

Remaining Close To Christ

Hebrews 10:26-39

Introduction

Our passage begins with a severe warning; against apostasy—intentional defection.

The warning is difficult to understand apart from the chapter's context and the whole book of Hebrews. In the chapter the author has invited the reader to approach the throne of God (vv. 19-22); advance the people of God (vv.23-25); and now avoid the judgment of God (vv.26-31). We Christians are encouraged to stay strong and persevere (vv.22-25). Our faith in Jesus is the only way to salvation (vv.26-39).

How do we avoid God's judgment? The Hebrew Christians were in grave danger. Many were faced with the temptation of withdrawing from Christ and His Gospel and returning to Judaism. The writer reminds the reader that God under the economy of the Old Covenant punished those who rejected the Law of Moses (vv.26-28); and will punish those who reject the Lamb of God (v. 29). There are those who believe that somehow God will find it in His heart to forgive people apart from the Cross and apart from Christ. The writer of Hebrews leaves no room for doubt; God will punish those who reject Christ (vv.30-31). In order to avoid the judgment of God we must believe and embrace and receive the Son of God; and acknowledge the faithfulness of God in our lives (vv.32-39). Once again the writer urges the reader to remember God's past faithfulness in times of suffering (vv.32-34); and His future faithfulness and care (vv.35-39).

A Warning About Willful Sin (vv.26-27)

Hebrews 10:26 (NKJV) 26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

This is the fourth of five exhortations given in the book of Hebrews.

“We ought to give heed. . .”

“How shall we escape”

“Let us fear”

The warning is against willful sin (deliberate habitual).

Warren Wiersbe: “Careless Christians start to drift through neglect; then they doubt the Word; then they grow dull toward the Word; and the next step is deliberately sinning and despising their spiritual heritage. Note the important facts about this particular sin. It is not one sin committed once; “sin willfully” in v.26 should read “willingly go on sinning.” It is the same continuous tense as in 1 John 3:4-10—“Whosoever continually and habitually sins is not born of God.” So, this passage is not dealing with an “unpardonable sin”; it is talking about an attitude toward the Word that God calls willful rebellion. There were no sacrifices in the OT for deliberate, presumptuous sins (see Ex.21:14; Num. 15:30). Sins of ignorance (Lev.4) and of sudden passion

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were covered; but willful sins merited only punishment” (see *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*; p.705).

Think about the context. The writer has spoken about those who have forsaken the assembly of the saints. Now they forsake the Gospel and Christ. When we abandon fellowship with the Saints we risk abandoning the Savior and His Sacrifice. When we step away from the Saints and the Savior—it is a very short step to sin.

Christians can and do sin.

Sin and disobedience sometimes brings God’s discipline and loss of reward at the judgment seat of Christ.

Does the writer of Hebrews warn believers that their sins will condemn them to hell?

I don’t think so.

What is the passage saying? The warning is to the Hebrew Christian who willingly receives the knowledge of the truth about Jesus and rejects that truth and returns to Judaism as a substitute for the gospel and Christ. The Hebrew Christian who toys with the idea that there is a salvation apart from Christ and His sacrifice has misunderstood Judaism and the Gospel.

Who or what is an apostate? This is the person who moves towards Christ—hears and understands the gospel—is on the verge of saving faith—and then rebels and turns away.

Does it have any application for us? I think the answer is yes. Christians who experience life dominating sin are often tempted to walk away from God and Christ. They simply give in and give up! They don’t believe the presence of God’s Holy Spirit in their lives is sufficient to walk away from their life-style of sin.

27but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

What is left for the person who rejects Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross? There is only the fearful expectation of judgment. **The Christian Jew who abandon’s Christ—has no place to go.**

The expression “fearful expectation” “frightful expectation” (judgment will happen)—is supposed to awaken the profound sense of loss—eternal loss—in hell. The expression “fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries” is the picture of a consuming fire—about to consume the adversaries of Christ or the enemies of Christ.

Unbelief is our enemy. Sin is our enemy. Deception is our enemy. Satan is our enemy.

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He or she may go back to Judaism—but Judaism cannot provide salvation. The Gentile Christian who returns to the world—or some other religion likewise finds himself or herself—on the path marked judgment.

A Willful Rejection Invites Greater Punishment From God (vv.28-31)

28Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Anyone having set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy. . .

Certain crimes invited the death penalty. You couldn't simply go to the Tabernacle and receive absolution. You could not offer a goat or a bull or a ram. The offender was to be stoned to death by the people; as long as guilt was established by two or three witnesses (Deut.17:2-7).

What were some of those sins? Rebellion against God—and a refusal to worship God in true worship. This was called the sin of presumption—or the sin “with a high hand” (Num. 15:30-31). There was no sacrifice—no burnt offering—no grain offering—no peace offering—no sin offering—no trespass offering. Why? Because the offender—the perpetrator—was a rebel against God's revelation—and rejected God's Law—and His Sacrificial System.

What is the argument the author is making? If apostates of Israel's worship—suffered physical death as punishment for their crimes and sins—how much greater punishment should those who reject Christ's sacrifice expect and experience?

29Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

The writer of Hebrews accuses the apostate—the Christ hater and Christ rejector of three crimes.

1. Trampled the Son of God underfoot.
2. Counted as common the Blood of the covenant.
3. Insulted the Spirit of Grace.

How are we to think about this?

How important is Christ's sacrifice for sin? How does God see Christ's sacrifice?

“The Father values His Son; the Son shed His blood; the Spirit applies the merits of the cross to the believer. For us to sin willfully is to sin against the Father and the Son and the Spirit” (Wierbse pp.705-706).

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1. What does it mean to trample the Son of God underfoot? We have an expression in our own culture when someone walks all over someone. It means rejection—contempt.
2. What does it mean to count as common or make common the blood of the covenant? This is the blood of Jesus. This is the sacrifice—the once and for all sacrifice—to call it common was the same as calling it “unclean” (Acts 10:14,15). Counting Christ’s blood as common means to embrace the position—that Christ’s blood—Christ’s death is no greater than the death of any other person! We use the term efficacious—no more efficacious—no greater value. The blood of Jesus (his sacrifice) saves us. It means the covenant—that God has established—in Christ—by His sacrifice—is not real—and does not matter.
3. What does it mean to insult the Spirit of Grace. This is one of the many names of the Holy Spirit. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer? To bring us to Christ. To point people to Christ. To confirm the testimony of Christ. The Holy Spirit—applies the message of grace—the Holy Spirit causes us to be born again. The Holy Spirit convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment. The Holy Spirit brings us to Christ and then justifies us—and sanctifies us. This Spirit is called the Spirit of Grace (Zechariah 12:10). It is by the grace of God that the work of salvation is prepared and accomplished. Homer Kent Jr.; “The action of the Spirit in convicting and regenerating is thus a demonstration of God’s grace to sinners in bringing them to salvation in Christ” (p.206).

Can a blood bought born again Christian—do these things?

Once again can true believers—do such a thing? Or is this a warning—for the make-believer—the poser—the pretender—who entertains the gospel message and then rejects the gospel message and continues to reject that message?

30For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people.”

The writer quotes Deuteronomy 32:35-36; to show that His people (not unbelievers) reaped what they sowed and were judged when they disobeyed willfully.

When we read Deuteronomy 32:35—Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them”. The Hebrew text reads—“To me vengeance and recompense”and also from the Septuagint—“In a day of vengeance I will recompense”.

In Deuteronomy 32:6; “For the Lord will judge His people And have compassion on His servants”

31It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The author cites Psalm 135:4.

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What is the point? No one will escape God's judgment. The people of God will not escape judgment. No one—deserving of God's judgment—will escape—by simply wishing it were not so. What if a person identifies himself or herself—as one of God's people? The Lord will purge those who do not really belong to Him. God will purge the hypocrite. God will purge the rebel. If a Jewish Christian—thought he or she could escape the consequences of apostasy—by simply returning to Judaism—a mere outward connection to Israel—and have no spiritual relationship with the God of Israel—to turn from Christ—to turn from God's Messiah—and hold on to Judaism—was to turn from the living God since God has revealed that Jesus is Lord.

What does it mean to fall into the hands of the living God? It means to come in contact with the ultimate authority—and further resistance—is impossible. A similar phrase occurs in 2 Samuel 24:14 where David chooses to fall into the hand of the Lord—rather than the hand of man—because God's mercies are so great!

But here the reference is to the make-believer—or the apostate.

The living God is fully aware of every deed, of every heart, of every need. The living God will exercise His power and judgment with absolute justice.

Those who truly love the Lord will heed the warning and strengthen and their trust in Christ. Those who do not truly Love the Lord—will ignore the warning—and continue in rebellion.

A Reminder To Those Who Drift And Wander From Faith In Christ (vv.32-39)

32But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings:

What will those who love the Lord do? They will remember. They will remember their salvation—illumination—same word as 6:4—spiritual enlightenment. This is the enlightenment that follows regeneration—salvation—coming to Christ accepting Jesus as the Christ. They endured the struggle—and suffering! These Hebrew Christians apparently suffered severe persecution. Here a great struggle (contest)—a metaphor—where the trials or the sufferings are seen as fighting against them. At times the persecution took the form of antagonism—reproach—afflictions. Accepting Jesus immediately laid on them a burden of attack—from Satan—from their unconverted countrymen.

33partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

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Some have suggested that the spectacle—here means a public display—(theatrizomenoi)—like what occurs with Paul in the theaters in Caesaria and Ephesus. Perhaps it means—to be exposed to public disgrace (think cake shop—floral shop—photography shop).

Sometimes the attack—came directly—by identifying with Christ—and sometimes indirectly by identifying with Christians—who were being persecuted. **Sometimes silence—means—we don't have to suffer. Yet how can we remain silent? To stand up—and stand against evil—sometimes means exposure and ridicule. Remaining faithful in persecution is no easy thing.**

34 for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

Paul speaks of Onesiphorus who brought assistance while Paul was in chains (2 Tim.1:16-18)

“For both with the prisoners you sympathized and accepted with joy the seizure of your possessions, knowing that you have yourselves as a greater and abiding possession.”

Verse 34 gives in reverse order—the sufferings mentioned in verse 33—the mistreatment of those who are faithful to Christ. Sympathy—with Christian friends; personal suffering and the seizure of personal property.

What was the result of this persecution—suffering—trial—confiscation of goods? Joy! Abiding joy—because the new life in Christ—cannot be extinguished by the loss of material things!

How do you explain such an attitude? There is only one reasonable explanation! Jesus. Spiritual reality. Firm faith. They may lose the whole world—but they have Jesus. They have life. They have secured themselves—from the ultimate loss—and this far better than any temporary possessions.

The passage gives us a hint of life—then—suffering—loss—reproaches—afflictions (v.33); imprisonment and the loss of possessions (v.34)—some are killed (chapter 12:4).

35 Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

Your confident faith. The confident faith expressed in suffering and loss. To turn back to Judaism now—means a great loss. Jesus—“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in Heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt.5:12).

Loss of confidence—would mean a loss of conviction about the truth—the truth about Jesus and the Gospel. A loss of confidence would also mean a loss of boldness—in their witness to their persecutors.

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We all need patience in times of stress loss and persecution. Otherwise we are tempted to discouragement, despair, disappointment—abandonment of fellowship.

36For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

Here the word means patient endurance (hupomones)—endurance under pressure—endurance under trial—adverse circumstances—without compromise or defection! Trials are meant to produce—endurance—to do the will of God.

37“For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

38Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

The writer quotes Habakkuk 2:3-4—with a phrase borrowed from Isaiah 26:20—Isaiah “for yet a little while”—perhaps the presence of suffering—perhaps the interim before Jesus comes—the just shall live by faith. Those justified live by faith. Faith is the opposite of apostasy. This is a preview of our next chapter! Faith pleases God. The person who rejects the Gospel and Christ prove their apostasy.

Jesus is coming back. We should be ready. We should not turn our backs in cowardice. This is no time to play the coward. When Habakkuk wrote those words the Chaldeans were ready to invade and destroy Jerusalem. God would eventually judge the Chaldeans—and vindicate Himself and His people. Jesus is the coming one (in the first coming and the second coming).

39But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

Who turns back? We are not of those who draw back to perdition—turn their backs on Christ. Apostates abandon Christ. Christians embrace Christ. There are some on verge of believing—near to believing—who can be pulled away from the shores of the lake of fire!

Conclusion

Real Christians experience saving faith (vv.19-25); and are warned against false faith (vv.26-39).