

Hebrews 10:26-39
Numbers 15:1-31
Psalm 119:65-72

“Do Not Throw Away Your Confidence”

April 25, 2021

Numbers 15 tells us about the rules for the ordinary offerings.
And then there is a section on “unintentional sins.”

Nowadays we tend to think of sin as always being *intentional*.

We often think that “I didn’t mean to do it” means that we are *not guilty*.
But while intent is important for a *crime* –
that is not at all necessary for a *sin*.

“Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.”

So if you have acted contrary to what God says –
it doesn’t matter what *you intended*.

What would be an example of an unintentional sin?

Well, you are supposed to love God with *all your heart, soul, mind, and strength*.

It’s really easy to fail at that without even trying!

And how about “love your neighbor as yourself”?

I can ignore you and forget you *so easily*!

That’s not love.

Did I do it on purpose? No.

But that’s why – when you realize that you have sinned –
you need to humble yourself.

Verse 30 points out that the one who sins high-handedly –
the one who reviles the LORD –
will be cut off from his people.

The point here is that when you sin, you need to repent.

It’s not okay to just keep on sinning deliberately.

The one who keeps sinning deliberately has ‘despised the word of the LORD’ –
is ‘reviling’ God – and has rejected the sacrifice.

In our Psalm of response, the Psalmist reflects on this.

In Psalm 119:67, the Psalmist says,

“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word.”

The word translated “went astray” is the same word used to speak of “sinning unintentionally”
in Numbers 15.

The idea is that when we are living at ease, we often go astray.

When we are comfortable, we get forgetful – and we are especially prone to commit unintentional sins.

We're just not thinking!

God sends us affliction in order to teach us to *hate sin*.

“It is good for me that I was afflicted,
that I might learn your statutes.”

Sing Psalm 119:65-72

Read Hebrews 10:19-39

Passages like this are sometimes difficult for us.

We don't like to think about the fact that sometimes Christians apostatize.

But I suspect you've all seen it–

someone you knew and trusted,

someone you thought was sound in faith, hope and love,

turns away from Christ and rejects the faith.

What is apostasy?

And how can we avoid it?

Hebrews clearly says that some Christians apostatize:

“those who shrink back and are destroyed.” (v39)

Some would prefer to say that “those who shrink back” aren't *really* Christians.

But a Christian is one who professes Jesus as Lord.

A Christian is one who has been baptized into Christ and his church.

If you have been baptized, and you profess Jesus as Lord, then you are a Christian.

But Hebrews wants to encourage you that this is not you!

“We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed –
but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

Introduction: What Is Your Confidence?

So what is your “confidence”?

Hebrews has used this language before:

3:6–“Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.

And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence
and our boasting in our hope.”

4:16–because of what Christ has done, “let us then with confidence
draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy
and find grace to help in time of need.”

This was the language he used to open our section in 10:19:

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places
by the blood of Jesus...”

Our confidence is that Jesus has paid the price for our sins in his once-for-all sacrifice.

Our confidence is that our conscience has been cleansed by his blood—
our sins have been washed away!
Our confidence is that Jesus *sits* at God’s right hand
having brought us to maturity and completeness in himself.

In other words,

“My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

Your confidence is not grounded on yourself, but in Christ.

1. What Happens if You Throw It Away? (10:26-31)

But verse 35 warns us against “throwing away your confidence.”

And verses 26-31 warns us of what happens if we throw it away.

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

Verse 26 uses the language of “sinning deliberately.”

What does “sinning deliberately” mean?

The language of “if we *go on* sinning deliberately”
suggests that the sin in view is already understood—
and the only sin in 10:19-25 is not drawing near, not holding fast,
and not stirring each other up to love and good works—
all of which can be summarized as “neglecting to meet together” in verse 25.

“Sinning deliberately,” then, is synonymous with “throwing away your confidence” in verse 35.

It is apostasy.

After all, what do we do when we meet together?

We draw near to God in faith (verse 22).

We hold fast the confession of our hope (verse 23)

And we stir each other up to love and good works (verses 24-25).

So the heart of apostasy is neglecting to meet together:

it is refusing to draw near to God in faith,

letting go the confession of your hope,

and ignoring and abandoning each other – not loving one another.

To put it simply,

apostasy is refusing to worship God.

Hebrews 10:26-29 functions as the other bookend to Hebrews 6:4-6.

These two exhortations open and close the central exposition of Hebrews 6-10.

And 10:26-29 echoes what we heard earlier in chapter 6.

Back in Hebrew 6:4-6, we heard this:

“For it is impossible to restore again to repentance
those who have once been enlightened,
who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,
and have tasted the goodness of the word of God
and the powers of the age to come,
if they then fall away, since they are crucifying once again
the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”

The point is that the effect of apostasy is irreversible.

To reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is to reject the final, once-for-all sacrifice.
If you will not hold fast to him, then there is nothing to hold fast to!

The basic difference between 6:4-6 and 10:26-29 is the sacrificial language of chapter 10.

Having worked through the better priesthood, the better covenant, and the better sacrifice,
Hebrews is now able to state the same point of 6:4-6 in different language:
If rejecting the old covenant was bad—with its weak and futile sacrifices,
then how much worse is it to reject the new covenant?!

When you were baptized you were marked with the blood of the covenant.
But when Hebrews speaks of apostasy,
he speaks of more than just rejecting your baptism.
Some people are baptized as infants—but never come to a knowledge of the truth.
They are baptized in Christian churches,
but churches that did not do a very good job of teaching you.
Hebrews 10 isn't talking about people who were only half-taught.

“If we go on sinning deliberately *after receiving the knowledge of the truth.*”
You have heard the Word of God proclaimed,
you have received the knowledge of the truth.

These are people who understand *exactly* what they are doing.
They are not ignorant or confused.
This is willful, prideful, deliberate rebellion.

If you then set aside the sacrifice of Jesus,
then there is nothing left for you but the wrath of God.

(read)

²⁸ *Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.* ²⁹ *How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?*

In Numbers 15:22-31 God distinguished between intentional and unintentional sins.
The “defiant” sinner was to be cut off from his people—put to death.

There are some who sin willfully and defiantly.
Calculated, persistent renunciation of the truth results in
“a fearful expectation of judgment,
and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”

Contempt for the blood of Christ will receive retribution more terrible
than the death penalty of the old covenant.
Willful contempt for Moses’s law brought death.
Willful contempt for Christ’s sacrifice brings nothing less than hell itself.

The descriptions of what the apostate does are graphic:
he has “spurned the Son of God”--
contrast this with Hebrews regular call to “hold fast” to Christ.
He has “profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified”--
in other words, he has treated holy things as common and vulgar.
And he has “outraged the Spirit of grace”--
the same Spirit that was poured out upon the church at the day of Pentecost,
he has now deliberately insulted.

The apostate had once “held” to Christ—since they had “received the knowledge of the truth.”
But they have not “held fast.”
The apostate did believe—in some sense—they had, as Jesus put it,
“received the word with joy” (Mt 13:20).

Jesus speaks of the seed that falls on the rocky soil as sprouting up quickly –
but because it had no root – it withered and died.

In the end, the apostate does not *hold fast* to their confidence,
and as Jesus put it in Mt 13, that was because they had no root in them!

Likewise, the apostate had been sanctified by the blood of the covenant.
To sanctify means to set apart, or consecrate.
All those who are baptized are set apart and consecrated to Christ.
All those who participate in the life of the church are participating
in the sanctified (set apart) people of God.
The sacrifice of Jesus, after all, established a new covenant—
and that covenant is fleshed out in history.
And in history, all sorts of people become part of that covenant.
But those who treat the sanctifying blood of the covenant as a common thing
face God’s judgment without hope,

because in the end, they do not have Christ.

As our confession puts it, there are those who have “some common operations of the Spirit,” but “never truly come unto Christ.” (Confession 10.4)

The Holy Spirit worked in them for a time.

They were sanctified by the blood of the covenant.

But they do not, in the end, draw near, hold fast,
or stir each other up to love and good works.

Because in the end, they forsake the assembly—
they willfully and defiantly reject the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

And because of this, Hebrews warns (read 10:30-31)

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 fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The quotations from Deuteronomy 32 in verse 30

originally emphasized the vindication of God’s people,

but here they are used to remind us of the implication of that vindication:

that when God vindicates his people,

he will also bring vengeance against the wicked.

We may have confidence that God will take vengeance upon apostates.

Why is that a good thing?

Think of the various sex scandals in the churches.

Pastors abused those who trusted them.

How many of Christ’s little ones are still angry at the church,
because of what happened to them?

Remember what Jesus says:

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin,

it would be better for him to have a great millstone

fastened around his neck

and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” (Mt 18:6)

The Lord *will* judge his people.

And while we take comfort in that—that God will vindicate us one day—
we must also heed the warning.

2. Remember the Roots and Fruits of Your Confidence (10:32-35)

Having provided this terrifying warning,

Hebrews then turns to comfort (just as in chapter 6).

He starts with the fruit of confidence: (Read 32-34)

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being

partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Apparently his hearers had endured through persecution.
And so he calls them to remember the past—
remember how you endured through suffering.
You endured so much:
don't cast away your hope now!

If God has forgiven your sins in Jesus Christ,
if God has forgiven *all* of your sins in Jesus Christ,
if God has forgiven all of your sins through the *once-for-all* sacrifice of Jesus Christ,
then why would you throw that away?

³⁵ *Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.*

The confidence that we have in Christ is a confidence that bears rich fruit.
If you have peace with God, then you can endure anything.

You may not be facing persecution right now.
But you are facing suffering.
Several of you have recently moved to a new city,
leaving behind family and friends.
Some face illness, challenges at work or at home,
and some of you are discouraged.
Remember that you yourselves have a better possession and an abiding one!

Because the fruits of your confidence grows out of the root of your confidence.
What is that root?
You have a better and abiding possession—v34

What is the “better possession and an abiding one”?
What is this promise that you receive?
6:12—be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises”
9:15—those who are called receive “the eternal inheritance”

What is this promised eternal inheritance?
We sometimes call it “eternal life.”
We could also call it eternal fellowship with God

Your confidence has a great reward.
And that reward is God himself.
There is no greater reward—no greater inheritance.

3. We Need Endurance to Do the Will of God (10:36-39)

³⁶ *For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.*

Therefore “you have need of endurance,
so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”
What does it mean to do the will of God?

This is what we saw last time from verses 22-25:

“Draw near”

“Hold fast”

“Consider how to stir each other up to love and good works.”

We draw near to God in worship.

We hold fast the confession of our hope—even in the midst of trials.

And we encourage each other daily.

We need endurance as we do the will of God.

We are constantly tempted to take the “easy” route
and throw away our confidence.

But notice that “doing the will of God” is not the root of your confidence.

Your confidence is what Christ has done.

Doing the will of God is what you are called to do on the basis of your confidence.

And “when you have done the will of God,
you will receive what is promised.”

Scripture tells us regularly that the final judgment is a judgment

according to what we have done in the flesh (Mt 25:31-46; 1 Peter 1:17).

Paul tells us that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,
so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body,
whether good or evil.” (2 Cor 5:10)

But as we’ve seen throughout Hebrews,

if Jesus Christ has taken your sins upon himself,
then all of your sins have been forgiven.

And at the final judgment,

not one of those sins will be held against you.

Therefore, when God judges you for what you have done in the body,
all he will say is “well done, good and faithful servant.”

Because you have endured in doing the will of God.

Another way of saying this is in verses 37-39.

³⁷ *For, “Yet a little while,*

and the coming one will come and will not delay;
³⁸ *but my righteous one shall live by faith,*
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him.”
³⁹ *But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

This is a quote from Habakkuk 2:3-4,

but the author of Hebrews has altered it slightly.

In Habakkuk 2 God says that ‘the end’ will surely come; *it* will not delay.

But Hebrews turns this into a statement about the coming of Christ.

This is accurate enough—the coming of Christ is the coming of the end!

But what he does with verse 4 is even more interesting.

The LXX translation said “if he draws back, my soul will not take pleasure in him,
but my righteous one shall live by his faith.”

Hebrews inverts the order.

This has the effect of distinguishing between the “coming one”
and the “righteous one.”

In other words,

Hebrews has taken what the LXX applied to the Messiah and applies it to us.

Jesus is the righteous one who lived by faith,

and because we are in Jesus, therefore we are called to live by faith as well

Hebrews looks at you and says,

Do not shrink back from Christ!

Believe!

Hold fast to him!

For it is only through faith that you will preserve your souls.

Passages like Hebrews 10 sometimes shake our assurance.

They are intended to do so!

Hebrews wanted to shake you.

Do not become complacent!

And do not put your confidence in yourself!

But fix your eyes upon Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith:

let your confidence be in him,

and then persevere in doing good,

endure in doing the will of God,

and when you have done the will of God you will receive what is promised.

When you live by faith you are doing the will of God,

as you draw near to God in faith,

as you hold fast to the confession of your hope,

and as you consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.