

Drawing Near or Drawing Back?

by David Guzik

David Guzik's sermon emphasizes the choice between drawing near to God through faith in Jesus or retreating into discouragement and ritualism.

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Scripture: Hebrews 10:4-39

Topics: "Drawing Near to God", "Overcoming Discouragement"

Description

David Guzik emphasizes the choice between drawing near to God or drawing back, as presented in Hebrews chapter 10. He addresses the discouragement faced by early Christians, urging them to embrace the abundant life found in Jesus rather than retreating to a middle ground. Guzik explains that the Old Covenant's sacrifices were merely shadows of the perfect sacrifice of Christ, which provides complete forgiveness and access to God. He encourages believers to draw near with boldness, reminding them that their relationship with Jesus is the key to overcoming discouragement. Ultimately, Guzik calls for a commitment to faith and community, reinforcing that drawing back is not an option for those who believe in Christ.

Transcript

I can't get verse-by-verse teaching out of my blood. So tonight, we're just going to go verse-by-verse through a chapter that I think the Lord laid on my heart to talk about tonight, and it's Hebrews chapter 10. So open up your Bibles there.

Father, we ask, Lord, that you'd speak to our hearts this evening. We thank you for your word and the power of it, and we thank you for your presence with us. We love you, Lord, and we bless you in Jesus' name, amen.

Hebrews chapter 10 tonight, if I could title the theme of what we're going to be speaking about this evening throughout this chapter, I think this chapter offers us a choice. It's either drawing near or drawing back, and both of those thoughts are developed in this chapter. You should understand that the letter to the Hebrews was written to a group of Christians in a very specific circumstance.

It would be interesting to go through tonight and take a look at verse-by-verse throughout the book to show you passages that speak to the condition of the people to whom the writer of the Hebrews is addressing. But I'll just sort of summarize it for you. They were discouraged.

I think the book of Hebrews speaks powerfully to discouraged Christians, not that any of us have ever been in that place, but you probably know some people who have been discouraged in their Christian life at some time or another. Well, that said with the tongue firmly in the cheek, because every one of us deals with discouragement. I know that I deal with it.

Sometimes I deal with great waves, with seeming tsunamis of discouragement that come over me, and I'm sure it's common to many of you at times in your walk with the Lord or in whatever you try to do in serving God. And the book of Hebrews has something very important to say to discouraged Christians. Now, the situation for these Jewish believers was their discouragement in their minds wasn't pushing them to give up on Jesus, but just sort of back away from being such radical Christians.

And they kind of were looking for this vague middle ground between Christianity and Judaism. Well, the writer of the Hebrews insists that the Christian life, that the abundant life that's in Jesus Christ, it's not lived in some vague middle ground. It's lived right out there on the cutting edge with Jesus Christ, and he's going to make the argument for that very compellingly in Hebrews chapter 10, as he does throughout the whole book.

So let's jump into it. Verse one. For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come and not the very image of the things can never, with the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect for then would they not have ceased to be offered for the worshippers once purified would have had no more consciousness of sins.

But in those sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year where it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away since we are parachuting into the middle of a book tonight, the book of Hebrews and the book of Hebrews is one that has a great logical flow, but he's just developing the idea that Christians don't need to put themselves under Old Testament ceremonies and sacrifices. Even these believers who came from Jewish backgrounds, he says, no, don't go back to these ritualistic observances of the law because it says the law having a shadow of the good things to come and not the very image of the things. It's very important for us to understand that the law is for us in many ways a shadow and the substance is found in Jesus Christ.

My son was asking me the other day, and I think the occasion for the question was prompted by something he was learning in a Bible class at school. But he asked me, Dad, how come we don't keep all of the Old Testament law? You know, there's all these things about sacrifices and there's all these things about what you do with lepers and there's all these people that you're supposed to stone. And I said, well, son, there's basically two reasons for that.

First of all, we are not a theocratic nation the way that Israel was. We are not a nation where the laws of God govern our nation in the civil sense, the same way it was in Israel. That's why we don't have the exact same punishments for crimes and such that they had in ancient Israel.

But I said the other reason is just as important. It's because in many ways, the Old Testament laws are the shadow of the coming work of Jesus and the substance is found in Jesus Christ. And once the substance has come, the shadow is unnecessary.

It's fascinating that this picture of the law as a shadow is repeated several times in the New Testament. It's repeated in Colossians chapter two and a couple of chapters before in Hebrews chapter eight. You see, the shadow means that the law communicated the outline, the figure of the fulfillment of Jesus.

But it was not the fulfillment itself. I mean, what can you tell from a shadow? You can tell something, can't you? A shadow is a little distorted. A shadow doesn't give you all the features, but you can tell the outline.

You can get a vague idea of what an image is from a shadow, but you can't get the reality. Friends, I'm not trying to imply at all that shadows are bad things. Sometimes shadows can tell you a lot, but the shadow is not the substance.

And the old covenant and its law, they were not bad, they were not evil. No, not at all. They're only incomplete.

They're only insufficient to bring total cleansing from sin and to save us. You see, the shadow can never make those who approach perfect. Never.

But the substance can in Jesus Christ. And he goes on and he develops the thought there in verse two, he says, for then would they not have ceased to be offered? He's speaking about the sacrifices that the writer of the Hebrews repeats a familiar argument throughout his whole book. It's that the repetition of sacrifice shows its inherent weakness.

You have that leaky faucet at home. It drips and drips and drips and you fix it, don't you? Matter of fact, you fix it all the time. You're fixing it about every month or at least you should be.

Now, what does it tell you about your ability as a home handyman that you have to fix that faucet every month? It tells us that you're not a very good you're not a sufficient home handyman, because if you fixed it right the first time, you wouldn't have to fix it continually. The same principle applies to the atonement of sins. If animal sacrifice had fixed the sin problem, then the animal sacrifices could have ceased to be offered.

But no, they knew that they had to continually offer animal sacrifices, not just the law telling them, but conscience telling them. Notice what it says in verse two, for the worshippers once purged would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices, there was a reminder of sins every years.

Every repeated sacrifice was a reminder of sins. Every slain bull or ram or lamb brought the consciousness of sins to the people again and again. But the work of Jesus on the cross takes away sin.

That's the idea. It doesn't just cover it, it takes it away. See, that's what he says here in verse four, did you notice that? For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

Animal sacrifice under the old covenant could cover sin. As a matter of fact, that's what the ancient Hebrew word for atonement Kofar means. It literally means to cover.

But animal sacrifice could never take away sins. It's a shadow. It's a prefiguring of the finished work of Jesus.

And once the reality has happened at the cross, you can do away with the shadow. You don't need the reality. Excuse me.

You don't need the shadow once the reality has come. Now, he's going to develop in verse five to show us how this is an entirely scriptural idea. Quoting the Old Testament, of course, verse five.

Therefore, when he came into the world, now, when it says when he came into the world, he said, who do you think that he is that it's speaking about there? It's speaking about Jesus. How do you know it's Jesus? Well, because he is capitalized. Well, no, I'm joking around when I say that.

You're aware that in the ancient Greek manuscripts, there wasn't capitalization and ancient Greek manuscripts were written all in one case. They didn't develop uppercase and lowercase until later. Well, context tells you that it's Jesus speaking here.

So it's entirely appropriate for the writer or excuse me, the translator of the New King James Version, which we're studying tonight to capitalize he there because it is a reference to Jesus. By the way, you might call me old fashioned, but I in my own writing, I capitalize pronouns when they refer to God. He is always capitalized.

Him is always capitalized when I refer to God. Some translations don't. Some modern writers don't.

That just doesn't rub me the right way. I mean, I don't not to condemn anybody for that, but it just personally, when I'm talking about he or him and referring to God or to Jesus, I capitalize it. And that's how it's done here, of course, in verse five.

Therefore, when he came into the world, he said. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin, you had no pleasure. Then I said, behold, I have come in the volume of the book.

It is written of me to do your will. Oh, God, this quotation is taken from the Septuagint version of Psalm 40, verses six and eight. By the way, this is why sometimes when you see a verse quoted in the New Testament from the Old Testament and you turn back to the pages of the Old Testament, then you say this doesn't read the same in Psalm 40, verses six, seven and eight as the quotation I find in Hebrews chapter 10.

Why is it different? Well, because the writer to the Hebrews was not quoting from the New King James Version. The writer of the Hebrews was quoting from the ancient Greek version known as the Septuagint. That's the classic ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament.

In any regard, it shows us that prophetically Jesus declared the insufficient character of the Old Covenant and he declared or should I say sacrifice under the Old Covenant and he declared his willingness to offer a perfect sacrifice under the New Covenant. In other words, in Psalm 40, verses six, seven and eight, that's Jesus speaking prophetically. And what does he say? He says sacrifice and offering you did not desire.

Now, it's got it's Jesus speaking to his father saying you didn't want more sacrifice, you didn't want more bowls, more rams, more of those made under the law. That's not going to please you. No, no.

What you wanted is a body that you have prepared for me. What pleased God could only come through Jesus, the incarnate son of God. And when he came, look at it here, verse six, he's developing the idea in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin.

You had no pleasure. Then I said, behold, I have come in the volume of the book. It is written of me to do your will, O God.

I've come to do your will. Jesus's submission to the father is what pleased God. And where did that submission find its ultimate fulfillment at the cross? Even the death at the cross, as the apostle Paul puts it in Philippians, chapter two, this desire to do God's will.

It was shown in the Garden of Gethsemane, right where Jesus had that classic struggle. Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, but not my will, but your will be done. And he grabbed on to that cup, so to speak.

And he totally surrendered himself to the will of God and submitted himself into that death of the cross. And you can see very well how the writer to the Hebrews sees that this is Jesus speaking in Psalm 40, verses six, seven and eight. And he says, behold, I've come in the volume of the book.

It's written to me to do your will, O God. You see, the sacrifice of Jesus was determined before the foundation of the world, correct? Yet it was still an act of his will to submit to the cross at the appointed time. You know, Jesus wasn't a robot, folks.

It wasn't some just preordained, you know, automaton in God's plan. I must suffer. I must die on the cross.

It all worked within that incredibly unfathomable framework of how the eternal plan of God finds itself exercised through the choices and through the will of man. He says it very plainly. Look, verse eight, previously saying sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings and offerings for sin.

You did not desire nor had pleasure in them, which are offered according to the law. Then he said, behold, I've come to do your will, O God. He takes away the first that he may establish the second.

In other words, the first covenant was swept away with all of its animal sacrifices. Not that it was rejected, not that it was counted as an evil thing, but it was a preparatory thing. It was a way to prepare the way for the new covenant.

But once the new has come, you don't need the old anymore. And look at verse 10, by that will, by what will, by the will of Jesus surrendering his will, surrendering it there in the Garden of Gethsemane, surrendering it there on the pavement before Pilate, surrendering it there on Golgotha, where he died on the cross. It says, by that will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Isn't it staggering to consider that our sanctification, our being set apart to God, is founded on the will of Jesus? You will not be sanctified by your mere willpower. No, I'm not saying your will is irrelevant. I'm not saying that your will is uninvolved, but that's not the foundation.

By the will of Jesus, by the offering of Jesus, not by your own offering or your own sacrifices for God. And then if there's any vital words here in verse 10, let me read the whole verse again. By that will, we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

These are the important words of this passage, and the writer to the Hebrews repeats this theme over and over again, once for all. Now, if the sacrifice of Jesus paid for your sin once for all, how much of your sin is left for you to atone for? Two percent? One percent? One one hundredth of a percent? No, none. His is the atoning sacrifice.

Isn't it amazing how we have this tendency to punish ourselves for our sin, to seek some kind of strange form of self-atonement. This impulse has worked its way through the church in many different ways throughout the history of the church. There was a group of Christians in the Middle Ages known as the flagellants.

The flagellants believed that they could draw closer to God and that they could become more right with God by physically abusing their body. And so they would do all sort of weird forms of self-mortification. They would sleep in cold rooms on cold stone floors for days at a time.

What they were most known for was having a whip of cords and striking themselves with it repeatedly until welts and bruises and blood would come forth from their back. And what they were trying to do was atone for their own sin. They would have huge processions down the streets of Europe with hundreds of these people rhythmically walking and chanting and saying prayers and whipping themselves.

And blood would flow in the streets because these people were determined to atone for their own sins. How tragic. How man-centered.

You know, why don't you just go up to Jesus on the cross? Can you see Jesus there hanging on the cross, hanging in all his shame and all his humiliation, bearing our sin, bearing our guilt? Walk up to Jesus, bloodied and bruised on the cross, and look him in the eye and say to him, Well, geez, this is pretty good, but it's not enough. I mean, thanks, but it really doesn't do it all. It's not worth much unless I add my bit to it.

You shrink back. I would never say that to Jesus. I would never look at my Savior dying on the cross for me and say, well, you could have done more.

He couldn't have done more because he did it all once for all. And so he's building on this theme in verse 11. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

You know, the priests had to stand continually in their work. If you go into the book of Exodus, you'll find elaborate instructions for the building of the tabernacle, this tent of meeting where the people of God were to come and meet with God and where the priests were to serve in their capacity as those who would make atonement for the nation by sacrificing animals. And God gives a whole set of elaborate instructions for the building of the tabernacle.

You know how to build the altar, how to build the tent, how to build the courtyard, how to build the ramp that goes up to the altar, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. You know what? There's never a single instruction for the building of a chair. No place to sit in the Old Testament service, no place to sit at the tabernacle, no place to sit at the temple.

You know why? Because God wanted to reinforce the idea. You're on duty, mister. Your work is not done.

There is no sitting down for the priests. And that's why he says in verse 11, every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifice. They can never take away sins.

But isn't it glorious looking there in verse 20, excuse me, verse 12. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God. Isn't that dramatic? There's all these priests, thousands of years of Israel's history, never a place for them to sit.

Why? Because they have to do the work. The priest could never sit down. But when Jesus finished his work on the cross, what did he do? He ascended into heaven and he sat down at the right hand of God, having finished his work of sacrificing for sin.

Might I remind you that the seated posture of Jesus in heaven is important. It shows us that his work is finished. He does not need to stand ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices the way that the priests under the old covenant had to.

No, Jesus still ministers in heaven, doesn't he? Why is Jesus lazy in heaven? He's sitting at the right hand of God, the father. Is he reclining in a lazy boy recliner? I think not. No.

What is his ministry now? Interceding for the saints. He is praying for us. It's a ministry of intercession for his people.

But that ministry flows from his completed work. So he can adopt a posture of rest. He can practice that ministry of intercession seated at the right hand of God, the father.

And therefore, it says in verse 12, let's read verse 12 again. But this man, after he has offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God from that time waiting until his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering, he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

And the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us for after he had said before, this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their hearts and in their minds. I will write them.

And he adds their sins and their lawless deeds. I will remember no more. Now, where there is a remission of these, there's no longer an offering for sins.

You see, this is the covenant. This passage quoted from the book of Jeremiah, the writer of the Hebrews, makes note of the promises of the new covenant instituted by the Messiah. Look at it there in verse 18.

What's the character of this new covenant? Well, first of all, it says this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days. That's one of the most important principles of the new covenant. It's new.

It'll come after those days from the time of Jeremiah. It was yet future. The new covenant is new.

I know I risk going off on a digression right now, but there's a lot of theological arrogance, smacks of superiority. Of those who, for some reason, think that the new covenant isn't new. They think that the standing of believers in the Old Testament was exactly the same as believers in the New Testament.

That there's no difference between God's dealing with Israel in the Old Testament and God's dealing with the church today. They'll use phrases like this. Israel is the church in the Old Testament and the church is Israel in the New Testament.

I find that absolutely staggering that somebody would come and so blatantly contradict what is so clearly written here in the book of Hebrews. Just the fundamental truth that the new covenant is new. It's new.

If it's not new, then why are you calling it the new covenant? Now, I do think it is important that we recognize a great continuity between the people of God in all ages. And I don't mean to apply for a second that believers in the Old Testament were somehow saved by works. No, they were saved by grace

through faith, but they were saved by trusting in what the Messiah would do.

We are saved by trusting in what the Messiah has done. Friends, I'll lay all my chips on this marker. Is that a godly kind of reference for a preacher to use? I don't know why.

Who knows why that came to mind right now, but I don't know. I'll bet all my money on this one, whatever you want to say. There's something new about the new covenant.

It's new. There's something different about the standing of the believer under the new covenant and the standing of the believer under the old covenant. Look at what he says will happen here under the new covenant.

Verse 16. This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord. I will put my laws into their hearts.

The new covenant has to do with inner transformation. God changes the heart of man and he writes his law into their hearts. So, therefore, if a person has entered into this new covenant with God, if they have received the terms of the new covenant, if they are born again, you should expect to see an inner transformation.

I don't think I'm going out on a limb for saying this. That's what the new covenant's about. Next, notice it.

He says, verse 17, their sins and their lawless deeds, I will remember no more. I love that because it isn't saying that God can't remember them in the way that we can't remember things. No, it means that God chooses to forget our sins.

And there's quite a difference between the two, isn't there? Between something that you can't remember just because of the frailty of the human condition. And that thing that you choose to forget, the new covenant offers complete forgiveness. And the forgiveness is so complete that God can say that he doesn't even remember our sins in light of the new covenant.

Doesn't this remind us that in no way is the believer on probation before God? You know, you're a guilty criminal going before the judge and the judge says, well, you're forgiven of this crime. Matter of fact, we're going to wipe it all from the records. And so you go home and you say, well, I guess I'm still on house probation.

I can't leave the house. How strange that would seem, right? You'd say, no, there's not even a record of it back at City Hall. I mean, your records have been wiped clean.

It's all been expunged. Well, no, no. I'll consider myself under probation.

Well, God doesn't consider you under probation. And so he says, verse 18. Now, where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering of sin where sins are really forgiven and forgotten.

There is no longer an offering of sin. You don't need one anymore, right? Because the price has been paid. Now.

The first word of verse 19 is therefore. And this should remind us that the writer of Hebrews is going to do what he commonly does throughout the book is state a position and then talk about the practical implications of it to our life. So he's very carefully developed and I think rather persuasively developed the

idea of the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf of the perfect sacrifice, the all sufficient sacrifice of Jesus for you and I. Now, knowing this, how should it affect our life or our walk with God? We'll look at it here.

Verse 19. Therefore, brethren. Having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which he consecrated for us through the veil that is his flesh and having a high priest over the house of God.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. What does he say? Starting back at verse 19. Therefore, brethren.

Having boldness. You see, the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. Gives us boldness in our approach to God.

It's as if the right of the Hebrew saying, look at what he's done for you. Look at the way he's paid for you to go to God, the father. Now you go and you go in there boldly.

We must take advantage of this access and we must take it with boldness. Now, when he says. There in verse 19.

Having boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus. He's not speaking of a geographical place. He's speaking about a place of spiritual intimacy with God.

Of richness of experience in spiritual relationship. Now, he's building on the idea of a geographical place. What would a first century Jew associate with that term entering the holiest? Well, he would associate it with the temple ritual.

The temple had a the temple was all about walls. All about barriers. There was an outer court.

That restricted Gentiles from coming in. And there was another court that restricted women from coming in. Then there was another court which restricted everybody who was not a priest from coming in.

Then there was the temple itself. Which could only be entered by certain priests at certain times. And then within the temple, there was another place behind the veil.

The holiest of all. Which only one man, the high priest of Israel, could enter into once a year. Are you familiar with some of the rituals there on the day of atonement? The high priest would go in with the blood of a sacrificed animal and go through the veil.

And he would first make atonement for his own sins. Then he would make atonement for the sins of the nation by sprinkling that sacrificial blood. Sacrificed on the day of atonement there in the holy place.

Around the fringes of the garments of the priests. There were little bells on the on the hem of his garment around. And there would even be a little rope tied to his ankle and extending outside of the holiest place.

Why would he need little bells on his garments? Was this just to make nice little music while he was in there? Why would he need the rope around his foot? Was this the latest fashion craze among ancient Israelis? No, not at all. Let me ask the question the other way. Did the high priest enter the holy place? He could only enter in there for really a few moments once a year.

Did he enter in there with boldness? No. Because the bells around the hem of his garment. The rope around his foot was in case God struck him dead in the holiest place.

Now, how would you like that? You know, you can go in here. You can go into this room. Well, hold on.

Put these bells on. Oh, OK. Tie this rope around your foot.

Well, why am I doing this? Well, because God might strike you dead when you're in there. And if he does, we're not going in there after you. We need to be able to drag out your dead carcass.

You know, and not get one of us killed in the process. Oh, OK. Can you see the shaking hands of the priest as he holds the basin full of blood? Can you hear the tremor in his voice as he pronounces those sacred prayers behind the veil? Friends, even the one man who once a year could enter the holiest, he couldn't enter it with boldness.

But now the writer of Hebrews says that Jesus has made the way for you and I to come into the presence of God with boldness. If we entered like an Old Testament high priest did with the blood of animals, we couldn't have boldness. But because, and look at how he says it there in verse 20, because of a new and living way which he consecrated for us, then we can enter in with boldness.

He even says in verse 20, through the veil that is his flesh. It's as if the writer of Hebrews is building this picture, which the veil, which separated the holy place from the holiest place. He's saying, well, Jesus is like that veil.

And just as much as that veil was torn in two on the day that Jesus died on the cross. You're aware of that, aren't you? It's one of the things that happened on the day of the crucifixion of Jesus, that the veil in the temple. And when you think of a veil, don't think of a light, you know, sort of chiffon kind of fabric thing.

This was several inches thick fabric and it was torn into beautifully, the Bible tells us, from top to bottom. In other words, it wasn't torn in two from man ripping it up to heaven. No, but from God, from heaven down, rending that veil, saying, come on in.

The way is open now. And the writer of Hebrews saying, well, that's like the body of Jesus torn in two so that we can come into the presence of God. It's just as Jesus's body was torn, so was the veil, indicating that now we can come to God boldly because why? Verse 21.

And having a high priest over the house of God. Verse 22. Let us draw near.

We've got perfect cleansing available to us, but we've got the outer man and the inner man. That's what he says there in verse 22. Let us draw near with full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled.

That's the inner work from an evil conscious and our bodies washed with pure water. There's an inner work of cleansing and an outer work of cleansing. But the whole idea is that it enables us to draw near with full assurance of faith.

Now, friends, if this is exciting for us and I don't know about you, but it's very exciting for me. Can you imagine how thrilling it would be? For a Christian from a Jewish background in the first century, so many issues have been settled for them. The problem of access to God has been settled.

The problem of a perfect high priest has been settled. The problem of moral and spiritual pollution has been settled. So now what do you do? You do what it says in verse 22.

You draw near. Isn't that dramatic there in verse 22? Now, let us draw near. Now, I will give you a very fundamental principle.

A biblical interpretation. It's like God does not say things unnecessarily. The exhortation to draw near was given because it was needed.

And why was it needed? Because these Christians were discouraged and because they were discouraged in their walk with God, they had a problem in drawing near. Now, I wonder if you were to survey them. You take this group of discouraged Christians of a Jewish background there that first read this letter written to the Hebrew Christians.

If you were to survey them and ask them, what's the real problem in your life? How many of them do you think would say, well, the real problem in life is I'm not drawing near to Jesus. No, they wouldn't say that. What would they say? The real problem is my life is I've got a boss who is stressing me out and I can't take any more of it.

The real problem in my life is the kids at home, they're driving me crazy. Now, the real problem in my life is this temptation that I can't shake free from. And I find myself getting into this sin again and again.

Now, the real problem in my life is this and this and this, you see. But so often we don't get the real problem, what it really is. The real problem with these Christians was that they were distant from an intimate relation with Jesus Christ and nothing else was going right.

Why are the Hebrews diagnosed with this situation? Because you know what your real problem is? You aren't near to Jesus. So let us draw near. Oh, they would list all the problems.

We have persecution, we have difficult relationships, we've got hard times in the culture, hard times in the economy. But the real problem was that their relationship with God was not on track. They didn't draw near to God on the basis of what Jesus had done.

I got a call several weeks ago from a fellow and he was telling me how troubled his marriage was and how he just couldn't take it anymore and how he just had to get out. That just was going to be the right thing for him to do. And so I was just having a hard time with that that night.

And so I spoke to him on the phone and I said, well, you know, I remember reading years ago about a Christian in Russia, the old Soviet Union, who was arrested for the crime of being a Christian and thrown into the most horrible Siberian prison that you can imagine. And the Siberian prison wasn't just a cell. It was a prison slash work camp.

And so, yes, you went back to the most dreary, horrible barracks each night and ate the worst kind of food. But all day long, you had to work in the most wretched kind of weather, doing the most horrible kind of work under the worst kind of psychological torture that you could imagine from your captors, not to mention the fellow prisoners who hated you because you were there as a Christian. But most everybody else there was there because they were a psychopath.

And this guy was able to keep a joy in the Lord and a vibrant Christian relationship and testimony through it all. I'm explaining it to this fellow. I go now maybe playing the Colombo routine here.

You know, now there's just one thing I don't understand. Do you really think that your problems are worse than his? No. No.

Well, then what is it in your situation that makes you say, I'm giving up? I can't. My wife isn't nice to me. I'm giving up.

And this blessed saint of God. Is undergoing the most wretched things in life, the things that truly make a man or a woman say, I can't take anymore, I give up and he's hanging in there. And not just hanging in there, not just surviving, but his inner life with Jesus Christ is flowering.

What's the difference? Well, as I explained it to him and as he agreed with. The difference was that man had an inner relationship with Jesus Christ that this man did not have. It's not all that complicated, is it? When you are near to Jesus, what can't you handle? I mean, when it's you and Jesus side by side, what pressure is too much? All those things in your life that you just feel like I can't take it anymore near to Jesus, what can't you handle? And so do you really see that the problem is that we have to draw near.

Now, let me say another thing here about drawing near to Jesus is this speaks of Christian experience with Jesus. This is very much on my heart and I plan to speak of it on a Sunday morning soon. And.

The whole idea of how. Christian knowledge is not enough. It must be coupled with Christian experience.

Now, the two are not against each other. Might I say as well, Christian experience is not enough. It needs Christian knowledge as well.

But honestly, if you were to look at your life. Or this congregation. Would you say that you are better at Christian knowledge or Christian experience? Drawing near is an experiential thing.

It's an experience of fellowship and relationship with Jesus. That's drawing near. Now, when you do look at the resource you have, verse 23, let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who promised is faithful.

Well, that's kind of the attitude that you have in your life when you're near to Jesus, isn't it? I mean, it's like, man, I'm sticking with him. I'm not going to waver. It's me and Jesus together.

He who promised is faithful. You see, discouragement was making them waver from the truth, but a renewed confidence in the greatness of Jesus and in the new covenant on their behalf. Well, it's going to make them stand strong in the faith.

And why do they stand strong? Well, because they're so good. No. You see that in verse 20.

Why do they stand strong? Because he who promised is faithful. You're not going to get very far trusting in your own faithfulness. But trusting in God's faithfulness, that'll take you a long way.

And then he goes on, verse 24. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another and so much more as you see the day approaching. You see, this this spell of discouragement made them avoid community at the very time they needed it most.

Can you see these discouraged Hebrew Christians and they're discouraged? They're down in their Christian life. And when you're discouraged and down like that, what do you need most? You need to be in the company of other believers. You you are a coal growing cold.

And what do you need to do? Do you need to get further away from the pile of burning coals? No, you need to get right there in the mix with it. But isn't it funny when you're in that discouragement? What do you feel like doing? You feel like isolating yourself all the more. Isn't that funny? Isn't that just the total strategy of Satan? Here's the discouraged Christian.

I'm going to kick him away from the body of Christ even further. Well, discouragement made them avoid community at the very time they needed it most. But no, Jesus meets us in one another to do what? Consider one another in order to stir up love and good works.

So get together assembling ourselves together. And then he goes on. Because and not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, you know, forsaking fellowship is a sure way to give in to discouragement.

Discouragement festers where God's people are not exhorting one another. So he says, listen, get. It's almost like he's, you know, kicking him in the rear end.

Right. Get up, get going and get in there and go exhort somebody. It's fascinating.

That many people find their motivation in going to church. As to whether or not they feel they need it at the time. For whatever reason, you feel like, well, I don't need it today.

I don't need it and I'm doing pretty good. I don't need it. But our motivation for fellowship.

Is not based on personal need. I'd say that's third on the list. Number one, it's to obey God.

Number two, it's to give to others. And number three, it's because it's good for you. Well, I mean, look at it there.

He says, let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another. And so much more as you see the day approaching.

You see, we can go to church looking to encourage someone who needs to hang in there against a tide of discouragement. You know, sitting around you tonight might be that person in there. They're going under that tsunami of discouragement.

It's crashing down upon them in their life right now. Well, how do I know? Well, part of it is, is you just open your eyes. Sometimes it's not very hard to tell, is it? That person with the hang dog look, the stooped shoulders, just kind of wanting to isolate themselves.

You know, that could be them. But then again, you know as well that we oftentimes know how to hide the discouragement and put on the good churchy smile. And you know, everything's fine.

Yeah, you know, we know how to do that as well. So maybe you ask the Holy Spirit, Lord, will lead me to that discouraged brother or sister who needs to just be just encouraged in you today. You allow the Holy Spirit to lead you as well.

Verse 26. For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. But a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries.

Anyone who's rejected Moses's law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses of 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's been sanctified a common thing and insulted the spirit of grace? For we know him who said vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. And again, the Lord will judge his people.

It is a fearful hand thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Well, what is it that he speaks about here in verse 26 to sin willfully? I think he defines it in verse 29. The willful sin that he speaks about there in verse 26 is of those who have, well, trampled the son of God underfoot and counted the blood of the covenant by which he sanctified a common thing and insulted the spirit of grace.

I believe that this deliberate sin that he speaks of is a knowing, deliberate rejection of Jesus's great work for us on the cross. Now, friends, it's a it's a worthy discussion to debate sometime or another. You know, can a person lose their salvation and so forth and so on? But I want you to know that I don't really think that that subject is germane to what the right of the Hebrews is speaking of here.

What he's speaking of here is whether or not there's any salvation outside of Jesus. If you reject Jesus and his sacrifice, is there any other way you could be saved? No, it's certain you're going to be condemned, period. You cannot reject Jesus's work for you on the cross and expect to find salvation any other way.

And friends, might I say that this was particularly relevant for these first century Christians from a Jewish background because their Jewish friends and relatives were telling them that they could still find salvation within the Jewish rituals. What the right of the Hebrews to say, no, there is not some safe middle ground that you can retreat to somewhere in between Judaism and Christianity, not distinctively Christian, but not extra, extra Jewish sort of this. They know that the salvation isn't found in the middle ground.

If you reject what Jesus did for you on the cross, there's no other way to be saved. You see, if you sin willfully by rejecting Jesus's work on the cross, then it's as if you've trampled the son of God underfoot. You've disgraced him by rejecting his greatest work.

You devalue him by devaluing what he did. And so the line there is very meaningful in verse 26, where he says there no longer remains the sacrifice for sins. There is one sacrifice, the finished work of Jesus on the cross.

If Jesus's sacrifice for sin is rejected, there remains no other sacrifice that can cleanse, period. Verse 32. But recall the former days.

In which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings. Partly while you were made a spectacle, both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated. For you had compassion on me and my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

Now, the writer of the Hebrews is speaking to these discouraged Christians. And he's trying to encourage them. You know, he's kind of like the football coach at halftime.

It's been a tough first half. He's saying, I've got to encourage these guys. So what am I going to do? Well, first, he's laid it all out about what Jesus did on the cross for us.

About the finished work of Jesus, about all that it means. And that really should be enough, right? That should be plenty sufficient. But you know, God just loves to pile riches upon riches.

He says, I'll give you another reason to not be discouraged. He says, recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings. Listen, do you remember all the persecution that you faced when you first came to Jesus? And you can imagine these first century Christians from a Jewish background.

Boy, did they get it from their family and friends when they came to Jesus, right? Boy, they were rejected. They were turned out. They might have been in situations counted as dead from their families.

Yet, it was a struggle with great sufferings. Notice how he talks about this persecution here. Verse 33.

You were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations. Well, people would laugh at them as they walked down the street. And you became companions of those who were so treated.

There's a Christian being persecuted. And you'd go and you'd put yourself beside them. You'd say, I'm this person's friend.

If you're going to persecute them, persecute me with them because I'm a Christian, too. And he takes a look at them. He says, do you remember how tough you stood for Jesus in those early days? Stand tough now.

Isn't it encouraging for us to remember that we have stood for God in tough times before? Well, you have. That trial you're going through right now. What, is that the first trial you've ever been through in your Christian life? It is not, is it? No, there's been many trials.

And you've weathered many of them, haven't you? Oh, I'm not saying that you've weathered them all. Some of them you have faltered under. But you've come back.

I mean, you're here right now. You want Jesus. You want more of him.

And you've stood very tough for him in the past. God bless you for that. Well, can't you remember that right now? This is not unfamiliar ground for you.

You've had victory over other sin before. You can have victory over sin now. You've weathered that discouragement, that gossip, that slander against you.

You've done it in the past. You can do it now. You've trusted God when you had no idea what God was doing or where he was going.

You did it in the past. Well, you can do it now. God's still the same.

And then he says, why don't you draw on this past experience and gain some strength to endure for the future? That's where he's going in verse 35. He says, Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. You have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

For yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now, the just shall live by faith. But if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

We are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. You discouraged Christians. You're in danger of casting away your confidence in Jesus.

You're kind of shaken, aren't you? You're a little shaken because this trial is different. You've had ones that have been similar, but there's something about this one that's different. It's more prolonged than ones in the past.

Or maybe it seems more severe. Or it just comes at you from a different direction. Well, you're in danger of casting away your confidence in Jesus.

Oh, you'd never say that. I mean, after all, this is church, right? You don't talk like that. But somewhere back in your mind, somewhere in your heart, you're in danger of casting away your confidence in Jesus.

Well, what do you need? You have need of endurance. Why? Well, he says, look at it again. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

You know, sometimes you'll do the will of God, and the reception of the promise is a long way off. So what's going to sustain you between the time when you've done the will of God and the time when you receive the promise? What's in that gap there? Endurance. Well, that's what you have need of.

And that endurance is built through trials, the testing of our faith. So here's the promise. For yet a little while, and he who's coming will come and will not tarry.

Now the just shall live by faith. Those are the footsteps we need to walk in. We need to follow the footsteps of the just who will live by faith and endure to see the promise fulfilled.

Do you know where he's quoting from when he gives that passage there at the end of Hebrews chapter 10? The book of Habakkuk, chapter 2, verse 4, where Habakkuk says the just will live by faith. Now again, a very basic principle of biblical interpretation. God doesn't waste words.

So when that passage, the just will live by faith, when it's repeated three times in the New Testament, there's something significant there, isn't it? Romans chapter 1, Galatians chapter 3, and Hebrews chapter 10. Each one of those quotes this passage, the just will live by faith. It's fascinating that each one of them, a different aspect of that quotation is emphasized.

In Romans chapter 1, Paul's emphasis is on faith. The just will live by faith. In Galatians chapter 3, Paul quotes the passage and the emphasis is on just.

The just will live by faith. But here in Hebrews chapter 10, what's the emphasis? It's on live. The just shall live by faith.

That's where your life is. That's where your encouragement is. It's in this faith relationship, this relationship of faith and trust in Jesus.

And that's why he wraps it all up this way in verse 39. But we're not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul. Do you know what perdition is? Destruction.

All right, so here's your Christian life. And might I say that this is a rule for every Christian. I don't care if you came to Jesus yesterday or if you've been a Christian for 50 years.

Here you are on the road of your Christian life. Behind you is destruction. Period.

There's no going back. That's why you cannot be of those who draw back to destruction. No, not at all.

I guess that leaves us with our question that we talked about at the beginning. Compare verse 39 with verse 22. Let us draw near in verse 22.

Verse 39. We are not of those who draw back. So which way are you drawing in your life? You're drawing back.

You're drawing near. Now, discouragement by its very nature makes you want to draw back, doesn't it? We cannot allow it. No, we will draw near.

We will draw near to Jesus. We will long for a closer experience with him than ever. We will seek him diligently.

We will extend ourselves. We will stretch ourselves out to draw near to him, to seek his face. We will do it all the more when we are discouraged, knowing that the devil wants us to do just the opposite.

I trust that this is an encouraging word. For some Christian who has battled either now or in the past or sometime in the future with discouragement, let us draw near. And let us agree that drawing back is not an option for us.

Because what's behind us? Destruction. In front of us is Jesus. Lord God, that's our prayer tonight.

We need you to write this with an extra heavy pen on our hearts. We cannot forget these principles, Lord. We need them to be our experience, not just our ideas.

So work these things in us and through us. Thank you for the beauty and the power of your word. And Lord God, tonight, we thank you for the finished work of Jesus on our behalf.

We praise you and thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

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