

Christ Is Superior to the Old Covenant

"A Fearful Thing"

Hebrews 10:26-31

We considered some of this text when we studied a similar view in chapter six (6). As was stated then, I don't believe this is speaking of those that have lost their salvation, nor do I believe it is a hypothetical look at what could happen but didn't. I believe, as I did of the text in chapter six (6), that this is speaking of true believers that if they go as far as to follow a path of sin will fall under the judgment of God as given here. In chapter six, it was the issue of "falling away" from their faith, deliberately walking away for whatever reason that might be. Here, it is to "sin willfully" that brings about the same type of judgment (chastening hand) upon the believer. As was the case in chapter six, once a believer has gotten to the point where they have chosen a life of sin that is contrary to Scripture (specifically what is given in the previous verses) without regard for its consequences, there will be nothing more the church or other believers can do for them - they are entirely in the Lord's hands. That is what is meant in verse thirty-one (31) of our text and from where we draw the title for this message: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

There are a couple of preliminary observations to make before we look into the actual text.

- The first word of verse twenty-six (26) - "for" - functions as a logical connector - it introduces a reason or explanation for what was just stated in the preceding verse (10:25). ""Don't stop meeting together and encouraging one another... because (γάρ) if we go on sinning deliberately [i.e., by forsaking the community, or other willful rebellion], there's serious judgment to face."

- The third word of verse twenty-six (26) - “we” makes the connection we’ve seen before in our study between the human author and the readers of the letter. He includes himself in this particular context to show that even he could end up under the chastening hand of God if he neglected the things of the Lord - particularly the meeting together and the encouraging of others spoken of in the previous verse.
- I believe this text describes what the more severe chastening hand of the Lord is for those who refuse to listen to the Holy Spirit’s conviction in their heart when they start down the path of disobedience and sin. This is supported by the fact that that very subject is discussed in chapter twelve (12).
- The phrase in verse 31 from which I’ve drawn the title - “a fearful thing” - is one word in the Greek (φοβερός) and in this form is only found in the book of Hebrews: two times in this text (vs. 27 and 31) and in Heb. 12:21.

Hebrews 12:21

²¹ And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

- ⊖ In the texts in this chapter, it describes something deeply sobering and serious, maybe even terrifying and dreadful. It reflects the sobering reality of God’s discipline and justice. It conveys a holy dread, the kind of awe that grips the soul when you realize you’re dealing with the living, active, and righteous God.
- ⊖ It doesn’t necessarily imply eternal judgment - it implies the seriousness of standing before the God who disciplines, judges, and cannot be mocked.
- ⊖ There’s a parallel thought to this found in 1 Corinthians 11:3-32, where Paul says some believers were weak, sick, or had died because they partook of the Lord’s Supper unworthily. Then

he adds:

“But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (vs. 32).

That’s the same idea: God's hand of discipline is indeed fearful, but it's loving and restorative, not condemnatory.

With that in mind, “It is a fearful thing”:

I. TO DISREGARD SIN - VS. 26-27

A. “Willfully” - voluntarily and intentionally

Although a case can be made that this may be applied to sin in general, as it does in other Scripture, the context of this particular phrase is the key to understanding this text.

It’s not referring to general, daily struggles with sin, even if those are willful at times. It’s not saying, “If you sin on purpose once, you’re done.”

The context of the previous verses encourages believers to:

- Draw near to God with confidence through Christ
- Hold fast to their confession of hope
- Consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds
- Not forsake assembling together
- Encourage one another

This immediate context suggests that the "willful sin" being addressed has something to do with abandoning the Christian community and faith commitments. The author appears concerned with believers who might deliberately turn away from

Christ after having embraced the gospel and going away from all that they've been encouraged to do.

B. "After that we have received the knowledge of the truth"

This is dealing with after receiving Christ as our Saviour, as opposed to the old covenant laws of sacrifice as the real means to appease God.

C. "There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins"

If they turn away from the only sacrifice that can save - namely the work of Christ for man's redemption - there isn't any other sacrifice to go to (we've seen this before in our study of chapter nine and ten).

D. Vs. 27 - "But a certain fearful...judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."

1. "But" - since there is no other means of salvation apart from the work of Christ that's already been done once for all, the only thing those believers that choose to deliberately sin against the word and will of God have to look forward to is the judgment (chastisement) of God.
2. "Fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries"
 - a) As pointed out already, this text is not speaking of unbelievers but true believers that act like adversaries - those who are turning away from Christ's sacrifice and reverting to the old covenant system or simply neglecting true faith.
 - b) The "devouring" of "adversaries" would have taken the Jewish audience back to the Old Testament account of Korah's rebellion

recorded in Numbers 16 and would have created a picture in their mind of those that defy God and His word and go against its teachings.

Numbers 16:35

³⁵ And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense.

The thing to remember here is that although we cannot make a complete comparison here, Korah and the 250 that were consumed were God's chosen covenant people. They didn't stop being that because they defied Him - they were severely judged because of it.

- c) We will see this principle come up again in Heb. 12:29 where it states that "our God is a consuming fire" - a reference made from Deut. 4:24 to show why we ought to serve God with holy reverence and fear (more on this verse when we study that text).
 - d) Fire is used here as a purifying presence, His disciplinary wrath against sin, even among His people - not the fire of hell in this context.
 - e) The overall pastoral tone of Hebrews is seen here: the writer isn't trying to drive people into despair, but to warn and woo them back to faithfulness. He's saying, *"Don't play around with grace—it's serious. But God is still your Father, and He disciplines those He loves."*
3. This verse is meant to wake up believers. The tone is one of loving but urgent warning - don't treat the blood of Christ lightly. If you rebel against His grace, you may find yourself on the wrong end of His fire - not as an enemy eternally, but as a son under judgment (or chastisement).

II. TO DESPISE THE SAVIOUR - vs. 28-29

A. Verse 28 gives the old covenant consequences.

1. It's referring to Deut. 17:2-6 where willful defiance (in the case in Deuteronomy, it is idolatry) under the Law led to capital punishment (stoning) but only after confirmation by two or three witnesses.
2. The focus is on deliberate rebellion, not mere weakness or unintentional sin.

B. Verse 29 shows a greater covenant, greater consequences; greater grace requires greater responsibility.

1. If that kind of rebellion under Moses resulted in death without mercy, then "of how much sorer punishment..." (how much more deserving of a severe penalty).

Let me say here that although I believe the context here is speaking to and about believers, there is an even more severe warning for the unbeliever who does this very thing.

2. There are three charges leveled against those believers who show such a willful disregard for the word and will of God:
 - a) "Who hath trodden under foot the Son of God"
 - (1) Implies utter contempt, as if Jesus were worthless
 - (2) Not just passive neglect, but active dishonor of Christ
 - (3) Describes a believer who persists in

deliberate sin (again, keep in mind the context of verses 19-25), acting in opposition to the lordship of Christ. This compares to Heb. 6:6, where the author uses the phrase, "seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh."

b) "And hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing"

(1) The person considered here is someone who is "sanctified" - speaks of initial sanctification - they are born again. If they were mere "professors" and "possessors," this phrase wouldn't be here.

(2) The one worthy of "sorer punishment" is seen here as someone who treats the blood of Christ as if it were like the blood of bulls and of goats, or worse, of no special worth at all.

This is what a believer who shows a disregard for the truth by their actions and lifestyle. There are too many believers today that do what they want no matter the consequences simply because it benefits them or because it makes them feel good.

c) "And hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace"

(1) "Done despite" - to give insult to, to treat with rudeness or contempt arising from arrogance.

(2) "The Spirit of grace" - it is the Holy Spirit that calls to repentance, faith, and obedience and to despise that Spirit of grace is to grieve and quench His direction and conviction in our lives. The grace that saves us is also the grace that disciplines us when we drift or rebel.

Ephesians 4:30

³⁰ And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

1 Thessalonians 5:19

¹⁹ Quench not the Spirit.

Each offense escalates in depth: from dishonoring Christ, to despising His sacrifice, to resisting the Spirit's work.

III. TO DISPLEASE THE ALMIGHTY - VS. 30-31

A. There are two quotes from the Deuteronomy 32 in verse 30 - the context of which is the Song of Moses, which isn't about judgment of Gentiles (unbelievers), but on God's own people when they rebel.

1. "Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord." This is a quote from Deut. 32:35: "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence."

The point here isn't that God will punish the world, but He will not overlook unfaithfulness in His own house.

The author is not warning outsiders, but those who have received light, participated in redemption, and now risk drifting, denying, or despising grace.

2. "The Lord shall judge his people" - a quote from Deut. 32:36: "For the LORD shall judge his people."
 - a) "Judgment" here (as it does in many places in

the Bible) doesn't mean damnation to hell, but corrective discipline.

- b) A similar principle is found in 1 Peter 4:17 - "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God."

I pointed out last week, in relation to Heb. 10:21 that we can "draw near" ourselves because of the priestly work of Christ, that that verse in 1 Peter shows that the church is the people and not a building.

I drew an analogy that us judging others is not the point - that that type of judging doesn't begin (nor does it belong at all) in the church house, in the building. I pointed out one application of the judgment spoken of there is the understanding that judging is the work of the Holy Spirit - it's His job (John 16:8-11) not ours. We are to demonstrate His justice (judgment) to others through love and compassion and mercy.

Another aspect of judgment beginning at the house of God - one to which Hebrews 10:30 relates - is that the chastening of the Lord begins there, with His children.

B. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" - vs. 31

1. We looked at the first phrase earlier. This whole text is meant to grip the heart.
2. "To fall into the hands of" - this is an idiom for being fully at someone else's mercy, especially for judgment or discipline.
 - a) Falling into God's hands is both comforting (Psalm 37:24) and sobering (2 Sam. 24:14).

Psalm 37:24

²⁴ Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth *him* with his hand.

2 Samuel 24:14

¹⁴ And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies *are* great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.

- b) Notice that in 2 Samuel 24:14 that David recognizes God's severe hand is more merciful than human cruelty - but it is still fearful when His children provoke Him.
- 3. "The living God" - God is not passive, abstract, or distant. He's active, involved, and holy - and He needs to be feared.

Conclusion: Too many times, we look too lightly at sin, even as believers. This is due, partly (and to the context) because we haven't drawn as near to the Lord as we should ourselves (10:22), we are not holding fast to what we believe (10:23), and we are not considering others and our relationship with them when it comes to encouraging them in their walk with the Lord (10:24-25). Because of this, we may find ourselves so far outside of the will of God that we are walking in the world and trampling "under foot the Son of God" by our actions. Even those that look good, sound good, and act good at church may be living a double life, so to speak, and will "fall into the hands of the living God" if the conviction of the Holy Spirit is not listened to.