

¹² Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For we share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵ As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion." ¹⁶ For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Introduction

This morning we are going to consider Hebrews 3.12-19 again. Our title for this text last time was "Exhort One Another with Open-Minded Humility" and we emphasized open-mindedness. This time our title is the same with an emphasis on humility. You will easily see that this further expands on what we are to do about heart hardening. There are two main points to cover: the duty of mutual exhortation (in review of Heb. 3.12-19), and the practice of open-minded *humility* (for further application of this important theme).

1A. The Duty of Mutual Exhortation

Let us review the passage by reflecting on the dangers in view, the main thing to do, and the complicating problem.

1B. Dangers

Importance attaches to this subject because of the intertwined dangers (plural) associated with the danger (singular) of heart hardening. They are judgment, unbelief, and apostasy.

1) The judgment is that heart hardened people in the church today will not enter into rest with God in His rest *just as* the sinful Israelite church did not enter the Promised Land. Indeed, their bodies literally fell to the earth in the wilderness (3.17).

2) Another danger is unbelief (3.12). Thus, the writer gives a warning (note the word "lest"). He warns about the fear that **there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart**. This danger could occur among you (**in any of you**, 3.12), among the brothers and sisters of the church family for he began by addressing the church with the endearing term of **brothers** (3.12). He addresses the entire church with the concern that some among us (the church then and now) may have "an evil heart of unbelief."

3) The evil unbelieving heart is the root that leads to the fruit of apostasy. Falling away **from the living God** (3.12) is *a step beyond* having an evil heart of unbelief.

For any of us who claim the name of the living God, whenever we grumble, complain, quarrel, and oppose authority (as did the church in the wilderness), we step on the path that leads away from God. There, we walk with our backs to God, and the end of this path, if we stay on it, is death in a wasteland outside of Eden, outside of paradise, outside of the Promised Land, and outside of rest with God. There we walk in the dark on a road that leads to destruction.

Therefore, there are many serious dangers associated with hardheartedness. That is why the preacher puts us on alert: ¹² **Take care, brothers... as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin** (3.12-13). "Take care" means to be careful; pay attention closely; look, open your eyes, and watch for the dangers of hardness that may be in you. You must guard against this sin of rebellion and autonomy. By contrast, if you have a heart of belief, a good heart that is called good because it is a believing heart, then you will be very careful about heart hardening sins that are back turning sins. If you are the Lord's in truth, you will fear this kind of back turning and you will turn away from it. This brings us to the next point of review.

2B. The main thing to do

You must be an active participant in a regular give and take of mutual admonition: **(exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today”, v. 13).**

To exhort is to call out to, to call to one’s side, to call out for help, to invite, to appeal to, to comfort, encourage, to urge, console, cheer up, to implore, request, and conciliate. It has a range of usages that reflect a wide variety of interactions between people. Exhortation presupposes circumstances such as trials and difficulties that may discourage and dishearten. Thus, it presupposes various needs that we all have as we experience trying and challenging situations.

This duty is reciprocal. That is, you *all* face things in which you need the counsel, help, encouragement, guidance, comfort, and companionship of others in a common cause before God. Sometimes you may call out for help by calling someone to your side. Sometimes you may ask for help; other times others may call out to you for help. Moreover, sometimes you may not want to receive help and other times you may not want to be helpful; you may be proud or lack courage.

There are many variables, aspects, and dimensions to the duty of mutual exhortation, but no matter which pertains at a given time, opportunity presents itself; namely, we live in the “today” of God’s warning and His provision for the way forward. The solution involves a daily taking up of the present opportunity (while it is called “today”). “Daily” refers to a regular, continual, ongoing practice of one anothering exhortation. At times, this may be literally every single day. Today is the time of decision and action before it is too late and judgment falls. Today, not tomorrow, is the time to weed your spiritual garden, to wake up, to live as children of the day, and to **cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light** (Rom. 13.12, for battle!).

3B. The complicating problem

In the shadows of heart hardening lurks the deceitfulness of sin. Therefore, you need the perspective of other believers on your thoughts, attitudes, and actions. In astoundingly simple terms, the solution to this profound complication is mutual exhortation **(exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today”, Heb. 3.13).**

Sin is difficult to face and hard to see because, in pride and disobedience, we hide ourselves from ourselves. Thus, it is imperative that we face the battle with sin in a joint way helping one another. Sin is tricky, so, we need honesty in facing it. For that we need an objective outsider to help us see more clearly. We need the help of others for this. Therefore, each of us should say, *“I must be about the business day by day of giving and receiving encouragement, entreaty, counsel, help, guidance from the brothers and sisters of the church family.”* This does not exclude pastoral care; it runs parallel with it. Finally, this duty requires open-minded *humility* to fulfill it. To that we now turn.

2A. The practice of open-minded *humility*

As we focus on humility, we want to do so in context of open-mindedness. This spirit of openness has four necessary ingredients. You are not open if you are unwilling to compare what you think or how you act with another way of thinking or acting. However, comparison is not enough. You must compare looking for the good to truly be open and to profit from mutual exhortation. That means being empathetic. To comparison and empathy, we must add counter-question and question or dialogue; it takes time to get on the same wave length in the process of mutual exhortation. Finally, you must carry yourself in a way that opens up conversation rather than in a way that closes it down. You open up conversation by assuming an objective posture in which you say things like, “Correct me where I am wrong as I make this important point”; this invites correction and opens the door of exchange for honest reconsideration.

One reason that humility enters this discussion is that there is no one-sidedness to our duty of exhortation; one person is *not* the policeman for all the other members of the church. No,

it is something mutual; we are to exhort one another; things are reciprocal here. Therefore each one of us must humble his or her self and be *willing to both give and receive* appeals, encouragements, comfort, challenge, dialogue, entreaty, help, along with correction and instruction. The “give and take” prevents the policeman-nag syndrome.

Humility connects with open-mindedness because it involves the right use of the *mind*. This is an aspect of loving God with all your heart, soul, and mind. On one hand, a person does not have open-minded humility if he does not engage the mind and engage it critically (one ought not to be so open-minded that his or her brains fall out: one should have answers and convictions, 1 Pet. 3:15). On the other hand, Christians should display great humbleness of mind. The ultimate expression of humility in our use of reason and logic (in humble-mindedness) is the submission of our selves, of our reasoning selves to Christ speaking in Scripture.

Four basic ingredients make up humility. These virtues are of supreme importance for the right use of logic at a basic level. They are supremely important to mutual exhortation. As we consider these ingredients, remember, there is a right way to eat humble pie and not get sick.

1) First, there must be awareness. That is, awareness and acknowledgement of the "hidden man" problem. This is the proverbial mask-wearing problem, hiding from ourselves, and hiding from our sinful selves. As Augustine said, we put ourselves behind our backs so that we will not see how foul we are. The point here is the personal recognition that sin is *my* problem. We must each face this squarely before the Lord or we are not humble. We must do so carefully and on the alert because of the deceitfulness of sin that dogs our heels: **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** (Heb. 3.13).

2) Second, there is risk. We must be willing to take the risk of being wrong. Of course, it is pride that keeps us from candidness lest someone shows that we are wrong. We must be willing to admit it when we are "wrrrrong"! The word just does not want to come out. However, it is good to put our reasons for what we believe on the table in public view. This helps us see them better, to see strengths and weaknesses in our thinking better; it helps us see what others offer in critique of us and as alternatives for us. Of course, such a process of exchange gives clearer and clearer perspective that runs the risk of showing our thinking to be out of line in some way. Knowing that may happen, we still engage with others “**out of reverence for Christ**” (Eph 5.21). Again, take up the command of the Holy Spirit to give and receive admonition because of obedience and because of the subtlety of self-deception: **that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin** (Heb. 3.13). It is a matter of obedience to the Spirit and a matter of need.

3) Third, an element of distrust is part of the idea of humility. I refer to a basic distrust of ourselves. I do not mean this as an ostrich extreme, but I have in mind a seasoning of our view of ourselves. We might use language like this: "Maybe, I don't have it all together. I need more perspective. I must suspend judgment on this or that until I get a better handle on it, especially regarding something so personal that requires change." Or we may say, “Although I have been through all the important arguments for x, I can always do so again, besides, I may have missed something along the way.” Circumstances and consideration of the needs of others may call us to revisit stopping points of arguments that we bumped into long ago, but we honor the call in honor to Christ, to the gospel, and to our brothers and sisters. Distrust of this kind is but an application of humility in a way that opposes leaning on our own understanding: **(Proverbs 3:5-7** ⁵ **Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. ⁷ Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil).** Leaning on your own understanding is what you are to avoid. In this way, you add the ingredient of distrust to make a complete humility pie. You can become very confident in the things that you learn, in the understanding that you have attained. Learning is good and you should grow in conviction regarding the things you learn. However, *nothing that you learn and none of what you count as understanding is to have some sacrosanct status that puts it beyond critical scrutiny.* If

what you understand and hold with conviction is true, then open rethinking with others will confirm it and that is good. If what you understand with conviction is false or unclear, the open rethinking will reveal those things and that is good. Either way, you move forward, amen.

This comes to vital application when you face biblical paradoxes such as the doctrine of the trinity, but it is critical with similar intensity to humble your reasoning self in your grasp of any teaching of Scripture because as a finite sinner you have what you have by the grace of God. Therefore, you must hold to the truth with confidence on one hand and with humility on the other.

4) Fourth, preventative love is part of being humble. Humility is having qualities of love that are opposite to pride. Love prevents a) scorn, making others feel small or worthless around you. Love prevents doing what some of the Corinthian Christians did at the Lord's Table: they made others feel poor, weak, and stupid (1 Cor. 11.20-22, **you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing**). Love prevents b) an arrogance that says, "I have all the answers, no one else's opinion is worth consideration." We may do this or think it in the back of our minds, as Edwards put it, we may think that "Everyone must bow and truckle to me." Again, I say, we should have answers (1 Pet 3.15), and we should engage in earnest refutation (Titus 1.9), but we must always give due consideration to other views (to other *people* and their views). If they do not give us due consideration, then we must strive after patience and gentleness without quarrelling (2 Tim 2.24-25, **And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,**²⁵ **correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,**²⁶ **and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will**). Notably, the opposite of quarrelling is being kind, patient, and gentle (to lack them is to quarrel).

In addition, love prevents c) a leveling spirit or destructive criticism. What happens when you tear other people down? You lift self up! If logical criticism is necessary (and often it is) you will begin with self-criticism first, always first. That means doing something about the telephone pole in your own eye. Then you will be gentle with other people's eyes. You will do well to look closely at our Lord's guidance on how to deal *with a speck of dust in the other person's eye*. The analogy here obviously concerns the eye with all its sensitivity (Mat 7.3-5, ³ **Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?** ⁴ **Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?** ⁵ **You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye**). You will do this lovingly when you do it kindly, softly, and gently.

Open-minded humility is a cluster of Christian graces that we must earnestly implement as we engage in mutual exhortation that displays charity and its fruits.

Conclusion

To get the best impact of open-minded humility with an emphasis on humility, you might ponder God's attitude toward the proud that we have in the following texts: **Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."** ⁶ **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you** (1 Pet. 5.5-6) and **He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble** (NIV, Prov. 3.4). Therefore, what God requires of you is clear. You are to put on humility every time you get dressed. Think this way as you dress for the day. Moreover, you are to wear the clothing of humility in relation to your brothers and sisters in the Christian family (toward them especially). By engaging in mutual exhortation out of reverence for Christ, you honor the Lord, follow His example and you find protection from the deceitfulness of sin.

May we fall down before the majesty of the living God in due recognition of our sinfulness and need; may the Holy Spirit impress on us the radical need that we have of one another and of one another's exhortation; may He teach us how to receive admonition as well as give it; and may He teach us how to do these things with great wisdom for the glory of our great high priest, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, amen.