

Hebrews 10:26-31

Christ or Judgment

In a majestic passage on encouraging one another, the writer of Hebrews brings us to the last warning passage in Hebrews 10:26-31. It is similar to the one in 6:4-8.

What are the consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ?

"For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer 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" (Hebrews 10:26-31, NASB95). Unless otherwise noted all Scripture quotations are from New American Standard bible, 1995 Update.

Jesus declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). And the apostle Peter finished a powerful sermon on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ saying, "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The death of Jesus Christ is the all-sufficient payment for sin, and if a person rejects it for whatever reason there is only the judgment in the end.

In contrast to the Christian's perseverance in the previous paragraph, the author now takes a serious look at apostasy. Here is a strong warning against rejecting the truths of God's atoning sacrifice by Christ.

God is the God of Grace

The writer of Hebrews believed Christians can have full assurance of their salvation because they rest their faith in the perfect atoning sacrifice of Christ.

The book of Hebrews teaches us about the God of grace. Because of what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross, and His presence before the throne of God in heaven as our high priest we can come boldly before His throne of grace. We have access into the presence of God to offer praise to Him for our salvation, and in our time of need. This whole section of Hebrews (7:1-10:18) has been about the saving grace of God, the atoning sacrifice of Christ and His priesthood. We have access to God based upon the blood of Jesus (9:12, 14; 10:19, 29; 12:24; 13:12, 20). Jesus' death was an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Christians are participants of the new covenant with God based on the death of Jesus. Hebrews places great stress upon this new covenant as opposed to the old covenant under Moses.

The author of Hebrews reminds us of 1 John 5:11-13. "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:11-13).

There is coming a day when we must each give an account of ourselves to the Lord God. "Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. . . . For yet in a very little while, He who is coming will come, and will not delay" (Hebrews 10:25, 37).

The readers of Hebrews had received the knowledge of the gospel. There is no hint of any deficiency in their knowledge. We will assume as in the other warning passages these readers understand these truths.

God is Holy

This warning passage echoes the previous passages.

"For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:26-27).

"Sinning willfully" catches our attention immediately. The present tense prevents us from identifying this as isolated acts of sin. Other passages of Scripture clearly teach there is forgiveness for sin for Christians who sin. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us" (1 John 1:6-10). "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2:1-2). "Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted" (Galatians 6:1). Christ is our great high priest who is interceding for believers who sin (Heb. 2:17-18; 4:15-16).

Since the Scriptures do not contradict themselves, in this context the sinning referred to in verse 26 is continual, willful, voluntarily and deliberately intentional. In this context it is the once-for-all rejection of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for sin. For this reason we are told there is no sacrifice available for this willful rejection of Christ. Verse 25 also strengthens this interpretation. There is simply no other place to go for cleansing for sin. Jesus alone paid the full price for our redemption. This would especially be true of Jewish people who were tempted to go back to the Temple rituals. They were departing from the living God by abandoning the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The "willful sinning" is an apostasy from the Christian faith. It is a willful rejection of Christ.

If a person willfully goes on rejecting Christ the only prospect is nothing left but "a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (vv. 26-27). It is an eternal judgment that awaits those who reject Christ.

God is a God of vengeance. God hates sin, and therefore must judge the sinner. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay," is a truth we must accept if we accept the truth that God is holy. "The Lord will judge His people."

I have observed that most people don't want to accept the fact that God is a holy God because they don't like the idea of judgment and wrath of God. Salad bar theology is unrealistic. We do not have the privilege of picking and choosing what we want to believe and reject what is inconvenient or not appealing. A lot of motivational preaching in our day tells people what they want to hear, but has no gospel at all. It appeals to the flesh and worldly-minded Christians. It is a pure self-help pop-psychology program of a gospel of felt needs, but void of Biblical theology. It is lacking in balanced truth.

God is just; He does forgive sins; He does turn away His wrath based upon the sacrifice of Christ. But He does it on His terms, not ours.

God's wrath

"It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We cannot escape the truth in this great passage that divine judgment and the wrath of God are real.

It is "a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:27). It is a just act of a righteous judge, and is therefore judgment that is frightful in itself. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is a judicial act standing before a righteous God. His wrath is seen as "the fury of a fire," literally it is "a zeal of fire" or "zeal (fury) of fire." It is the holy fire of God's presence. It is the picture of the fiery passion of God against all sin. This fire is described as consuming the adversaries.

The truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ should cause us to tremble at the power and the wrath and judgment of God. The wrath of God is a raging fire of holy righteous indignation and anger at sin.

It would be bad enough for a Jewish person to reject the covenant of God and suffer the punishment according to the Law of Moses (Deut. 17:2-7). But here the author speaks of those who trample under foot the blood of the new covenant, the blood of the Son of God. How far worse it would be to reject the Son of God. This individual is treating the blood of Jesus as something common, just like the blood of a malefactor who died with Jesus on the cross. Such a person considered the blood of Jesus cheap, and not the once-for-all sacrifice for sin. He considered it as unclean. This would be to treat the death of Christ as blasphemy.

"Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Hebrews 10:28). Those who rejected the Law of Moses were put to death. Since that was true, "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot 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?" (Hebrews 10:29)

Listen to the warnings in Hebrews of the day drawing near. . . terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. . . severe punishment. . . vengeance is mine, I will repay. . . the Lord will judge His people. It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

That is serious stuff. If you are a true believer in Jesus Christ it makes you want to do business with God now, not later. It brings conviction of the soul to make sure all things are right with Him.

Sin is what God is angry about.

When is God a consuming fire?

The Bible does not teach annihilation.

"How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot 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" (Hebrews 10:29-31).

It will be a dreadful, terrifying day of judgment for the sinner unless he has been forgiven by faith in Christ.

For whom is there no longer any sacrifice for sin?

Let's go back to verse 26. It is "a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:27). There is a terrifying expectation of judgment if we reject God's truth. The whole book of Hebrews has presented only two options. God has provided one perfect sacrifice for our sins in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. If we accept that sacrifice by faith God will cleanse, forgive and pardon us. The other option is if we reject His offer of grace through faith in Christ we will face the terrifying judgment of God. There are no other options. God has made the perfect provision for escaping His righteous wrath. Don't blame God if you choose the other option. God has provided for the believer what we could never provide for ourselves. He sent His own Son to die in our place and therefore turn away the wrath of God. The wrath of God has been propitiated by the sacrifice of Christ. God provided that sacrifice. Sinful man did not offer the propitiation. God did. The wages of sin were paid in full on our behalf.

We do not have the privilege of rejecting the wrath of God because we want a loving, friendly deity. If there is no wrath to escape, there is no gospel. Why should God go to the extreme of sending His Son to die on the cross if there was no need for it?

Christianity is no fairytale. It is divine truth; it is the revelation of God to sinful man. That truth includes the fact of sin, the holiness of God, His judicial wrath, and the atoning sacrifice of Christ for the believer. God is a loving God of grace, but He is also a holy God. You cannot have one without the other. Because He is loving He has made a way to escape His wrath. That is the good news of Jesus Christ.

That leads us to the question for whom is there no longer any sacrifice for sin? Of whom is the author of Hebrews speaking?

Who are these people?

They have rejected the person of the Son of God, His work on the cross, and the person of the Holy Spirit.

They are individuals who go on sinning (v. 26). Note present tense in the Greek. They go on sinning willfully. The writer of Hebrews does not have in mind a particular kind of sin, but the willingness to sin against the grace of God. It is an attitude of contempt for the salvation provided by the death and resurrection of Christ. They have permanently repudiated God's provision for atonement for sin. The sacrifice for sin is once for all rejected by this person. The only sacrifice that will deal with sin has been rejected, and there is no other sacrifice that can atone for sin. With this rejection there is no other name given under heaven whereby he can be saved. He has rejected the only means of salvation.

They are also described as God's "adversaries" (v. 27). The wrath of God is focused against these adversaries (*hupenantios*) meaning "opposed, contrary, hostile." It will consume them. They have rejected the grace of God, and have become God opponents.

In verse 29 the worst thing possible is sternly stated: they have trampled under foot the Son of God. They very one who died as their substitute on the cross has been treated in the most horrible manner. They have regarded the blood of the covenant as (*koinos*) "unclean." They consider it as common, the opposite of holy. They see the precious blood of the Son of God as something cheap and profane. They do not regard it as the precious blood that cleanses from all sin. They do not see it as the propitiation that turns away the wrath of God. It is to them no more than any other animal. There is nothing special about it in their eyes.

Observe also how they have treated the Holy Spirit with scorn and mockery. Moreover, verse 29 tells us they have arrogantly "insulted the Spirit of grace." They have "outraged the Spirit of grace" "Outraged" or "insulted" (*enubrizo*) is a good translation. Their minds were illuminated by the Spirit of God, they enjoyed the benefits of Christian fellowship, but they rejected it and chose to go on sinning in unbelief. The Holy Spirit is the one who brings sinners to God, accomplishes regeneration, and sanctifies them. He is the "Spirit of grace" (Zechariah 12:10).

This is a description of the unpardonable sin (Matt. 12:32). This person has insulted the third person of the Trinity, and there is no forgiveness of this sin. No Christian can commit the unpardonable sin because the Holy Spirit lives within Him. He is a new creation (2 Cor. 5:14-21). However, the person in the context of this passage in Hebrews is rejecting the saving work of Jesus Christ, and the regeneration by the Holy Spirit. The author is not talking about doubting one's salvation. This is open hatred of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the point of never trusting in Christ as your savior.

It is to these people the author says God is a consuming fire because there is nowhere else to turn. There is no other means of salvation.

Observe the severity of the problem.

They knew the truth of the gospel. They chose to "go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth" (v. 26). They are without excuse. They heard the gospel of saving grace through Jesus Christ, and they turned away. They have received the "full knowledge" (*epignosis*). It is the revelation of God by Jesus Christ they are rejecting. Therefore there is no sacrifice for sins left.

They were even considered a part of "God's people." They associated with Christians and the church. They had gone through all the rituals, but were never saved. There are many in the visible church who are not in the body of Christ. Many have their names on church rolls who are not Christians.

"The Lord will judge His people" is probably best taken in the same sense as "Not all those from Israel are Israel" (Rom. 9:6). They have a name for themselves, but they are not born again believers. They have never been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. They are on the books, but not in "the book of life." Their name is not written down in heaven.

The writer of Hebrews gives his readers the benefit of the doubt as those who have professed faith in Christ. However, he is fully aware the visible church and the true church of God are not necessarily the same. He is not talking about denominations, but the sovereign grace of God.

It is interesting how he ties in "not forsaking our own assembling together" in fellowship and worship in verse 25 with those who continue "willfully sinning" and turning away from the saving benefits of the gospel of Christ.

What is the meaning of sanctified?

How then shall we understand the word "sanctified" in this passage?

There are a few who teach that you can be truly born again, justified by faith in Christ alone, and yet be finally lost by forsaking the truth. This would be a partial sanctification.

Another view sees it as the judgment of believers at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10-13), not the great white throne judgment of the lost unbelievers (Rev. 20:11-15). The believer would lose his reward, but not his salvation.

Most conservative evangelical Bible scholars teach those who are truly elect and born again will be kept from apostasy by the work of the Holy Spirit. No person truly set apart to God would ever apostatize. They have been perfected for all time, i.e. set apart to God once and for all. This is the overall message of the book of Hebrews. Those who are of the elect of God will take heed to the warning and persevere in faith in Christ.

God knows who the elect are, and they will remain faithful to Him. They have been set apart to Him for His glory. If a person does not hold fast to the end he is not of the elect. His apostasy simply demonstrates that he is not a true believer. He has never become a partaker of Christ. He is not "in Christ."

"For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14). This is the true sanctification that is sure evidence of being eternally set part to God. The believer is perfected for all time.

The meaning of sanctification in verse 29 is not the same as in verse 14. Verse fourteen speaks of the once-for-all eternal sanctification whereby we are set apart to God permanently. In verse 29 the stress is on guilt after apostasy. It is an outward purification, but there is no change in the heart. It is not a real sanctification of the heart. It is merely external. True sanctification as in verse 14 is in the heart and is a separation from sin and dedication to God.

Are true believers ever guilty of complete apostasy?

I think the evidence of the Scripture says, no. The real issue is what is your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Only you and God know.

I think the best approach is to humbly come before God and realize that this would be the outcome if a person does apostatize. It causes the true believer to search his own heart to make sure of his relationship with Christ. The true believer will be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. It is a serious thing to stand before the Lord God. Everyone will one day give an answer to the Lord in regard to their relationship to Him, and how they have lived this life. One day God will purge all hypocrites. The wheat and the tares grow together. Only the Lord God knows the difference; He judges the heart. The living God is fully aware of every person and their relationship with Him.

It is a terrible thing to reject the perfect sacrifice of Christ for sin. This is a personal choice of an evil heart of unbelief. They openly renounce the blood of the covenant.

Let me show you a better way. If your heart is being pierced by the Holy Spirit as you read this Bible study let me encourage you to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and ask Him for forgiveness, cleansing and spiritual healing. He is ready to forgive you right now and bring reconciliation. If your heart is sensitive to the Spirit this is the right time for you do business with Him. The perfect atonement of Jesus Christ is available to you. He died for all your sins. He wants you to experience His peace. "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord

Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2)

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