

Hebrews 10:32-39

Remember Who You are in Christ

The writer of Hebrews is consistent about giving words of encouragement after he has stated his warnings against apostasy (Hebrews 6:4-8; 10:26-31).

"But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, 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 accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay. But My righteous one shall live by faith; And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:32-39, NASB95). All Scripture references unless otherwise noted are from the New American Standard Bible 1995 Update.

It does us good to remember where we have been, and to reevaluate where we are going. The sensitive heart will submit to the probing of the Holy Spirit and repent of sinful thoughts, attitudes, behaviors, and refocus on Christ. It is hard to forget some things, even with God's help. That is where His cleaning and forgiveness is needed. On the other hand, there are some wonderful things we need to write down and remember. We need to recall them and keep them in our memory.

Christians draw encouragement from past experience of walking with the Lord. We stand back and see His sustaining grace, His provisions, joy of salvation, and praise to His glory and say I saw God do it. We remember how He reached down in His grace and mercy and pointed us to the saving death of Christ and believed on Christ as our Savior. We remember how He has been there for us when there was no other place to turn. We have watched Him open doors of opportunity and privilege to serve Him. We remember those special intimate moments of entering into His presence, and the daily abiding in Him. These remembrances cause us to refocus our faith in our great God and Savior. The writer of Hebrews now admonishes us to remember who you are in Christ. Look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in all of His glory.

Remember your former days.

The author of Hebrews admonishes his readers to "keep on remembering" those special events in the Christian life. He uses the Greek present imperative which is not a timid suggestion. Remember the early ages and stages of your Christian life. Remember how and when you put your faith in Christ as your Savior. I would encourage you to take a few minutes and write out personal testimony of God's saving grace in 250 words. Keep in mind three things: 1) this was my life before I came to Christ. This is why I need Christ to save me. I am a sinner, radically depraved and Christ died for me. 2) This is when I placed my faith in the saving grace of God and was born again. I believed on Christ as my Savior. 3) This is what God

is doing in and through my life since the day I trusted in Christ to save me. This is how He has changed my life. You will be surprised how the Holy Spirit will enable you to recall how He brought you to repentance, faith in Christ and the changes He has brought about since He began His life in you. He will open doors for you to share this simple testimony of His saving grace.

Remember when you began you walk with Christ. Remember those good things he has done in your life.

Remember when you were "enlightened."

"Enlightened" (*photizo*) from "to give light to, light up, illuminate" signifies spiritual light that has been given to the person enlightened. This is the effect of the Word of God on the mind. It is the illumination of the Word of God in the mind and heart of the individual hearing it. They were enlightened by the Word of God and brought to a saving faith in Christ. It is the enlightenment that came when they were spiritually regenerated. It is the work of the Holy Spirit applying His Word. Their spiritual eyes were opened to the truth of God's Word and the good news of Christ.

Remember those delightful days when you first believed on Christ and were saved?

Persecutions

Accepting Jesus as the Messiah opened the door for personal attacks by their own countrymen and pagans. They were persecuted viciously because they declared their faith in Christ. "But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated" (Hebrews 10:32-33).

The author of Hebrews uses an athletic metaphor to encourage his readers to stand firm in the midst of persecution. You stood your ground is the idea of "endured" (*hupomeno*). After they placed their trust in Christ they endured persecution instead of fleeing. They endured the hard struggle with suffering.

"You endured a great conflict of suffering" or "a hard struggle with suffering." You "endured a harsh conflict of suffering after you were enlightened" (NET). The "great conflict" (*athlesisi*) is literally "contest" or struggle. They were contending for a crown, and were resolute and did not waver in the spiritual combat.

It is encouraging to note the intensity and repetition of the conflict. It is of great intensity. The word is *polus* meaning "much, great, strong, severe, hard, deep, profound." They were enduring an intense profound struggle with sufferings (*pathema*). The sufferings were the severe trials that are described in the next verses.

They were "made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations" (v. 33a). The "public spectacle" (*theatrizo*) reminds us of the public derision, scorn and death that was literally true of the believers who were exposed to wild beats in the Roman amphitheaters. The story line in the book of Acts demonstrates the early Christians were exposed to open shame, persecution and derision (Acts 4:15-18; 5:17-18, 40-41; 8:1; 9:1-2; 12:1-5; 13:50; 14:19; 16:19-24, 37-39; 17:5-8, 13; 18:2; 19:9, 23ff; 21:27-39; 28:16-17, 30). Stephen's martyrdom in Acts 8

is an excellent example of this kind of persecution. James the brother of John was murdered by King Herod (Acts 12:1-2).

These believers were exposed to public shame and reproach. They became the gazing stock of public spectacle. Westcott noted that "reproaches affect the character; afflictions affect material prosperity.

They were "abused" (*oneidismos*) has the idea of reproach, defamation, insulted. They were abused for being followers of Jesus. Again the emphasis is on public reproach because of their faith in Christ.

"Tribulations" (*thlipsis*) is a more general picture of affliction, oppression, tribulation brought on because of their faith. These are pain sufferings.

They shared "with those who were so treated" (33b). Even those believers who had not been directly persecuted suffered by being identified with those who were savagely persecuted. They were subject to the public reproaches and suffering in part because they, too, were Christians. They sympathized with those who were persecuted. They refused to abandon their faith knowing what the consequences could be. They were "partners" (*koinonos*) with those who suffered the shame. The word means one who takes part or share with another person something in common. They shared the life of reproach and shame for being a believer.

For indeed "you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one" (Hebrews 10:34). The writer of Hebrews reverses the order of ideas of verse 33 and emphasizes with more definite instances in verse 34. "For indeed" or "for in point of fact" they had become joint partakers with the persecuted believers.

The fellow believers ran the risk of persecution by visiting the imprisoned believers. They showed "sympathy" (*sumpatheo*) with prisoners. Phillips paraphrases, "You sympathized with those who were put in prison."

Moreover, these believers joyfully accepted the plundering of their property. "For you . . . accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one" (Hebrews 10:34). That runs counter to the modern Christian mindset. You cannot water it down. It is the same message of the beatitudes of Jesus. You accepted joyfully the confiscation of your belongings. You "accepted joyfully the seizure of your property." Their joy in Christ was so great that it could not be extinguished by the loss of their material prosperity.

Their personal possessions were seized (*harpago*) denoting violent and unjust confiscation, pillage, robbery, and extortion by authorities or plundered by a mob. It is the forcible confiscation of property in persecution. A couple of years ago I was conducting workshops in a Baptist church in Honduras when a drug dealer forced a Christian woman who was an active member of the church to sell her property at a huge devalued price so he could take possession. It was her house and it was paid for in full. All the members of the church were gripped with fear, intimidation and revulsion, but there was nothing that could be done. The lawyers and authorities shrugged their shoulders and turned a deaf ear. This Christian purchased a smaller home in another part of town. She resolved in her own heart the same attitude of these Hebrew

Christians. They yielded their property without resistance and with joy. They had a spiritual prosperity far greater than any material prosperity could ever be valued. Westcott, "You gladly accepted loss as if it were gain."

You accepted it "with joy" (joyfully). The preposition "with" denotes the attendant circumstances of something that is taking place. Here it is "with" the feeling of excitement, a state of mind, filled with "joy" (*chara*). Jesus said, "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:12).

How can a Christian have that kind of attitude? It is by "knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one." That is the peace of mind, the joy of heart, the eternal security of knowing you have an eternal possession of which no one can rob you. Where are your possessions? What are you storing up in heaven?

Would you and I accept such news of confiscation of our property with joy? They "accepted" (*prosdechomai*) means to receive, welcome, receive willingly. The writer implies that the knowledge came to be realized through the trial. "Knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one" (NASB). "You knew that you certainly had a better and lasting possession" (NET). Are you conscious of the fact that you have for yourselves greater, everlasting possessions? That great knowledge will get our eyes back on right things. The author is speaking of those eternal unseen objects of glory. The world may rob you of your sacred objects, but you know that you still have for yourselves something much better. Let's ask God to clarify our values. Do you realize that you possess something better and more lasting than any earthly possession? We have an eternal inheritance the world cannot touch. It is something better and more lasting.

It is a "better possession" (*kreitton*) better, higher in rank, preferable. And it is "an abiding one" (*meno*) because it remains, continues to live. Believers have an abiding possession of which no one can rob them.

Remain steadfast

"Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward" (Hebrews 10:35).

You have been steadfast; therefore, do not cast away like a worthless garment, this confidence in Christ Jesus. Lenski said, "By all means hold fast your assurance no matter what comes!" Do not abandon your courage now.

Confidence in Christ

"Do not throw away your confidence" (*parresia*) meaning courage, confidence, boldness, fearlessness in the presence of high ranking government officials. Don't throw away your confidence in God, and your faith in Christ.

Waiting on God and persevering demands patient, steadfast enduring faith in God.

Endurance

"For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised" (Hebrews 10:36). "Endurance" (*hupomone*) can be translated "patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, perseverance." Every Christian must have patient endurance to do the will of God daily. We especially need it when times of stress.

The inheritance of eternal life is already sure for us (1 John 5:11-13; John 10:25-30; Phil 1:3-6; Romans 8:31-39). What we need is patient endurance to continue doing the will of God. God will fulfill His promises. We faithfully fulfill the performance of God's will by looking to Christ as our great High Priest for every need in our daily walk with God.

Receive promise

The believer will receive a great reward when Christ returns. We have the peace of God in our hearts now, and the assurance of our eternal reward in heaven. Let's show perseverance for a short time longer as we wait the realized promise in due time.

The reward (*misthapadosia*) is literally the payment of wages.

"And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory" (1 Peter 5:4).

Christ is coming

"For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay" (Hebrews 10:37). The one who is coming is the Messiah (Matt. 11:3; Luke 7:19-20; John 1:27; 11:27; Rev. 1:4, 8; 4:8; 11:17). The Coming One has already come, and He is coming again! He will make His appearance before the public. "Coming He will come." By placing the definite article before the participles the author stresses the Messianic title, "The Coming One will come and not delay." One day we will see His personal glory fill the skies.

He is not going to fail to come as some would suggest in our day. "But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:8-13).

Live by faith

"But My righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:38-39).

Who is it that lives by faith? Habakkuk 2:4 is applied to the Christian believer. Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrews 10:38 tells us the "righteous one" lives by faith. Man is justified by faith in Christ. The individual justified by believing in Christ is saved. He is not only justified by believing, but continues believing. He abides in Christ. The person who lives by faith obtains the permanent blessing from God.

Here the principle of life of the righteous person is faith. "The just shall live by faith." This is the only way we shall survive the perilous time in which we live. Albert Barnes said, "The

righteous shall live by continued confidence in God." Faith in this context is the continuing trust in God, not just for our justification, but also for our sanctification and glorification.

"My righteous one" is a believer. The person "shrinking back" is a reprobate who was never saved. If he shrinks back he only proves he is a reprobate. The author of Hebrews stresses the necessity of endurance in the righteousness. There is no tension here between forensic righteousness which saves the believer and the righteous life that it produces. The only way an individual can stand in a right relationship with God is justification by faith in Jesus Christ. God's forensic verdict is the believing sinner is declared righteous by God. It is always an alien righteousness. It is something God provides; it can never be provided by sinful man. Those who are reckoned just before God can only live by faith. That right standing with God will produce a life of righteousness. God's righteousness works from the inside out. He justifies us and then goes to work transforming us by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. The person whose faith has made him right with God must live by faith in the same Savior.

How tragic to "shrink back" from trusting in God. The idea is to shrink back in fear, in a cowardly timidly fashion, and give up his faith. How tragic to disappoint God. The book of Hebrews is concerned with holding fast to one's faith in the midst of temptations and suffering. Warren Wiersbe said, "A believer who does not walk by faith goes back into the old ways and wastes his life."

The author stresses in verse 39 that he and his readers are true Christians, and do not belong to the reprobates who fall away. God is never pleased with disbelief or lack of faith.

"But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul" (Hebrews 10:39).

John Calvin said, "This is the real preservation of our soul because by so doing we escape eternal death." The true Christian will not in the end apostatize. The true believer will remain faithful.

"We are not those who shrink back to destruction." "Destruction" (*apoleia*) means perdition, destruction or perishes. Judas and the Antichrist are called "the son of perdition" (John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3). The context is describing final destruction of apostates.

We shall see beautiful examples and illustration of walking by faith in the chapters that follow.

In the past these faith believers in Christ had stood their ground and withstood public shame and persecution for their faith. They unashamedly encouraged other believers who were enduring persecution. Prisoners were not pampered as in our day. These Christians were punished in prison. Like in many parts of the world today their daily food came from family and friends or they starved. These believers considered it a badge of honor to serve Christ by ministering to persecuted Christians in prison. There was a great risk involved, as in our day in some areas of the world. The visiting Christian became identified with the prisoner. They were guilty by association.

Their focus was on their eternal inheritance in Christ which was laid up for them in heaven, and it was so real to them that they did not consider material prosperity of high value. What a condemnation to much of our contemporary preaching in the 21st century. One day they will

rise up to condemn our modern day secular humanistic commercialized Christianity. These early Christians were willing to suffer material loss because they focused on a better inheritance in the future.

The writer of Hebrews encourages us to clarify our values and keep on keeping on living Christ. W. H. Griffith-Thomas said, "The safeguard against degeneration, isolation, and consequent failure is to make progress in the Christian life, and to proceed from point to point from one elementary to the richest, fullest, deepest experience."

The writer of Hebrews has confidence that his readers are true born again regenerated believers who have been justified by faith in Christ. Therefore, he wants them to grow up in Christ. We need to keep walking by the same faith that saved us. In this manner we will please our great God and Savior. To shrink back in our Christian walk will result not in the loss of eternal life, but the loss of eternal rewards in the Christian life.

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