

Hebrews

Christ or Judgment!

Hebrews 10:26-31

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INTRODUCTION:

This is a paraphrase of what Charles Spurgeon told about a church that was asked to accept as their minister a man who did not believe in hell. They said, "You believe that there is no hell. If you are correct, then we do not need you. And if you are wrong, we do not want you. So either way, you are of no value to us.

To speak about God's terrifying future judgment is not pleasant, but it is necessary, since the Bible clearly teaches that it **will** happen. Although some prominent evangelical leaders deny the doctrine of hell, we need to remember that Jesus spoke more about the terrors of hell than anyone else in the Bible. We cannot claim to follow Christ and at the same time reject the doctrine of eternal punishment.

It is a doctrine with great practical ramifications. Spurgeon also said, in paraphrase, "Think lightly of hell, and you will think lightly of the cross. Think little of lost souls, and you will soon think little of the Savior who saves you." If we reject Christ as God's sacrifice for our sins, we will face His certain, terrifying judgment **with** our sins.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 10:26-31 (NASB95)

²⁶ For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*. ²⁹ 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? ³⁰ For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Prayer

This is the second difficult warning passage in Hebrews. The other was in chapter 6, verses 4-8. It is difficult not only because of the subject of judgment and hell, but also because some of it is difficult to interpret. There are many opinions on what this passage means. I, by no means, have the mind of God. Nor can I, or should I, preach that I know where the dividing line is between being saved or being lost; by committing apostasy or still having the ability to receive God's mercy. That decision is left to God. For He only

knows the heart of each individual. I can only preach based upon how I interpret the scripture.

The correct explanation, as I understand it, is that the passage is warning those that this letter was written to and have made a profession of faith, have associated themselves with the church, **and then turned back to Judaism**. This places the person in a terrifying danger of God's eternal judgment. These people outwardly seemed to be saved. To abandon Christ's sacrifice and to return to Judaism would be returning to a system that could never save.

This is referred to as apostasy. And we know that apostasy manifests itself in many different ways.

The main difficulty of this passage is the phrase "**by which he was sanctified**". Is this only an **outward** sanctification in the sense of being identified with God's people, but not to the person's true heart condition before God as the "**once saved always saved**" group contend. Or is it an **inward** sanctification that was lost by falling away from God as the group who contend that one can "**lose their salvation**"?

In both cases the person is "set apart" from the world in the sense that he has joined with the church and its ordinances. He sits under the preaching of the Word and even agrees with it intellectually. He has received "**the knowledge of the truth**" and then falls away.

My question is this...if a person died while he was serving the Lord and before he fell away from God, would he still be considered lost? Or does God, in His infinite knowledge, never allow anyone to die until they have exhibited their true character? You see, it is **impossible** for us to know if their heart had ever been transformed by God's saving grace. Thus I am glad that God did not place the burden of judgment upon us.

With that as an overview, let's work through the text, which falls into three sections.

BODY:

I. Willful Rejection Brings Terrifying Judgment.

Hebrews 10:26-27 (NASB95)

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

When the author says, "if we go on sinning willfully," he is not talking about the "normal" sins that every believer commits. If he were, then who could be saved? No one has ever lived without sin after salvation! While we do sometimes sin inadvertently, most of our sins are willful! We sin because we **choose** to sin! But the Bible is clear that if we sin, God graciously forgives and cleanses us when we confess our sins. Confession is more than just telling God "I have sinned". It requires repentance and abstaining from that sin in the future.

1 John 1:7-9 (NASB95)

⁷ 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. ⁸ If we say that we have

no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

“Sinning willfully” refers to what **Numbers 15:30** calls sins of defiance, for which there was no sacrifice available.

Numbers 15:30-40 (NASB95)

³⁰ But the person who does *anything* defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. ³¹ Because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt *will be on him.*”

³² Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. ³³ Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; ³⁴ and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. ³⁵ Then the Lord said to Moses, “The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” ³⁶ So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

It would seem to us, who are in the new covenant of grace, that this was an extreme punishment...to be stoned to death for gathering wood on the Sabbath. But it shows the seriousness of remaining obedient to God's Word. Commentators compare such sins to the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, representing an unpardonable sin of revolt against God. To go on sinning willfully means deliberately and knowingly to renounce the faith by rejecting Christ's sacrifice for sins. It is a total defection from the faith in Christ as Savior.

The only ones who can commit this sin are those who have received "**the knowledge of the truth**". These people have come into the church and have heard teaching on the meaning and significance of the death of Christ, such as the author has just given in the first part of this chapter. These apostates knew that Christ is God's only, "once-for-all sacrifice", who fulfilled and thus abolished the Old Testament sacrificial system. They knew the truth about the person of Christ and His exalted role as High Priest.

Yet even so, some were forsaking the assembly of the church and returning to Judaism. The author is saying that to make such a choice is to "**trample underfoot the Son of God**" and to treat His shed blood as worthless. It is to turn from the only way of salvation to an obsolete system that never could remove the guilt of sins. It is to place oneself on the side of God's adversaries. All that awaits them is **not** salvation, but a "**terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire that will consume the adversaries.**" The word "terrifying" is emphatic in the Greek. He repeats it in 10:31 and 12:21. These are the only three times it is used in the New Testament. He wants to hit us with the frightening consequences of turning away from Christ!

II. Our Punishment will be Greater than Those Under the Law of Moses.

Hebrews 10:28-29 (NASB95)

²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses.* ²⁹ 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?

If the Law of Moses had such stiff penalties for disregarding the law, the penalty will be **much greater** for spurning the Son of God who fulfilled the Law.

In verse 28, the author is stating what every Jew knew well: If a person brazenly defied the Law of Moses, he or she was to be stoned to death on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

Deuteronomy 17:2-6 (NASB95)

² “If there is found in your midst, in any of your towns, which the Lord your God is giving you, a man or a woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, by transgressing His covenant, ³ and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly host, which I have not commanded, ⁴ and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly. Behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, ⁵ then you shall bring out that man or that woman who has done this evil deed to your gates, *that is*, the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death. ⁶ On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

The author, up to this point in Hebrews, has just shown how Jesus is greater than Moses. He is a superior priest to the Levitical priests. He inaugurated the new covenant, which is better than the old. He is the better sacrifice. So the author is saying, in effect, "In light of the superiority of Jesus to Moses, and in light of the severity of punishment under Moses, seriously consider what will happen to the person who deliberately rejects **Christ!**"

He describes such apostates by three phrases. First, he “**has trampled underfoot the Son of God.**” To trample something under foot is to treat it as completely worthless. The use of the title, “**Son of God,**” seems to indicate that the form of apostasy in view involves a scornful denial of the deity of Christ. It means rejecting all that the author has argued for ten chapters on the supremacy and superiority of Jesus Christ, who is God’s final word to us. He is the radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of His nature, and He upholds all things by the word of His power. To treat this exalted Son of God like a bug under one’s foot is an indescribably horrific sin!

Second, such an apostate “has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.” The first charge trashed the **person** of Christ. This one despises His **work** on the cross. “**To regard as unclean**” means, literally, “to treat as common.” It may refer to partaking of communion even though his faith was not genuine, and so profaning the cup representing the blood of the covenant. Or, it could mean viewing the death of Jesus as a common death. The apostates shrugged off the significance of Christ’s death. Maybe they viewed His death as a noble tragedy, but nothing more. By so doing, they treated the blood of the new covenant as commonplace.

The third charge was that the apostates had “**insulted the Spirit of grace.**” “**Insulted**” has the implication of arrogance. This is similar to the unpardonable blasphemy against the Holy Spirit of which Jesus spoke.

Matthew 12:31-32 (NASB95)

³¹ “Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. ³² Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

For a guilty sinner to spit in God's face when His Spirit offers a free pardon made possible through the death of God's Son is simply outrageous.

ILLUSTRATION:

Picture a man lying in a makeshift cardboard shelter, covered with sores, hungry and homeless. He is there because of his own sinful choices. A kind, generous man offers to take this man to the hospital, pay all of his bills, and then to give to him all that he would ever need in life. He would have a comfortable home, all the food he could eat, and every comfort he could dream of. But the ungrateful man spits in the man's face, curses at him, and then tells others that the man's offer was worthless. That would not be as bad as insulting the Spirit of grace by turning your back on the free pardon that He offers through the blood of Jesus Christ! The person who spurns God's grace in Christ deserves far greater punishment than physical death by stoning. He will suffer justly throughout eternity.

III. God's Terrifying Judgment is Certain.

Hebrews 10:30-31 (NASB95)

³⁰ For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." ³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

We know that God's judgment is as certain as His Word, and it will be terrifying.

Even though he has been issuing this strong warning, the author has all along included himself with his readers by using the first person plural. Here he says, "**For we know Him who said,**" and then he cites two verses from Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 32:35-36 (NASB95)

³⁵ Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.' ³⁶ "For the Lord will vindicate His people, And will have compassion on His servants, When He sees that *their* strength is gone, And there is none *remaining*, bond or free.

The first quote establishes God's sole right to take vengeance, but the second part places emphasis on the fact that those who wrong such a Being as God have no chance of escape. You may wrong another person and somehow manage to escape his vengeance. But when God is scorned, He **will** repay!

The second quote in its original context states the certainty that God will vindicate His people by judging their enemies. Although the apostates had formerly been associated with God's people, their rebellion has put them on the side of God's adversaries. They will not escape. Leaving the fellowship and rejecting the sacrifice of Christ does not remove them from judgment, but rather, places them squarely in line **for** judgment! So the author concludes, "**It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**" He is trying, quite literally, to scare the hell out of them!

The Apostle John describes the terror of God's judgment.

Revelation 6:12-17 (NASB95)

¹² I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴ The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and they *said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

CONCLUSION:

Sometimes people will say, "I don't believe in a God of judgment. My God is a God of love." If you hold to that view, then your "god" is not the living God who reveals Himself through His Word! We have a very good example of God's revelation of Himself when He was speaking to Moses.

Exodus 34:6-7 (NASB95)

⁶ Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; (At this point they would shout "yeah! That is my God) yet He will by no means leave *the guilty* unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."

You may protest, "But that is the God of the Old Testament. You believe in Jesus, who was always gentle and kind." Really? I again remind you that Jesus spoke more often about the terrors of hell than anyone else in the Bible. He described hell as a place of outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 8:12 (NASB95)

¹² but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

He described the rich man in hell as being in agony in the flames.

Luke 16:24 (NASB95)

²⁴ And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.'

The **only** options are: **Christ or judgment?** If you reject Christ after hearing the gospel and being associated with God's people, you will fall into the hands of the living God, and it will be an eternally terrifying ordeal! You do not want to go there! But if you entrust yourself into the hands of Christ, which were pierced for you, you will find God's abundant mercy and grace to cover all your sins!

What a Day That Will Be!