

The Essential Grip: Clinging to Christ When Tempted to Let Go

By Marco Scouvert



Imagine you and a friend decide to go free climbing on the rock-face of a very steep mountain. You want a maximum thrill. It's just the two of you and some rope, just in case of an emergency. Your friend ascends to the first plateau, ties the rope around his waist and drops it down alongside the mountain. You begin to climb, but at one point your foot slips. You lose your hold and momentarily free fall with nothing but jagged rocks below

you. Instinctively, you reach out and grab hold of the dangling rope with both hands. Your friend above is bearing your weight and begins to slowly pull you up to safety. But if you are going to make it alive, you must hold on to that rope with all your might.

In Hebrews 3, the writer reminds the Jewish-background believers what their forefathers experienced as they journeyed through the wilderness. God had rescued Israel out of Egyptian bondage and prepared a place of rest for them. But as the Lord carried them through the wilderness, they had the obligation to hold on to him and walk in his word if they were going to receive their promised inheritance. Sadly, they let go of their grip. They disobeyed God's instruction and made plans to return to Egypt. That generation fell away from the Lord and died in the wilderness under the wrath of God.

The writer of Hebrews recalls Israel's ruinous fall as a warning so that Christians would not share their fate, since their journey is parallel to ours. Through Jesus, God has delivered believers out of slavery to sin and the fear of death, and has prepared a place of rest for us. But as the Lord leads us through the wilderness of this world, we have the responsibility to cling to him and persevere in the journey to receive our promised reward. If we reject his promises and let go of our grip on Christ, we will likewise fall short of entering into our inheritance and perish under God's judgment.

So, we are exhorted to hold fast our confidence in Jesus, firm to the end. But more than that, throughout his letter the writer provides practical instruction meant to enable us to do so. In 3:12-13, there are two exhortations that will help you maintain your grip on the gospel, avoid a deadly fall, and make it safely to your future reward in Christ.

Watch Your Heart

First, we are warned, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God" (3:12). In the wilderness, Israel faced various challenging circumstances and frightening prospects. Though they had experienced God's saving power and tasted his merciful provision, they grumbled against him and rebelled. Underneath their complaints and disobedience were evil hearts that refused to

believe God's word of promise. They doubted God's goodness and love, accusing him of evil intentions and hatred. They also questioned his wisdom and power, believing they knew better and that their enemies were too great to defeat.

Sadly, in the midst of hard circumstances or a situation that threatens pain or difficulty, we, too, have failed to believe in the Lord. We have lost confidence in his unchanging character. We have failed to confess his goodness and affirm his perfect wisdom. We have not rested in his absolute control over our lives. We have neglected to give him thanks and be content with what we have. We have not trusted in his promises, failing to courageously embrace our situation assured of his love for us and satisfied with our future hope in him.

Unbelief toward God's truth always comes along with belief in a lie that sin has spoken. Sin told the Israelites that following the Lord was foolish and would lead to death, while going back to Egypt was wise and safe. Regrettably, the Israelites allowed themselves to be misled by "the deceitfulness of sin." As a result, they developed a terminal case of cardiac sclerosis — a hard heart.

Similarly, sin attempts to turn us away from Jesus by tricking us to believe ideas like that the events of the gospel are non-historical, or Jesus is not the divine Son of God and only way to eternal life, or the Bible is merely a collection of men's fallible religious perspectives. It tries to deceive us by convincing us that the Christian hope is not worth the pain and suffering of following Jesus, and that the pleasures of sin and comforts of this life are more satisfying than reading the Bible, communing with God in prayer, and active participation in a local church.

So, how can we protect our hearts against sin's lies with their hardening and deadly effects?

Strengthen Each Other

Second, the writer tells us to "encourage one another, day after day, as long as it is called 'today'" (3:13). Between the two frightening possibilities of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin and allowing an evil unbelieving heart to develop within us, we are told the way we will be protected from both: we need the ongoing encouragement of other believers. Their support and input is critical if we are going to cling to the rope of the gospel and safely reach God's rest.

This means we must prioritize being there when our local church has its normally scheduled meetings on Sundays and at other times. And we should be in regular dialogue with other believers. But more than that, in those meetings and in that communication, we need to "speak the truth in love" to each other, so that we won't be as susceptible to the confusion and misdirection of sin's crafty schemes (Ephesians 4:14-15). Specifically, we must help each other to remain convinced of the gospel we've received, and we must strengthen one another's confidence that Christ, and all that we have in him, is superior to the momentary pleasures of this world (Hebrews 11:25-26).

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