

Text: Heb 3.13

Last week we talked about Heb 3.12 and the fearsome warning about an evil heart of unbelief.

Our theme in Hebrews these last weeks has been the *hardened heart*. We've been talking about genuine believers and how their hearts can grow hard to the things of God. This hardening can be gradual, partial, or complete.

After this discussion we talked about the evil heart of unbelief. The passage uses the verb from which we get apostasy.

When we look at it in isolation, this is very fearful, as no Christian wants to risk such a devastating fall away from God.

The next verse in our text turns the warning around, turning the warning on its head as a positive exhortation to walk the other way.

Let's read our text:

Heb 13.6-15, text 13, with a look back to 12

One of my commentaries starts his comments on this verse with this:

"Verse 13 parallels v. 12 with another imperative, 'encourage one another,' but with a positive focus signaled by ... 'but' ... to balance out the warning."¹

Later, he makes several points that show how verse 12 probably doesn't mean apostasy as we think about it, but certainly it is a bad condition where the heart is very hard towards God.

If we are going to avoid falling away, if we are going to avoid the evil heart of unbelief, if we are going to keep our hearts soft rather than hard, how will we do it? This verse gives the answer.

Proposition: One key to a close walk with God is faithful fellowship in a local church.

¹ David Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary 35 (Nashville, Tenn: B & H Publ. Group, 2010), 263.

I. The call to encourage one another

A. The verb translated “encourage” is *parakaleō*

1. Many Christians know this word even if they don’t know Greek
2. From the Upper Room discourse we learn that our *Paraclete* is the Holy Spirit

Jn 14.16 “I will ask the Father, and He will give you another **Helper**, that He may be with you forever;

Jn 14.26 “But the **Helper**, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Jn 15.26 “When the **Helper** comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me,

Jn 16.7 “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the **Helper** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.

3. The Holy Spirit is given to us *for our advantage* ... to encourage us in our Christian life
 - a. Other versions translate the term “exhort” in our text, which is all right, but “encourage” gets at a fuller meaning
 - b. Bauer: “to urge strongly, *appeal to, urge, exhort, encourage*”²
 - c. Thayer: “*to admonish, exhort ... to beg, entreat, beseech ... to console, to encourage and strengthen by consolation, to comfort ... to encourage, strengthen*”³
4. How does the Holy Spirit perform his ministry of consolation?
 - a. Through other Christians
 - b. In the Christian assembly, *i.e.*, the church

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

³ Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (International Bible Translators (IBT), Inc., 1889).

B. Many commentators recall Heb 10.25 in connection with our text

Heb 10.25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

1. The “encouraging” in 10.25 is the same word
2. The assembly is the congregation, the body of believers that makes up the local church
3. Back to our text, notice the phrase “day after day”
 - a. Lit. ‘according to each day’
 - b. Several commentators point out that the early church met more often than we do: daily

“This statement and 10:25 may indicate that the readers met together daily.”⁴

“The admonition ‘encourage one another every day’ may actually presuppose a daily gathering of the house church...”⁵

- c. Daily meetings are not practical in our circumstances, but Constable adds this

“However we need to encourage one another day after day, not just when we go to church. Mutual encouragement in godliness is something we all need frequently so that we do not become hardened to sin.”⁶

4. The psycho/social aspect of church life
 - a. God created us for society
 - b. God gave us the family as the first institution to fill our social needs

⁴ Allen, *Hebrews*, 263.

⁵ William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1991), 87.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Heb 3.13.

- c. God gave us the church as the New Testament institution to fill our spiritual needs

This is why churches so often emphasize the “family” aspect of fellowship.

This is why we’ve always included social events to fill out our fellowship: worship is essential to the church, fellowship is just as vital.

- d. For our church, we have worship and fellowship every Sunday

1) The coffee time and the meal aren’t just part of our church for practical reasons

2) There is a spiritual purpose as well

BTW, we need to spread ourselves about ... I always sit in the same place ... but we should break our habits and talk to different people each Sunday

5. The relationship of Christians to their local church

a. The reality is that sometimes we are prevented from the meetings of the church (many factors)

b. The second reality is that to some extent or other we harden ourselves against the meetings of the church

In light of our texts, is this wise?

Do you cut yourself off from encouragement by skipping church events?

Do you risk hardening?

II. The time to encourage one another

You may think I already discussed time with the phrase, “day after day,” but our text adds, “as long as it is *still* called ‘Today’”

A. What is “Today”?

1. The quotation of Ps 95 starts with “Today” (7)

Heb 3.7-8 ¶ Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS,

2. For the Israelites, “Today” was when the Holy Spirit reminded the Psalmist and all who read him of ancient Israel and their hard hearts
3. We emphasized in our preaching that the verb is in the present tense: the Holy Spirit *is saying* “Today” right now, today (the day of the author of Hebrews)
4. Is our day any less of Today?
5. Eschatological sense
 - a. Compare Heb 4.7 and 10.25

Heb 4.7 He again fixes a certain day, “Today,” saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS.”

Heb 10.25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

- b. Today is the present time, “the day” is the Day of the Lord that is coming

Westcott: “For the Church it is the whole time till Christ’s coming. For the believer the period of his own life.”⁷

B. Today is right now

1. We are not yet in “the Day” – the Day of the Lord
2. We are alive! (none of you are in resurrection bodies!)
3. We are in a Bible-believing church

Today we need to encourage one another.

⁷ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 85.

III. The purpose of encouraging one another

A. The ever-present spiritual danger: hardening

1. The verb “be hardened” is in the passive voice: “allow yourself to be hardened” – let it happen to you
2. Forsaking the assembly, resisting the encouragement, is one way to allow hardening
 - a. You shouldn’t hold yourself aloof from others
 - b. You should learn how to talk to one another and be involved with other lives
 - c. You should keep short accounts with one another
 - d. You should commit yourself to each other for their benefit (and yours)

You probably will resist a hardened heart with a smile on your face and your hand outstretched

B. The deceitful hardening agent: sin

1. Sin is personified here, as if it is a personal enemy
2. Four ways sin deceives us towards hardening
 - a. By getting us to think we are getting away with it

The Israelites, when they hardened their heart at Kadesh Barnea, were on their tenth cycle of disobedience (Num 14.22)

Num 14.22 “Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice,

- b. By getting us to think God won’t judge us: “so far so good”
- c. By telling us our “little” sin is “no big deal”
- d. By subtly hardening the conscience so we don’t even see sin as sin

3. Remember the great temptation of the Hebrews: to draw back from Christian assembly and go back to Judaism

Drawing back from the Lord's church is a sign of hardening.

Conclusion:

Proposition: One key to a close walk with God is faithful fellowship in a local church.

Do you have reasons for missing out on the fellowship of the local church?

Why don't you try to eliminate just one of those reasons and grow closer to one another in the church?

I think you will grow closer to God if you do.