

Sermon 30: Hebrews 10:26-31: Judgement on Those who Despise the Gospel

OUTLINE

The consequence of judgement
The nature of judgement
The certainty of judgement

INTRODUCTION

Last week we examined the carrot, Why should you hold fast to Christ? Well, based on the amazing results of His sacrifice and priesthood we should draw near in faith because of the access He has made; hold fast to the hope which is guaranteed; and stir one another up in love by meeting together. Today we examine the stick, What will happen to those who forsake Christ, rejecting the gospel for something else? The answer is judgement! Our verses are the 4th of five warning passages in Hebrews, 2:1-4; 3:7-14; 6:4-8; 10:26-31, and 12:25-29. If Hebrews 6 are the most worrying because they talk about not being renewed to repentance, apostasy being a sin that some won't come back from; then these in 10:26-31 are the most terrifying for their clear promises that God will judge those who despise the gospel of His Son. This is a message that every Christian must take to heart. God has given His best in His Son, and to pour scorn on His best guarantees final judgement. There are many positive incentives in the Christian life. There is more grace and beauty in God to satisfy our sinful heart and even our glorified hearts for all eternity. But at times we don't guard our hearts; we don't turn them to the ravishing glories and beauties of the gospel. So, if the sweet honey of the goodness of God in the gospel does not catch your attention God in His kindness has firmer methods to bring you to your senses. Sometimes the Lord disciplines us. Or as here in these warning passages we hear the Lord's parental warnings underscored with the power of His promises. We have three points as we look into these warnings of judgement for those who despise the gospel by apostatizing. In v26-27 we will see the consequence of judgement; in v28-29 the reasons for judgement; and in v30-31 the certainty of judgement.

The consequence of judgement

V26-27, '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.' Our verses begin with a 'for' indicating that if we do not do the three exhortations of the former verses. If we do not draw near, hold fast, and stir one another up, with the result of our falling away from Christ, then this is what follows.

Firstly, we must identify the sin in question. The author speaks here about an ongoing sin and a deliberate sin and a sin against knowledge, but what sin is this? As a young Christian I thought that the author was speaking about a sin that you had committed, repented of, but then did again after you knew you should not do it, and even promised you wouldn't do it again when you repented the first time. So you can imagine the absolute agony my conscience was in. Because after all isn't every sin deliberate, you have to choose to do it; and after receiving a knowledge of the truth, Christians always sin from the position of being informed better about the sin than the unbeliever. The sin in question is

not a mortal as opposed to venial sin; nor talking about post-baptismal sin; nor talking about doing a sin you promised not to do, it is talking specifically about the sin of apostasy. The whole context of the book is about the pressure these Christians are feeling to go back to Judaism and give up Christ to escape persecution. Even in the immediate context we are called to hold fast to our confession of faith, v23; and the sin is described as trampling Christ underfoot, v28. This is important to know. I want every young Christian to realize what is being spoken about here. All sin is terrible, but it is dishonouring to God to labour under the lie that you don't get second chances. We must see that the Lord's prayer that begins with 'Our Father' calls us to seek forgiveness for our trespasses. We are not disowned for repeat offences. The sin in question before us is not the daily struggles we usually face but the particular sin of disowning Christ.

Secondly, the author lists two fatal outcomes of rejecting Christ. First, we must understand the statement, 'there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.' This does not mean that you only get forgiveness for sins of ignorance, or for first time sins, once again this is particular to the sin of apostasy. These Jewish believers were considering forsaking Christ's sacrifice to go back to the sacrifices of the Temple. The point the author is making is that there is no other sacrifice provided by God where forgiveness can be found. In other words, in the OT while the sacrifices were given and authorized by God as types and shadows pointing to the final sacrifice of Christ, they were useful to cover sin. But now that Christ has come, and the types are fulfilled and made redundant, the only sacrifice that God now accepts is the sacrifice of His Son which has fulfilled and done away with the OT sacrifices.

The implications of this are very important. Anyone who tries to be saved through Judaism back to the purest form of OT religion cannot be saved. God is no longer offering salvation through those sacrifices. The only sacrifice, which is the one that the OT ones were pointing to and anticipating has arrived shutting that door. Any Jew who wants to be saved must come to Christ. But not only Jews, anybody. The problem with every other religion is that they do not have a sacrifice for sins. Even if that religion practices blood sacrifices, they are not effective. If the OT ones are no longer effective how much more would pagan sacrifices offered to false gods, demons, be effective. We have to say it again, no other religion can save. We are not saved by being good people who cleverly work out there is a Creator and then sincerely seek Him. What lies between man and God is sin, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin. There is no other name under heaven than the name of Christ for salvation. Those who hear of Him, who call on Him, who trust on Him can be saved. To not have Christ is to not have a sacrifice, to not have a sacrifice is to not have forgiveness, to not have forgiveness is to have God as your judge not your Savior.

If you forsake Christ, not only is there no other way to obtain forgiveness for there is no other sacrifice, but there is also judgement, v27, 'but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.' Without Christ the only thing you can expect to get from God is judgement. In other words, justice. On the last day of history as we know it, when Jesus comes again, every action that every human being has ever committed will be weighed against the law of God. This verse is reminding us, that without Christ we cannot be optimistic. It is not like some of us have a 50/50 shot, and maybe with a few more good deeds we can tilt the balance in our favour. No, without Christ there

is only us in our sin standing before a holy judge who sees all and who cannot deny His holiness and not punish sin. Paul spells this out in 2 Thess. 1:7-10, '... 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...'

The punishment is spelled out as 'a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.' Some have wrongly taken this verse as proof for the unbiblical teaching of annihilationism. Some want to say that because eternal torment is an unimaginable horror that is beyond our comprehension; and terrible judgements like this seem to be out of step with what we can conceive about God's love, some think it unlikely and look for evidence of a fire that destroys rather than torments. Firstly, eternal torment for sin is a horror beyond our ability to conceive. But we remember that God is unchangeably just, sin will always get exactly what it deserves in the end. In fact, right now He is restraining His justice, giving only reminders and token judgement not giving sin all that it deserves in full. I would volunteer that our present experience of God's restrained sin, His goodness and restraint is what misleads us to think sin is not as serious as hell makes it out to be. But the infinite nature of Hell, and the infinite value of the God-man who alone can pay to satisfy sin's debt against an infinitely holy God puts it into perspective for us. Our inability to conceive or imagine does not make a thing untrue, that is why we must believe on the authority of God's word not our emotions.

Second God's love is demonstrated in that the first full vent of what sin deserved is not poured out upon mankind but Himself. The fall was not the final judgement, or the flood, or Sodom and Gomorrah; or the exile, but the God forsakenness of the Son of God upon the cross when He took all the guilt of our sins and bore the weight of God's perfect justice against it, paying until the last drop was paid. The cross is proof of God's love and justice. Too many speak of hell apart from the cross, but hell is unintelligible apart from the cross.

Third, the bible speaks about a fire that consumes, but that is not all it says about this fire. It is also called an eternal fire, Matt. 18:8. That this is the fire prepared for the devil and his angels, Matt. 25:41, "'Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' Summarized in 25:46 as everlasting punishment. The fire that the devil is destined for is described in Rev. 20:10, 'and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.' The devil will suffer eternal torment, but what about non-angels? Rev. 14:11 describes human beings who suffer from the final wrath of the lamb, 'the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest, day or night.' I take no joy in demonstrating the bible's teaching that sin is so serious that an eternal punishment is the only fitting punishment for sin against an eternal God. But this cold hard fact, this scary and incomprehensible fact is called on here as the stick to wake up those who will not heed the carrot. Those who reject Christ, those who have no sacrifice for sin, those who have to face God as His enemies, dressed in their sins and not the garments of salvation provided in Christ, they will be judged.

The nature of judgement

Maybe you think this is too much, that this can't be true, the author goes on to argue that this judgement must be by arguing from the lesser to the greater and by spelling out how terrible a thing it is to trade in Christ for another, v28-29, '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?' To demonstrate the reality of the threat he appeals to what would be well known among the Jews. If God judged those with death who sinned against the lesser covenant of Moses, how much worse is it to sin against the new and better covenant. Deut. 17:2-6 likely lies behind these verses, '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, ³ 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, ⁴ 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, ⁵ 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. ⁶ 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.' Spiritual adultery spelled out in terms of transgressing the covenant is the grounds for the death penalty. Based on that we move from the lesser to the greater. If the lesser deserves physical death; then the greater spiritual death. If the lesser receives being judged by men; the greater being judged by God.

The author adds to the horrific nature of apostasy by spelling out three things that these Jewish believers would be doing if they denounced Christ and went back to Judaism. Think of these as sins against the person of Christ; the work of Christ and the Spirit of Christ. Firstly, they trample underfoot the Son of God. Trampling is a word that was often used to describe the Gentile desecration of the temple when they defeated Jerusalem. But this now turned against the Son of God. This title is not just a human honorific. In light of all that the author has said about the Son in Hebrews this is a sin against God. The one who is Creator and sustainer of the world; who is the radiance of God's glory; who is all the redeemer, Heb. 1:2-4; the one whom angels adore. This is the one you have to reject when you turn away from Christianity. He is not merely a man. Secondly, you 'profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.' Profaning is to take that which is holy and make it unclean. So not only is the person of Christ despised but the blood that He shed and what He accomplished by it. This is the blood that secures eternal redemption, 9:12; that removes the guilt of sin, 9:25-26; that grants us access to God, 10:19; that establishes the new covenant, and now it is being cast off as something unholy. Imagine it, as a Jew who confessed Christ, got baptized, and partook of the Lord's Supper, there would be no mystery about the blood of Christ, every Lord's Table would be a call to remember the blood of Christ that establishes the New Covenant. To turn your back on Christ, on all that His blood means, on all that He suffered to give it, and buy the benefits of our salvation with something so precious. This is high handed sin.

There is some discussion around who the 'he' is in this verse. The subject is not in the Greek and the translators have to provide it. Is the 'he' the person who has been sanctified by the blood? The significance of this is that those who believe that truly born again people can fall away would use this as a proof text

to show that truly sanctified people can fall away. John Owen takes the 'He' as speaking of Christ. He Christ was set apart for His heavenly session as part of the new covenant by His death. This is a clever view that avoids the losing salvation questions but does not agree with this book's usual use of the word sanctify. Another view is to translate he as 'it'. In other words the blood sanctifies/inaugurates the covenant, so the covenant is the subject not a person. And there is a fourth view which translates he as 'one'. In other words, a general truth about the blood is in focus not the soteriological standing of the person committing the sin. There is no problem in taking the subject as he as our translations have it, we have already shown that these warnings are spoken to the visible church, to people who for all intents and purposes appear to be saints. Those who are truly born again will take these warnings to heart and they will be the means by which they are encouraged to persevere. Those who are not born again will not heed them, and the threats of these warnings will come to pass as they promise.

The third aspect of this sin is outraging/insulting the Spirit of Grace. This title, the Spirit of Grace is from a famous Messianic prophecy in Zech. 12:10 which prophesies the death and spearing of Christ and how the Holy Spirit will give a spirit of grace and mourning to Israel, "'And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.'" To insult the gift of God, God Himself who opened your eyes to see Christ for who He is, and who helped you to see what you had done to Him bringing you to repentance. And now to turn your back on what the Spirit wrought, to call it lies and deception and not grace. This is just like the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit Christ condemned in the gospels. The religious leaders knowing that Jesus did miracles by the Spirit of God called it satan, sinning against a full understanding of the truth.

To turn your back on Christ is no light matter, it would be harder to find a more direct and high handed way to sin. Perhaps you have been this person and worry you cannot be taken back. Let me share a story with you of another pastor who faced this very issue.

'I had a pastoral situation some time ago that is instructive here. It involved a young woman who had been close to my wife and me while she was a student at the college where I taught. After she graduated, we maintained some contact, and it became clear after several years that this woman had fallen deeply into sin. At one point she visited our home and lamented this with tears. She attended church with us and went back to where she lived determined to do better. However, she soon fell in with an unbelieving crowd, and the next time I spoke with her she informed me that she had come to realize the falsehood of Christianity. Unable to answer her atheist friends, she began reading Nietzsche and other atheist philosophers, and rejected the faith. Needless to say, I was distressed by this news. So far as this went, our passage in Hebrews 10 presented a stark possibility to my soul, since her deliberate embrace of sin suggested "a fearful expectation of judgment" (Heb. 10:27).

Time passed, until I was asked to perform a wedding for a young man I had also known in those days. The wedding was in this woman's hometown, and she was invited. Sure enough, she was there at the wedding reception, sticking out like a sore thumb in this Christian crowd by the way she dressed and acted. Reluctantly, she approached me, and after a brief conversation she agreed to drive me to the airport that evening.

Along the way she recounted to me the various philosophies that had led her away from Christ, many of them advocating ideas the writer of Hebrews wanted his own flock to avoid. I was tired after the wedding and didn't think I could manage to keep straight the various Christian answers to each of these challenges. Instead, I simply asked her, "Tell me, which came first: your descent into sin or these philosophical convictions? Was it the philosophy that persuaded you of sin or the sin that persuaded you of the philosophy?" To my astonishment, she broke down at once into tears, admitting that atheism had gripped her only after she had fallen badly into sin. However, she insisted she was no longer a Christian but an apostate. She had betrayed the Lord. Even if she wanted to come back, she said, citing passages like the one before us here, her sins had damned her forever.

As our conversation progressed, now at the airport, I confronted her with a question at the heart of what our passage from Hebrews is all about. I asked her, "Have you renounced Jesus Christ? Can you do that now? Can you say that he is not the Son of God, that he did not die upon the cross for sinners? Do you now repudiate Jesus Christ? If you can do that, I will admit that you are damned." I don't know which of us was more nervous. But she could not repudiate Jesus, and that evening I had the privilege to evangelize her all over again, starting with the cross where Jesus took the wrath of God in her place. She had been backslidden—badly so—but not apostate. As of this writing, she has repudiated her life of sin, is an active member in a Bible-believing church, and is growing steadily in the Lord.¹ Many today mimic famous atheists, say stupid things, adopt dumb beliefs, but I do believe that there is hope for them. Sure some God has handed over to judgement for they have hardened their hearts, but He does save people from this place. It need not be too late. Today if you hear His voice do not harden your hearts. The promises are still true that if you come to Him He will not cast you out. Like the prodigal son if you return He will welcome you.

Certainty of judgement

Our author ends by quoting from Deut 32 that God is just and does judge, even when the ones to be judged are among His people. V30-31, '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 author appeals to the certainty of judgement by appealing to these OT texts. But there is another thing we can appeal to prove that judgement is final for those who reject Christ, the cross itself. The perfect Son of God, who was beloved, who had obeyed God, who had never sinned, He took our sin upon His shoulders and even though He was perfect but our sins were seen as His; the judgement of God fell upon Him. God has given His best in His Son; and taken His worst punishments Himself upon the cross. There is no greater proof both of the love and justice of God. Christ has been given for us to receive Him and live; but to reject Him is death. These are the two choices that lie before us, the best and the worst, life or death, salvation or judgement. John 3:16 or 18, "'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life... Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.' Which will it be for you, life or condemnation accept or reject?

1 Richard D. Phillips, [Hebrews](#), ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 373–374.