

The Fourth Warning Passage

Hebrews 10:26-39

Hebrews 10:26-39 - *For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,²⁷ but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.²⁸ Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.²⁹ 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 was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?³⁰ For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people."³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Background Notes

There are five warning passages throughout the letter to the Hebrews. At the end of Hebrews 2 is the well-known verse: *"How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?"* A second warning passage is in chapters 3 & 4, about the danger of falling short of the *"rest"* of God. The third warning passage is in chapter 6. It's the most familiar of the warning passages: it is impossible to renew again to repentance those who were once enlightened, and have fallen away. The fourth warning passage is in chapter 10, and the fifth warning passage is in Hebrews 12.

Two big questions come to mind when we read these warning passages. Why did the author of Hebrews include them, and how do we interpret them? The answers to both questions have to do with the people the author was addressing. To whom was he writing, and why? The recipients of this letter were primarily Jewish, as the name of the book implies. These Jews had become at least professing Christians, and they had had come out of Judaism. Some of them had obviously become true believers, but some had only come to the threshold of salvation - they hadn't stepped across the line yet. Some of these "borderline" believers were thinking about going back to Judaism. That's the audience the author of Hebrews was addressing.

What about the interpretation of these warning passages? Are these warnings for true believers - warning them that they can lose their salvation? Are they for backsliders - warning them that they will lose their reward, but not their salvation? Or are these warnings for unbelievers who have come close to salvation - but are only professing Christians?

I'm convinced that the third option is the proper interpretation of all five warning passages in Hebrews, because it best fits the historical context and occasion of the letter. The author was warning those Jewish people who had come out of

Judaism and professed to be Christians, but hadn't really become true believers. Turning back to Judaism would prove that they had never truly become believers.

Doctrinal Points

1. Apostasy is evidence of threshold profession.

To "*apostatize*" means to *turn away and abandon a position once held*. Apostates are not true believers who backslide - ***apostates are unbelievers who were never saved***. They have come close to salvation, and they have even "tasted the good things" of Christianity - but they have never really trusted in Jesus Christ as personal Savior. A true believer may backslide but does not apostatize.

If a person ***forsakes*** the Christian community (v25) and sins ***willfully*** (v26) by turning away from Christ, and by ***trampling*** the Son of God underfoot by treating His shed blood as a common thing (v29) - then that person is apostate. The evidence shows that he or she was never a true believer. In the context, these people would be turning from the sacrifice of Christ back to animal sacrifices. For apostates, there "*no longer remains a sacrifice for sins*" (v26). In other words, there's no other way. For apostates, the only thing that remains is judgment and hell (v27).

Under the Law, there was no sacrifice for the forgiveness of *willful or presumptuous sin* (Numbers 15), and that's what Hebrews 10:28 was referencing. Anyone who willfully rejected Moses' Law died without mercy. Now notice verse 29: "*Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot?*" How much worse punishment can there be then dying without mercy? These verses were not referring to backsliders and loss of reward. No, this is speaking of unbelievers.

The fact that verse 29 says they have been "*sanctified*" doesn't mean that they were truly saved. They were *outwardly* identified and *set apart* with the people of God. The same thought is seen in 1 Corinthians 7:14, in reference to the unbelieving spouse in a mixed marriage; they're "*sanctified*" (*set apart*) in that sense. That's the author's thought in Hebrews 10:29.

In addition, don't misinterpret verse 30. In the phrase "*the Lord will judge His people,*" the use of the words "*His people*" does not mean that this warning passage is referencing believers. No. This phrase is a quote from Deuteronomy 32. Look at the context of Deuteronomy 32. When viewed in the proper context, you'll see that the idea of the Lord will "*judge*" His people is in the sense of the Lord *vindicating* His people.

Thus the correct interpretation of verse 30 is that God will *separate between the true and false*. True believers will be judged and vindicated. Apostates will be judged and punished.

This is serious business. No wonder verse 31 says, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* Apostasy is evidence of threshold profession.

2. Endurance is evidence of true possession.

Hebrews 10:32-39: *But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; ³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. ³⁵ Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ³⁷ “For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. ³⁸ Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.” ³⁹ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.”*

When a person says that he or she is a Christian, how can we know for sure that it's real? We can't be sure. Only God can know for sure. But here's the point: ***endurance is evidence of true possession of faith, not just mere profession of faith.*** Verse 36 says, *“For you have need of endurance.”*

The author was writing to Hebrew people who, in their early days, certainly appeared to be true believers. They had left Judaism, they had joined the Christian community, and they had “tasted the good things” of Christian faith along with true believers. They had been *“illuminated”* as to the truth about Christ (v32). They had all “suffered the reproach” of Christ (v33). They had shown sympathy to Christians who were thrown into prison (v34). They had even accepted joyfully the loss of their material possessions, knowing that treasure in heaven is what really counts (v34)!

The author to the Hebrews was convinced that most of his readers who had endured these tribulations were true believers (v39). But some of his readers were in danger of going back to Judaism. They were tempted to throw away their confidence (v35). This was very serious: *“...if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him”* (v38).

Notice that those who draw back, *“draw back to perdition”* (v39). Perdition is not loss of reward – it is loss of soul! The professing believers who were considering turning back to Judaism would be like the “stony ground” hearers in the Parable of the Sower in Matthew 13. The “stony ground” hearers received the word with joy - but then fell away.

The apostates would be like Judas. Judas certainly looked like a true believer at first, but in the end the Lord Jesus Himself called him the *“son of perdition.”* Judas was not a true believer who lost his salvation. No! Judas was never saved.

These believers who were considering drawing back would be like the professing believers of 1 John 2:19: *“They went out from us but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be manifest, that none of them were of us.”*

Some years ago, I worked with a young man who professed to trust Christ as his Savior. I disciplined this man, and he certainly appeared to be a genuine believer. He began to read the Bible and pray with joy. He did Bible courses, and came to Bible studies. He went to church services, and even went on Christian retreats. This went on for close to a year - and then he suddenly lost interest and abandoned the faith. Like Judas, I think he had never become a true believer.

We can't always say for sure who is a backslider and who's an apostate, but one thing we can say for sure. ***Endurance is evidence of true possession.***

Practical Application

How would you change your life now, if you were looking back on it 100 years from now?

Verses 37-38 quote from Habakkuk 2: *“For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith...”*

Are you living by faith? As we've seen, perseverance and endurance is evidence of salvation. So are you living by faith? What are you doing that's not worthwhile, and won't count 100 years from now?

How would you change your life, if you were looking back on it 100 years from now?

What would you change? Would you sell some things? Would you change some of your activities? Would you give more time - more talent - more of your money - to the Lord?

Would you change some of your priorities? Would you pray more?

Remember - the Lord is coming back! And you have only one life to live!

How would you change your life now, if you were able to look at your life from the perspective you'll have 100 years from now?