

Main Idea: Hebrews 3:7-19 warns us to get serious about dealing with the sin of unbelief. In part two of this message, we'll begin by reviewing the highlights from verses 7-13 and then break new ground by examining verses 14-19.

- I. God the Holy Spirit confronts unbelief (7-11).
- II. We must confront unbelief (12-19).
 - A. We need to deal with it in our own hearts (12).
 - B. We need to help each other deal with it (13).
 1. Beware of faith without the Spirit.
 2. Beware of faith without Christ.
 3. Beware of faith without reason.
 4. Beware of faith without repentance.
 5. Beware of faith without fruit.
 6. Beware of faith that does not last.
 - C. We need to make sure we possess real faith (14-15).
 1. Real faith shares in Christ (14a).
 2. Real faith perseveres to the end (14b).
 3. Real faith is a present tense reality (15).
 - D. We need to remember that real faith is real over the long haul (16-19).
 1. The Jews escaped Egypt but later rebelled (16).
 2. The Jews sinned against God and died in the desert (17).
 3. The Jews missed the promised land because of their disobedience (18).
 4. The Jews missed the promised land because of their unbelief (19).

Take Inventory: Let's ask ourselves these important questions.

1. Do I possess saving faith?
2. Am I taking seriously the sin of unbelief in my life?
3. Will I humble myself today and experience God's grace?

Rest in the Son! What an invitation, brothers and sisters. And we're learning about this invitation in our current exposition of *Hebrews 3-4*. *Rest* is the wonderful gift God has given us in His Son. We're not working our way into God's favor. We're invited (indeed we're *commanded*) to *rest* in the Son. Yet there's a sin that's common to man that fights this rest. It indeed is the sin behind the sin, behind *every* sin in fact, and the writer of Hebrews confronts it head-on in Hebrews 3. It's so vital that we're taking two weeks to unpack what this text is saying. Let's read first last week's text and then move into this week's passage.

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 3:7-19

“Most people will spend far more time examining the vegetables in the supermarket than they will ever spend scrutinizing their faith.” With those words Jim Elliff begins his thought-provoking book entitled *Wasted Faith*. Is Elliff right? The world certainly doesn't encourage a person to examine and evaluate the validity of one's faith. “Faith is a personal matter,” we're told. “As long as your faith is meaningful to you, that's all that matters. Don't let anyone tell you that you need to question your faith.”

Yet it's not just the world that frowns at faith-testing. Many church-goers echo the same charge, albeit for different reasons. Think of the following scenario.

A preacher proclaims the gospel message to his audience. He explains that all men, women, and children are sinners, cut off from God, and heading for eternal suffering in hell. Then he announces that God has done something to rescue sinners from their plight, that He sent His one and only Son into the world, Jesus the Christ, who lived a perfect life, died on the cross to pay sin's penalty, and then rose again on the third day. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...that whoever believes in Him should not

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

perish but have eternal life.” That’s what the Bible says, the preacher announces, if you will believe in God’s Son you will have eternal life.

At this point the preacher extends an invitation and asks his listeners if they would like to know for sure that they have eternal life. The only thing you must do, he says, is *believe*. Put your *faith* in Jesus Christ and you will be saved, he emphasizes. He then leads the congregation in a prayer of faith, the “sinner’s prayer” as he calls it. “Just repeat after me these words and mean it in your heart, and God will save you today.”

At the close of the service, while the congregation is singing a hymn of response, a ten year old boy named Billy approaches the preacher. “I don’t want to go to hell,” he shares. “I want to have eternal life like you just talked about. I want that.”

“Did you pray the sinner’s prayer?” he asks. The boy nods his head.

“Did you mean it? Did you really believe in Jesus?” he adds. Again, the boy nods his head, but this time says, “I prayed the prayer, and I meant it, but I don’t feel any different. I’m still afraid that I won’t go to heaven.”

In response the preacher tells the boy to take his pen, and write the date in the back of his Bible. “This is your spiritual birthday, young man. You’re in God’s family now, and don’t let anybody ever tell you otherwise. If you ever have doubts, just look right here in the back of your Bible, and remember this day. Remember, you believed in Jesus today, and the Bible says that if you believe you have eternal life.”

And so, with assurance in his heart, ten year old Billy leaves church that day. A few years later he leaves church altogether and makes his home in the world he loves. He feels badly from time to time, but he quickly dispels those doubts by looking at the words in the back of his Bible: “November 7, 1985. My spiritual birthday.”

In college he meets a unit-mate who shares Christ with him and urges him to believe and be saved. “I’ve done that,” he responds. “I’m in God’s family.”

“Really?” his unit-mate asks. “I’ve never heard you talk about Jesus before, or seen you go to church or read your Bible. You’re a Christian? Are you sure?”

“Absolutely!” Bill emphasizes, and starts digging through his sock drawer. “Here it is! Look right here. *November 7, 1985. My spiritual birthday*. Don’t worry about me. I’m okay with God. See, it says so right there. I was born again on that day.”

Bill’s unit-mate probes further. “But the Bible says that if any person is in Christ he is a *new* creation (2 Cor. 5:17). Please don’t take me wrong, but in all the time I’ve known you I haven’t seen much evidence that Christ has made you new. And I…”

At which point Bill interrupts, “I don’t like where this conversation is going. I may not be perfect, but I’ve got faith and that’s all that matters. Are you ready for lunch?”

To cite Jim Elliff again, “Most people will spend far more time examining the vegetables in the supermarket than they will ever spend scrutinizing their faith.” To put it simply, when I scrutinize my faith, it means I look not to the back flyleaf of my Bible for assurance, but to the pages between the front and back covers, for the Bible calls us to test our faith and the Bible shows us what the test is.

Do I believe that a person can know for sure that he or she is saved and eternally secure? Yes indeed! for the Bible teaches so (1 John 5:11-13). But I also believe the Scriptures teach that it’s possible to think I am saved and *not* be saved (Matt. 7:21-23). Which is why the Bible exhorts us, in passages like 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?”

Are you going to heaven, my friend? On what are you basing your assurance? When was the last time you followed the Scriptural charge and *examined your faith*?

Well, it's exam time for all of us. We're going to take the faith-test this morning, for scrutinizing one's faith is precisely what Hebrews 3 helps us do. We began the exam last week by pondering Hebrews 3:7-13 which exposes the sin of *unbelief*, which is essentially is the absence of genuine faith.

I. God the Holy Spirit confronts unbelief (7-11).

Verse 7 begins, "So, as the Holy Spirit says." If you want to hear God the Holy Spirit speak to you, where do you go? You go to Scripture, like the writer of Hebrews did. In verses 7-11 he quotes from Psalm 95, a psalm where David recalls what happened to the Israelites in the wilderness. They heard God's voice, but they hardened their hearts (8), tested and tried God (9), failed to know God's ways (10), and consequently failed to enter God's rest (11). Don't let that happen to you, said the Holy Spirit through David in Psalm 95. Don't tolerate any unbelief in your hearts.

But there's more. According to Hebrews 3 what the Holy Spirit did, we too must do.

II. We must confront unbelief (12-19).

Let's remind ourselves who received this letter first. The writer is addressing Jewish Christians. These *Hebrews* were facing persecution and discouraged, in fact, more than discouraged. Some were considering throwing in the towel on Jesus and going back to their old ways in Judaism. What did they/we need to do? To confront unbelief.

A. We need to deal with it in our own hearts (12). That's what verse 12 exhorts us to do. "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." But addressing unbelief is not just a personal assignment. It's a family assignment.

B. We need to help each other deal with it (13). How? Notice verse 13, "But exhort [NIV 'encourage'] one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Again, it's not just *my* faith-test that should matter to me. I need to be concerned about *yours* as well.

That's why Jim Elliff wrote his soul-stirring book, *Wasted Faith*. As I heard him share, he grew up in the Southern Baptist denomination that year after year produced statistics indicating that huge numbers of people were saved, baptized, and added to the church. In his own admission, "Out of the nearly 16 million on the rolls only 30% come on a given Sunday morning. This is my own denomination and the pangs of this truth have driven me to an all-out effort to say whatever can be said to turn this situation around."¹

Pretty sobering. And it's not just the SBC. The same could be said of churches all across Appalachia regardless of denomination. Elliff says, "In the following pages we will take a hard look at faith...*your* faith. We will pry off the lid of deceptive faith and smell its contents. In the process we will come to an understanding of what is authentic—the faith that is the acceptable response to the activity of God. And we will discover the disturbing possibility that what we thought was conversion to Christ may have only been a shadow, an illusion, a mere experience."²

Listen carefully, friends. Not all faith is saving faith. In *Wasted Faith* Elliff exposes six kinds of deficient, non-saving faith.³

¹ Jim Elliff, *Revival and the Unregenerate Church Member*, p. 6.

² Jim Elliff, *Wasted Faith*, p. 7.

³ To see Jim Elliff's materials, visit his website at <http://www.ccwonline.org>

1. *Beware of faith without the Spirit.* Elliff writes, “To say that you have had what you call a faith experience does not in itself prove anything. Faith, after all, does not save; God alone saves, *through* faith. Faith is a necessary corollary, to be sure. You must believe if you are to be saved. But apart from the ‘wind’ of God’s Spirit, no one *can* believe. A hoisted sail has no power to make the wind blow; it only catches the wind when it does blow. Likewise, human decisions (often mistakenly viewed as certain evidence of saving faith), have no power to cause the Spirit of God to work.”⁴

Remember Jesus’ words in John 3:8? “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” So beware of faith with the Holy Spirit.

2. *Beware of faith without Christ.* Many people know the story of Christ, that He died for sinners and rose again. And many have recited these facts in some sort of prayer. But knowing *about* Christ is no guarantee that a person truly knows Christ. As Elliff puts it, “Knowing His biographical sketch accurately is not the same as knowing Him personally.”⁵ True faith is not transactional but *relational*, for true sheep hear and follow the Shepherd’s voice (John 10:27).

3. *Beware of faith without reason.* We just stated that true faith is *relational*, but that doesn’t mean we throw truth out the window. Just because I’ve had a “faith experience” doesn’t make my experience valid. As Elliff puts it, “Faith is not a subjective experience apart from fact. Faith is relational, but it must also be rational. It is not a matter of faith being either subjective or objective; it is both.”⁶

4. *Beware of faith without repentance.* Elliff explains, “Christ did not come to bless good people, but rather to save sinners. He did not come to give people the added benefit of heaven attached to their already fulfilled lives. He came to snatch sinners out of the hellishness of their souls and deliver them from the hell of their destiny! Any other understanding makes too little of Christ’s sacrifice.”⁷ This is Peter’s invitation in Acts 3:19, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out...”

5. *Beware of faith without fruit.* The fruit of the Spirit, says Galatians 5:22, is “love, joy, peace, etc.” The Holy Spirit indwells all who know Christ personally. That would indicate that all who know Christ will demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. There will be *love*—they will love God and God’s people. There will be *joy*, not merely circumstance-based happiness but real heaven-sent joy, especially in trials. And the other virtues too. And if this fruit is missing? It could indicate a deficient, non-saving faith.

6. *Beware of faith that does not last.* This, of course, is what the book of Hebrews is all about. Some first century Jews had professed faith in Messiah Jesus, but now their families are putting pressure on them. And they’re not getting the job promotions like they used to. So they’re thinking about reneging on Christ. Don’t do that, says the writer. “Run with perseverance the race marked out for us (12:1). “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus...who endured the cross (12:2).” If He suffered for us, ought we not follow Him to the end?

I mentioned last week that I ran Cross Country. In four years of high school Cross Country, here’s something I never saw. I never saw trophies presented at the beginning of a race, nor during a race, but always after the race. That’s because a fast start didn’t

⁴ Elliff, p. 12.

⁵ Elliff, p. 19.

⁶ Elliff, p. 23.

⁷ Elliff, pp. 27-8.

mean much. A person could fake being a runner for a couple hundred yards, maybe longer. But the grind of the race exposes the reality of the runner's condition.

If a person is a believer in Jesus Christ, that person will persevere in the race of life, by the grace of the One who makes their perseverance possible. Yet if the person is an *unbeliever* who merely professed faith in Christ, in time he will likely drop out of the race, for if faith isn't real then perseverance won't be a reality.

This brings us to a critical question. We've talked about *unbelief* and the need to confront it, and we've considered *wasted faith* and the great danger of settling for it. But it's not enough to be able to dissect deficient faith. What exactly is *real faith*?

C. We need to make sure we possess real faith (14-15). And that brings us to verses 14-15. "For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.¹⁵ As it is said, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'"

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For by grace are you saved through faith." A person is saved by grace through faith. But how can one know whether his faith is genuine or not? How can we know if we have truly been saved? We find the answer right here. The writer gives us three evidences of real faith.

1. *Real faith shares in Christ (14a).* Notice the switch from the second person "you" in verse 13 to the first person "we" in verse 14. "We have come to share in Christ." The Greek word translated "share" is *metachoi*. We find the same word back in 3:1 where the writer says that his readers "share in the heavenly calling."

This is gospel reality. God is holy and cannot tolerate sin in His presence. He must judge sin appropriately. That's why He sent His Son into the world. Jesus did something we could not do. He lived a sinless life. And Jesus also experienced something we deserve to experience, the judgment of God for sin. On the cross God judged His own Son. Why? Because on the cross, God's Son took upon Himself the horrendous sins committed by every person that would ever truly believe on Him. He paid the penalty for those sins, and three days later He raised His Son from the grave to verify the success of His saving mission.

Biblically defined, true Christians are those who "share in Christ."⁸ They recognize that Christ did what He did *for them*, and so they *believe*, not just in the facts of His death and resurrection, but they believe *in Him* as a person. They come to share *in Him*.⁹

Eliza Hewitt expressed it well when she penned the following:¹⁰

*My faith has found a resting place,
Not in device or creed;
I trust the ever living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.*

*I need no other argument,
I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
And that He died for me.*

⁸ Donald Guthrie observes, "The word *metochoi* could be understood to mean either 'partakers of Christ' or 'partakers with Christ'. The latter is certainly better suited to the context." Donald Guthrie, p. 107.

⁹ Leon Morris remarks that it can be understood in two ways: "participators in Christ" or "participators with Christ," and favors the former translation. Leon Morris, p. 36.

¹⁰ The hymn, "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place," is attributed to Lidie Edmunds, Eliza's pseudonym.

Well said, Eliza Hewitt! And so says the true child of God. Real faith, first of all, shares in the person and work of Christ. But it doesn't stop there.

2. *Real faith perseveres to the end (14b)*. The writer says, "For we have come to share in Christ, *if*." If? Yes, if. This isn't the first time the author has pointed out that real faith meets real conditions, nor will it be the last. Back in verse 6 we were told, "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." So true faith *holds on*. For how long? He doesn't tell us in verse 6. He does in verse 14, as the NIV puts it, "...if we hold firmly *till the end* the confidence we had at first."

Think carefully now. Although real faith perseveres, we are not saved *by* our perseverance. Christ alone saves us. We are saved because we "share in Christ." Yet our perseverance is visible evidence that Christ has truly saved us.

Let me say it another way. A person is saved when he repents of his sin and puts his total trust in the person and redemptive work of Christ. However, if a person professes to believe in Christ and then subsequently denies his belief in the unique personhood and substitutionary work of Christ, then his denial is evidence that he never truly did believe to begin with, not with saving faith.

Jonathan Edwards once said, "The sure proof of election is that one holds out to the end."¹¹ Real faith shares in Christ and perseveres to the end. Here's a third evidence.

3. *Real faith is a present tense reality (15)*. Listen to verse 15 again, "As has just been said: 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.'" Sounds familiar, doesn't it? The writer is quoting again from Psalm 95, just like he did back in verses 7-11. This time he cites only the verse that begins the section, yet in so doing he undoubtedly has the whole passage in mind. It's kind of like singing the first line of a song, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound." By stating those initial words, I'm calling your attention to what follows as well. "That saved a wretch like me!"

The writer wants us to remember what happened to the Israelites in the scene described in Psalm 95. In fact, he's going to tell us exactly what happened to them in the next three verses, as we'll see. But for now, notice that word 'today' again. He loves that word and uses over and over in Hebrews. His point? Real faith is a *present tense* reality.

So you heard God's Word when you were ten years old, and responded. That's great. But what about *today*? The truth is, if you responded with saving faith that day long ago, then it wasn't the last time you heard His voice and responded. That's because real faith is a *present tense reality*.

You don't have to twist a true believer's arm to get him to come to church. That's because he loves to hear God's voice as He speaks through the preached Word. And you don't have to entertain him to keep him coming, either, for he loves to hear the sweetest voice of all, the voice that called him out of darkness and into light.

Does the true believer ever struggle? Indeed he does, and she does too. That's why Hebrews was written! At times we can get sidetracked by other voices and begin to wander from the fold. But our Shepherd won't let us go. Jesus says, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand (John 10:27-28)."

Note our part. We listen and follow. But we do that because of what Christ does. He gives us life, eternal life. When we were dead in our sins, His Spirit regenerated our dead

¹¹ Quote by Jonathan Edwards, in Gromacki, p. 67.

hearts so we could exercise faith in Him. And every day since, He has graciously enabled us to live out our faith in Him. Even when we blow it, He stands ready as our mediator and great high priest to restore us back into our Father's fellowship.

This brings us to our fourth responsibility in confronting unbelief. The first three again? We need to deal with it in our own hearts (12). We need to help each other deal with it (13). We need to make sure we possess real faith (14-15).

D. We need to remember that real faith is real over the long haul (16-19). In the closing verses of the chapter, the writer takes us back to 1400 BC. He wants us to learn from the Jews in Moses' day that real faith is real, not just today, but with the long view in mind. He uses a series of questions to show us that Israel lacked this long-haul faith, and it showed up in four stages.

1. *The Jews escaped Egypt but later rebelled (16).* "For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?" Talk about experiencing privileges! The fifteenth-century-before-Christ Hebrews saw God perform ten plagues in Egypt, harden Pharaoh's heart and then change his heart so that he set free the Israelite slaves. They watched God part the Red Sea and walked across on dry ground. They ate heaven-sent food called manna that came fresh from God every day. They watched God provide fresh drinking water from a rock in the desert. They saw the mountain smoke when God met with Moses on Sinai. Later they saw the first-fruits of the land of Canaan that the spies brought back. They heard the promise of God that He would destroy the inhabitants of the land and give it to them.

Yet in spite of all these privileges, they rebelled. And the rebellion led to stage two.

2. *The Jews sinned against God and died in the desert (17).* "And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?" Notice that God was *angry* with them. He loved them, showered them with blessings, but became angry with them. Why? Because they sinned against Him in specific ways which will be identified in the following verses.

"And their bodies fell in the desert," says the writer. Just think. The trip should have taken a couple of months, but in the end it lasted forty years. Yes, forty regretful wandering years, and in the end everyone over the age of twenty died except for Joshua and Caleb.

603,550. According to Numbers 1:46, that's how many Hebrew men over the age of twenty left Egypt. And they all, minus Joshua and Caleb, died. Or to use the harsh reality of Hebrews 3:17, their *bodies fell in the wilderness*.

If we divide the number of Hebrew men by the number of weeks (there are 2,080 weeks in forty years), we discover that there was an average of 290 funerals per week in the Israelite camp, every week for forty years. That translates into 41 funerals every day for forty years, and that's just the funerals for the *men*.

Is sin costly? Yes, the wages of sin is *death*. And what specific sin caused this massive loss of Hebrew life such that an entire generation forfeited the promised land? The writer of Hebrews tells us. He gives what appears at first to be two causes although they are indeed inseparable.

3. *The Jews missed the promised land because of their **disobedience** (18).* "And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?" The defining moment, of course, happened at Kadesh Barnea (see Numbers 14). God had told the Israelites to take the promised land, but when the spies returned and said there were giants in the land, the people grew hysterical.

“Why is the LORD bringing us here only to let us fall by the sword?” they asked. “Let’s go back to Egypt!” they proposed, and even talked of stoning Moses. And by that act of disobedience, which was their *tenth* act of blatant disobedience according to God’s assessment in Numbers 14:22, they forfeited the promised land.

Yet there’s more to the story. According to the final verse of Hebrews 3, there’s another reason. Not just disobedience, but unbelief.

4. *The Jews missed the promised land because of their unbelief (19)*. “So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”¹² Unbelief. They didn’t believe in the Lord. Oh, they said they did once upon a time, but their faith was deficient.

Look at those two deadly sins. Disobedience and unbelief. They go hand in hand. Indeed, the failure to believe God is the root of all disobedience.¹³ Unbelief is the heart sin that produces the action sin of disobedience. Unbelief is the root, while disobedience is the fruit.

If I speak harshly to my wife, it’s because I don’t believe God is present and listening to what I’m saying. If you are paralyzed by worry, it’s because you are not believing that God is right there with you and that He loves you and promises to take care of you. Unbelief is the sin behind the sin. Always.

Unbelief keeps a person from getting baptized. The person doesn’t believe the Lord is worthy of his public declaration of allegiance.

Unbelief is why a man walks away from his marriage. It’s why a mother refuses to let her adult child go. It’s why a young person doesn’t read his Bible and why he chooses to do the ungodly things his peers are doing. Unbelief is why pastors become critical of the sheep they’re called to love. It’s why congregations do hurtful things to their shepherds.

It’s not just disobedience which is the fruit. It’s unbelief which is the root.

Think about it. Faith is trusting in the person of God and relying on the promises of God regardless of how I feel. Unbelief is the opposite. Unbelief is choosing to do what I feel with little or no thought of God and His promises.

We’re not unique, says the writer of Hebrews. Just think about the Israelites.

Paul takes a similar approach with the church members in Corinth. They had their share of fruit sins (being divisive, sexual immorality, taking each other to court, to mention a few), but in 1 Corinthians 10:11-12 Paul goes after the root. How? By pointing their attention to the Israelites in Moses’ day. And he says, “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”

If we learn anything from the Jews in Moses’ day, it’s this sobering reality. Past privileges do not guarantee future blessings. Sure, the Israelites experienced God’s delivering power when they left Egypt. They later heard God speak at Mount Sinai, and even saw Him provide for their needs time and time again. *But* they never made it to the promised land. They forfeited what could have been theirs because of one very simple and deadly problem.

It’s the same problem that the first readers of the book of Hebrews were facing, and the parallels were striking. They too had seen God rescue slaves out of bondage, slaves to sin who were set free through faith in Jesus Christ. They too heard God’s voice

¹² In the Greek text, the word ‘unbelief’ appears in the climactic position at the end of the sentence.

¹³ Observation by BAG, p. 82, in Leon Morris, p. 38.

through His Word, and saw Him provide for their needs time and time again. *But* now they were in danger of forfeiting God's rest, the promised land of heaven, because of this same deadly problem. The sin behind the sin. The sin of *unbelief*.

It's time to take inventory, says the writer of Hebrews. He's talking to us, too.

Take Inventory: Let's ask ourselves these important questions.

Sometimes the Bible comforts the troubled. Sometimes the Bible troubles the comfortable. The passage before us today can do both if we'll take its message to heart. So let's ponder carefully three personal questions.

1. *Do I possess saving faith?* Remember the three identifying marks from earlier? Real, saving faith shares in Christ, perseveres to the end, and is a present tense reality. Does that describe your faith? Is your confidence in Christ alone, is it persevering, and is it real today?

Allow me say a word to parents and grandparents. We must be careful not to give our children and grandchildren a false sense of assurance about their spiritual condition. We must encourage them to test their faith as we do ours.

Suppose your child bought a parachute and told you he was going skydiving. And suppose right after he left the house you happened to hear a news release about a parachute manufacturing company, indicating that thousands of defective parachutes, instead of being destroyed, were sold to the public. My question is, would you let your child jump out of the plane without first urging him to check out the reliability of his parachute? You know the answer. Any loving parent would urge their child *not* to jump until he first did a thorough exam of that parachute.

Beloved, we're talking about something much more dangerous. Eternally so. Why would we allow our kids or grandkids to go through and leave this life with what may be a deficient-faith (a defective parachute) without urging them to test it? Yet it happens in families all the time.

Remember Billy from the beginning? It's not just Billy who has his "spiritual birthday" written in his Bible. It's in his mother's Bible, too. And what happens when Billy's youth leader approaches Billy's mother and expresses concern over Billy's disrespect for his leaders and peers and his disinterest in spiritual matters? Does she thank the leader, proceed to urge Billy to examine the validity of his faith, and fast and pray for the sake of his soul? Or does she take the leader's comment as an insult on her parenting, defend her son, and start looking for another church that knows how to make Christianity appealing to boys like hers?

Beloved, let's all of us examine our faith and encourage those we love to do the same. The stakes are too high to try and save face with people and lose face with God Himself.

2. *Am I taking seriously the sin of unbelief in my life?* It's not just my unsaved neighbor that struggles with unbelief. I do too. We all do at times. The question is, are we dealing with our unbelief when it appears.

Are there doubts that we have refused to face, questions we have avoided answering? If so, let's be honest with ourselves. Let's not coast on spiritual autopilot. Let's get help dealing with our unbelief.

Last week I looked back at our 2006 church directory. I'd like to describe what I saw as I turned the pages and saw the names and faces of people who were here twenty years ago. Not surprisingly, I saw many who are now in heaven. Their journey is over. Thankfully I saw many others who are still walking with Christ faithfully. But I also saw some painful sights.

I saw a couple who divorced and left our church. I saw a teenager who left church and hasn't returned. I kept looking and saw two other young people who left church and haven't returned. Then I saw three other young people who left church when they left the home. I saw another couple that divorced due to adultery. I saw another young person who has since spent time in prison. I saw another couple that divorced. I saw another young person who left the church and has since denied the faith. I saw another couple who divorced over adultery. I saw a man who became involved in sexual immorality, refused to repent, and is no longer with us. I saw a young person who grew up here who hasn't returned to church since he left the nest. I saw two other young people who participated in our children and youth ministries who are no longer interested in spiritual things. I saw a young lady who bore a child out of wedlock and walked away from us. I saw another couple whose marriage ended in divorce due to infidelity. I saw another couple that got their feelings hurt and walked away from us. I saw a man who refused to repent and died a premature death. I saw another couple that got distracted by the world and just walked away from us.

My heart grieves over what I saw. Yet here's the reality. What I saw and have described are the fruit sins. Yet at the root in each case was the root sin of unbelief. My friends, let's take seriously any and all indications of unbelief in our hearts. Here's how.

3. *Will I humble myself today and experience God's grace?* Here's the good news, my friend. Listen to James 4:6, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." If we will humble ourselves today, God will give us exactly what we need. Exactly. So let's believe Him. Let's humble ourselves and open ourselves to the grace we need.

As we sing today's closing song, let's notice the connection between faith and rest.

Closing Song: #405 "*My Faith Has Found a Resting Place*" (all four verses)

Right Hand of Fellowship: Rusty and Carolyn Pruitt

Community Group Discussion:

1. Today we continued to ponder a passage that confronts the sin of unbelief. After reading again Hebrews 3:7-19, have someone do a quick walk through of the main points of the sermon outline. Why are we calling unbelief *the sin behind the sin*?
2. Jim Elliff has observed, "Most people will spend far more time examining the vegetables in the supermarket than they will ever spend scrutinizing their faith." What concern is he raising? What does it mean to scrutinize one's faith? Is there an improper way to do this?
3. According to verses 12-13, dealing with the sin of unbelief is a community project. It's something we're supposed to help each other do. What are some practical ways we can fulfill this assignment together?
4. What do we learn about genuine faith in verses 14-15? In verses 16-19?
5. As we did last week, let's conclude our time by praying the Word together. Allow today's passage to guide your group in a time of meaningful calling on God. Have someone lead with a prayer of **adoration** to the One who has given us His Word. Then have someone offer a prayer of **supplication** asking the Lord for help with our unbelief. Then have someone conclude with a prayer of **thanksgiving** for the many ways the Lord is helping us deal with our unbelief.