

Text: Hebrews 10:19-39

As you all have figured out about my teaching, I normally give a number of background passages before getting to the main text of our lesson, but today I want to delve immediately into our text. Continuing in Hebrews Chapter 10, the author moves from proving Christ's superiority to the Mosaic system to exhorting these Jewish believers to continue in the faith because of Christ's completed work. In other words, he leaves a more or less "academic" theological discourse and delves into "real world" application. That said, he does ground this discussion in historical and theological truths:

19Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (Hebrews 10:19-21)

Now, if you don't have the frame of reference of a first-century Jewish Christian (or, if you don't remember some of our earlier lessons from Hebrews), this imagery of "the holy place" or "through the veil" might not make a lot of sense. So, let's explore that for a moment:

6" You shall put this altar in front of the veil that is near the ark of the testimony, in front of the mercy seat that is over the ark of the testimony, where I will meet with you....10" Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the LORD." (Exodus 30:6, 10)

29" This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you; 30for it is on this day that atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you; you will be clean from all your sins before the LORD. 31" It is to be a sabbath of solemn rest for you, that you may humble your souls; it is a permanent statute. 32" So the priest who is anointed and ordained to serve as priest in his father's place shall make atonement: he shall thus put on the linen garments, the holy garments, 33and make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar. He shall also make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. 34" Now you shall have this as a permanent statute, to make atonement for the sons of Israel for all their sins once every year." And just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he did. (Leviticus 16:29-34)

3Behind the second veil there was a tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, 4having a golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant covered on all sides with gold, in which was a golden jar holding the manna, and Aaron's rod which budded, and the tables of the covenant; 5and above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat; but of these things we cannot now speak in detail. 6Now when these things have been so prepared, the priests are continually entering the outer tabernacle performing the divine worship, 7but into the second, only the high priest enters once a year, not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the sins of the people committed in ignorance. (Hebrews 9:3-7)

So that's the veil and the holy place, but what does it have to do with Jesus, or with our present faith?

50And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. (Matthew 27:50-51)

Upon Jesus' death, the veil that separates believers from God was removed, allowing us access into His presence, where Christ Himself intercedes with the Father on our behalf as our Great High Priest. (Hebrews 7:25)

Now, moving ahead back in Hebrews 10:

22let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Hebrews 10:22)

Why are we able to draw near to God in full assurance? Think about how arrogant and presumptuous that sounds for a moment. Think about Who God is, the Creator of all that is, Who is so perfect in every way that He cannot allow sin into His presence. Now, consider your life, your nature and personality, your thoughts and desires. Are these in any way compatible with a Holy God that cannot

tolerate the presence of sin? Why, then, does the author of Hebrews, inspired by the Holy Spirit Himself, tell us to go ahead and not only approach God, but do so *confidently*?

3For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 4But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, 5He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3-7)

2I find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin. 1Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 7:21-8:4)

21He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Do you understand what Paul is saying in all of these verses? He acknowledges that we, even Christians, are sinful. *But*, Jesus *became sin for us*, fulfilling the requirement of the Law so that **we might become the righteousness of God in Him**. We did *nothing* to deserve this—God saved us, declared us righteous by declaring Jesus’ sacrifice as an acceptable payment for our sins, and on His merit alone allows us access to His throne in the present, and promise of eternity with Him in the future. How incredible to even think about that!

Continuing in Hebrews 10:

23Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; (Hebrews 10:23)

The admonition to not fall away from the faith is even more potent in the later verses of this passage, so we will discuss “holding fast” in detail later in today’s lesson. The second half of this passage is especially encouraging: **He who promised is faithful**.

6For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 1:6)

26In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; 27and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; 30and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. 31What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? 33Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; 34who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36Just as it is written,

**"FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG;
WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."**

37But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:26-38)

Two things to take from these passages:

1. We can neither deserve nor effect salvation. God, in His mercy, and by His grace alone, saves people.
2. God is faithful. Because of His sovereign decision to call us to salvation, He will neither abandon us in the present life nor turn us away from the life to come. We approach life and death with confidence in Him because He promised to remain true to us.

Now, the last two verses in the first section:

24and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

We have two admonitions in these verses. First, we are to **stimulate one another to love and good deeds**. Why is that important? Isn't salvation a sovereign act of God's grace, **not of works** (Ephesians 2:9)? Yes, but consider the following passages:

9The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:9-11)

14What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? 17Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. 18But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works." 19You believe that God is one You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. (James 2:14-19)

Remember the discussions we've had about salvation being both a process and an event? That we are justified before God the moment we confess Jesus as Lord, but that He continues to sanctify us? As James makes quite clear, the presence of good works is an indicator that sanctification is taking place and, thus, that justification has occurred. Likewise, love for the brethren is evidence of the Holy Spirit's work in one's life. In short, we are to **stimulate one another to love and good deeds** not because we earn salvation for doing so, but because the presence of these are "fruits" commensurate with salvation, and we want to take care that our lives—and those of our fellow Christians—demonstrate the results of a true conversion experience: a conversion that results in unfettered access to God's throne and the promise of eternal life in Heaven through Jesus Christ.

The next admonition, to not abandon assembly as a church, was clearly already needed in the first century. The command makes sense: if true believers are responsible for encouraging, strengthening, and sometimes admonishing one another, and if we depend on that support from others in order to live as true believers, the most appropriate and logical venue for this to take place is the church. Moreover, since we know that all Scripture is God-inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), we must accept this directive as a command from God Himself. In other words, if we are not engaged in regular assembly with fellow believers, we are disobeying God and, therefore, sinning.

At the end of verse 25, we are told that this instruction becomes even more pressing as we draw nearer to Christ's return.

1But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. 13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:1-5, 13).

We all know that the Bible teaches us that the last days will be a time of tremendous calamity. If for no other reason than that, we should be actively about the business of encouraging one another. Beyond the calamities, however, lies the truth taught in the book of 2 Timothy that even the religious—possibly even nominally Christian—community will fall away from the true faith and follow selfish impostors. For that reason, it is doubly important that believers stay rooted in the Word of God, actively encouraging and admonishing one another.

The next Hebrews 10 passage discusses the gravity of the need to hold true to our faith.

26For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, **27**but a terrifying expectation of judgment and **THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES**. **28**Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. **29**How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted 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 terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Hebrews 10:26-31)

This passage seems, when taken in isolation, to teach that a Christian can lose his salvation; only a more complete reading and knowledge of God's Word demonstrates otherwise. Passages such as this clearly demonstrate why we must use Scripture as its own interpreter, cross-referencing the Word with Itself and developing a coherent, systematic theology that accounts for all of the various truths taught in Scripture and how seemingly disparate or even contradictory passages actually harmonize with one another. In this case, the author is warning his recipients against falling away into willful, unrepentant sin, essentially rejecting the Blood of the New Covenant, which they claimed to cherish. Matthew Henry put it this way:

*The exhortations against apostasy and to perseverance, are urged by many strong reasons. The sin here mentioned is a total and final falling away, when men, with a full and fixed will and resolution, despise and reject Christ, the only Saviour; despise and resist the Spirit, the only Sanctifier; and despise and renounce the gospel, the only way of salvation, and the words of eternal life. Of this destruction God gives some notorious sinners, while on earth, a fearful foreboding in their consciences, with despair of being able to endure or to escape it. But what punishment can be sorer than to die without mercy? We answer, to die by mercy, by the mercy and grace which they have despised. How dreadful is the case, when not only the justice of God, but his abused grace and mercy call for vengeance! All this does not in the least mean that any souls who sorrow for sin will be shut out from mercy, or that any will be refused the benefit of Christ's sacrifice, who are willing to accept these blessings. **Him that cometh unto Christ, he will in no wise cast out.** (John 6:37)*

Henry ends this commentary by quoting from John 6:37; a similar passage appears in John 10:27-29:

27"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; **28**and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. **29**"My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27-29)

A truly converted individual will remain forever true to his calling to Faith in Jesus Christ: as Jesus promised, **no one will snatch them out of My hand**. Still, 1 John 2 addresses the fact that some do fall away:

18Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. **19**They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1 John 2:18-19)

According to this passage, those that fall away were never truly converted, perhaps, according to one commentator, having given intellectual assent to the facts surrounding the Gospel (**James 2:19: You believe that God is one You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.**) but never having surrendered to Jesus Christ as *Lord* and Master (Romans 10:9). Returning to Hebrews 10, these can look forward only to **THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES**. We as believers must strive to make our **calling and election sure** (2 Peter 1:10), continually seeking to **bear fruits keeping with repentance**. Jesus Christ is *it*. If we reject Him, there is no remaining source of forgiveness, mercy, freedom, and life. If we reject Him, we die in our sins, and without God's mercy.

In the final verses presented in our books today, the author again aims to encourage his audience, this time by reminding them of the spiritual triumphs they have experienced through endured hardships.

32But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, **33**partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. **34**For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting 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 was promised. **37**FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

38BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH;

AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

39But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul. (Hebrews 10:32-39)

Like the previous passage, the statement **AND IF HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM** certainly conveys the terrible prospect of condemnation for those that fall away. For the most part, however, these verses have as their aim to encourage believers to “stay the course.” The original recipients had already endured persecution for Christ’s sake—the author is saying “Good. Rejoice in that. This is *supposed* to happen.” Consider the following passages:

12Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

40They took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:40-41) *Give immediate context if time remains.

12Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1 Peter 4:12-14)

Far from serving as a source of comfort (in one respect) to those believers weary of persecution, these passages tell us that we should *expect* it, and that such trials serve, in part, to test the veracity of our faith. We should rejoice when persecution comes, however, because such persecution serves as evidence of **the Spirit of glory and of God** resting upon us. Indeed, it appears that we as Christians should be more concerned if we do *not* experience persecution, an indication that our lives blend in too easily with those of the unbelievers surrounding us.

As we conclude today’s lesson, remember that this book was likely written to comfort and encourage Jewish Christians who had endured hardship for His name, and were perhaps considering a return to Judaism. After spending so much time reviewing and explaining the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old, how interesting it is that the author then turns to the subject of persecution not to explain it away or give promises of a rosier earthly life, but rather to say “You’re persecuted? *Good*. Welcome to God’s Kingdom.” Serving God fully is *not* popular; you will not be able to live a life of complete surrender to Jesus Christ and still “blend in with the crowd.” Remember:

For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

God’s Word, and by extension the life that is governed by its precepts, pierces through people, bringing cognizance of sin and guilt before God. People don’t *want* their sinfulness exposed—as long as they are able to silence those that wield **the Sword of the Spirit** (Ephesians 6:17), they don’t have to face their sin. *That’s* why (or at least part of why) we see such a concerted effort in many quarters to silence Christians. Rather than trying to blend in—which, I will admit, is my tendency—let us be on the receiving end of such efforts, and **rejoice [if we are] considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41)**

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