



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Should We Be Afraid?

July 31, 2022

Hebrews 10:26-39

Clint Pressley

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. 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." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so 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."*

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

(Pastor prays)

The God of the Bible is a God of love and mercy and forgiveness and grace, a God of compassion and patience and healing, and that's good news. Even our

word “gospel” means “good news.” That Jesus saved sinners, that’s good news. Even still we can’t ignore that this God hates sin, and that hatred seems to be even more intense when the sin happens to be inside the church, among church people.

The thing that I’ve not been able to get around this week as I’ve wrestled with this passage is that the preacher is talking to and about people in the church, people who are on the roll at Hickory Grove, people who have been baptized or made some sort of profession of faith in Jesus and yet are in significant danger of nonchalantly sliding toward judgment.

Now this passage and this sermon are not for the faint of heart. You might even want to silently pray right now and say, “God give me ears to hear. God give me the will to respond.” Because as your pastor I want you to flourish as a child of God. I want your faith to be in the crucified, resurrected Jesus and to know the joy of having your sins forgiven by grace and your life sustained by the mercy of God at the cross. Today we speak of life and death because...

God is Good But Judgment is Real

There seem to be two different categories of people the preacher is addressing in the text, and I’ll leave it to you as to what category you are in. We all land in one category or the other. Let’s start with the scariest in verses 26-31.

Some people need a warning

I think the best thing to do is to allow you to see it for yourself. There are three things. See the warning in verses 26-27. See the theology behind it in verses 28-29. And see the outcome of missing Christ at the end.

Let’s go right to the warning in verse 26. ²⁶ *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,* Right there in the middle of the verse, after receiving knowledge of THE truth. That is the body of what it means to be a

Christian. THE truth is an explanation of the Gospel: that God is the holy creator who created all of us in His image. That image in us is disfigured because of our sin. We are separated from God and deserve to go to Hell. But God is also love. And to the degree He loves us He gave us Jesus who lived perfectly, died on the cross in the place of sinners as a substitute, taking the wrath of God. God raised Him from the dead in a shout of victory on a Sunday. That's why we worship on Sunday. He ascended into Heaven and the promise is that anybody who repents and believes that, will be saved.

Now here is what he's saying in verse 26. After you have received that knowledge of the truth, the sin is characterized by two things, and I want to be as careful as I can here. There is *deliberate* sin and *continual* sin. If you deliberately go on sinning – let's talk about deliberate. That means you have understood the Gospel, know what it means to become a Christian, beloved by God and blessed with a Christian home, enjoy the benefits of church life and all that goes with it, and then knowingly reject the lordship of Jesus in your life. It means you have said Jesus is Lord and claim to be born again, and yet there is no fruit, or you have started to be able to rationalize wrong behavior, possibly your own sin. That's the word "deliberate."

The other is at the front and the end of the verse. And here's where you need to make the distinction. If you go on sinning. That is a lifestyle of a person who is not a Christian. This is directed at the person whose name is on the roll of a church and yet has no real involvement with the body. This person doesn't worship, doesn't love the things of God, and doesn't care. If you have heard the Gospel and know the Gospel and even said you accepted the Gospel and yet you go on living like someone who's not a Christian, the end of verse 26 says then you stand outside the line of God's grace. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins and here is the outcome. It is terrible. Verse 27 says, ²⁷ *but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

Do you see that word "adversaries"? That is the enemy. All of those not truly in Christ will be treated as enemies by an otherwise gracious and loving God.

That's the warning and now let's look at the theology behind it. Verses 28 - 29 is an argument from lesser to greater. 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?* Verse 28 is the death penalty and verse 29 is worse than that, Hell. Then he tells us why in three darkly picturesque phrases what happens when you say you're saved but you are not. Trampled underfoot the son of God is an attack on the character of Christ. Matthew 5:13 says, ¹³ *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.* And Matthew 7:6, ⁶ *"Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.*

Here's the warning. When you know the truth of the Gospel and yet continue to live against that truth, you walk up to Jesus as He has laid down His life for you and you step on His neck and keep on going. The other phrase in verse 29 is *profane the blood of the covenant*. That means to treat it as common, as no big deal and not holy. That's the death of Jesus not being any different than any other death. That is that the blood He shed to turn away wrath and take away sin is not enough for you to live a life submitted to His goodness and lordship. And then the last phrase in verse 29 is *outrage the Spirit of grace*. What a great phrase! This is the only place in the whole Bible that the Holy Spirit is called the "spirit of grace." And grace is good! It is supremely loving and kind.

To outrage the Holy Spirit is the deepest kind of personal insult. God comes to you in grace and love and mercy, but that love is not welcomed or wanted. The third person of the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. What does the Holy Spirit do? The Holy Spirit convicts us of sin, regenerates with life, enlightens our minds, seals our hearts, grafts us into the body, strengthens us

with the Gospel, heals us with affection and gives us the very air we breathe. And yet, not to take the free gift of the lordship of Jesus is actually to insult the spirit of the living God and all that is left then is in verse 30, judgment and vengeance.³⁰ *For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay."* And again, *"The Lord will judge his people."*

Two chapters over the preacher will tell us that our God is a consuming fire. Here in verse 31 he just offers the warning.³¹ *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* Some people, maybe in this room or maybe online, need to be warned: come to God through Christ. Quit the charade and see Jesus on the cross in your place and trust Christ alone to save you. He will. After the warning he turns to another group of people.

Some people need encouragement

Maybe that is you. It's probably most of us. In fact, it's safe to say that almost everyone you come into contact with this week could use some encouragement and that's just what the preacher does here as he turns to his beleaguered congregation. He takes them on a journey starting in verse 32 to help them interpret all the hard and gut-wrenching things they have been through, especially by way of persecution. It's a good time to ask, "What does God teach me in pain and suffering? Why am I going through it and what is this struggle doing for my Christianity?" Suffering and persecution and pain do at least 5 things.

It proves your faith. ³² *But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, You were enlightened. That is the moment of conversion. That's when you understood the Gospel and became a child of God through faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And when that happened, this is the anti-prosperity gospel in verse 32, after you were enlightened, you endured hard struggle and sufferings. Your salvation was tested and proven to be true. Satan attacked, you were sinned against, ridiculed, mocked, maybe fired. You may be frustrated, hurt, walked through and mistreated or abused. You may have lost*

a child. And yet, God has walked you through it all and by grace He has sustained you. Your life is marked by the phrase, “if it weren’t for God carrying me through, I’d be ruined.” This is proof that your faith is real and growing.

It deepens your fellowship. Sometimes you were on the receiving end of suffering and sometimes you went to the aid of a brother or sister and stood with them in the midst of trouble. When you are a Christian, you are never in trouble alone. You have brothers and sisters standing shoulder to shoulder, strengthening the connection in Christ. You took on the attitude that if one member suffers, we all suffer. Pain, hurt, sickness and tragedy: all those give us the opportunity to take care of one another. And you have taken it big ways. Maybe through Hearts & Hammers and in small ways like showing up at a funeral. Hard times deepen our connection.

Hard times increase our compassion. God gives us wounds so we aren’t prideful and instead say if it weren’t for the grace of God, that’s where I would be.

Difficulties strengthen our commitment and priorities. 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.* Our contentment in Christ is so important. We learn to let loose of comfort and luxury, things and security, prestige and positions. Romans 5:3-5 says, ³ *Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,* ⁴ *and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,* ⁵ *and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* We find out what matters.

Struggles renew our confidence. Here is great assurance as to who you are, who you belong to and why you are actually going to be OK. That by grace you are saved and sustained. To live is Christ and to die is gain. That God is for you and not against you, that this “light momentary affliction” is preparing you for the eternal weight of glory that is beyond compare. That “when you

walk through the waters, I will be with you and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. Therefore, be strong and courageous. I will walk with you, and I will never forsake you. Even to the ends of the earth.” For some of you, God knew you needed some encouragement. Receive it and feel loved by God. For others, God gave this to you as an affectionate warning. And this morning I’m asking you to respond in faith.

(Pastor prays)