

## Membership Matters: Session 2

### *How to Prevent Heart-Hardness: One Another*

*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. – Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Life Together*

### The Wilderness Generation

*“Today, if you hear his voice,  
8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,  
on the day of testing in the wilderness,  
9 where your fathers put me to the test  
and saw my works for forty years.  
10 Therefore I was provoked with that generation,  
and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart;  
they have not known my ways.’  
11 As I swore in my wrath,  
‘They shall not enter my rest.’”*

- Hebrews 3:7-11
  - o Citing Psalm 95
    - Which is citing Numbers 14 (and Exodus 17)
- What is this describing?
  - o Israel’s unbelief at the border of Canaan upon hearing the report of the 12 spies
    - *And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”... Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. – Num 14:4, 10*
    - David’s analysis: *they always go astray in their hearts.*
  - o God’s response to their unbelief: wrath, no rest, no promised land.
- So David warns us: *don’t let that happen to you!*
- You can hear God’s voice, witness God’s miracles, but go astray in your heart.

### The Church of the Hebrews

*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 have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

- Hebrews 3:12-14

- Note: the book of Hebrews is a letter to a church, possibly a sermon a pastor is giving his church.
  - see Heb 13:22, “word of exhortation,” a technical term for a sermon in the NT (see Acts 13:15)
- The author is concerned about the same thing that David was concerned about in Psalm 95. How can the church be kept from falling away in unbelief like Israel did?
- *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*
  - Who is being addressed?
    - “Brothers”—Christians
  - What are they being warned of?
    - “An evil, unbelieving heart”
  - Why is that a danger?
    - It leads “you to fall away from the living God.” That is, rebel against God the way the wilderness generation rebelled in Numbers 14. To “fall away from the living God” therefore is to be shut out from God’s rest (salvation) and experience His wrath (condemnation).
  - In sum: life and death hang in the balance of whether or not we have unbelieving hearts.
- *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.*
  - The remedy?
    - “exhort one another”
    - What does “exhort” mean? It is the word *parakaleō*, which can mean “beg, urge; encourage, speak words of encouragement; request, ask, appeal to; console, comfort, cheer up; invite, summon.”
      - Two major applications: affirmation, or admonition
      - This is where we get the term *paraclete*, a title for the Holy Spirit in John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7, usually translated as “Helper.”
  - How often?
    - “every day”
  - Why?
    - So “that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”
    - Heart hardening is just another term for an “Evil, unbelieving heart”
      - See 3:8 and 10, “do not *harden your heart*...they always go astray *in their heart*.”
    - But watch out! It is “deceitful” so you won’t know it is happening to you.
- *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

- The legitimacy and genuineness of our faith is revealed over time. If we do not hold our original confidence firm to the end, then have not come to share in Christ.
- “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.” – 1 John 2:19
- *Wait—are you saying that Christians can lose their salvation?*
  - “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out... And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day,” – John 6:37, 39
  - “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ,” – Phil 1:6
  - No, since Christians don’t earn their salvation they cannot lose their salvation. But, all genuine Christians will persevere to the end.
    - *Stay Awake! Analogy*
- But how are we kept from evil, unbelieving hearts? From having a hardened heart that is deceived by sin? How are we kept by God? *Through the ministry of mutual exhortation.* Therefore the Christian who is isolated from other brothers and sisters who are encouraging and exhorting him/her is in serious danger.

## **Definitions**

**Church:** “We believe that a visible church of Christ is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel, observing the ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, and exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His word.”<sup>1</sup>

**Church Membership:** “Church membership is (1) a covenant of union between a particular church and a Christian, a covenant that consists of (2) the church’s affirmation of the Christian’s gospel profession, (3) the church’s promise to give oversight to the Christian, and (4) the Christian’s promise to gather with the church and submit to its oversight.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From our Statement of Faith, XIV. *Of a Gospel Church*

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Leeman, *The Church and the Surprising Offense of God’s Love*, p. 217