

“Characteristics of a Hard Heart”

Hebrews 3:7-19

I am sure that you have heard the following expression: “The same sun that melts the ice also hardens the clay.” Two different people can experience the same thing in life, and yet they can both come to opposite conclusions about it. They can both respond to it very differently. While one gets better, the other gets bitter. One heart melts, while the other heart becomes hard.

If you and I are not careful, our heart can become cold and hardened and desensitized to all spiritual stimuli.

Hebrews 3 shows us where a hard heart begins and how we can safeguard ourselves and prevent it from happening to us.

Illustration—*“I’m amazed by all those commercials that advertise some medical product, and while they tell you all that the product is going to do to heal your diseases, they give you all the warnings of the things that can happen to you if you take their product. And after you listen to all those warnings, you decide to just keep the disease you have!”*

As crazy as some warnings may sound, I’m appreciative of them and all of us know their value.

It is within these verses that the writer of Hebrews issues a stern warning about the heart. The heart of the issue is that it is an issue of the heart. It is almost as if he were giving us a spiritual EKG.

Three times here in chapter 3, and then once in chapter 4, we are warned of the dangers of having a hard heart. Just like drifting away from the Lord, developing a hard heart is something that happens little by little, ever so subtle and slowly.

So this section in Hebrews is about people who have hearts that get calloused to the things of God. How does it happen?

1. Commences with ignoring God’s voice (3:7-9)

“Therefore, 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, tried Me, and saw My works forty years.’”

The first step toward possessing a hard heart is made when you choose to ignore the voice of God in your life.

Notice the Spirit's exhortation to us.

The precious Holy Spirit of God is speaking to his people, warning us of the dangers of ignoring His sweet voice. God speaks and desires for His people to listen and respond.

Illus. of Samuel and the voice of the Lord

God has precious words of life which He desires to impart to every follower of Christ, and we must filter through all the distractions of this life to make sure that we hear. This was something that Jesus Himself was very passionate about.

Mark 4:9—“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!”

John 8:47—“He who belongs to God hears what God says.”

Henry Blackaby—*“If anything is clear from a reading of the Bible, this fact is clear: God speaks to His people. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in Genesis. He spoke to Abraham and the other patriarchs. God spoke to the judges, kings, and prophets. God was in Christ Jesus speaking to the disciples. God spoke to the early church, and God spoke to John on the isle of Patmos in Revelation. God does speak to His people, and you can anticipate that He will be speaking to you also.”*

Truths about God speaking:

1. *When God spoke, it was usually unique to that individual*
2. *When God spoke, the person was sure God was speaking*
3. *When God spoke, the person was sure what God said*
4. *When God spoke, it was an encounter with God Himself*

God speaks into our lives when we are listening for His voice through a passionate love relationship with Him.

Notice the Scripture's example for us.

God speaks, but it is all too possible that we ignore His voice. An example is given for our consideration in verse 8 of Old Testament Israel.

The quote here is from Psalm 95:7-11 which is the record of God's response to His people's hardened spiritual condition. In light of all that God had done on their behalf, their hearts had grown dull and hardened.

Early on in Exodus 17, they complained to Moses about water and that God had abandoned them.

Moses called that place "Massah and Meribah" which means provocation and trial. These are the words used in Hebrews 3:10.

Provoking God's anger and trying God's patience

This pretty much sums up their attitude all the way to Numbers 13-14, where the ten spies trouble the people, the people turn negative, and they harden their hearts to the promise of God. The result is 40 long years of wandering in the wilderness.

The point being made is that despite all that God did before them and around them and for them, they did not benefit spiritually. Instead, the opposite happened. Though they were given chance after chance, and though they saw God's power time and again, they grew calloused and indifferent.

Matthew 11:21—"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes,"

God's people have seen God's works, yet they tend to develop a hard heart over time and through repeated gospel exposure.

2. Continues with inwardly going astray (3:10-11)

"Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.'"

When a believer ignores God's voice, then they always go astray in their heart. This is without exception.

Matthew 4:4—"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

When Israel decided that their way was better than God's way, they went astray in their hearts and their hearts were hardened.

Warren Wiersbe—*“The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart.”*

Three words characterize Israel's condition in the wilderness:

1. Unrest
2. Undecided
3. Unfulfilled

F.B. Meyer—*“But how typical of the lives of so many amongst ourselves! Life is passing away so swiftly from us...How few Christians seem to have learned the secret of inner rest! How many are the victims or murmuring and discontent; or are bitten by the serpents of jealousy and passion, of hatred and ill-will! The almost universal experience tells of broken vows and blighted hopes, of purposeless wanderings, of a monotonous horizon, sand, with here and there a palm tree! Always fed on the same food, till the soul loathes it! Life passes away amid fret and chafing disappointment and weariness of existence, till we say with Solomon, ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’”*

The issue is our barrenness and dryness of heart.

3. Culminates with insistent unbelief (3:12-19)

He warns of three potential things:

1. The peril we need to look out for
2. The past we need to look back to
3. The process we need to look into

God always speaks in terms of TODAY. Today, not tomorrow. Today is His favorite word, while tomorrow is the enemy's favorite word.

David Jeremiah—*“If God speaks and we allow time to elapse before we respond, we give over that time to the enemy and he tries to discourage us from obeying God.”*

He will steal away the Word that is sown in our hearts!

See Mark 4, Luke 8 and the Parable of the Sower

Alexander Maclaren—*“Important lessons are given by this alternation of the two ideas of faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Disobedience is the root of unbelief. Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience. Faith is voluntary submission within a person's own power. If faith is not exercised, the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual reasons. It lies in the moral aversion of human will and in the pride of independence, which says, “who is Lord over us? Why should we have to depend on Jesus Christ?” As faith is obedience and submission, so faith breeds obedience, but unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion. With dreadful reciprocity of influence, the less one trusts, the more he disobeys; the more he disobeys, the less he trusts.”*