

Hebrews Chapter Ten (vv.26-39)

The *will* of **God** (10.1-10) has been fulfilled by the person and *work* of **Christ** (10.11-14). Consequently, God's people have entered into the great blessings of the new covenant as *witnessed* by the **Spirit** (10.15-18). This has resulted in **privilege** ('*we have*') which leads to **practice** ('*let us*'), vv.19-25. The remaining verses of the chapter (vv.26-39) comprise the **fourth warning** section of the epistle followed by an **exhortation** to persevere in the light of persecution. This follows the same pattern as the warnings which have gone before, each one including an encouragement and exhortation to true believers to demonstrate their faith by: giving earnest heed, labouring, growing spiritually and enduring. *Note. These warnings (2.1-4; 3.7-4.13; 5.11-6.20) have become progressively stronger in their language. Revealed light from the word of God brings increased responsibility to the hearers.*

Apostates: Warning of Coming Judgment (vv.26-31)

26 For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, **27** But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

These verses do not concern the eternal security of the believer. They describe the perilous condition of an apostate; one who once professed Christianity but has now fallen back to an original condition (Judaism) and renounced Christ. Thus, the 'wilful sin' in view here is not some act of sin or failure. It is not being 'overtaken in a fault' (Galatians 6.1) but rather a continuous and settled condition or course of action in opposition to the gospel. This includes deliberate abandonment of the assembly (v.25) and the truth of the word of God; something they once professed and owned. These apostates had received full revelation and knowledge (*epignosis*) of Christ (2.1) and yet they had abandoned it and returned to Judaism. For such there remained 'no more sacrifice for sins'. If the sacrifice of Christ is rejected, there is no other sacrifice for sins or means of salvation available. Where the sacrifice of Christ has been accepted, God requires no more (v.18). Where the sacrifice is rejected, God can offer no more. All that remains for the Christ rejecter is a 'certain' (inexpressible), 'fearful' (terrifying) expectation of judgment and 'fiery indignation' (boiling wrath) which shall 'devour' the adversaries' (they had become enemies of God). This came upon the apostates **literally** in AD70 as the temple burned with such ferocious heat that the gold melted and ran down between the stones. What a foreshadowing this was of the *nature* of future eternal judgment (Mark 9.45, cf. Leviticus 10.2, Numbers 21.6, Jude 7). There is a practical application to be made: It is a most serious sin to come to a full knowledge and understanding of any truth of Scripture and then refuse or turn away from its practice (Amos 3.2).

28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: **29** Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, ~~wherewith~~ (which) ~~he was sanctified~~, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

To impress upon his readers the serious nature of rejecting the gospel, an illustration is used from the law (Deuteronomy 17.2-7). The context is turning away from Jehovah to worship false gods (apostasy). Such people 'disregarded' the law of Moses and, on the corroboration of witnesses, were stoned to death. There was no mercy for them (see Deuteronomy 13.8). How much more serious it was to reject the Son of God! The apostate had:

- 'trodden under foot the Son of God', demonstrating the utmost contempt and scorn for Christ and His claims. They were reducing deity to the level of 'creeping things' or 'refuse', fit only to be eliminated.
- 'counted the blood of the covenant... an unholy thing', a conscious calculation to treat the shed blood of Christ as unclean, common and having no cleansing value. *The priceless sacrifice of Christ is worthless to an apostate.* Yet, this is the precious blood by which the new covenant was established and God's people are sanctified (10.10, 14).
- 'done despite unto the Spirit of grace', they had 'outraged' or 'insulted' the gracious work of the Spirit of God. They had stubbornly resisted (Acts 7.51) His confirming of the truth of the gospel to them (2.4, 3.7, 6.4).

30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, ~~saieth the Lord~~. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. **31** It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

True believers 'know' the character of God and the fact that He **must** and **will** punish such apostates, even if they were 'His people', i.e. of the nation of Israel. Moses confirmed as much in his song (Deuteronomy 32.35-36) which was largely an indictment of Israel's unfaithfulness and a warning of God's forthcoming fiery judgment upon her. God is a God of 'vengeance', not that He is vindictive, but that He 'fully metes out justice to all parties'. This is God's prerogative, not ours (Romans 12.19). God is also a God of 'recompense', i.e. God gives mankind to reap what he sows, **positively** in terms of *reward* (v.35), or **negatively** in terms of *judgment* (2 Corinthians 5.10, 9.6, Galatians 6.7-9). David considered it better to fall into the merciful hands of God than the hands of men (2 Samuel 24.14), but for apostates, there would be nothing but sure and eternal judgment at the Lord's hand.

Believers: Encouragement of the Coming One (vv.32-39)

32 But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions;

33 Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. **34** For ye had compassion of ~~me~~ (them) in ~~my~~ bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing ~~in~~ (that ye) yourselves ~~that ye~~ have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

The Hebrew believers are exhorted to **endure** in the light of past experience (vv.32-34) and future promise (vv.35-39). In terms of the past they were to constantly or habitually 'call to remembrance' the time after their **conversion** when they suffered greater persecution than they were now experiencing. This was 25-30 years ago when they experienced a great 'fight' or 'athletic conflict/struggle' of suffering. This they 'endured'; 'standing their ground' and not 'fleeing the battlefield'. We too should remember, not so as to be distracted from the goal ahead (Philippians 3.13-14, Hebrews 11.15), but to be encouraged by the Lord's mighty hand in our lives (Deuteronomy 8.2, Matthew 16.9).

The great fight of afflictions took two forms. They suffered **personally** and **participated** in the afflictions of *others*.

- **Personal:** they were made a 'gazingstock' (*theatrizo*), a public spectacle of shame through 'unjust verbal insults' ('reproaches') and 'acts of violence' ('afflictions'). During the reign of Nero (54-68 AD) this was literally true as Christians were brought to the stage to face wild beasts in the amphitheatre.
- **Personal:** they had joyfully and willingly suffered the violent and unjust seizure of their possessions because they had learned that their heavenly and spiritual possessions were much greater. In heaven they had '**substance**', something of real weight and worth. *Possessions on earth are but shadows*. Their substance was 'better' and 'enduring', i.e. spiritual and eternal. These believers were able to differentiate between temporal possessions on earth and the enduring realities in heaven (1 Timothy 6.7). It is natural to mourn when deprived of material possessions, but it is supernatural to rise above such grieving.
- **Others:** They became *companions* or 'partners in suffering' with others. They stood 'side by side' with them and ministered to their needs (6.10). They shared the reproach of the reproached (Romans 12.15).
- **Others:** They had *compassion* or 'voluntarily chose to suffer with others' by visiting those in prison. They were liable to great suffering unless friends, risking imprisonment themselves, brought them food and clothing.

35 Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. **36** For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. **37** For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

In the light of future reward and promise the Hebrews were to *retain* their **endurance** (v.32, 36) and *maintain* an attitude of '**confidence**' towards God (1 John 3.21, 5.14). We know that the God who justly recompenses unbelief (v.30) will likewise recompense faithfulness. For the believers, continuing to 'remain under' ('patience') these persecutions was the 'will of God' and followed in the pattern of their Saviour. He is the One who, in doing the will of God, was called to suffering and death (10.7-10).

Was it worth it? At the end of the wilderness journey was the 'promise' of full and final salvation in the coming Christ (v.37). This is a heavenly hope enjoyed in the eternal rest of the heavenly city (4.1, 11.13, 16, 12.22-24).

Could they endure? For yet a very, very little while and He that cometh shall come, and will not delay (v.37). **Yes!** The coming of the Lord Jesus was (and is) imminent. This is a quotation from Habakkuk 2.3 where the prophet is exhorted to wait for 'it', i.e. the fulfilment of the vision he had been given. Though the vision lingered or hesitated, it would not be deferred, delayed or late. In Hebrews, the vision of Habakkuk (it) becomes the Coming One (He). See Matthew 11.3, Luke 7.19, Revelation 1.8. His return should be of great comfort to us during the wilderness journey (John 14.3, 1 Thessalonians 4.18).

38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. **39** But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

Continuing the quotation from Habakkuk (2.4), the writer emphasises the need for true believers to be characterised by faith. Although this verse is quoted in Romans 1.17 and Galatians 3.11, the emphasis there is that the 'justified by faith one shall live'. Both Habakkuk and the writer to the Hebrews emphasise the truth that the believer lives **by** and **in** faith. It is the influencing principle of their lives (Galatians 2.20, Hebrews 11.6). True believers live, walk and wait in faith. Living by faith leads to the 'preservation' ('saving') of one's soul, both presently and eternally (1 Thessalonians 5.9). The apostate, however, is one whose character is marked by 'shrinking' or 'falling back' from Christian profession to the old way of religion. Such a person brings no delight to God and faces eternal ruin and eternal loss.