

Take heed! As has been mentioned, Hebrews is written to the Jewish people who have adopted Christianity replacing Judaism as their preferred religion. Adopting one religion or another does not necessarily change a person's true spiritual status before God. God looks not at the outward appearance but looks upon the heart

1Samuel 16:7 But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. {outward...: Heb. eyes}

2Corinthians 10:7 Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.

Religious affiliation is often undertaken for the sake of quieting one's conscience before God. Or one is religious for the sake of appearances before others. We can't always know whether a real, honest relationship with God exists in a person's heart. We can only observe if there is an apparently heartfelt confession by mouth and if the confession by mouth is subsequently borne out by the fruit shown in their lives. To test profession the Lord asks hard questions throughout scripture just as He did while here on earth.

Psalms 51:6 Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom

These questions arise especially in the epistle to the Hebrews. The Jews' religion was full of outward appearances. There were obligations which God desired from devoted hearts of people who truly love Him. But the obligations and ceremonies of the law of Moses could easily become empty form and ritual and eventually dropped as irrelevant. The history of Israel in the land documents their departure despite many recurring efforts by the Lord to revive and return their hearts to Himself. Sadly something similar has occurred in Christendom though warned against in the epistles and Revelation 1-3. Yet many hearts truly have been changed and lives transformed by the Cross down through the centuries Praise the Lord! But the inborn sinful nature of all descendants of Adam remains unchallenged in too many "Christian" congregations. Mere outward profession is rampant and cries for a strong dose of reality. Therefore the warning, TAKE HEED!

12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

Take heed, brethren. Those who claim to be believers, brethren of the Lord, are called upon to take heed. We are to review briefly our personal walk daily so we can eat the Lord's Supper having judged ourselves, 1Corinthians 11:28. We then can exhort one another daily, warding off a hardening of heart that inevitably follows upon sin in one's life. As believers we have a privileged position, "made partakers of Christ." If truly His, we will indeed steadfastly hold the confidence we received upon the beginning of our profession of Christ all the way through

our life here on earth. If one who is labeled a brother (or sister) is not truly the Lord's, may their self deception be exposed by the faithful exhortation of those faithful believers around us. Galatians 6:1 is one example among many of this care. 1Corinthians 5:11 has directions for stronger measures in a persistent case of departure.

Holiness is insisted upon. The writer offers a stark but familiar example of the Israelites in the wilderness. When we read the story in the books of Moses don't we all think "we wouldn't act like *they* did." But we might indeed act like them. The deceitfulness of sin is very real. They were God's chosen people the beneficiaries of His lavish grace contained in the unsolicited, unconditional promises given Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God took upon Himself the responsibility to fulfill His promises even if they didn't really seem to grasp His magnanimity in granting them. The Spirit, through the psalmist, describes their attitudes and conduct in the wilderness. He reveals God's thoughts about them, warning their descendants learning the Psalms. In this epistle to the Hebrews the Spirit mercifully reiterates the warnings once again—faithful warnings to the Jewish professing believers receiving this new epistle to them for their transition from their Judaism to their Christ. Yea, warnings to us today at the end of the age. (And, perhaps, warning to the Jewish believers that the Spirit will call in the Tribulation that will overwhelm the world after the Rapture we now await.)

Who provoked God? So much that this was even called the "Day of Provocation" by the Spirit in the Psalms quoted here. Who? His chosen people Israel, after they had witnessed the mighty power of the God who had delivered them from slavery and from Egypt through miraculous demonstrations on their behalf. He had miraculously provided for their needs and protection in the wilderness. Poised to enter the Promised Land they provoked Him. They believed the ten spies rather than God. This was the act of willful unbelief that so provoked God. He swore that none of them would enter His rest. This act triggered the sentence to forty long years perishing in the wilderness under the displeasure of the God who had delivered them from bondage. They gradually dropped, carcasses strewn in the wilderness. Despite the daily manna from above and the water from the rock that followed them. Despite the clothes and shoes that didn't wear out. Just the children would enter the Promised Land their parents had forfeited, not simply for lack of faith but for willful unbelief. The warning is for us. "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, **any of you** should seem to come short of it." Can we fall short of the promises God has given us in Christ? How so? Isn't Christ's death effectual for each believer? Yes! And even the faith to trust in Him is a gift of God. But God warns each of us called a brother of unbelief. Will some "Christians" we know seem to fall short of the promise as the children of Israel did? Take heed and exhort them as needed.

By Ron Canner, December 17, 2008