

The Perils of Apostasy
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
Dr. H. Powell Dew, Jr.
August 7, 2022

Text: Hebrews 10:26-31

Purpose: The early Hebrew church was warned sternly that there is no other sacrifice for sin except the blood of Jesus Christ. God will judge those that reject Christ.

About three years ago, I began a series of sermons based on the Book of Hebrews. We stopped near Hebrews 11 which is known as “Faith’s Hall of Fame” list. Today, we rejoin Hebrews at a most difficult passage. This passage deals with the topic of apostasy. It has to do with the judgement of God.



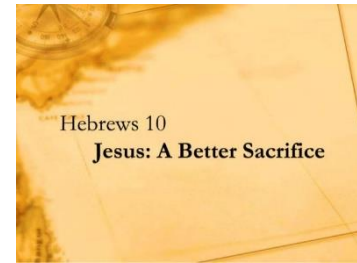
If I were to be honest with you, I would rather skip over this section related to the judgment of God, and talk about love, joy, peace, patience, faith, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. We do not like to hear sermons on judgment. We do not want to face the truth of our sinful nature and our standing before God if we reject Christ. We want to sweep all that under the rug and pretend that God is 100% merciful and will overlook our willful disobedience and our rejection of Christ as our sacrifice for sin.

But that word apostasy stands before us like a loud, red warning light. There are pitfalls when we reject the only way of salvation. There are consequences for those that have once tasted salvation and understand the great lengths God went to redeem us, but willfully turn their backs on that offer of salvation and turn back to a life of sin and grieve the Holy Spirit.

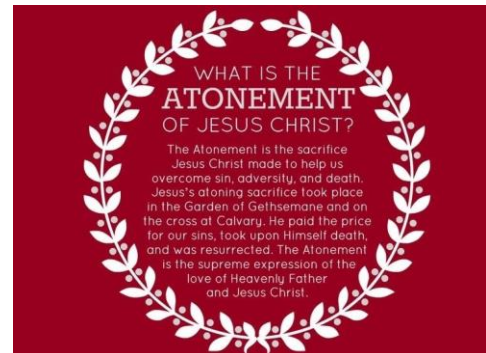


According to Webster’s Dictionary, the word apostasy means to desert one’s religious faith, party, or principles. The Greek word is *apostasias*. According to Vines Greek Dictionary, it means “falling” or “forsake.”

Our passage of scripture here in Hebrews is one of the sternest warnings found in the Bible. We need to know that there are dire consequences to turning your back on God and His only way of salvation. The writer of Hebrews, has in prior chapters, talked about the superiority of Christ's priesthood, the superiority of Christ's blood sacrifice, and how Christ now totally fulfills the requirements of the Old Testament Law.



Some Christians during the early days of the church were torn between the old dispensation, sacrifices for sin offered by the blood of animals in the temple, and the total sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary. They were torn between what they knew to be true before Christ came, and now how God has sent Jesus Christ into the world to totally fulfill the Law of God through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

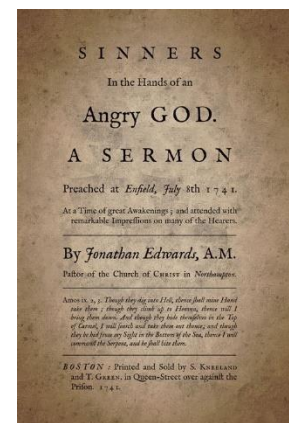


The writer of Hebrews wanted to warn them that if they continue to ignore the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, then they were in effect annulling the only way

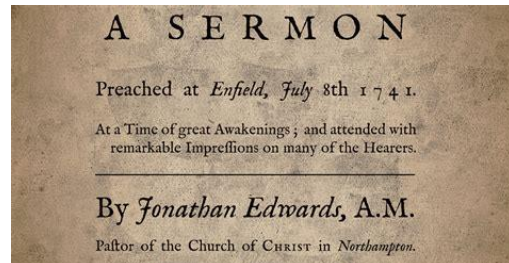
God provided atonement for their sins. And if they totally remove the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice, then there was no other way in which they could be saved. God has only provided one way of salvation and that is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. There is no other way to God. There is no other sacrifice sufficient enough. Our works will not save us. Our good thoughts will not endear us to God. Only through Christ can we be made justified. That is why the stern warning was given to the Hebrews.



But this trumpet blast was not only for that early church, it is a word for us today as well. R. Kent Hughes in his commentary on Hebrews compares this passage in Hebrews to the preaching of Jonathan Edwards in the 18th Century. In Jonathan Edward's day, that fiery evangelist warned his people there in Northampton, Massachusetts about the mercy and grace of God in his now famous sermon, "*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.*"



Many people think Jonathan Edwards loved detailing the fires of hell and scaring the people there into accepting Christ. But shouting and yelling was not his style. He actually read his manuscript at the pulpit a few inches in front of his face and read his sermons in a monotone flat style. His sermon has been read by thousands since the first day it was presented on July 8, 1741. That day as he preached, people moaned, groaned, and cried out, “What must I do to be saved?” He had to tell the people to be quiet so he could finish the sermon. The result of his sermon that day was that hardened hearts were changed.

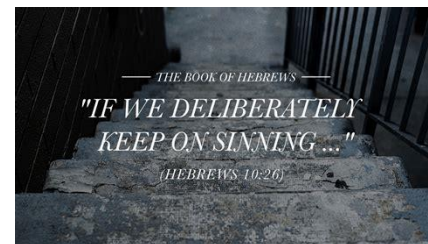


Jonathan Edwards was more concerned that people come to know God through Jesus Christ, not because of the future judgment God has waiting for those that reject him, but rather because of the Grace and Mercy of God we are spared from that judgment. He was presenting Christ as the answer to their sinful hearts. And that day, 281 years ago, God's grace broke through.

How many of you have ever sternly warned your children not to play in the road? You may have said, “If you go out in that road, those big trucks will come by and smack you flat and you will be dead.” Now were you trying to be unkind to your child with this warning? No. You were telling the truth and that truth was meant to point out the perils of rejecting what you taught.

The Terrors of Apostasy¹

The writer of Hebrews starts out with that same kind of warning.



“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left.” (v. 26)

Some Christians were in effect by continuing to participate in the sacrificial system at the temple, rejecting the sacrifice of Christ. And if they reject that, what else is left? Nothing! The writer of Hebrews was not saying if you continue to sin there comes a point where Christ's sacrifice runs out. That is not what is said here.

The writer is describing a person that is in a reprobate state that is – deliberately and continually – rejecting what Christ has offered.

You and I know exactly what deliberate sin looks like. It is like the little two-year boy that was told not to eat any more cookies. A little time later, he was found reaching up on the counter and slipping his hand in the cookie jar. That is deliberate, willful disobedience. Anyone that does not believe children have a sin nature early on, has never had children.

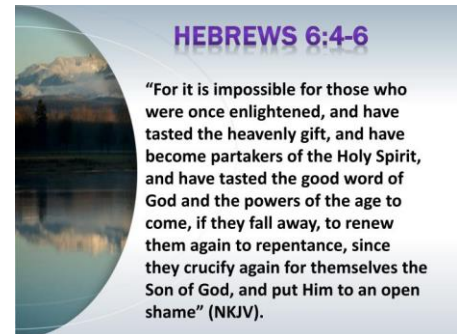


Our text is talking about deliberate, continual sinning. The point is that this individual has heard the message of Christ, and understands the truth of the Gospel. But they knowingly reject it. They willfully stay in a state of apostasy.

Calvin describes it this way, “This person is a sinner who doesn’t fall into any kind of sin, but forsaken the Church and separate themselves from Christ ... there is a great difference between individual lapses and universal desertion of the kind which makes for a total falling away from the grace of Christ.”

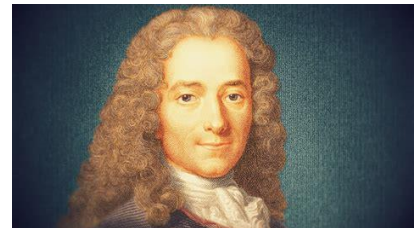
This is what Jesus described as sin against the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 12:32, Mark 3:29) Hebrews 6:4-6 says this:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace.



The ignorant cannot commit this sin. It is a sin committed by “church people” who know better but willingly walk away and reject God’s offer through Jesus Christ.

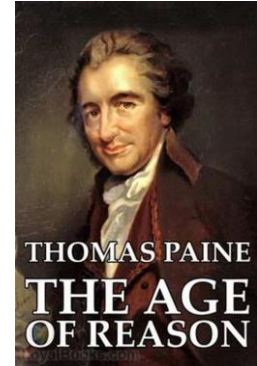
Throughout the years, people have lined up against Christ willingly. Voltaire once said, “Curse the wretch.” He boasted that “in twenty years, Christianity will be no more. My single hand will destroy what twelve apostles started.” Ironically after his death, the house in which he printed his literature became a home to the Geneva Bible Society.



The nurse that attended Voltaire when he was dying said, “For all the wealth in Europe, I would not want to see another infidel die.”

Thomas Paine was a well-known American writer, best known for his book, *Age of Reason*. He was an enemy of Christianity. As he laid upon his death bed in 1809, he said,

I would give worlds, if I had them that *Age of Reason* had never been published. O Lord help me! Christ, help me! O God what have I done to suffer so much? But there is no God! But if there should be, what will become of me hereafter? If ever the devil had an agent, I have been that one.

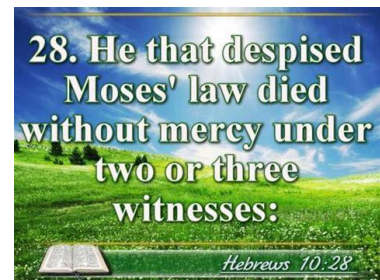


Make no mistake about it, “If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment.”

Those two thoughts should cause us to shake with fear – no sacrifice for sin and an expectation of judgment.

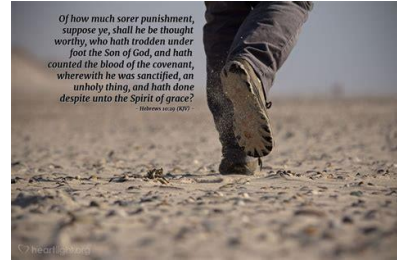
The Logic Behind the Terrors

The writer of Hebrews uses two arguments to prove that apostasy will result in punishment. He begins with a lesser argument taken from Deuteronomy 17. He said in Hebrews 10:28, “*Anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.*”



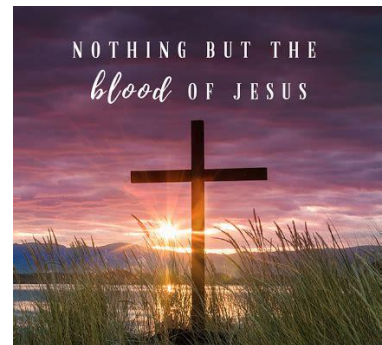
The Old Testament Law allowed and demanded that if an individual was caught worshipping idols and it was seen and testified to by two or three witnesses, then that person was to be stoned to death. The deliberate rejection of God by worshipping idols resulted in death. It had to be proven beyond doubt. One person’s witness was not enough. Once proven guilty, there was no mercy, no appeal, only certain death.

The writer of Hebrews moves to the greater argument when he said in Hebrews 10:29, *“How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace.”*



There are actually three great travesties that characterize all apostasy.

1. First, they *“trampled the Son of God under foot.”* You and I have probably seen people attack Jesus Christ for one reason or another. Jesus has been dragged through the mud by unbelievers ever since He came to this earth. They have blasphemed His name and routinely denounced Him. Jesus is the butt of many jokes.
2. No only do they trample Jesus; they also attack the work of Christ. They treat what was “holy as unholy.” They reject the blood of Christ, the blood of the new covenant, and treat it as a vile offense. If you look at Hebrews 9, you will see the superiority of Christ’s blood. Christ did what no other animal sacrifice could do, He took our sin away, once and for all. There was no other need of another sacrifice.



The hymn writer put it this way,

*Oh, Precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow.
No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

The kind of apostasy seen here in rejecting the finished work of Christ is by a person that may have professed faith in Christ, listened to the Word preached, and even celebrated in the Lord’s Supper. These outward activities many have initially sanctified Him, but that person’s faith was not internal nor was it genuine. And now they have rejected the blood of Christ and treated it in the same manner as yours and mine. They do not understand or choose not to grasp the significance of Christ’s sacrifice.

3. A person that takes these two stands (rejecting the person and work of Christ) will also reject the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The writer of Hebrews calls the “Holy Spirit” as the “Spirit of Grace.” That is what the Holy Spirit is

and does. The Holy Spirit *enlightens* our mind, *seals* our hearts through adoption, *regenerates* us with a new spirit within us, and *grafts* us into the body of Christ. This is God's grace at work through the Holy Spirit.

To insult God's Holy Spirit is the ultimate rejection of God. It is the Spirit of God that speaks to our heart, calls and woos us to God, and for a person to reject that Spirit of God, is to reject God Himself.



Jesus said, “*And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.*” (Matt. 12:31-32)

The question that comes from Hebrews 10:29 pushes us to the edge. “How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished?” Let this resonate with you – there will be no mercy for a person that rejects Christ. If no mercy was shown to a person in the Old Testament who rejected God through the worship of idols, do you think any mercy will be shown if you reject Christ? In the Old Testament we were talking about physical death, but here in the New Testament, we are seeing a spiritual death – eternal separation from God.



There are two sides to Christ, the loving forgiving Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. But there is also the fearful judgment coming from the Lamb of God found in Revelation chapter six.

Jesus said this concerning the coming judgment:

Matthew 13:49-50

So it will be at the end of the age. The wicked will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 18:8

If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands and feet, to be cast into everlasting fire.

Matthew 22:13

Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness: there will beeping and gnashing of teeth.'

Matthew 25:41

And He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Matthew 25:46

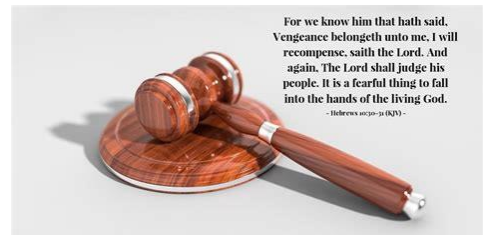
And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

As Charles Spurgeon once said, "Think lightly of hell, and you will think lightly of the cross."



The Terror of Judgment

As we return back to our text in Hebrews 10:30, we are reminded of the fact that it is "*the Lord that will be the judge of His people.*" This passage is taken from Deut. 32:35-35. Clearly judgment is inevitable and it will be impartial. It will be equal justice for all. He alone will be our judge. He knows our hearts and will judge it accordingly.



God's judgment will be based upon what each has been given. Those with greater knowledge, such as the apostates in the Hebrew church and in Jonathan Edward's church will be judged with greater stringency.

Finally, we come to that grand statement of terror. "*It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"

*It is a dreadful
thing to fall
into the hands
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God.*

HEBREWS 10:31

Divine Judgment

Those hands provide Divine judgment. If you look back over the life of King David, you will notice at one point in his reign, he decided to take a census of the people. He was advised not to do this because once a ruler knows the number of his people, he begins to subvert God's place in the life of the nation. After David counted the people, he was confronted in 2 Samuel 24 with three options for punishment for this disobedience.

He could accept seven years of famine in the land, flee for three months from their enemies, or a plague come upon the land for three days. David replied, "Please let us fall into the hands of the Lord." God allowed a plague to come upon the land and 70,000 people died. There is judgment when we are disobedient to God.

But God's hands are the very place we as believers need to be. We need to be obedient and trust God. When we do, we are a blessed people.



Dreadful Judgment

Falling outside of God's divine care is dreadful. The judgment that God offers is perfectly equitable. It involves separation from God for all of eternity. We may not grasp how long eternity is, but our choice here while we are alive determines our eternal destiny. As Jonathan Edwards so eloquently said in his sermon, "we are like spiders hanging by a thread of web over the eternal flames of hell". We are ready to be consumed by the judgment if we fail to turn to God and place our eternity in His hands.



Wonderful Salvation

As intimidating as that may seem, we do not need to face that separation from God and those that we love. Christ has extended His arms wide enough to hold all that come unto Him. His sacrifice not only atoned for our sins (covered), it also propitiated our sins (removed). Our guilt is no longer stuck on us. We can live forgiven, free from the guilt of sin, and out of the wrathful path of God.



Jesus is willing to do this for all that repent of their sin, receive Christ as their Savior, and believe He is the Son of God sent by God to atone for their sins.

I have placed my heart, life, and eternity in the hands of Jesus Christ. He can be yours today as well.

LET US PRAY

Notes:

¹Outline taken from R. Kent Hughes Commentary on Hebrews 10:26-31

Preached at Fremont Missionary Baptist Church, Fremont NC
July 13, 2008

Preached at Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
November 10, 2019
August 7, 2022