

The Terrifying Consequence of Defiance Hebrews 10:26-31

Introduction

The letter to the Hebrews calls for us to be unshaken in our faith by holding fast to Christ. It is driven by the author's pastoral concern for his readers, who have professed faith in Christ but are experiencing pressure to abandon their faith and turn back to the old ways of their people and culture. We hear that pastoral concern in the warnings given from time to time in the letter:

Hebrews 2:2-3a

² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

Hebrews 3:12

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Hebrews 6:4-8

⁴ For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore

them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. ⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.

Hebrews 10:26-31—our text this morning

Whenever we gather for worship, we nearly always have a mix of people. Many in our worship services on any given Sunday are truly born again, trusting in Jesus and living for Him. Some are unbelievers. Perhaps they are still in the exploration and discovery stage of Christianity, and have not yet come to the place of transferring their trust completely to Jesus and His gospel. Others grew up in a Christian environment, but have never really taken seriously the teachings of Jesus and submitting to His Lordship. Some believe, but struggle with whether or not they are actually saved because of the battles with sin and with doubt. Others are confident they are Christian, but their lives are dominated by devotion to sin and unwillingness to repent of it. They worship with God's people for a time, but under pressure from the culture or from their appetites, they will eventually abandon identification with Christ and His people.

The writer of Hebrews is targeting those who participate in the blessings of identification with the church, but really have no living relationship with the Lord Jesus. He's calling them to be all in, and he's warning them that turning away has devastating consequences.

Last Time: Bold

The best defense is a good offense.

Be Bold in Your Worship—Christ has made a way for you into God's presence.

Be Bold in Your Confession of Hope—don't be intimidated or seduced to let loose of it.

Be Bold in Your Love Work—be mindful and intentional in stirring one another up to love and good works

"And all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

The Day is coming when King Jesus returns to judge the world and to usher in the next age when we enter our inheritance.

Why so important to be bold? Verse 26 begins with the word "for," and what follows gives us the answer: the price is too high to do otherwise.

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.

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? 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.

1. Persistent Deliberate Sinning Brings God's Fiery Judgment (26-27).
2. Rejecting Jesus desecrates His blood of the covenant and outrages the Spirit of grace (28-29).
3. God will surely execute vengeance on those who turn away from Him (30-31).

1. Persistent Deliberate Sinning Brings God's Fiery Judgment (26-27).

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.

In the Greek text underlying our translation, the word "deliberately" stands at the front of the sentence. Hebrews is not talking here

about just a person who is struggling with whether he or she is actually saved, or even a believer who has an ongoing battle with certain sins. This is talking about those who deliberately keep on choosing to sin contrary to the truth they've received. Just as the old covenant sacrifices were for unintentional sins, not deliberate ones, this refers to an ongoing commitment to sinning in the face of God's commands otherwise. Counting the truth you've received as a lie. And counting as true Satan's lie, "You shall not surely die."

The Bible's terms for our sin reveal that sin carries the personal dimension of antagonism toward God. The common word *sin* speaks of our failure to meet God's standard. *Iniquity* communicates that we have twisted God's design for who we are to be. *Transgression* speaks of our having rebelled against God's boundaries. *Lawlessness*—we have broken His law. *Evil*—when we sin we choose what is harmful to those made in God's image.

A genuine believer desires to please God. Doing right matters to him or her. It grieves a born-again person to yield to sin, however and whenever it happens. So there is this ongoing battle for righteousness against sin (Romans 6; Romans 8). In contrast, the person Hebrews is talking about has decided not to fight sin in order to serve God but to openly defy God in order to pursue sin.

Richard Phillips: "What this verse describes is not believers who are struggling with sin, or even those who have besetting sins which plague their spiritual life and displease the Lord. Rather, this refers to those who reject God's authority to tell them what to do, and who flagrantly continue in their sin."

Proverbs 2:13-15 describes persons like this as those—

¹³ Who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, ¹⁴ who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil, ¹⁵ men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.

Such a path does not end well. It cannot. It is the path to the fiery wrath of God, and we do well to fear ever taking such a course.

When we choose an ongoing lifestyle like that of God's adversaries, we make ourselves one of their number. Such a deliberate pattern is especially offensive when we have been taught the truth along with the people of God. It is bold defiance of God, almost daring Him to take action. The very opposite of the holy boldness the writer has called us to in the previous verses. A reckless sacrilege (as the next verses will explain).

1 Thessalonians 1:5-10 (encouragement to persecuted saints)

⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering— ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

God's fiery judgment of the lake of fire is for Satan and his angels, and for all who choose to obey him rather than yielding to God. Why would anyone in his or her right mind choose such a destiny?

Only those who think God a fiction or a liar, a bully or an enemy do so.

If you will not consider the prideful insult sin is to God, will you not at least take into account the horrible damage it does to you? Why choose what dishonors God and destroys you?

Why not rather choose love for the Creator, Sustainer, Revealer, Redeemer?

Why not choose life for yourself, made in God's image with a high purpose as a human being. Created to shine out God's goodness and splendor and to enjoy the sweet relationship of knowing Him?

Psalm 90:11-12 Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 92:7-8, 10 Though the wicked sprout like grass and all evildoers flourish, they are doomed to destruction forever; but you, O Lord, are on high forever. . . . You have exalted my horn . . . ; you have poured over me fresh oil.

2. Rejecting Jesus desecrates His blood of the covenant and outrages the Spirit of grace (28-29).

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?

Having proven the superiority of the Son of God to Moses, the servant of God, it only makes sense that rejecting Jesus and His new covenant work is worse than even the death penalty crimes under Mosaic law.

Rejection of the Person of Christ—
"trampled underfoot the Son of God"

Complete reversal of being bold in your worship.

Jesus the Savior-King is the Hero of the Good News. He deserves our adoration and worship.

Much of the world seems drawn to Jesus as a human being. And many are willing to talk about God. But they become irritated if you talk about Jesus as more than just a religious teacher, but as Savior and Lord, the only way to the Father. Such a spirit betrays either ignorance or rejection of what the eyewitness accounts record about Jesus.

At His baptism, as the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove, the voice of God the Father spoke audibly from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Same words at His transfiguration, with the additional words, "Listen to Him."

John 5:21-24

21 For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. **22** For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, **23** that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. **24** Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

Remember how Hebrews began?

Hebrews 1:1-3

1 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **3** He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Repudiation of the Saving Work of Christ—"profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified"

Complete reversal of being bold in your confession of hope.

Our reason for hope is that we have been redeemed—bought back from slavery to sin—by the blood of Christ and set apart as God’s special possession. Turning away from the gospel is to treat Christ’s blood as common, nothing special, nothing powerful, nothing saving, and to count ourselves as no longer belonging to God at all despite Christ’s precious blood poured out for us.

Contempt for the Holy Spirit—"outraged the Spirit of grace"—treating with utter contempt (Rienecker)

Complete reversal of being bold in your love work—motivated and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Christ freely gives the Holy Spirit to those who trust in Him as their Savior. The Spirit is a priceless gift of God’s favor to us that we could never earn. He seals those who have truly believed in Jesus and guarantees their future eternal inheritance (Ephesians 1). He empowers their love and good works. To shut your heart to the Spirit is to treat Him with contempt, along with all He brings to us.

Richard Phillips shares a pastoral experience from his ministry that is so helpful in understanding the point of this text that I want to read it to you. Excerpt from *Hebrews*, "A Dreadful Punishment," Hebrews 10:26-31:

"I had a pastoral situation . . . subsequent repudiation." (451-52)

So if you find yourself trapped in sin and yielding to doubt, which one are you? Are you like Peter, weeping that you have betrayed your Lord? Or are you like Judas, and have decided never to repent and trust?

3. God will surely execute vengeance on those who turn away from Him (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.

We tend to think of God's judgment as primarily for the pagan nations of the world. Those that have found community among the people of God can think themselves safe despite the true state of their hearts and actual pattern of their lives. But that is the very group Moses was addressing in Deuteronomy, and Hebrews addresses here.

These verses draw from a song Moses taught to Israel toward the end of his life, warning them against turning away from God to idols. So the warning is for those who identify as God's people, those who have been taught the truth but whose hearts are resisting God and His Word and are turning from Him to their own sinful ways.

Context of the OT verses Hebrews 10 quotes:
Deuteronomy 32:15-18

15 "But Jeshurun (Israel) grew fat, and kicked; you grew fat, stout, and sleek; then he forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation. **16** They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger. **17** They sacrificed to demons that were no gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently, whom your fathers had never dreaded. **18** You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth.

Deuteronomy 32:35-36

35 Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.' **36** For the LORD will vindicate (judge) his people and have compassion on his servants, when he sees that their power is gone and there is none remaining, bond or free.

Deuteronomy 32:39-41

39 "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand. **40** For I lift up my hand to heaven and swear, As I live forever, **41** if I sharpen my flashing sword and my hand takes hold on judgment, I will take

vengeance on my adversaries and will repay those who hate me.

If you reject Jesus and His sacrifice for your sins, what other outcome can you expect but the terrifying prospect of God's wrath? He alone as the completely Righteous Judge has full right to bring vengeance, and as the Sovereign Lord of the Universe, He has complete power to do so. He is no fictitious paper deity. He is the living God. And His hands are almighty. Mighty to save. Mighty to judge.

Jesus gave honest warning to His disciples that they would face persecution for His name sake. But He encouraged them not to fear it. There is something far worse than suffering mistreatment for following Jesus.

Matthew 10:28-33

28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. **29** Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. **30** But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. **31** Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. **32** So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, **33** but whoever denies me before

men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

People fear many threats these days—personal, national, international. But they all pale compared to setting yourself in defiance of the Living God.

Those who trust in Him find in His omnipotence their supreme refuge. Those who repudiate Him will find in His omnipotence their most terrifying nightmare.

Conclusion

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Ezekiel 33:11

As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?

Discussion Questions

1. When do you find yourself most vulnerable to deliberate sin or to unbelieving doubt? Have you found a connection between your own spiritual experience and the maxim, "The best defense is a good offense"?
2. What does deliberate, persistent sinning reveal about a person's heart, and thus present a barrier to receiving forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice?
3. What is the heart difference between battling sin and pursuing sin? Why is one the normal experience of a healthy Christian (Romans 6, Romans 8), and the other a tell-tale sign of being unregenerate?
4. What practical effects have you seen in your relationship with God and others from delaying confession of a sin?
5. What theological and practical problems does it create if God were never to execute fiery justice on His adversaries?
6. Since rejecting the gospel tramples God the Son underfoot, profanes the blood of the covenant, and outrages the Spirit of grace," what are some way you have found help you value the person of Christ, His sacrificial work of shedding

His blood, and the Holy Spirit He has given?

7. What does God's bringing judgment on those who have been privileged with His truth tell you about the nature of His righteous character, and why do you think the religious crowd most needs warning of His wrath?
8. What are some practical ways a professing believer can make sure there is no question he or she is heading for God's wrath?