as it was intended for the biblical audience to whom it was written. This approach is generally referred to in hermeneutics as the “historical-grammatical” approach, or what did the passage mean to the individuals to whom it was written. How did they understand the message? And even though there may be many applications of any passage, there is only ONE correct interpretation and meaning, and it is the duty of every diligent teacher of the Word to find that correct meaning and then teach it persuasively. If a teacher does not have the correct meaning of biblical words in their context, then in essence they are not teaching the Word of God, but rather teaching a flawed interpretation of the Word. The power of God resides in the actual words that He has given in the Scriptures, so the closer that one is to the actual meaning, the greater will be the power in the message preached. On a personal note, when approaching any passage in the New

Testament, and especially the various epistles, this author only uses his various dictionaries and word study aids and the Greek Interlinear Bible so that the proper parsing of a word can be completed. Every verb, for instance, has five elements – tense, mood, voice, person, and number. And it is important to understand those various verb characteristics. Any one of those verbal elements can change the subtle nuances that are critical to proper interpretation, but maybe not apparent at the first reading of a passage.

The following listing of key elements in a New Testament passage is one developed by this author for the purpose of expository teaching. The listing is by no means exhaustive. Each student should develop a method and technique of personal study that best suits their objectives, but having a disciplined approach to evaluating a passage will better ensure that in the final analysis that the individual has rightly handled the Word of God. There are the “**therefore’s**”, key verbs, key words, important connecting words, small significant words, repeated words, repeated phrases, conjunctions, exaltations of Christ, doctrine, warnings, reproofs, promises, historical narratives, Old Testament quotations, dialogue passages, various figures of speech, the tense and mood of the verbs, and context. Every element of a passage is important. Meditating on the Word of God involves going over what has been said in your mind a number of times. The Hebrew word for “**meditate**” was developed from the concept of a cow chewing the cud, or ruminating. A cow has several stomachs and when it eats it regurgitates the food for additional chewing and better digestion for the next stomach to which it will be transferred. So, the biblical concept of meditating of a passage involves reading that passage a number of times and thinking about what has been said until the reader senses the flow and direction of the material. And as an encouragement to the reader, they would be best served to maintain a journal where their developing thoughts on a passage can be retained. Normally, the real treasures of a passage are not on the surface, but below the surface. One reason that many people never

seem to get much out of their reading of Scripture is simply because they approach it in somewhat of an irreverent manner. They open it up, read it quickly, put it down, and then fail to incorporate the truth of what they read into their life. That is no different than reading a novel or watching a television program, and when concerning the Word of God it approaches a form of spiritual neglect and irreverence. It is treating something sacred as if it is common.

Now, [Hebrews 3:1](#) begins with the words “**Therefore, holy brethren**...”, and then in [Hebrews 3:12](#) the author calls his readers “**brethren**” once again. The word “**holy**” in v1 does not have particular reference to a quality of life or how someone actually lives, but rather it is making reference to a position in salvation. The actual Greek word means to be “set apart for God”. I.e., these people have been separated by God for God. In fact, in v1 the author states that these readers are actually “**partakers of the heavenly calling**”. And to even more definitively identify who he is speaking to, in [Hebrews 3:14](#) the author refers to his readers as “**partakers of Christ**”. The word “**partaker**” implies that two people have something in common in the sense that they are partners, associates, and fellows with one another. The word literally means “to have with”. It clearly designates people who are associated with one another in a “**heavenly calling**”, and even more specifically is addressing people who are a part of the Church. The reason that it is so important at this juncture to properly define the word “**partaker**” is because when the author arrives in [Hebrews 6](#) he uses the same word again. And since that passage is considered by many to be the hardest passage in all of Scripture to interpret, it is critical that our word definitions be correct and consistent with one another. The thrust of many commentaries is to imply that the individuals referred to in [Hebrews 6](#) simply are not saved. However, if the author is consistent in his use of this word “**partaker**”, then it is important to let how the word “**partaker**” in [Hebrews 3:1 and 14](#) is defined to have some lev-

el of influence on how the same exact word is used to interpret the meaning of the difficult [Hebrews 6](#) passage. In [Hebrews 3](#) it is clear that the author is referring to believers, or what he calls “**holy brethren**”.

So, in the author’s mind it should be apparent that those to whom he is addressing this letter are Christians, and within the context of this chapter there are two strong admonitions given to them – [Hebrews 3:6](#) and [Hebrews 3:12-14](#). The point is simple – these verses, to include the warnings, are written to Christians, or people who cannot lose their salvation. Christians need warnings! Christians often drift away from the things of God, neglect their spiritual calling, and often abandon their morals. Spiritually they sometimes become discouraged and give up, and many have often turned aside from following Christ wholeheartedly. Christians can easily become spiritually lazy and sluggish and become so influenced and shaped by the culture in which they live that they eventually become much more cultural in their outlook than biblical. Many Christians become easily distracted and simply lose their spiritual focus and find themselves just going through the nominal and acceptable motions of religion. Believers can quickly develop wrong priorities and sinful habits. Christians are often prone to sin, to spiritual carelessness, to moral negligence, and to inattention to the things of God. And when those kind of things happen, warnings and admonitions are a very good thing. Scripture appears to indicate that these kinds of spiritual lapses will actually increase as the Second Coming draws nearer, so the warning’s application to us as believers is not something that can just be ignored. They become an essential part of the biblical message with a specific purpose. And if that purpose is minimized in any way by stating that the warnings are NOT written to Christians and for Christians, then we might as well put the Bible on a shelf. We do not have the spiritual right to just casually pick and choose what we like, and then discard what makes us uncomfortable by manipulating how we might “interpret” that which has some issues not fitting into our theological grid. In the author’s mind these are not just “**brethren**”, but these are “**holy brethren**”,

“partakers of the heavenly calling” and “partakers of Christ” – called out ones, separated ones, believers, Christians.

Now, there are three “therefores” (v1, v7, and v10). The “therefore” is always pointing the reader back to what has previously been said so that the author can further emphasize the meaning and purpose of what he has just taught. The “therefore” is simply saying that the author is about to draw a conclusion from the preceding argument. So, in [Hebrews 2](#) the writer said twenty different things in eighteen verses about the person of Christ. All of those different characteristics of Christ were specifically designed to make these Hebrew readers do exactly what the author encourages them to do in [Hebrews 3:1](#) – to “consider” Christ. The word “consider” means much more than just simply thinking about something. Rather, it carries the idea of observing something fully, or beholding it. In one usage in the New Testament it is translated as “discover”. W.E. Vine says that it means to clearly perceive something, to understand it fully. The Greek word for “consider” is “katanoeo” from “kata” (an intensive preposition) which means “down” and “noeo” which means “to exercise the mind”. The Amplified Bible translates it as to “**thoughtfully and attentively consider**”. So, because of the many attributes of Christ every Christian needs to be extremely careful to thoughtfully and attentively give their minds and hearts to making sure that they understand as much about Christ as they possibly can. Once again, the question needs to be asked as to why the author is even addressing this. It is simply because some of these Hebrew Christians had become very distracted and were probably ignoring the one thing that they needed the absolute most – to keep their hearts and minds on Christ.

The second “therefore” in v7 deals with what the writer has been talking about in [Hebrews 3:1-6](#) – that of being “faithful” (v2, v5, and v6). The simple fact that Christ is both God and Savior demands personal faithfulness. So, what the “therefore” reveals is that

the author is going to talk about what it means to be “faithful”. So, here is what is crucial to see. In the context of these verses, the issue the writer is addressing is NOT one of salvation, but rather that of faithfulness. Would not every serious believer think that faithfulness is a major issue in the Christian life? How would someone like it if they found out that their marriage partner was faithful to them 98% of the time? In reality, it would be devastating! However, when we speak about our relationship to Christ, for some reason there is this cultural idea that faithfulness in the spiritual realm does not really mean the same thing that it does in marriage or other areas of life. However, in reality, it is actually more important.

The issue in [Hebrews 3:7-8 and 15](#) is very simple and is the same in both cases. In fact, they are actually repeated again in [Hebrews 4:7](#). For instance, [Hebrews 3:7-8](#) says,

“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says: “Today, if you will hear His voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness,

So, what is the issue clearly delineated in this portion of Scripture? The issue is that the believer can hear and harden. It has already been seen in [Hebrews 1](#) that God is a speaking God, and in [Hebrews 2](#) that Christ is a speaking Lord. Obviously the writer feels very strong about this idea of hearing the Word of God, but then casually hardening our heart to it. The word for “hear” is the same word used in [Hebrews 2:1](#) which means to hear with understanding. So what does “harden” mean? It means to become stubborn. It means to make something dry or hard and was used of Pharaoh when he hardened his heart against the obvious. So, the practical side of this to believers is that it is very possible to “harden” our hearts to the things of God. Obviously our heart will never allow us to believe that we are actually doing that, but clearly that is the repeated implication of what the author is stating. In fact, the author continues to emphasize this in [Hebrews 3:13](#) when he says,

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

This becoming “**hardened**” that the author is speaking about is a process, not an event. It could be called a spiritual hardening of the heart similar to the physical hardening of the arteries in the heart. We all know what we should not eat, but we eat it anyway, and slowly over time our heart develops atherosclerosis. And it is this spiritual process of hearing, but not obeying that creates a heart condition that has a much stronger propensity to continue to disobey than it previously may have had.

Now, it is important to determine what is the consequence of this for a “believer”. Many of the commentaries simply say that the author is talking about people who are only professing to have salvation, but who do not actually possess salvation. And obviously, most every church has some people like that in it. It would be foolish to think that everyone who attends a church is a Christian. Generally as a rule that is not true or accurate. But by the same token, it would be just as unwise to think that these warnings only apply to those kinds of people – yet that is exactly what many commentators have concluded. For the lost person the only issue is salvation, not holding fast to something that they do not yet have! How can a lost person neglect a salvation that they do not even possess? How could someone neglect a job that they did not have?

So, what is the consequence for the believer that is being addressed in these passages? The consequence and the issue given in [Hebrews 3:11, 18, and 19](#) is that of not entering into God’s “rest” – a primary subject that the author will address in [Hebrews 4](#). In fact, Hebrews 4 is the only place in Scripture where the subject of spiritual rest is addressed.

¹¹ So I swore in My wrath, “They shall not enter My rest.”

¹⁸And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹So we see that they could not enter in because of **unbelief.**

In [Hebrews 3 and 4](#), the issue for the Christian is not one of salvation, but one of spiritual “**rest**”. Unfortunately, it seems very easy for many of the commentators to misdefine “**rest**” to actually mean “salvation”, but obviously what the author has been addressing in [Hebrews 3](#) is that of hearing, but not heeding. When a Christian does that, invariably it can eventually lead to an “**evil heart of unbelief**” or to being “**hardened through the deceitfulness of sin**”. And the regrettable result for the believer is not being able to enter into God’s “**rest**” because of their hearing, but not heeding. It is extremely important to understand that the consequences are not something that the believer controls, but what God has ordained are the spiritual outcome of hearing His Word, but not regarding it as important and crucial to one’s personal life. These results are inevitable for the believer who simply ignores what God is saying to them. In essence, it could be considered a spiritual law that always prevails in a person’s life. Spiritually, everyone reaps what they sow.

A Christian who refuses to listen to God (which actually sounds like an oxymoron) simply will not be able to enter into God’s rest. So, the issue to resolve is simple – to what is God’s “**rest**” referring? Is it referring to now, to later, or maybe both? Is it another word for salvation? In fact, this word “**rest**” or “**rested**” is so important in the author’s mind that it is specifically used or referred to 11 times in 11 verses in [Hebrews 4](#) alone. Without overstating the obvious, it is actually the primary subject of [Hebrews 4](#) – entering into God’s rest. The two key words in [Hebrews 3](#) are “**enter**” and “**rest**” and are used here to begin to introduce the deeper explanation of “**rest**” given by the author in [Hebrews 4](#).

In [Hebrews 3](#) there are only three verbs in the imperative tense, or what is often called the command tense. These are generally considered to be the strongest verbs in a passage because of the spiritual mandates and obligations that they place on the believer. They are not options or preferences for the Christian life, but imperatives. They are spiritual directives that God's word is clearly telling the believer to do. The imperative tense verbs do not represent good advice. They are commands. The three verbs are "consider" (v1), "beware" (v12), and "exhort" (v13). The word "consider" was previously discussed in [Hebrews 2](#) and how it related to thoughtfully and attentively considering all that was said about Christ. The word "beware" is the Greek word "*blepo*". It is a word that is instructing believers to take heed to what is being said and to take serious note because there is a danger lurking of which they need to be fully mindful. As an example, [Colossians 2:8](#) uses the same word and says,

⁸Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

One of the worst things happening in the institutional church today is that men are compromising the Word of God for cultural expediency and for developing a spiritual atmosphere that accommodates everyone's wishes and preferences. It seems that often the leadership within a local church is more concerned with what people think about church than what God thinks about it. It can easily just become human "**philosophy and empty deceit**" as well as a spiritual smorgasbord of ideas that has nothing to do with the Word of God or the ways of God. And unfortunately, much too often Christians just casually buy into it. In reality it is a subtle irreverence and disrespect for the Word of God. In [Mark 12:38](#), Jesus warned His disciples,

³⁸Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces....

I.e., what Mark is saying by using the word "beware" is to "look out" for these people. So, when approaching [Hebrews 3:12](#), the warning is that there is something that believers need to look out for, and that something is that it is very possible to depart "**from the living God**". The word "depart" is a very important term to understand as well. It is the Greek word "*aphistemi*". The prefix "*apo*" means "off", and "*histemi*" means "to stand", so the compound word carries the idea of "standing off" from something. It has an air of pride, independence, and arrogance to it. In fact, the English word "apostasy" comes from this Greek word. An apostate is someone who previously subscribed to a certain belief, but has renounced what they formerly believed.

The point is that the word "beware" is a strong word associated with something desperately critical to understand. How much more serious can it be than for a Christian to just depart "**from the living God**", and to do so with "**an evil heart of unbelief**"? What an "**evil heart of unbelief**" is referring to is the fact that the believer's heart is one in which the very evil of unbelief is still present. It means that it is present not just in a passive state, but in a state of active opposition. I.e., it is actively working to overcome the believer's faith in Christ, and unfortunately the believer is allowing that to take place in their life. However, we must be very careful to distinguish between a heart in which unbelief is present, and an unbelieving heart. The two are very different. The first may be true of a Christian, but not the second. The expression "an unbelieving heart" is distinctly referring to a heart that is solely and entirely controlled by unbelief. In that case there is no biblical faith in Christ whatsoever and therefore no salvation.

The third imperative verb is the word "exhort" in v13. It is the Greek word "*parakaleo*" and literally means "to call near". It means "to call aloud, to utter in a loud voice". When the prefix "*para*" is added to the verb, it intensifies the word and gives it the stronger meaning of to call urgently. In other words do what

you have to do to get people's attention. Most of the translations use either the word "**exhort**" or "**encourage**". However, the Amplified Bible translation simply says to "**warn, to admonish, to urge, and to encourage**". The words warn, admonish, and urge represent the full meaning of the word. This exhorting, this warning, this admonishing is something that believers are to do "**daily**". That simply means all of the time. The ESV says "**But exhort one another every day...**". So, why is all of this necessary? Why are believers commanded to be warning and admonishing each other so often? That is the important question to answer. It is simply because it is quite possible through neglect and spiritual indifference for a believer to unfortunately develop a heart that becomes "**hardened**" to the things of God. It does not happen overnight, but generally occurs over an extended period of time. And that is why constant encouragement is needed – to combat that subtle propensity that every believer potentially has of departing and abandoning the things of God in their life for what the world offers. The writer simply says that sin is "**deceitful**" – and it is. So, one of the practical cures given to the church for helping those who struggle with unbelief and eventually departing is constant encouragement from committed believers. Every believer needs to develop this skill and follow through with this injunction.

In [Hebrews 3](#) there are five specific exaltations of Christ. The exaltations of Christ in Hebrews are the very heart of the entire epistle. [Philippians 2:9-11](#) explain to us why when it says,

⁹Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, ¹¹and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

When we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and exalt Him, what we are doing is affirming His sov-

ereignty over our lives, affirming His right to rule our lives, and affirming His authority over our lives. It is when these issues are not fully understood and when Christians casually abort these fundamental truths out of their lives through spiritual neglect that the warnings and admonitions of Hebrews become critical to heed. To not follow Christ is to demean His amazing sacrifice and work on our behalf. It is more than irreverent and flippant to call ourselves followers of Christ, but then not actually follow Him. So, these exaltations of Christ are given to strengthen the believer and to help refocus their attention on what is eternally important – that of becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

V1 - He is called the "**Apostle and High Priest of our confession**". This is dealing specifically with His priestly work on our behalf. Most of this is clarified and expounded in [Hebrews 7-9](#).

V2 – He was "**faithful to Him who appointed Him**".

V3 – He has been "**counted worthy of more glory than Moses**".

V3 – He is the One "**who has built the house**".

V6 – And once again it is implied that He was faithful. The NASB, NIV, ESV, RSV, and Amplified versions all utilize the actual word "**faithful**" in their translation of v6.

Next, [Hebrews 3](#) gives several characteristics that can describe a believer. Only one is positive (v6 and v14) and the next four are negative. That simple fact alone should help clarify that the disciplines of the Christian life and the exhortations of Scripture are not something that can be casually ignored. To the contrary, every admonition of Scripture has immense significance for the true believer. They are the very words that have life transforming effects in the believer's life when given their due attention.

V6 and 14 – A true believer is someone who can "hold fast" to their "confidence". This should be a profound encouragement to every believer. Being faithful to the

things of God is a great privilege with enormous eternal rewards, and the believer does not need to lose sight of those vital truths in their Christian life.

V8, 13, and 15 – **Believers can “harden” their hearts to the things of God.** This aspect of hardening the heart is further stated in [Hebrews 4:7](#). So, in nineteen verses, the author gives four repeated admonitions for believers not to “harden” their hearts, not to become spiritually stubborn, obstinate, and indifferent to God’s Word in their life. Once again, why would the author do that? It is simply because the reality of that happening in a believer’s life has great potential if they neglect the great salvation that God has given to them. The warning would not be repeated these four times if the potential for this happening in a believer’s life was not that plausible. However, the repeated nature of this warning magnifies the reality of its probability, as well as the severity of its consequences. It is not something that can be taken lightly.

V12 – **Believers can have “an evil heart of unbelief” and because of that they may eventually “depart from the living God”.** This one element of [Hebrews 3](#) should drive every believer to spiritual sobriety. To be indwelt by the Spirit of God Himself and to have the truth spiritually embedded in our lives should be all the motivation that a believer needs to live for Christ. The compounding loss of eternal rewards for departing from the living God cannot be measured, quantified, or even understood.

V18 – Believers can be disobedient. Spiritual disobedience is simply a sign of divine disrespect and a lack of reverence for that which is sacred. It is the earmark of spiritual immaturity and will be further addressed in [Hebrews 5:12 – 6:8](#).

V19 – **Believers can fail to enter into God’s “rest”** simply because they are unwilling to believe God.

[Hebrews 11:6](#) talks about the spiritual necessity of believing God when it states,

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.

In [Hebrews 3](#) there are two major exhortations, and both relate to the same subject.

V6 and 14 – These two verses are encouragements to every believer to “**hold fast**” to what they know to be true. When the Holy Spirit indwells a believer, one of His major works is that of giving them a “**new heart**” and guiding them into the truth. [John 16:13\(a\)](#) says,

“¹³However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth;....

In essence, the author encourages his readers to “**hold fast**” to their confidence simply because he recognizes the subtle propensity that exists within every believer to potentially loosen their grip on that which is deeply spiritual in their life. Excellence in the Christian life is something that must be both intentional and deliberate. Without an intentional spiritual focus, the believer will never make any significant personal spiritual progress or have any meaningful impact in the lives of others. For instance, every believer should intentionally and purposefully embrace a deliberate effort in evangelizing and discipling others. It is not something that just happens, but rather something that requires significant effort and labor on the believer’s part. In [I Corinthians 9:27](#), Paul spoke these sobering words,

“²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Here is the godliest man on the planet, yet he fully recognizes that he must live a deliberate, intentional, calculated, and purposeful life in order for it to really count. This is much of the problem for so many pro-

fessing Christians – there is just not much intentional about their Christian life. They have not yet really decided that they are going to invest their lives into the kingdom of God for the glory of God. Believers cannot grow by doing nothing. There has to be an intentional effort on every believer's part for meaningful biblical growth to occur.

People are not into commitments, and especially commitments that require a high level of sacrifice. It is much too demanding. Many Christians seem to be simply going through the motions without really investing themselves intentionally into what God desires for their lives. Too often Christians use the excuse that they do not know what God's will for their life really is. However, finding the will of God is never the primary issue. What if when we get to heaven we find that the real issue was not finding the will of God, but following the will of God? The Scriptures are not vague and nebulous concerning God's will for the lives of His children. The will of God is not something that is elusive, mysterious, and difficult to discern. Why would God want to hide and disguise what [Romans 12:2](#) calls His “**good and acceptable and perfect will**”? Why would God want to take the most glorious path a believer's life could ever pursue and then hide it from them?

Next, there are six verses out of nineteen that are Old Testament quotations and two of them are repeated which gives them added weight and significance within the overall passage. Once again, and as he does all the way through Hebrews, the author is simply using the Old Testament Scriptures to reinforce his basic premises dealing with the believer's faithfulness and steadfastness in the Christian life.

So, what are some of the simple truths expounded by the author in [Hebrews 3](#)? It is to simply be faithful and steadfast so that we can enter into God's spiritual rest. If we choose not to be faithful, then

our hearts will become hardened through unbelief and sin and we will not experience the very important element of God's spiritual rest in our lives. One of the greatest tragedies of the Christian life is for a believer to fall significantly short of God's intended purpose for their life. Unfortunately, many Christians live “accidentally”. If God uses them in a meaningful way, very often it is more accidental than intentional. However, the people that God is divinely using are those people who are intentionally, willingly, and deliberately living for His glory. For those of us who are pastors, every message has to be intentional. We have to make sure that the gospel is never diluted and that the message is clear and understandable. And in embracing the message of Hebrews, we must consistently emphasize that there is much to lose in not living out and embracing the Christian life. In [2 John 8](#), John stated all of this as follows,

⁸Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that we may receive a full reward.*

It is not our responsibility to define the terms of discipleship simply because Christ has already done that for us. Our responsibility is to intentionally and purposefully be committed to completing the task that Christ has given to us. And as long as Christ has not returned, it only means that the work is not yet complete. Therefore brethren, “**hold fast**” to your confidence “**firm to the end**”, and “**exhort one another daily while it is still called ‘Today’**”!

ENDNOTES

- ¹Wuest, 68.
- ²Vine's, 836.
- ³Wuest, 68.
- ⁴Wuest, 68.
- ⁵Strong's, 1172.
- ⁶Vine's, 222.
- ⁷Vine's, 525.
- ⁸Wuest, 78.
- ⁹Wuest, 79.

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