

Eternal Security – Message 4

The Hebrews Paradox

This is the fourth message in this series dealing with *Eternal Security* or the doctrine of ‘*once saved-always saved*’. I trust you’ve found the previous three to be both informative and reassuring.

We’ve examined the truth in **Romans 5** about how God actually saves us, by taking us from Adam’s line and placing us *in Christ*. That alone is grounds for perfect confidence in our eternal Salvation!!

But there are, nevertheless, certain passages which, unless thoroughly understood, still tend to cause anxiety among many troubled souls - not the least of which are those found in the book of **Hebrews**. So I trust we can, in this message, put our minds at rest once and for all.

While **Romans** assures us that salvation is by *grace* - and obtained by *faith* alone, certain passages in the book of **Hebrews** seem to suggest something quite different! Let's read out two or three examples:

The first one is from the King James rendering of **Heb.2:3**, where the translation itself gives rise to anxiety.

It goes like this:

How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...?

At first glance, it *does* sound like there's a heavy price to pay if we '*mess up*' or fail to live up to our potential!

Now we move on to **Hebrews 6:4-6**, where it gets even worse! Here the writer says:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, [5] who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age [6] and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

Sounds ominous! And clearly these must have been believers, mustn't they? After all, they had been *enlightened* and *shared in the Holy Spirit*. And evidently they must have repented at one time - a repentance they apparently couldn't repeat if they fell away!

How much clearer does a passage need to be? Surely the doctrine of '*once saved -always saved*' gets torpedoed right here!

And finally, what about **Hebrews 10:26-29**?

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, [27] but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. [28] Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. [29] How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Deliberately sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth - for such a person there is only judgment to look forward to!

Of course, if this passage proves that - then it proves too much! It would patently contradict what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture - in particular, the truths we've already discussed in reference to exchanging Adam's headship with that of Christ's and the fundamental truth of being *in Christ* as opposed to being *in Adam*.

And this presents us with a real paradox. While we may differ in our interpretations of certain passages - and while these interpretations may be sometimes wildly contradictory, one thing we *must* agree on is that the Bible cannot contradict *itself*. In fact, this widely-accepted assumption has led to a principle of *hermeneutics* (or *interpretation*) called "*the analogy of faith*" that states the following:

"No scripture can be taken in such a way as to render it in conflict with what is clearly taught elsewhere in Scripture."

So this begs the question: how should we interpret these passages in **Hebrews**?

The solution to this dilemma is actually a relatively simple one! Remember the three golden rules of real estate? *Location, location, location!* Well, the three underlying principles for correct interpretation of any Bible passage are as follows: *Context! Context! Context!*

I can't emphasize this enough!!

If you don't take the context of each passage into consideration, then you're likely to find enough material in any given book of the Bible to apparently fuel a storm of false cults and various heresies.

A handy little rhyme I was introduced to some time ago, goes like this:

If in this book you choose to look,

Five things observe with care:

Of whom it speaks,

To whom it speaks,

Why, when and where.

A closer examination of the book of **Hebrews** will make clear that our problems with its interpretation arise when we take both the book itself - and sections within the book - out of their proper context. *Understand* the context and the problems in these passages will vanish like a mist in the clear daylight of the New Testament revelation.

So let's do just that!

To begin with, one huge mistake in the interpretation of this letter is to unthinkingly assume that just one *homogenous* group is being addressed by the writer. This leads to the assumption that every statement - every word - is applicable to this same group of people. In consequence then, if one passage clearly addresses true believers and another passage warns of eternal damnation - then of course the inference is naturally drawn that a true believer is still in danger of losing his or her salvation.

But this *a priori* assumption is not supported by the evidence! It is clear from the onset that the intended recipients of this letter were *not*, as with Paul's epistles, a specific church (or group of churches) throughout the Mediterranean. They were, as indicated by the title of this letter, Jews who, as the text makes clear, may potentially have fallen into one of three categories:

1. Those who had *embraced* Christianity and become an integral part of the Church.

2. Those who were contemplating doing so.
3. Those who, for whatever reason, had become disaffected and were thinking about returning to Judaism.

The latter two groups may have been represented among true believers who *did* go on to faith in Christ.

However, the writer does not assume that they are necessarily among his audience; on the contrary, when warning against the sin of unbelief, he says *this* in **Heb.6:9**,

Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case – the things that have to do with salvation.

And again, in **Heb.10:39**, he says:

But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

So much is clear, but because there was always a *possibility* that such waverers or even potential apostates existed among the true believers, the writer warns of the dangers of holding such attitudes.

And that's really the key to understanding this epistle!

At different points in the letter, the writer has *one group or the other* in mind - but *not all at the same time!* On the one hand, he addresses the confirmed Jewish saints with words of praise, encouragement and support. On the other, for those who *may be* currently wavering on the brink of commitment, he has both encouragement and stern warnings about the consequences of not following through in their faith.

And history teaches us that these Jews really did need encouragement and support! We know that at the time of the writing of **Hebrews**, persecution had broken out against the Church. Not against Judaism, mind you, because the Jewish religion had long been tolerated - even accepted - by Rome, but against this new, threatening movement known as "*The Way*"!

Anxious to control its subject population, and inflamed by the Jewish leadership, Rome had initiated a spate of persecution against the followers of the new so-called *religion* - one that refused to acknowledge any but the one, true God.

Given the intended audience, and for the sake of both Jewish believers and the as-yet uncommitted, it was entirely appropriate for the writer to clearly demonstrate the superiority of the new way over the old - the New Testament revelation of Christ over the foundational teachings of Judaism portrayed in the Hebrew Scriptures we know as the *Old Testament*.

In doing so, he is both more firmly establishing confirmed Jewish believers but also expressing his concern for the particular group of Jews that may have also been the recipients of his letter.

It seems reasonable to suppose that these would have initially left the temple sacrifices, identified themselves with the visible church, and made a profession of Jesus as Messiah and High Priest - without going on to true faith in Christ. Now, in the face of intense persecution, these same individuals would have been in danger of renouncing Christ and returning to the temple sacrifices - *apostasizing* if you will!

This point is crucial to our understanding of this **Hebrew** epistle!

I repeat: warnings against the sin of ultimate unbelief and rejection of the true Messiah are therefore interspersed throughout the book of **Hebrews** and must not be confused with the many sections devoted to true believers.

So all of this begs the question: will a close look at the text support this interpretation? I believe it will - and it's those confusing passages that we're now going to discuss in some detail – particularly the two crucial passages in **Hebrews chapters 6 & 10**.

But firstly we must go to **chapters 2&3** to understand their context!

So let's begin!

Our first so-called '*problem*' text is **Hebrews 2:1**.

Here the reader is clearly warned against letting NT truth slip away (*italics mine*):

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to *what we have heard*, so that we do not drift away.

Notice here that the problem addressed is not one of morality or life-style in any form, but one of treating New Testament *truth* lightly or carelessly: not attaching sufficient importance to this new revelation. This warning is reinforced in **verse 3** where the writer adds:

how shall we escape if we *ignore* so great a salvation?

The writer is clearly not referring to the actual living of the Christian life. He's warning of *inattention* - not to *how one lives* but to *what has been heard*! The facts of the new revelation are clearly in view, for he goes on to say:

This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

In **chapters 3 and 4** – as we shall see in a moment - this sin of unbelief - of rejecting revealed truth - is described as a *hardening of the heart* and *disobedience*.

This does suggest that if this sceptical or wavering or dismissive mind-set *should* apply to any of the writer's audience, then such Jews would be in real danger of allowing the current persecution to harden them to what they were on the point of accepting. And this would lead them on to disobediently renouncing their professed faith in the new Messiah and coming under God's judgment!

In **chapters 3&4**, the writer illustrates the pitfalls of them doing so by using their previous downfall in the wilderness as an example. This time he describes this sin of *apostasy* - not as inattention to what has been presented but as a *hardening of the heart* and *rebellion*; the very thing that had proved their undoing so long ago.

So he says in **chpt 3:8**:

do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness,

Those addressed by the writer to the **Hebrews** were being tested now - just as their forefathers had been in the wilderness. At that time the Israelites had got as far as Kadesh Barnea but had turned back when they saw what lay ahead of them - in spite of Joshua and Caleb's urging.

The result was that they were condemned to wandering and experiencing ultimate death in the wilderness! But notice that

they didn't lose what they had. They had stopped short of getting it in the first place!

And what was the problem? Not lifestyle, not wrong-doing - but *unbelief!*

Heb.3:19 So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

And so the lesson to be learnt is sounded out in **v.12:**

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

The expression *a sinful, unbelieving heart* is, in the Greek, what is known as a *genitive of reference*. The original literally says:

a heart sinful with reference to unbelief

We must clearly understand this one crucial point: the sin described and warned against in **Hebrews** is the *sin of apostasy* - of unbelief and renunciation of professed belief. The verb *turn away* is the Greek word **aphistemi** and it not only means: *to flee from, shun, desert*, but can also mean: - *to stand aloof from*. It's the word from which we derive our English word *apostasy* - which *describes the act of someone who has previously subscribed to a certain belief but has now renounced this former professed belief in favor of some other which is diametrically opposite. At every point it negates his former belief.*

Can this sin be committed by a person genuinely born again? Surely the answer speaks for itself! But could it describe an unsaved Jew who was in danger of turning back to Judaism? Absolutely! Turning back to Judaism would negate all New Testament teaching and deny that Christ was the true Messiah!

And indeed the fact that the writer is addressing potentially unsaved Jews seems to be borne out further in [chapter four](#). Here we find that the *true believer*, far from falling short, has actually *already* entered the promised land which is the end point of faith:

Hebrews 4:3

Now we who have believed enter that rest

Notice that the rest is for those who *believe*; it's a rest of *faith* - not relying on *works* for salvation. It's the possession of every believer in Christ but the writer is concerned that some may not have entered that rest:

Hebrews 4:1

Therefore, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us be careful (or -let us fear) that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.

Falling short of the promised land; turning back at Kadesh Barnea, on the very borders of the land; afraid of what might lie

ahead! Similarly, these Jews were liable to turn back because of persecution. And the problem? The sin to be avoided at all costs?

4:2 For we also have had the good news proclaimed to us, just as they (your fathers) did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed.

And this is the burden of the writer to the Hebrews. *Lack of faith* was the problem with certain professed believers as it had been with their fathers. So he concludes this section of the epistle with the admonition in **chapter 4:11**:

Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.

When we come to **chapter 6** of this epistle, the *same sin* is warned against - the sin of deserting the Messiah and returning to the Judaism of the O.T. In this case it's described in terms of *falling away*. In this case: *abandoning the new faith and returning to Judaism!*

Look at what he first urges them to do in **Hebrews 6:1**:

Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ.

This translation is misleading. What the Greek literally says is this:

Therefore leaving the teaching of the beginning (first principles) of Christ,

The Greek verb used here (*aphiemi*) is best understood in this context as: *to lay aside, leave, forsake*. And what were they to leave behind?

the teaching of the beginning of Christ,

A strange expression indeed! And surely, in this context, it must refer to Old Testament teaching, which does indeed contain the initial teaching about the Messiah – Christ in all the Scriptures - prophetic revelation that would come to fruition with the advent of Christ.

Remember what Jesus said in **John 5:39**:

These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.

And to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

But the Old Testament revelation was the shadow; Christ *himself* was the substance: the Messiah who had come to his own, to seek and to save the lost and to build his church!

So they were not to remain in Judaism! As John said:

.....the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. (1 John 2:5)

So, having put Judaism behind us, the writer says, **let us be taken forward to maturity** (*completeness*). This word *completeness* is derived from the same Greek word-stem as the word '*culmination*' found in **Romans 10:4** where it says:

Christ is the culmination of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.

The natural reading of this passage, therefore, makes it clear that the writer is addressing a group of Jews who may not yet have come to full faith in Christ – and were still clinging on to initial teachings of Judaism. He is urging them to abandon the rituals once for all and make the transition from Judaism to Christ. As *he* is the end-point of the law- the teachings of Judaism pointed to *him* as their fulfilment.

And now the writer gives examples of the principles or concepts they were to move beyond:

Continuing on in **verse 1 of Hebrews 6:**

not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith in God.

What's wrong with repentance from dead works or, if you like, works that lead to death?

Well - thinks of the basic thrust in Judaism: justification by *self-effort* as we clearly see in **Romans 9 verses 30-32**.

And what about faith in God? Why move beyond that? Surely such an exhortation is counter- intuitive!

Well - not when you realize that the expression is a general one describing Yahweh of the Old Testament. The opening verses of **Hebrews** make it abundantly clear that God has no longer confined Himself to the shadow teaching of Judaism: He is no longer to be thought of in general terms but as One who has revealed Himself in the Person of Christ!

Heb.1:1-2

In the past God spoke to the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.....

And that's just the point - the Hebrew seekers were to move beyond a general acknowledgement of God as we see in Judaism to a specific faith in, and relationship with Christ the Son.

As Paul said in **Acts 20:21**

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and *have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

And so the writer continues. They were to also discard **instruction about cleansing rites... (v 2)**.

This is a clear reference to the *washings* or *ablutions* of Judaism: types and shadows which were to find their spiritual fulfilment in the cleansing work of Christ brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3:5

He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.

And so the list in **verse 2** goes on:

The laying on of hands is self-explanatory. It's a clear reference to **the laying on of hands** that was a feature of the sacrificial offerings – detailed in the book of **Leviticus**.

The last two are less clear but a little thought will throw light on the meaning:

the resurrection of the dead at first sight appears to be a perfectly respectable component of NT teaching but notice that the expression doesn't recognize any distinction between the resurrection of the *just* and that of the *unjust*. In other words, it represents a prior understanding of a *general resurrection* rather than the *first* and *second* resurrections revealed in the New Testament Scriptures. It is in the New Testament that we are given a more fully-developed understanding of the *out-resurrection from among the dead* initiated by the resurrection

of the Messiah himself – the first-fruits of them that have fallen asleep.

The saved are raised first - separated from the lost! In this sense it is an *out-resurrection from among the dead* as Paul refers to in **Philippians 3:11**

and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

As **Revelation 20:6** says, specifically there in reference to those who were martyred in the Great Tribulation:

Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

The final truth they were to move beyond was that of *eternal judgement*. The reason for this seems even less clear until we understand that the understanding of judgment expounded in the O.T. Scriptures has been superseded by the 'no-judgment' or *justification* of the believer in Christ!

It certainly does appear then that the dangers warned against are those relating to *Jews* and *Judaism*. In fact, the purpose of the writer - and the targeted audience of these instructions – seem to be self-evident! This being so, it's difficult to comprehend why believers seize hold of the next paragraph, sever it entirely from

its implied context - and apply its warnings to the true believer in Christ.

And this - in spite of wording: - expressions that appear nowhere else in the NT and which can only be reasonably interpreted in the context of Judaism versus Christianity.

Let's read this so-called *problem* passage:

Hebrews 6:4-6

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

So this begs the question: are those people described in this passage saved and in danger of losing their salvation? The verses immediately preceding this passage would, as we've just discussed, certainly suggest otherwise. But is such a conclusion borne out by the passage itself?

Let's find out!

The writer begins in **v4:**

It is impossible for those who have once (once for all) been enlightened,

The writer is declaring in no uncertain terms that the objects of this particular warning had had their eyes opened to the truth. This enlightenment could only occur as a result of the Holy Spirit's work. They now clearly understood the issues involved: how the type had been set aside for the reality - the shadow for the substance - the O.T. for the N.T. And that Christ was the true Messiah - their one and only spiritual High Priest.

The writer goes on to describe this group of people as those who: **have tasted the heavenly gift**

The word tasted – *gustomai* - means just that. They had been given a distinct impression of the character and quality of this new life in Christ the Messiah: the reality of this fellowship and communion in the Body of Christ. Like the spies at Kadesh Barnea, they saw the land: they had its very fruit in their hands.

And in this same position, what did their fathers do? They turned back - on the very threshold of the land of promise! And why? As we saw earlier: *because of unbelief* - the very sin these current Jews were in danger of committing!

But surely this group was different! Surely they must have saved! After all, they are then described as having:

shared in the Holy Spirit.

This expression literally means that *they had been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.*

For many - this clinches it! These must have been believers who were in danger of losing their salvation!

Well - actually no! The text doesn't suggest that at all! Certainly they had been *enlightened* by the Holy Spirit - the land was before them! The fruit of the land was in their hands; *but they hadn't yet entered!* The text right up to this point bears this out very clearly.

So in what sense were they made *partakers of the Holy Spirit* - if they weren't yet saved?

Well - the first thing to understand is that this passage does *not* say that the Holy Spirit was *indwelling* this group of Jews. *Partakers* does not mean *possessors*.

The Greek word used here is **metachos** - and, according to the famous Greek scholar, Kenneth Wuest, is used of *someone who cooperates or partners another in an undertaking or enterprise*

Consider the use of this word in a couple of other NT passages:

Luke 5:7

So they signaled their partners (metachoi**) in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.**

And again in **Hebrews 1:9**

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions (*companions* - there's that word *metachos* again) by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

Up to this point these wavering Jews would have cooperated with the Holy Spirit – *partners in the same enterprise – in the same undertaking!* The role of the Spirit, as we know, is to lead an unbeliever step by step toward the act of faith. This is described in **1 Pet 1:2** as **the sanctifying work of the Spirit which leads a person to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood:**

And He had done just that with these Jews! And they had cooperated - been partners with the Spirit in this work which was so thoroughly done that it never needed repeating. They were, as previously described, **once and for all enlightened.** The next step, *the step of faith*, was up to them alone and the terrible danger was that of renegeing on Christ and turning back.

There was simply no excuse for these Jews. They had, as we find in **verse 5**, **tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers (miracles) of the coming age.** Miracles which showed that the New Testament was of God. And they should have been convinced by all of this!

But if, given all these advantages (*full enlightenment* which could not be repeated or added to and consistent exposure to the Word of God and its effects), they must be very careful not to **fall away**. This expression is a translation of the Greek word: **parapipto** (used here for the only time in the N.T.). It means: *to fall beside a person or thing; to slip aside; hence: to deviate from right path; to turn aside*

In other words, they should be careful not to turn their backs on what they professed of the New Testament and deny Christ as their true Messiah!

This is the essence of apostasy and, once committed, it becomes *impossible* for the offenders **to be:**

brought back to repentance. (v6)

This should instantly set warning bells ringing in the minds of those familiar with N.T doctrine. If it was a reference to true believers being unable to repent, it would immediately fly in the face of **1 John 5:9**,

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

But, of course, the word *repentance*, as it is used here, has nothing to do with the act saving faith *per se*. The word is **metanoia** which literally means: *a change of mind* - exactly the meaning of its English equivalent: *repent* ("*to think again*").

Remember in **Heb.12:17**, when Esau desperately tried to change Isaac's mind with respect to the inheritance? The verse literally translated reads that: **he did not find a place of repentance though he sought for it carefully with tears.**

In other words, he couldn't change Isaac's mind - no matter how hard he tried!

Similarly, given their advantages - together with their complete enlightenment, if these Jews should turn away at this point, what possible combination of future circumstances could cause them to repent - to change their minds? Their spiritual condition - the hardening of their hearts - would make this an impossibility!

Why? Because, As the writer goes on to say:

To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again

Literally this verse means:

They are crucifying again the Son of God for (or in respect of) themselves.

These Jews would be taking sides again - once again identifying with those Jews who had Christ crucified. They would be virtually confirming their judgment - that Jesus wasn't the true Messiah after all; instead he was a deceiver - worthy of death!

As well as this, the writer adds, they would be **subjecting him to public disgrace.**

H.A Ironside records that the Jews had a terrible way of taking the apostate Jew back. They would take him to an unclean place where he would kill a sow. Then, to prove his denial, the apostasizing Jew would spit on the blood of the sow and say:

“So count I the blood of Jesus the Nazarene.”

The Jews would then purify him and take him back.

Very obviously this process would harden the heart to such an extent that it would be rendered impervious to any further ministry of the Holy Spirit. All hope for such a betrayer of the Messiah would be gone!

It should be clear that this sin cannot be committed today. There is currently no temple in Jerusalem, no sacrifices to leave and to return to, no attesting miracles being performed, and, except in the case of the Jew, no question as to the closing of the Old Dispensation and the opening of the New.

This sin involved the relative merits of the Old and New Testaments. It involved an abandonment of Christian reality and a return to the types and rituals of Judaism. It involved a rejection of Christ as the Messiah and a relegating of him once again to the cross as far as the individual was concerned!

This sin then simply not the same as the rejection of Christ by a sinner today. And it's certainly not a sin that can be committed by a *believer*; it simply has no relevance to us!

But the writer wants to encourage *all* his readers so he goes on to say:

Hebrews 6:9 Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are convinced of better things in your case---the things that have to do with salvation.

Very clear, isn't it? The above situation could only occur if salvation had not yet taken place!

And now we come to the second so-called *problem* passage. It's found in **Hebrews 10:26-27** where this rejection of the Messiah is described as the sin of wilful (deliberate) unbelief. The writer begins:

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

This passage has left many Christians shaking in their boots! But as we said before, with reference to a previous verse, if this verse proves you can *lose your salvation*, then it also proves too much. After all, how many of you have not committed a single

deliberate, wilful sin during this past week? So we're all lost - right?

Given the Scriptural teaching of the substitutionary work of Christ, justification by faith and our subsequent identity in Christ, such a position is self-evident nonsense, of course! It contravenes the whole tenor of Scripture and thoroughly violates the *analogy of faith* that we discussed at the beginning of this message. But that being so, what is this passage in **Hebrews 10** actually talking about?

The answer is a simple one: it's a further warning against the *same sin* spoken about in chapters 2, 3, 4 and 6.

In **chapter 2** it's a *neglect and careless treatment of revealed truth* - allowing the New Testament revelation to *slip by*; in **chapters 3 & 4** the sin is described as a *hardening* of the heart because of *unbelief*; in **chapter 6** it's a *falling away* from *revealed truth* and a *return to Judaism*.

And now here - in **chapter 10** - it's described as the sin of *wilful rejection* of that *knowledge* and *unbelief*.

Notice that the writer says: '**if we deliberately keep on sinning**'. This sin - that of rejection of revealed truth (and consequently a rejection of Christ himself) was not the result of a *spur-of-the-moment* judgement on the part of this first-century Jew. The

writer is describing a wilful continuation in an *attitude* of unbelief - a confirmed *state of heart*!

'If we *deliberately* keep on sinning after we have received the *knowledge of the truth* - the verse says.

This confirms the fact that this sin has nothing to do with morality or life-style. The sin contemplated here is the sin of deliberate, continuing unbelief. The wording of this particular verse, when taken in the context of the **Hebrew** epistle as a whole, as well as all the verses we've been previously considering, strongly supports the conclusion that this sin must be one that consists of a rejection of truth that has been revealed; a **willful and deliberate and persistent rejection**

...after we have received the *knowledge of the truth*

This sin concerns knowledge and how the Jew responded to the knowledge he had gained.

The word *receive* in this verse does not imply a passive reception. It means: to *take hold of, take up, attain*. This is the '*once and for all*' enlightenment of **chapter 6**. And the word *knowledge* (**epignosis**), implies a *thorough awareness*. These Jews had been fully-informed and knew perfectly well the difference between the O.T and the N.T. This sin was then a wilful rejection of that knowledge!

And if, in spite of this awareness, the individual persisted in the sin of unbelief, the writer asserts that **no sacrifice for sins is left.**

A strange expression indeed unless understood in this particular context. If the almost-saved Jew were to abandon Christ and revert back to OT rituals, he should be aware that this practice would now be entirely pointless! The sacrifices would have no further meaning - no possible significance – because the Lamb of God to whom they pointed, had already come! There could be no future fulfilment - no further sacrifice for sin.

v.27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Unbelief is a serious matter! **1 John 5** is of particular relevance here; reading from **verse 9**:

We accept human testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. [10] Whoever believes in the Son of God accepts this testimony. Whoever does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because they have not believed the testimony God has given about his Son. [11] And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. [12] Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Deny God's testimony and you're calling Him a liar - exactly what Adam did in the garden of Eden!

The writer then drives his point home.

Verse 28-29 **Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot.**

Going back to OT Judaism would be tantamount to treating Christ as *nothing* - treating him with contemptuous indifference! Trampling him underfoot!

The writer goes on:

....who has treated as an unholy thing (a common thing – one that has no meaning) **the blood of the covenant that sanctified them...**(or *set them apart*)

The word '*treat*' here (**hegeomai**) conveys the idea of: 'to *deem*' '*consider*', It denotes a conscious judgement resting on a deliberate weighing of the facts.

And what would be this conscious judgement? That the blood of the Covenant was an unholy thing! Nothing less than concluding Christ's blood to be *unholy* – that is: *common-place - nothing special*. It would be to claim that he had died like any *ordinary* man - a death no different to anyone else's and his teaching therefore a delusion and a lie!

This deliberate, contemptuous rejection of the Messianic sacrifice of the Son of God was the terrible wilful sin of apostate Jew who treated with contempt the very blood that sanctified them.

But then people say: 'Look - these people had been *sanctified* - they must have been *saved* Jews'.

Not at all! Sanctified means *set apart* - not necessarily *justified*. We *are* sanctified forever upon salvation - as well as being *progressively* sanctified in our Christian walk but *sanctification* is not always used in this regard and we come back to the golden rule: *context, context, context!*

Consider the following verses:

1 Corinthians 7:14

For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband.

Here, to be *sanctified* is to be *set apart* for the work of the Holy Spirit!

1 Corinthians 6:11

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

So you can see that sanctification is depicted as a work that *precedes* salvation.

In **1 Peter 1:2** there is a clear line of causation. We are firstly set *apart* (or *sanctified*) for the work of the Holy Spirit - a work which then leads to faith and consequent justification by faith. The verse reads:

who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

And these Jews had certainly- as a nation - been sanctified by the blood of Christ (depicted in the Passover); the blood which delivered them from Egypt. It was because of that blood that Israel could be *set apart* as God's own inheritance among the nations. As He says in **Exodus 19:4-5**

'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. [5] Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

The Jews had many privileges. Listen to the words of **Romans 9:4-5,**

....the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. [5] Theirs are the

patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

Give these privileges, how much greater their sin, should they reject the Messiah they had come to know about so undeniably!

And much like the nation, these Jews, individually, had also (as we read before in **Hebrews 6**), been sanctified (set apart) for enlightenment by the Holy Spirit.

And the writer goes on in **10:29: and who has insulted the Spirit of grace.**

This sin against the Holy Spirit, summed up as a reliance on the works of the Law rather than the accepting of a free gift of grace by faith, is, of course, one not exclusive to the Jew. As Paul said the Galatian church:

Galatians 5:4,

You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.

They had insulted the Spirit of Grace!

And reliance on the dead works under the law was a particular danger for the Jew - as the apostle made clear in **Romans 9:31-32**

but the people of Israel, who pursued the law as the way of righteousness, have not attained their goal. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone (which of course was Christ!).

Failure to accept the One who was **full of grace and truth (John 1:14)** and who brought them grace – rather than the law!

The law was given through Moses but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

Now the writer gives the advice necessary avert this terrible sin of apostasy:

Hebrews 10:36

You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

Persevering in this context doesn't mean living a Christian life to the very end - much like the perseverance of the Calvinist's *TULIP*: that would clearly be justification by works. The writer's meaning, in the context of the warnings given in this letter, is that should any of his readers be wavering in their commitment, they need to hang on to what they had been taught until they had done the will of God!

And what is meant by doing the *will* of God? That too is quite evident by the context. God's *will* for them was that they come to the point of full acceptance of Christ by faith: a sincere reception of the Messiah. *Then* they would receive the promise of eternal rest vouchsafed to the true believer in **chapter 4** of this letter.

And in case any of this is still in doubt, listen to the concluding statement in this chapter:

v 39 But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

In conclusion, then, we can confidently assert that the book of Hebrews in no way runs counter to the general teaching of Scripture or holds any fears whatsoever for the genuine child of God. There has been a general failure to correctly understand the context - both in respect of its general intended audience and the particular subset who are the target of the specific warnings. Many have failed to appreciate that the warnings are given in light of the danger of *one particular sin* - that of apostasy by a first century Jew!

The true believer in Christ is just that - he or she is *in Christ* - and nothing in heaven or on earth, in time or in space, as Paul says in **Romans chapter 8: can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

May God add His blessing to our meditation on His precious Word! Amen

Stephen Smith

© 2018

www.emmauspathway.com