

5 Warning Passages from the Book of Hebrews

Various Passages

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, March 27, 2022

Well, before we begin our sermon this morning, I just want to mention that we have a big task before us, because we're looking at what some considered to be the hardest book in the New Testament to study. And that is the book of Hebrews. If you've ever read it before, you'll know that it can be hard to figure out at times, because in this book the words are strange, and the people are strange, and the setting is strange, and the stories are old, and the references are old, and so are some of the customs. In fact, they're so old that we don't even practice them anymore, which makes some people want to throw their hands up in the air and say that a book like this isn't worth it; you shouldn't waste your time going through a letter like this in the New Testament. But that is a wrong way to think because this is the Word of God to us. And as such, it's worth taking the time to understand what it has to say, and to show you that, if you would please open your Bibles with me to the book of Hebrews. And as you're doing that, I just want to say, if you're wondering why it is so important to study something like this, you've come in a good time, because we're looking at a passage today that's unique to this book, or at least it's unique to the Bible anyway because it says something that you won't find anywhere else in the world. You won't find this on the television, you won't find it on the news, you won't see it on your iPhone, or in the culture or on Facebook, no matter how many times you recheck your feed throughout the day. Because what it says is that you're in trouble. As a follower of Christ, your soul is in great danger if you don't do what this passage says. And to show you that, if you would, read Hebrews chapter one with me. It says,

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature. And He upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down to the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are My Son, today I have begotten you?” And again, “I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me”? And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” And of the angels He says, “Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.” But of the Son, He says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions.” And, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands; they will perish but You remain and they will all become old like a garment, and like a mantle You will roll them up; like a garment they will also be changed. But you are the same, and Your years will not come to an end.” But to which of the angels has He ever said, “Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the word spoken

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through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience receive a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great salvation?

We're going to end the reading there, but I wanted to read all that to you because if you notice, chapter two starts off with the phrase "for this reason" or "therefore" in some of your translations, which takes you back to the previous chapter. In other words, since God has spoken in these last days to us in His Son in verse one, and since He is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature in verse three, and since Jesus will make all His enemies into a footstool, at the end of the chapter, this is what you need to do now: you need to be careful not to drift away from it. You need to make sure you don't wander off and set your heart on something else because if you do, you will live to regret it.

And just to say a few words about this, I don't really have to tell you why the author puts this in here because if you've grown up in church, you'll know this is a very common thing. People love to drift away from Jesus, don't they? It happens all the time. If you've been a believer for any number of years, you've seen it happen among Christians. You've seen it happen among churches. You've seen it happen among schools and denominations and seminaries that once were faithful to Him, and you've seen it happen in entire countries. You have seen whole nations defect from the name of Jesus Christ like what's happening in Canada right now. People are leaving Christ by the 1000s today, in this land. At one time, it was said, statistically, there were more Canadians who profess the name of Jesus Christ than Americans south of the border. Now it's a total opposite because this is a very common problem. In fact, this may be the number one issue that we're facing in the church today, in the 21st century, and it's so popular that theologians have come up with a term for it. The word apostasy comes from the Latin root word *apo*, meaning *away*. It means to move away from the positions you once held with the Lord and abandon the faith. You had it once and now you don't; you believed in Jesus one day, but now you've left Him for something else, because your faith was just a sham. The idea is not that you lost your faith or you misplaced it. The idea is you never had it to begin with. You were faking it the whole time. And it all it took was a little pressure and suffering to squeeze it out of you. Once that occurred, off you went on your way to hell, which is tragic to watch.

It breaks your heart every time you see somebody do this, but it shouldn't surprise you because the Bible said it would happen. When you see people become apostate, that shouldn't shock you. It was talked about long ago. You may want to write some of these verses down: First Timothy four, verse one says, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in latter times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." And that phrase *fall away* could be translated apostasize because Paul says in latter days, some people will do that--not the true Christians, but the fake ones, not the real ones, but the artificial ones, because they're being tricked by demons. When you see people apostatize, they often tell you how enlightened they are now. And they figured everything out. That's a lie. They're being deceived, hook line and sinker, by the devil.

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Luke eight, verse 13, also uses this expression another way when Jesus gives the parable of the soils, because there he says, “Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, and these have no firm root; they believe for a little while, and in time of temptation fall away.” That's the same term there because Jesus says some people receive the word with joy. They'll take it home with excitement and go to church and pray and read their Bibles and talk like Christians and walk like Christians and act like Christians only to stop in a day of temptation. Again, it's not a logical apostasy; it's a spiritual one. They leave when the sin looks too attractive.

The point is that the Bible talks about this sort of thing a lot. I could give you verse after verse on that, in fact, when you put it all together, you find several examples of apostasy in the Scriptures. And we don't have time to talk about all of these; there are too many, but I want to mention a few, because the first one is the story of the golden calf. I said a few words about this one last week, but I can't leave it alone because it's a form of apostasy that shocks us today; it's just so blatant. But if you want to turn your Bibles back, keep your finger in Hebrews and turn back to the book of Exodus. You can see this in the second book of the Bible, which is important because it shows you how far back this goes.

If you look in Exodus 32, you can see this event described there because it says,

Now when the people [of Israel] saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god [that right there should have told you there's a problem. Seriously? Make you a god?] who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters and bring them to me.” Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. He took this from their hand, and fashion it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.”

That is a horrific passage because it occurs right after the Lord had saved him from Egypt; it took place right on the heels of miracles like the 10 plagues, and the crossing of the Red Sea, and the destruction of the entire Egyptian army by the hand of God, because it tells you how Israel responded to that. And it says they committed idolatry. They couldn't even wait for Moses to come down with the 10 commandments off the mountain before they started breaking them. Because when he didn't show up right away from the mountain, they said, “That's it! This guy's done for and so is his God. So let's go worship another one.” The reason they probably picked a golden calf is because that was a sort of thing they worshipped in Egypt. And that's what they wanted in place of the true and living God because they had become apostate.

And unfortunately, that's not the only example of this in Scripture, because you could look at the example of Saul, the first king of Israel. If you ever wonder why the people of Israel acted this way, it's

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because their leaders did. He just followed their example. And you can see this one in the book of First Samuel chapter 15. This is a story of the very first king Israel had. And it's just as ugly as what you just read because if you look in First Samuel 15, verse 10, it says,

Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, saying, "I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back [apostatized] from following Me and has not carried out my commands." And Samuel was distressed and cried out to the Lord all night.

Samuel had just anointed the guy and he is distressed because Saul had turned his back on God. But there you see a very clear description of Saul's spiritual state. He had turned back from God; he followed him for a season and then he quit. He loved him for a while in a superficial manner because he talked like a Christian and walked like a Christian and acted like one. But there came a time when he stopped, because he'd had enough of it. And to demonstrate this, the rest of the passage goes on to say that Saul defeated the people called the Amalekites in battle, but instead of obeying the Lord and killing all the sheep like he was supposed to, he killed most of them, but kept the best for himself. And if you look in verse 22, this is what Samuel tells Saul:

"Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination...because you've rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you from being king.

You may wonder why Samuel was so harsh to Saul here, but the answer is that apparently this was not an isolated thing in his life. He did it over and over again. He was consistently disobedient so the Lord finally had enough because Samuel says God is not interested in sacrifices, He wants your obedience. He doesn't care if you go to church and read your Bible and pray and kill a few Amalekites if you don't do it from the bottom of your heart. And Saul never got that because apostates don't get that. They think you can paint the barn door and that's enough for God and it's not.

One more example of apostasy in the Bible, and this is the most famous one which you may be familiar with and that's the example of Judas Iscariot. He's the most famous version of this because his name became synonymous with betrayal and deceit and trickery. But if you want to turn over to the Gospel of Matthew, you can find Judas mentioned there because he was one of Jesus' 12 disciples. He was part of His inner circle, which means he saw Jesus' miracles and heard all of His sermons and watched Him heal the sick and raise the dead and walk on water, but apparently it had no impact because this is what he did in chapter 26 of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew 26, verse six says

Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table. But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste? For this

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perfume might have been sold for a high price and the money given to the poor.” But Jesus, aware of this said to them, “Why do you bother the woman? She's done a good deed to me.”

Then if you look down in verse 14, it says, “Then one of the 12 named Judas Iscariot went to the chief priests and said, ‘What are you willing to give me to betray Him to you?’ and they weighed out 30 pieces of silver to him. From then on, he began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus.”

I wanted to read that whole section to you, because Matthew doesn't come out and say this. But the Gospel of John says Judas is the one who complained about the cost of the perfume, because he was the one who kept the money back for the disciples, and He was stealing from it. So he brought it up in order to keep all the money for himself. And after Jesus rebukes him here, he storms off in a rage, goes immediately to the chief priests, and sells him out for 30 pieces of silver. If you're wondering why he did it for 30 pieces of silver, it's because that was the price of a slave at the time. In other words, he sold Jesus for the lowest price imaginable, because he didn't think he was worth more than that. And if you wonder why Matthew puts this in here, he does it to teach you a lesson. And that is that if it happened to Judas, it could happen to you because you don't know more about Jesus. And he did. You don't have more information, because he spoke with Jesus face to face, walked with them, slept beside him, ate with them. And look at what he did, he stabbed Him in the back to show us that we're all capable of doing this. No one is too good for this sin.

And I bring it up because if you turn back to Hebrews chapter two, that's all a backdrop for a passage here. Because this is what the author of the book of Hebrews is referring to when he says this in chapter two, verse one. “For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard, so that we do not drift away from it.” I'll say a few words about this in a moment, but a key word here is the word *drift away*. It's one word in Greek, *pararreō*, which means to drift away or wander off. The way it's used here, it refers to something that, like a ship or boat, wanders off where it just kind of sails off into nowhere. In other words, it doesn't do it quickly. It does it over time, slowly, and in baby steps. Because if you think about it, it doesn't take a lot of effort to drift into something, you just have to drift. And it doesn't take a lot of work to wander off, all you have to do is come to church, zone out, doze off, don't pay attention, and off you go. And that's what this is talking about. Because the trouble the author is referring to here is not that of being pulled away from Christ, as much as it is being lulled away from Christ. It's not about being yanked out of church by your hair. It's about being distracted. Which is convicting, right? If the church is full of anything today, in Chilliwack, it's full of distracted Christians. It's made up of people who are constantly being pulled away by stuff like their job and their work and their career, and their home and their hobbies and their trips. Because we love our trips here in British Columbia. It's all about trips for us. I've never seen so many RVs in my life. Which is not bad. There's nothing wrong with RVs unless they steal your heart away from Christ. And that's the warning here. I mean, all that's fine unless it takes your mind off the Lord. Because the author says over and over again in this book, don't let that happen to you. Don't let the things of this life choke out your love for Jesus. Because yes, He's done all these wonderful things in chapter one. And yes, Christ is greater than the

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prophets. And He's greater than the angels. And He's greater than the nations and He's greater than the world is greater than everything. But it's all for nothing if you forget it.

None of that does you any good if you ignore it in favor of something else. So you have to be careful not to do that. Friends, this is not a warning to get saved. This is a warning to persevere in your salvation. It's not a reminder to start well in the Christian life. This is a reminder to finish well, because that's what God cares about. He wants you to cross the finish line. He wants you to end the race and complete the journey and bring it all to a close with Christ on your side. So you don't end up like Judas. Judas started, okay. He walked with the Lord. But by the time you get to the end of his life, he's committing suicide.

If you've followed his ministry throughout the years, you'll know John MacArthur has written a lot about this subject. His master's thesis in seminary was on the subject of Judas Iscariot because he had a friend who abandoned the faith in high school and he couldn't figure it out. He couldn't understand why somebody would do that. So he studied him more in order to learn about him. And he came to this conclusion in one of his messages. He said, "No one sets out to be an apostate. No one says, 'Okay, I'm going to turn my back on the Lord right now and sell him for 30 pieces of silver.' Because it doesn't work that way. It's never the result of one abrupt sudden decision. It's usually the result of a pattern of compromises that harden and gradually steer you away from the truth. It doesn't happen in leaps. It happens in increments. It doesn't occur in jolts, it happens in stages, where you pursue one bad choice after another, until it ruins your life. And that's why we need to take a subject like this seriously today, because who's not guilty of making some bad decisions. And the author is warning you not to do that.

And that's what we're going to talk about this morning by looking at five warnings against apostasy in the book of Hebrews. We're going to do this because the book of Hebrews doesn't just give you one of these, it gives you several. It doesn't just give you one caution against turning away from Christ in chapter two, it talks about this multiple times. And so I just want to maybe stop our verse by verse study and scale back for a moment and look at it as a survey. Because apparently, this was a real problem in the first century. We often think that we're the first ones to face an issue like this. But even within a generation of dying, Christians were defecting from the Lord Jesus Christ. Some of these people were saved by the ministry of the apostles. Some of them knew Peter and Paul and James and John, and they did it. And the author says not to let it happen to you. If you leave Jesus, you have nothing left. So here's five warnings against apostasy.

The first one is a warning against drifting and becoming hardened. I'm going to put these in groups for the sake of time. So the first and second warnings are a warning against drifting and becoming hardened to the things of God. Which means that the author is cautioning you against developing a hard heart toward the Lord out of apathy and neglect, and just pure laziness. He's going to get more serious as the book goes on, but he starts off with just telling you not to be lazy. Because if you read in chapter two, this is what he says. He says, "For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For the word spoken through angels proved on alterable and every

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transgression and disobedience receive a just penalty. How will we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” Now, as you read that, I want to remind you that Hebrews two comes on the heels of chapter one, which is a very lovely portion of Scripture, as you just saw by reading it, it's a very beautiful piece of writing, although it is hard to follow because it was written, not like a normal introduction that we're used to where the author gives you his name and location and place of writing. Hebrews chapter one is written like a sermon. This is the way the rabbi's preached in the first century, because they would give you a bunch of bible verses on the front end, and then they would explain it. Doctrine and then application and the application is here in chapter two. When it says “For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we've heard” that phrase *pay attention* is one word in Greek *prosecho* which means to hold on tightly to something and don't let it go. It sounds a lot like the word for drift away, which is *pararreio* because the author is making a contrast here between *prosecho*, paying attention, and *pararreio*, drifting.

If you notice, he's pretty colorful with the way he says it because he doesn't say “pay attention”, but he says “pay much attention”. In other words, don't do it a little bit, but do it a lot. Don't pay attention some but you need to go overboard with it. Take this to the nth degree. And if that were not enough, he doesn't just say “pay much attention” but he says “pay much closer attention.” Which means don't be flighty about this. Don't mess around and think that all this stuff about Jesus is not important because you can just come to church and daydream because you have to approach this as if your life depends on it. If you don't, you will drift away.

And that word *drift away* can refer to lots of things, depending on the way it was used in the ancient world, it can refer to a ship veering off course, or a ring slipping off your finger, or a piece of ice slowly melting, or a rock going gently down a hill, or a leaf falling gradually off a tree, because it gives the idea of a long, apathetic slide into something. Or a slow, steady descent into hell. Because John MacArthur was right, most people don't wake up one day and say, “I'm going to be an apostate now.” It happens slowly over time. Which is what you saw with Judas.

When you study the life of Judas, it really is interesting because his name hardly ever appears in the gospels, until he does all this stuff and betrays Jesus in Matthew 26. Because all he did was show up at church, sit in the pew, daydream, tune it out, and you hardly even knew he was there. And as a result, this guy just drifted. All it took was one thing to send him going over the edge. Far as I could tell, that was the first time Jesus ever said anything to him in the Gospels. And it made him so angry that he went out and sold them for 30 pieces of silver, because that's the way apostasy works. It's a death by 1000 cuts. And it might be worth mentioning these two verbs that I just showed you in this passage, they're very different from each other. The first one *pay attention* is in the present tense in Greek, which means it's an ongoing thing. You need to do this over and over again. Because you have to keep a constant watch over your soul. But the word *drift away* is in another tense that implies that this is a one time thing, because there is such a thing as drifting away from the Lord and coming back. And there is such a thing as wandering off and then returning. That's what Peter did, right? Peter wandered off over and over

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again. He was called the apostle with the foot shaped mouth, always putting his foot in his mouth, but he repented and he made it right. Judas never did that. There came a point in Judas life, where he drifted and never came back. And the author says here, you don't want to do that.

First Timothy four, verse two says that after some fall away, in the latter days, they will go so far as to sear their conscience, which means they'll burn it with an iron to the point that they can't even feel it anymore because they become so used to sinning. And it becomes such a regular part of their life that they don't even know when they're doing it. We've all known people like that. They can't even tell when they're lying anymore. It's just lies, lies, lies for them. Ephesians four, verse 19, says that other people will become so callous to the things of God, they'll experience the same thing, because they come to church and everything just bounces off of them like a wall. You don't want to do that.

And that leads you to another warning that the book of Hebrews gives us; it goes right along with this, and that is the warning against becoming hardened. If you look over in chapter three, you can see this one there. Because in chapter three, verse five, says this, "Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence." Then if you look down in verse seven, "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.'"

We don't have time to get into everything that's being talked about here. But as you can tell, the author is making a comparison between Jesus and Moses, because the Jews held Moses in high esteem. And he is saying that Jesus is greater than Moses because in verse two, Jesus as our high priests while Moses was just a worshiper, and in verse three, Jesus was given all glory while Moses was just given some glory. And in verse five, Jesus was God's Son, while Moses was just a servant. Because the point is, no matter how you look at it, Jesus is greater. So here's what you need to do now in verse eight: Don't harden your hearts against Him. And the word hardened is the word from which we get our English word, skeleton. It means to become hardened or petrified, like a rock. And the way it's used here literally means to dry up because you don't feed something anymore. It's what a skeleton is. It's part of your body. You just stop feeding it. This is what Israel did in the wilderness, they heard the word of God, they listened to it for a season, but a time became when they stopped. And as a result, their souls dried up like a skeleton. And you don't want to do that. I don't have to tell you that if you let your heart drift long enough, your soul will do this, you will become hardened. If you come to church and come to church and come to church, and ignore what said here and tune it out, and this will be the next stage in your slide toward apostasy, you will start to become cold to the things of God. You'll get to the point where you say, Well, I don't need that anymore, because I've already heard it before.

And let me tell you what this has to do with our lives today. The greatest way to become an apostate, the simplest way to ruin your life spiritually, is do nothing. That's it, do absolutely nothing, and you will destroy your soul and become an apostate. You know, the easiest way to go to hell. The simplest way to

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be damned is do the same thing: let yourself drift and you will be damned. Let yourself wander off and see where it takes you because it will take you straight into the arms of the devil. We get this so backwards today. We think the road to hell is so hard. We think it's so tough to be lost. It's not. Do what everybody else does, and you will be lost. Act just like all the other people on the planet and you will end up in hell. All you have to do is stop fighting, stop resisting the impulse to sin and see where it takes you.

I did some research on it this week and I found that about 60% of teenagers leave the church after graduating high school here in North America, most of them never to return. Because they go to university and they relax. They go to the world and just let themselves drift. Because they grew up in a Christian home, they had Christian parents, they come from a Christian family, but then they listen to some professor University and they say, you know, he's right. I don't need the Bible anymore. I've grown past it. I'm an adult now. Or they listen to some co-worker and they say you know what? He's got a point. I don't have to believe this Jesus stuff. I can make it on my own. And it all starts with just a little bit of compromise.

We've had people come to Grace fellowship and tell us that they grew up in church and they learned the Bible as a child but they never took it seriously until the lockdowns began. They never tried to understand what this is all about until their world whole world turned upside down with the Coronavirus because that's what it took to snap them out of it. The author of Hebrews says you want to snap out of it before you get into something like that. And I can quote a lot of verses to you on this subject. Again, this is talked about a lot in scripture. But maybe just to mention one or two. I mean, Matthew seven, verse 21, which we just read a moment ago says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven. But he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Christ on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in Your name cast out demons? And in your name perform many miracles?' And then Jesus will declare to them, I never knew you depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." And I think the most frightening thing about that verse is the word *many*. Many will go to hell who called Jesus Lord, not a few, but a lot. Because they thought they did religious stuff, and they prophesied in His name. They did miracles, or as we might say, today, they prayed a prayer, they walked denial, they got sprinkled as a baby, they learned the Catechism as a teenager, they sang in the choir, gave 1000s of dollars to church, but their heart was never in it. So Jesus said, "Depart from Me." He didn't say, "Come, come up here while we figure this out." He didn't say, "You know, I know you're just a really good person." He said, "Get out of my sight."

In Revelation three, verse 15, the Lord said, "I know your deeds, that you're neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other. Because you are lukewarm and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth." And as far as I know, that's the only time in scripture where Jesus says, "You make me so sick that I want to puke." He does it to people that are neither hot nor cold. They just don't care anymore. He didn't say that message to a mosque. He didn't say it to a synagogue. He didn't say it to a temple. He didn't say it to a bar. He didn't say to a club, he didn't say to a store that sells marijuana, he sent it to a

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church. Because that's not good enough for God. And if that hasn't sobered us up enough, there are more of these warnings in here. So for the sake of time, let me just talk about some other ones.

Here's another warning against apostasy in the book of Hebrews. And that is a warning against dullness and sinning willfully against the Lord. The first and second one is a warning against drifting and becoming hardened. And that comes first because it's the most popular one. We've all seen people come to church and start off doing fine and walking with the Lord until they get distracted by something and off they go. Pretty soon they stopped going to Bible study, so they can spend more hours at the lake. And they stopped serving as an usher. So they can spend a few more days in the office, or they stopped coming to care groups so they can get an early start to the golf game on Sunday. And the author says, "Don't let that happen to you. Stay passionate in your love for Christ."

And that brings us to a third and fourth warning against the sin of apostasy. And that is a warning against dullness and sinning willfully. You can see this one in chapter five, verse 11, if you want to turn over there. Again, this is just a survey, we're not going to be able to talk about all of this in detail. But in chapter five, verse 11, it mentions this issue of dullness. Because it says, "Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing, for though by this time, you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk, and not solid food." And I want to stop there and point out this warning is more implied than stated. Because he tells him, "You have become dull of hearing." And the idea is that you need to stop. Cut it out. That's the caution here because he begins by saying "Concerning Him, or concerning Christ, we have much to say. But I can't go into more detail because you're so dull of hearing." This means that the audience, which doesn't mean the audience couldn't hear because they are dumb. It means they couldn't hear because they are unwilling to do so. The dullness was a problem of the heart. And as a result, verse 12, says it stunted their growth in Christ, because they should be teachers by now. But instead they need someone to teach them the elementary principles. And the phrase *elementary principals* is one word in Greek that could be translated *alphabet* or, the first letters of the alphabet. He referred to small wooden blocks that the ancient people would give to their children to learn their letters, because they didn't have tablets back then, or iPads. So what they would do is they would take pieces of wood and carve an A or a B or a C into them. And in verse 12, the author says you people are like that, because you should be teachers by now. But instead, you're still learning the alphabet. You're playing with your ABCs because you simply won't listen. So he says this in chapter six verse one, therefore leave the elementary teachings behind and press on to maturity. In other words, it's okay to study elementary stuff for a while and learn your ABCs for a season, but you shouldn't stay there for long.

I don't have to tell you that some Christians never grow up, do they? They never go past the kindergarten stage with Christ. Their life exists somewhere between the old man and the new man because they never make progress in anything. You meet with him today and they say they struggle with lust. You meet with him tomorrow and they struggle with the same thing. So you ask him, "What have

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you done about it?” And they say, “Nothing.” Or they tell you they struggle with their marriage. Their relationship with their spouse has gone sour. So you ask them, “What have you done to make a difference?” And you get the same response because they're dull of hearing. It's not that they can't hear, the Bible is they just won't hear. It's not that they can't listen to God or that they refuse to do it, they'd rather do something else. If you've ever been around children before, one thing you notice is that their hearing doesn't work too well. They have ear damage, because you have to keep repeating yourself to them, right? They're caught. Their favourite word is huh? You say their name they say, huh? And to clean the room, they say, Huh? You tell them it's time to eat. They say Uh huh. You say the world's about the end in a blazing inferno on the day of Armageddon, when the Messiah returns on a white horse to judge His enemies and they say, huh? The author says some Christians act that way toward God. I have met people who could listen to a sermon for an entire hour and get nothing from it. You preach your guts out to them. You pour your soul out from the pulpit and all you get is a blank expression. Or they read their Bible for an hour, it's the same thing. They go to a conference and hear the best speakers on Earth and sit under their ministry and soak in their wisdom and they are unaffected by it. What the author is saying to people of the Book of Hebrews is if that is happening to you, you need to be concerned because it's a sign that you're slipping into apostasy. Christians are not perfect people. But we listen well. That's a sign of our growth in Christ.

And it brings us to the other warning in this group and that is a warning against sinning willfully. And that's found in Chapter 10. And it's even more troubling than the previous one because the author is taking it to another level here. You can see as this book develops, things just go further and further off the rails. If you look in chapter 10, verse 26, here's your next warning. He says, “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” Now, that's a pretty heavy couple of verses there, but the warning there is to not go on sinning willfully. And the key word here is the word *willful* because it sheds a lot of light on what he's saying. This doesn't refer to someone who sins every once in a while and tries to stop. It's not referring to someone who sins by accident. This is someone who does it willfully all the time. Their inhibitions are gone. It's just unbridled sin for them because they've taken God out of the picture. One commentator said it's like the difference between first degree murder and involuntary manslaughter. One is intentional, while the other is not. And this is referring to intentional sin. Because here's the problem with that: verse 29 says that it's like trampling the Son of God under foot. When your heart becomes hard, and you stop listening, and you get to the point where you just sin carelessly. It's like you are despising Jesus, because Jesus did all these things for you, and you won't even bother to repent anymore. He went to the cross for you gave His life for you; He suffered the wrath of God for you. And you won't even take the time to do something little like work on your lust and work on your marriage.

Verse 29, says it's like regarding as unclean the blood of the covenant by which you're sanctified. Because when you act that way, this is what you do as well. When you sin and sin and sin, you're treating Jesus' blood as unclean, because you're saying it's just like everybody else's. His blood means

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no more to you than the blood of the guy next door in your neighborhood. And the point the author is making here is that you shouldn't do that. Because when you do it, verse 26, says, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin. And that's a confusing expression. It's troubled a lot of people. If you do that, the door will be closed for you. Not because you want salvation and can have it, but because you're acting like you don't want to have anything to do with Christ. And so Christ says, "Fine, you don't want anything to do with me. I don't want anything to do with you." And that's a terrible thing to do.

And let me tell you how this one applies to our lives. You need to take your sin very seriously today. You need to be very intentional about killing it, because it can do this to you. It can take you to the point where there is no more a sacrifice for sins. I think we've all known people who came to church and were faithful to it for a season until they started watching pornography. And before you knew it, they were lost. They totally abandoned the things of God. Why? Because the two things have nothing in common. They couldn't be any farther apart. And we've all known people who started working at a job where they made a little money and a little more money, and a little more money until money became their God and they turned away from the Lord. Because you can't serve God and money, you can't have two masters. You can't go this way in that way. At the same time, you can't go up and down all at once, you have to make a choice. And you have to do it quickly. Otherwise, it won't be long before your sin gets the upper hand. Because the Bible says sin should no longer have dominion over you. It doesn't say sin should always have dominion over you, or sin should continue to have dominion over you. It said it should do it no more, which means there needs to come a time when there is a definite break in regards to your relationship to sin and how you look at it. It doesn't mean you don't sin any more, it means you fight it now knowing you have victory. The Bible also says in all these things, we're more than conquerors. Not in all these things we're more than failures or losers or wimps with our sin. We can defeat it through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

But the point is you can't do it if you don't take it seriously. Because this is the way it works. Anytime someone becomes an apostate, I guarantee you, they didn't fall into that sin, they planned it. And it didn't happen because they stumbled into it by accident. They fantasized about it for months, years. Which means the best way to prevent all this is to stop it as soon as it starts and don't give the devil a foothold. I know there's not a lot of talk about the responsibility of the believer in some circles today, but we need to be very clear about the fact that we're Christians, we're not fatalists. And we believe in a sovereign God, but we don't believe in a stoic one who treats us like we're robots. God doesn't do that; He holds us accountable to the things we do in this life. If you choose Jesus, you go to heaven. If you choose sin, you go to hell. So the author says here, make the right choice. Be very careful with how you treat this precious life that you have to live.

Which brings us to one more warning against this apostasy in the book of Hebrews. Just to review these other ones, the first one is a warning against drifting and becoming hardened. Then the third and fourth one is a warning against dullness and sinning willfully. Which is so easy to do. I can't tell you how many times I've heard somebody say they're abandoning the faith, because they don't see the logic behind it

anymore. That's not true. If you would pull back the veil on their life, I promise you, you would see a truckload of sin. The problem is not logic; it is spiritual. It's not about facts and figures. It's about the heart.

And we need to let it be a reminder to us, which brings us to a fifth and final warning against the sin of apostasy, which is a warning against rejecting the Lord completely. A fifth warning against this sin is a warning against rejecting the Lord completely, which is the final stage in the descent toward apostasy because as you can tell there is a progression of thought here. And that is that if you start out with drifting and you don't repent of it, and you get into hardening and you don't repent of it, then you move into dullness and you don't repent of it. Then you get into sinning and you don't repent of it. This is where you'll end up. You'll reject the Lord outright. You'll throw Him out completely which is what the word apostasy refers to. And you can see this one in chapter 12 verse 14. The author says, "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to have that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal." Now, as you read that, you can tell that you're coming to the end of the book here, because the author gives you one commandment after another because this is the way he's applying all that he's talked about. Because he says in verse 12, "You need to strengthen the hands that are weak," verse 13, "Make straight paths for your feet." Verse 14, "Pursue peace," for this reason in verse 15: so you don't come short of the grace of God like Esau did. He is the ultimate apostate. You have Judas in the New Testament, he's the worst apostate there, you have Esau in the old. They're kind of counterparts of each other. And just to explain this, that phrase *come short of the grace of God* has been misunderstood. But it doesn't mean you can lose your salvation or come short of it because you tried real hard and failed, it means you can come short of it because you don't try at all. You don't even want it. Because that's what Esau did.

If you remember his story, he sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. And then when he wanted it back, he couldn't have it. It's kind of a sad story. He traded it in for some porridge. Then when he wanted to have a blessing from his father, Isaac, he was too late. Isaac turned him away. Verse 15 also tells us to let no root of bitterness spring up inside of you, causing trouble. And that's a little hard to understand. But the word bitterness could be translated bitter pride, or arrogance because it refers to a bitter attitude, which says I don't need God anymore, because I can just think about Him later on like on my deathbed. That's what Esau did. When Jacob offered to sell him his birthright, Esau said, "What's that to me? I'm hungry. Now. I want to eat now. I want to please my fleshly appetites now. Don't talk to me about the future. Don't talk to me about the life that is to come." And here's the problem with that way of thinking. Verse 17 says, "For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance that he sought for with tears." And again, the idea here is not that God is rejecting Esau, because he wants to be saved and he can't be. The idea is that God is rejecting him because he found no place for repentance. That means he saw had no place for repentance in his heart. He regretted his mistake, but he didn't repent of his mistake. He cried about it. But that's all

he did. Because that's how an apostate operates. He wants God's approval, but not God. He wants Christ's blessing, but not Christ. And so Christ says you can't have me. When you think about it, Esau is really an interesting analogy here, because he grew up in a Christian home, and he had Christian friends, and he enjoyed Christian fellowship or the ancient equivalent of it. But it all meant nothing to him because all he wanted was soup. The author even says in verse 16, that he did all this for a single meal, not a bunch of meals, but a single meal.

One commentator said he saw his life as perhaps the saddest one in the Bible outside of Judas' life, because on the outside, he didn't seem too bad. Esau had a great light and he rejected it. And he had a great family, but he turned them away. And he had great doctrine and great opportunities and great chances to believe, but he spurned them all. Because listen, friends, here's the lesson here, Esau shows you that you can grow up in Israel and still be lost. And you can be a child of Abraham and still go to hell if you don't believe. In fact, this is a difference between Jacob and Esau: Jacob believed and Esau didn't. Jacob was no angel. He was the other brother of Isaac, the son of Isaac. In fact, right above this, if you look in chapter 11, Jacob's name is mentioned because it says in verse eight, "By faith Abraham when he was called, obeyed," and the idea is that Abraham was saved by faith. And then it says down in verse 20, "By faith, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith, Jacob, as he was dying, trusted in God." That's interesting, because you read about Jacob's faith right there, then you come to chapter 12. And it mentions Esau. Why? Because Esau didn't have any faith. He didn't trust in the Lord at all. And I told you last time that on the final day of judgment, Jesus will divide the world into two groups of people, the sheep and the goats. Remember that He'll separate the entire human race into two categories. And it won't be rich or poor, or black, or white, or conservative or liberal or Democrat or Republican; it will be the saved and the lost. And it's the same way here because if you notice, there's two holes at the end of this passage, there's a hall of faith in chapter 11. And there's the Hall of doubt. And there's the example of Jacob in chapter 11. And there's the example of Esau and that's it. And it's laid out this way at the end of the book to ask the question, which one do you belong to? Jacob or Esau? Which one are you following? Because, make no mistake, the Bible says, once saved, always saved. And it says, If you come to Christ, He will never leave you or forsake you. But it also says, if you're saved, this is what you have to do, you will believe. And you'll do it all day, every day for the rest of your life. Not because your friends do it, but because you want to do it, not because your family does it because you have to do it. Not because you grew up in Israel or went to a Christian school or went to a seminary. You'll do it because you can't help yourself.

Listen, friends, the idea in this book is that apostasy is a dangerous sin, but you don't have to be an apostate. And this is a terrible way to ruin your life. But you don't have to do that. God has done everything for you to believe. God has sent you a Saviour in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, who has done everything necessary for you to go to heaven. When He lived among us, the Lord kept all of God's law, but in His grace, the Lord put Him to death on the cross, so that He could pay the price that your sins deserved. As the hymn writer says, "I would have debt I could not pay, he paid a debt he did not owe." But you have to believe it all goes back to your faith.

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Next week, Pastor Mike Chalmers will be with us from Prairie Chapel in order to do our pastor swap. And I'll be preaching for him there at that church. But after that, we're going to look at the first of these warnings here in more detail in chapter two. So please join us for that, but it should be good. But if you hear nothing else, I say today, remember this: There's nothing in the book of Hebrews that says you have to go down this path. You can be saved today and remain saved. Put your faith in Christ.

In my studies I got came across a story the time Mark Twain's wife married him despite her family's reservations, because he wasn't a Christian. But she said it didn't matter because she could handle it. She could handle him. But she was wrong. Because toward the end of her life, they asked her why she quit going to church. And she said it was because I gave up Christ for my husband.

Friends, I tell you that story, because you don't ever want to do that. You don't want to give up Christ for your husband or Christ for your wife or Christ for anything. It isn't worth it. You want to hold on to Him for life. And let me pray that you would. Let's close in a word of prayer and ask the Lord's grace to apply all these things. Heavenly Father, I come to you this morning, Lord, in some ways with trepidation because I look out on our church family. And I don't know where everybody is at in this. I don't know whose heart is giving into sin and whose soul is being pulled away by temptation, who is sinning willfully and who's fighting it? Those things are unknown to me, but they're not unknown to You. And as such, Father, you are a God that takes great compassion and you hear our prayers. And our prayer this morning, Lord, is that we would not ever drift into apostasy. We do see it happening all around us. It's happening in frightful numbers in this place. We can stand firm through what Christ has done on the cross, and Lord, I pray for our church family, that we would stand firm. For those who are lost and all this stuff is kind of mumbled to them. They don't know what we're talking about. Lord, I pray you would remind them that there is a hell, but they can be saved through the Lord. Father, thank You for a book like this such rich doctrines and such a deep truth. And yet, it's very practical things for us to take home. We want to hold on to Christ, Thank you for such a Saviour. Thank you for such a cross. And as we come to the Lord's table, let this be a reminder to us of what we do have in Him. We have so much to hold on to, so much of a reason to stand firm. And then we can go out and live in a way that honors you with it. We pray this all in Christ's name for His glory. Amen.