

What It Means to Be Faithful

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[0:00] Well, we come to our Bible reading, so please do pick up your Bibles and turn to the letter to the Hebrews. Chapter 3. If you don't have a Bible with you, please help yourself to one.

And we very much look forward to hearing Edward continuing on our studies in this colossal letter that we really need to help us persevere. And we're going to be reading the whole of chapter 3 now. So, Hebrews 3, beginning at verse 1. Hear the word of the Lord.

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now, Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that were to be spoken later. But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope. Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years. Therefore,

I was provoked with that generation and said, they always go astray in their heart. They have not known my ways. As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

[3:22] As it is said, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion. For who were those who heard and yet rebelled?

Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was he provoked for 40 years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?

And to whom did he swear that they will not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? So, we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Well, amen. May God bless to us this, his sobering word. Well, good evening, friends.

Good to see you. Let's turn to Hebrews chapter 3. Hebrews chapter 3. Now, in this chapter, the author of Hebrews is developing his main theme, which is to call his readers to persevere with Christ.

[4:49] And my title for this evening could be expressed as a question. What does it mean to be faithful to Jesus? What does the persevering Christian look like?

Just cast your eyes around this gathering for a moment. Would you not say that we're quite a mixed bunch? There's an old song which includes the lines, Bless them all, bless them all, the long and the short and the tall.

Now, that's a bit like us, isn't it? So varied, long, short, tall, young, old. Some born in Glasgow, others born 10,000 miles away. A delightfully mixed bunch of human beings.

But there is a pressing and sobering question to be asked of us all. And that is, which of us will prove to be faithful and persevering Christians?

Will all reach heaven? Or will some of us fall by the wayside? Now, that is the question that Hebrews 3 forces us to think about.

[5:56] Well, let me at the start flag up three aspects of the chapter which begin to open up for us the way our writer is thinking. First of all, the word faithful. Look at verses 1 and 2.

Consider Jesus, who was faithful to him who appointed him. Again, in verse 2, Moses also was faithful in all of God's house.

Then verse 5, Moses was faithful as a servant. And verse 6, Christ is faithful as a son. So the writer of Hebrews is asking us to consider the faithfulness of Jesus and Moses because their example teaches us also to be faithful.

Faithful and persevering. Then secondly, think of the word heart or hearts. Look at verses 7 and 8. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

Again, verse 9, towards the end of the verse. I said, they always go astray in their heart. And then verse 12. Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

[7:16] So this passage is going to make us look into our hearts and ask ourselves what is going on inside. The danger of having an unbelieving heart is that it might lead us to fall away from the living God and to stop persevering.

Then thirdly, think of the phrase, if indeed, which comes twice. Look at verse 6, first of all. We are his house, meaning his family, his household, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting.

That's the first one. Then verse 14. We share in Christ if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end. Now those are two very big ifs.

If we hold fast our confidence, verse 6, and if we hold our original confidence firm in verse 14. The implication is unmistakable, and that is that it is possible to let go of our confidence in the Lord and not to persevere to the end.

So friends, are you beginning to feel the concerns being expressed by the author of Hebrews? Our author is saying to all his readers, both his original ones back in the first century and to us today, he's saying to us, never give up.

[8:40] Hold fast, hold firm. You'll be tempted to give up, but never give in to that temptation. There is too much at stake. And just what is at stake, I hope we'll see as we read the chapter carefully together.

Well, let's start with verses 1 to 6, where the author is showing us the faithfulness of both Jesus and Moses. Now Jesus, as you know, is the subject and center of the New Testament gospel, and Moses is the author of the foundation documents of the Old Testament.

So Moses represents the former and preparatory revelation, while Jesus represents the new and decisive revelation of God's salvation.

And our author makes it clear that Jesus is greater than Moses, definitively and absolutely greater than Moses. Look at the way the two men are compared in verse 3.

For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself.

[9:47] So the glory and honor of Jesus leaves the glory and honor of Moses in the shade. There's another comparison made between the two in verse 5. Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.

But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. The role of the servant in a great house is to serve the master, but the role of the son is to be the master and to inherit the ownership of everything.

And verse 5 makes the point that Moses' role was preparatory. It was to testify to the things that were to be spoken later. So Moses is saying, look down the road of history.

What is really important is coming later. Jesus once said to his opponents in John's Gospel, chapter 5, if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.

So Moses is the servant. Jesus is the son and heir of God's house. But why is the author of Hebrews bringing in Jesus and Moses at this point?

[11:02] Verse 1 helps us to see why. In verse 1, our author describes Jesus as the apostle and high priest of our confession. Now that's a striking description, because nowhere else in the New Testament is Jesus described as an apostle.

But the point is this. An apostle is an envoy sent out with instructions to pass on and also with a goal to achieve.

Jesus has been sent out by God the Father with a message of salvation to pass on to the world and a goal to achieve, namely our rescue by means of his death and resurrection.

So as God's apostle, he teaches God's saving message and has achieved the wonderful goal of saving his people. But he is also the high priest of our confession.

And what has he achieved as high priest? Look back to chapter 2, verse 17. He is a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

[12:12] Now that's what he has achieved. The offering of his lifeblood to God has propitiated the anger of God against our sins. So we're forgiven. This means that our greatest need has been met by Jesus, our high priest.

The greatest need of human beings has never been for food or shelter or friendship or happiness. What we need is salvation, rescue from the judgment of God and the forgiveness of our sins.

And that is the very thing that Jesus, our high priest, has won for us by laying down his life for us. Now to come back to Moses, although Jesus is infinitely greater than Moses, Moses' role is very similar to that of Jesus.

It is a two-way role. Jesus, as apostle, brings the word of God to his people. And as priest, he represents his people to God and intercedes for their salvation.

In just the same way, Moses was the channel of God's original words to his people. And then, when his people were in dire danger of being cast away from God's presence because of the wretched golden calf episode, Moses stepped up and prayed for them and his pleading, his intercession, prevailed with God who pardoned them.

[13:38] So Jesus and Moses have matching roles. They each bring the word of God to the people and they each act as intercessor for the people when the people are in danger of being cast off.

And in this dual role, Moses is the pattern, he's the template, in a preparatory way. And Jesus fulfills the pattern fully and decisively in a way that Moses could only look forward to.

Verse 7. Therefore. Now whenever you get a big bold therefore at the beginning of a Bible section, you have to ask what it's doing. And the function of a Bible therefore is always the same.

It's introducing a section which explains the implications of what has just been said. This is true, therefore these things follow. Now what has just been said is that Jesus is infinitely greater than Moses.

And this is entirely in line with what we read at the beginning of chapter 2. Just look with me back at chapter 2, verse 2. Chapter 2, verse 2.

[14:48] For since the message declared by angels, that is the law of Moses thought to be given to Moses by angels. If the message declared by angels proved to be reliable and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, expulsion from God's people or capital punishment, how shall we, since the coming of the much greater gospel of Jesus, escape God's judgment if we neglect such a great salvation?

A message far more weighty than the law of Moses. So as our author reaches the therefore of chapter 3, verse 7, he is gathering up the weight of his argument and what he means is this.

The law of Moses was a tremendous revelation. Those who treated it lightly and disobeyed its regulations suffered severe penalties. But the revelation brought to us by Jesus is infinitely more serious.

It's the gospel of eternal life brought to a world that is standing on the lip of the abyss of eternal death. Don't, therefore, dismiss it. Don't do as so many people do and think of it as a lightweight matter.

And don't put it off. Don't procrastinate. Don't say to yourself, I might think about this when I'm a bit older, when it's more convenient for me. Look at verse 7.

[16:15] Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, today, today, if you hear his voice, if your ear is open to his voice, don't harden your hearts. We human beings, we have an amazing capacity to harden our hearts against the voice of God.

It's almost as though we know how to put on a breastplate of steel armor. and to say to God, keep out. I don't want you to interfere with my pleasant life and my ambitions.

But the author of Hebrews, because he loves his readers, sends out his powerful warning, which is, if you harden your heart against the voice of the Lord, the way to heaven will be barred to you.

When the Jews of long ago rejected the law of Moses, they felt the pain of God's discipline. But for us to harden our hearts against the gospel of Jesus is to set out on the road to death.

Now, this message of Hebrews was written in the first century primarily to those who had already set out on the road of following Jesus. But the problem was they were in danger of turning back, turning away from him.

[17 : 30] They were in danger of not persevering with him because they were finding it very difficult to persevere. They were discovering that the Roman Empire was hostile to Christianity and there was a powerful temptation to them to slip quietly out of the church.

A quiet life seemed preferable to a life lived under the pressure of state persecution. Now, the position of Christianity in the Western world today is similar.

We're not undergoing real persecution in this country and let's be very thankful that we're not. But the atmosphere that we live in today is becoming increasingly hostile to churches like ours which seek not only to believe the Bible but to teach the Bible and its ethical implications publicly and without embarrassment.

So we feel the pressure to stop being wholehearted outspoken Christians. What's really happening in Britain today is that we're losing the characteristics of an enlightened liberal democracy.

Central to a healthy democratic society is the ability to disagree with people openly and cordially. Now, we used to be able 40, 50 years ago we used to be able to say to each other I disagree with you profoundly on this topic but I strongly uphold your right to speak publicly about it and to state your point of view.

[18 : 59] In other words people could express their opinions on controversial subjects without fear of being prosecuted at law. Nowadays, however legislation is being drawn up as you well know which insists that if you disagree with somebody's position publicly it means that you hate that person and you're liable to fall foul of some hate speech law even though you don't hate that person at all you simply disagree with him.

Therefore, the pressure is upon you to keep your mouth shut. It's a kind of tyranny. Tyranny rules by fear. Tyranny says you've all got to believe the same things about the important aspects of human society and if you step out of line you'll be denounced and prosecuted.

But friends if we're to be faithful to the Lord and faithful to the Bible and persevering we can't give way to that kind of fear. The Bible openly challenges the values of the world and faithful Christians especially church leaders and preachers need to explain in their teaching and preaching why so much that goes on in the world is wrong in God's sight.

The message of the Bible is not only for the church it's for the world. The gospel is for the world to bring it from unbelief to faith and teaching the Bible gospel involves calling out the sins of the world. It's what the Old Testament prophets did constantly. It's what Jesus did and the apostles did. They cried repent and believe the gospel. But you can't ask people to repent if you don't detail the sins that need to be repented of.

[20 : 46] Now the reason I'm talking about democracy and tyranny is that all of us feel this kind of pressure in the modern world and these pressures can make us fearful. We can think better to keep my head down and my mouth shut.

A preacher can think I'll just stick to safe subjects motherhood and apple pie subjects. After all our sermons get recorded. They're available to anybody who goes onto the church website and there might be hostile ears listening.

So I won't mention anything that could get me into trouble. I don't want to have a brick coming through my front window. So I won't speak about the way God views non-Christian religions. I will certainly say nothing about rainbow flag values. I'll keep completely quiet about abortion and euthanasia even though I know very well that God says thou shalt do no murder.

In the end I'll say very little about sin at all because I don't want to upset members of the congregation. After all I crave their approval. So I'll only say gentle things which are designed to make them feel better.

[21 : 59] But anything that contains real moral challenge I won't touch with a barge pole. Now a church leader who takes that route will lead his congregation and himself away from the Lord and away from persevering Christianity.

Look at our verse 7 again. Today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts against it. If you know what God says but you turn away from it you're not being a faithful Christian.

A church leader who behaves like that will end up playing with Christianity and his congregation will end up playing with Christianity being afraid to engage with the real issues which the Bible requires

us to address.

So let's turn to verses 7 to 11 in our chapter. Our author here has chosen to quote the final few verses of a psalm Psalm 95 and he introduces the quotation you'll see as the very words of God. Verse 7 Therefore as the Holy Spirit says not said as though it was a Bible passage from long ago which has no contemporary relevance but says in other words he said it centuries ago but he's still saying it today its message is alive and active in the first century and it's alive and active in the 21st century also.

[23:29] So the Holy Spirit continues to say these words to us. Now no need to turn this up just now but when you do turn to Psalm 95 in the book of Psalms you don't learn who might have written it because the psalm has no title.

So rather helpfully Hebrews chapter 4 verse 7 4 7 tells us that David wrote it. It's a psalm that contains a moment of sudden shock about halfway through.

The first seven verses are pure praise and jubilation. O come let us sing out to the Lord let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation let us worship and bow down and kneel before the Lord and so on.

It's a joyful invitation to worship the Lord. And then suddenly right in the middle of the psalm there is a powerful shock almost as if you're lying asleep on the beach and a child empties a bucket of seawater over your head and you suddenly wake up in an uncomfortable fashion.

The writer says today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts. It's a bit like saying it's no good singing all these Obie Joyfuls if you're not prepared to be obedient to the Lord.

[24:44] I'll read the whole quotation out again because we need to feel the force of it. Verse 7 as the Holy Spirit says today if you hear his voice do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion on the day of testing in the wilderness where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for 40 years therefore I was provoked with that generation and said they always go astray in their heart they have not known my ways and I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest which means they will never reach the promised land.

now King David wrote his psalms in the 10th century BC and he's looking back to the 15th century BC when Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt to the river Jordan and right to the borders of the promised land of Canaan now to put it mildly that was a torrid and tumultuous period in Israel's history just look again at verse 8 do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion now when you read the history of those years in the books of Exodus and Numbers you discover that there were several significant rebellions episodes where the people of Israel grumbled against God and against Moses and their grumbling was really a form of unbelief God has been so cruel to us back in Egypt the food was lovely we had garlic and leeks and onions but here we are in this howling wilderness of a desert with nothing to eat except this revolting manna and there's no water we're dying of thirst etc etc all of which was saying that they didn't really this is unbelief they didn't really believe that God could be trusted to rescue them and bring them to the safety and rest of the land of Canaan but the most significant episode of rebellion and the one which the psalmist seems to have in mind here is recorded in the book of numbers chapters 13 and 14 and I want to tell you the bare bones of that story because it opens up to us the follies and frailties of the human heart the Israelites as you know had crossed the Red Sea by the power of God where the walls of water had risen up to right and left and they looked back and they saw the Egyptian army being drowned behind them the Exodus was a spectacular miracle of God's power they then went to Mount Sinai where Moses received from the Lord the Ten Commandments and the whole body of what we call the law of Moses then they set out from their camp at Mount Sinai and they marched northwards towards Canaan which was little more than 200 miles away 200 miles now even walking at a gentle pace it shouldn't have taken them more than three or four weeks to get there it's about the distance between

Glasgow and Inverness you could walk that distance in less than three weeks couldn't you even a flat-footed broken-winded old buffer like me could get to Inverness on foot I think in less than three weeks it took the Israelites 40 years and numbers 13 and 14 tell us why they reached a place called Kadesh Barnea just a few miles south of the southern border of the promised land and at this point the Lord said to Moses send twelve men one from each of the tribes of Israel to spy out the land and I want them to bring back a report are the inhabitants weak or strong few or many how well fortified are their cities is the soil fertile bring back some of the local fruit for us to try so Moses chose his twelve men and he sent them off when they returned they had with them a single bunch

of grapes which was so huge so heavy that it had to be strapped to a pole and carried by two men as if they were carrying a tiger in the foothills of the

Himalayas along with the grapes they also brought pomegranates and figs it was clearly a land metaphorically flowing with milk and honey but the spies brought back two contradictory reports to Moses ten of the spies said one thing and the other two said something very different the ten men said yes yes the produce of the land is excellent as you can see from this wonderful fruit but the people are strong and their cities are large and well fortified it's a land that devours its inhabitants and all the people we saw there are like giants huge great men obviously descended from the giants of old time and next to them we felt like grasshoppers we can't possibly fight men like these but the other two spies whose names were Caleb and Joshua brought a minority report Caleb said nonsense of course we can occupy the land let's go straight up there and do it but the ten men shouted more loudly than the two men and the people of

[30:09] Israel believed the ten and they wept and wailed all night long they cried out if only we'd never left Egypt if only we'd died in this wilderness are we going to allow our wives and our dear little children to be cut to pieces by these monsters the best plan is to turn tail and go straight back to Egypt in fact let's choose a new leader and head for Egypt let Moses take a running jump then Joshua and Caleb they tried again come on they said look this land is flowing with milk and honey don't rebel against the Lord and don't be afraid of these Canaanites they have no divine protection but the Lord is with us you see Joshua and Caleb they knew very well that the Lord had promised to give them the land of Canaan that's why they were so bold they trusted the Lord's promise but the Lord then said to Moses how long will this people despise me and how long will they not believe in me I will strike them down with a plague said the

Lord but Moses pleaded with the Lord not to destroy them he begged the Lord please pardon their iniquity show them your love and forgiveness and the Lord replied I have pardoned them but none of these men who have seen my glory and witness my power and yet have put me to the test ten times over shall see the land I swore to give to their fathers none of those who despised me shall see it the only ones I shall allow to enter the promised land are Joshua and Caleb as for the rest they shall wander in this wilderness for forty years and in this wilderness they shall die and that's what happened Joshua and Caleb forty years later entered the promised land along with the children of the ones who had grumbled against the Lord but all of that older generation perished except for Joshua and Caleb as Hebrews chapter 3 verse 11 puts it as I swore in my wrath they shall not enter my rest they started out well enough but they didn't persevere in trusting the Lord and they were barred in the end from entering the land of rest in the words of verse 8 they hardened their hearts it was an act of rebellion well it's a salutary and sad story and it contains one of the strongest warnings in the

Bible in fact the letter to the Hebrews revolves around massive encouragements and powerful warnings and this passage in chapter 3 is one of the powerful warnings but our author has not finished yet he's full of loving pastoral concern for his readers so let's see how he now counsels them verse 12 take care brothers lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God now do you see how he's addressing each of his readers as an individual here take care lest there be in any of you so each one he's saying needs to look inside each of us need to look into our own hearts and ask ourselves what is going on in there in the words of verse 12 the possibility is that your heart or my heart might prove to be an evil unbelieving heart which will lead us to fall away from the living

God which means to fall away from salvation now you might want to say but surely the Bible teaches us that once you're a Christian you're always a Christian well yes we can say with confidence that a person who is truly called by the Lord and chosen by the Lord will certainly be saved and will have full assurance of their salvation the problem is that our understanding of each other is limited and our understanding of ourselves is limited and it's only as time passes that it becomes clear who truly belongs to the Lord now all this is made very clear by Jesus in his parable of the sower you know the story there are four different types of soil the good seed of the gospel says Jesus is scattered onto all four types of soil the first type of soil is hard packed down ground where the seed makes no impression the second type is shallow soil deep enough for the seed to get in and germinate and a plant sprouts up initially it looks healthy and strong three cheers we all say here's a new

Christian hallelujah but after a while that plant withers and dies the soil is too shallow to support it trouble comes says Jesus persecution comes and the person who appeared to make a good start as a Christian disappears from the church and is seen no more the third type of soil is infested with thorns and Jesus says the plant begins to sprout but the thorns sprout up and begin to choke it and these are the people says Jesus who hear the word but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and the life of the gospel is choked in that person that person sells himself out to money and possessions and worldly ambitions but the fourth type of soil is the real thing that's where a person hears the message of the gospel and holds it fast in an honest and good heart and bears fruit with patience in other words with perseverance perseverance so Jesus is saying an initial response to the gospel can only be tested by the passage of time he says elsewhere in mark 13 13 the one who is saved is the one who endures to the end so that person's salvation is demonstrated by their perseverance now the author of [36 : 34] Hebrews is fully aware of all this he's fully aware of the potential fickleness of the human heart and that's why he brings in this story of the rebellion in Moses day he wants to shock his first century readers into realizing how dangerously fickle our hearts can be look at verse 16 who were those who heard and yet rebelled was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses the point of verse 16 is that the Israelites who left Egypt had personally witnessed the glory and power of God at the crossing of the Red Sea they'd personally seen the drama of the giving of the law of Moses at Mount Sinai they'd seen the splendor and power of God with their own eyes and yet they didn't believe that he would bring them into the promised land and defeat the enemies who intimidated them they refused to take courage and press forward and so verse 19 at the end sums up the painful truth they were unable to enter because of unbelief so unbelief was the problem and that's why our author says in verse 12 take care lest there be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart now friends that unbelief is not atheism it's the failure to trust that

God is willing and able to do what he has promised it's the unwillingness to trust him when life gets difficult these Israelites led by Moses knew very well that God existed they weren't atheists they knew that he'd promised to be with them and to bring them into Canaan and defeat their enemies but when their enemies were close up and seemed to be like giants about to crush grasshoppers they said we can't trust God to bring us through this appalling crisis it is too awful let's turn back to Egypt now friends we need to feel the force of this warning it's not in the Bible without good reason but the author of Hebrews is a most loving pastor and he's going to give us great encouragement in verses 13 and 14 and we'll look at that in just a moment but before we look at the encouragement I want to ask what kind of pressures on our lives might push us towards deserting the Lord and deserting the Lord's people

I want to name just three there are others but these three are perhaps the most common the first is fear the Israelites were afraid of the Canaanites and their fear of them got the better of them now Joshua and Caleb were not afraid they said to the Israelites come on the Lord is with us don't be afraid trust him step forward but the others gave way to fear and it was their ruin we too can be afraid that if we press on in the Christian life we may encounter obstacles which are more than we can bear we can fear that we'll be shunned and ostracized by work colleagues possibly disadvantaged an example a gifted young academic might be somebody here might want to be a university teacher but realizes that if it's known that he believes in the ethical teachings of the Bible he may not be able to get a job or may lose it if he gets one not long ago a university professor in the south of England a woman professor not a

Christian lost her job because she published her belief that a man is a man and a woman is a woman and you can't alter a person's gender her university said you can't say that these days you've got to go and she was sacked a young academic might think I better shut down my Christian faith because I'm afraid I shan't get a job fear secondly suffering now everybody suffers in different ways as life goes on but suffering as many of you know can become acute and almost unbearable a person might say I've wanted to follow the Lord but what is happening in my life now is so awful that I'm convinced he's cruel and I just can't bear to keep following him the book of Job is in the Old Testament to show that somebody can suffer the most awful cocktail of pain and yet survive as a believer and be greatly blessed in the end the story is Job suffered the loss of all ten of his children all his possessions his servants his money his health in the end even the respect of his wife but his sufferings drove him to the

Lord not away from the Lord now think of Jesus did he avoid suffering he couldn't he was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief he knows our sufferings and he is able to sustain us through them Paul writes in Romans chapter 5 that our sufferings produce endurance and endurance produces character and character produces a hope that does not disappoint us then thirdly sin temptations come the way of all of us and there are many traps that we can fall into a man might commit adultery or under severe financial pressure he might commit fraud then his sin is discovered he feels deeply ashamed and his conscience is traumatized he says to himself I've done this thing [42 : 39] I can't go on as a Christian my fellow Christians will be ashamed of me I might even become a laughing stock so I'll quietly withdraw from the Christian life now what he needs to do of course is not to withdraw but to repent and be forgiven both by the Lord and by the church no sin is unforgivable but he feels crushed by his own past and he says I can't go on now friends all of us will be tempted to drop out of the Christian life by fear by suffering by sin perhaps by something else living life in this fierce old world is like swimming in shark infested waters so what does the kind wise strong minded author of Hebrews tell us to do look at verse 12 take care lest there be in you an unbelieving heart that leads you to fall away so we must be watchful because danger is everywhere but and here's the strong encouragement in verse 13 but exhort one another every day as long as it is called today that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin now this verse warns us against the deceitfulness of sin what that means is that sin deceives us because it promises joy and delivers wretchedness now look again at verse 13 it is a one another business exhort one another every day in other words we're in this battle together the Lord has provided us with each other to keep us on the narrow road that leads to life now look carefully again at verse 13 exhort one another every day the Lord only trusts us to go for 24 hours before we need encouragement from our

Christian friends exhortation means warm penetrating encouragement to do the right thing and to avoid the wrong thing for example one Christian man says to another brother are you falling for that attractive woman whose desk is next to yours in your office the other one says well possibly then the first one says well stop it you're a man not a wimp your wife is the one for you to fall for over and over again love her love her till the cows come home love her till she's older than Queen Victoria but don't disobey the Lord that's exhortation or how about this two women sister I know that you're in real financial difficulties if you're tempted to get money by falsifying your position to the tax man please don't do it don't do it it'll end in tears sell your flat if you have to and buy a cheaper one cut back on luxuries and holidays

I'll be your anti-fraud friend I'll speak to you every week and help you to get through this rough time that's exhortation but it's not only each other that we share our lives with wonderful as that is look at verse 14 we share in christ that's the glorious reality of the christian life we share in him in his inheritance which is to rule the kingdom of heaven with him forever yes indeed we share his sufferings but we also share in his resurrection if indeed if there's the great condition if indeed verse 14 we hold our original confidence firm to the end now that's the real christian life it's the faithful christian life to keep going with the lord jesus to the end of our lives whatever sufferings and bruising and buffetings we have to endure it is better to be saved than to fall away and be lost well let's bow our heads and we'll pray our dear lord jesus we remember that you were tempted in every way as we are but you endured and you triumphed indeed you endured the cross for our sake so that we should be rescued for eternity help us to follow your example of patient endurance give us the faith to believe that you will indeed bring us through to the promised land of heaven and after all our patient endurances open to us the gateway to heaven the gateway to eternal joy and we ask it for the sake of your name and your glory amen amen