

“HARDENING OF THE HEARTARIES” - PART TWO

Sermon- Sunday November 24, 2019

A few weeks ago I 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 95:7-9 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. For forty years I loathed that generation and said they are a people who err in their heart, and they do not know My ways. Therefore I swore in my wrath, truly they shall not enter into My rest.”*

Psalm 106:32 gives us further insight into what happened at Meribah. It says the people provoked God to wrath because they rebelled against His Holy Spirit. This is the key issue. Though they had seen the power of God’s Spirit which protected and provided for them in the wilderness for forty years, as they were about to enter the Promised Land, they rebelled against Him and denied God’s ability to provide and protect them going forward. They maligned God’s character by believing He 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. This is understandable. Food and water are scarce in the desert. Yet for forty years God had consistently provided both during their wandering in the desert. Their faith should have been strengthened by these timely provisions. But it was not. If there was a gap between God’s past and future provision they did not walk by faith, anticipating God’s faithful provision of their needs, as He had in the past. Instead, they grumbled about God’s lack of care for them.

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, simply gather it each morning for six of the seven days of the week. And, according to Deuteronomy 8:4, 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 God’s provision. They were not grateful. They were unfaithful to the God who had been faithful to them. When they grew tired of the manna provided in the wilderness, 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, 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’”* (Hebrews 3:10). God had provided a place of rest for them but, because of their hardened unbelieving hearts, God would not allow them to be partakers of this provision.

When God spoke of His rest to the Israelites in the wilderness, He was speaking of a land flowing with milk and honey. A place where they would inhabit homes that they did not build, land which they

did not cultivate, crops which they did not plant, flocks and herds which they did not raise, and wells full of water which they did not dig. It was far better than the abundance of food and water in Egypt, because they would be free people, no longer slaves to evil Egyptian task masters. This is the “rest” that God offered the Israelites but because of their unbelief, they were not allowed to enjoy what God had provided for them.

When God speaks of His rest today, He is speaking of a place of tranquility where belief trumps unbelief. As with the Israelites, it is the rest that comes from trusting in God’s word, which the Israelites refused to do. But within this rest also lies the promise of Heaven itself, the ultimate place where God has provided rest.

Now according to the author of Hebrews, 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 (God’s rest) because of disobedience*” (Hebrews 4:2). They refused to believe the word of God and refused to submit to its authority.

For unbelievers this means that the opportunity for salvation has come and gone. God has said in 2 Corinthians 6:2, “*Behold, now is ‘the acceptable time,’ behold, now is ‘the day of salvation’*” When unbelievers harden their hearts and resist the message of salvation the opportunity for salvation passes them by. Does this mean that God is unjust? No. The Scriptures tell us that, “*God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Timothy 2:4). God wants all men to be saved and has provided a provision for that to come about through the death and resurrection of His Son. But God also says, “*My Spirit shall not strive with man forever*” (Genesis 6:3). There is a day set aside for all men to come to faith. When that day comes and an unbeliever’s heart is hardened, then the opportunity to be saved passes by; and they miss their opportunity to enter into God’s rest. In this case that “rest” is Heaven itself.

When the day of salvation came to all of us who believed God’s word, we gained the right to enter the rest of God in Heaven. But we also were able to experience the rest of God through faith in His Word while on earth. However, while dwelling in the flesh there remains a danger of us hardening our hearts against the Holy Spirit’s work within us. Because God works the process 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.

God’s rest is more than just Heaven itself. God’s rest is intended to permeate our souls while here on earth; to transform us into His image and to produce the fruit of His Spirit in our lives. This is what 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 when we allow our hearts to become hardened to His word and to the prompting of His Spirit in our lives. The New Testament warns us against hardening our hearts against the move of the Spirit in our lives 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 these three, 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 of renewal and regeneration when we begin resisting the Spirit and cease to cooperate with Him. So, let's look at the first one: 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 by failing to believe in His promises or His protection. When our hearts are hardened against Him, we fail to perceive or recognize the many opportunities for grace when they come.

Here is an example. When we as believers continue to sin and resist the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we cannot experience the "rest" that comes from repentance because we have missed the opportunity to confess and be restored. Here is another example. God desires to conform us into His image, but when we resist that change, we pass up the opportunity for growth and miss the rest that comes from such a change. These are the types of resistance that we all have in common.

But are we so foolish as to think that we 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 God's 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, not resist Him. We must also be willing to hear the truth and to walk in it, fully embracing its power to transform and free us from our sinful nature. We must not resist the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The second thing that happens when we harden our hearts is that we grieve the Holy Spirit. To grieve means to cause sorrow or sadness, to injure or offend. That is why we are told: DO NOT GRIEVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. Let's see how Scripture tells us to avoid grieving the Holy Spirit.

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 speak ill of others, then we are grieving the Holy Spirit and causing Him sorrow. As Christians we are supposed to be encouraging one another daily. It grieves the Holy Spirit when we tear others down with our words.

Verse thirty-one 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 by constantly resisting

the One who can make the change. The Scriptures say, “*You shall know them by their fruit*” (Matthew 7:20). God desires the fruit of the Holy Spirit to be produced in our lives. 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,
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 in 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.” (This ends the words of Rev. Shield.)

There is one last instruction we are given about the Holy Spirit. We are told: **DO NOT QUENCH THE HOLY SPIRIT**. To quench is to extinguish or put out; to cool or cease to lose heat or warmth; to become calm. When applied to a house fire these are good things. But when applied to the fire of the Holy Spirit, it is not so good. In fact it is detrimental to our Spiritual health.

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 quench the Spirit (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 or put out the Spirit’s power. When you see or sense God working, do not attempt to put that fire out, whether it is in your own life or in the life of another. Instead, as the Apostle Paul instructed Timothy to *“fan into a flame the gifts of God”* (1 Timothy 1:6). Paul mentions one of these gifts specifically – the gift of prophecy. He says we should not treat prophetic words with contempt, but rather test them in the light of God’s word, removing that which is false and embracing that which is true (1 John 4:1).

According to Paul then, when it comes to the Holy Spirit and whatever gift we see God expressing through ourselves or through others, 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 the Spirit of God working within ourselves or within others. That’s what Satan tries to do. It is not what God wants us to do. We are to resist all attempts from Satan to thwart God’s plan in our own lives and in the lives of others.

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're 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; when we lack interest in setting aside time for God and His word; when we use our gifts to advance our own cause rather than the cause of Christ. We quench the Holy Spirit when we fail to do what God's Holy Word says; when we criticize or discourage others with a spiteful or ungracious attitude.

You see, 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 their 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. As the Body of Christ we 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 in His sight; not offending Him or causing Him to be grieved because of our behavior.

Psalm 127:1 says, *"Unless the Lord 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.

Let's call on the name of the Lord together and allow our Deliverer to move us from where we are, to where God has willed and destined us to be. This can only be done through the Holy Spirit in us, and by us dying to self, crucifying our flesh daily, consistently 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 our house can remain standing.

Today is the day of salvation, a day of reconciling ourselves to God, a day of opening our hearts to the work of the Spirit in our lives. Let's take these next few moments to open our hearts and receive all that God has for us, with no resistance, no inhibitors, and no doubt of His goodness. For Isaiah 30:18 reminds us that 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 us not grieve the Holy Spirit by disobedience. Let Him have His way with you right now. Yield to His presence.

One hundred and seventeen (117) years ago, Adelaide Pollar and George Stebbins put words and music to these thoughts. It seems appropriate to sing a few verses of that hymn right now.

HAVE THINE OWN WAY, LORD
Have Thine own way, Lord, have Thine on way
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay
Mold me and make me after Thy will

While I am waiting, yielded and still

Have thine own way, Lord, have Thine own way
Hold o'er my being absolute sway
Fill with Thy Spirit 'till all shall see
Christ only always living in me.
PUBLIC DOMAIN

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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