

**HEBREWS 32**  
**(Hebrews 10:26-31)**

**THE DANGER OF APOSTASY**  
**By Ron Harvey**  
**(April 22, 2012)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Last week we began the practical portion of the book of Hebrews. And we saw that as Christians we have three great privileges and three great duties.

In 10:19: We have boldness to enter. Now this is quite a privilege, because in Judaism there was never boldness to come into the presence of God. In fact, coming into the presence of God was forbidden for the most part.

The people were not allowed to go up Mt. Sinai. Only Moses was allowed to go.

In the tabernacle, the people were not allowed in the holy places. Only the priests were allowed.

But in Christ, all of us may enter boldly. And that is because in Christ our sins are really forgiven. The people of Israel offered bulls and goats for remission of sins and they found that this was not effective and they could not get close to a holy God. But in Christ, we come right in because his effective atonement has taken away our guilt and we have boldness to enter in.

In 10:20: We have a new and living way as opposed to the old and dead way.

There was an old way and that was by the Mosaic Covenant. It was a law way. It was a works way. And it was an ineffective way. It was a way that led to death and condemnation. But then Christ and his new covenant burst on the scene and it put an end to that old way of Judaism and it established a new way that became known as Christianity.

And this new way was a living way because Christ actually saves. Bulls and goats never saved anyone. But Christ saves.

In 10:21: We have a high priest. Those old Levitical priests were over the house of Israel and those Levitical priests could never save Israel from sins. But then, another priest came along and his name was Jesus Christ. And Christ was a priest after a better order. He was after the order of Melchisedec. And Christ was the priest over his house. The Levitical priests were priests in their house (the house of Israel). And Christ was high priest in his house (the household of God)

*And having a high priest over the house of God. (v.21)*

And here is the great and marvelous thing about Christ's priesthood that distinguishes it from that previous priesthood. He could actually and effectively mediate between God and man because he was God and he was man and because he was a priest without infirmity. He is our great high priest and our great high priest actually saves us from our sins.

Now as part of the household of God, we have these great privileges. We are absolutely the most special people in all the earth. There is nothing like being a Christian. We are the very household of God. We are his sons and his daughters. We are children of the King himself. There are no people like us. We are his people. He sits daily in the heavenlies as our high priest. He mediates for us. He doesn't mediate for everyone but he mediates for us. We stand before God as righteous as Christ himself for he is our substitute. We are the most blessed of all people on the face of the earth. We are God's chosen people. We are the eternal objects of his affection. He holds us in the palm of his hand and he will never let us go. He has taken us out of this world and given us a citizenship in a far better place.

Though we may be poor in this world, he has made us rich in the next. Though we be physically sick, he has made us whole spiritually. Though we stray from him in our earthly weakness, he ever welcomes us back home, because we are his household.

Now we have come to a most difficult passage of Scripture. And this passage of Scripture has been used by many to suggest that the saved may ultimately fall away.

*For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. (v.26)*

*Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. (v.38)*

Now one thing I know from the Scriptures is that salvation is a work of God from beginning to end. I am saved because God saved me. I was lost and now am found. I was dead and he made me alive. (Eph.2:1; 5)

Over all these years I have learned that if God left me to myself there would be no disposition toward Him. If I were not kept, I would leave the faith. We all teeter on the edge of perdition and only by the power of God are we preserved. And I would say to you this morning, that if you have faith in Christ; if you have love for Him; if you have a true desire to fellowship with his saints; if you a love for His word; if you desire to draw near to him or to assemble in his church, it is because He has worked it in you by his sovereign power and good pleasure.

It says,

*We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus . . .*

Eph.2:10

This means simply that we are the clay and he is the potter. We are his workmanship.

Our very spiritual life has been created by Christ just in the same way that he created the heavens and the earth. He made them out of nothing and he made us alive out of nothing. Where no spiritual life existed, he made us alive. And I know that I could never make myself alive and I can never keep myself alive. But if God has determined to save me, then I am saved for now and evermore. I can't trust myself with my own soul. But I trust him with my soul and my soul is in good hands. I am nothing, but he is everything. And no one will ever be able to snatch my soul from his care.

Jesus said,

*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I*

*give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.*

And so, I know for a certainty, that Hebrews does not teach that the saved may be lost. This cannot be true under any circumstances. Paul said in Romans 8,

*Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Romans 8:33-35)*

And further,

*For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38,39)*

Those who would claim that the saved may lose their salvation cannot possibly believe that salvation is a work of God, for if salvation is a work of God, then our salvation is sure.

Those who would claim that the saved may lose their salvation cannot possibly believe in the doctrine of election. For how can the elect ever be lost? How can God's eternal purpose ever be undone? How can Christ's inheritance ever be disinherited? It is impossible. It is more possible for the sun to rise in the west than for the elect to be lost. It is very rare for a human father to disown a son. But it is utterly impossible that a loving God should disown his sons and daughters.

Those who would claim that the saved may lose their salvation cannot possibly believe in the depravity of man – for if you believe that all men are hopelessly depraved and you believe a saved man can fall away, then you must believe that all will fall. If we stay saved by our own power, then we are all hopeless.

Those who would claim that the saved may lose their salvation cannot possibly believe that sins are really forgiven. For if sins are forgiven, how can a man be lost? And the Bible says that God has cast our sins as far as the east is from the west. It says, *Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.* (Romans 4:8)

Those who would claim that the saved may lose their salvation cannot possibly believe that Christ's atonement was effective – for if his atonement was effective for me, then I cannot be lost.

Those who would claim that the saved may lose their salvation cannot possibly believe that Christ is at the right hand of God serving as our great high priest and mediating daily on our behalf.

*Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*  
Hebrews 7:25

But all of these things we do believe, because we believe the Scriptures and we know that the saved can never be lost because of the wonderful work of Christ that was done on their behalf.

And yet, there is a stern warning here in Hebrews that we should never leave the faith of Christ, for then there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins (v.26) but [or, rather] a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.

Now I want to put this passage in context to help us understand it better. Remember that this book is written primarily to warn Jews who have joined the church not to resort back to Judaism. This is the thrust of the entire book. The writer has taken 10 chapters to prove that Judaism is an inferior religion and that it is passed away in favor of Christ. And then, in several places, Hebrews warns that there is no hope unless the readers embrace Christ. If they fall away from Christ then there is no other hope.

*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation.* (Heb.2:3)

*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to*

*come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance.  
(Heb.6:4-6)*

*For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. (Heb.10:26)*

Now here is what happened at the time of Christ. All of the Jews were rolling right along in that religion called Judaism. John the Baptist's father, Zacharias, was a priest. Jesus' parents were faithful Jews who went to Jerusalem ever so often according to the law. And Judaism was the authorized religion.

But then Christ came. And Christ was a bright light. And he preached the gospel. And the bright light of the gospel began to shine in Israel. And it began to overshadow the shadows. And many people began to attach themselves to Christ. And Christ developed a large following. Now, were all of these people saved? And the answer is that many were, but many were not.

See John 6:65-66.

*And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.*

So, many of the people followed Christ. Many of them sipped from his cup for a while. Many of them heard him preach. Many of them did a little sunbathing in his light. The light shone on them for a while. But then, many of his disciples "went back. And walked with him no more" (v.66)

Did they attach themselves to Christ for a while? Yes. Did the light shine on them for a while? Yes. Did their souls burn within them for a while? Yes. But then, they turned back and walked with him no more.

When Christ left the earth, he commissioned his disciples to carry the gospel to the world. And they went out into all the world and preached the gospel. And many people were saved and many more people were attracted to the light of the gospel for a while. Many Jews liked what they heard initially and they attached themselves to the disciples and to the church. And the light of the gospel shined on them for a while. And the light

of the church shone on them. And they hung around while the Holy Spirit was shining in the hearts of men. Many were near as 3000 were saved on the day of Pentecost. And they were curious about this new way – this new Christian way.

But, after a while, many of them went away.

*They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.*

I John 2:19

So the question is, “Who are these people referred to in Hebrews who are in danger of fiery judgment?”

And I would suggest it is in particular those Jews who have drawn close to the light of Christ and to the light of the church for a while, but who will ultimately decide that Christ is not for them and they will go back to Judaism. They will walk out of the church and back into the synagogue. They will leave the new way and go back to the old. They will leave the great high priest and go back to those human Levitical priests.

Now let's look at our text this morning:

*For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. (v.26)*

Now you will notice the first word in our verse. It says, “For.” This word makes a connection with the previous verse.

If I said, “You should not rob a bank, for if you commit such a crime you will go to jail,” I would be connecting the cause and the natural result.

Now in verse 25 it says, Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together . . . for if we sin willfully . . .

So I take it that in the immediate context, the sin that is at issue is the sin of leaving the Christian assembly – that is, leaving it in favor of the synagogue. It is essentially saying, “It’s been nice being with you Christians for a while, but now it’s too hard. Our families and friends despise us, we

are being persecuted and we must go back. It is saying, "We tried Christ for a while, but in the end we find his way to be no better. He is interesting, but we find his sacrifice to be no better than the sacrifice of bulls and goats." It is saying, "We intend to have no more of Christ. He is nothing to us anymore."

This is what is called apostasy. Apostasy is the deserting of one's professed faith. For a while, they said they believed in Christ. But now, they are turning back. They are deserters of the faith.

Notice that their sin is a sin not only against the assembly of believers, but also against God himself.

*Who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing and hath done despite unto the Spirit. (v.29)*

It says that those who forsake the assembly in favor of some other religion are actually trampling on Jesus Christ. Here Jesus endured such suffering, even the suffering of death on a cross, and these people are now counting his sacrifice as nothing. They are willing to just walk away from Christ and his church. They are walking away from his sacrifice and his atonement. They are rejecting his priesthood. And all of this is a personal affront to Jesus Christ. And it is in effect treating Jesus as a doormat. They are wiping off their shoes on the Son of God.

And that is the nature of rejecting Christ. It is a personal affront to his dignity and his person and his work.

**Example: What if a mother worked all day in the kitchen to prepare a feast for her family. And when they came into the kitchen they turned their noses up at the food and they rejected it. And furthermore, they said they were going down to McDonald's to get a burger. And as they were leaving, they knocked the turkey and dressing and all the trimmings off the table and onto the floor. And then, for good measure, they threw their mother to the floor and stepped on her as they went out.**

Now we can't imagine such a thing. But this is how the writer portrays the rejection of Christ by these Jews who are returning to Judaism. It is a

most personal affront to Jesus.

Not only is it a hateful affront to the person of Christ when they leave the faith and return to Judaism, but it is also an affront to the work of Christ. Look in verse 29:

*And hath counted the blood of the covenant . . . an unholy thing.*  
(v.29)

They have decided that the suffering and death of Jesus is to be counted as nothing – as though it has no effect whatsoever. And more than this, they count it as an unholy thing. By leaving they say that the work of Jesus is not only an empty work but also a fraudulent work. It is the work of an imposter. It is a devilish work. They are saying that Christ is a false god and that Christianity is a false religion.

Ah, and not only is this an affront to the person of Christ and to the redemptive work of Christ, but also it is an affront to the Holy Spirit of God.

*And hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace.* (v.29)

So, by leaving the assembly of the saints, they are trampling on the person of Christ, they are calling his redemptive work an unholy thing and they are snubbing their noses also at the Holy Spirit who graciously applies that redemptive work of Christ to the hearts of the saints.

Now in verse 26 when it says, “If we sin willfully,” it cannot possibly refer to the sins of born again Christians. For who could stand under such a standard? Why if that were the standard we might as well pack it up and leave the church ourselves. The fact is that Christ came because we were sinners. And Christ continues his work of mediation in heaven day to day because we are sinners. And when we get to heaven we will marvel at the grace of God which accepts us as righteous because we will know that we were sinners.

One of the most outrageous sins would be to maintain that we do not sin.

*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.*

I John 1:8

*If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.*

I John 2:1

And furthermore, when we sin we are sinning willfully. No one is holding a gun to our head and making us sin. When we lie, we willfully lie. When we steal, we willfully steal.

So what does verse 26 mean? It is clearly talking about the willful sin of forsaking Christ. It is the sin of walking away from Christ and his church and counting it as worthless. It is the sin of apostasy.

Apostasy is when a person has had an encounter with the light of the gospel. He has been around it. Perhaps he has had some favorable inclination to it for a time. Perhaps he has even joined the church and made a public profession of faith. Perhaps he has been sanctified in some way by his attachment to the church. He has been salted by his close proximity to other saints. He may have obtained certain knowledge of the Word of God and of the good news.

And yet, in the end, he walks away and says, "No thanks." This is what it means in verse 26 when it says,

*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. (v.26)*

Nowhere does it say they received the knowledge of the truth in a saving way or in an inward way. These are not born again who are walking away. They are those who are unregenerate, who had a mere natural attachment to Christianity but no permanent change of heart.

And here is the awful condition that befalls these apostates.

*There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*

When you withdraw from Christ, when you say no to his sacrifice, what sacrifice will you turn to?

These Hebrews would undoubtedly return to the sacrifice of bulls and goats? But we already know that is fruitless:

*For it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins.*

Hebrews 10:4

When you reject Christ and his sacrifice, where will you turn?

Some say, "I will bring the sacrifice of my good works." But if you bring your good works you bring nothing at all, for under the law of God you must bring perfect works. Jesus had perfect works, but you have rejected him in favor of your own paltry deeds. Can you imagine the utter embarrassment and humiliation of any imbecile who brings his own righteousness to the table of God's final judgment and offers that instead of the righteousness of Christ which was offered freely? The utter foolishness of such a presentation will set the heavens aroar with laughter. God and his angelic host will laugh with derision at such a sinner.

It is an act of utter foolishness to reject the free offer of the sacrifice of Christ.

There is one sacrifice and one only that atones for sin and that is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ himself. And when you turn your back in apostasy from that efficient sacrifice, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. There is nowhere else in all the earth to turn. You have forsaken your only hope. You have opted out of your only option. And it says,

*There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.*

And in verse 27 we see the inevitable conclusion of the matter for the sinner who turns from Christ in a final rejection of him. Verse 26 says "If we sin willfully" and verse 27 tells us the awful consequences.

*But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. (v.27)*

Under the old covenant, there were certain crimes for which there was no available sacrifice. Crimes such as murder and adultery and blasphemy were punishable by death and there was no sacrifice available. And when a person was taken in such an act, he had no hope. His only expectation was to be stoned to death

And in the new covenant, there is such a crime that can be committed for which there is no sacrifice available. And that crime is the utter rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Once Christ is turned away in a willful act of final rejection, there is only one expectation on the horizon and that is the fiery judgment of God.

*There is no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation . . . (vs.26,27)*

Now the fate that awaits these apostates is here described as judgment. The penalty for rejection of Christ is not some arbitrary penalty imposed. But it is a reasoned judgment. There will be a full and open trial of the matter and a reasoned sentence will be imposed which is commensurate with the crime.

And what crime could be greater than trodding the Son of God under foot? What crime could be more heinous than counting the blood of Christ as an unholy thing? What crime is greater than despising the Holy Spirit of God and turning a deaf ear to the free offer of grace?

This reasoned judgment is characterized by the words, "fiery indignation." Christ will not be pleased that his redemptive work was thrown down and despised. He will not be pleased that he was trod under foot. And he will be that final Judge. And he will be full of fiery indignation.

But we are not through with this verse. We notice here that this fiery judgment is absolutely certain.

Those who reject Christ are in a holding cell awaiting execution. And the execution is here said to be certain. You have rejected Christ which was the only hope. And now, your fate is certain.

Note the severity of the penalty. It shall be worse than being stoned to death in Israel.

*He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God . . .*

Hebrews 10:28,29)

So what is the instruction for us this morning. We may not be Hebrews who are tempted to reject Christ for Judaism. But the warning is applicable to us all. Whether we leave Christ for Judaism or for some other dead religion, the effect is the same. There is only one sacrifice for sins and that is Christ. Leave Him and there is a certain fearful looking for of judgment.

This world will tempt you in many ways to leave Christ. It will tempt you to leave for earthly riches. It will tempt you to leave for temporal pleasures. It will tempt you to leave for the sake of comfort and ease. But you must not forsake Christ for anything in this world.

Hold fast. Don't fall away but draw near to God in Christ. Continue to assemble with the saints of God and guard against slipping away into apostasy.

This is the warning.