



Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. ² He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. ³ Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. ⁵ Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. ⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, **if** we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

⁷ So, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the desert, ⁹ where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did.

¹⁰ That is why I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways.'

¹¹ So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest.'"^a

*¹² See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ **if** we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. ¹⁵ As has just been said:*

"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."^b

¹⁶ Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? ¹⁷ And with whom was he angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies

*fell in the desert?*¹⁸ *And to whom did God swear that they would never enter his rest if not to those who disobeyed?*¹⁹ *So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.*

Last week the concluding application had to do with complaining. The first thing the Israelites did when God rescued them from slavery in Egypt was to complain. Therefore, our final application was to not complain. Generally, we do not concern ourselves very much with complaining. After all, everybody does it, right? That's always a good ethic to live your life by, don't you think? ☺ Complaining comes as easily as breathing. It is as natural as our beating heart. It is so commonplace that it becomes like an involuntary action. It really is like the involuntary movement of our diaphragm muscle and heart muscle. And that's the excuse that we all use—"I can't help it. I can't possibly stop all complaining, so why even try?" There's another faulty ethic to live by—"I can't help it." Or the ever popular, "It's not my fault. It's just the way I am."

Why do we excuse our grumbling by using these weak ethics? Everybody else does it. It's not my fault. We wouldn't use these ethical standards for other behaviors. One study showed that 79% of employees steal from their employers.¹ Hopefully none of use a part of that 79% but you really could almost say, "everybody is doing it, so why shouldn't I?" We would not use this standard when referring to stealing, so why do we use it with complaining?

Fifty six percent of college students engage in binge drinking.² Are we tempted to say that everyone does that? Are we tempted to say that such behavior is acceptable because these students obviously have no control over their actions? We would not use this weak ethical standard when talking about stealing or binge drinking so why do we use such flimsy excuses when referring to complaining and grumbling? The only possible answer is that we do not think complaining is that big of a deal. We don't come close to putting it into the same category as stealing and binge drinking.

But we should—and here's why. All of our grumbling and complaining is based upon the sins of unbelief and rebellion. If you recall from last week, this chapter in Hebrews is based on Psalm 95 which in turn looks back on Exodus 17 and Numbers 14—two tragic times in Israel's history. First the author quotes Psalm 95 than he commented on the Psalm and the very first thing he said about the Psalm comes at verse 12. *See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.* Likewise, the last thing the author said about the Psalm is recorded in verse 19. *So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.* There is no question that their complaining and grumbling were the overflow of their sinful, unbelieving hearts.

But some of you might be wondering if this is a fair application of the text? After all, the stuff that happened with the Israelites in the desert occurred 3,500 years ago. Moreover, they were obviously a bad bunch of people. Their grumbling is far worse than ours. Their sin ran much deeper than ours, right? I can see why you might tend to think that way, but I think it is dead wrong. Obviously, there are degrees of sin and rebellion—there's no question about that. But there are two reasons why I think the sin and rebellion of the Israelites was no worse than ours.

First of all, the author of Hebrews did not think so. The reason this chapter is in the Bible is to warn us against falling into the same trap. The author hopes that none of his readers turn away from the living God but he absolutely believed the potential was there. So it is with us. We may not have turned away and developed a sinful unbelieving heart, but the potential is just as real for us. It did happen to the Israelites and it did happen to the readers of Hebrews and it will happen to some of us.

The second reason I think that our potential rebellion is just as real as the Israelites in the wilderness is the reality of verse thirteen. *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.* By its very nature, sin is deceitful. We often don't know we are sinning. We don't realize the severity of our sin. We don't realize the depth and depravity of our sin. We don't realize where our sin is leading us. All of this is true—and more—because sin is deceitful. Sin does not want you to know it has taken root in your heart because if you did know, you might try to get rid of it.

But how can this be? Aren't we all struggling with sin? Are we not all painfully aware of the presence of sin in our lives? The answer is both yes and no. Here's the good news. If you are struggling with sin then this is a good indication that you are a believer and probably a growing believer. Unbelievers don't struggle with sin because they don't know what it is. The fact that you are struggling is evidence that you are engaged in the battle. This is a good thing. However, just because you are aware of your own struggle against does not at all mean that you are not deceived by your sin. We all are deceived but some of us are deceived more than others.

Using 1 John, let me explain how sin is not only deceitful but that there is also a downward spiral of inherent deceitfulness. In other words, if you are not aware of the deceitful nature of sin, it will take you deeper in and further down and because the deceit grows all of the time, your awareness naturally decreases.

⁵ *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.* ⁶ *If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.* ⁷ *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

⁸ *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* ⁹ *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* ¹⁰ *If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.* (1 John 1:5-10)

There is a very distinct downward spiral of deception in this section of Scripture. Did you happen to notice it? The first step comes in verse six. *If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.* This is really important to understand. Before a full-blown deception takes hold of our hearts and minds, the first step is willful rejection of the truth—we lie and do not live by the truth. When we downplay the significance of our sin we are actively lying about it. Here is where those flimsy excuses begin to rear their ugly heads. It's not really that bad. Everyone else is doing it. I can't help myself—it's just the way I am. We throw around all of these excuses while we are claiming to have fellowship with the Lord.

It is unfortunate that one of the reasons we do this is because we have been raised or are currently living in a graceless home—even if it is a Christian home. A graceless home is one where sin is not tolerated but neither is repentance encouraged. A graceless home has a high standard of behavior—which, of course, is a good thing—but very little recourse if someone breaks the high standard. Do you know what I mean? The children in a home like this know what right behavior looks like but they also know what will happen to them if those high standards are broken—shame and punishment and very little forgiveness.

Think about how the children in these homes process their behavior. If they do something that they know is wrong and their parents don't see it, what are the chances that they will tell their parents what happened? The likelihood of confession and repentance is in direct proportion to the amount of shame and punishment—the more shame and punishment doled out by the parents the less likely the children will ever confess. And tell me what happens next? What happens when children—or anyone else for that matter—does not confess their sin? Two very tragic things begin to happen. First, sin is driven into secret. If a person is afraid to confess their sin but they are still struggling with it, the sin habit will almost certainly continue to get stronger and the stronger it gets, the less and less likely it is that it will ever be confessed and the deeper and more secret it becomes. Think about how the child in these circumstances reasons this out. “If mom and dad will yell at me and punish me for doing this thing one time, how much more trouble will I get in if I tell them I gave done it ten times? This child cannot even imagine the wrath that would fall upon them if they repented. Can you see how addictions are created in part by living in a graceless home?

The second thing that the offender begins to downplay and excuse away is the sinful behavior. If there is no avenue for confession and if the sin gets driven deeper and more secret, the person cannot live with this tension between the high standard of behavior and their own. Their only choice is to change the standard of behavior by claiming that what they are doing is not all that wrong in the first place. They cannot stand to view themselves as law-breakers so they are forced to change the law. And how do you do this? “Everyone else is doing it. It's not really that bad. I can't help myself. Who are you to judge?” Excuses, excuses, excuses.

Let me give you one easy step for bringing grace back into a graceless home. Don't judge your children's behavior by their level of disobedience but rather by their level of repentance. Our typical reaction is to punish and/or shame based upon what we perceive to be the severity of the infraction. For example, which behavior are you most likely to discipline more severely—a child who leaves a wet towel on the bathroom floor OR a teenager who comes home half drunk? Ahh—that's a no-brainer, you think. Of course the drunk teen is in hot water and your wrath will descend upon them swiftly and severely but the child who left the wet towel on the floor will get a simple reminder, if anything at all. I know this is what you are thinking because this is the way I tend to think as well. But let's fill out these two scenarios.

Let's assume that the child who left a wet towel lying on the bathroom floor did the same thing for the fifth day in a row. This child is quite obviously not showing any signs of remorse, repentance or change. The behavior is inconsiderate and habitual and the child does not show any signs of either acknowledging the problem or wanting to change the behavior. However, the teen who came home half drunk is full of deep remorse and repentance the next morning. The

teen is literally sobbing over their sin and because you know their heart well, you have a strong sense that this is genuine repentance. With that as background, let's apply our principle: don't judge your children's behavior by their level of disobedience but rather by their level of repentance. Now we can see that the careless child needs to be disciplined more severely than the teen.

Right about now some of you are shaking your heads and thinking, "What's wrong with you are you insane?! Don't you think getting drunk is much worse than a wet towel?" If this is what you are thinking then it demonstrates that you don't understand grace. I am not suggesting that the drunk teenager doesn't deserve any consequences. You will need to have great wisdom in how you work this through. Moreover, you have to consider the possibility that the teen is playing you for a fool. They are acting remorseful only because they got caught. However, if you come down on the teenager with an iron hand you will instinctively teach them that repentance is a bad thing. They will learn the lesson that it is far better if they hide their sin. In addition, you will teach them powerful lessons about God. Despite the fact that verse nine of I John 1 says *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness*, you are teaching them that God would rather punish them than forgive them.

Another unintended consequence will flow from this scene. If you do not correctly discipline the child who persistently leaves a wet towel on the floor, then this child really is playing you for a fool. This child is smart enough to know that they can keep getting away this behavior. Even worse, you are teaching them household standards are meant to be broken. You are training them to be deceived by their own sin. Don't judge your children's behavior by their level of disobedience but rather by their level of repentance.

The second step in the downward spiral sin's deceptiveness comes at verse eight. ⁸ *If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.* We have basically covered this step already. Once a person starts lying about their sin and hiding it deeper and deeper, it does not take long at all before they themselves are deceived. By the time you start making excuses you are already deceived. You have to change the basis of what is wrong and right. If you can't tolerate the fact that you continue to do wrong, is it easier to change your behavior or change the standard which measures behavior? It is so much easier to change the standard.

I have only received one speeding ticket in my life and that was over twenty years ago but last Monday Officer Mitch Ziolkowski stopped my on Chicago Ave. He told me I was traveling 45 in a 35 mph zone. Since my driving record was clean, he let me off with a verbal warning. He was extremely nice about the whole incident. This happened on the wide section of Chicago just south of Village market. You know what I thought after he drove away? I thought to myself, "Ya know, everyone goes *at least* 45 mph on this section." Furthermore, I was traveling downhill at the time so it's perfectly natural to pick up a little speed—and there were no other cars in sight. Do you see what I was doing? I was getting trapped in the deceptiveness of sin. I was attempting to change the standard and thereby declare myself innocent. If I could somehow change the speed limit to 45—at least in my own mind—I would be blameless. Do you see how powerful of a hold this can have in our lives? The deceitfulness of sin creeps in and slowly takes over. And worst of all, we don't it is happening because we have been deceived!

The final step in the downward spiral is seen in verse ten. *If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.* First we lie to everyone around us. Then we start to believe our own lies and if we do that long enough, we have to call God a liar. I am not wrong—God’s standard is wrong. In fact, God doesn’t have a right to set standards anyway. Why should I follow what the Bible says? It was written thousands of years ago by a bunch of genocidal maniacs. The downward spiral is complete and my fate is sealed. When you get to this point, you have turned away from the living God. You will fail to enter God’s rest because of your unbelief.

To come full circle now we can see how the sin of complaining and grumbling are so dangerous because they are even more susceptible to deception. It is much easier to think that complaining is no big deal, but it is the beginning of unbelief. It is the start of self-deception and calling God a liar.

But thankfully there is a solution to our wandering hearts. Verse thirteen reads, *But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.* The word for encourage here is more often than not translated as exhort.³ The meaning is to plead with, to warn, urge and admonish. It is a very strong encouragement and it is our mutual responsibility to exhort and encourage one another. In order to do this well, we need to keep the following in mind.

- We need to know **how** to encourage someone. Verse one reminds us to *Fix your thoughts on Jesus*. It is not enough to merely warn others against certain behaviors. If you say to me, “Don’t do that” my flesh is immediately enticed and now I want to do that. Encouragement of this type is based on the Law and it will almost always fail and it will produce miserable Christians. If we want to help those struggling with sin we need to exhort them not only to judge themselves by God’s standards but also to confess and receive his cleansing forgiveness.
- We need to place ourselves in an atmosphere where this can happen. In chapter ten the author gives us this encouragement: *Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching* (Hebrews 10:25). Please don’t ever think of this command to meet together as merely a way to make sure our church is full every Sunday. If we do not meet together—on Sunday and at other times—then it is impossible to encourage and exhort one another. Moreover, this has to be much more than just showing up at church—we need to be in relationships that are close enough where we can exhort one another.
- We need to be in a place in our walk with the Lord that we CAN exhort one another (eg. *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual, should restore him*—Gal. 6:1) Not that we have to be at a place of perfection but neither do we want to knowingly exhort others when we know full well that we have failed to heed the same exhortation.
- We need to have the courage to exhort one another. It is easy to encourage one another but much more difficult to exhort one another.
- We need to be willing to be exhorted. We need to invite others to speak truth into our lives.

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“the deceitfulness of sin”

- “choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures” (Luke 8:14)
How are worries deceitful?
Riches?
Pleasures?

This explains how someone can “drift away” as we saw in chapter two

This explains how a person can be an apostate church goer, how they can fall into practical atheism.

v. 14

The necessity of perseverance

We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. (6)

And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast. (14)

It is NOT involuntary—we do have control

v. 12

“turns away” from the living God

the word means to rebel, to lead a revolt, to forsake, abandon

cf. to v. 19—*So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.*

They saw what I did

1 Cor 10:6-13

Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.⁷ Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.”^b⁸ We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.⁹ We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.¹⁰ And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

¹¹ *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.* ¹² *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!* ¹³ *No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

^a Psalm 95:7-11

^b Psalm 95:7,8

^c Or *disbelieved*

¹ <http://www.investigation.com/press/press4.htm>

² http://www.upi.com/Health_News/2009/09/11/56-percent-of-college-students-binge-drink/UPI-93211252700693/

³ παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*)

^b Exodus 32:6