

4) DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE (SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2020)

Scripture reading – 10 Commandments; Hebrews 10:32-39

INTRODUCTION

A number of years ago I remember reading a testimony about Christians who lived under communist tyranny.

Just as we prayed that they would remain faithful to the Lord, so they also realized that Christians in the west faced a dangerous enemy – ease, spiritual laziness, and the pursuit of merely the cares of this world.

Isn't it amazing to see in our nation how many turn away from the truth, but not because of fiery persecution?

Recall the first parable Jesus gave in Matthew 13, the Parable of the Sower.

Recall that some seed fell into stony places speaking of tribulation and persecution.

Other seed fell into thorny ground representing the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches.

Jesus was making a profound comparison.

We certainly don't want difficulty.

But do we realize the danger of the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches?

I have chosen for our main text Hebrews 10:32-39 because this is the third text in the NT that uses Habakkuk 2:4 and the precious truth that the just shall live by faith.

Last week our focus was on this verse related to justification. This is how this verse is used in Romans 1:17 and also in Galatians 3:11.

But Habakkuk 2:4 also has application in the context of what we could call sanctification and endurance.

This is the context of Hebrews 10.

Briefly I want to discuss the difference between justification and sanctification and then we will focus our attention on Hebrews 10:32-39.

Don't throw away your confidence. The just shall live by faith.

1) JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION - THE DIFFERENCE?

The Westminster Larger Catechism has a very helpful question and answer about the difference between justification and sanctification.

Let me share the question and answer in slightly updated language.

Q77: In what ways do justification and sanctification differ?

A77: Although sanctification be inseparably joined with justification, yet they differ, in that God in justification imputes the righteousness of Christ; in sanctification His Spirit infuses grace, and enables to the exercise thereof; in the justification, sin is pardoned; in sanctification, it is subdued: the one does equally free all believers from the revenging wrath of God, and that perfectly in this life, that they never fall into condemnation; the other is neither equal in all, nor in this life perfect in any, but growing up to perfection.

This is an excellent answer based on at least 12 Scripture passages.

Let me review the three main points.

1) Justification is based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. In sanctification the Holy Spirit causes us to grow in grace and righteousness.

Justification is not a process. It is an instantaneous work of God. Sanctification on the other hand takes place over the remainder of a believer's life.

2) In justification we have assurance of the total forgiveness of sins.

In sanctification we still see that we struggle against sin but hopefully see also victory and the subduing of sin.

3) In justification there is total assurance that God's wrath has been atoned. There is no condemnation. This is true for every believer.

In sanctification we will never reach a point of sinless perfection. And we can also say that there are believers who are more mature and consistent and others less so.

Here is another important point.

The faithful preaching of the gospel, pointing a believer to fully rest in the Lord Jesus Christ does not conflict in anyway with the call for repentance, warning, and the call for endurance. Further, the faithful preaching of the gospel reminds sinners of what they enjoy now in Jesus Christ.

This does not conflict in anyway with the call for endurance as we serve the Lord Jesus Christ and wait for His glorious return.

We consider all the blessings that we have now.

We consider that the best is still to come!

While our focus is on the end of Hebrews 10, we see that the theme developed at the end of Hebrews 10 leads into the beautiful testimonies of faith shared in Hebrews 11, which prepares the ground for the further admonition of Hebrews 12.

2) DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE. THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH, HEBREWS 10:32-39

For some of us, when you came to an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, there was only joy among other family and friends.

For others, when you came to true saving faith, that might have meant conflict with others.

Now try to imagine what early Jewish believers faced when they came to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

While Rome later became the great persecutor of believers, during much of the first century, the greatest opposition and persecution came from unbelieving Jews.

Listen to the opening words of John 16.

John 16:1 "These things I have spoken to you, that you should not be made to stumble. **2** They will put you out of the synagogues; yes, the time is coming that whoever kills you will think that he offers God service. **3** And these things they will do to you because they have not known the Father nor Me.

The first readers of the book of Hebrews were Jewish Christians who had suffered but not as much as others had at that time.

As we see in Hebrews 12, they had suffered but not to the point of blood or death.

What may have happened for these believers was that they went through a severe time of testing, and then that intense level of pressure and suffering diminished for a time.

And so, in verse 32 the believers were called to remember the previous times after they came to an understanding of the gospel that they endured a great struggle with sufferings.

There are several key words here.

Illuminated is used also in Hebrews 6:4.

And the verb **endured** is the same verb used three times later in **Hebrews 12**.

And then also observe from verse 36 we have the noun form of the verb – **endurance**.

To endure - *to continue firmly, hold out, remain constant, persevere.*

Consider two points of application and reflection here.

God is the one who causes His true children to endure and persevere. It is not just your own strength or determination.

Rest in Jesus Christ.

And yet without any contradiction, there is the call that is given to believers, endure. Remain steadfast. Don't quit.

I believe we are living in a time of great uncertainty that can be very draining, discouraging, and difficult.

But let us not over exaggerate what we are facing and think that no one else has had to face what we face.

Second, verse 32 gives the call to remember the past.

It is good to remember the trials that God allowed you to overcome in the past.

It is not that we live constantly in the past, but it is good to remember previous tests and battles especially in times when the fight may not be as fierce as it once was.

We do this especially when we can testify that we are not as engaged, not as focused, not as vigilant as we should be.

In verses 33 and 34 the writer reminds the first readers of what they had faced.

They were directly mocked and shamed for their faith.

The word **made a spectacle** is a verb that contains the root - theatre, to be put on display.

We have to keep in mind the culture of that time is different than ours. It was more a shame/honor culture than what we have today.

These believers were exposed and put to shame.

These believers also stood with those who were persecuted.

And in particular, the believers stood with the writer of this passage who was imprisoned.

Now there is a difference here among versions because of a slight difference in Greek manuscripts.

The ESV for example reads: For you had compassion on those in prison.

What stands out in verse 34 is the second part of the verse.

You joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

There is a similar verse in 1 Thess. 1:6.

1Th. 1:6 And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit,

We obviously don't know all the details of what verse 34 mentions in terms of the seizure or plundering of goods.

But these believers did not just bitterly accept this injustice.

They joyfully accepted it.

We know that there is a lot of garbage teaching today in many evangelical churches related to what is taking place today.

We believe that the Bible teaches the basic principles that are connected with a system of free enterprise, limited government, and the like.

We reject the idea of government-based salvation.

On the other hand, we must be very careful that our love for freedom and our enjoyment of God's blessings do not become distractions and weights that keep us from knowing the greatest blessings are not what we yet hold in our hands.

It is right to ask from verse 34, would we also joyfully accept the loss of earthly goods knowing the gain that cannot be taken from us?

Verse 35 contains the central command of this section.

Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward.

This word **confidence** is used three previous times in Hebrews.

Heb. 3:6 but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the **confidence** and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

Heb. 4:16 Let us therefore come **boldly** to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Heb. 10:19 ¶ Therefore, brethren, having **boldness** to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,

Now if you hear the word confidence today, what does it generally represent?

I would say for the most part it speaks of self-confidence.

What is the meaning of the word used here?

Confidence or boldness is that which we have in Jesus Christ.

The word confidence¹ comes from Latin and it means with faith or trust.

Notice that in Hebrews this confidence is connected with Jesus Christ and His work.

This is not self-based confidence on who you are and what you have done.

¹ Vulgate has *confidentiam*.

Notice also the word reward at the end of verse 35.

The same word is used in the next chapter speaking of Moses.

Heb. 11:26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The reward speaks to the fullness of God's work of salvation, which we enjoy in part now, but we keep our focus that more is yet to come.

The need then is again presented in verse 36 of endurance.

We have another important connection with chapter 12 here - **and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us...**

I think there is a misconception that the more that you grow in your faith and walk with the Lord, the easier that life becomes.

And certainly because of sin and foolishness we directly bring much misery into our own lives, which by God's grace we turn from.

But nowhere in Scripture is there the idea that life becomes easier and easier the more you follow God.

I think we can say, just the opposite in many ways.

The more that you follow after Christ, the greater the opposition you will find in the world.

Earlier in Hebrews 10, the writer speaks of the testimony of our Lord in terms of doing the will of God.

Look at verses 5-7.

We also need endurance so that we might do the will of God and afterward we know that we will receive the promise.

It is in support of this call and encouragement that the writer of Hebrews uses Habakkuk 2:3-4.

Now there is another OT passage that is used right at the beginning of verse 37.

The words, “for yet a little while,” come from Isaiah 26:20.

The MacSB notes:

The loose reference to Hab 2:3, 4 (cf. Ro 1:17; Gal 3:11) is introduced by a phrase taken from Isa 26:20. This is the second reference to the Isaiah passage (cf. v. 27) that is part of a song of salvation. The passage in Isa 26 (or, its greater context, Isa 24–27) is perhaps uppermost in the writer’s mind.²

There are a lot of interesting details that we could study in looking at the verses, but let us focus on the main point that we have here.

There are three main things that are emphasized here in verses 37-39 that relate to the call to continued confidence and endurance.

First, you are to live focused on the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The author of Hebrews here has slightly modified the text of Hab. 2:3, but the point is the same.

What seems from our perspective to be delay is not from God’s perspective.

There is a day of coming judgment.

There is a goal to all of life that is connected with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think there is also expressed here the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ is with His people and brings us strength and deliverance in times of great trial.

Second, the call of God’s people is to live by faith.

Here the use of this precious truth, the just shall live by faith, is connected not to the doctrine of justification but sanctification, the call to endurance.

Our salvation in terms of our justification is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone.

And this is also how you must continue to live the Christian life – in firm dependence that God has given us the truth in His Word and we have a Savior!

Third, we have the warning about turning away from God’s truth.

The writer here has taken Hab. 2:4 and switched it around. The first part of the verse in the Greek translation of the OT is used in the second part of verse 38.

² John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), paragraph 24611.

It sounds different in our English translation, but in Greek it is the same.

There are a number of warnings in the book of Hebrews. Some would say that there are five warnings in Hebrews.³

The warning here in **verse 38** is part of a larger text that runs from verse 19 to verse 39.

I found a good article written by someone attached with a mega church in Texas on the warning passages in Hebrews.

The author Steven Smith wrote:

[So] the warning is to those who make little of Christ, and the promise to those who make much of Christ. **In both cases, the exaltation of Christ is the principle concern.** So a practical lesson from these texts is to make much of Christ always. He created all (Colossians 1:15-16); He sustains all (Colossians 1:17); and ultimately He will judge all (Romans 2:16, 2 Corinthians 5:10). The whole of God's plan is to exalt Christ (Philippians 2:9-11). Therefore, making little of Christ (i.e., not focusing on Him) will cause one to be judged by God. Ignoring Christ is the singular mark of an unbeliever who is storing up God's future judgment.⁴

And we notice that the writer here is not writing to cause doubt but give encouragement.

The chapter ends with a contrast and assurance.

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

CONCLUSION

Don't throw away your confidence. The just shall live by faith.

I don't like the statement, Christianity is not a religion it is a relationship.

I understand what people mean, but the statement strikes me as kind of nebulous.

By God's grace we are brought into saving union with our Lord.

³ <http://www.prestonwood.org/docs/default-source/Bible-Fellowship-Leader-Resources/hebrews/how-to-teach-the-warning-passages.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

⁴ Ibid.

The glorious reality of God's saving work is that we do now have fellowship with the living God.

We have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus.

We must seek to grow in our understanding of all that God has revealed to us so that we can do His will rejoicing always that we have a Savior who died for us and lives now for us!

The just shall live by faith.

We keep our confidence in our Lord and Savior.

Prayer

Closing Hymn: 441

BENEDICTION - HEBREWS 12:1-3

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.