



Jesus Christ or Eternal Judgment

Series: *Hebrews – An Anchor for the Soul*

Hebrews 10:26-31

August 28, 2016

Pastor Nick Shaffer

A Lengthier Introduction Beloved, this text that we are looking at this morning is a weighty text. It is sobering, serious, and scary and it is meant to be that way and for that reason, it requires a somewhat lengthier introduction than usual, ok? All throughout this sermon to the Hebrew Christians, the writer of Hebrews – the man I believe to be the imprisoned pastor of this church – this man has been giving to the church, warning after warning. He warned them in chapter 2, against drifting away by failing to hold fast to the gospel, saying, **“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? (Hebrews 2:3, ESV)** He followed that in chapter 3 by telling the Hebrew Christians to examine themselves and to **“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” (Hebrews 3:12, ESV)** Then in chapter 6, the writer directly addressed the danger of apostasy, the danger of professing Christians falling away from their profession of faith in Christ and returning to the world, what the Apostle Peter describes in this way: **“The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.” (2 Peter 2:22, ESV)**

Truth is, all of these warnings can be kind of off-putting to our contemporary ears. After all, we live in the age of “positive only” Christianity. Faithful preachers and faithful churches, those who actually preach the warnings of Scripture, are often caricatured for being haters, or for being harsh or severe for preaching the whole counsel of God. People prefer a positive message only, no warnings, no strong theology, no objective standard of good and evil, of faithful or unfaithful - just rainbows, butterflies, and unicorns. But the writer of Hebrews is no modern preacher and thank God he isn't. He understands what is at stake as he is writing this letter to a church in a place where the preaching of the gospel is out of season, where persecution is real and increasing, where real faithfulness to Christ is costly, and where the rejection of family members stings deeply. He knows that what is really at stake for the members of this church is not some temporal blessings, not the loss of rewards, not the effectiveness of their witness, not social acceptance, not their best life now, but heaven or hell, salvation or wrath, Jesus Christ or eternal judgment. That is what is at stake.

Look at those warnings that I mentioned. They are plain and they are eternal in scope. This letter to the Hebrews is a serious sermon for serious times. This writer is not writing to sound intelligent. He is not writing to give the Hebrews some theological truths to toss back and forth as so much coffee talk. He is writing and explaining powerful and rich theological truth about Jesus Christ – the final Word from God, the radiance of His glory and exact imprint of His nature, the One who is superior to everyone else, the Great High Priest who alone saves sinners and gives eternal forgiveness, who inaugurates the new covenant in His blood, who puts an end to sin and cleanses the believer’s conscience, the One who is seated at the Father’s right hand having made atonement for our sins past, present and future, who is interceding for us, who is active in sanctifying His people, and who is awaiting the day when His enemies will become His footstool and He will appear to save those who are eagerly awaiting Him. And he is doing it all to strengthen and confirm the faith of his hearers, to call them to lay hold of Christ and never let go, to keep believing in Jesus, to keep trusting in Jesus as He is offered in the gospel, to rest all of their hope in Him and to persevere to the end and so prove that your faith in Christ was not in vain.

Now look, I know that our eternal security is ultimately found in the sovereign power of God, right? Jesus testifies to this truth. He says, **“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.”** (John 10:27–29, ESV) Jesus plainly says, **“For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”** (John 6:38–40, ESV) The power to persevere is found in the Lord alone. But in these warnings, the writer of Hebrews’ focus is not on the Godward side of the perseverance of the saints but on the human experience, the human perspective, the God-wrought and necessary faithfulness of those who are truly saved. Do you see that? These are warnings that those who are truly in Christ will hear and say, “Yes and Amen.” They will hear them and it will exhort them and guard them from carelessness in their walk with Christ. It is designed to keep the Hebrews and us faithful to Christ regardless of the cost and to guard us from slipping into from what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls “cheap grace,” which is all the rage today.

He says, **“Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kingly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows Him... Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it costs God the life of His Son: “ye were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us. Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon His Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but deliver Him up for us. Costly grace confronts us as a gracious call to follow Jesus, it comes as a word of forgiveness to the broken spirit and the contrite heart. Grace is costly because it compels a man to submit to the yoke of Christ and follow Him; it is grace because Jesus says: “My yoke is easy and My burden light.” Happy are they who, knowing that grace, can live in the world without being of it, who by following Jesus Christ, are so assured of their heavenly citizenship that they are truly free to live their lives in this world.”** Saving grace is a costly grace. Jesus said in the parable of the faithful servant in Luke 12, **“Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required...”** (Luke 12:48, ESV) Cheap grace produces cheap counterfeits.

These warnings from the writer of Hebrews are gracious and much needed, both in the days of the Hebrews and in our own. They are intended by the writer and by God to arrest our souls and keep us faithful, to help us to persevere in the faith. What is at stake is heaven or hell. The choice before these believers is Jesus Christ or judgment.

Now look, it is important to keep this warning in context in order to rightly understand what the writer is warning against. Some people have lifted this warning out of its context and done great damage to the sensitive hearts of true believers. Context makes all the difference in whether we understand this text rightly or not. So what is the context? Well, remember what we looked at last week. It was the turning point in the sermon. After his masterful exposition of the glories of Christ, the writer tells us the effect that this truth should have on the lives of everyone who truly believes in Jesus Christ, right? He says: **“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true**

heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:19–25, ESV)

These commands that he gives here are not suggestions, they are not optional; this is what a true believer, in light of the glorious grace that has come to him in Christ, does. They are both descriptions and commands for the real Christian – you must draw near to God through Jesus, you must come with a sincere heart in confidence that you are accepted, you must hold fast to your confession of Christ as your hope in word and in deed, you must stir up other believers to faithfulness, to love and good works, and you must make corporate worship the central reality of your life. These descriptions and commands are absolute necessities and purposeful in order to keep us faithful and to protect us from the consequences of falling away that we see here. These are not up for debate. The stakes are that high. So the writer of Hebrews having given us these commands sets them as the backdrop and the context for this fearful warning.

A Fearful Warning (26-27) Looking back to what he has just written – that is the purpose of the connecting word, “for,” he says to the Hebrew church, ***“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”*** (Hebrews 10:26–27, ESV) Now the first thing that I want you to see here is both the awareness and the humility of the writer of Hebrews. It’s very important to see. First, I want you to understand that the author is writing with the awareness, as we talked about when we looked at the warning in chapter 6, that the church to whom he is writing is a mixed bag. It has in it wheat and tares, sheep and goats, true Christians and false ones. He knows that there are some in the church, just as our own, that have real and true faith, even if it is as small as a mustard seed, but there are others who are only outwardly Christians and who are absent saving faith, who are slipping away from Christ in heart and in life, some who will ultimately fall away and who will prove by their defection that they never were Christ’s.

But notice too, that there is great humility in this man. He includes himself in this warning saying, ***“For if we go on sinning deliberately,”*** not you. He does not see himself as above this

warning, or as past the need for these words. And that says something to us. If this man, who wrote this sermon, needs to hear and consider these words, so do we. So do we!

So, what is this deliberate sin of which the writer speaks? What is he talking about? First, let me tell you what he is not talking about. He is not talking about sin in general, ok? We are all sinners and even after salvation we sin and our sins -- all of them -- are more or less, deliberate. He is not talking about these individual acts of sin. If that were the case, he would be undoing everything that he has just been talking about with regard to the sacrifice of Christ. Neither is he speaking of true Christians that are struggling with a habitual or besetting sin which plagues their spiritual life and displeases the Lord and leads to His discipline. That's a serious issue and if you are there, I encourage you to reach out to one of the pastors or elders. We want to serve you and help you and wash you with the water of the Word and help you to overcome that sin by grace. Neither is this referring to some deeply ingrained sin, an area of sin over which you mourn and against which you are fighting and desire to overcome by grace. That is not the focus here. Praise God, the words of I John 1:7-9 are eternally true, ***“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1 John 1:7–9, ESV)

What the writer of Hebrews is talking about are those people who have heard the gospel and understand it, who have made some outward profession of faith in Jesus, who know the facts of the gospel and the gospel claims of Jesus Christ and for whom, ***after receiving the knowledge of the truth***, it has made no real difference in their souls. The word that is translated as “deliberate” refers less to the purposeful intent of sin and more to the scope and extent of the sin. He is describing a graceless heart, one that is marked by deliberateness and continuance in sin, persistent and unremitting rebellion against God and His Word, and yet, for the time being at least, bears the name of brother or sister – those who are flippant with the gospel and presumptuous regarding their own faith.

It describes those who, in contrast with verses 19-25, do not draw near to God though Christ or regard Him as the treasure of their souls, those who lives are absent the evidence of the confession of hope in Christ – worship, service, growing holiness, open witness to Christ, those who are self-absorbed and self-focused, and those who neglect the corporate worship of the saints. All of this points to a stunning but very real lack of regard for Jesus Christ. It

describes a life that is absent of all of the evidences of real and living faith in Jesus Christ. It describes the sin of rejecting Christ as Savior and Lord, of refusing to believe in Him for eternal life, of failing to continue in the confession of Christ, of looking for another way to stand accepted before God rather than in the righteousness of Christ – for the Hebrews by way of Judaism and the old covenant or in our modern age by another Jesus, a less costly version of Christianity, a Jesus of your own making rather than the Jesus of the Word of God, a less-demanding Jesus, a self-esteem producing Jesus, a Jesus like all the other gods, or by some other religion or combination of religions, or to turn from the truth and embrace some form of private spirituality or even atheism.

This text is describing an apostate – the one whose confession of Christ is false, and who falls away from that confession of faith, sometimes publically and openly and sometimes privately, but who falls away and for whom the judgment of God is a certainty. This text is speaking of those who outwardly profess Christ, who for a while walk with the people of God, whose profession looks very much like other true believers in the congregation but who at some point, either publically and vocally or by the way that they live and their lack of responsiveness to the Word of God, decisively and conclusively reject the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Maybe it's too costly. Maybe it's too intense. Maybe you just don't believe it anymore. At some point, they definitively turn away in their hearts from Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, from the true gospel, from the true Christ, from the Word of God as Truth, from the cross, and from surrender to Christ. They fail to endure, to persevere, to be fruitful in their walk with Christ and so fall away and prove they never were Christ's. There were some in the Hebrew congregation that were on that track and there are many in contemporary Christianity that are in the same boat. In fact, to help us understand this even more, the writer of Hebrews describes the

Character of the Apostate (29) The writer of Hebrews talks about the character of the apostate when he asks, ***“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?”*** (Hebrews 10:29, ESV)

Now, we will talk about the deserved punishment of the apostate in just a moment, but I want us to focus on the character of the apostate for just a moment. The writer uses three, very descriptive phrases to describe the character of the apostate and it is a sobering picture.

The apostate is described as **one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God**. It is to treat Jesus as cheap and worthless like the dirt under your feet, as if he has no relevancy to your life at all. It is a denial of all that Scripture says that He is, absolute contempt for the person of Jesus Christ. You don't have to say it with your lips, you can just live your life that way and there are a lot of professing Christians who do.

The apostate is the one who **has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified**. It means to count as common or insignificant the work of Christ as Savior and Priest, the worth of His blood. Now I don't want you to misunderstand. The way that the writer uses the word "sanctified" here is not in the sense of salvation and growing holiness. He is using the word in the sense of outwardly being set apart as member of God's people, like all of the nation of Israel at the Exodus, though only a remnant were truly believers. In other words, he is describing the one who after his profession of Christ and membership in the church, had some spiritual experiences like are described in chapter 6 – they have been in the assembly of God's people, they have been in the atmosphere of worship and taken part in the singing, the fellowship, the praying, hearing the preaching. They have professed faith in Christ. They have had the experience of being in and being involved in the company of the redeemed – but now they see the blood of Christ as worthless, common and treat His sacrifice as insignificant, unimportant, not worthy of real consideration, just treat it as worthless.

And last, he is described as someone who **has outraged the Spirit of grace**. The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts of sin and points to Christ as the redeeming sacrifice for sins. He is the one who imparts the truth of the gospel to the mind and the heart, who witnesses to the glory and worth of Christ. And with outrageous arrogance, the apostate has rejected His witness and outraged the Holy Spirit who glorifies Christ.

Now you may be thinking, "Preacher, by my sin I have done all those things. I have done these things whenever I have sinned. I have even continued in sin for a long season. What makes me any different than the apostate?" And, look, it is true that all of our sin carries with it an element of each of these things, but here is the difference. The difference is continuance in a lifestyle of sin and rejection of Christ vs. repentance. Listen, there is a grave difference between an apostate and a prodigal. A prodigal can go to the far country, and waste his life for a time, but he cannot stay there. Eventually he comes to himself,

eventually by God's grace, he repents. The apostate never does. He leaves for the far country; he goes out from the Father's house and He never returns.

Think of the difference between Judas and Peter. Both walked with Christ for three and a half years. Both professed faith in Christ. Both were engaged in ministry. Both were fully accepted members of the disciple band. And both betrayed Christ – Judas out of greed and Peter out of fear. One was apostate and the other was a fallen brother. What was the difference? Repentance. Judas did not find repentance. He did not love Jesus. He was an unrepentant, unregenerate, religious man who ultimately rejected Christ. On the contrary, Peter loved Jesus. He betrayed Him by his sin and he believed that there was no forgiveness to be found for him. He went back to his old life of fishing and Christ pursued Him for repentance. Jesus appealed to Peter's love for Him, for His people, and for His work as Savior and Lord. And Peter found repentance, and forgiveness, and restoration, and life. The true Christian cannot continue in sin and rebellion. He just can't. ***“Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God.”*** (1 John 3:8–9, ESV) The difference between an apostate and a fallen brother or sister in Christ is abiding faith, abiding love for Jesus and His people, and repentance. The apostate has none of these. He conclusively comes to a point where the Biblical Jesus means nothing to Him and to His life, where in his heart, he walks away from Christ. And the fate of the apostate is a fearful thing. So what is

The Fate of the Apostate (26b-29) The writer of Hebrews tells us that for the apostate, for the one who falls away from Jesus Christ and from His gospel as it is presented to us in the Word of God, ***“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. 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?”*** (Hebrews 10:26–29, ESV)

Here is what he is saying, pointedly and directly. If you decidedly reject Jesus Christ, openly or privately, there is nothing left for you, no sacrifice for that sin. No sacrifice for your sin is left, no deliverance is possible. If you walk away from Christ, if you leave Him behind, if with

full knowledge, you turn away in your heart and with your life or lips, renounce the Jesus of Scripture for anything else, and discard your confession, and leave the people of God, there is no way of salvation because you have rejected God's only valid sacrifice, Jesus Christ. All that awaits is God's judgment, the fury of fire that will consume all of God's enemies – a very real place called hell. It is a terrifying judgment, a fury of fire, that the tense of the Greek means one that consumes and keeps consuming.

The writer of Hebrews is serious, deadly serious and he makes his point by making an argument from the lesser to the greater. He's looking back to Deuteronomy 17:2-7. There God gave the law that if anyone transgressed the old covenant by serving other gods and worshipping idols, that person, on the testimony of two or three witnesses was to be stoned to death. Capital punishment, physical death, was the price for breaking the old covenant. But the new covenant in Christ is far, far greater and the punishment for breaking it is too – spiritual death, the second death, eternal hell. That is the fate of the apostate and

There is No Escape (30-31) The writer of Hebrews closes the door on any thought that there may be any way out for the apostate. He says, ***“For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*** (Hebrews 10:30–31, ESV) God will exact judgment and His divine justice will be satisfied. He will repay desertion of Christ with vengeance. That is a picture of God that we are not used to seeing or considering at all in this modern age. We have been told our entire lives that God is love, exclusively love, but robbed of biblical definition, that love has been distorted into a sort of superficial mushiness that robs God of the fullness of His character. As a whole in our culture, even in the church culture, we have no categories to understand – let alone love – a God whose wrath is real. And it shows. Think lightly of God's just wrath and you will think lightly of the cross. And many professing Christians do just that. Look, God cannot be a God of love without being a God of wrath; He cannot be good as God without being just in His judgment of sin. If you want proof of that, look no further than the cross. Out of love, God sent His Son as the just payment for our sins before God; the one who stands in the sinner's place and takes the righteous judgment that all of us deserve for our sins against God – our rebellion, our wickedness, our trespasses, our rejection of God's commands – so that we can be forgiven of the sins that we have committed. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to satisfy the justice of God and bear His wrath so that we would not have to. God demands the payment of sin's price. God demands it. Either Christ pays it or you do. He is a God of perfect justice, perfect wrath, and perfect love.

How can we love such a Righteous Judge? Because He loved us first and gave His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. The cross reveals the justice of God and how wide and long and high and deep is God's love. This is what it took for God to satisfy his holy justice, the full payment of the debt of sin.

The apostate who turns away from Christ will suffer the wrath of God with no mercy. God will not be fooled. The Lord will judge His people. Quoted from Deuteronomy 32:26, the implication is that the Lord discerns among His people. There were those who were a part of the nation of Israel, the people of God, who had evil unbelieving hearts. Outwardly they appeared to share in the blessings of God, but inwardly their hearts were far from Him. The same is true of the visible church. The day is coming when God will discern between the sheep and the goats, the wheat and the tares. The wrath and judgment of God is real and it will be complete and horrible. ***It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.***

Therefore, do not trample Jesus Christ under our feet by unbelief, or count as unholy that blood, or outrage the Spirit of grace who bears the testimony of that love to our hearts. And if any does, and repudiates this gospel of justice and love, then surely God will avenge. He will vindicate His Son. He will repay. He must. Let's close this morning by talking about some

Things We Need to Consider

I think about the people who have come to this fellowship, some of them for a while, some who have even become members, but have left because this Jesus we preach is too intense or the gospel is too intense, or the expectations of discipleship are too high. It scares me for them. But I bring that up to say, there are going to be times when you are tempted to think that way. Don't give in to that temptation. There is no other Jesus, no other gospel, no other Truth than what we see before us in this text today. Don't quit. Don't look somewhere else. Don't fall away. Keep your eyes on Jesus, keep your heart tethered to Him, keep trusting Him.

If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you most likely have known friends that have made certain choices, chosen a path away from Christ, chosen to engage in things that are not in keeping with a profession of faith in Christ, and have never returned. Don't let that be you. This text is a strong warning and it not meant to unduly scare us, but is meant to motivate us to faithfulness and self-examination. Apostasy always begins with a single decision that seems to be insignificant. No one wakes up one day and says, "Today I will begin my slide to apostasy." It starts one sin at a time. Guard your heart, feed your faith in Christ, do the things that will strengthen your soul. Draw near to God, hold fast the confession of your hope without wavering, consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, and worship with the saints.

Last, listen, this text may expose your life this morning as a pretense, as a shell when it comes to true faith in Christ. It may expose you as desperately needy this morning. Only God can show you that and if He has, that is a grace from His Holy Spirit and I am pleading with you, do not outrage the Spirit of grace. Cry out to the Lord today in repentance and ask Christ to save you. Don't plow over conviction but surrender to Jesus Christ. Here is the truth about all of us. There are only two places that your sin can be -- Either your sins are UPON YOURSELF, unforgiven, uncleansed, unwashed away, hanging over your soul. Or else your sins are UPON CHRIST, taken away, forgiven, pardoned, blotted out and cleansed away by Christ's precious blood! Where are your sins? Are you trusting in Christ? I am calling you faith in Christ today. I am calling to you today to cling to Jesus as the only one who can save sinners like me and like you. Cling to Christ and avail yourself of His forgiveness every day. Abide in Him daily. Cling to Christ and show your love to Him. Show it by obedience to His commandments and your perseverance in the faith.

Oh beloved, if this warning does not make me serious and watchful, if it does not drive me to faithfulness, and to pursue Christ as my treasure and my all, as my highest joy, as my King and my Lord, what will?

© West Salem Baptist Church, 2016

Permissions: You are free to reproduce and distribute this material but you may not alter its contents in any way or charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. If you are posting online, a link back to this original document is preferred. Anything beyond these guidelines will require prior approval by West Salem Baptist Church.