

Caution Against Unbelief

Obstinate Unbelief

In the first section of Bunyan's work *Pilgrim's Progress*, we are introduced to a man who lacks faith and conviction. His name is *Obstinate*. John Bunyan names his characters after their individual temperament.

The dictionary defines "obstinate" as perversely adhering to an opinion, purpose or course in spite of reason, arguments or persuasion. One who is obstinate resists change despite truth revealed. In Bunyan's story, Christian tries to convince Obstinate that their city is about to experience wrath from God and the answer in preventing this destruction is in the book Christian holds in his hands. Rather than listening; Obstinate considers Christian mentally unbalanced and returns home rather than looking for the truth. Bunyan's portrays Obstinate as an opinionated and hard-hearted individual. One who is obstinate is a grumbler and a complainer and self-promoting. This person is marked by a lack of faith. Much of the world today considers Christians unbalanced for the world is Obstinate and in their passionate desire to be able to do as they please; the world rejects God despite the abundance of truth.

In the Old Testament, we read about a whole generation of people who could be referred to as "Obstinate". This generation saw the Lord ravish the land of Egypt with one plague after another. They saw the Red Sea split down the middle and then once they crossed, swallow the Egyptian army. They saw the manna literally rain from heaven. They saw water flow from a rock. They saw the cloud

by day and the pillar of fire at night leading them to safety. In the midst of these great and wondrous miracles they were characterized by grumbling and complaining – they were Obstinate.

The danger of complaining to God is that there comes a time when His longsuffering ends. God’s patience with man finally reaches an end. Often God simply will give people what they want and that is exactly what He did with the generation of Israelites who left Egypt. Let me quickly take us back to the Book of Numbers chapter 14. In verse 2, it becomes clear how the people responded to God’s salvation from the Egyptians, “**all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, ‘Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!’**” Skipping down to verses 28 and 29 Moses pronounces God’s judgment, “**Say to them, ‘As I live, declares the LORD, what you have said in my hearing I will do to you: ²⁹ your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me.’**” They endlessly complained to Moses about their circumstances and they wanted Moses to tell God what He needed to do. They were a bunch of complaining “Obstinate” people. They were really complaining and grumbling not against Moses but against God. For us today, we should see that God equates grumbling and unbelief with rebellion.

So, a basic truth that Moses taught and the writer of Hebrews echoes is, unbelief manifests itself in a person’s heart by rebelling and one’s life is marked by grumbling and complaining and never being at peace - for they are Obstinate. The writer continues with the idea that a new interpretation of the “house of God” has come because Jesus moved God’s people from the Old Covenant to the New. The writer wants the readers to understand there is a transference from the Israelites as

Moses' house to the church as the Messiah's house and this caused the writer to reflect further on Israel's failure to inherit the promises. So, my beloved, as believers, we must battle against unbelief, both, individually and as a church community for a faithful church is God's house overseen by Christ as our Lord, Savior and Shepherd. A pastor serves as an under-shepherd of Jesus.

The Individual's Call To Belief (v. 7-11)

As the writer of Hebrews begins this passage, he quotes King David's Psalm 95. We must not be obstinate but open our hearts and minds and souls to God's truth. We must understand that even though Psalm 95 was penned by King David, the ultimate author, just like with all of Scripture, is God the Holy Spirit and He caused David to write inspired words for a purpose. Listen to God through the inspired words of King David and echoed by the writer of Hebrews, beginning at verse 7, "Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice,⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,⁹ where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'¹¹ As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'" (From Psalm 95:7-11) Obstinate people go astray, reject God despite of abundant truths and will not enter eternity in the presence of God.

In the books of Exodus and Numbers, we have the account of the rebellion. Murmuring and grumbling against God marked the generation that God rescued from Egyptian slavery. Through David in Psalm 95, and chapter 3 of Hebrews the Holy Spirit warns God's people. He says, do not be like those I freed from Egypt. Do not harden your hearts, do not test God, do not go astray in your hearts but instead let your life be marked by seeking to know God's ways. The

account in Numbers shows the rebellion. Then in Psalm 95, we are told not to be like that generation who rebelled against Moses. The writer of Hebrews repeats this warning as does Paul to the Corinthian Church. All these words of God are recorded for benefit of those claiming the God of the universe - as their God.

Let us hear what God tells us through Paul's letter in 1 Corinthians, chapter 10, reading the first 11 verses, "For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea,² and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,³ and all ate the same spiritual food,⁴ and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.⁵ Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.⁶ **Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil 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 rose up to play.'^(Exodus 32:6)⁸ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.⁹ We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents,¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. *(Destroyer is found only once in the NT - here. An angel of destruction sent by God)*¹¹ **Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.**" God sent Christ so that we might be saved through belief in Jesus. God does not want people to say in a corrupt state but through His saving grace be transformed into the image of Christ their Lord and Savior. God, therefore calls His children to believe in Christ, His Son and Savior of God's elect. Belief needs to be lived out, even while living in the midst of this broken world. Why do you think the writer of Hebrews places this text from Psalm 95 in the Book of Hebrews? I think, the writer is showing us

that it was a terrible thing to reject Moses. For that generation to reject Moses cost them their lives. To be led out of slavery by the one whom God had sent and then to reject God would cost them everything. He adds this passage to the Book of Hebrews to show us that there lies an even greater danger. Jesus is greater than Moses. Jesus is divine, Jesus is God. So, to reject Christ is far worse and will meet with an even greater act of God's wrath than to reject Moses because Christ is superior to Moses. So, the writer quotes from the Psalm to show us the seriousness of rejecting Jesus. This problem continues to this very day.

This is why the writer begins in verse 7, [“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’”](#) Take notice of the very big, but little word [“if”](#). [“The Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice.’”](#) Using the word [“if”](#) means that you might not hear God's voice, just as many of the Hebrews did not hear God in the Exodus even though He showed Himself through many miracles and signs. There are people on this planet that have not heard the voice of God through the Holy Spirit or His Son, Jesus, thus the reason for missions. However, and this is important, if you hear the voice of God – do NOT reject it, do NOT ignore it for the price will be eternal. Hear the Word of God, listen and obey. Anyone reading the words of Hebrew chapter 3 or hearing my voice, I say, do not harden your heart against God. Open your heart to the eternal truth God gives all people in His Word, the Bible and obey God's Word for your benefit.

Let me ask, is there something in your heart, in your inner being that is saying, *“come to Christ?”* Is there a still small voice that is telling you to obey God's Word? This is the Holy Spirit speaking – you need to be quite and listen. Maybe there is something that you have been putting off. Maybe God has a ministry for you in this church and you have heard the Holy Spirit over and over

again and for some reason you have not acted on what you know is right. This is hardening your heart; this is being obstinate. There may come a day, just like it came in the wilderness, when the Holy Spirit goes silent and God's judgment is administered.

Perhaps the Spirit has been pleading with you to be saved from your sin. Maybe you have felt His gentle nudging and heard His still small voice. Perhaps you have thought that there is something you must do first. This text clearly says, “**Today**”... my beloved, “**Today**” is this day. If you have heard God's voice or if you are hearing His voice, do it today. Do not reason your way into disobedience. If you hear His voice, obey.

You may not have all the answers but if God is moving – you need to listen and act because salvation is by grace through faith, salvation is **not** by grace through logic. If the Holy Spirit is pleading with you, repent and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Church's Call To Belief (v. 12-19)

As we continue and I read the next 8 verses I want you to hear the urgency, the writer uses for he knows the time is short; either our time here on earth or the ticking of history until Jesus returns, time is short. The call is for the church to mobilize in sharing the Gospel. Reading at 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.** 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.** ¹⁴ **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.’** ¹⁶ **For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left**

Egypt led by Moses? ¹⁷ And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹ So we see that *they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*” (From Psalm 78:22 & 106:24) The writer is telling the church that we are to be presently doing this. As a community of Christ, we are called to care for each other, to strengthen each other against the world’s unbelief. Evangelizing for the Gospel of Christ strengthens one’s faith. This is why the writer began this new paragraph with verse 12 saying, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” These words might lead us to believe that one might wake up one day and discover they have fallen away. They may realize one day they are not walking with God. To prevent this one must fight evil and hold fast to faith. But, for those with an unbelieving heart there is an intentional rebellion that wars in their hearts. The battle rages between believing God and walking in His ways or not believing, not hearing, being obstinate despite the truths that one hears. An unbelieving heart is lost because it operates under the influence of the evil one. The Pharisees would have said they were not evil, yet they had unbelieving hearts and therefore, they did not walk with God. One cannot look to the world and God; one must leave the world, be set apart, be holy and live for God’s glory. This is what God has always commanded for those who call themselves His children.

However, the Old Testament shows clearly the most of “God’s chosen people” did not obey Him. One example is found in Deuteronomy, ²⁰ “Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, **so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the LORD your God.**” (Deuteronomy 8:20) This was written to the Hebrew people, but this truth is true for all generations until Jesus

returns. Do you understand what that means for you and me? Luke confirmed their disobedience in Acts chapter 7, ³⁵ “This Moses, whom they rejected, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’—this man God sent as both ruler and redeemer by the hand of the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in Egypt and at the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years. ... ³⁹ **Our fathers refused to obey him, but thrust him aside, and in their hearts they turned to Egypt.**” (Acts 7:35-36, 39) These people were freed from slavery and watching miracles and being led by God’s prophet to the Promised Land. They were grumbling every step of the way they did not want to let go of Egypt or the way of the world. What is it that leads people to discontent and grumbling? We are clearly told that it is unbelief. Unbelief by the Hebrews, by those who call themselves Christian and yet have unbelieving hearts and they belong to the world that does not want to be convicted of sin.

What the writer wants us to see is this simple truth, “**Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.**” Are you hearing the voice of God this morning through His Word? Are you hearing the truth of God through the preacher? Christ created the church, so that, the body would strengthen each other. Each believer has strengths and weaknesses but we are not in this battle with unbelief alone. We have Christ, we have the Holy Spirit, we have the Bible and we have each other, as the church we must encourage each other every day. Verses 13 and 14 make this clear, “**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.**” ¹⁴ **For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.**” To “**exhort one another every day**” means to press, push, encourage, urge and to advise one another in our faith. We are to plead with each other. When we go through trials together, a healthy church will be urging the one enduring the trial to

believe God is at work. The church is to encourage belief in its members. The church is given the Divine responsibility to encourage and advise in faith. We are to be strengthening one another's faith. How are we doing? How can we better pray, encourage, advise and support each other? Verse 13 says we are to exhort each other "as long as it is called 'today'. We cannot change yesterday, but we can live this day to the fullest for God's glory and to sacrificially love and support each other and by living this day for God's glory and supporting your brothers and sisters in Christ it will build a more glorious tomorrow. As Luke said in Acts, ⁴² "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ... ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-44, 47) My beloved if we live in this manner the Lord will bless our efforts, our obedience and faith and God will use this to bring people to be saved. Do you believe this? An effective church for the kingdom has significant and heartfelt fellowship. How are we doing? How can you help our community be better; spiritually, in kindness, in exhortation and in fellowship? As Paul wrote to the church under spiritual attack in Ephesus we are to prepare for spiritual battle against unbelief and help each live 'lock, stock and barrel' as sold out Christian lives.

In order to accomplish our church becoming the best spiritual community possible we need to understand ourselves and others. If we are in this together and apply the Word to our lives and those of our brothers and sisters, how do we encourage faith and discourage grumbling and obstinance? What goes on in our minds when we begin to grumble and complain?

Common Lies That Deceive

Let me identify some common lies the unbelieving grumblers believe. Lies we need to identify and stop accepting and help others overcome.

1. As a Christian **my life should be free from difficulties**. Some say, coming to belief in Christ means living a blessed life with little to no challenges. My beloved, let's face it we are creatures who like comfort. If things are not going the way we want we often grumble. However, God tells Christians that He wants challenges to come into our lives. It is through these challenges that God is completing the work started by Christ. Challenges grow us spiritually. Christians are made into the image of Christ through suffering. Our belief, our faith can be strengthened and our faith deepened as we experience trials if we take the position and belief that God is making us more like Christ. We grow as we let go of ourselves and trust and obey God. As Paul wrote to Timothy, ¹² "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed." (2 Tim. 3:12-14) My beloved, you must believe!

Remember the Israelites left Egypt led by God and they came to the shores of the Red Sea. The Egyptian army was bearing down and they had nowhere to go. The Egyptians had chariots, swords, spears, bows and were experienced in battle. The Hebrews on the other hand, knew how to make bricks and build. Here at the banks of the Red Sea they were trapped with nowhere to go. God placed this challenge in their path, God took these people to this spot. This challenge was one the people could not handle – they needed God. God

performed His mighty miracle in order that people would see their need to rely on Him and that He is the one who is to receive glory.

2. I am in charge of my own destiny. This has been driven into Americans – we are self-made, we create our own opportunities. Most American and most people think they can live fulfilled lives without trust and dependence on God. We fail to accept this fact; we are finite and God is infinite. We want to approach life’s problems using our own abilities and conquer them to prove we are worthy. Here the grumbler forgets about grace; one should embrace human weaknesses because it points to an all-sufficient Savior. When we fail are reminded by faith that though we are weak we have a Savior who has never failed and He chose us and He has redeemed us out of His love and grace. Just as Christ told Paul, He tells us, “ ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Paul responds, Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:9-10)

3. People believe they can find happiness in creation rather than in the Creator. The grumbler, the obstinate, believes meaningful life can be found in human acceptance, love, and the acquiring of material stuff for creature comfort. Yet as one grows in spiritual maturity and life maturity, we come to understand the things of this earth fall through our fingers like sand. If we try to build our life on the things of the world, we are not trusting God and we will be grumbling the whole time, and life will ultimately be unfulfilling and disappointing. Jesus made the choice clear, ¹⁹ “Do not lay up for

yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Mt. 6:19-20)

I want to teach you a principle that I have found extremely helpful in seeking to live a life by trust. I certainly have not perfected it yet and still have times of living outside of faith. Here is something you can do that will help you live by faith. The biblical truth given to us to fight off grumbling is to practice thanksgiving.

The life change today is that the Holy Spirit wants us not to be grumblers like the Hebrews in the wilderness, but instead it is clear that He wants us to practice a godly way of expressing our feelings. Practice thanksgiving instead. Why? The Holy Spirit want this, because grumbling ultimately produces rebellion and thanksgiving produces faith.

Let’s say we are caught up in a life of grumbling or we at least tend towards grumbling. Complaints about life, things, events, other drivers and people flow out of our mouths fairly regularly. Our heart is grumbling and it shows itself through what we say and how we act. This is our nature for as Jesus said, ⁴³ “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. ... ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” (Luke 6:43-45)

We have potentially been living life, at lease at times, without trust and without dependence on the Creator. In order to break this deadly cycle of sin, we need help. To help us God gives each believer the Holy Spirit that gives each believer supernatural power; power to strengthen us to fight temptations and sin,

power to become more sensitive to others, power to express grace, love and mercy – even when we are the target of spiritual warfare, power to be obedient and live a faithful godly life. If we begin to purposefully practice thanksgiving, even though our hearts are still going the direction of grumbling, in time, we will think less of ourselves and more of God and we will then be thankful in all circumstances by the strength God supplies.

Paul teaches, “The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:5-7) My beloved know, thankfulness strengthens faith and grumbling weakens faith. It is important that we cultivate strong faith in ourselves and others. This brings us to verse 19 where the writer gives us this parting thought which is also found in Psalms 78 and 106, “So we see that *they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*” (From Psalm 78:22 & 106:24) The writer began this passage with “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.’” My beloved, hear God’s voice, do not harden your heart and obey and this will produce thanksgiving in all circumstances. With love and grace in your heart and soul you will know peace and be able to love those God has placed in your life. Be obedient with thankfulness! Amen!