

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter the apostle applies what he had said in the chapter foregoing concerning the priesthood of Christ,

I. In a serious pathetic exhortation that this great high priest, who was discovered to them, might be seriously considered by them (v. 1-6).

II. He then adds many weighty counsels and cautions (v. 7 to the end).

~~381~~ HEBREWS 3:1-6

ATTENTION DUE TO CHRIST

In these verses we have the application of the doctrine laid down in the close of the last chapter concerning the priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. And observe,

I. In how fervent and affectionate a manner the apostle exhorts Christians to have this high priest much in their thoughts, and to make him the object of their close and serious consideration; and surely no one in earth or heaven deserves our consideration more than he. That this exhortation might be made the more effectual, observe,

1. The honourable compellation used towards those to whom he wrote: *Holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.*

(1.) Brethren, not only my brethren, but the brethren of Christ, and in him brethren to all the saints. All the people of God are brethren, and should love and live like brethren.

(2.) Holy brethren; holy not only in profession and title, but in principle and practice, in heart and life. This has been turned by some into scorn: "These," say they, "are the holy brethren;" but it is dangerous jesting with such edge-tools; *be not mockers, lest your bands be made strong.* Let those that are thus despised and scorned labour to be holy brethren indeed, and approve themselves so to God; and they need not be ashamed of the

title nor dread the scoffs of the profane. The day is coming when those that make this a term of reproach would count it their greatest honour and happiness to be taken into this sacred brotherhood.

(3.) *Partakers of the heavenly calling* — partakers of the means of grace, and of the Spirit of grace, that came from heaven, and by which Christians are effectually called out of darkness into marvelous light, that calling which brings down heaven into the souls of men, raises them up to a heavenly temper and conversation, and prepares them to live for ever with God in heaven.

2. The titles he gives to Christ, whom he would have them consider,

(1.) As the apostle of our profession, the prime-minister of the gospel church, a messenger and a principal messenger sent of God to men, upon the most important errand, the great revealer of that faith which we profess to hold and of that hope which we profess to have.

(2.) Not only the apostle, but the high priest too, of our profession, the chief officer of the Old Testament as well as the New, the head of the church in every state, and under each dispensation, upon whose satisfaction and intercession we profess to depend for pardon of sin, and acceptance with God.

(3.) As Christ, the Messiah, anointed and every way qualified for the office both of apostle and high priest.

(4.) As Jesus, our Saviour, our healer, the great physician of souls, typified by the brazen serpent that Moses lifted up in the wilderness, that those who were stung by the fiery serpents might look to him, and be saved.

II. We have the duty we owe to him who bears all these high and honourable titles, and that is to consider him as thus characterized. Consider what he is in himself, what he is to us, and what he will be to us hereafter and for ever; consider him, fix your thoughts upon him with the greatest attention, and act towards him accordingly; look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith. Here observe,

1. Many that profess faith in Christ have not a due consideration for him; he is not so much thought of as he deserves to be, and desires to be, by those that expect salvation from him.

2. Close and serious consideration of Christ would be of great advantage to us to increase our acquaintance with him, and to engage our love and our obedience to him, and reliance on him.

3. Even those that are holy brethren, and partakers of the heavenly calling, have need to stir up one another to think more of Christ than they do, to have him more in their minds; the best of his people think too seldom and too slightly of him.

4. We must consider Christ as he is described to us in the scriptures, and form our apprehensions of him thence, not from any vain conceptions and fancies of our own.

III. We have several arguments drawn up to enforce this duty of considering Christ the apostle and high priest of our profession.

1. The first is taken from his fidelity, v. 2. He was faithful to him that appointed him, as Moses was in all his house.

(1.) Christ is an appointed Mediator; God the Father has sent and sealed him to that office, and therefore his mediation is acceptable to the Father.

(2.) He is faithful to that appointment, punctually observing all the rules and orders of his mediation, and fully executing the trust reposed in him by his Father and by his people.

(3.) That he is as faithful to him that appointed him as Moses was in all his house. Moses was faithful in the discharge of his office to the Jewish church in the Old Testament, and so is Christ under the New; this was a proper argument to urge upon the Jews, who had so high an opinion of the faithfulness of Moses, and yet his faithfulness was but typical of Christ's.

2. Another argument is taken from the superior glory and excellence of Christ above Moses (v. 3-6); therefore they were more obliged to consider Christ.

(1.) Christ was a maker of the house, Moses but a member in it. By the house we are to understand the church of God, the people of God incorporated together under Christ their maker and head, and under subordinate officers, according to his law, observing his institutions. Christ is the maker of this house of the church in all ages: Moses was a minister in the house, he was instrumental under Christ in governing and edifying the house, but Christ is the maker of all things; for he is God, and

no one less than God could build the church, either lay the foundation or carry on the superstructure. No less power was requisite to make the church than to make the world; the world was made out of nothing, the church made out of materials altogether unfit for such a building. Christ, who is God, drew the ground-plan of the church, provided the materials, and by almighty power disposed them to receive the form; he has compacted and united this his house, has settled the orders of it, and crowned all with his own presence, which is the true glory of this house of God.

(2.) Christ was the master of this house, as well as the maker, v. 5,6. This house is styled his house, as the Son of God. Moses was only a faithful servant, for a testimony of those things that were afterwards to be revealed. Christ, as the eternal Son of God, is the rightful owner and sovereign ruler of the church. Moses was only a typical governor, for a testimony of all those things relating to the church which would be more clearly, completely, and comfortably revealed in the gospel by the Spirit of Christ; and therefore Christ is worthy of more glory than Moses, and of greater regard and consideration. This argument the apostle concludes,

[1.] With a comfortable accommodation of it to himself and all true believers (v. 6). *Whose house we are:* each of us personally, as we are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and Christ dwells in us by faith; all of us jointly, as we are united by the bonds of graces, truths, ordinances, gospel discipline, and devotions.

[2.] With a characteristic description of those persons who constitute this house: *“If we hold fast the confidence, and the rejoicing of the hope, firmly to the end; that is, if we maintain a bold and open profession of the truths of the gospel, upon which our hopes of grace and glory are built, and live upon and up to those hopes, so as to have a holy rejoicing in them, which shall abide firm to the end, notwithstanding all that we may meet with in so doing.”* So that you see there must not only be a setting out well in the ways of Christ, but a steadfastness and perseverance therein unto the end. We have here a direction what those must do who would partake of the dignity and privileges of the household of Christ. *First,* They must take the truths of the gospel into their heads and hearts. *Secondly,* They must build their hopes of happiness upon those truths. *Thirdly,* They must make an open profession of those truths. *Fourthly,* They must live so up to them as to keep their evidences clear, that they may rejoice in hope, and

then they must in all persevere to the end. In a word, they must walk closely, consistently, courageously, and constantly, in the faith and practice of the gospel, that their Master, when he comes, may own and approve them.

~~<BIB>~~ HEBREWS 3:7-19

CAUTIONS AGAINST APOSTASY

Here the apostle proceeds in pressing upon them serious counsels and cautions to the close of the chapter; and he recites a passage out of ~~<BIB>~~ Psalm 95:7, etc., where observe,

I. What he counsels them to do — to give a speedy and present attention to the call of Christ. “Hear his voice, assent to, approve of, and consider, what God in Christ speaks unto you; apply it to yourselves with suitable affections and endeavours, and set about it this very day, for to-morrow it may be too late.”

II. What he cautions them against — hardening their hearts, turning the deaf ear to the calls and counsels of Christ: “When he tells you of the evil of sin, the excellency of holiness, the necessity of receiving him by faith as your Saviour, do not shut your ear and heart against such a voice as this.” Observe, The hardening of our hearts is the spring of all our other sins.

III. Whose example he warns them by — that of the Israelites their fathers in the wilderness: *As in the provocation and day of temptation*; this refers to that remarkable passage at Massah Meribah, ~~<BIB>~~ Exodus 17:2-7. Observe,

1. Days of temptation are often days of provocation.

2. To provoke God, when he is trying us, and letting us see that we entirely depend and live immediately upon him, is a provocation with a witness.

3. The sins of others, especially our relations, should be a warning to us. Our fathers' sins and punishments should be remembered by us, to deter us from following their evil examples. Now as to the sin of the fathers of the Jews, here reflected upon, observe,

(1.) The state in which these fathers were, when they thus sinned: they were in the wilderness, brought out of Egypt, but not got into Canaan, the thoughts whereof should have restrained them from sin.

(2.) The sin they were guilty of: they tempted and provoked God; they distrusted God, murmured against Moses, and would not attend to the voice of God.

(3.) The aggravations of their sin: they sinned in the wilderness, where they had a more immediate dependence upon God: they sinned when God was trying them; they sinned when they saw his works — works of wonder wrought for their deliverance out of Egypt, and their support and supply in the wilderness from day to day. They continued thus to sin against God for forty years. These were heinous aggravations.

(4.) The source and spring of such aggravated sins, which were,

[1.] They erred in their hearts; and these heart-errors produced many other errors in their lips and lives.

[2.] They did not know God's ways, though he had walked before them. They did not know his ways; neither those ways of his providence in which he had walked towards them, nor those ways of his precept in which they ought to have walked towards God; they did not observe either his providences or his ordinances in a right manner.

(5.) The just and great resentment God had at their sins, and yet the great patience he exercised towards them (v. 10): *Wherefore I was grieved with that generation.* Note,

[1.] All sin, especially sin committed by God's professing privileged people, does not only anger and affront God, but it grieves him.

[2.] God is loth to destroy his people in or for their sin, he waits long to be gracious to them.

[3.] God keeps an exact account of the time that people go on in sinning against him, and in grieving him by their sins; but at length, if they by their sins continue to grieve the Spirit of God, their sins shall be made grievous to their own spirits, either in a way of judgment or mercy.

(6.) The irreversible doom passed upon them at last for their sins. God swore in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest, the rest either of an earthly or of a heavenly Canaan. Observe,

[1.] Sin, long continued in, will kindle the divine wrath, and make it flame out against sinners.

[2.] God's wrath will discover itself in its righteous resolution to destroy the impenitent; he will swear in his wrath, not rashly, but righteously, and his wrath will make their condition a restless condition; there is no resting under the wrath of God.

IV. What use the apostle makes of their awful example, v. 12, 13, etc. He gives the Hebrews a proper caution, and enforces it with an affectionate compellation.

1. He gives the Hebrews a proper caution; the word is, *Take heed, blepete* — *look to it*. “Look about you; be upon your guard against enemies both within and without; be circumspect. You see what kept many of your forefathers out of Canaan, and made their carcasses fall in the wilderness; take heed lest you fall into the same sin and snare and dreadful sentence. For you see Christ is head of the church, a much greater person than Moses, and your contempt of him must be a greater sin than their contempt of Moses; and so you are in danger of falling under a severer sentence than they.” Observe, The ruin of others should be a warning to us to take heed of the rock they split upon. Israel's fall should for ever be a warning to all who come after them; for *all these things happened to them for ensamples* (⁴³¹¹1 Corinthians 10:11), and should be remembered by us. Take heed; all who would get safely to heaven must look about them.

2. He enforces the admonition with an affectionate compellation: “*Brethren*, not only in the flesh, but in the Lord; brethren whom I love, and for whose welfare I labour and long.” And here he enlarges upon the matter of the admonition: *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*. Here observe,

(1.) A heart of unbelief is an evil heart. Unbelief is a great sin, it vitiates the heart of man.

(2.) An evil heart of unbelief is at the bottom of all our sinful departures from God; it is a leading step to apostasy; if once we allow ourselves to distrust God, we may soon desert him.

(3.) Christian brethren have need to be cautioned against apostasy. *Let those that think they stand take heed lest they fall.*

3. He subjoins good counsel to the caution, and advises them to that which would be a remedy against this evil heart of unbelief — that they should *exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day*, v. 13. Observe,

(1.) We should be doing all the good we can to one another while we are together, which will be but a short and uncertain time.

(2.) Since to-morrow is none of ours, we must make the best improvement of to-day.

(3.) If Christians do not exhort one another daily, they will be in danger of being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Note,

[1.] There is a great deal of deceitfulness in sin; it appears fair, but is filthy; it appears pleasant, but is pernicious; it promises much, but performs nothing.

[2.] The deceitfulness of sin is of a hardening nature to the soul; one sin allowed prepares for another; every act of sin confirms the habit; sinning against conscience is the way to sear the conscience; and therefore it should be the great concern of every one to exhort himself and others to beware of sin.

4. He comforts those who not only set out well, but hold on well, and hold out to the end (v. 14): *We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast to the end.* Here observe,

(1.) The saints' privilege: they are made partakers of Christ, that is, of the Spirit, nature, graces, righteousness, and life of Christ; they are interested in all that is Christ's, in all that he is, in all that he has done, or can do.

(2.) The condition on which they hold that privilege, namely, their perseverance in the bold and open profession and practice of Christ and Christianity unto the end. Not but they shall persevere, being kept by the mighty power of God through faith to salvation, but to be pressed thus to it is one means by which Christ helps his people to persevere. This tends to make them watchful and diligent, and so keeps them from apostasy. Here observe,

[1.] The same spirit with which Christians set out in the ways of God they should maintain and evidence to the end. Those who begin seriously, and with lively affections and holy resolutions and humble reliance, should go on in the same spirit. But,

[2.] There are a great many who in the beginning of their profession show a great deal of courage and confidence, but do not hold them fast to the end.

[3.] Perseverance in faith is the best evidence of the sincerity of our faith.

5. The apostle resumes what he had quoted before from ~~1ST~~ Psalm 95:7, etc., and he applies it closely to those of that generation, v. 15, 16, etc. While it is said, *To-day if you will hear*, etc.; as if he should say, “What was recited before from that scripture belonged not only to former ages, but to you now, and to all who shall come after you; that you take heed you fall not into the same sins, lest you fall under the same condemnation.” The apostle tells them that though some who had heard the voice of God did provoke him, yet all did not so. Observe,

(1.) Though the majority of hearers provoked God by unbelief, yet some there were who believed the report.

(2.) Though the hearing of the word be the ordinary means of salvation, yet, if it be not hearkened to, it will expose men more to the anger of God.

(3.) God will have a remnant that shall be obedient to his voice, and he will take care of such and make mention of them with honour.

(4.) If these should fall in a common calamity, yet they shall partake of eternal salvation, while disobedient hearers perish for ever.

6. The apostle puts some queries upon what had been before mentioned, and gives proper answers to them (v. 17-19): *But with whom was he grieved forty years? With those that sinned. And to whom did he swear?* etc. Whence observe,

(1.) God is grieved only with those of his people who sin against him, and continue in sin.

(2.) God is grieved and provoked most by sins publicly committed by the generality of a nation; when sin becomes epidemic, it is most provoking.

(3.) Though God grieves long, and bears long, when pressed with the weight of general and prevailing wickedness, yet he will at length ease himself of public offenders by public judgments.

(4.) Unbelief (with rebellion which is the consequent of it) is the great damning sin of the world, especially of those who have a revelation of the mind and will of God. This sin shuts up the heart of God, and shuts up the gate of heaven, against them; it lays them under the wrath and curse of God, and leaves them there; so that in truth and justice to himself he is obliged to cast them off for ever.