

“LIVING BY FAITH”

I. Introduction

- A. The second half of Hebrews 10 marks a significant turning point in this letter.
- B. Up through 10:18, the epistle focused upon Jesus’ ministry as our great high priest before God.
- C. From the “Therefore” in 10:19 through the rest of the letter, the writer turns his attention to what we should do in light of the fact that we have Jesus as our great high priest.
- D. As we saw in our previous sermon in Hebrews, this section began with the writer issuing the three exhortations found in 10:19-25: let us draw near to God in full assurance of faith; let us hold fast the confession of our hope; and let us stir up one another to love and good works.
- E. In the passage that we are considering tonight, we find a warning, a recollection, and another exhortation.

II. A Warning (26-31)

- A. We begin by looking at the warning, which is issued in verses 26-31.
 - 1. The writer says that there is no longer a sacrifice for sins for those who go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth.
 - 2. I hope that you can see that this is a very serious matter.
 - 3. We need to know what this phrase “go on sinning deliberately” means.
 - 4. If it is referring to the sins that we commit as Christians, then we are all in trouble.

5. While no Christian should ever think that God's grace gives him license to sin, the fact of the matter is that even the best Christians do continue to sin.
 6. We know that "sinning deliberately" cannot be referring to the times when true believers are overtaken by temptation because the Scriptures explicitly tell us that forgiveness is available to Christians when we sin.
 7. One place where we see this is in 1 John 2, where the apostle writes, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins". (vv. 1-2a)
 8. Notice that John doesn't say that Jesus was the propitiation for our sins but that Jesus is the propitiation for our sins.
 9. In other words, Jesus' sacrifice remains efficacious for as long as we live.
 10. In the words of John Calvin, "God invites to daily reconciliation those who abide in Christ; they are daily washed by the blood of Christ, their sins are daily expiated by his perpetual sacrifice... Christ's sacrifice is efficacious to the godly even unto death, though they often sin; nay, it retains ever its efficacy, for this very reason, because they cannot be free from sin as long as they dwell in the flesh."
- B. In order to understand what this passage means when it speaks of "sinning deliberately", we need to understand the Old Testament background to verse 28, where the writer says, "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses."
1. This is probably alluding to Deuteronomy 17, where it says this: "If there is found among you, within any of your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, in transgressing his covenant, and

has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, and it is told you and you hear of it, then you shall inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abomination has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones. On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst." (Deut. 17:2-7)

2. Under Israel's civil law, those who worshipped other gods were to be put to death.
 3. Idolatry was a capital offense in Old Testament Israel, a crime that resulted in the temporal punishment of physical death.
 4. The writer of Hebrews is alluding to that part of the law in order to show that the sin that he is talking about here receives an even worse punishment: the eternal punishment of spiritual death.
 5. When we consider this in light of the teaching of the rest of Scripture, we have to conclude that this is the sin of final apostasy.
 6. Jesus said that the only sin that cannot be forgiven is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is persistently rejecting or ignoring the Spirit's testimony to Christ in the gospel.
 7. When this sin is committed by a person who was previously part of the Christian community, it is referred to as apostasy.
 8. This is what the writer of Hebrews means when he speaks of "sinning deliberately."
- C. The original recipients of this letter were in danger of committing this sin.

1. They were beginning to think that Jesus might not be necessary for salvation after all.
2. They were considering the possibility of returning to their background in Judaism.
3. Few, if any, of us face that temptation today, but there are plenty of ways in which we are tempted to de-value Christ.
4. Our culture is putting intense pressure upon us to adopt its ideas about religion and morality, and many who profess to be Christians are caving in to that pressure.
5. It should be clear that we need to heed the warning that is contained in these verses.
6. We need to remember that those who make light of Christ are spurning him and outraging his Spirit.
7. Such people have no place of refuge from the fire of God's judgment.
8. This is what the writer means when he says, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."
9. We need to remember what the gospel saves us from in order to guard ourselves against neglecting such a great salvation.

III. A Recollection (32-34)

- A. We turn now to the second part of our passage: the recollection that is found in verses 32-34.
 1. The writer urges the Hebrew Christians to recall the earlier days of their walk with Christ.
 2. He reminds them that they suffered because of their profession of faith in Christ.

3. They were made the objects of public reproach.
 4. Their possessions were plundered by their enemies, a detail that may refer to the looting that took place when the emperor Claudius expelled Jews and Jewish Christians from Rome.
 5. They did not distance themselves from their brothers and sisters who were suffering for their faith but went and visited them in prison.
 6. In doing so, they were saying that they were in fellowship with those persecuted Christians.
 7. They were exposing themselves to the possibility of further persecution.
 8. These Christians endured a degree of suffering that was far beyond the minor opposition that Christians in our culture sometimes experience.
 9. And they remained faithful in the face of these afflictions.
 10. They even responded to the plundering of their property with joy, not because they were happy about it but because they knew that they had treasure laid up for them in heaven.
- B. There are two things that I want to point out about this recollection.
1. The first is the importance of cultivating a heavenly-oriented mindset.
 2. It is easy for us to be earthly-minded.
 3. We can get so focused upon our finances, or our property, or our health, or our relationships, or our job, or our other interests that we lose sight of what really matters.
 4. When we remember that we have a lasting inheritance in the world to come, our hearts will not be so invested in the things of this

world.

5. Of course, we not should go through life in a state of stoical detachment, but we do need to face up to the fact that nothing in this world is going to last forever.
 6. One day, it will all be gone.
 7. The way to keep things in perspective is to remember that, as Christians, we have an inheritance that will never fade away.
 8. As Thomas Boston once put it, "Had we a clearer view of the other world, we should not make so much of either the smiles or frowns of this." [*The Crook in the Lot*, 109-110]
- C. The second thing that we can learn from the recollection that the writer makes in this passage is that remembering our past graces is one of the means that helps us to persevere in the faith.
1. When we look back upon what the Lord has already accomplished in our lives, we become more and more confident that he will complete the good work that he has begun in us.
 2. We are also reminded that we need to run our race all the way to the finish line.
 3. It doesn't do any good to start off well in the Christian life if you don't make it all the way to the end.
 4. Listen to how Calvin expresses this: "it is a shameful thing to begin well, and to faint in the middle of the course, and still more shameful to retrograde after having made great progress. The remembrance then of past warfare, if it had been carried on faithfully and diligently under the banner of Christ, is at length useful to us, not as a pretext for sloth, as though we had already served our time, but to render us more active in finishing the remaining part of our course. For Christ has not enlisted us on this condition, that we should after a few years ask for a discharge like soldiers who have served their time, but that we should pursue our

warfare even to the end.”

5. If you are a Christian, then you are enlisted in active duty in the church militant all the way up until the time of your death.
6. Never let yourself think that you have already done enough.
7. There is no retirement from the Christian life.
8. You need to keep on fighting to the end of your days.
9. Only then will you receive your transfer to the regiment of the church triumphant.

IV. An Exhortation (35-39)

A. This brings us to the third part of our passage, where the writer exhorts the Hebrew Christians of their need for endurance in the faith.

1. He urges them, “do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.”
2. In saying this, the writer is urging us not to throw away Christ.
3. Jesus is the sure and steadfast anchor of our souls.
4. It is only because our hope is in him that we can say,

*In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.*

5. Through Christ we have confidence to draw near to God and to commune with him.

B. The “great reward” of which the writer speaks at the end of verse 35 is the final consummation of all that God has promised us in the gospel.

1. When our faith rests upon Christ we already hold title to that reward, though we do not yet have full possession of it.
 2. If we want to take full possession of it on the Day of Christ's return, we need to persevere in faith.
 3. This does not mean that we merit the reward.
 4. It simply means that the only people who will receive this reward are those who have true faith in Christ, faith that is characterized by the fact that it perseveres to the end.
- C. The writer illustrates this by citing a passage from the prophet Habakkuk where the Lord says this: "Yet a little while, and the coming one 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."
1. In the original context in Habakkuk, God was assuring the prophet that a day is coming when the wicked will be called to account for their sins.
 2. A day is coming when all of God's enemies, all who oppose and oppress God's people, will face God's holy justice.
 3. We do not know when that day will be, but we can be absolutely certain that it will come at God's appointed time.
 4. When God told Habakkuk that his righteous shall one live by faith, he was calling Habakkuk to trust him in spite of how things appeared at that particular point in time.
 5. The Hebrew Christians to whom this letter was originally written needed to hear the same exhortation.
 6. God's sovereignty and justice are not always evident in the things that take place in the world around us, but we always need to trust that the Lord is in perfect control.

7. We cannot be certain that things will always go well for us in this life, but we can be certain that Christ will return to punish the wicked and to bring the righteous into their inheritance.
8. The thing that we need to remember, though, is that this will unfold in God's time, not ours.

V. Conclusion

- A. The Christian life is a life that is lived by faith, not by sight.
 1. The writer is going to develop this theme further in chapter 11 by calling our attention to the faith that was exhibited in the lives of various Old Testament saints.
 2. God's promises can only be received by faith
 3. And the faith that receives these promises is not a faith that is vibrant for a time and then fizzles out at the end.
 4. As our text vividly puts it, those who shrink back will be destroyed.
 5. Only those who have faith will preserve their souls.
- B. This is why you and I have the same need as the Hebrew Christians to whom this letter was written.
 1. We have need of endurance in the faith, so that we may receive the great reward that is the fruition of our confidence.
 2. And we can be thankful that this enduring faith is not something that we have to generate but is a gift that is given by our God.
 3. As Peter explains in his first epistle, "by God's power [we] are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Pet. 1:5)