

Hebrews 3.12-13  
**The Believers**

**Intro**

- Memorial Day Weekend

- Why JD had me preach

When I ask for it, show pic of my family. They make for long sleepless nights & great teaching illustrations. You'll see.

- SG pastor. I get to oversee a good bit of our spiritual formation here Come with great news from this year at the Summit.

- 300 groups at our peak this year.
- 12+ group leaders & over 80 group members on the mission field. very big win.
- 3 languages, maybe 4.
- Many people coming to faith
- Thank you Summit small group leaders! One

As a church we are walking through the book of Hebrews where the author is working to convince us that Christ is Better. The author feels the effect of a broken, fallen world on his audience. In the face of everything you are dealing with:

- Job loss, Persecution, Depression, anxiety, Infertility, Kids rebelling, Death of a loved one or abandonment by a loved one, loneliness, or maybe something else.
- In the face of all of this, CHRIST IS BETTER.

**We come to chapter 3 this week and this message, Christ is better, is going to go on attack against the number one foe of the church: unbelief.**

When sin entered the world in the garden, it did so first in the form of unbelief. When Eve ate the fruit she wasn't supposed to eat, do you remember why she chose to eat it? She chose to believe what Satan said about the tree instead of what God said. God said "don't eat" then satan came along and questioned it saying "has God really said?" And in that moment she believed the lie, or to say it another way, she actively chose NOT to believe God at his word.

Now I pause to say that because the exact same problem plagued Israel as we will see in a minute, it plagued the church & that is what the writer is talking about here, and it plagues you and I today.

Illustration to lighten mood: My kids are great pictures of this. 3 & 2. Daddy says a lot of very black & white commands. very little room for interpretation. Do Not Get Out Of Bed. PERIOD. Daddy wants to spend time with Mommy. Your baby sister will be up in a couple of hours so I'm working in a tight window here. So STAY IN YOUR BED. Yes sir? "Yes sir." So I walk out of the room, and like clock-work from the 7<sup>th</sup> layer of Dante's inferno, in about 30 seconds I'm gonna hear "thump....pitter patter" then I'm gonna go in & TCB. Why do they wait? just enough time to begin doubting daddy & to let ideas they come up with seem BETTER than the rest Daddy knows they need.

We do this as adults to don't we? Sure we do. Here is why:  
**The fundamental flaw sin has stamped on the human condition is a bent towards unbelief.**

So here in Hebrews 3 the author finally engages it head on. So today we are going to look at the symptoms of Unbelief, the cure for unbelief, and the community of belief. So if you are taking notes, that's your outline. (REPEAT).

## READ TEXT

**<sup>12</sup> Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. <sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>1</sup>**

### **1. The symptoms of unbelief**

**V.12 - Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.**

Take Care – watch. be careful.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001 (Heb 3:12-14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Brothers – family of God. important later.

**Evil, unbelieving heart** – Ok I want to pause here for one minute to show you one of those times where knowing the context of the passage you are reading gives you a much richer understanding of what the author is saying.

If you notice in your bible right before verse 12 is a section that looks like poetry or something. In verses 7-11 the author is quoting Psalm 95. And Psalm 95 is referring to a very significant moment in the Old Testament we find in Numbers chapter 14. If you want to look it up later you can, I'm just gonna fill in the gaps from vv 7-11 so we are reading this with the knowledge his intended audience would have.

In Numbers 14 Israel is on the cusp of the promised land called Canaan. God brought his people out of slavery from Egypt & was bringing them to the land he had promised them. To a land of "rest." You know the story...the plagues: gnats & flies infestations, hailstorms, darkness...Some of you are thinking this sounds like Durham. Truth. (PS – I'm loving the 'durham, its not for everyone' shirt. Its one thing both our North Durham campus & our Cary campus seem to agree on.)

Also sounds like the exodus. God brings his people out. Does some unbelievable, unforgettable stuff. All to get them into the promised land. So they are right there about to enter and send over 10 spies to check out the land they are

gonna conquer. The spies come back and 8 of the 10 say...We've got a huge problem. a really huge problem. These people are....TALL. I'm talking NCAA DI Mid-Major starting line-up tall. Not NBA, but definitely D1. We are a bunch of short jewish guys. Now 2 of the guys, Joshua & Caleb are ready to go in. Tall people do not threaten them because God is with them. My OT heroes. My dad is 6'2" my brothers are 6'5" & 6'3" and so at a mighty 5'9" I read this and go "THAT'S RIGHT JOSH. I SEE YOU. You know how it is. Just gonna go in there, Holy Spirit is gonna tell us when to sweep the leg & the job is DONE!" But the other 8, and the rest of Israel do not believe God will see them through to victory here so they revolt. They demand new leadership and "grumble" against God.

God says to Moses How long will they not believe in me? later he calls them evil for their unbelief. The only time in the first 5 books of the bible the people of God are called "evil" by God is in Numbers 14.<sup>2</sup> & as a result God banishes that generation from the Promised Land because they had hardened their hearts against him. That's where the "hardened" language comes from.

Now, our author here in Hebrews 3 is making a point. THE PEOPLE WHO GOD BROUGHT OUT BY A PILLAR OF SMOKE BY DAY & A PILLAR OF FIRE BY NIGHT...They ended up missing what God had for them because of their own

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<sup>2</sup> Peter O'Brien, *The letter to the Hebrews*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI Eerdmans, 2010) 146.

unbelief. As if to say...if anyone should have had NO TROUBLE believing God at his word, it was ISRAEL. And if they fell, anyone can...so verse 12..take care.

What our author is doing is warning us against doing the same thing Israel did. Because sin is deceitful (v.13), you don't know that your heart is hardening, ie that you are developing a pattern of unbelief. And what does an evil, unbelieving heart lead you to?

**Leading you to fall away from the Living God.** Literally to apostatize. This is a very active rejection of God, not just a passive indirect consequence of your actions. now we start to understand what unbelief is, by what it does. One who has an unbelieving heart actively rejects God.

This a big huge warning against unbelief. So we must understand how we get from Exodus Israel to Rebellious Israel. how do you and I (remember author is writing to Christians) wind up with a hardened heart that outright rejects God?

It's a process. unbelief usually manifests itself as a progressive withdrawal from the presence of God. So here's what that progression looks like.

**Doubt** – Doubting God will be faithful, or that Christ really will be better. Doubting God even cares about your sin. Maybe you even start flirting with sin because you doubt there will be consequences. The first step in rationalizing your sin is doubting what God says about it.

**Fear** – When you start doubting God, fear comes next. Because the thing you would have trusted God to take care of you now are uncertain about. And anxiety begins to reign in your life. What should have been a blessing (Canaan) became a source of anxiety for Israel. I've heard it said the basis of all fear is believing God is not in control. **And in the absence of confidence in God's faithfulness, shallow crises incite deep fear in us.**

**Pride** – Now you've come up with your own plan & your ways seem better than God's ways. So you outright refuse to obey God in certain areas of your life. Israel outright said NO & refused to obey God. Just a flat no. You get that? They would have said yes, this is sin, but we don't care & are gonna do it anyway. That's pride.

**Isolation**: you cut yourself off from God & his people. Just like Adam & Eve hid, so you hide from God out of some kind of underlying shame the enemy is trying to make you feel when you think about God & your sin together. So you stop bothering with God. You stop praying, stop reading your bible, stop coming to church, stop going to small group, you drift off the grid. And it kills me to watch you do this. If that is you today. Maybe you are here on vacation and your friends or relatives forced you to come to church & you just wanted to vacate, LISTEN: you are in the most frightening place I can think of. That is, when you start becoming numb to the voice of God. The most dangerous emotion you can feel is numbness towards the voice of God. Had a guy sit in

my office 1 month ago who loves Jesus and his church and is fighting a sin battle and he told me "honestly I just don't feel like there are any consequences to my sin, and I don't really feel that bad anymore when I sin." Your heart is hardening. This is what the author is calling the "Hardening by the deceitfulness of sin" in verse 13. Sin wants to keep you alone and in secret. One of my favorite pastors, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said of sin...

- "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community."<sup>3</sup>

So what are we to do then? Satan, with his primary weapon of unbelief, is prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour with unbelief. What are we to do? Thankfully, the author has an answer:

## **2. The Cure for Unbelief**

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<sup>3</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together* (Harper Collins NY, NY, 1954) 122.

<sup>13</sup> But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. <sup>14</sup> For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. <sup>4</sup>

We will get back to the “exhort one another” in a second, but first I want to talk about the content of our exhortation. And I think the author is saying simply:

### **1. HOLD FIRM TO THE GOSPEL!**

Now, I feel like I have to give a caveat here. If you were raised in the south, lines like “cling to Jesus” are so cliché they’ve lost all power on us. I’m so likely to see a line like “hold firm to the gospel” cross stitched on a pillow sitting in the window of a car with a “Warning: in case of rapture this car will be unmanned” with “jesus take the wheel” blasting. But listen, I tried the whole way home from the beach yesterday to come up with a sexier more tweetable way to say this & then realized you know what...The plain & simple truth is the author is telling you to hold firm to the gospel.

There is a very intentional language choice the author of Hebrews uses to talk about how you live every day for Jesus. The phrase he uses often is “hold” or “hold fast” (2.1, 3.6, 3.12, 6.18-19, 10.19-25, all of 12, and really a big part of 13 as well). I believe the author of Hebrews really has 2

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<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible : English standard version*. 2001 (Heb 3:12-14). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

basic commands that sum up what he wants you to do after reading his letter.

1 )HOLD FIRM TO THE GOSPEL.

2) Do so in community (that’s point three we will talk about in a second).

How do you “hold our original confidence firm?”

**Illustration:** This week at beach playing in the waves with my kids. Now they are small so we are just right there at the edge, but even there in waves their Dad sees as small, to them are frightening. So I hear, “hold you daddy hold you” So standing there they have 3 options. They can stand on their own & get knocked over, they can run out of the water, or they can hold on to someone stronger than the waves. And when Daddy holds them, they still get wet right? but they begin to have fun as they realize that with dad, these waves aren’t so menacing anymore.

Forgive the cheesiness but the point is significant. When the waves come at you in life, what are you going to do? You can’t run out on life unless you die. Not a pleasant option. You can try to stand on your own & get pounded. Or you can hold on to something stronger than the waves.

To hold firm requires present and active mental energy. You cannot autopilot “hold firm.” You’ve got to be thinking about it right in the moment. Every moment. Actively hold firm to, what the author calls in verse 14 “our original confidence” we share in Christ. What is that?

It's the gospel!! HOLD ON TO IT. The author is pointing a big huge arrow back to the cross and the empty tomb and saying... THERE. THERE IS YOUR CONFIDENCE. THERE IS YOUR HOPE. THERE IS YOUR CONFESSION.

Jesus...is the one who went into the desert (luke 4 *temptation*) and didn't test the Lord (3<sup>rd</sup> temptation). He is the spy that went into a distant land that required him becoming something completely different (man) to be around the spiritual canannanites. Except he didn't leave the land to report to his Father that the people were evil. No...he went to the center of town and laid down his life so that all of the people could have the opportunity to enter into the land.

It's verse 1 of this chapter. Jesus Christ was sent by God (apostle v.1) as the representative of the human race (high priest v1) to stand in your place before God. And not only is he your rep, he's your substitute. In the greatest act of love the world has ever known The innocent (Christ) took the punishment owed to the guilty (us) and gave the guilty (us) the reward deserved by the innocent (Christ). SO NOW, if you believe that, God calls you his child. His son, his daughter.

The author here is saying...TODAY you need to actively, mentally dwell there. Consider it. Filter your decisions through it. Your relationships through it.

How can you get started? I think the exercise we laid out to begin this series is a great start. 15, 15, 15. I think maybe just waking up & praying that short "Gospel Prayer" our pastor wrote up is another great start. Bottom line - if you gave the same attention to your spouse as you give to your savior, where would your marriage be?

Don't just assume Christ & the gospel, hold firm to it today.

### **3. The Community of Belief**

Ok, here is the part the small groups pastor is going to get all giddy over. Like I said, there are really 2 interwoven commands in the Hebrews letter. Consider Jesus, and do so in community. Let's read verse 13 again. for like the 3<sup>rd</sup> time.

**"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that you might not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."**

Notice we are to exhort...one another. Here lies I believe a core truth the scriptures are in essence built around. That is: we are created to live in community. we are created for it. And to live life in isolation is miserable and, I believe, sub human. This is true for all people, but especially for Christians. Let me show you 2 reasons the author says you need Christian community:

1. **Community breaks through sin's deception**<sup>5</sup> This is the whole point of verse 13. Another way to say it... you have blind spots. Remember Israel? had the presence of God with them yet were deceived by sin. They had massive blind spots in their spiritual life and so do you. Many people react to the idea of opening up & being in community with "really? what am I going to get out of this? They aren't pastors? or professional counselors? What credentials do these people have that I would let them into my life?" I'll tell you: They are not you. And there is a lot any NOT YOU can see about you that you cant see. Proof? Ever heard your voice recorded and played back to you? What do you say? noooo that's not what I sound like. And what does everyone around you say? Yes it is..

More Proof: the first 5 episodes of Any Network TV Talent show. Person after person comes through, and we all cringe and laugh because they think they have talent...but what does EVERYONE else...literally millions...know? They are completely blind to their own shortcomings.

I know...to the point it scares me...that somebody here this weekend is being fooled by sin & you are starting to be hardened by it. God is becoming less & less attractive to you. You feel you are too far gone. Apathy is reigning

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<sup>5</sup> The "not you" concept comes from Tim Keller's sermon "Members of one another" on Hebrews 13 in his series through Hebrews preached at Redeemer Presbyterian Church called "Christ our Treasury" in 2005.

in your spiritual life. Doubt, Fear, Pride, Isolation...when I talk about those I am describing you. Listen to me. Like you are being shot from a cannon you need to run to somebody at the end of this service and tell someone. I've watched too many men my age leave their families because, some time ago they got mad about something that happened. And instead of dealing with that anger through Jesus, they let it fester. And then 2 years later they leave. And we all go into crisis mode "WHERE DID THIS COME FROM?" Truth is sin has been hardening their heart for years. I'm no better. That's why I am so insanely adamant about being an open book. Because just like those guys I DON'T WANT TO WAKE UP...EVER...AND SAY I DON'T LOVE MY WIFE, I HATE GOD, AND I'M DONE! The only way I don't end up there: Confession in community where every single day a brother can say...CHRIST IS BETTER. CHRIST IS BETTER.

Remember, unbelief produces pride & isolation. But the gospel produces humility in community. And here in humility, we find breakthrough after breakthrough into deeper fellowship with Christ. As we allow brothers and sisters to, in essence, shepherd us with the Gospel.

**What does that look like?** Very practically it means you need to deputize some people to go hunting for sin in your life. You need to commit to them that you will leave your life completely open to them, & they need to commit to be as honest as necessary to point out the sin

in your life. And here is the kicker, you commit to do the same for them. It's mutual. You need a head start? use 3 questions: "where are you? Why are you there? What is our next step?" LISTEN...YOU CAN BE IN A SMALL GROUP AND THIS NOT HAPPEN! TO move into this kind of community, true community, requires intentionality. DO NOT ASSUME you are there. talk about it and get there.

Why do that? I complete the quote from our friend bonhoeffer: "When you confess your sin to another Christian...The expressed, acknowledged sin has lost all its power...He is no longer alone with his evil for he has cast off his sin in confession and handed it over to God. It has been taken away from him. Now he stands in the fellowship of sinners who live by the grace of God in the cross of Jesus Christ. Now he can be a sinner and still enjoy the grace of God. He can confess his sins and in this very act find fellowship for the first time. The sin concealed separated him from the fellowship, made all his apparent fellowship a sham; the sin confessed has helped him to find true fellowship with the brethren in Jesus Christ."<sup>6</sup>

Do you have that kind of fellowship with anybody? someone you sit down face to face with and let them inspect your life. watch your mannerisms & see your facial expressions. Can put a hand on your shoulder & pray the promises of scripture over you as you rip off

your mask & show the ugly in your life?

If that scares you, you may have bought into sin's deception about who God is, and who you your brother is. See God says that GOD is the judge of you & the one without fault. And that all MEN are sinners. period. But sin is deceitful and switches those roles in our eyes. So when I talk about confessing sin to another person you think "NO WAY..." what will they think about me? Can I for a second: Who cares? What they should think about you is...me too. Because they are just like you. Now it should freak you out to repent to God because he is holy and just. So if you think, I will just confess it to God and not to others...you are being deceived. Because you are really just confessing to yourself. That's one of the reasons you are stuck in a cycle with whatever sin it is you are battling. Don't buy sin's deception. Now, I don't think that means you shout it out right now for all to hear. But get it out.

The last stronghold satan has on your life is the lack of confession of sin. Community breaks through sin's deception. And in that moment...when you are finally known for who you really are...and you experience LOVE instead of condemnation? right there is when you don't just hear the gospel...you experience it. And it begins to change you.

## **2. Community shows us how Christ is better.**

Ok I know that last one was a bit of a downer. That's

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<sup>6</sup> Bonhoeffer, 112-113.



why I made this the second point on community. Because I truly believe that your participation in a healthy community of Christians will leave you worshipping God as you see his faithfulness light up lives again and again.

When you and I are daily exhorting one another with the Gospel, Daily reminding each other that Christ is better, We start to see evidences of God's faithfulness in one another's lives. And that stirs even more belief in us.

Now as your small groups pastor I get to hear the stories. And they are unbelievably inspiring. Stories of how we are exhorting one another to how Christ is better. I tell my staff team their #1 job is to be story tellers. Find those stories and tell you. can I share a couple from this past year? Thanks.

1. Couple joins a new small group we planted in August. In January their marriage hits rock bottom & wife leaves. Like really leaves. goes several states away. The husband talked it through with his group leader, went & confessed to the group & to his wife for how he had treated her. The group prayed vigilantly for this marriage. And eventually the wife agreed to talk to husband. That led to a series of conversations, which led to counseling, which led her moving back in, which led to a small group meeting I promise none of them will ever forget. ever. Where that couple walked in, holding hands, & BOTH in recounting their reconciliation said...

if God had forgiven me so much, how could I not forgive my spouse?" Ya'll that is real life.

2. Another one...during the Jesus in my place series... the paired up to practice sharing the gospel with one another. And in one of the pairings a girl who was only there for her second time ever...came to faith in Christ. Well, thought this was practice...even better!

DOESN'T THIS GET YOU AMPED!! I CAN DO THIS ALL DAY! THAT'S WHAT THE CHURCH DOES! We exalt Jesus. Tell each other Christ is better. Hold one another in the hard times then celebrate like crazy when God proves himself to be better!

Let's be real honest here. You can come in here, pay attention even take notes, and there is no way you can fulfill this command of scripture to exhort one another daily. How can you exhort one another daily apart from relationships that interact daily? daily. Do you think that word is a metaphor? do you think it's an analogy for "not daily, just often?" NO. Its just the word. Daily. Don't adjust the meaning of the bible to your life because it might get inconvenient otherwise.

Let me ask you this. If I showed up in your kitchen every morning at 7:30am and looked you square in the eyes and told you "I want to remind you that God has called you his son. He approves of you through Christ. and in the gospel you are secure as a man so you can go work today with

confidence, boldness, and grace believing God wants to make himself known through you. today. I know you have a propensity to find your contentment in how your manager views your work. but not today. You find that in Christ. So, man of God, go and work your tail off for the glory of God today. See you tomorrow.”

Aside from the obvious “how did you get in here” question and the weird stuart smalley vibe, that would be pretty good right? That’s supposed to be us. AND WHEN IT IS...The weekend gathering stops becoming the ONLY place we connect with Jesus and instead becomes a place of mutual celebration over the gospel we all are swimming in all week.

The Community of Belief is the delivery mechanism God designed to call you up to belief in the gospel each day. Or let me say it this way:

**The goal of Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.<sup>7</sup>**

That happens in 2 ways like you’ve seen. Sometimes you are the one who needs to hear the freeing grace the gospel in response to the dark twisted internal battle you are waging with sin. Other times you get to bring the message of hope & power as you exhort us with what God is doing in your life. EITHER WAY...THE GLORIES OF GOD SHOULD BE AUDIBLY COMING OUT OF OUR MOUTHS A LOT CHURCH!!!

We need to start gospeling one another...I’m not sure if that’s a word but It is now for us.

**IF THERE IS TIME...**By the way this may be the best form of evangelism you will ever engage in. Why? when you drop a non-christian into a group of believers who have a clear hope, that carries them through real life stuff, they want to at least know about it.

Had an intern once ask me if they should allow a non-christian in their group who wanted in. They had some people in the group dealing with serious sin...eating disorders, sexual sin. And she said to me...”shouldn’t we wait until we are fixed up to allow non-christians in?” NO! Everyone on earth deals with the same garbage: the brokenness of the fall that leads us away from the life God intended for us. The only difference is you and I have a hope: Christ is better. Let your circle of influence into your community to see that in action...and believe what God might just do.

### **Closing**

Where does all of this begin? “We share in Christ” he says in verse 14. The foundation of healthy Christian community is a bunch of people actively, daily choosing Christ over whatever life brings at them. Choosing to interpret their life through the lens of the gospel. Community is simply helping others, Christian or not, do the same. So what is your next step?

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<sup>7</sup> Bonhoeffer, 23.

For some of you maybe its time you just got intentional with some people and started moving below the surface. And this makes you realize you need to have a conversation with some people you are already in relationships with about how you can breakthrough to real community where you are gospeling one another.

Maybe you need to start a small group. Need 100 for all campuses moving into this fall. The purpose of this sermon is not a pitch for group leaders. But if you hear those stories and you think “I want to be a part of that...” maybe now is the time to start one. You write your name down on that worship guide tear off & just say “let me know about how to start a small group” & my team will get up with you.

But here is what I feel God pressed on me all week. For somebody here this weekend. I said earlier your first step is running down the aisle to meet a brother or sister who will look at you like Christ does. will say “I don’t judge you” & will help you see the freedom and hope offered by Jesus. Choose today to believe CHRIST IS BETTER! And come repent. To repent means to turn from sin & follow Christ. He’s willing and able to forgive you. Come and find freedom & rest. Christ is better.

Let’s pray.

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The BENCH

Bonhoeffer, Life Together

- a. "God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men" 22
- b. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure. 23
- c. **The goal of Christian community: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. 23**
- d. Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it. 30
- e. We enter community not as demanders but as thankful recipients. 28
- f. Human love constructs its own image of the other person, of what he is and what he should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. Spiritual love recognizes the true image of the other person which he has received from Jesus Christ; the

image that Jesus Christ himself embodied and would stamp upon all men. 36

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William Lane, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol 47 Hebrews 1-8 (Thomas Nelson 1991)

- "particular importance must be attached to the term *apistai* 'unbelief' because it is introduced in the opening and close of the writer's commentary (v.12,19). That element was not contributed by Ps 95. It is narrowly related to Numbers 14.11 'how long will they refuse to believe me?'... The allusions to Num 14 are significant because they indicate that unbelief is not a lack of faith or trust. It is the refusal to believe God. It leads inevitably to a turning away from God in a deliberate act of rejection...It recognizes the Christian community is not immune to from the recalcitrant spirit expressed by the generation in the desert."

Tim Challies Blog: 05/18/12

How to Backslide in 9 Easy Steps

A few days ago I shared John Bunyan's wisdom on why some who profess faith in Christ [eventually backslide](#). Today I want to follow him a little bit farther. Having covered the *why*, I've now drawn from *Pilgrim's Progress* instruction on the *how*. In each case I've given my short summary followed by Bunyan's own words. Here is how to backslide in nine easy steps:

1. Stop meditating on the gospel. "They draw off their thoughts, all that they may, from the remembrance of God, death, and judgment to come."
2. Neglect your devotions and stop battling sin. "Then they cast off by degrees private duties, as closet prayer, curbing their lusts, watching, sorrow for sin, and the like."
3. Isolate yourself from Christian fellowship. "Then they shun the company of lively and warm Christians."
4. Stop going to church. "After that, they grow cold to public duty, as hearing, reading, godly conference, and the like."
5. Determine that Christians are hypocrites because they continue to sin. "They then begin to pick holes, as we say, in the coats of some of the godly, and that devilishly, that they may have a seeming color to throw religion (for the sake of some infirmities they have espied in them) behind their backs."
6. Trade Christian community for distinctly unChristian company. "Then they begin to adhere to, and associate themselves with, carnal, loose, and wanton men."
7. Pursue rebellious conversation and fellowship. "Then they give way to carnal and wanton discourses in secret; and glad are they if they can see such things in any that are counted honest, that they may the more boldly do it through their example."
8. Allow yourself to enjoy some small, sinful pleasures. "After this they begin to play with little sins openly."

Admit what you are and prepare yourself for everlasting torment. "And then, being hardened, they show themselves as they are. Thus, being launched again into the gulf of misery, unless a miracle of grace prevent it, they everlastingly perish in their own deceivings."

### **Extra under 1.3 - PRIDE**

I'm not doing that, I'm doing THIS. "GOD, I know you call me to be generous with my money but there is NO WAY I can do that and make ends meet. NO. I'm gonna do this..." "GOD, I'm realizing that this relationship does not match with what your word says, but change is too big (FEAR) so I am going to do THIS (PRIDE). NOT THIS AREA OF MY LIFE GOD. HANDS OFF. If that is you today hear me. Unbelief is saturating you & God is warning you here that you are rejecting him. This is step 3 in rationalizing your sin & hardening your heart.

Or maybe you haven't outright refused God. Maybe you are in that phase so many get into where you are trying to cut a deal with God. This is step 2 in rationalizing your sin (thought I missed something didn't you). "Me & God have an understanding..." SOME OF YOU FLIPPANTLY SAY THAT, BUT DEEP DOWN YOU BELIEVE IT. YOU BELIEVE GOD HAS MADE A SPECIAL CASE FOR YOU WHERE YOUR SIN IS OK. You and I both know when we say that we are just trying to make ourselves feel better about whatever it is we are refusing to obey God in.

### **Extra under 2.1 – hold Firm**

- We are three chapters in, and the author has only given two imperative statements. Just twice has he said to “do” something. And it’s the same thing both times. Hebrews 2.1 – We must pay closer attention to what we’ve heard “Lest we drift away from it.” Hebrews 3.1 – Consider Jesus. And now he comes and says to “Take Care” and to exhort one another TODAY.

### **First Draft of “unbelief” section**

What it (unbelief) does is almost like diagnosing a virus. You observe the symptoms to come up with a diagnosis of the underlying cause. So here are the Symptoms of unbelief Israel had, and I think they help us diagnose it in our life:

**1. DOUBT.** Doubting God will do what he promised. It’s the same thing that happened in the garden. “has God really said?” And the author of Hebrews sees a people, sees you and I, living in a broken world and he knows the whisper of the serpent is right there beside us when we wake up trying to go all Inception on us and plant doubt in our minds. I’m supposed to be happy right? my marriage isn’t happy. that woman doesn’t respect me. That man doesn’t care for me. Maybe I should leave? Maybe God is telling me to leave? HOW BOUT THIS: Is God even really gonna care if I DO LEAVE? DOUBT.

**LISTEN TO ME:** The first step towards rationalizing your sin (& HARDENING YOUR HEART) is doubting what God says about it.

**2. FEAR:** I cannot get through what I’m facing. In your life: What should be an opportunity to show off God’s faithfulness, becomes a source of deep rooted fear & uncertainty. The Israelites should have seen this as nothing. THEY JUST WALKED THROUGH A FREAKING OCEAN!!! ARE YOU KIDDING! TALL? REALLY? **But in the absence of confidence in God’s faithfulness, shallow crises incite deep fear in us.** Whether or not that guy is going to call, whether or not he’s going to propose...Whether or not you are going to get that job, or that promotion. For us fear often shows itself in the form of anxiety. Actually, I’m not saying a crisis in your life isn’t legit, I’m just saying God’s faithfulness definitely is. What do you have a deep insecurity about right now? What kind of role is the gospel playing there?

**3. PRIDE:** Your ideas begin to seem better than God’s ideas. Israel goes into an uproar & wants to flee. Even wants to go back to Egypt & into slavery. So violent a revolt they threaten to stone Moses & Joshua & the guys. So God calls them the rebellious generation & refuses to let them enter the promised land. Gonna have to wait 40 years until the next generation. They looked at a situation & said there is NO WAY God. NO. Do you refuse to obey God in certain areas of your life? Just refuse to believe God is going to provide or be faithful and decide...I’m not doing that...I’m doing my thing here. Or maybe you try and make a deal with God. Where you and he “have an understanding.” and deep down you believe God has made a special case for you

where your sin is ok?

**4. Isolation:** you cut yourself off from God & his people. Just like Adam & Eve hid, so you hide from God out of some kind of underlying shame the enemy is trying to make you feel when you think about God & your sin together. So you stop bothering with God. You stop praying, stop reading your bible, stop coming to church, stop going to small group, you drift off the grid. And it kills me to watch you do this. If that is you today. Maybe you are here on vacation and your friends or relatives forced you to come to church & you just wanted to vacate, LISTEN: you are in the most frightening place I can think of. That is, when you start becoming numb to the voice of God. The most dangerous emotion you can feel is numbness towards the voice of God. Had a guy sit in my office 1 month ago who loves Jesus and his church and is fighting a sin battle and he told me “honestly I just don’t feel like there are any consequences to my sin, and I don’t really feel that bad anymore when I sin.” Your heart is hardening. This is what the author is calling the “Hardening by the deceitfulness of sin” in verse 13. The author here is reminding the reader that while that generation had Moses, you have JESUS! Canaan was at stake. SALVATION & ETERNITY are at stake here.

- “Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in

it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together* (Harper Collins NY, NY, 1954) 122.