

Hebrews - Part 4

by Richard Owen Roberts

The sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining a deep spirit of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ in order to avoid willful sinning and to maintain a healthy relationship with God.

Duration: 1:20:52

Scripture: Hebrews 10:26

Topics: "Perseverance Of Faith", "Assurance Of Salvation"

Description

This sermon delves into the warning passages in Hebrews, exploring reasons why people drift away, harden their hearts, become dull of hearing, willfully sin, and resist God's discipline. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining a high level of gratitude for Christ's sacrifice to avoid falling into willful sin. The urgency of enduring, holding fast to faith, and looking forward to Christ's return is highlighted, along with the need for ongoing faith and assurance of salvation.

Transcript

As we have become aware, we are dealing with these warning passages in Hebrew. I've chosen to work from a list of six, and I've already explained that it doesn't matter quite how the divisions occur. Here is the essential thing that we need to begin with tonight.

Ask this question. Why is it, according to the first warning, that some people drift away? Why is it, according to the second warning, that some people harden their hearts? Why is it, according to the third warning, that some become dull of hearing and sluggish? Why is it, according to the warning that we're looking at tonight, that some people willfully sin and shrink back? Why is it, according to the warning that we're scheduled to speak about tomorrow night, that some resist the discipline of the Lord? Why is it, according to the sixth warning, that some people refuse him who is speaking from heaven? I believe there's a common reason why these things occur. When you don't hold at the high level of gratitude and appreciation what Christ has done, then you run the terrible danger of violating God, violating any or perhaps all of these six warnings.

The combination of the truth itself, the way the epistle is constructed, helps to bring that to the forefront of our thinking. These passages, as has been explained, are warnings mingled with these incredibly wonderful doctrinal truths elevating Christ above all others. You are never in greater danger of violating God when you have some in tune of spirit, of murmuring and complaining.

Whenever there is any lack of gratitude in your heart, your danger increases dramatically. Well, it is my intention on Sunday night to give you twelve ways by which you can move on perpetually with Christ, clear until the end. A word of encouragement now, I believe, is appropriate.

Keep the level of gratitude high in your life. Feel increasingly your indebtedness to Christ for the wonder of his salvation, and you'll not be moved in the direction of falling away from him. Now the warning that we have before us tonight is unusually severe, and there is the danger of our reacting in a fashion to the warning that is extreme, for the warning is concerning willful sinning.

Is there anyone here who has not willfully sinned? If all willful sinning results in eternal condemnation, who would there be who had any hope at all? While it is not a major theme in scripture, there is the theme of overmuch sorrow. There is a time for weeping, and there is a time for laughter. There is a time for conviction of sin, and there's a time for thanksgiving that you have been redeemed from sin by the blood of Christ.

So I'm merely wanting to give a caution. Don't try to talk yourself out of the kingdom, or to think yourself into a mood of blackness. If we pay close attention to this fourth warning, we will see that indeed it is a very real warning, but it is not intended to bring each of us to the very verge of defeat, and to sweep out from under us all hope.

That most certainly is not the case. So we're looking tonight at Hebrews chapter 10. We have read the chapter in its entirety, which of course is most appropriate, but the warning itself is basically between verses 19 and 39.

So that's the portion that we will be focusing upon this evening. But it seemed to me appropriate to step outside of the realm of Hebrews for a moment or two, and just give you a word of encouragement and a suggestion of hope. Over a period of several years, I have heard from a variety of sources that the likelihood of the next great revival in America occurring in our prison was very strong.

Can you imagine that? A revival of true religion beginning not in our churches, but in our prisons. As I said, I've heard that mentioned a number of times. I had no basis on which to evaluate that.

Until March of this year, I had become acquainted with a man born in the Philippines who works for a ministry that some of you are acquainted with, a youth ministry, the Awana ministry. He began attending the church where I had been living in, and began coming to talk with me about spiritual things with some frequency. Then he asked if I would be willing to preach in a prison.

Well, I did some prison ministry six years ago, but I haven't been in a prison for a very long time. And I wasn't really very keen on it. But you can lack keenness for a matter and still have willingness.

So when he pressed me, I said yes. I would be willing to talk. So I spent three days in prison in the month of March.

Not the prison that some of you have some familiarity with. Angola prison in Louisiana. Now in a great deal of difficulty because floodwaters are troubling the situation.

It's a prison with 5,100 and some inmates, 85% of whom are there on life sentences with no possibility of parole. There happens to be a state law in Louisiana. A man with a life sentence has no hope of getting out.

A movement has begun, and I'm mentioning this because I would like to urge you people to pray for this movement. A movement has begun called Malakai Death. You see, what has been discovered in Angola prison and in many other prisons as well, men who are in prison on a life sentence in many cases have fathers who are in prison on a life sentence.

And in some cases, grandfathers. And the expectation is that the current prisoners who have children, and that's true of a very high percentage of the prisoners, their children will end up in prison for life. So there's a very vicious cycle that has been roaring forward in the nation.

So this dream came, is there some way we can break this vicious cycle? And so this movement called Malakai Death, based on that scripture that some of you can recall, and it will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children back to the fathers. So I went there in March to speak to about 180 of the prisoners who have been converted to Christ and have joined the Malakai Death movement. Now according to the warden whom I talked with at length, some 2,400 prisoners have been converted in the last eight years.

A very high percentage of them have been involved in Bible classes. Several hundred of them have graduated from a four-year Bible college in prison. Some 200 are at the present time enrolled in a three-year theological seminary course.

I talked with 30 life sentence prisoners who have become pastors of churches in the prison. The prison has been changed from the most treacherous place in the nation to one of the safest places in the nation. I was assured that I could walk anywhere in the prison and be safer than on any street in New Orleans.

But God is doing incredible work. I'm currently scheduled to return there in July for a long teaching session with these men. I want to encourage you to pray.

That movement which began in Louisiana is now occurring in 30 prisons across the nation. This month, hundreds and hundreds of the children of these prisoners in Angola are being brought to the prison and several hundred Christian people from churches around the nation are gathering there to help. And fathers are being released from their cells and from their normal work duty to have the whole day with their children in the hopes that those prisoners who have been completely separated from their children will indeed build once again a relationship.

And this terrible cycle of crime will be broken. As I said, I had heard often the statement that it was likely the next great revival would begin in prison. I didn't have any confidence in that statement until I was there.

I was the major outside preacher, but four of the prisoners spoke. And I had not heard more sound biblical preaching with great attraction and insight into the human heart. I thought to myself, I'd like to take these four guys and put them in the churches across the land.

I think something marvelous would take place. So I've shared that with you because I think encouragement is at work. God is at work.

He is doing a new thing. It is not unreasonable that an incredible movement of the Holy Spirit beginning in prison could spread across the land. And the people who had asked the question, why is this happening in prisons, have come to this conclusion.

These men are broken. They are absolutely without hope. They have a life sentence as I've said.

They will never be released. And in their brokenness, having hit the bottom, they have reached out toward Christ who has been reaching out to them. That there might be some of the thousands who have appeared to have been converted who will fall back as soon as possible.

But in our churches, it is indicated that somewhere around 90% of all of those who profess to be converted are nowhere with Christ two years after their professed conversion. So if some of the prisoners fall away, the likelihood is there will be far fewer that have fallen away in the churches. Is it too much to hope that some of you will begin to pray fervently for a mighty work of God to continue and expand in the prison? And if indeed it's within the providence of God that I spend time with them in July, I shall be sharing with them things like I've shared with you over the years and things that we've looked at together this week.

Well, let's come then directly to the text. And as I said, it is a very severe word, and yet indeed when taken with careful prayerful consideration, it is in no way a destructive word, but a very helpful word. And as long as we maintain a deep spirit of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not going to turn aside in willful sin.

But the problem of willful sin has become an incredibly wide problem in the church. It is sometimes illustrated by well-known characters. Some of you who've been here over the years know that in addition to the privilege that I have of preaching in many places, Maggie, my wife, and I operate a bookstore in Wheaton, Illinois.

And it is a bookstore that deals primarily with old books. And that means then that we acquire libraries when pastors die, when theological seminars close, when colleges murder, we often end up with these huge collections of books. I mention that because it's relevant to what I'm going to say.

There are, as I said a moment ago, notorious cases of those who seem to have been walking with Christ, who have fallen away. Having lived in Wheaton, Illinois for 35 years, I've become at least somewhat familiar with the history of that city. Wheaton was at one time called the Evangelical Vatican, or the Holy City.

At the time we moved there some 35 years ago, there were 60-some Christian organizations that had their national and international headquarters there. Youth for Christ, which following the Second World War was a very strong movement, began in Wheaton. I want to mention the names of four men who were connected with Youth for Christ.

Billy Graham would be the best known of the group. Robert Cook, who was for many years president of King's College. Torrey Johnson and Charles Templeton were the four major men who brought that organization into being under the Providence of God.

And then young people were reached for Christ during the years of Youth for Christ. The best preacher of the four was conceded by all to be Charles Templeton. But Charles Templeton sinned willfully and departed from the faith.

But because he had a strong friendship with the four men that I mentioned, he sent autographed copies of the books that he wrote to these men. Not too long ago we acquired the library of Torrey Johnson, and in that library were copies of all the books that Charles Templeton had written, all of them inscribed to Torrey Johnson and autographed by Charles Templeton. It was very sad for me when I assembled that row of books in chronological order.

The first one, very spiritual. But less and less so. And the last book he wrote was practically a pornographic novel, a filthy piece, disgusting.

I hope you understand that there is a pattern that regularly accompanies falling away, hardening the heart, becoming dumb, sinning willfully. A person begins in what appears to be a right relationship with God, but they harbor some secret sin. They refuse to put that secret sin away.

God brings them under some kind of remedial judgment, but they do not repent. They persist in this secret sin that normally results in the withdrawal of God's manifest presence from their life. But they don't normally immediately abandon Christianity.

Rather, they tend to lapse into some kind of formalism. If they're involved in the church, say as a pastor, it's very common for them to have candles put in the church, and various kinds of vestments, and they themselves are very likely to begin to wear a turtleneck collar and other clothes that distinguish them from people regularly. They become much more formal in their approach to Christianity.

The besetting sin, which they did not put away, gains strength in them, ascendancy. In many cases, the besetting sin becomes the most prominent feature of their life. Gradually, they abandon attendance at Christian worship.

They cease all personal Bible reading, and eventually, for many of them, they hold Christianity in contempt, and they speak wickedly against God and Christ. Even in the case I mentioned to you, like polygraphic literature. That's a pattern.

Now, we have a similar pattern to that in the book of Judges. Now, recall pointing this out to this assembly years ago. In the book of Judges, we have a pattern that is seven times repeated between chapters 3 and 16.

The people are in right relationship with God, but they sin and do not repent. God brings them under some form of a righteous judgment. When the judgment is beyond their ability to endure, they cry out to God and a judge to deliver is raised up.

Now, that pattern, as I said, is repeated seven times. But if you've studied the history of Israel, you know that over the passing of the decades, their hearts grew harder and harder. It took them longer to come to repentance.

It took more of a judgment from God to disturb them and to cause them to cry out to God. And eventually, it was too late. They were simply cut off.

So the pattern of which I've just spoken is both biblical and we see it often in those around us who at one time appeared to have walked in Christ. Now, let's come directly to the passage. Let me point out first that in the passage, verses 19 to 25 provide the specific background of the warning itself.

And we need to carefully weigh the statements of these several verses. It begins with two realities that are to be considered. The reality of access.

Notice in verse 19, this access is by a new and a living man, which he inaugurated for us through the veil that is his flesh. Now, if I may take just a moment to relate that to the subject of gratitude with which I began this evening. When you realize who you are and who God is and the incredible gulf that exists

between you of rotten, no good, miserable, depraved, filthy, self-righteousness and pride, and it draws on you, here I am in all my rottenness and corruption, and I have been given access to the risen God.

A tremendous sense of gratitude wells up as you face that ritual. And then you remember those around you who, in many cases, are far more righteous than yourself. People who haven't scooped to the level of filth that you have.

People who haven't even had the opportunity of knowing right from wrong to the degree that you've known. And you realize they are completely apart from Christ. They have no known access to the Father.

They don't even begin to know how to draw near to God. And I do. Again, the spirit of gratitude wells up.

Christ has made for me a way of access to the Father. I have this privilege beyond description of knowing the living God, of walking with him, and this access was made for me not by some righteous cause that I advance, but by the righteous one himself. Gratitude springs up.

And as long as that gratitude is prominent in the heart, the flaw of willful sinning is an abomination. Truly, though, you would rather make a meal of horses' blood than to sin against a God who has made access for you. When you lose the spirit of gratitude, the temptations of the flesh become so attractive, and you're drawn with such force to turn away from that which is truly precious.

So that fact must be changed. Then four responsibilities are spelled out. The new and living way is ours, verse 21, because we have a great high priest over the house of God.

And in the lifetime of those incredibly marvelous facts, four responsibilities mentioned. Verse 22, let us draw near with a sincere heart. Now, how could you possibly be willing to draw near with an insincere heart when you have understood the access that has been provided for you after twice the price paid in order that you might be one with God? So draw near.

As long as you keep gratitude high, then you see what an incredible privilege it is to draw near. And you have protection against these warnings. You have no inclination.

You'd rather be sick and die suddenly than to depart from the living God. And we are instructed to draw near, first, in full assurance of faith. Secondly, in having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience.

And thirdly, having our bodies washed with pure water. That's an obvious exposition of what it means to draw near with a sincere heart. You don't come before the Lord cherishing your filth.

You come before the Lord grateful that your filth has been removed, that you have been washed clean, that you can enter the presence of the Holy God. And you have this longing to draw near to him. Therefore, we observe constantly in the Church one of the first signs of that flagging that we see in people is their unwillingness to keep participating in the prayer meeting.

Over and over, I have watched people who at one time were zealous to be part of the prayer life of the Church, who gradually lost all appetite for prayer meetings. And when you confront them, and this I saw some speaking out of experience, when you confront them, they have an incredible array of excuses why they haven't been able to come. For many, many years, I've led an early morning prayer meeting in my office, never large, but we had maybe 20-25 pastors and Christian workers in the area.

And I kept track of all those that came. But we had a man come to a little over a year, came faithfully, prayed fervently, and then suddenly he wasn't there. So I checked up on him and asked him why he had dropped out.

Because when he had come, he had said he was there for the duration. The Lord had called him to join us in prayer for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So when I confronted him, he said, Oh, well, it's not that I don't want to be there, because, you see, I've had a number of men in my church that I have to spend time with personally, and the only time I could meet with them was that morning of prayer.

But I thought it was a lie. But I didn't know for sure, so I let it fall. But he assured me he would be back, and he didn't come back, so I sought him out again.

He called me a totally different liar. The third time when I confronted him, he said, he started to tell another lie, and then he turned white. He said, I don't think I dare tell you another lie.

He said, the truth of the matter is, I came under terrible conviction in the prayer meeting. It became very clear to me, I have to repent. I'm not willing to repent.

I've simply said that an indicator of a movement away from Christ is often seen by one's irregular attendance at the prayer meeting. So the first command, draw near with sincere heart, in full assurance of faith, having a heart sprinkled clean from an evil conscience, having our bodies washed with pure water. The second responsibility stress, verse 23, let us hold fast to the confession of our hope, and hold fast without wavering.

Because he who promised is faithful. But again, when you lose the spirit of thankfulness, then you begin to be uncertain about the faithfulness of God. You no longer have that same confidence in him, and you set yourself up for a very realistic possibility of a fall.

The third responsibility introduced in verse 24, let us consider how to stimulate one another, both in love and to good deeds. And again, it's quite clear, when you are full of the spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving, you want to share what God is doing for you. You're quick to encourage others to get in on the blessing of God.

But when you lose the spirit of gratitude, when something in your world, something in the flesh becomes an allure to you, and your attention is drawn away from it, then you're no longer faithful or consistent, or even useful in stimulating others to love and good deeds. And finally, verse 25, let us not forsake our own assembling together, as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another, and all the more increasingly, as you see the day approaching. Now let me tell you what I consider one of the most remarkable things that I have ever seen in all my life.

Here, as a nation, we are on the verge of destruction. Many of the soundest people in the nation are saying, we have less than ten years as a democracy. The nation is in a self-destructive mode.

Erwin Lutzer, pastor of the Moody Church, has written a very searching book on what happened to Germany under Hitler. And there's an amazing parallel. Germany was destroyed from within by allowing man to do the very things that are happening to us as a nation.

But no, I mentioned that, not to throw stones at politicians. But to say some of us have become so dull that we don't even see the day approaching. We're not even alert to the peril of the nation.

We're not sensitive to it. And we began forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. Well, that's the background that this warming passage is set in.

So again, I simply urge you to maintain an incredibly high level of gratitude. And clearly, one of the great purposes of Hebrews is to elevate our level of gratitude by showing us how marvelous Christ is and how infinitely above all else He truly is. But now, the horrible danger of willful sinning.

We focus now on verses 26 to 35. If we go on sinning willfully, after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin. But a certain terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversary.

Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three worshippers. How much severe punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the spirit of grace? For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay. And again, the Lord will judge his people.

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Now I read those several verses together because if you isolate that first verse, verse 26 from the rest, you may very well worry yourself into deep apprehension. I frequently speak with people.

Just this last week, a woman came to me in tears using this statement, fearing that she had sinned away all possibility of grace. If you don't keep the matter in perspective, as I just said, you isolate verse 26 from the rest. You might gain a false conclusion.

So this is specifically speaking of those who go on sinning willfully, deliberately, voluntarily, continually, and do so knowing what they're doing. Now let me mention an incident. Some time back when I was preaching in one of the major cities in Texas, a man came up to me after the service and was obviously very deeply troubled.

He said to me, I'm in a very great predicament. He said, I hold the highest paying position in city government in this city. But I realized tonight that I am in a huge danger of sinning willfully.

He said, the truth is, I got this job in city government by falsifying my resume. I did not have any of the qualifications that the job called for. I made up qualifications and submitted them, and they were accepted.

At the time, I was not aware of my wickedness. I was so determined to get ahead, but tonight I'm not. If I go on, it's willful sin.

So I said, what are you going to do? Well, he said, I'm waiting. What I need to do is to call together the city public and confess to them that I completely falsified my resume. But if I do, I may end up in prison.

I certainly will lose my position, and it will be impossible for me to get another one. So what are you going to do? He said, I don't have any choice. First thing in the morning, I'm calling the city council together, and I'm declaring that I'm a reprobate.

So I thanked him and encouraged him, and he went, and he did it. He came back the next night. All too long, he said, the inconceivable happened.

I told them what a liar I had been and submitted my resignation. They asked me to wait. Well, they left.

They called me back, and they said, actually, you've been doing a splendid job. And now it's our decision to give you a raise. They said, we trust you now to a degree we never had before.

Now, it doesn't always happen that way. But what if that man had said, no, it's too great a price. I'm not going to do it.

In his case, because the Spirit of God had convicted him deeply, I didn't even know him, let alone know about his falsified resume. Certainly there was no way I could bring that matter before his conscience, but the Spirit of God did. And by the grace of God, the matter was cleared in a way that was honoring God.

No, I'm not suggesting that we have a group of people here tonight who have falsified their resumes and are in danger of losing their position. But I do want to ask, has the Spirit of God convicted you about anything in your life that's displeasing to him? If he has, and you have not responded in obedience to him, then this warning passage must be faced by you with very great care. For we read very plainly in verse 26, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin.

God is not going to make a second provision for willful sin. If you're not willing to do things God's way, there's no hope. Because he's not making another way.

He's made a way, a wonderful way, a way that can embrace all of us. But we're going to have to go his way, not our way. So willful sin must be taken, as I told you earlier, in the context.

Look at the 27th verse, a certain terrifying expectation and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversary. For God is not going to make another way. If a person repudiates the only way that God has made, and when you deliberately choose to live in sin, you are repudiating the only way.

In the old covenant, there was a provision for repeated sin in a fashion. But nobody can go back to the old covenant because it's dead in God. In the new covenant, we turn our life over to Christ.

And we do things his way. No, not perfectly. All of us here have sinned after we believe him.

But this passage is not talking about incidental sin. This is talking about people who repudiate the way that God has made. People who face realistically the truth.

This is war. God forbids it. I must turn from it.

I will not turn from it, they say. That is truly a very, very treacherous position. So anyone who's been around me any length of time knows that I regularly distinguish between what we call root, R-O-O-T, root sins and fruit sins.

And I'd like to urge you to think on that for a moment tonight. There are root sins. There are fruit sins.

Now, the book of Jude, in a very powerful passage, in verses 5, 6, and 7, in addition, verse 8, sets forth some truth about root sins of very great consequence. And it singles out three root sins. It describes Israel, in verse 5, and it says that Israel's root sin was unbelief.

It describes the fallen angels, and it makes it clear that the sin of the fallen angels was stubbornness, rebellion. It describes Solomon and Gomorrah, and again makes it clear that the root sin of Solomon and Gomorrah was pride. Now think about those three root sins.

Unbelief, stubbornness, rebellion, pride. Let's go back to the real illustration, I have cited, of a man who had falsified his resume. Suppose, after coming under the profound conviction of the Holy Spirit, and I assure you it was profound conviction, no man would have risked the highest paying job in his city just on some frivolous whim.

He knew he had to deal with his sins. But suppose he had said, no, not now at least, maybe later. What would that have represented? Well, it would have represented pride.

It would have represented stubbornness, rebellion. God tells me what to do, and I say, well, no, not now, anywhere! And it surely would have represented unbelief. Because when we talk about belief, we're not just talking about the positive things, that Christ hadn't come to die in our place.

We're talking about the negative things, like this passage that warns us, if you go on sinning willfully, if that man had said, I will not, he would have acted in undeniability. And he would have been in extraordinary danger. Now, as I said already, we're not people for the most part who have falsified our resumes.

But I ask you again, how has the Spirit of God convicted you about a sin in your life? If you refuse him who speaks, look at what the passage said. Verse 28 again. Anyone who set aside the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Now this is the same truth that I focused upon on Sunday morning when I introduced this subject of these warning passages to you. In the first warning, chapter 2, verses 1 to 4, we were told very plainly what happened to Israel. And then it was pinpointed as clearly as a man could be pinpointed, don't you dare think that you can get away with what Israel could not get away with.

Now that is a huge issue in our American society. The bulk of the churches are actually teaching that God has grown up. He's gotten control of his disposition.

He is now no longer a God of anger and wrath, but he's so overwhelmed with loving kindness that you can get away with anything. But that is simply a grievous, wicked, falsehood. And so the question is very clear here.

If those in the old covenant could not get away with anything, but if there were two or three witnesses against them, they have to pay the penalty. So verse 29, how much sorer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God and is regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified and has insulted the spirit of Christ? Let's look at those words with care. Take them one by one.

Has, number one, regarded the blood of the covenant as unclean? Now how can you stoop to more grievous sin than despising what Christ has done, treating with contempt the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? Now, while none of us, I expect, would consciously do that, the tragedy is that we're not very conscious often of what we are doing. And it simply got to be said, if you deliberately choose to sin, you are treating with contempt the blood of Christ. So the one, dear, dear people, don't let that happen.

You're trampling underfoot the Son of God. You're treating the covenant, the blood of the covenant, by which you're sanctified as unclean. And you're insulting the spirit of grace.

Now that's what I'm going to focus upon. The great trust in the American church is grace, grace, grace, grace. We're always talking about grace, grace, grace.

Well, there is incredible grace. But grace cannot be abused. And whenever we choose willfully to sin and to live therein, we are abusing grace.

I don't believe that I've ever met anyone who deliberately started out saying, I am going to abuse God's grace. No, we don't start out thinking that way. We commit a sin.

We begin to love that sin. We cultivate it. We nurture it.

We won't let it fall. And before we know it, we're insulting the spirit of grace. So I'm simply trying to say, dear friends, this passage is not describing someone who has set their heart to live all out for Christ.

But you were so attempted, and you fell flat on your back. We could wish that never happened, but it does. But you have insulted the spirit of grace when you have realized you have sinned, and then you fall on your face and cry out to God for mercy.

You declare your dependence upon grace, in fact. And this passage is not talking about those who are dependent upon grace, but those who, in pride, in unbelief, in stubbornness, rebellion, simply pay no attention to what God says. So he speaks plainly about the certain terrifying expectation of judgment, of curing, of fire that will consume at this hour.

Hopefully this does not mean to say that everyone who deliberately chooses to sin should know for certainty what's going to happen to them. God will not allow the blood of his Son to be trampled on the floor. God will not allow anyone to treat the blood of the covenant as an unclean thing.

God will not allow anyone to despise the spirit of grace. So the picture simply, you've caught it I trust, but let me simply state it again, just in the hopes that no one will miss the truth. This passage, extremely severe, is a warning.

Don't ever lose the spirit of that. At all times, remember the splendor of Christ made available to cleanse you from your sin and to enable you to live as a child of God. Don't ever let slip that high dear, that treasure dear, of what Christ has done, because if you do, then the probability is you will turn aside to sin, and then you can anticipate a terrifying fall into the vengeance of God, into the judgment.

So verse 31, it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But the lovely thing about this passage is, severe as it is, the words that introduce it and the words that follow it are wonderfully encouraging and helpful. So let's focus now on verses 32 to 34.

Remember the former days, when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of suffering, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and you accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you had for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one. We will not take long on that, but it's a reminder of things that we've already considered.

I told you, when we began this series, something of the background of the epistle, and something about the people to whom the epistle was written. I told you about the mural garden parties and burning people on crosses at these garden parties. I told you about the systematic polluting of their homes by mobs that were sent out to try and destroy Christianity by bringing the people themselves into grievous circumstances.

So the exhortation, verse 32, remember the former days. And it's appropriate for me, speaking now to those here who are true believers, it's appropriate for me to remind you of the joy that you felt when you first came to Christ, of the incredible sense of relief from the burden of the sin, of the glorious prospect of walking with God the rest of your days. So after warning us with great severity, we are encouraged to remember how we once talked about Christ, how deeply stirred and moved we were, how resolute we were to follow him at any cost.

It's when we forget that our danger increases so greatly. So remember all that Christ has done for you. You were, according to the last verse of this section, verse 34, you were held by an incredible hope, the hope of a better possession and an abiding one.

So just thinking in terms of the young believers to whom this was written, who had their home systematically looted, he's saying to them, be realistic, what did they steal from your home? Well, the only thing they could steal was what you had by way of possession. But why should you get agitated and concerned about the loss of those when you've got all of God's glory as yours, when you are a joint heir with Jesus Christ? Why should you be all worked up and disturbed by the loss of something which you're going to lose anyway? None of us are taking anything with us to glory. So if we lose it a few years before we get to glory, God is certainly more than able to replace anything we lose.

And the price that we pay for being loyal servants of Christ is as nothing in comparison with the hope that we have in Christ Jesus. Well, we come then to the final portion. Verses 35-39, an urgent call to appropriate action in the light of all that's been said in this warning.

Verse 35, Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. Let that sink in. I plead with you, don't throw away your confidence.

It has a great reward. Every true believer has confidence in what's coming. I think one time when I was here, I gave a series of messages on Hebrews 11.

And if I didn't, shame on me. But I remember saying, take the word faith and let each letter in the word convey real meaning and consequence. The first letter, act.

And I urged at that time, Hebrews 11.1, act, facts, in focus. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. And that's exactly what it's talking about here when it talks about confidence.

When you have faith in Christ, the eternal becomes more real and demanding than the temporal. All the things that are hoped for, Christ, and eternal life, and heaven itself, and the throne of God, and eternity with the saints. All of the things hoped for gave tremendous reality with faith.

So, if it costs you something to follow Christ, goodbye, tale of woes. I'm on my way to glory. I've got a better hope.

I'm going to live with my mind and heart set upon what's before me in Christ Jesus, rather than groaning and complaining about what I have lost in this lifetime. So, he urges this confidence. Don't throw it away.

It carries with it great reward. In verse 36, he urges endurance. You have needed endurance so that when you've done the will of God, you may receive what was proper.

Now, some of you young people, it looks easy now. But I will tell you very plainly, there can be some mighty tough days ahead. Every atheist Christian that I know has passed through the fire.

We know something about the storms, the conflicts, the difficulties. But I want to tell you, endurance is worth it. There's a little song some of us know.

I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back. No turning back.

Here's the call for endurance. Say it to your heart right now. I don't care what it costs.

I have determined to follow Jesus. And you'll not be sorry. There is an incredible reward at the end for those that endure.

Then in verse 37, the place of assurance. Yet, in a very little while, he who is coming will come and will not collect. You want something to send shivers up and down your spine bone.

Think about the day I mentioned last night when the great host of angels assembled and the blast of the trumpet is heard in the sky and you see the Lord himself returning. My words, I can't imagine anything like that. And to know when he comes, that he's come for you.

And that's along your way to eternal glory. Keep that thought in mind. And when you're tempted to grumble, to complain, when you'll say, I wonder if the Lord even remembers I'm here, when you're lacking peace and confidence and assurance, remind yourself of what's coming and glory in it.

Start to praise the Lord for what's ahead instead of murmuring about what's here at the moment. And then he moves in the next verse, 38, to the necessity of ongoing faith. My righteous one shall live by faith.

And if he shrinks back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. I think there's wisdom in having specific goals. I believe it's very much in order to have the personal goal in your life that the Savior himself will take pleasure in you.

I want to live in such a way that my Savior is full of joy I want to live that way not just today, but all the tomorrows of my life. In doing faith, enabling me day after day, year after year, decade after decade, to live in rejoicing expectation that my Savior is pleased and will soon be coming to welcome me back to the place of eternal inheritance. And it ends with the simple words of verse 39.

We're not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. Now I only get to come here occasionally, but my memory's still pretty bad. And I remember some people from the last time I was here were not here tonight, who as a being turned aside.

I find that very grieving. At the same time, I've seen many who have been here every time, and my heart leaps with joy. Can I say concerning this entire group, we are not of those who turn back.

We are of those who persevere to the salvation of their soul. Let that be our goal. Let that be our determination.

No matter what comes, we are going to hold fast. But these passages, as I pointed out, have both a personal application and a corporate application. So be on the walk constantly for those around you in the fellowship.

And encourage one another. And by the grace of God, live with a view for the day of Christ. Thank you.

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