

What If I Sin Deliberately?

- ²⁶ 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 [Is 33:14; etc.]
- ²⁸ 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?
- ³⁰ For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" [Dt 32:35]. And again, "The Lord will judge his people" [Dt 32:36].
- ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God [possibly 2Sa 24:14].
- ³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so
- ³³ treated.
- ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you

joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

³⁷ For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;

³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him" [Hab 2:3-4; Isa 26:20-21].

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls."

Hebrews 10:26-39

Why Do We Want To Know This?

PEOPLE HAVE ASKED ME, “**Were Nadab and Abihu believers?**” These two men were the oldest sons of Aaron, and one day they consciously went into the tabernacle of God as priests and offered “strange fire” and were consumed *by fire* from God. Others have asked me, “**What about Ananias and Sapphira, where they Christians?**” These were

a husband and wife in the early church in the book of Acts. On one occasion they purposely sold some property and then held back part of that money, but giving everyone the impression that they gave everything they had. For this deception and lie, Peter came to their house and pronounced a curse upon them. Both died instantly and great fear seized the church.

We could multiply these examples of people **deliberately sinning** against God all day if we wanted to. But let's ask the question, **why do we want to know the answer so badly?** There are underlying reasons some of which are very powerful to us personally. Some wonder how you could sin deliberately, on purpose against God, and **ever think that a person could be saved**. I mean, the Bible clearly says things like, **"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth"** (1Jn 1:6). What else could that possibly mean?

Others struggle with losing salvation. This is particularly a problem in Arminian circles, though the problem has been around for millennia, as even Rome teaches that you can lose your salvation. It causes no end of torment for people who trust in Christ and confess him to

others. “What if I do something that will make God so mad, that he will punish me in hell for all eternity?” “If I chose God by my own freewill, can’t I un-choose him too?” You can see how not understanding the relationship between works and grace or having a biblical view of predestination can lead to serious anxiety of heart.

“But,” you say, “we are all Calvinists. None of us have that problem. Reformed people don’t struggle with losing salvation.” I’m sure that is true with many of us here. But I know for a fact it isn’t true for all of us. Sometimes even Reformed people struggle with this. It may be that their minds are constantly bombarded with demonic thoughts, or they can’t think clearly enough about these doctrines, or they are simply looking inward too much. A related question that some Reformed people can’t stop asking is, “What if I’m not one of the elect?” But notice how similar this question is to what we are asking about the examples above (“Are they Christians?”). So this line of thinking is relevant for very personal reasons.

This leads to a third point. When we think of some of these examples of punishment from God, some have the assumption that when a person is punished *physically* by God,

it must necessarily have a spiritual, *eternal* counterpart. In other words, if someone dies at the hand of God, does it mean that they are going to spend eternity in hell, and and if they don't, then why would God punish them like that? We may, for example, we assume (rightly) that you can't lose your salvation. But if we assume that God couldn't punish you physically, then what must we conclude about Nadab and Abihu? They could not be believers.

You say, “**That’s not a big deal**,” and maybe it isn’t. But do we realize that we smuggle the same assumption into places where it actually is a big deal? Hebrews has talked about “not entering God’s rest.” This is talking to *us*, and so it isn’t just about fun speculations about other people. It really matters what this means.

How many of us think that this refers to eternal salvation? But what if it didn’t? What if it was talking about physical blessings and curses, exactly like it was in the Exodus where they were not aloud to enter the Promised Land? How many of us read the story of the twelve spies and the subsequent cursing of the wilderness generation and think to ourselves, “**Wow, only two of the twelve spies went to heaven** (Caleb and Joshua)?” How many think that

two million people all went to hell for their “unbelief,” for that is the word that is used of them, and we all know that you can’t live in unbelief and go to heaven. And yet, do we realize that it says that Moses and Aaron “**did not believe in me [God]**” (**Num 20:12** YLT), and that for this exact reason, they were not allowed to enter God’s rest? So why don’t we think they also went to hell along with everyone else?

Of course we know that Moses and Aaron also had faith, and we even see this in Hebrews. But they also didn’t have faith *simultaneously*. All sin is really unbelief. We Christians are living contradictions, full of both, side by side. So why do we assume the best of some of them and the worst of others? Can you see the way our assumptions impact how we read the text and then begin to apply it? What if I start assuming the best or worst of myself or others around me based on a misunderstanding of the Bible?

Today we are entering the fourth warning passage in Hebrews. Warning these Christians is obviously important. We have already seen how “**not entering God’s rest**” is one of those warnings and how it is possible that we are reading it wrongly, especially if the OT is being used as the example for us today. What makes us think it is talking about our

eternal destiny?

The fact of the matter is, **almost everyone simply assumes that it is**. Some read the text and (rightly) know that it is clearly talking about Christians, true Christians. But they also assume (wrongly) that Christians can lose their salvation. Thus, when they read the language, which can certainly seem at least in places like it might be talking about eternal punishment, they just assume that Hebrews is warning people not to lose their salvation. Nothing else can even enter their mind as a possibility, because of their assumptions. Suddenly, they find biblical justification for something that isn't actually true or in the Bible.

On the other hand, some rightly know that Christians cannot lose their salvation. There are few things more evident in the NT than this fact. But when they read these passages, they *also assume*—again at least in part because of the language—that it is talking about someone's eternal destiny in hell. Here is a good example in our own passage, “... a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:27). “Obviously” this must be talking about hell, right?

But because they know people can't lose their salvation,

then the only conclusion they can come to is that these warning passages are totally hypothetical for real Christians. The passages aren't talking about actual Christians, even though the everything in the language of every warning passage in Hebrews says that they are. In just our passage, these are people who have been **baptized** (10:22), who **confess** the faith (23), who **assemble** to build one another up (24), who have received the knowledge of the **truth** (26), who have been **sanctified** by the blood of the covenant (29), who know the **Spirit** of God enough to have outraged him (29), who are “**his people**” (30), who have been “**enlightened**” (32), who have been **persecuted** for the faith (33), who have a great **confidence** and hope (35), who most importantly who actually have **faith** (38-39) and who **preserve** their souls (39). I'm not sure how else you could talk about a true Christian than like that. But, since it *can't* be talking about Christians, you can basically just move on and not worry about any of this. We might as well go home, since Hebrews 10 would be the equivalent of just playing games with other people's salvation.

The NT and Obedience

What I want us to see today is that **our warning passage is powerfully meaningful to real Christians**. It is not here to make us fearful of losing our salvation, or to make us skip past it because we are true Christians, or to make us judge others who aren't. It, and the others in the book, are here to cause us to look at our own behavior and realize that if we do not do what the Bible says, God has not changed. He does not approve of our sin. Therefore, it spurs us on to love and good works. It is something we should be talking about with one another.

Just as it is abundantly clear that Christians cannot lose their salvation, so it is also clear in the NT that God wants his people to be holy and to keep his commandments. We could go to any NT book and find many examples. The early church had many teachers who were saying the opposite. We have our own today. The passage just before our text today has ended with **three such commands**. God tells us that we are to “**draw near**” to God in full assurance of faith, that we are to “**hold fast**” our confession of hope, and that we are to “**consider how to spur one another on to**

love and good works, not neglecting to meet together” (Heb 10:22, 23, 24-25). These are not suggestions. We are to obey them. Now we are going to find out how these are related to the warning of Hebrews.

The Warning

It is immediately after these commands are given that our passage today begins, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins” (26). Right away we can see how *deliberate* sin is something we have to think about. Deliberate sin is sin done knowingly, against the commands of God. Is there a specific kind of sin in mind? Almost everyone in both of the views we have already talked about assumes that it refers to *apostasy*. But the word “apostasy” is not in not found anywhere in Hebrews. So why is it assumed?

The first reason is that it seems on the surface that Hebrews is talking about eternal damnation. Again, think about the next verse, “But a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the

adversaries” (27). What could fury of fire, judgment, and being consumed mean if not hell? It is assumed that it can’t mean anything.

A second reason is that it seems on the surface like not holding fast to your confession or no longer assembling together must mean a complete abandonment of Christianity, including being with God’s people and openly rejecting the central beliefs of the Faith—hence, again, apostasy. So the view does take the context into consideration up to a point. Now, while it is certainly true that this could be in mind, and no doubt it is true that many falsely professing Christians have in fact done both things, it is by no means necessary to take either statement in this absolute sense. If we do, we make the text say more than it actually says.

Let’s look at the second thing. It does not seem to occur to many people that there are all kinds of things that we “confess.” One of them, for example, is that we are saved by faith rather than works. This is actually found in these very commandments. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (10:22). The same thing appears in vs. 38, “my righteous one shall live by faith.” What if the

temptation wasn't to abandon Jesus, but to trust in things like works of the law as additions to faith, as we see throughout the NT, especially in books like Galatians? The Galatians were not apostates. But they were entertaining very serious error.

Here we have to remember [the context and the occasion of Hebrews](#). The [context](#) for many chapters now has been how Jesus is superior to OT temple types such as sacrifices, baptisms, and furnishings. It seems highly likely that among the reasons to tell these people of Jesus' superiority is in order to prevent them from returning to types and shadows, which was a very real temptation. This would mean returning to the law, especially ritual law which has passed away.

The [occasion](#) (the reason for the writing of the letter) must fit the context. As many have argued, and as the title of the book itself hints at, Hebrew Christians and probably not a few converted Jewish priests were being tempted to flee the pure forms of Christianity and return to Jewish legal traditions,¹ just like we see in so many other places where

¹ Cf. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 10–11; T. K. Oberholtzer, "The Danger of Willful Sin

they return to circumcision or external regulations of calendars or lists of do not handle, taste, or touch, and so on. This was THE problem of the early church. Maybe they were even being tempted to return to the synagogues while still trying to hold on to something of Christianity. Many Jewish Christian groups do these kinds of things to this day. Add to this the fact that the word “apostasy” simply does not appear here, and apostasy isn’t by any means the only way one could fail to hold fast their confession. Nevertheless, these are very serious.

[What about the question of fire and hell?](#) Here is where it is helpful to remember that perhaps more than any other book in the NT (other than maybe Revelation), Hebrews is saturated with the Old Testament. Throughout the warning passages up to this point, it has clearly had many OT passages in mind, and they do not speak directly about eternal damnation.

One is the **Kadesh Barnea** episode with the spies who cause Israel to wander for forty years and a whole generation never enters God’s rest—that is, the Promised Land.

in Hebrews 10:26–39,” *BSac* 145 (1988): 412–13; David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 65-70.

Certainly, the Promised Land is a *type* of heaven, and so there is something implicit about heaven here. But types are not the reality itself. They point forward and in this case warn. But the judgment was in fact purely physical for them, at least in the text. There is nothing whatsoever said about them all going to hell. Did some not go to heaven? Undoubtedly. But some, like Moses, Miriam, and Aaron most assuredly did, even though they did not enter God's rest.² So isn't it possible that our warning passages are doing something similar, given the fact that they are drawing upon this OT story? We still live on earth. We still live in a sense "in the wilderness" between Egypt and heavenly Canaan.

Hebrews is probably thinking of "fire" the way Isaiah did when he said, "O LORD, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed. Let the fire for your adversaries consume them" (Isa 26:11). Hebrews says, "... a fury of fire that will

² **Going Deeper:** Allen cites Gleason and it is instructive here. "Gleason goes on to give three reasons why the exodus generation did not commit apostasy. First, they were forgiven in response to Moses' prayer (Num 14:20); second, the people "mourned greatly" (14:39) and confessed they had sinned (14:40) when Moses pronounced judgment on them; and third, they were not permitted to return to Egypt. In fact, for the next 38 years, they experienced God's hand of protection, provision and guidance" (David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, 381). Certainly, this ought at the very least to help us understand that a good number of that generation really were forgiven of their sins, really meant it when they confessed them, and should be considered in the same category as Moses himself: Saved and now in heaven.

consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:27).³ Isaiah refers to temporal, physical fire, not eternal hell fire. Think of something like fire coming down from heaven and destroying Sodom and Gomorrah.

In Isaiah, it is very often it is the covenant people themselves that are physically consumed by fire (cf. 9:18-19; 10:17; etc.). One commentator says,

Often in the Old Testament “fire came from the Lord” to consume his people due to their covenant unfaithfulness. Examples abound in the Pentateuch, ranging from the complaining people of the Exodus (Num 11:1-2) to Korah and his 250 companions (Num 16:35) to Aaron’s two sons, Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2). Similarly, Moses warned the new generation of Israel coming out of the wilderness that if they were unfaithful to the covenant, Yahweh would “burn” their land and “consume” them (Deut 32:21-22) as he did some from the previous generation. Rather than a

³ This is almost certainly taken from Isaiah. This is all the more probable given that Hebrews quotes the same chapter in Isaiah at the end of our passage where Isaiah’s “Hide yourselves for a little while ... the LORD is coming” (Isa 26:20-21) becomes Hebrews, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come” (Heb 10:38). See George H. Guthrie, “Hebrews,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 983.

description of eternal damnation, fire was a common method of physical judgment for covenant unfaithfulness throughout the Old Testament.⁴

And so, they are not⁵ going to hell, but they are coming into contact with God who is a Consuming Fire and as Isaiah says elsewhere, **who can dwell with him (33:14)?**⁶ God himself is a Consuming Fire (**Heb 12:29**; cf. **Dt 4:24**). Someone might say, **“But God doesn’t send fire in the NT.”** Tell that to Revelation which says things like, **“The fourth angel poured**

⁴ Randall C. Gleason, “A Moderate Reformed View,” in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007), 363–364.

⁵ In the old covenant, there were those in the covenant who were not true believers and therefore could perish eternally though in covenant. In the new covenant, as I have argued, this is not the case. Though, there are those who profess faith in Christ who will nevertheless perish (these are the people who can apostatize), they are not “in the new covenant.” Rather, they are “in the visible church.”

⁶ This is an interesting verse. It says, “The sinners in Zion are afraid; trembling has seized the godless: “Who among us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who among us can dwell with everlasting burnings?” The Isaiah Targum seemingly takes this as hell saying, “Who can *sojourn* for us *in Jerusalem, where the wicked are about to be judged and handed over to Gehenna, everlasting burning?*” But the focus seems to be on God, not hell (HE is the Consuming Fire, citing Deuteronomy). Yes, hell is eternal fire and perhaps that emanates from God himself (or perhaps it is a created eternal fire, who knows). But the immediate context is clearly people alive on earth, not in the afterlife. These are men who come into God’s direct presence and thus are consumed.

The grammar is inconclusive, though one can see how the idea of eternal fire in hell might be developed from it in the NT. It is literally “burnings” (plural) and “everlasting” or “eternal.” So you get translations like “continual burning” (NAS, begging the question “of what?”) or “burnings of the age” (YLT, begging the question “which age,” but which seems to be this one) or “everlasting burnings” (JPS) and “the eternal place” (LXX, which focus on the afterlife).

out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire” (Rev 16:8). Even in the NT, the judgment of God is sometimes physical fire upon men.

Going back to our first verse, there are other OT passages probably in mind here. These are Numbers 15:27-31 and anything related to it. Compare “If we go on sinning deliberately” (Heb 10:26) to, “If one person sins unintentionally, he shall offer a female goat a year old for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally ... But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people.” To sin “with a high hand” is the equivalent of sinning “deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth.”

This is a defiant in-your-face, “I don’t care what you told me, I’m going to do it anyway” attitude. It particularly relates to drawing near to God, holding fast the confession, and spurring one another on to love and good works. But it can be other things as well. There is actually an example given immediately after it talks about unintentional vs. high

handed sins in Numbers.

This is the famous story of **the man who was gathering wood on the Sabbath** (**Num 15:32-36**). Apparently, this man did what he did defiantly, with a high hand. There was no sacrifice that could now be offered for him. The community was to “**put him to death.**” But will he necessarily go to hell? This is hardly the sin of apostasy! Notice, Hebrews says that we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth and therefore “**there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**” (**Heb 10:26**). Hebrews probably has this in mind, given that it has Numbers 15 in mind and now quotes the law in Deuteronomy about two or three witnesses needed to put a law-breaker to death. “**Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses**” (**Heb 10:28**; cf. **Dt 17:6-7**). Again, the punishment is not eternal damnation in hell, but the death penalty. Whether or not this man was saved is not something we are told. Putting him to death served as a warning to the people. This is very similar to the warning here in Hebrews.

What is the warning? “**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?” (Heb 10:29). This is a very important verse to understand properly. Earlier in our chapter Hebrews said, “For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). This is talking about Christians, for only Christians are perfected. Sam Waldron has pointed out that if this is talking about people who do not profess faith and are not in fact real Christians then “sanctification” has to mean something totally different in these two places, but with no grammatical or contextual reason to see why.⁷ This is talking to Christians. Of course, there is always an implicit warning to falsely professing people and eternal damnation. But it isn’t talking to them here. It is actually saying something that is both relevant and consistent with out theology from other places.

⁷ Samuel E. Waldron, “A Brief Response To Richard L. Pratt’s ‘Infant Baptism in the New Covenant,’” *The Reformed Baptist Theological Review* 2, no. 1 (2005): 108 [104-110]. There is a problem. If we assume it is talking about apostates, and Christians can’t lose their salvation, then we have to change the actual language of the Bible in order to make it fit our theology. Some have actually done this so that “by which he was sanctified” (an aorist indicative passive verb) becomes “by which one is sanctified.” But it isn’t talking about someone who isn’t sanctified. It is talking about someone who is, and who has therefore been perfected by the blood of Jesus once-for-all. It is a terribly important lesson that we do not change the language of the Bible to make it fit our theology. Instead, we must want to understand the Bible and make our theology fit it.

But there are still some things that might concern you about this. The passage continues, “For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people’” (Heb 10:30). You say, “This has to be talking about eternal damnation in hell.” Certainly, if you are a false Christian and are pretending, it would. But if it is talking to real Christians, it can’t. Both things are possible, but it is Christians he is writing to.

This is two quotations from Deuteronomy 32—the Song of Moses, vv. 35 and 36. The context is of God being severely angry *at his people*, but then turning to their enemies and taking vengeance upon them. The first quote is about the enemies. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay,” is about God judging unbelievers, and certainly this would also include any falsely professing Christians who might end up apostatizing. The vengeance is for the protection of his own people.⁸

The second quote (“the Lord will judge his people”), however, is about God’s people! It says it explicitly. But this is actually a comforting thing, the exact opposite of what

⁸ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, vol. 6B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 818.

you probably suspect. Listen to it in different translations. “For the LORD will vindicate his people, And will have compassion on His servants” (NAS, ESV). But some have noticed that Hebrews is quoting the LXX, rather than the Hebrew and it uses the word “judge” rather than “vindicate.” Therefore, it is purely a severe warning. There is no comfort here.⁹

But listen to how the Targum is actually very comforting here as it interprets it using the word “judge.” “For the Word/Memra of the Lord judges mercifully the case of his people Israel, and for the evil He has appointed upon His servants there shall be repentance before Him.”¹⁰ The LXX actually continues by saying, “... he [the LORD] will relent on his servants.”¹¹

Listen carefully. Hebrews is warning us here as Christians. Hebrews continues, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). This is a warning to true Christians, not to false ones. But how? Not in an eternal way. Do you remember your OT? For true

⁹ For example, Guthrie (n. 3).

¹⁰ This combines the new translation by Clarke/Magder in *The Aramaic Bible* with the old Targum translation by Etheridge.

¹¹ This is the Lexham LXX “relent” combined with the Brenton “servants.”

Christians, God’s judgment in this life can be terrible. Just ask David who sinned greatly by numbering his army rather than trusting in God his King and Warrior. God came to him with a choice of judgment: Three years of famine, three months of your foes pursuing you or three days of pestilence in the land. Decide! (2 Sam 24:12). David, a true believer, was not immune to the temporary judgment of God. Neither are we.

Yet what did David say? “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great” (14). F.F. Bruce and others have suggested that this very passage was in the Apostle’s mind when he added this verse to Hebrews.¹² But why the Living God? Dt 5:26, “For who is there of all flesh, that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of fire as we have, and has still lived?” Do you see that for the Christian, to be judged by God is not a bad thing, but a good one? “Though he slay me, yet will I hope in Him” (Job 13:15). He is our Father!

The warning is all about continuing in our hope to the end through obedience. If, the Lord decided to discipline

¹² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 266.

you (a theme we find later in Hebrews), or even if, God forbid, He decided to take you out for your sin, if you are a believer, it is for your well being. Father's discipline their children. It is also a warning for other Christians, not to follow in the ways of evil. Of course, it is even more a warning to falsely professing Christians that God will not deal with them as sons, but as his enemies who will face eternal fires and not just the fire of temporary judgment on this earth. **Vs. 29** says, "How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son, profaned the blood of the covenant, and outraged the Spirit of grace." Yes, if we sin against Jesus who is infinitely greater than the old covenant, the punishment does deserve to be much greater. But God is still a God of mercy and grace.

Therefore, Do Not Shrink Back

At perhaps the crescendo in all of Hebrews where these warnings occur, suddenly, the Pastor asks you to remember who you are. "But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with

sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated” (32:33). In other words, if you ever get the point where you contemplate and then go ahead with sinning in any of the ways mentioned here, just remember that you have already been through much testing in this life.

Even if no one in this room has undergone the kind of persecution they did, still, there isn't a one of us who hasn't had to endure the discipline of God in our lives. Yet, we are here today. It is a good thing to look back and see what you have come through as a Christian, and then to realize that God did bring you through it. Therefore, he will be faithful to continue so to the end. Looking back on our lives and what God has brought us through already is a great way to press ahead towards the prize of heaven.

He continues, “For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (34). This moves us from perhaps unwilling hardship and persecution that came upon us without our consent, to willfully subjecting ourselves to such things for the sake of Christ.

Perhaps you have never moved outside of your own comfort zone for the sake of the Name. I have known **very few** Christians who have gone into prisons to meet with those who have undergone persecution for Christ. I have known **very few** who have actually had their property stolen from them and then deliberately said, “That’s OK, you can have it.” This is perhaps a shame upon us, because rarely do we look such things in the face and run towards them for the sake of Christ or his people. Yet, surely, **you have known something** of this? Known firsthand through mission trips what your brothers in other countries are going through? Been singled out at work for behavior that honors Christ but is vilified and criminalized by our culture? Had compassion on hungry brothers who could not afford their next meal?

If you have not, then it is time you stop thinking only of yourself. If you haven’t or if you have, what you need to know is that such things are used by God to strengthen you in times of your own trouble. You need to personally experience the hardships of others in order to move out of the wealthy, haughty, me-centered view of everything around us. This can profoundly change us, and help us

persevere, knowing that our brothers and sisters are not falling away though they have much worse temptations to than we do.

This very application then comes in **vs. 35**, “Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.” What is that reward? Heaven. Sinlessness. Eternal life. New bodies. Christ himself.

“For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised” (36). Whatever our temptations to give up, be they real physical torture, imprisonment, loss of property, or the opposite temptations that we face such as our own arrogance, complaining spirits, or spiritual complacency and apathy, the solution is the same. In this verse, it begins with doing God’s will. “Doing God’s will” is bible-code for obeying his commandments, the very thing that prompted this warning in the first place.

The second and more fundamental thing is continuing to live our lives by faith. Two more quotes now arise to show us this. “For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in

him” (37-38). This is a composite of **Isaiah 26:20-21** and **Habakkuk 2:3-4**. We’ve already seen this chapter in Isaiah and how the theme is of judgment.

The passage in Habakkuk is ground zero in Romans and James for the NT’s emphasis **on faith alone**. The righteous, that is those who obey God, are righteous by faith. Faith is what causes them to obey. Faith comes before obedience. Are are justified by faith alone, but not faith that is alone. True faith delights in God’s commandments and in wanting to please the Father.

Too many think that faith means not caring about obeying God. The opposite is true. Perhaps we think this because we have bought into another lie that people say comes from the Bible, that there is that OT mean God (Yahweh) and the NT nice God (Jesus). One of the reasons to know from every page you read in the Bible that Jesus is Yahweh is so that you will not fall prey to this teaching which devours your soul. It is the same God, and what Habakkuk said is still true. If you shrink back, His soul takes no pleasure in you.

This refers not to an objective state where God not longer loves you in Christ, but to a subjective state where

Christ is severely displeased. It is **an emotional word**, and Christ is an emotional person, and make no mistake, it is Christ who is speaking to the prophet for like so many others in the OT, “**The oracle that Habakkuk the prophet saw,**” (**Hab 1:1**). He is Habakkuk’s mediator to the Father.

Christ can be displeased with his own people. Is there anything more clear in the OT than this? This is what I’ve been trying to show you this morning. But he can still love you in Christ. Yet, if you are not in Christ, it is not discipline, but wrath that you face soon. In a little while, the coming one will come and will not delay. This is the Day of the LORD, and it is coming sooner than you think.

“**But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls**” (**Heb 10:39**). This verse will immediately be followed up by dozens of examples from the OT, of men who often acted quite badly. And yet they were also men of faith. Therefore, they were not destroyed by the Destroyer. Their souls were preserved.

There are **a couple of passages in the NT** that come to mind as we end our time today. The first is 1 Corinthians 10 where the Apostle lists a whole number of events that ended

badly for the Israelites. He even says that “some of them were destroyed” (1Co 10:9-10). There is no hint whatsoever of losing salvation in that chapter. It is abundantly clear that he is talking to true believers. Yet, these things happened as examples for our instruction (11).

Another is just a chapter later where many of the Corinthians were actually dying because of how they took the Lord’s Supper. In fact, our passage and that one are the only two that speak about judgment due to mistreatment of the blood of the covenant (1Co 11:25-30). Some of them were guilty of profaning the body and blood of Christ and their behavior resulted in some of them being “judged” (11:30).

If you think those people could not have been true Christians, then you need to get that thinking out of your head. Surely, they may not have been. But “could not” have been is a very different thing. This was not a renunciation of the faith like an apostate would do. It was a neglecting of the duties of the Christian assembly, like Nadab and Abihu did, like Ananias and Sapphira did. It is far too easy even given what we have said to start taking the sins you can commit on a personal internal heart level as what is primarily in

mind. Those are bad, of course. But if it causes us to ignore the actual warnings in the book, to pay no heed to them, then it does you no good.

Therefore, **let us** again remember to draw near with confidence with a true heart in full assurance of faith. **Let us** hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering. And **let us** consider again how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, but encouraging one another, all the more as we see the Day drawing near. For we are not those who shrink back and are destroyed. We are those who have faith and preserve our souls.

“**It is a fearful thing,**” said the original translators of the KJV at the end of their preface, “**to fall into the hands of the living God; but a blessed thing it is, and will bring us to everlasting blessedness in the end, when God [speaks to] us, to hearken; when he [sets] his word before us, to read it; when he [stretches] out his hand and [calls], to answer, Here am I, here we are to do thy will, O God. The Lord work a care and conscience in us to know him and serve him that we may be acknowledged of him at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Holy Ghost be all**

praise and thanksgiving. Amen.”¹³

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 266.