

“HARDENING OF THE HEARTARIES” - PART TWO

Sermon- Sunday August 10, 2014

Last week we introduced the topic of hardening our hearts against the Lord. We looked at a few passages from Hebrews, the Psalms, and Deuteronomy which speak of hardened hearts. The basic scripture we used was from Psalm 96:7-9 which says, “Today, if you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested Me, they tried Me, though they had seen My work.”

We learned the word Massah means “test” and the word Meribah means “quarrel, contention, or strife”. So they were testing God’s faithfulness and contending with Him over His provision and care for them.

Psalm 106:32 tells us that the people provoked God to wrath because they rebelled against His Holy Spirit. This is the key issue. They denied the power of God to sustain them in the wilderness and maligned His character by believing God had evil plans for them and not good. They hardened their hearts against God and the work of His Holy Spirit.

The constant theme of their heart, what consumed their thought life, was the necessities of life in the desert – their need for food and water. And whenever there wasn’t any they constantly grumbled and complained about it. Now I can certainly relate to this. Sometimes I can get cranky when I am really hungry or thirsty. But since I’m not a very good or creative cook I try to keep my negative comments to myself in hopes of persuading my wife to make something for me. I don’t want to bite the hand that feeds me. But evidently that did not bother the Israelites. They were more than eager to complain to the One who provided their daily meals for forty long years.

So the bottom line is this. God called the Israelites out of Egypt fulfilling a promise he made to Abraham over 400 years earlier. He provided them with a leader, Moses, to whom He granted miraculous powers to overcome the objections of the Egyptian king. He used Moses to part the sea allowing them to escape the army of Egypt and also used him to bring water out of a rock. God also sent forth a wind bringing in quail from the sea and provided manna for which they did not have to labor, just go out and gather it each morning for six of the seven days of the week. And as they traveled through the Sinai desert God did not let their clothing wear out or allow their feet to swell for all of those forty years.

God was their constant provider, doing things for them that no one else could possibly do. And yet they still complained. They were not content with all these things. They were not grateful. And they were unfaithful to the God who had been faithful to them. They hardened their hearts against Him and were ready to trade their freedom for slavery once more if only they could satisfy their hunger for leeks and onions, figs, and pomegranates.

The consequence for the wandering Israelites of hardening their hearts against the Lord was that they were not able to enter the rest God had planned for them. God said of them, “They always go astray in their heart, and they did not know my ways; As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall never enter My rest.’” God had provided but they, because of their hardened unbelieving hearts, would not be partakers of this provision.

Now people today are in the same danger of not entering the rest God has provided for them if they harden their hearts against His message of salvation. That is the main point of Hebrews chapter four. It

says, *“Those who had the good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience”* (Hebrews 4:2). They refused to believe the word of God and refused to submit to its authority.

But for those of us who have been saved from the wrath of God and have found rest from our labors, there also remains a danger of hardening our hearts, hardening our hearts against the Holy Spirit’s work within us. His is the work of regeneration through His indwelling presence and His equipping of us for service. When we harden our hearts against the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives we hamper or bring to a halt the progression of change He is affecting within us.

This is the issue I want to address today, this issue of change brought about by the Holy Spirit - and what affect hardening our hearts has on this transformation.

The process of becoming a new creature in Christ starts with belief and confession. But it is hampered by unbelief and resistance which comes about when we begin the process of hardening our hearts. The New Testament warns us against hardening our hearts by telling us three specific things not to do. We are told not to RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT, not to GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT and not to QUENCH THE HOLY SPIRIT.

As we look at this I want us to keep this in mind. When we resist, grieve, or quench the Holy Spirit we are actually fighting against God’s work in our lives. We stop the process when we begin resisting the Spirit and cease to cooperate with Him.

DO NOT RESIST THE HOLY SPIRIT

To resist the Holy Spirit is to resist any attempt on the part of the Spirit to influence our decisions, our actions or our thoughts. We resist because we have hardened our hearts against Him. Consequently we fail to perceive or recognize the opportunity of grace when it comes.

For unbelievers this means that the opportunity for salvation has come and gone. They resisted the message and now the day of salvation has passed, for God has said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “Behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’ ”

For we who are believers it means we continue in sin and miss the opportunity to confess and be restored because we are resisting the conviction of the Holy Spirit. And we also miss the working of His Spirit within us for change. We resist the change and pass up the opportunity for growth.

Now some of you may be saying, “That’s right. That’s exactly why I am resisting the Spirit. What He is doing in me is painful. What He is asking me to do is too difficult. Of course I resist Him. It’s the only way I know how to cope with what is happening.” But are you so foolish as to think that you can accomplish any spiritual change without the Holy Spirit? If that were possible there would be no need of the Spirit. But we do have need of Him for we cannot be perfected without the work of power residing within us in the form of the Holy Spirit.

If we are to have any hope of change, any hope of conquering the sin in our lives, we must respond to the Spirit and embrace Him, not resist Him. We need to be willing to hear the truth and to walk in, it fully embracing its power to transform us and set us free.

One last comment before we move on. We sang earlier about worshipping the Father in spirit and in truth. When true worshippers of God recognize His call, they do not reject the Holy Spirit but rather receive His

truth. They respond to truth because truth is also in them. And they will not harden their hearts against Him. As the songs says, "In this holy place, Lord, let us know Your grace so we can live a life that pleases You. Father, help us see that we were born to be true worshippers of You." Embracers of both spirit and truth.

DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

To grieve means to cause sorrow or sadness, to injure or offend.

In Ephesians 4:29 – 32 we read, "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you.*"

According to these verses, when we speak, we should only be speaking what will edify and build others up. If all we do is tear others down, then we are grieving the Holy Spirit and causing Him sorrow. As Christians we are supposed to be encouraging one another daily, not tearing one another down at every opportunity. It grieves the Holy Spirit when we tear others down with our words.

Verse three describes what grieves the Holy Spirit. We are warned explicitly to "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*" When we disobey this command we hurt God, causing Him to grieve.

If we are filled with these things - bitterness, rage and anger - if we practice malice by brawling and slandering others, then we are grieving the Holy Spirit of God. When we behave contrary to God's word, we offend God. We cause God to be sad because of our behavior. We ruin any hope of testifying of God's goodness and grace in our lives because our believability as a witness goes right out the window. We testify of God's ability to change us but we refuse to cooperate in the process because we are constantly resisting the One who can make the change. The Scriptures say, "*You shall know them by their fruit*" (Matthew 7:20). But if we are not careful our fruit can go rotten and start to stink.

ILLUSTRATION

(Taken from a sermon by Rev. Bruce A. Shields of First Baptist Church in Tawas City, Michigan)

Picture an old mansion in need of repair. A mere shadow of its former glory, but it is under renovation. You can see scaffolding and tools about the areas that have already been restored although work is still needed in other areas. You see the worker, who is fulfilling his obligation to the owner by the agreement in which they made with each other.

Now every time the owner breaks that agreement, he so grieves the worker, that he puts down his tools and ceases the renovation. No work is done. If left long enough, the mansion will deteriorate to a state even worse than when the work began. So the house remains in a state of disrepair until the owner apologizes to the worker for the breach of agreement and asks the worker to return to the restoration.

In the same way, sin has the same effect on us as time and neglect had on the mansion. When we received Jesus as our Lord and Savior, He gave us His Holy Spirit. Now the Holy Spirit's job is to sanctify us. That is, He lives in us and bit by bit he renovates (or transforms) us, and just like the workman, the Holy

Spirit can be grieved, and in turn our renovation (and sanctification) ceases, until such a time we repent from that sin and ask the Holy Spirit to continue His work within us.

This sin, this grieving of the Holy Spirit of God can happen in different ways. It may be through willful ignorance of His Word. Or it may be through disobedience. It may be, as Ephesians 4 states, because we are tearing others down instead of building them up. Or perhaps we have or are harboring bitterness, rage, anger, slander or gossip.

Grieving of the Holy Spirit can also be caused by our apathy or lack of concern towards God's Word. Or perhaps when God grants us new insight and understanding it's not accompanied by an appropriate response from us. He may show us the meaning of "dying to self" only for us to reject His insight as too difficult, costly or inconvenient.

All of these things are considered resisting the Holy Spirit, which in turn grieves the Holy Spirit. Any time you resist Him, He grieves. Any of these things are sufficient to grieve the Holy Spirit of God. When we do this, when we grieve the Holy Spirit, we hinder the purpose of God to transform us into the image and likeness of His Son.

This is also how we lose the fullness of the Spirit, for He is no longer allowed to have free reign within us. And if we continue in sin, (and sin grieves the Holy Spirit) not only is there no work of transformation going on within us, but in time our spiritual life will start to deteriorate. For nothing this world remains the same. It is either growing or dying. The same holds true of our spiritual life. There may be times of labor and rest, but if there is no nourishment everything starts to decline.

When the Holy Spirit stops working in us, we immediately begin our trip backwards. We, and everyone who knows us, will start to see spiritual decay set in, especially affecting the Fruits of the Spirit. Our love, joy, peace, patience, etc. will be lost until we turn from our sin through repentance and restoration. When this happens the Spirit is free to move about and we start to experience the fullness of the Spirit within us once again.

Jesus said, "*It is not what you put into your mouth that defiles you, but what comes out*" (Matthew 15:11). And we know from scripture that what comes out of our mouths is from the overflow of our hearts (Matthew 12:34). So it's important to remember that all sin begins inside of us. We grieve the Holy Spirit, not just with our outward sin, but with what fills our hearts and minds.

Every unholy thing, whether external or inward offends God's Holy Spirit and causes Him to grieve. When we find ourselves in this position we must quickly confess and repent so that we can be forgiven of our sin and restored to a proper working relationship with God.

DO NOT QUENCH THE HOLY SPIRIT

In 1 Thessalonians 5:13–22 we read: "*Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.*"

Do not quench the Holy Spirit. When you see or sense God working, do not attempt to put that fire out! Instead, as the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to “*fan into a flame the gifts of God*” (1 Timothy 1:6). So it seems we have a choice. We can either be fans or fire extinguishers.

When we see the Holy Spirit working, we should be building up, edifying and supporting, not tearing down with our mouths, speaking evil against others, gossiping and trying to put a stop to it. That’s Satan’s job, not ours.

It’s important to keep this in mind: When the Holy Spirit indwells us with the purpose of equipping us for service, evil comes against us to quench that. That is why we are warned to build up each other and edify the Body of Christ, not tear it down. If the Holy Spirit is left unhindered He will burn within us so that we are set on fire for Jesus. But if we hinder Him by quenching His fire, we will do nothing more than flounder and fail. And nothing would please the enemy more.

If we are not careful we can easily quench the Holy Spirit in ourselves and in others. We do this when we stifle the desire to witness the truth of Jesus through Word or deed. When we fail to make the most of every opportunity or through our lack of interest in setting aside time for God. When we misuse our gifts and use them to glorify ourselves and advance our own cause rather than the cause of Christ and doing what God’s Holy Word says. We quench the Spirit when we criticize or discourage others with a spiteful or ungracious attitude. Our words or deeds can act like a wet blanket smothering the service or joy of others for God’s work. It’s like throwing cold water on the fire of the Spirit in their lives.

We need to be careful we are not putting out anyone’s fire, including our own. If you feel the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart today, I encourage you to respond to Him. Do not resist the Holy Spirit. And when you see Him working in the heart of a fellow believer, use words of encouragement rather than words of discouragement. See if you can fan into flame their desire for obedience as well. Be heir fan, not their fire extinguisher.

There really is no reason for us to resist the Holy Spirit. God has called us to desire that which is holy and good and God’s word tells us what is holy and good. We as the Body of Christ should be working together to achieve that goal. Together we are to answer God’s call to be a people pleasing to the Lord, sanctified by Him, holy worshippers in His sight, worshipping in Spirit and in truth. Not offending Him or causing Him to be grieved because of our behavior.

Let’s call on the name of the Lord together, and together let’s allow our deliverer to move us from where we are, to where God has willed and destined us as a Body of believers to be. This can only be done through the Holy Spirit in us, and by us dying to self, crucifying our flesh daily, and daily choosing God’s Holy Word as our guide, and Jesus Christ as our foundation; For when the storms of life come, and they will come, there is no other foundation on which the house can remain standing.

Unless God builds the house, those who labor, do so in vain! Let’s not be vain laborers resisting the Architect of the universe. Let’s build together with God on the foundation He has laid not hardening our hearts against His plans, not resisting His direction, not quenching His motivating fire within us, and not grieving Him because of unconfessed sin and unaddressed behavior. Let’s remain united with Him in purpose and deed so that we may see the kingdom of God advance, not only in our own lives, but in the lives of those around us.

As I close I'd like us to take a few moments to be still and come to a place of yielding to the Spirit. There is an old hymn which says this,

Have thine own way, Lord. Have Thine own way.
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will
While I am waiting, yielded and still.

Let's take this opportunity to open our hearts and receive all that God has for us, with no resistance, no inhibitors, and no doubt of His goodness. For He longs to be gracious to us and waits on high to have compassion on us. Today, right now, let's not resist His love but rather embrace it. Let us not quench the movement of the Holy Spirit in this place. Let Him have His way with you right now. Yield to His presence.

PRAYER

Father, how sweet it is to be in your presence, to feel Your love surrounding and enveloping us right now. We thank you that you take us just as we are, with all our imperfections and fears. We thank you that Your mercies are new every morning. No matter how we came into Your presence this morning we can leave changed and renewed through the power of Your Spirit. And Holy Spirit we embrace You, we welcome You. We put down the barriers that have kept you at a distance and stunted our spiritual growth. Lord, have Your own way right now. We lay down our way. We are clay in Your hands so make us and mold us after Your will while we wait here, yielded to Your Spirit, with hearts stilled by Your presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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