

“Spiritual Cardiology”

Fixing Our Eyes On Jesus Our High Priest

Hebrews 3:7-19

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April 20, 2018

Jeff: Father in heaven, we are thankful for this day. We're thankful because You've made us thankful people. And yet we oftentimes look at the world around us, and we look at events and life and people, and we find ourselves discouraged, even depressed, downtrodden, feeling as though all things are working against us when, in fact, if we pause, we remember that He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world, and we remember then to be thankful. Thank You for giving us a reason to be thankful and joyful people. And we pray that You would continue to cultivate in us that mindset.

Father, as we gather together, we submit ourselves to Your word, for we know that this is indeed Your word. We ask that Your hand would be upon us as we read and study together. We know that You use it as a means of Your grace to shape us, to fashion Christ in us. And we pray that that would be the case today. So we give ourselves to You, asking that You would do with us what You will.

Father, as we come here today, we come with heavy hearts and we also come with praise on our lips, and Father, we've heard both. And we ask that You will tend to each family, providing what is needed and encouraging hearts and strengthening them.

Father, as we've heard that Bruce is going to try and be here next week, we look forward to that, to seeing him and to interacting with him. We pray, Father, that You would make that possible for him. And Father, we pray for his continued wellness. We ask that You will enable him to recover beyond even his own expectations.

Father, as we gather here today and open Your word, we pray that You will lead us, for we need Your leadership by Your Holy Spirit. And we're thankful that in His leadership there is also transforming power. And so we pray that You will enable us to submit wholly to Your word that we might be blessed thereby, for we ask it in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Well you know, Sig always makes me feel a bit guilty. You know, he starts us off by saying “in the house,” and “greater than anybody in the house” over at the PPG Paints Arena. *(Laughter)* And then I put something like that up there.

Transcriber's Note: A Pittsburgh Penguins logo.

Jeff: I always feel like I'm bringing it down a notch. *(Laughter)* We're going to finish business tonight.

Participant: Absolutely.

Jeff: All right. We're going to look today at Hebrews chapter 3, verses 7 through the end of the chapter. So Don, would you read that? Do you have that? Why don't you read that for us?

Don: Okay. *“Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says,
‘Today, if you hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion,*

“Spiritual Cardiology”

*As in the day of testing in the wilderness,
Where your fathers put Me to the test,
And saw My works for forty years.
Therefore I was provoked with that generation and said,
‘They always go astray in their hearts.
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. 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 forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.” This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: Okay. Thanks, Don.

Don: You’re welcome.

Jeff: So when you think of—you know, we should probably do this first. I always want to enter into this, rather than going through the outline of what we’re about to do. We’re going to look at an introduction today. We’re going to pause and we’re going to think about *the nature of God’s word* for just a minute. You’ll see the importance of why that’s the case. I mean, it is important that we value that anyway. There’s a particular reason why that’s important for us today. Then we’re going to look at *the warning* that’s in the text; there is a warning. And then we’re going to look at *the remedy*. Now the reason we’re going to look at the remedy today, and I want us to spend a little time with it, is because I don’t think it’s one of those remedies that we oftentimes give a whole lot of thought to. And you’ll see what I mean again when we think about that as well.

So let’s think some about the introduction. And let me just talk to you again about the nature of this particular document. It’s a sermon. When you read it as such, you begin to see that there are a number of things in it that are really helpful to the listener. There are those things that we’ve identified already. There is an *inclusio*. And that form of literary help appears repeatedly in this particular document. In other words, the speaker ropes off a section of text by using a familiar phrase or a familiar word or concept or idea at the beginning of the section. He develops it and then he caps it off or book ends it on the other side. So we know that we have finished with a particular section. It’s similar to point 1 or point 2 or point 3.

And you can imagine the importance of that in an oral culture., a culture that’s really hearing this and trying to memorize it even as they hear it, because they don’t have a

“Spiritual Cardiology”

Bible right now. Or if they do have a Bible, it's an incomplete document because it's so early in the time of the church. And if you were illiterate, you might be able to copy something down. But not everyone had this.

And so it's a sermon. And one of the things that we find in this particular document is the use of history as an important piece in the development of the ideas. And that's what we have here.

What we have here is that we have a document that in this particular section reminds us about the Exodus. And we can think about all that went into the leaving of Egypt and how that was difficult for the first generation. In fact they died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. But one of the things that this particular author wants to remind us of is a particular problem in the wilderness, an effort to where the people of Israel failed and failed quite miserably. And that was the rebellion at Rephidim.

And you remember that story. That story appears for us in Exodus 17. And you can go there and read that if you'd like, or just jot that down. But it's when the people of Israel rebelled against God's leadership and Moses. And they were bitter about it and tested God in the midst of it. And the idea of Meribah and Massah are pretty important to us when we think about that.

But without rehearsing the lesson I want you to just simply notice this. I want you to notice that it is a lesson. The historical aspect of it becomes a lesson for us. Now what is the lesson?

Now you have to understand what he's doing. He is not wanting us necessarily to spend time with the idea that this is so much a historical lesson as much as it is taking the historical and finding a lesson in it, and actually shaping the lesson for us by using the history.

Let me show you what I mean by this. In Psalm 95 you have a poetic rehearsal of the problem.

*“Today, if you hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah,
As on the day at Massah in the wilderness.”*

But notice what he does with that. Notice what he does. Hebrews 3:

*“Today, if you hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
On the day of testing in the wilderness.”*

So what he's doing is he's taking this historical event—it is a historical event. And that historical event is captured in those two words Meribah and Massah. We know those. They almost tell the story for us.

But what the Preacher is doing is he is quoting Psalm 95. But what we find is that we find that he is wanting us not necessarily to remember the historical event, but to remember the reason behind the historical event—the rebellion and the testing of God.

And there's an important reason for that. The reason is because the people in his congregation are putting God to the test. And there is the danger of rebelling against the Lord. And we're going to see that.

“Spiritual Cardiology”

He’s already reminding them that you remain where Christ is. But once we get into chapter 10,—and we’ll see this in just a little bit—he’s telling us. Don’t forsake the assembly. Don’t forsake the place where Christ is.

And so the key to this is that the people of God are testing the Lord. And there’s a potential of them rebelling just like we found in the Old Testament.

So why this? Why now? In other words, why is this particular warning in this particular place in the book of Hebrews right now? Well, it really follows on the heels of what we talked about last time in verse 6. “*And we are His house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.*” In other words, remember what we said. We said that we’re not talking necessarily about perseverance of the saints, or the perseverance of God in us. What we’re really talking about right now in that particular verse is this. Are we in the house? Are we?

And what we are confronted with in verse 7 and following then is a warning. Think about this. Are you like the church under age, or are you different? Are you holding fast? So that’s the idea that we’re supposed to be thinking about that contextualizes what it is that we’re looking at today.

And we just have to ask ourselves. Are we ready to move forward? Or are we rebelling?

I just want to pause at this particular time and just ask you. Are you rebelling? You know, no one really knows what’s going on in the heart and the mind of anyone else. You know, we get together with people all the time. And we have no clue, no indication that there may be a problem in someone’s thinking. And we never know if they’re about ready to rebel.

Now I’m going to talk to you about that later. But I want to just challenge you men and not call you out, but challenge you to think about yourselves. Where are you in your thinking? Where are you in your love for the Lord? Where are you in your commitment to Him and His bride? Where are you? Are you putting the Lord to the test? Are you about ready to rebel against Him? Where are you? I think that’s important for us to ask ourselves as we walk through a particular section where we’re going to talk about warnings.

So let’s talk first of all about *the nature of God’s word*. Now I’m not going to go through a systematic theology of the word of God. There are all kinds of things that we can talk about when we talk about God’s word—important things, one of the things that we value and prize as Reformed evangelical Protestants, is the idea that God’s word is from an infallible God. And you know what that means. To be infallible means to be true.

And so God is true. Jesus tells us that. He says, “*I am the way, the truth and the life.*” And we know that if He is true, the Father is true because He has come to exegete the Father to us, to reveal the Father to us. And so God is true. He’s infallible.

But we also know that an infallible God who reveals His word does not wander from the truth. Now He may report about people who do wander from the truth. So He tells stories about Cain and how Cain wandered from the practice of the truth. But the point is that His word does not wander from the truth. And we say that His word is inerrant. It

“*Spiritual Cardiology*”

doesn't wander. That's what the Latin means. It doesn't wander from the truth. And we would expect that coming from an infallible God.

And so we think of God's word being infallible and inerrant. And if it's an infallible Word from an infallible God that does not wander from the truth, we also think of that Word as an *authoritative* Word. In other words, this Word speaks into our lives with authority. And this Word has say above all other words because it's God's word.

So those are just some basic things that we need to think about when we think about the word of God. When I talk about the nature of God's word, that's what I'm talking about. I'm talking about infallibility and inerrancy and authority.

But I want to talk to you about the *eternality of the Word* this morning, because that's really what's at heart in the text. Everything else I've said to you already is assumed in what this speaker has said. But this speaker is bringing out for us the eternality of God's word in a way that we need to hear it, because he's applying it to us.

Now what do I mean by this? Well I mean that God's word, when we talk about the eternality of God's word, I mean that it's a living and active Word. And you can see that in chapter 4. And isn't it interesting, how he's going to bring this concept out into the next chapter. He's going to talk to us about God's word as being living and active, as if being an eternal Word.

But here's the point of this. This Word is living and active because—and B. B. Warfield said this about a hundred years ago. He said, “*God's word, no matter what form it takes, emphorical,*” which means that it's His living voice. So whether it is written, or it's a prophet speaking it, or an apostle writing it, it doesn't matter. It is all the oracle of God. It is the voice of God. And it may be, like it is here, inscripturated or captured in written form. But it is the oracle of God, the voice of God that continues to speak. And because it is the voice of God inscripturated, that means it's not a dead Word. This Word is still a living and active Word.

I once had a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. And after class we got into a dialogue about the nature of Scripture. He said to me, “Look, Jeff. If I put this on the ground and I step on it, have I really done anything to God's word? This word,” he said, “becomes God's word when a person opens his eyes to the fact that it is God's word. And so it's an existential experience that we're talking about when we're talking about this being the word of God. But it's not like this is God's word. You know, it's not like that.”

And I said, Well I totally disagree with you about that.”

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: “I totally disagree with you about that. This is the living voice of God in this inscripturated Word. This is the oracle of God.”

And that's what I'm talking about. I think—and I'm going to show you—that's what I think the author of Hebrews is talking about when he talks about this Word as being the living and active word of God. And that means that this Word speaks into your life today. I'm just telling you up front where I'm going. This Word is a word for you today.

And you get the idea of that when he says, “*Today.*” Now let's think about that.

In order to maintain that, we need to maintain a couple of things. The very first one is that *there is one primary Author to this Word.*

“Spiritual Cardiology”

Now all of us in this room may be thinking, “Why do you need to tell us that? We all believe that.” I see head affirmations and that sort of thing. But I want you to know that that is not affirmed today in the way that it ought to be affirmed.

I’ll tell you just briefly how that works itself out. There’s a book that was published several years ago. And in that book, basically what the teaching was is this: that the analogy for thinking about the way that Scripture is inspired is the Christological analogy.

Now you know what I’m talking about. I’m talking about the Deity of Christ and the humanity of Christ united in the Person of Christ. And this person said this. Well, what you have in terms of an analogy for thinking about the writing of Scripture is just that. There is a human writer and there is a divine Author. And they come together and they produce the Bible.

Now B. B. Warfield years ago heard that. And he said that’s not quite the best analogy that we might use, because there’s no incarnation in this analogy like there is in the actual analogy, or as there is in the actual human and divine becoming one in the Person of Christ, or becoming united in the Person of Christ.

But this person said no; that’s a good analogy. And what you find with the Scriptures is that you find a 50/50 proposition. The human authors bring their contribution and God brings His contribution. And that’s why the nature of Scripture can change. In other words, when we talk about the nature of Scripture, and we talk about it being God’s infallible word and God’s inerrant word and God’s authoritative word, that can change because man’s contribution and God’s contribution have to be worked out. And so that means that God’s word is not without error, because man brings his contribution to it. God does not guide it in such a way that it is an inerrant Word.

And so it is a fallible Word. And so it is an errant Word. And the point is that we would believe, we would embrace that yes, it is a human Word and it is a divine Word. But just like in the Incarnation, where there is the human nature and the divine nature coming together, the divine brings personhood to the union, and so becomes the primary mover in the union.

Well in the same way, it’s not just human and divine where we’ll have to ferret out the parts. No, it is human authors and the divine Author. And the divine Author has the human authors say exactly what He wants them to say. And yet there is freedom and creativity on the part of the human author.

Now how that is the case, that it can be exactly what God wants them to write for us, and they can contribute and have freedom and creativity is in some way a mystery. But it’s a mystery that I’m willing to affirm.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: And I think it’s a mystery that the Biblical authors are willing to affirm.

So there’s one primary Author to this. Now you see this as we unfold this. Notice this. Inspiration is included in all that we’re saying. He assumes that. But in Hebrews 17 Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3 he talks about these things as if all three of them are in fact God’s living word. Go ahead.

Participant: What do you mean by Hebrews 17?

Jeff: Whoops! That should be Exodus 17. Thank you. Sorry.

“Spiritual Cardiology”

Participant: (*Unclear*)

Jeff: It just shows my fallibility. (*Laughter*) All right. There’s another point. *God is speaking*. Now the whole point of saying that God is the primary Author, and that He is the primary Author of Exodus 17 and Psalm 95 and Hebrews chapter 3—all of which are the same text—is that God is speaking.

Now notice how this works itself out. Look at verse 7. “*Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says.*” Isn’t that subtle? He doesn’t say, “just as the Holy Spirit said,” back in Exodus 17 or Psalm 95. He uses the present tense. “*Just as the Holy Spirit says.*” In other words, he’s communicating that this is a living and active voice that continues to speak to you in the church under my hearing, says the Preacher to the Hebrews. But by implication we realize that it’s a word to us. Go ahead.

Participant: So just to illustrate that point, sometimes there’s a danger in the Old Testament Scripture because God is speaking specifically to Israel, taking it out of context and applying it to us. But what you’re saying here really kind of validates that. Even though he was speaking to Israel, there’s still application in my life today, right?

Jeff: Absolutely.

Participant: Our theme verse is Jeremiah 29:11.

Transcriber’s Note: Jeremiah 29:11. “*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD—plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*”

Participant: But the context is Israel.

Jeff: Yes. They are in Babylon, right?

Participant: So I have to be careful that I don’t just twist that. But we can claim that. Is that right?

Jeff: There certainly is application there. For instance, they’re living in Babylon. And what does God say to them? That advice is applicable. I mean, very much so, right? We’re exiles. And Peter talks about exiles in his very first epistle. So I’ve used that idea of Jeremiah 29 and the people of Israel before. This is what you’re to do while you’re in exile. I’ve used that in 1 Peter, absolutely. Anybody else? Okay.

So verse 7. Do you get the idea? And so what it is that we’re bringing the past into the present. And we’re not doing it in a metaphorical way. In other words, he’s not cutely finding some way in which he can make this applicable. What he’s really saying is that this Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, speaks this Word. It’s a living Word. And though it’s actual historical aspect—Meribah and Massah—are past; the Exodus 17 event is in the past, it’s a Word that is a living Word and it speaks to us today. And therefore he translates those words *rebellion* and *the testing* in order to bring the lesson forward, and says that the Holy Spirit says this to you. And so the idea is that it’s a Word that continues to speak to our lives in a way filled with application, not metaphorically but really.

And so he says, “*Today, if you hear His voice.*” It’s not just the *today* of Moses. It’s not just the *today* of the Psalmist. It’s not even just the *today* of the preacher to the Hebrews. But if you’re reading this Word, it is a *today* for you!

But here’s the clincher. And this goes back to verse 6, remember? Verse 6 was the conditional aspect of it, right? “*We are His house if.*” And here is that *if* that comes down

“Spiritual Cardiology”

now into the warning. “If you have heard.” And that drives us again to ask the question. Am I in the house? Do I find myself in the house? Have I heard?

So then that takes us to *the warning*. But I think that we need to get ourselves situated with the fact that this is the word of God. It’s the living word of God. It’s not just living for the Exodus generation, the Psalmist, or the church in the first century, but for us today. The *today* is today.

Let’s talk about *the warning* for a minute. Now there’s a basic assumption. And the reason why I introduce this basic assumption to you is that weeks ago, when we started this series, is that we’re going to pick it up now. We need to see that it’s applied now.

And that basic assumption was this. The Preacher is saying that you are not what you once were. You are something different. In other words, when you look at a person, the first thing you see can’t be their faults if they’re in the church. When you look at a person, the first thing that you see must be the Christ who is in them, because they are not what they once were. Okay?

Now the Westminster Confession 18th 4 on assurance. The believer is “*never utterly destitute of that seed of God and life of faith.*” That’s the idea—never utterly destitute, even when they’re at their lowest point, if they remain in Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: So you see that in verse 12, don’t you? Take care, brethren, even in the midst of a really hard warning, right? “*Today, if you hear His voice.*” You are His house if you hold to the confession of faith. If, if! Now brothers, take care.

You see how that works? I think that’s just a magisterial way of thinking about the church together,—not just the pastor thinking about his people. But I think that’s a magisterial way for us to be thinking about one another.

And we’re all at different places in this walk. Some of us are more ahead and some of us are more behind, and everybody in between. But if we think of one another as brothers,—

Participant: We’re all together.

Jeff: We’re all together in it. And I think that’s crucial, vital.

But the pastor is the spiritual physician. And this is important. This idea of the spiritual physician comes up in a guy by the name of Gregory of Nazianzus in an early work that he wrote called *Oration 2: Flight to Pontus*. It’s actually a longer title than that.

But Gregory of Nazianzus was a really neat figure. He was actually called The Theologian because of the five Christological essays that he wrote. But he actually did not want to become a minister. His father forced him to become a minister in order to help him out. And so what he did was that he fled. He fled to Pontus. And after being there a little while he realized that he really needed to get home.

And when he got home and preached his first sermon, Oration 1, nobody showed up. And so Oration 2 became the reason why he fled. He said, “All right. I apparently need to explain to these people why it was that I fled and didn’t want to take up this job in the first place. So Oration #2 is going to be the reason why I fled.”

“Spiritual Cardiology”

And that becomes a basic important pastoral text in the life of the Christian church. I have every intern I ever get read *Flight to Pontus*, because it is a wonderful book about the nature of the pastorate. Yes, Don?

Don: Would that be Pope Gregory?

Participant: No.

Jeff: No. Pope Gregory actually comes after him and writes a pastoral theology. I can't remember the title of it. But it's in the sixth century, the 500s.

Participant: He's in the 300s.

Jeff: Nazianzus is in the fourth century.

Participant: Right after Nicea.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: He was one of the Niceans; right.

Participant: What's that book called?

Jeff: It's called *Oration 2: Flight to Pontus*. But if you type in Oration 2, you might get one of the Christological essays. So you've got to put *Oration 2: Flight to Pontus*. And it's about 32 or 33 pages. You can get it on the Internet. It's available there.

But in this book he says that what the pastor does is that the pastor is a guy who is like a spiritual physician. And he's got his medical bag. And there are some people that need the hammer and tongs. They need a cautery. You need to really work hard with them. And then there are other people that need the feather. They need to be handled lightly and gently.

And he has this long section in there about how you work with different people in the church, because everybody's different. Everybody is in a different spot.

And here the pastor is the spiritual physician. And he makes the incision at 3:6, doesn't he? He makes the incision—"if you are in the house." And then he continues that incision in verse 12. And I have verse 12 up here. Look at both of those. "*We are His house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting and our hope.*" And then verse 12. "*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart.*" Yes?

Participant: Is that calling into question their salvation, because as those redeemed in Christ, our hearts are changed, right?

Jeff: Absolutely. But I think that what he's doing is that he's not looking at them from the aspect of God's vantage point, from the aspect of "I know." What he's looking at is from the perspective of "I know you as you've confessed Christ. But I also know that the reality is that there are some who have gone out from us who are not of us." This is what he says. "I don't think that way of you, brothers. But I'm realistic enough to know that that is true." So search your hearts, right?—that idea. Does that make sense?

Participant: Yes.

Jeff: Okay. So "*take care, brothers.*" Notice: "*Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart.*"

Now the question—and it kind of follows on the heels of what we just talked about—is how would we know? Well certainly that question is somewhat difficult to answer. But it's not difficult for us to answer. Now it may be difficult for us to answer.

“Spiritual Cardiology”

I’ll never forget. You guys know John Gerstner. It was reported that John Gerstner had several hundred sermons that he preached. But he had really only one sermon. And John Gerstner’s sermon, the point and intent of any of John Gerstner’s sermons, was to get you to realize that you weren’t actually in the kingdom of God. *(Laughter)* You know, that idea? And I can tell that some of you have not heard John Gerstner, because you’re not reacting the way that I expected. *(Laughter)* That might explain it.

But I remember listening to a series of sermons he did on the parable of the ten virgins. I was living in a Northern town at the time. And by the time I got to Grove City, which was about a half hour drive from there, on my way to Pittsburgh I was starting to doubt my salvation.

Participant: Yeah.

Jeff: And by the time I got to Butler to pick up a friend of mine, I was in a teary-eyed mess. *(Laughter)* “What’s the problem with you?”, I thought. “I don’t think I ought to be going to seminary if I’m not sure.” I was starting to waver.

But how do you know? How do you know if you have an evil, unbelieving heart? Well, you know, that question can take up a bunch of our time, and I’m willing for that. But here’s what I would say to you. I would say to you that the very first thing that you should do is to examine yourself before the Lord. Am I harboring, nurturing, cherishing sin in me? And if I am, I need to confess it. And then what I need to do is that I need to mortify it. I need to put it to death.

And that’s the first thing that I do, because if we don’t do that, an evil, unbelieving heart will eventually express itself in disobedience. And though we may hide it for a while, it will eventually emerge.

You know, there are a few girls in the church I pastor. Their father told me one time that they are taken to some quite elite teachers from which they take lessons. And the father told me one time that one of these people told him that you can practice your instrument every day and become proficient at it. But if you miss a day, said this teacher, you’ll know. But if you miss two days of practice, your fellow musicians will know. If you miss three days, then the audience will start to know.

And it’s that same idea. The timetable may be different. But the idea is that if you’re harboring and cherishing and nurturing a sin, only you’re going to know for a while. But those closest to you will begin to know. And then those outermost will also know.

And so the point is that we need to put sin to death in our lives, because if we don’t, it will eventually be known.

Now it may seem like I’m saying to you that we ought not to tell anybody. *(A chuckle.)* No, it really does seem that way. But let me tell you something. This is the interesting thing. I just ask you that question. Let me show you *the remedy*.

What’s the remedy? In this text what’s the remedy? I’ll tell you what we might think. We might think to ourselves that the remedy is Bible reading and meditation on Scripture. We might think that it’s all kinds of spiritual exercises—prayer and fasting and those kinds of things. But isn’t it interesting that he says that it’s family life. He says, “Encourage one another day after day.”

“Spiritual Cardiology”

So if your idea was “I’m harboring this and hiding this. I’m nurturing this, and I’d better put it to death before anybody else finds out”, he would destroy that by saying that, you know, this is one of those scenarios where you can’t go it alone. You need to be in the family of God. You weren’t called individually into the family of God. You were, but immediately upon being called into it, you became part of the family. And as part of that family you need to encourage one another day after day.

Participant: That reminds me of that passage in 1 John. “They went out from us because they weren’t of us, or they would have remained.” So this past year we had several in our community who had fallen into disobedience and had left the community. So the question is how can they be restored? How can they come back to Christ? Are they going to come back? That’s the true test—not how you start, but how you finish. It’s not over till it’s over.

Jeff: Yeah, right. You know, when you think about this, whether the person has been put out of the church or they have put themselves out of the church, there’s a sense in which there’s a difference between full apostasy, which is an excommunication declared by the church, or a partial apostasy. Somebody seems to be backsliding. What’s the difference between the two?

Well let me ask you this. If you met Judas and Peter on the same night, would you be able to tell the difference between who is the partial apostate and who is the full apostate? I don’t think we could.

Participant: Amen.

Jeff: How can you tell? You can tell by repentance. The one repents and the other doesn’t. Do you know what I mean? So it’s what you’re saying, but at the end, right? Yes?

Participant: Maybe on some point you could elaborate on that, because I’ve struggled with that for a long time. I thought Judas did repent. He repented to the point of taking his own life because of what he had done to his Savior. But that’s something for discussion at a different point.

Jeff: I would say this. I would say that the reason he took his own life was that his repentance was not a repentance of turning to faith. His repentance was I’m sorry I did this because my sin is greater than the grace of God. That’s the idea there. So in despair he kills himself, right?

Participant: But isn’t that forgivable?

Jeff: Well I think that in his case when he repents, he did it and doesn’t recognize the grace of God. He’s only got half repentance.

Think about repentance as it’s explained in the Confession. I recognize the odiousness of my sin, and then apprehend the mercy of God revealed in Christ. And then turn to God in repentance. He recognized the odiousness of his sin. But he did not apprehend the mercy of God revealed in Christ. He actually thought that his sin was bigger than the grace of God at that point. So I think that there wasn’t true repentance unto life there.

Participant: There’s a tension I’d like you to touch on. When you look at Esau, he repented and begged and pleaded. Yet God didn’t call him to salvation. And then it also says here to encourage one another. If you’re in sin, encourage one another. Don’t be

“Spiritual Cardiology”

bound in encroachment; there’s hope. Repent and believe. So that’s the encroachment side. So how can we have Esau who was repenting with tears, yet never saw true saving faith when we’re saying here, “Encourage one another’ there’s true saving faith?”

Jeff: You’re going to have to help me with the Esau reference.

Participant: Romans 3.

Second Participant: Hebrews 12.

Jeff: Hebrews 12. Is that where he repents for having sold his birthright for a mess of pottage?

Participant: Yes. And he could not obtain it even though he sought it with tears.

Jeff: I gotcha. Yes. I am going to step out on a limb with this one and say that the repentance unto tears that could not procure the thing that he desired was not what he really desired, because if it was something that he really desired through a repentant heart, he would have obtained it. So I think that we have to say to ourselves that Esau, though he repented, that his repentance had to have in some way mirrored a Judas-like repentance rather than a genuine repentance that apprehends the mercy of God in Christ, or the mercy of God in a Redeemer, because if it had, he would have found it. I think that by inference we would have to say that.

Participant: Contrition.

Jeff: We’ll come back to that, Brian.

Participant: Just a couple things. First of all, you were talking about are we harboring, nursing or cherishing sin within us? And the fact is that every one of us does that, and will do it until we die. We may say, “I cherished, I harbored and I nursed pornography. But I don’t do that anymore. But I worry, as if God’s not in charge.”

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: So it’s ongoing. So when you begin to peel the onion back of human nature, of our nature, you can get rid of the big stuff if you discipline yourself enough. But there’s always going to be a lingering problem. I guess that’s one thing. So in terms of dealing with it, number one, it’s dealt with over the long haul, in the family.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: That’s why the question was asked. Are we talking about your salvation, or not? Thinking of salvation as a one-time event, where you make a commitment to Christ or go forward, or say, “I accept You, Jesus,” is not the final solution. You can say it and still be going to hell, because Jesus said, “*He who endures to the end will be saved.*” This is a lifelong experience. So salvation is not just a one-time event. It’s a lifelong experience. I would say are you still in the race? Are you still abiding in the family? Are you still submitting yourself to the family disciplines? I guess that’s what I’m thinking about. And that’s the only hope that we have. We do not have hope in raising our hands and saying a sinner’s prayer.

I heard it in a sermon on the radio the other day that you know you’re going to heaven because I believe in Christ and I’ve said the prayer. That was the quote.

Second Participant: Oh, my!

“Spiritual Cardiology”

First Participant” That was the quote. And I just said, “Pastor, why are you telling the people this? This is simply not true.” So I’m not interested in your great testimony today. I’m interested in where you are ten years from now.

Jeff: Leave it right there. You will agree, won’t you, that-

Participant: I’m being set up. *(Laughter)*

Jeff: I just wanted to clarify. So I would agree that there’s an engagement with sin all of our lives. But I’m talking about the difference between the harboring, the nurturing and the cherishing of sin versus the engagement of sin and the hating of it.

Participant: Right. Yes, we say that. But the fact of the matter is that if we really hated it, we wouldn’t be doing it.

Jeff: Yes, but—*(Laughter)* It’s the sin that remains, you know? I mean, really. It’s Paul in Romans 7. Why do I do what I do?

Participant: There must be some kind of engagement or attraction to it.

Jeff: Yes.

Participant: I’m not saying to continue. I’m saying submit yourself to the family. Stay in the family, and stay in the family over the long haul. That’s the solution.

Jeff: And I agree with that. Absolutely.

Participant: Don wants to talk.

Jeff: Are you going back? Wait a minute. Don has had his hand up.

Participant: We’ll get to Don.

Jeff: Come on, now! *(Laughter)*

Participant: That’s rough.

Second Participant: That’s all right. I don’t remember what I was going to say. *(Laughter)* Going back to Brian’s comment, when the Lord would speak, He would say, “Repent and believe.” It seems to me that in both of those cases, with Esau and with Judas, there was not faith with the repentance. It may be a physical sort of thing. I feel sorry that I couldn’t get what I wanted, or it didn’t work out the way I wanted it to. But there was no faith. I mean, they did not believe in Christ in the way they were required to.

Jeff: Right. Don, go ahead.

Don: A couple things. I think Jesus was clear about Judas. He called him “*the son of perdition.*” He said that “*it would be better for him if he had never been born.*” So I think that his fate seems to be very clear in that regard. But also, this whole thing of exhorting one another. How does that work itself out practically? Because if you’re struggling with particular sins, there’s always the danger that you might tell someone, and they go, “Oh, Don did this or that!” And then they may reject you. How does exhortation work itself out?

Jeff: Yes. So you ought not to tell just anyone, right? I think that the idea of the family of God is such that you build those relationships with brothers that you really trust. And it’s with those brothers that you share those things that are most intimate.

And there are a couple of churches in our presbytery that get together. And we have what’s called *iron man*, where brothers try to nurture those kinds of relationships among men so that men have a way of sharing those kinds of struggles with one another they have with somebody they trust, because you’re right. That’s not the kind of thing you

“Spiritual Cardiology”

want to share with just anybody, or stand up in a prayer meeting and say, “You know, I’m struggling with” It’s probably not the best way to go. You know, there are people who do that. And once they have come out the other side of the struggle, they’re okay with sharing that and they don’t feel so threatened by it. They share the victory they’ve had and they encourage others. But in the midst of it perhaps somebody wants to be a little more discrete about it and so share it with somebody they trust. I would say that’s basically the way to approach it.

Don: Okay.

Jeff: Yes?

Participant: So in repentance my understanding and my experience is that repentance is having a broken and a contrite heart. So I experienced firsthand having a daughter who had a man who was abusive and yet claimed to be a Christian. He would have tears, but he never, ever stopped. And so contrition is the key to that. And I think that what Ted is saying there, is community. Tim Keller last night in our Bible study said that you cannot have everlasting change apart from community. So the family is the key. It’s community. And are we having authentic community, or is it just a pseudo kind of thing?

Jeff: Yes, absolutely.

Participant: We’re going to have real life change.

Jeff: Yes, absolutely. Well, let me say a couple things. Oh, you had your hand up. Yes?

Participant: Maybe this is over-simplifying it, but would it be fair to say that the difference is between regret and remorse, in the sense that with regret you’re sorry for the consequences. But remorse is that you’re sorry not just for the consequences, but the offense that you caused against the other person. And then you do what is necessary to reconcile them or that situation.

Jeff: Yes. I think that’s a really good distinction. But I think that distinction has to add to it that even though I’m remorseful, I need to add to it that I can be forgiven by the grace that’s revealed, because I may still be remorseful and feel guilty. Repentance may be the added recognizing of grace that’s available to me.

Well let me say a couple of things. I’m just going to pass by this. The encouragement is the *paracoleo*, the calling to one’s side. We are to call one another to our side not because we are so good, but because we stand in Christ. In other words, brother, come and stand with me as I stand in Christ. That’s the idea.

And then we have to ask ourselves, and this is a daily question. Day after day this encouragement takes place. I am called to Christ’s side. I call others to my side as I stand in Christ day by day. And that means that I ask what’s next, right? What’s next for me today? Who do I help today?

Then there’s something else. I want you to catch this; no sleeping! Verse 13. This is the way it’s translated: “*so that none of you will be hardened.*” But it’s a passive verb, which means that it ought to be translated this way: “*lest any of you allow yourselves to be hardened.*” It’s similar, but it gets at the passive verb. And the question then becomes what are you allowing to happen to you, right? We allow things to happen to us all the time. We say, “I would never listen to elevator music, ever!” And then we get into an elevator and we listen to elevator music, right?

“Spiritual Cardiology”

Participant: I love elevator music! *(Laughter)*

Jeff: Yeah, yeah! *(Laughter)* I regret what I just said. *(Laughter)* But you get it. We allow things to happen to us all the time. And what are we allowing to happen to us that’s hardening us? And so we need to be encouraged and to encourage day after day.

Let me just pray and then we’ll exit here.

Participant: Hey, Jeff. As you pray, would you pray for our brother Don Bishop who’s getting married tomorrow?

Jeff: Yes. Oh brother, captivity! I mean marriage! *(Laughter)* Absolutely. Let’s pray. Father in heaven, we are so thankful for this day, and for the reminder that we need to be encouraging one another, and that with Your word, which is a living Word that speaks to our lives today and every day. And Father, we’re thankful for that. We pray that You’ll use Your word to strengthen and encourage us, to cause us to grow in Christ. And Father, we pray today especially for Don Bishop and his bride-to-be. We’re so thankful that this is happening, and for this time of joy in his life and in hers. And we pray that You will bless them not just in the day of the marriage ceremony, but also in the life to come. We pray, Father, according to Your word. You tell us that a man and a woman have a way of sharpening one another and bringing Christ out in one another more richly and fully. And we pray that that happens with Don and his bride. And we pray for Your blessing upon them in every way. We ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Men: Amen. *(Applause)*