

# You Are Partakers If You Hold Fast

**I**t was a nice, sunny Sunday morning. After church a brother and a sister were in the backyard playing together. After a little while, they heard some thrashing in a bush and turned to look to see what was happening. As they turned, they saw their dog, Matt, bounding out of the bush with a rabbit in his mouth. The rabbit was black with white lopped ears and the kids instantly recognized the rabbit. They knew that it belonged to their next door neighbor, Mrs. Klossen. The kids were panicked. The rabbit was dead and they were trying to figure out what to do. So they decided to ask Dad because they knew that he would know how to solve the problem. Dad was always telling them that "Everything is simple. Don't panic. Don't get excited." So they took the dead rabbit to Dad and showed it to him. They asked Dad what to do. He stopped and thought for a little bit, and said, "Take a hose. Hose the rabbit down with water. Take a cloth and wipe him down. Then put the rabbit in Mrs. Klossen's rabbit cage. When Mrs. Klossen comes home, she will just think the rabbit died on its own." So that is what the kids did. They put the rabbit in the cage and everybody went home. Mrs. Klossen arrived a little later that morning from church. Well, it wasn't very long afterward that the family heard some hollering, shrieking, and yelling coming from Mrs. Klossen's house. They ran out to give some comfort to their neighbor. After they arrived at her house, between her sniffles she finally blurted out, "I buried that rabbit three days ago!"

**THE DECEPTION.** The family had deceived Mrs. Klossen. Our study is about deception. We will be talking

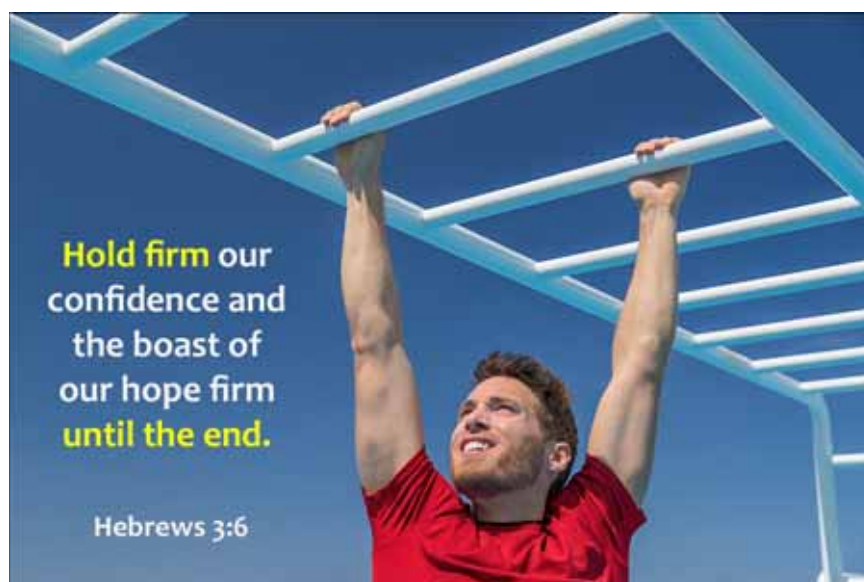
about deceiving ourselves. We begin our study in Hebrews 3:6. Our last study began in Hebrews 3:1. We saw in that study that Hebrews is written to Christians. The author of Hebrews told us that Jesus was greater than Moses. Earlier the author had said that Jesus was greater than the angels, and both statements should have given us a hint there is a problem. We are going to find in Hebrews 3:6 that deception is occurring. So, let's turn to Hebrews 3:6 and dig in and learn something important about these believers. Our first verse reads,

... but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house — whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. Hebrews 3:6 (NASB)

The reference to house in this verse is actually a reference to Christians. It is a reference to the body of Christ, to the church itself. Then the author throws in an interesting comment. He actually gives a warning. The warning is to hang on. Do not let go! They were told, "Whose house we are, if we hold fast." The point is if you are a Christian, you will hang on. Some people have asked the question, is it possible that Christians have to first believe and then also to hang on in order to remain saved? Is hanging on a requirement?

Do Christians have to believe and also hang on? If that was true, then it would mean that salvation is by faith plus hanging on.

To put it another way, is it faith plus doing something else? In other words, is it faith plus works? If so, that is contrary to the teaching of the



rest of the New Testament. It is important to understand that the author of Hebrews is doing the same thing that the apostle Paul did to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 we read,

Paul, called as an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling . . . 1 Corinthians 1:1-2 (NASB)

Notice that in these opening words Paul writes to the Corinthians and calls them saints. We have seen already that saints means holy ones. It is a reference to folks who are Christians. In 2 Corinthians 1:1 we read,

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is at Corinth with all the saints who are throughout Achaia . . . 2 Corinthians 1:1 (NASB)

1 Corinthians is addressed to saints. 2 Corinthians is also addressed to saints. Now look at the last chapter of 2 Corinthians. In verse 5 we are going to be surprised.

Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! 2 Corinthians 13:5 (NASB)

It is extremely interesting what Paul does. He has called them Christians and now he says, "Oh by the way, you need to check yourself out." He says, "Examine yourselves!" That is, some people thought that they were Christians and Paul is warning them that they might not be Christians. You may have deceived yourself. You may not be a Christian. Are you really and truly a Christian? That is what Paul is saying. Paul starts by calling them Christians and ends by questioning whether or not they really are Christians.

Now just as Paul did, the author of Hebrews does the same thing. He calls them Christians in verse one of chapter 3 and then in verse six he says that they may not really be Christians. Did you know that the mark of a real Christian is holding fast? If you hold fast your confidence and the

boast of your hope firm until the end, that is the proof you are a true Christian. In the Greek, there are four classes of "if". There is a first class "if" that affirms a truth. There is a second class "if" that says, if and oh by the way, it is not true. The third class "if" is, if and oh it is possible. And then there is the fourth class "if" that says it is not very likely. The "if" in this verse is the third class, if and it is possible. It is possible that they are not really Christians. It is possible that they are not true believers.

Many people have deceived themselves into thinking that they are Christians. They remember that prayer in which they begged God to forgive their sins. They asked God to take them to heaven, but sadly their lives never really changed. They just added Jesus to their lives and nothing really changed. Oh, maybe they experienced a temporary change, but it did not last. The mark of a real Christian is a changed life.

**ILLUSTRATION OF NOT HOLDING FAST.** Now let's ask, "In what sense does a Christian have to hold fast?" The author of Hebrews gives us an illustration starting with verse 7 through verse 11 that will help us understand the concept of holding fast.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,  
"Today if you hear His voice,  
Do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me,  
As in the day of trial in the wilderness,  
Where your fathers tried Me by testing Me,  
And saw My works for forty years.  
Therefore I was angry with this generation,  
And said, "They always go astray in their heart,  
And they did not know My ways;  
As I swore in My wrath,  
"They shall not enter My rest." Hebrews 3:7-11 (NASB)

In this illustration the author of Hebrews refers to the time the Israelites had left Egypt and were trying to get into the land of Canaan. They were wandering in the wilderness and they had some problems in their relationships with God. We have already talked in recent studies about the fact that Moses was called by God to lead the Israelites from Egypt

into Canaan. Moses met God at a burning bush where God called Moses to take them from one place to another. We have seen that Moses performed ten plagues . . . ten miracles that God performed through Moses and Pharaoh finally released the Israelites. We have seen that the Israelites plundered the Egyptians. They took a great amount of wealth including money and valuables. On the way out as they were leaving the land of Egypt, all of a sudden they noticed that the Egyptian army was chasing them. They became terrified. God was leading them by a pillar of smoke by day, and a pillar of fire by night, and yet they panicked when they saw the Egyptian army. They went to Moses and complained.

In Exodus 14:16 and following, we find that God parts the sea and they were able to escape. The Israelites were worried about their lives. They were worried that the Egyptian army was going to kill them, or at least take them back as slaves. Interestingly enough, even though God had done many miracles for them, they did not trust God. They were worried. They were panicked. What we are going to find is that they will doubt God nine more times. They tested God repeatedly for forty years. Nine more times the Israelites showed their lack of faith and trust in God.

For example, in Exodus 15:22-24, the Israelites revealed their lack of faith in the wilderness by complaining about the bitter water at Marah. Moses went to God and He told Moses to take a special tree and to put it in the water. The water became sweet so that the Israelites could drink.

In Exodus 16:4 on a third occasion, they grumbled in the Wilderness of Sin that there was no food. What did God do? God provided them manna. It was really great what God did. They had complained and wished that they had been able to stay in Egypt. They would have preferred the leeks, onions, and the garlic rather than being in the wilderness.

We find in Exodus 16 that they sinned, rebelled, disobeyed, and had a problem with God on two other occasions related to the manna. On one occasion they tried to hoard the manna. On another occasion they tried to collect manna on the Sabbath. God was upset with them for their disobedience because God had told them only to take what was enough for the day. God had told them not to take any additional manna for the next day or the day after that. On

the day before the Sabbath, they were to take a double portion; but they refused to obey. Maybe they just wanted some more. They were greedy. That is what they were. They were just plain greedy.

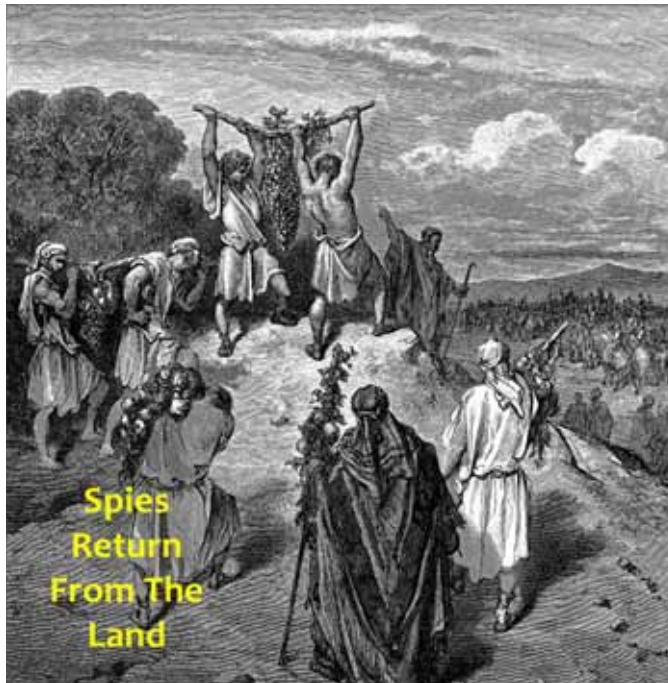
In Exodus 17 at Rephidim, there was no water and they complained. Consequently, Moses went to God, and under God's direction struck a rock three times and water flowed. Then they had the water that they needed. They had a hard time trusting God for the things they needed and for their safety. They had a hard time trusting God for water. They had a hard time trusting God for food. They had a hard time trusting God for just the basics, the necessities of life.

In Exodus 32 when Moses went up on Mt. Sinai, they worried that their leader was up there longer than they thought he should have been. These people were just worried that their leader was taking too long. They wondered where he was. Therefore, they asked Aaron to make them a god, and he made them a golden calf. We know that what followed was not pretty because judgment came upon the people.

In Numbers 11 we find that they complained two more times against God. They complained, complained, and complained. The tenth time they complained occurred in Numbers 13. We will pick up the story there. Numbers 13 chronicles the next time that they struggled with God. What we find in this particular chapter is that the Israelites were near Canaan. They were about ready to enter the land and God allowed them to send some spies to check out the land that was promised to them. Twelve spies went into the land to check it out to find out whether or not it was good enough to inhabit. Did they trust God's promised land? Let's look at verse 25. It says,

*When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong,*

and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan." Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it." But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." 32 So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great size. "There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight." Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. Numbers 13:25 - 14:1 (NASB)



Twelves spies! They check out the land. Ten of them give a bad report and two of them give a good report. The people respond in panic. Verse 2 reports,

All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and 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! Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."Numbers 14:2-4 (NASB)

**WHAT YOUR REACTION TO GOD REVEALS.** Wow, are

you surprised by their lack of faith in God? We think that if we could experience a miracle, we would have great faith. They didn't believe God at all. They were so consumed with their circumstances that they could not trust God. Their circumstances looked impossible to these people.

If we look at Numbers 14:20 we will see how God responded.

So the Lord said, "I have pardoned them according to your word; 21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord. Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have

put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. Numbers 14:25-31 (NASB)

Did you notice in verse 22 what God said? He said they had tested Him ten times.

We have already walked through those 10 tests. One time they complained about no water. Another time they complained that there was no food. On another occasion they complained that they were without a leader. They were disobedient. They were fearful. They were greedy. They wanted and they wanted. Now, they are struggling because they are supposed to go into a land that God had given them, and to which God had been leading them. Now they don't want to go. They do not want to go where God wants them to go. They do not want to go there because their eyes and ears of faith do not trust God. Therefore, they did not want to go. God says, "I have struggled with these people ten times."



We will discover what God does in just a minute. But first I would like you to think about something. The Israelites were consumed with their problems. They were consumed with their anxieties. They were consumed with their fears, and they were consumed with their worries. Do you know what they expected from God? They just expected everything to be really okay. They did not expect that they would have any trouble with food or water. They did not expect to have any problems with anything. They thought that God should just make life really simple and easy for them, because they were Israelites and God was with them. They thought that if God was with them, then life should be wonderful. There shouldn't be any troubles. There shouldn't be any difficulties in life, and they should be able to get whatever they wanted. Life should be easy!

Do you know what they had? They had a heart problem. Then when one problem occurred and another problem came, and another problem came, their hearts were progressively hardened. Their relationships with God were growing colder and colder; their hearts were getting harder and harder. One problem followed another problem. Progressively they were closing their hearts toward God. Their relationships with God were becoming more difficult. So, what was God's response? God's response was that they were not going into the land after all! Look at verse 29,

*... your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey — I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. 'Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer for your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness.'* Numbers 14:29-34 (NASB)

What was their problem? God said, "They go astray in their hearts." They didn't trust God, and their lack of trust in God grew worse. They continued to harden their heart. They did

not trust God and did not trust that God loved them. They were critical of God and God responded. Every time that God responded, He solved a problem in their lives. One would think that they would have learned to trust a God who repeatedly solved their problems. As the cycle continued, their hearts were progressively hardened. Finally, God said you are not going into the land because you are unfaithful. You do not trust me.

**SOLUTION TO A COMPLAINING HEART.** Now turn back to Hebrews 3:12 and we will discover why the author of Hebrews used this negative illustration of the Israelites. In Hebrews 3:12 we read,

*Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. Hebrews 3:12 (NASB)*

The Israelites' complaining revealed the kind of a relationship they had with God. The same is true of us. If you have an unbelieving and evil heart, you end up falling away from the living God. Remember that God does not move away from us. We move away from Him. The relationship with God is not what it should have been. Verse 13 gives us the solution to their problem.

*But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13 (NASB)*

Do you know what the solution to a hardened and unbelieving heart is? The author of Hebrews says in verse 13, "encourage one another." That is, remember what God has done for you! The Israelites should have encouraged one another with God's faithfulness and love, and we today should encourage one another as well. Some of us are going through difficult times. Maybe we are having financial difficulties. Maybe we have difficulties in our relationships with our spouses. We want. We want and we want more. Or maybe we're not satisfied with this or we're not satisfied with that. I don't know what you might be struggling with. But if you will remember the Israelites, remember that they were not happy

about much of anything. They complained about almost everything. It did not matter whether it was food or people. It did not matter what it was. They just complained. They blamed God every time for their problems. That is the result of unbelief. Verse 13 gives us the solution to an unbelieving heart that results in a complaining spirit. The verse tells us what they should have done! They should have encouraged one another!

How can we encourage each other? We can encourage one another through God's word. It is important to notice that the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 7:6 refers to the fact that a church sent Titus to comfort him. The purpose was to encourage him. We can encourage one another. When was the last time you invited somebody from your church over to your home? When was the last time you got together with somebody from the church just for a social time - just to encourage one another? We can encourage one another in the faith. We can encourage one another in our relationship with God by meeting together. We should teach the Word about God's faithfulness to each other.

**NOW HOLD FAST.** Look at Hebrews 10:23,

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful . . . Hebrews 10:23 (NASB)*

Doesn't that sound like holding on? "For he who promised is faithful." And lastly,

*. . . and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds . . . Hebrews 10:24 (NASB)*

He is talking about encouragement.

*. . . not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. Hebrews 10:25 (NASB)*

Some of the ways that we can encourage one another is by meeting together, by talking with one another, by teaching God's word, and by getting together with one another in fellowship and reminding one another of the truths of God's

Word. That is how we can encourage one another.

**ROOT PROBLEM OF A UNBELIEVING HEART.** Now back to Hebrews 3:13.

*But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Hebrews 3:13 (NASB)*

The Greek word translated as hardened has the sense of a horse or an ass that does not want to respond to its rider and, consequently, stiffens its neck and refuses to obey. It has the idea of somebody who refuses to respond and stiffens. It is a heart problem. Notice that it says we are "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Do you know what the root problem of a hard heart is? It is called sin. Sin deceives! The Israelites sinned. They sinned again, again and again. Every time that things did not go the way they wanted, . . . every time that they were unhappy with their life circumstances, they blamed God. They blamed God every time. They blamed God for this, and they blamed God for that. What happened to their hearts each time they complained was that their hearts became harder. Dr. J. Vernon McGee makes a great illustration that I would like to read. Dr. McGee is talking about a man, a broker, who came to his office one day, and here is what he says,

One day he came to my study and said, "I thought I was a Christian. Now I know I am not. I am only a member of a church. But, I have a few intellectual problems with some of the things that you have said. One of them is the story of Jonah. It is impossible for me to believe that a man could live inside a fish for three days and three nights."

I asked him, "Who told you that Jonah lived three days and three nights inside a fish?"

"I have heard preachers say it. Isn't it in the Bible?" the man asked.

"Not in my Bible." So I turned to the Book of Jonah and I showed him what it did say, then I turned to the New Testa-

ment and read what Jesus said about it: "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40)." I said to this broker, "If you are going to have trouble with the resurrection of Jonah, then you will have trouble with the resurrection of Jesus."

"Well," he said, "I didn't know it was like that. That is no problem for me at all now"

"Do you have another intellectual problem?"

"Well, maybe I don't."

I looked him straight in the eye and said, "What *sin* do you have in your life that is keeping you from Christ?"

The man turned red and asked, "Has somebody been telling you about me?"

"No, I just know that your intellectual problem is really a heart problem. There is something in your life that is keeping you from Christ."

The man broke down and started to weep.<sup>1</sup>

The root problem of unfaithfulness is sin.

**SIN, DECEPTIVE AND DECEITFUL.** Unlike Mrs. Klossen, who was deceived by a family, sin deceives us. We become so preoccupied with the things that we do not have. We become preoccupied with the difficulties in our life. We become preoccupied with perhaps a death. We become preoccupied with our financial problems. We become preoccupied with this problem, or that problem, or with why God did not make us different. We cry out, "God, don't you care about my life? God, why don't you care about me? God, don't you really love me?" We struggle in our relationship with God and as we do, our hearts harden. I think that can even happen to Christians because life isn't going the way

we thought it should. We think God should have treated us a little differently. The Israelites sure did. The Israelites are a great example of people who thought that life with God as His chosen people should have been different. Every time they found a pothole in the road, they questioned God's love for them. The things of this life were more important to them. God was supposed to be their servant.

**PARTAKERS IF WE HOLD FAST.** Next in verse 14 the Holy Spirit says,

*For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end . . . Hebrews 3:14 (NASB)*

Here it is again. This statement is a reminder that we can harden our heart. Notice that verse 14 says, "If we hold fast the beginning of our assurance." I remember when I first came to Jesus Christ. I remember that my heart was excited and thrilled with Christ. In the beginning I easily trusted Christ. Did you or have you ever trusted Christ? Do you know what the author of Hebrews is saying?

He is saying that if you really are a Christian, you will hold fast the assurance you had at the beginning when you first came to Jesus Christ. You believed in God. You trusted God. He was your all and all. He was all that you ever wanted. The Israelites started off well too, but they ended up not being able to go into the Promised Land because they continually rejected God. They continually doubted God. Verse 16 says,

*For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses? And with whom was He angry 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 not able to enter because of unbelief. Hebrews 3:16-20 (NASB)*

The warning of the author of Hebrews is that some of these people who called themselves Christians were not really Christians after all. The purpose of the illustration is to demonstrate that a complaining heart reveals a sign of unbelief.

1. J. Vernon McGee. 1 Corinthians through Revelation. Thru The Bible. Thomas Nelson Publishing. 1983. p. 528.

Can I ask you, are you a Christian? What kind of relationship do you have with God? Are you complaining? If you are a believer, maybe you complain? Are you always upset? Maybe you criticize God. I don't know what your relationship with God is like, but it is possible that the reason you are unhappy is that you are not really a believer after all. If you say you are a Christian but you are not really happy, maybe you are not really a believer after all. Maybe you really don't belong to God.

James 2:19 tells us that they went out from us because they weren't of us. In John 8:31, Jesus says

if you have never put your faith in Christ, why have you never put your faith in Christ? Is it because you are blaming God for something? Maybe there has been a family tragedy. Maybe your finances are not what you would like. Maybe there has been a death or an illness. Maybe you feel like God has rejected you. Then may I make a suggestion that it isn't God Who has rejected you; you have rejected Him! You do not trust Him! You have a heart problem. Hardness has set in on your heart. That is really the issue.

Deception! We can excuse ourselves. We can excuse our behavior! We can excuse lots of things; but I would like to suggest that if you are struggling with your relationship



**“... If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine ...” John 8:31 NASB)**

If we continue in His word then we are His. That is, we belong to Him. When we complain, we are like the Israelites. That is a hint that it is possible that you are not really a born again Christian, maybe you have not really put your faith in Jesus Christ.

Maybe you are just deceiving yourself into thinking you are a Christian. Maybe you need to stop and confess your sin to God. I find in my own life that sometimes when I am unhappy, the best solution is to confess that my complaining is a sin. When I am unthankful, I confess that as a sin. Start by confessing your sin. Today, if you an unbeliever,

with God because of circumstances in your life, it is because you have deceived yourself into thinking that God ought to treat you better. The truth is God is more interested in our relationship with Him and not our circumstances. Are you more interested in Him than your circumstances? Your circumstance will either pull you away from God or your circumstance will drive you toward God. The one who is a Christian believes in God initially and with confidence continues believing Him. Christians hold on and continue!