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Hebrews 3



Hebrews - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg delves into the conditional nature of holding fast to one's Christian faith until the end. He highlights the importance of obedience and faith as demonstrated by Jesus and warns against becoming obstinate and straying from the path of faith. Drawing from biblical text, he emphasizes that it is not enough to simply believe in God, but faith must be demonstrated through works. Ultimately, he stresses the need to follow Jesus and hold firm in one's faith until the end.

Transcript

We begin again now with Hebrews chapter 3, and this chapter is going to just get a few verses into it before he branches off into another parenthesis, which will carry actually pretty far. Most of chapter 3 and most of chapter 4 belong to the second parenthesis. Our first parenthesis was only four verses long, chapter 2 verses 1 through 4. But the second one is going to be from about chapter 3 verse 7 through chapter 4 verse 13.

There's not much of a break in the warning nature of that whole section. So, we'll take the first six verses. And Moses indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant for testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward.

But Christ as a son over his own house, whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. This is a great passage, and this is the place where we move now from considering the angels and Christ superior over them to the next most important person in the giving of the law, and that was Moses. In fact, Moses, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, is the most important person in the giving of the law.

The angels are not particularly brought to our attention in the Old Testament with the giving of the law, but if the angels were there, they're probably more important than Moses in some respects. Certainly more dignified creatures than any man, because man's made lower than the angels. But when it comes to human agents in the giving of the law, Moses is the man.

He's the man that the Israelites look to. You could be stoned to death for being perceived

as blaspheming against Moses, asks Stephen. When Stephen was accused, they said he was blaspheming against Moses and against this holy place, meaning the temple.

So Moses was that highly regarded among the Jews. He was the founder. He's the George Washington of the nation of Israel.

But more than the George Washington, he was the founder of the religions. He was like the Martin Luther and the George Washington, the Protestant American or whatever. He's kind of a mixture of the founding of the nation.

He was the deliverer. He was the guy that everyone knew was the great hero of the Old Testament, especially of Israel. Now, he, however, is going to turn out to be inferior to Christ, too.

The writer does not necessarily say anything bad about Moses, of course. In fact, what he says is extremely complimentary. But he says, by contrast, the thing that can be said about Jesus is far more complimentary, as much as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself has.

Moses is a creation. Christ is the creator. Moses was built by Jesus.

So whatever great things may be said about Moses, greater things by an almost infinite magnitude could be said about Jesus. So he begins, therefore, holy brethren. Now, remember that this is who he's talking to.

He's not talking to a mixed group of professing Christians, some of whom may or may not be Christians. This is important because in the many warning passages of Hebrews, he seems to indicate that the readers need to mind their P's and Q's and keep on the right path, or else they may lose what they have. They may end up condemned.

They may end up judged, damned even. And yet he's not writing to anyone that he does not regard to be holy brethren, Christians, partakers of the heavenly calling. Now, the heavenly calling, I want to make this clear.

The writer has already referred to the world to come, of which we speak in chapter 2, verse 5. The world to come is, as near as I can tell from scripture, the eternal destiny of the believer with Christ. We'll live in the new heavens and the new earth, but the new earth particularly, because we're in the new Jerusalem. In Revelation, the new Jerusalem is seen coming out of heaven to the new earth.

It's a renewed, unfallen earth, just as if Adam and Eve had never fallen, they would have lived forever in a perfect world. That was God's plan A. God intended for man to have dominion over this planet and to live in obedience to him without the curse that came on it, without thorns and thistles, without death, without sin, without any of that bad stuff. That's what it would have been.

If Adam and Eve had not obeyed the serpent, they would to this day be in the Garden of Eden, and so would we. That was what God intended for man, not to live in some disembodied state up in the sky, but to be the stewards and lords with him of this planet. What Jesus came to restore is that.

The Bible does not anywhere indicate that for eternity we'll be in heaven. Now, the Bible does imply, at least as I understand it, there are Christians who see some of these passages differently. As I understand it, the Bible implies that we will go to heaven when we die if we're Christians.

Again, some people think instead that we sleep until the resurrection. There's some scriptures that seem to point that direction. To my mind, as I work with all the relevant scriptures I can see on the subject, I believe the teaching of scripture is that we do have a non-material part.

When our material part dies, the non-material part does not. We already have eternal life. Jesus said, he that hears my words and believes in him who sent me has eternal life and will not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life in John 5, 24.

So we have that already, and yet our physical bodies will die, our spirit goes to be with the Lord, I believe in heaven. That's where he is. But that's not our eternal home.

It's not even Jesus' eternal home. He's coming back here. He's going to inherit the earth.

So are we, he said. The meek shall inherit the earth. Jesus himself, the promise God made to him is, ask of me and I'll give you the nations for your inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.

That's the promise God made to Jesus in Psalm 2, 8. So Jesus is coming back to claim what is his, the earth, and we will reign with him here. That's the goal of the Christian life according to scripture. Sometimes the new earth is spoken of by Christians who are speaking carelessly of heaven.

But earth and heaven are not the same thing. And the Bible does not say that we're going to be living forever in heaven. Only in the period between the time we die and the time Jesus comes back.

Now I say that because we occasionally encounter a phrase like that in chapter 3 verse 1. Partakers of the heavenly calling. And no doubt somebody who's already thinking in terms of I'm going to go to heaven and live forever in heaven and God's called us to go to heaven and so forth. Would see this to mean a call to heaven.

A call heavenward. You know, it's a heavenly calling. But of course the term heavenly calling doesn't necessarily mean that you're called to go to heaven.

And even though I do believe that I will go to heaven when I die, I don't see this as a reference to that. Something that is heavenly is something that emanates from heaven or from God. The calling we have is from God.

It's not an earthly calling. There's not some earthly king or earthly authority calling us to follow him. The one who's calling us to follow him is none other than the Lord of heaven.

It's a calling that emanates from heaven. It's of heavenly origin. Just like Jesus said, my kingdom is not of this world.

He wasn't saying my kingdom is not in this world. It certainly was in this world, but not of this world. It emanates from heaven.

It's the kingdom of heaven. Not the kingdom in heaven. And of heaven means from God.

Heavenly means from God, from heaven. Remember, heaven is yet another of the euphemisms that Hebrews used when they meant God. I've sinned against heaven and in your sight.

Heaven stands in for the word God, for the Jew in many cases. So this is more or less saying the divine calling, the calling from God. We are partakers of a calling that God has issued.

None less than God. He says, now therefore, if we're partakers of that, then we need to consider, here he refers to Christ as the apostle and high priest of our confession. That means the apostle and high priest that we confess to embrace.

Jesus Christ. Now he's already mentioned Christ's high priesthood in the previous two verses at the end of chapter two. Though we have not yet unpacked the author's thoughts about the high priesthood of Christ, nor will we until we get to the place where the author chooses to do that more.

But the word apostle is interesting here. Christ is not generally called an apostle in scripture. Christ has apostles, but this I think is the only place he's called an apostle.

The word apostle means one who is sent. And so the apostles of Christ were the ones that Christ sent. But Christ himself was sent.

And he was sent by the father. So he's like an ambassador too. We're his ambassadors, but he's God's ambassador.

And Jesus alludes to that. In John chapter 20, after he rose from the dead, verse 21, Jesus said to the apostles, again, peace to you. As the father has sent me, I also send you.

So Christ is one who is sent. He's an apostle sent from his father. And then he sends them.

They are his apostles. And so to refer to Christ as the apostle is a strange term, but not one that is without some kind of biblical parallel statements of sorts. Now verse 2 says that Christ was faithful to him who appointed him, as Moses also was faithful in all his house.

Now the first comparison with Moses is not a contrast, but is similar. Christ is similar to Moses. They're both faithful.

They're both faithful in the assignment that they were given. So he doesn't start out telling us that Christ is superior. He gets there.

He says there's some ways Moses and Christ are the same. Like they were both given an assignment, and they both faithfully fulfilled their assignment. Now when it says that Moses was faithful in all God's house, Paul is, I keep saying Paul.

It's not because I think Paul wrote this. I really don't. But because I forget I'm not talking about a Pauline epistle, because there's so many of them that are.

But here the writer, in referring to Moses as faithful in all God's house, is referring to something God said about Moses in Numbers 12. In Numbers 12, that's when Moses was criticized by his brother and his sister, because they felt like he was getting too much of the leadership opportunities, and they felt like they were important too. And you read at the beginning that when Moses apparently married an Ethiopian woman, that didn't please his sister or his brother.

And so they started criticizing him, and their criticism was in Numbers 12. They said, has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also? Notice, why does Moses get to be the big shot? God speaks through us too. Now it's clear that they could have said that at any time previously, but they're saying it now because they don't like who he married.

They've got a gripe against him because he married someone they didn't like having in the family. And because of that, they say, well, you know, Moses isn't perfect. I mean, he's the big shot.

Everyone thinks they should follow him, but he's not the perfect guy. He's not the only guy. God speaks through us too.

And so they were just kind of grumbling against him. And verse 4 says, suddenly the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting, or to the woodshed, we might say. And in verse 6, God spoke to them and said, hear now my words.

If there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will make myself known to him in a vision, and I will speak to him in a dream. This could include Miriam and Aaron, because God

spoke through them too, as they said. But it says, not so with my servant Moses.

Notice, he is faithful in all my house. That's where the writer of Hebrews is getting that eulogy of Moses. He was faithful in all God's house.

I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not with dark sayings. He sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? Now, by saying in Hebrews chapter 3 that Moses was faithful in all God's house, the writer of Hebrews is calling to mind this passage where God said that.

And in the context, what he was saying is, Moses is no ordinary prophet. There are ordinary prophets. I, the Lord, will speak to him in a dream or a vision or a dark saying if I want to.

But Moses is a unique guy. He's not like an ordinary prophet. He's above them.

He has a better revelation. He sees the Lord. I'll speak to him mouth to mouth.

He sees the image of the Lord. He sees what other prophets cannot see. He's not just on the level with ordinary prophets.

So, in mentioning Moses being faithful in all God's house, the writer of Hebrews knows that his sharp readers will remember that God said that about Moses in the very act of mentioning that Moses was no ordinary prophet. If you're looking for the most authoritative voice in the Old Testament, it would seem that Numbers chapter 12 names Moses as that man. And so, even though Moses is the most authoritative voice in the Old Testament, according to God, and the writer of Hebrews acknowledges that by making appeal to that particular passage, he says, well, he is the most authoritative man in the Old Testament.

He's better than ordinary prophets. He was faithful in all God's house. But that's not enough to put him on the level with Jesus.

He said Jesus also was faithful to him who sent him. So, the thing that God said about Moses that made him great was that he was faithful in all God's house. So is Jesus faithful.

Now, that doesn't put them on the same level, but it means that Jesus can't be. Jesus qualifies on that gauge, but there's more. Now, what did it mean that Moses was faithful in all God's house? I think many people assume that God's house here refers to Israel since Moses was the leader of Israel.

It could be. God did live among the Israelites. In fact, the Israelites were sometimes called the house of Israel.

But that really means household or family of Israel. For the most part, in Moses' day and

in most of the years following in the Old Testament, the house of God was the tabernacle. And Moses was the one who built the tabernacle.

And God had told Moses, make sure that you don't innovate on this. Make sure that you make every detail according to the vision, the image I showed you, the pattern on the mountain. And Moses did that.

He was faithful in that assignment. He was faithful with reference to the house of God. In that project of God's house, Moses didn't do anything different than what God told him to do.

And in that sense, with reference to the tabernacle, God's house, Moses had been faithful to that great assignment. But it's also possible that the house might allude to his leadership of Israel, which he was faithful in that too. But it's more common in the Old Testament for God's house to be referenced to the tabernacle.

Now it says in verse 3, after saying in verse 2 that Jesus and Moses had something in common. They're both faithful. He says, for this one has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses.

So, you know, by one measure, they're kind of similar, but there's other measures. And Jesus is kind of more glory than Moses in as much as he who built the house has more honor than the house. So God, Jesus, is the creator of Moses, just like a builder is the creator of a house.

Moses built a house, the tabernacle. But he himself was a house that was built by another, and that other was Jesus. And therefore, he is, Jesus has much more glory than Moses.

For every house is built by someone, but he who built all things is God. That is, Moses built the tabernacle, the house, and for that matter, all buildings are built by someone. Moses built that one.

Other people build other ones. But you know what? Jesus is not on their level because he built all the builders. You know, the builders built the houses.

Jesus built the builders. All houses are built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. And that's who Jesus has already been declared to be in chapter 1, God.

And that is why Jesus has more glory than Moses because he's his creator. And it says in verse 5, This statement also makes me think that the house of God here is referring to the tabernacle. It was the tabernacle of testimony.

It was in the design of the tabernacle, there was a testimony to spiritual things. And the writer of Hebrews is going to point that out later in chapter 8 and chapter 9. He's going

to point out that those things that Moses built in the tabernacle, those were a testimony of spiritual things. They were a shadow of things to come.

And that's what it says here too, that That is, the building of the tabernacle, because it was faithfully built according to the pattern, it bears a faithful testimony about things that it was supposed to testify to. Its shadow function is not compromised because Moses made it the way it was supposed to be. And he did so, it says, as a servant.

And even in saying as a servant, he's alluding back to Numbers 12. Because we read Numbers 12, 7, God says, So, in addition to being faithful, the writer says, But in that passage it says he's faithful, he's a servant. My servant, Moses.

So, we've got Moses as a faithful servant, but what is Jesus? He's a faithful son. Sons outrank servants. But Christ as a son, over his own house.

Moses was a servant in a house, but Christ is the son or the heir. The owner of that house, as it were. The son is really the heir.

Whose house we are. We are the new tabernacle. We are the new temple.

We are the habitation of God through the Spirit. And this is stated many times in the New Testament. Especially by Peter, in 1 Peter 2, 5. Where he says, In Ephesians, the last verse of Ephesians 2, says that we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

Christ himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building fitly framed together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. A habitation of God through the Spirit. Here he tells us that we are the house of God.

But notice the last part of verse 6, very important. If we hold fast, the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end. So here's a conditional point here.

And that same condition is mentioned a few verses later in verse 14. For he says, So this, if we hold fast, if we don't back down, if we don't go backward, but we retain our grip on the hope of Christ, then we are his house. Then we are partakers of Christ.

Now this language is very similar to Paul's language in Colossians 1. In Colossians chapter 1 and verse 23, Paul says, well I've got to get verse 22 with it. If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel. So God will present you blameless and holy before him if you continue.

If you don't back away. If you don't disregard the hope. So Paul teaches that.

The writer of Hebrews teaches that. It's a conditional thing. However, I will admit that though I'm not a Calvinist, the Calvinists have a good point they can make from this.

These particular verses in Hebrews 3, 6 and 14 that talk about if you hold fast, does not technically say you will be saved if you hold fast. It says you are partakers of Christ now if you hold fast. You are his house now if you hold fast.

Which might sound like we're not talking about what you will be if you hold fast. This is telling us whether you're really a Christian or not now. You really are a Christian now if you don't fall away.

Meaning that if you do fall away, you aren't a Christian now. You don't know yet if you're going to fall away. And of course the Calvinist says, perseverance is the evidence of election.

That if you are truly one of the elect, you will not fall away. And they can actually quote these verses for the point. Because the writer is not saying, if you hold fast, then when you have finished holding fast, you will experience such and such.

He says, you currently right now are his house. You currently right now are partakers of Christ. If you are among those who will prove it by holding fast.

It would be a way a Calvinist would understand it. If you hold fast, if you don't fall away, if you persevere to the end, that will prove that you are what I'm saying you are. True Christians, in other words.

So, although I don't believe in Calvinism, these verses, you know, the Calvinists don't have any reason to be embarrassed about these verses since they believe in the perseverance of the truly elect. The author would be saying something like, you are the true elect if you hold fast. And it proves that you are.

So these verses can actually work for the Calvinist as well as the non-Calvinist like myself. But there are, of course, many other verses that don't work so well for them. Just because, you know, there are a few verses that don't knock them out of the ring doesn't mean there aren't some that do.

And I believe they do, but we're not going to get into that now. Some of them are going to be encountered in this book. In fact, some of them are going to be encountered later in this chapter.

So, we have this conditional thing. If you hold fast. One thing we can say about that is whether it's a Calvinist or non-Calvinist understanding, it affirms that you have to hold fast.

Now, you see, if you don't hold fast, the Calvinists say, well, then you never were saved. You proved it by not holding fast. If you don't hold fast, you go to hell then, even if you're a Calvinist.

Or if you're not a Calvinist, you say, if you don't hold fast, you go to hell because you might have been saved, but you lost it. You see, both the Calvinists and the Armenians have the same opinion about those who don't hold fast. Namely, they're lost.

Holding fast is mandatory, whether you're a Calvinist or an Armenian. And if you don't hold fast and you die apostate, and you go to hell, you'll be an Armenian in hell or a Calvinist in hell, but not much preference for one over the other in hell. The truth of the matter is, whether you interpret these verses as a Calvinist or not, they affirm one thing for clear, is you're not going to be with God, ultimately, unless you hold fast to the end.

And whether holding fast simply proves that you were with God all along or means that you were and didn't lose it, that's really, this is an academic question that shouldn't matter. It only matters to the backslider. Only the backslider or the backslider's mother has to worry about whether, you know, the person who didn't hold fast was saved or not before, because they're not once they've apostatized.

And that's something the writer of Hebrews is going to be very strong in affirming. Apostasy is going to disqualify you from being a Christian. All right.

At this point, probably because the author has raised this condition, if we hold fast to the end, it is a segue into the next warning about the need to hold fast to the end. Not only to hold fast, but to move forward. And so we have at this point him breaking off into his next digression.

And that digression begins at chapter 3, verse 7. It goes through the remainder of chapter 3 into chapter 4, and almost all the way through chapter 4 up to verse 13. After that point, he resumes his main argument. And he picks up again that argument at the end of chapter 2 about Christ being a merciful high priest.

But before he breaks into that argument, he breaks away to give another warning. Now, parts of this warning are very obvious as to the meaning. Parts are not as obvious, because actually once he gets into chapter 4, he's going to be talking about failing to enter into God's rest.

When we get to that, it'll be clear that there are a couple of ways you can look at God's rest, and different commentators do. But in chapter 3, we don't really have to wrestle with that issue quite yet. Let's talk about this chapter.

In chapter 3, verse 7, the author introduces Psalm 95, verses 7 through 11. And he quotes them at length. They happen to correspond number-wise with the verses in the chapter, 7 through 11.

It's also a quotation of Psalm 95, 7 through 11. Now, this quote becomes something he quotes parts of through the whole section we're going to be looking at in chapter 3 and 4. This warning section, this becomes sort of his text for the warning. It's like he starts

another sermon based on this text.

And he draws words from this text and phrases from this text at various points in this warning section. So he gives us the whole text first. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, I might just point this out.

He quotes the Psalm as something that the Holy Spirit says, which means it's one of those things that tells us that he believed in the inspiration of the Psalms. As the Holy Spirit says, Today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, in the day of trial in the wilderness, where your fathers tested me, proved me and saw my works for 40 years. Therefore, I was angry with that generation and said, they always go astray in their heart and they have not known my ways.

So I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Now, I want to just make a, before commenting on that Psalm and its contents, I want to make just a note that doesn't come out in our English translation. So it does in the King James a little more.

The King James follows a little more verbatim, the Hebrew text. In the Hebrew text, that last line is, If they shall enter my rest. But the way it's rendered in almost all versions is, they shall not enter my rest.

So the Hebrew expression is, if they shall enter my rest. Now, the reason that, and I don't think the King James renders it right there, but he does later in chapter four, when he's referring to entering the rest, in the King James it says, if they shall enter my rest. I don't remember now exactly, which verse in chapter four it is, because I don't have the King James in front of me.

In any case, the Hebrew of Psalm 95, that last line is, if they shall enter my rest, which sounds like it's stating a condition. However, almost all translators know that this was a Hebraism, a Hebrew idiom. Saying something that way was affirming it not.

It's like saying, you know, if hell freezes over, you know, well, it's not, it's not going to. It's when he says, if they will enter my rest, is a Hebrew way of saying, they will not enter my rest. And therefore, modern translations, instead of translating it word for word from the Hebrew, they paraphrase it the way that they know an English reader would need to have it rendered so that we'd know what the Hebrew actually means.

It doesn't say it that way in the Hebrew, but it means that in the Hebrew. And this only would be an issue if you're using the King James, which sometimes we do. And it's strange.

Dave, can you see at a glance, you have King James there? Yes, I do. In chapter four, do you see what verse he says, if they shall enter my rest? It's verse 11, but they say they shall not enter my rest. Okay, it says it there, they shall not.

But there is another verse, I think in that passage. I'm not going to worry about it right now because very few people, frankly, are using the King James. But if they were, it'd be important for them to know that if they shall enter my rest, which is a quotation from the last line, Psalm 95, 11, really means not if they will, but they will not.

Okay, that's just maybe taking too much time on something that's not important enough for us to be too concerned about. But notice what the psalmist is saying or what the Holy Spirit is saying in the psalmist. He's inviting his generation not to make the mistake that the generation that came out of Egypt made.

Their ancestors. Their ancestors came out of Egypt with Moses, but they didn't enter the promised land, with the exception of two of them, Joshua and Caleb alone, who came out of Egypt, entered the promised land. All the rest died.

Only their offspring, who were under 20 years old at the time of the Exodus, made it into the promised land, and that's because the people tested God's patience. God's patience was vexed by them because he had promised them that he's going to give them this wonderful land. The spies went in, came back and said, yeah, it's truly a wonderful land.

Definitely a land worth having. God has picked a good land, okay, but the problem is there's some tenants there that will not be eager to see us arrive, and they kind of make us look like grasshoppers compared to them. They're big.

They're giants. And 10 of the 12 spies said, you know, it's a land worth having, but we can't get it. These people are too big for us.

We can't defeat them. Joshua and Caleb said, it doesn't matter how big they are. God promised us the land.

He can give it to us. But the people of Israel, for the most part, listened to the 10 faithless spies instead of Joshua and Caleb, and so they rebelled against Moses and turned back, and God was angry at them and said, okay, I'm not going to let you enter the land then. You say, I can't bring you in.

I guess I can't without your permission, so you're not going in. Your kids will. And this was a matter of great anger on God's part to be so distrusted by his people who had seen his works rot.

And David is saying in the Psalm, you know, we're in a position to make the same mistakes they made, and we don't want to harden our hearts like they did. They hardened their hearts against God. And so David says to his generation, today, if you hear this verse, don't harden your heart like they did.

Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. The rebellion is when the people refused to go into the promised land. The King James calls it the provocation.

I like that word even better because they provoked God. In the day of trial in the wilderness. Now, you might think that they were the ones being tested, but the next verse makes it clear, no, they were testing God.

Where your fathers tested me, improved me and saw my works for 40 years. That's because they refused to go in. They got a chance to see his works for 40 years as they all wandered in the wilderness for that 40 years, unnecessarily.

But he says, therefore, I was angry with that generation. I said, they always go astray in their heart. Now, this is the area where the people of, the readers of this epistle may begin to see a possible potential connection between them and the generation that God was angry at because they went astray.

If you're supposed to be following Jesus and you go back to Judaism, you're going astray. Don't do what these people, they always go astray. Don't be one of them.

And they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, if they shall enter my wrath, or the meaning, they shall not enter my wrath. God promised that that group would not go in to the land of Canaan.

Entering the rest is a term that refers to going into Canaan. We'll see more about that later. So basically, the psalmist is simply telling his contemporaries, let's not harden our hearts.

If God speaks to you, if you hear his voice, obey him. Let's not be like our ancestors who didn't trust him. And because of that, they came under the judgment of dying in the wilderness and not being able to enter into God's rest.

Let's don't do that like them. Now, the writer of Hebrews takes the psalmist's exhortation and says, you know what? What the psalmist is implying is God wants people to enter into his rest, and that's going to require that we have more faith than the Israelites had who came out of Egypt. He said they would not enter his rest, but that's because they didn't have faith.

But we could have faith and we could enter into the rest. And of course, entering into God's rest in that context meant entering into Canaan and the Israelites resting from their wanderings. They had a restless 40 years moving around all the time, pitching their tents, picking them up again.

You know, they just really didn't ever get to settle until they went into Canaan. And then they got to rest from their wandering around. And that Canaan rest is what they did not enter.

Now, the writer of Hebrews believes that the Canaan rest, coming into the promised land, is a type of something that Christians are offered. And therefore, we need to learn

a lesson from those who were not able to enter God's rest. And he implies, and he's going to imply this later in chapter 4, that, you know, even the psalmist suggests there's another rest besides the Canaan rest, because the psalmist wrote after Joshua did bring a later generation into Canaan, they did come into that rest, and yet David, writing later, still talks about the need for people not to neglect coming into God's rest.

Now, actually, the psalm doesn't, if you analyze the words of the psalm, it doesn't exactly urge David's generation to come into God's rest. It just urges them not to be obstinate, like those people were of whom God said they would not in an earlier generation. But the writer of Hebrews says, wait a minute, this word today suggests that even centuries after Joshua's time, the psalmist thinks there's an opportunity even now, today, to not make the mistake they made.

In other words, we can enter God's rest, which is what they couldn't do. And so he's kind of moving in that direction, his argument, and he sees the Canaan rest, and then he later introduces the Sabbath rest as well in chapter 4. These two rests of the Old Testament, the rest of the Sabbath and the rest of entering Canaan, are seen as types and shadows of something, a rest that Christians need to enter. And that will be the point he develops in chapter 4. But before he works on that much, he says in verse 12, Here, beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

But exhort one another daily, while it is called today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. While it is called today. What's that mean? Well, the passage from the psalmist begins with the word today.

And although the psalmist was talking about his own day, the writer seems to think, well, there's a sense in which what the psalmist is exhorting his people to do has not yet materialized. It's still today. It's still a day when we need to not harden our hearts.

It's still a day when we might enter God's rest, if we're willing to go forward. He's kind of, he's kind of, a little, what we might say, left field in his way of applying this passage. But he's an inspired writer.

You know, he's seen it the way the early Christians would see it. And Jesus is the one who inspired their seeing it. So I'm going to accept that he's extrapolating from this in a way that's legitimate, of course.

So, he says, you read in the psalm, if you read Psalm 95 today, it's going to say to you, today. Right where you're sitting. It's going to say today.

It's going to speak to you where you are, right now. He says, and while you can still see that word today, you're still breathing, and it's still today for you. And therefore for you, there's this opportunity to not make the mistake that the people of an earlier day made.

So, while it is still called today, exhort one another, lest any of you should be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. While it is said, today, if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion.

So he quotes again the first verse of that lengthy passage. He'll make reference to it again later. The interesting thing about these verses, I would call to your attention, is the warning in verse 12.

Beware. Beware what? Well, beware brethren. Okay, these are Christians.

In fact, in verse 1, he called them holy brethren and partakers of the heavenly calling. These are, as near as he is concerned, as far as he knows, they are Christians. He's not talking to fake Christians, he's talking to holy brethren.

And he says, you beware, what? Lest there be in any of you, brethren, an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God. Can a Christian depart from the living God? Can a Christian who has true faith and is a holy brother or sister, partaker of the heavenly calling, can that person depart from the living God? Can that person have an evil heart of unbelief? Well, all we can say is this writer thought so. And it's very likely that this author's view on this particular point was the view of his generation of Christians.

In other words, the apostolic church. The apostolic church, of which this person's teaching was no doubt a sample, held that people who are holy brethren could, if they neglect, if they don't hold fast, they could depart from the living God. And they need to be aware of that.

You don't have to be aware, you don't drive through Kansas and see signs, beware of falling rocks. They don't need signs to beware of falling rocks where there's no mountains, only flat land. You don't need warnings to beware of falling away from God if you can't fall away from God.

Warnings are for people who might face a real danger. Now, I want to say this about that, because, of course, Calvinists do believe that true Christians can't fall away ultimately and lose their relationship with God. And passages in Hebrews are often quite a challenge to the person who's maintaining a Calvinist viewpoint about such things.

Because the writer of Hebrews keeps saying things that makes it sound like his listeners might potentially be in danger of losing what they've got and falling away from God. And yet, of course, the Calvinist view is if you're a true Christian, you will persevere to the end, you won't fall away. That's a given in Calvinism.

So what do they do with passages like this? Well, some Calvinists in their writings, I don't know that all would be satisfied with this approach, but many of them say, well, these

warnings are the means by which God guarantees the perseverance of the elect. What's that mean? Well, the elect will take the warning seriously. You see, a person who doesn't take the warning seriously might drift away, but the elect will.

God uses these warnings to encourage the elect to persevere and therefore they will. Which is a way of saying that it's inevitable that these warnings will be heeded properly by those who are supposed to heed them. If you're not one of the elect, it means God didn't choose you, he doesn't intend for you to be a Christian.

He doesn't intend for you to persevere. If you're not chosen, these warnings are not for you. They're only for the chosen.

And because the chosen are chosen, they will heed them and obey them. Now, there's a number of problems with this particular argument. Although it seems on the surface to suit the purpose of that theological system, there's some issues.

One of them is that these warnings would only serve to inspire the elect if they didn't know that it was impossible to fall away. In other words, as soon as they take these warnings seriously, only if they take these warnings seriously, will they inspire them. If they come to these warnings with the theology of a Calvinist, if I'm the elect, I can't fall away, then they can disregard the warnings.

In other words, how could these warnings really inspire someone to persevere if that person believed he will inevitably persevere? The warning is just so much wasted ink, really. What's more, if Calvinism is true, and Calvinists often say these warnings are given to the visible church, which has some of the elect and some of the non-elect in it. So the warnings are, of course, are not just to the elect who can't follow it, but to the non-elect.

But wait a minute, if they're not elect, they can't be saved. They can't persevere. Why urge the non-elect to persevere? Since by definition, they can't.

If they're not elect, God has not chosen to save them. That's the very meaning of non-elect to the Calvinists. And therefore, in their view, any audience that hears these warnings is either already elect and cannot fall away, or they are non-elect and cannot persevere.

So the warnings are of no value in either case. If you can't fall away, you don't have to be warned against falling away. If you can't persevere, there's no sense being told to persevere.

Why would you even want the non-elect in the church to persevere? Wouldn't it be better if they're not real Christians, that it would soon turn out that they're not Christians? Wouldn't it be nice if they didn't persevere, so that they won't fool us into thinking they're Christians anymore? What would be the motive for telling non-elect

people to persevere? And what would be the motive of telling elect people to persevere? What's the point? They would only be able to do that if they didn't hold Calvinistic doctrines, and therefore, they took the warning seriously as something that could really happen. So as soon as a person who's elect becomes a Calvinist, the warnings would be of no use to him. It's only as long as the elect is an Arminian that God might use these warnings.

And so God wants people to be Calvinists, but not until they've been Arminians long enough to heed the warnings, and then he wants them to know Calvinism. This is really a very big conundrum, I believe, for Calvinism. And Calvinists, when you read their commentaries on Hebrews, they really do some kind of funny things with passages like this.

Now, let's face it. There are other parts of the Bible that the Calvinists are very much at home in. You know, John 6, Romans 8, 9, and several other places in the Bible.

Ephesians 1. Calvinists have a grand time with that, and they don't have to say any really wild and crazy things. But there are certain books of the Bible, like Hebrews, it just doesn't work out real well for them. They write commentaries on them anyway, but they don't have anything to say that a thinking person is likely to find compelling because the writer of Hebrews is not a Calvinist.

He believes his listeners can fall away or can persevere. He wouldn't think that. If he thinks they're elect, he would not think they could fall away if he's a Calvinist.

If he thinks they're not, he wouldn't think they could persevere. So his warnings would be never given in a situation where you're either, before you're ever born, you're already destined to be elect or not. You're either destined to persevere or not.

Why exhort about such things? So, I mean, this is the thing about these warning passages in Hebrews. They really are sort of an annoyance in many cases to somebody trying to maintain some of the Calvinist ideas. And I remember when I was a young teacher, still hadn't read the whole Bible yet, but I was working through it and studying the parts I was reading.

I was studying hard. Hadn't yet reached all my theological convictions. Even now, I may not have reached them all.

I remember friends asking me, do you believe in eternal security? Do you believe in once saved, always saved? And for a while, I didn't know what I thought. I just said, well, when I'm reading Hebrews, I don't. When I'm reading Romans, I do.

You know, and it's kind of that way. There are certain books that, you know, the Calvinist doctrine is comfortable with. This is not one of them.

And we'll see that as we come to the other warning sections too. There are some very serious problems trying to harmonize them with that particular system. So, verse 15, he quotes again the opening verse of the psalm that he's quoted more at length earlier.

Today, if you'll hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the provocation of the rebellion. For who, he asks, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all those who came out of Egypt, led by Moses? Now, with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest? But to those who did not obey. So, we see that they could not enter because of unbelief.

Now, this series of questions and answers, I'm not sure that it really, that those questions and answers really work as an argument so much as a clarification. You know, what are we talking about when we talk about people not entering his rest? Who are we talking about? We're talking about the people who came out of Egypt. What was their problem? Well, they didn't believe.

So, who's God angry at? Well, he's talking about the people who didn't obey him. Now, it's interesting that the words obey and believe are used quite interchangeably. Notice, he says in verse 18, To whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest? But those who did not obey.

So, we see that they could not enter because of unbelief. He doesn't say because of disobedience, which is what you'd think. But you see, in the Bible, faith is not just an academic acquiescence to certain propositions.

We think of faith that way sometimes, but not when we're thinking biblically. No one is saved just by believing there's a God. You do have to believe in God, but you have to have faith in God to be saved.

Like you have faith in a person. The devil believes. The devils believe in Tremble, but they're not saved.

They know the facts. The devil could affirm, if he wished, what he really believes. There is a God.

Jesus is God. Jesus died for the sins of the world. He rose again.

He's the Lord of Lords and King of Kings. All the things Christians profess, the devil could profess quite honestly. He believes them too.

But he's not in a relationship of trust and obedience to God. You see, faith doesn't just mean to believe things. It means to be in a relationship.

Like children with a father, they're expected to trust their father. What? Trust the father

that when he tells them to do things, that's a good thing for them to do. That they should do it.

He's not leading them to their doom. He's on their side. His instructions are intended for their good and for higher purposes even than their good.

In other words, the child doesn't know, if they're very small, they don't really have any clue why the father is giving certain instructions. Children grow to a rational state where they can make their own decisions based on rational reasons, but they're not born that way. And they have to count on the fact that dad knows more about the world than I do.

These instructions don't make sense to me. I don't know why I have to brush my teeth all the time. I'm not, you know, my teeth are fine.

But my dad must know something I don't know. I trust his wisdom. I trust his expertise.

I trust his good intentions for me, his love for me. I trust that if he gives me instructions, these are the instructions I should follow. Faith in God is the same.

If you do not obey, you do not have faith. That's why James said, if you have faith but no works, that's a dead faith. Your works will show that you believe.

Paul agreed with James. Paul said in Galatians 5, 6, in Christ circumcision doesn't avail anything or uncircumcision, but faith that works through love. If you have a faith that works, and by works means that obeys God, then that's what matters.

And unfortunately, we have taught in Western Christianity for a long time, at least in modern American evangelicalism, sort of an easy-believism that, you know, you want to be a believer in Jesus, it means you have to believe he died and rose again. You believe that? Yeah? Okay, well, you're a Christian then. Why? Because you believe those things.

That's faith. Well, believing those things isn't the same thing as faith. There is, in fact, information content in faith.

But faith is more than just grasping the information. It's responding to the information. You know, if I trust my parents, it's because I have information about their character.

I have information about their honesty or whatever. That information doesn't really become a trusting relationship unless I act on what they say in a way that shows I trust them. So, obedience to God in the New Testament is used almost interchangeably with faith in God.

Not in every passage, but in many passages, it is. And this tells us that the mentality of the early Christians is not precisely like that of the post-Reformation evangelical. Now, we always assume that whatever group we were raised in is as pure as a form of Christianity has ever existed, and that our group is the one that is most like what the

apostles thought.

And, of course, the Roman Catholics think that about their faith. The Roman Catholics think that theirs is Peter's religion. Peter established that.

The apostles were like the bishops. They practiced, you know, they believed in transubstantiation and revered Mary. So the Catholic thinks.

Why does the Catholic think that? Because they're Catholics, and they assume that their movement is the true church. And then Protestants, coming up from Luther and so forth, they say, oh, that's better. I see some truth in Luther's teaching that wasn't in the Catholic teaching.

He's got it right. And so people who are in those Reformed, you know, theologies, they figure, well, that's true Christianity. Those of us who have broken off from Reformed into more of an evangelical free church kind of a mentality, Baptist, evangelical free, even Methodist and so forth, these are more free church type.

We think, no, this kind of model is what the early church taught. But one thing we can say is that almost all non-Roman Catholic American evangelicals are following the Reformed tradition of Luther that it's not works, it's faith. Now, there are places where Paul said it's not works, it's faith.

Although what he's saying there, if you look at the context, he's talking about works of the law of Moses. You're not saved by keeping the law of Moses. You're not saved by following the old covenant and its circumcision and sacrifices and things like that.

It's faith in Christ. But Paul always believed that faith in Christ results in obedience to Christ. But because of the conflict between Luther and the Roman Catholics, the Catholics emphasize works, Luther emphasized faith.

And when you're in a conflict with another theology, you distance yourself more and more and more just by the dynamics of the debate. You say, okay, I don't believe what you do, so I'm way over here away from what you believe. And so that in the Reformed traditions, faith has come to mean something quite distinct from obedience.

But when we get back to the Bible, they don't see any difference between faith and obedience. You see, we are the products of post-Reformation Western evangelicalism, which has a certain culture based on the fact that Luther was coming against a legalistic, wrong-headed kind of religion. And we like what he said more than what they said because he's more right than they are.

But he, in the course of it, he had to define faith in a way that he was trying to distance himself from this legalism so that faith almost becomes denatured. It's just pure belief in something. And that's what evangelicals often think it means.

And when they hear you say, well, you're supposed to be a god, they think, well, that's salvation by works. We evangelicals don't believe in that. Well, Paul did, not salvation by works, but he believed that faith produces works.

So does James. So does every - certainly Jesus thought that. Jesus said, let men see your good works.

So they'll glorify your Father in heaven. Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and you don't do the things I say? I mean, all through the New Testament, obedience to Christ is taken to be part and parcel with faith in Christ. And there was no recognizable Christianity in the biblical times, the New Testament times, that didn't involve the conviction that Jesus is my Lord and he's the one I must obey.

We, in later history, have separated some of these concepts from each other, but they're all one package in the New Testament. It's time for us to quit here.