

A Warning Against Sinning Willfully

Hebrews 10:26-39

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, November 27, 2022

Before we get started this morning, I want to say thank you for your grace and patience last week. I woke up last Saturday morning for the Men's Bible Study and felt wonderful or good, everything was right in the world. And then by the time I went to bed, I had 102 temperature and the flu, all signs of the flu. And I prayed, "Okay, Lord, can you fix this between tonight and tomorrow morning." In His Sovereign Will, He said "no." Woke up Sunday, I still had it. So, I contacted the other Elders and they all said they're sick too. But we found out that Quentin was the least sick among us and he came in and delivered the morning message and he did a great job. So, we trust that was God's word for you last week, on the topic of faith, but those things do happen in the life of the church. Sometimes you make plans, and the Lord changes your plans, but it's all for His good and for His glory.

So if you would this morning, open your Bibles to the book of Hebrews, which is the 19th book in the New Testament. If you were to add them all up together, you'll find that Hebrews is the 19th of 27 books that you find in this part of the Bible. And it stands alone among them because it's anonymous. It's the only book in the New Testament that has that distinction, because we don't know who the author was, doesn't tell us that. And as such, there's been a lot of speculations on that subject. Because the Catholic Church said Paul wrote it. One of the Reformers said a Apollos wrote it. John Calvin said, Luke wrote it. Tertullian said Barnabas wrote it. Clement of Alexandria said, Luke wrote it. Alfred Harnack, said, Timothy wrote it. Several modern scholars said Priscilla and Aquila did it. But personally, I think Origen was probably right when he said that God alone knows for sure. This is a problem that's only going to be solved in heaven. Because this book is certainly Biblical. When you read it, you can tell it has its place in the Scripture, but no name is given to it. So, it's best to leave it there.

In fact, when you think about it, there's a number of things in the book of Hebrews that are left in the realm of mystery. Because when you open it up, you find that we don't know who the author was, and we don't know who the audience was, we don't know what the history was of the book, and we don't know the timeline, and we don't know anything about the setting because it's not written to the church in Galatia, or the church in Ephesus or the church in Philippi. But one thing that's very clear when you read this book is that it was written to the Jews. Whoever these people were, and wherever they were from, we know they were Israelites because the book contains so many references to the Old Testament. And this is something you see in our passage for today because if you would read Hebrews 10, starting in verse 26, this is the text we're going to look at this morning. Starting in Hebrews 10:26 it says this:

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. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy

on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot 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? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. 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. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

For yet in a very little while,

He who is coming will come, and will not delay.

³⁸ But My righteous one shall live by faith;

And if he shrinks back, My soul has no pleasure in him.

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

Well in the reading there as you look at that passage, you can tell it was written with the Jews in mind. For one thing, it gives you several quotations from the Old Testament, one from the book of Deuteronomy and one from the book of Habakkuk, which may not mean a lot to you as a Gentile, but it would have meant a lot to the Jews, because it means he's quoting from the Law and the Prophets here. He's giving you a reference from two of the most important divisions of the Old Testament in order to show you that what he's saying is true, because it's verified in multiple places in the Hebrew Bible. He also mentions, if you look up in verse 28, the importance of having two or three witnesses, that's a another reference to the law because the law said you couldn't kill a man on the testimony of one witness, you had to have more than that. And the lesson there is that if the law could punish you for that, how much more do you think God could do it if you reject His Son. If the Torah could kill you on the basis of two or three testimonies, how much more could *Yahweh* kill you if you neglect His Word? So, you don't want to do that.

This chapter also mentions other things like the sacrifices and offerings and sin in here. It mentions Moses and the covenant and the blood, it talks about the issue of cleanliness and sanctification and judgment. Because when Jesus came, the idea is that He saved us from all that. The reason the author brings it up here is because when the Lord appeared, He delivered us from the fear of those things by dying on the cross for us, which is something that we've talked about a lot in this series, so I don't want to repeat anything here, other than to tell you that now the author gives you a warning in light of this, and is found in verse 26. If you want to look back up there, this is the warning

for if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

Now, what does that mean? Why does the author say that in a passage like this? Well, he does that in order to remind you that this is what happens when you hear the truth about Christ, and you go on sinning anyway, carelessly, your soul is in danger, because there no longer remains a sacrifice of sins for you. Because you have turned your back on the only one you have, you've rejected the only hope of salvation available to you, and therefore, you don't want to do that. This phrase, sinning willfully, it's one that's confused a lot of people and caused a lot of alarm. So, I want to say a few words about that. But that doesn't refer to someone who sins one time, it refers to someone who sins all the time. And it's not talking about a person who does something wrong once in the eyes of God and mourns over it and grieves and repents right away. It refers to someone who never repents at all because they don't care - doesn't mean anything to them. Verse 29, says "they trample underfoot the Son of God," and it doesn't mean anything to them and they despise the covenant, and it doesn't mean anything to them, and they insult the Spirit of Grace, and it doesn't mean anything, because they despise it all. They look at all of it as a petty thing. So verse 30, says, The Lord will punish them as a result. I mean, how could He not? What are the choices would he have. And frankly, this sounds like a shocking thing to say. But the reason it's placed in here is because the author is shifting gears at this point in the book of Hebrews. Because so far, he's been focusing primarily on the issue of doctrine.

If you've been studying this book with us over the past several months, you know that he's been talking about how Jesus fulfilled the Old Covenant for us and came to take the place of the law and the rituals and ceremonies of the Jews, so we wouldn't have to. But now, he starts to take that subject and bring it down to earth. And he does it by giving you a caution, that you don't want to mess around with this. You don't want to play games with the amazing gift that God has given you in the Lord Jesus Christ. Because if you do, He will punish you for it. There will be a day of reckoning if you take this for granted. Which is important because if you think about it, we do this as church goers sometimes don't we? We have a tendency to show up at church and be apathetic and take it for granted and start to belittle the work of Christ in our minds. Because by and large, you know, we're not the kind of people to hear the Word of God and go out to the bar and get drunk afterwards. We're the kind of people who hear the word of God and ignore it because we're so distracted. Or we're the kind of folks who walk through the doors and sit in on a Sunday school class and listen to a Bible study and say, who cares? I don't like it because I've heard it all before. And we Murmur, murmur, murmur and complain about everything to the point that we tear it down, which is a wicked thing to do, and God hates it when we do that, because it shows that you have a hard heart. I mean, it's one thing to know a bunch of doctrine, it's another thing to listen to it, isn't it? And it's one thing to hear the Gospel, but it's another thing to pay attention to it and let it penetrate your heart and change your life and do a work inside your soul and that's what the author's telling you to do here. Because if you don't do that, God will hold you accountable.

Because God doesn't just do this to the people out there, He does to the people in here. And God doesn't just judge the folks that are out in the street rejecting Him, He does it for the people in the pews as well, because we're not too good for this, we don't get a pass simply because we're spiritual.

In fact, there's a saying it's very popular right now that I want to quote to you, because I think it sheds a lot of light on this. But it goes like this. It says, "I don't think we'll be surprised by the people in hell, I think we'll be surprised by the people in heaven." Has anybody ever heard that before? I think we all have, it's pretty common expression. And I think it's right, for the most part. There's going to be people who repent on their deathbed, there's going to be folks who were saved at the last hour and that will surprise us in heaven, I believe that. But I don't know about you. But when I read a passage like this one, I can't help but change that expression a little bit to say this, "I don't think we'll be surprised by the people in heaven only, I think will also be surprised by the people in hell." Because apparently, some people will go there from our churches. And some souls will end up in hell after sitting in a place like this, that their whole lives. And it'll happen for one reason, and one reason only, and that is simply because they didn't believe for themselves. They watched other people believe the Gospel, but they didn't believe the Gospel. And they saw other souls trust in Christ, and embrace the work of salvation, but they didn't embrace it and as a result, they were lost.

Listen, friends, let me be very clear, salvation is free. It comes by grace alone. You don't have to earn it or strive for it or work for it in order to get it, but you do have to do something and that is to trust in Christ. You do have to respond in faith in order to make it your own otherwise you don't get it. Salvation doesn't come by osmosis. You don't go to heaven simply because you showed up in church. It has to be more than that for you. And this is an important thing to talk about. Because this is the fourth of five warning passages in the book of Hebrews that run all throughout the book. And if you want to look at them in order, the five warning passages in Hebrews go like this: don't drift, don't harden your hearts, don't be dull, don't sin willfully right here in chapter 10 and don't act like Esau, who rejected the blessing of God. And if you're wondering why they're all scattered throughout the letter like this, the answer is that apparently, this was an issue in the church that he was writing to and that is that they were becoming apathetic. They were starting to backslide, like Esau, not because they weren't going to church simply because they were acting like this. They were going to church in a halfhearted way. And so, the reminder here is you don't want to do that. You want to take it to heart and repent. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning, by looking at four warnings against the act of sinning willfully. So, if you're taking notes, that's our outline for today. But in Hebrews 10:26-39, we're going to look at four warnings against the act of sinning willfully. And this is a serious passage. In fact, of all those five warnings, most commentaries that I read said, this is the most sobering one because of the way he writes this. And we're going to take some time to explain it, and I just want to jump in, so we can take advantage of our time.

The first warning that he gives us is a warning of judgment. The first warning against the act of sinning willfully in this passage is a warning of judgment, which means the author begins by warning you of the

fate of those who behave in this manner, they will be judged. They won't get off the hook. They might fool men in this world might fool men in this room, but they won't fool God as to the true state of their soul. And if you notice, he starts us off very strongly in verse 26 when 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.

You can tell as you read that, it is a pretty strong way to say all this. In fact, I remember the first time I read this, I had to go back over it several times, because I kept asking myself, did he really say that? I mean, after all, he's told me so far in the book of Hebrews about the work of Christ and the gift of salvation, that this guy really tells me that I will go to hell if I keep on sinning. And the answer is yes, but there's more to it than that. You have to work through this a little bit in your mind. Because if you notice, the verse begins with the word “for” which points you back to the previous section, where he says this up in verse 19. He says there “therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus”, and then down in verse 22, “let us draw near.” And what that means is that since Christ has done all of this for us and fulfill the Old Covenant, this is how you should respond, you need to draw near to Him. You don't want to stay away, far off at a distance. And then after saying that he's writes these words in verse 26 “for if we go on sinning willfully.” In other words, if we don't come to God due to our sin, and if we don't approach Him due to our apathy and negligence and half-heartedness and carelessness, this is what we can expect, He will send us to hell. Because there's nothing else for Him to do if we don't accept Him after he did all of that, we're on our own.

And like I just said, this phrase “sinning willfully,” it doesn't refer to someone who sins one time and that's it. It refers to someone who sins as a habit, or as a lifestyle, or as a practice. Because if you look in the verse, it says that they go on this way, and that word is in the continuous tense in Greek. So, it could be translated, if we go on sinning over and over and over again, and defying God repeatedly and repeatedly and repeatedly - this is what you'll expect a terrifying expectation of judgment. It also refers to a person who does it on purpose because it says if we do this willfully, and the word willful, demonstrates that this is an act of the will, because it involves the whole person. This is not an accident. This is not someone who sins as a mistake. This is not someone who does it and they're not aware that it was a sin at the time. I meet new Christians all the time, they get saved, and they ended up sinning and they didn't know it was a sin what they were doing. That's not what this is referring to. This is referring to someone who plans it out ahead of time. They don't fall into sin, they plot it out. It also refers to a person who does it with full knowledge of what they're doing, because the verse says, “for if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth” and that's important, because it shows you the timeline for this, it happens after someone receives the truth and not before. It occurs after you learn all the wonderful things Christ has done for you on the cross, and with the resurrection, and His ascension into heaven, but not prior to it.

And when you look in the Old Covenant, you realize this is something that Jews could have related to, because under the Old Testament, they had two categories for sins. They had Intentional Sins and Unintentional Sins. Because they understood that every sin was not the same and every evil deed was not on the same level, because some were willful, while some were not. Some behaviors were done with prior knowledge and others were committed differently, which is why Numbers 15 says,

if a person sins unintentionally, in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, he can bring a sacrifice and it will be forgiven. But if he sins intentionally, he can't.

Because there was no sacrifice for that sort of thing under the Old Covenant. In case of those sins, you had to just throw yourself on the mercy of God, and hope that he would forgive you. When David committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband, Uriah murdered, he said, sacrifice and offering you do not desire and what that meant was there was no sacrifice for that sort of thing. And it's a similar idea here, because what the author is saying in Hebrews 10, is that when Jesus offers you the Gospel, and you reject it, and when He offers you the Gospel, and you reject it, and when He offers you the Gospel, and you reject it, there's nothing more for Him to do. You've spurned every available opportunity He's given you. And when He shows you the cross, and you say, "I don't want it" and He shows you the cross, and you say, "I don't want it" and He shows you the cross and you say, "I don't want that" you're really in tremendous danger because there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin, because Jesus is your sacrifice, and you've constantly denied Him and said His death is worthless to you. So as a result, verse 27, says, you won't have anything to look forward to, but a terrifying expectation of judgment. And if you notice, this is pretty colorful language here because he doesn't just call hell a judgment, he calls it an expectation of judgment, or something that's looming over your head. It's a judgment that's weighing heavily upon your shoulders and doesn't just describe it as an expectation because it's a terrifying one, because it's frightening to think about God's wrath is nothing to be trifled with. And he refers to it as the fury of a fire, which will consume the adversaries, because hell is a furious place. It doesn't just burn you, but it does it for a reason - and that's because God is angry in hell. Hell happens because He's mad. And it consumes. It is the idea that it never ends, it will devour and keep devouring you, it will burn and keep burning. Because God will treat you this verse says, as His adversary.

We often think of the enemies of God as being those people out there don't we? And we often think of His opponents as being those folks that would never darken the doors of a church. But this book is being written to people in church. You can be God's enemy and sit right here in this room. And you do it by rejecting Christ. I read somewhere this week that the worst thing about hell is not the fact that God is not there. The worst thing about hell is the fact that God is there, and His grace is not. Because the only thing you find in hell is His wrath, because hell is a place where all the kinder attributes of God, and the gentler characteristics go away until the only thing you have left to deal with is His fury. Because listen, friends, God will forgive your sins, but He won't forgive this. And He will pardon you if you fail, but He won't pardon you if you never repent, never believe, never acknowledged you need a Savior, and that's

the lesson here. I think one of the reasons the author mentions this in here and keeps repeating it all throughout the book, is because a lot of these Jews must have been forgetting this. Because they thought that God would forgive them because they're Jewish. And they thought God would save them and bring them into heaven, simply because they were Abraham's descendants and they were good and nice and paid their taxes, He might send a Gentile to hell, but not them. He might put a Roman there, but he'll spare their lives. It's not true. There are millions of Jews in hell this second, right now, because they rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah. It's the same way with us. If you don't believe me, let me just throw out one name that we've talked about several times in this series, because it really drives the point home. And that's the name of Judas Iscariot, remember him, he was Jewish. He was a perfect example of this. And you can read through this passage and see his name all throughout. Because if anyone had a knowledge of the truth, it was him. And if anyone knew that Jesus died for us, it was him. And if anyone understood he was a savior, or came to save us, it was Judas. But he was lost because he didn't believe any of it. In fact, Judas was so lost, that the Bible says that at the end of his life, Satan entered into him. So that when he betrayed Him, he wasn't a good man at all anymore, he was possessed by the devil himself. But it happened because he went on sinning willfully. Made a little compromise here, a little compromise there, got a little lazy in this department of his life, a little lazy in that one, until his sin consumed his soul. And the point is, you don't want the same thing to happen to you.

I mean, I don't know about you guys. But this kind of stuff scares me because I know a lot of people who fit this description, or at least I've met them throughout the years, I've been around church my entire life. I've lived in two Bible belts here in Canada and one in the States. And I've seen so many good people make this mistake, I'm using my quotation fingers here "good people." They think they'll go to heaven just because they're from Tennessee. Think they'll be saved simply because they're polite and friendly and they don't offend anybody and pay their taxes. But there's millions in hell that are just the same way. It's not the way it works. Salvation didn't work that way for these people. It doesn't work that way for us. You don't get to go to heaven because you're nice.

Which brings us to another warning against the act of sinning willfully here in this passage, and that is a warning of punishment. Now, I do have some good news to come. The passage will get more encouraging in a moment. But before we get there, he's going to continue on this subject, because the first warning is a warning of judgment. But the second one is very similar to this. And it's a warning of punishment, which is just a reiteration of what he said in the beginning here. He's going to echo some of the same ideas for the sake of emphasis. Because if you read on in verse 28, he says this

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God

Now, I just want to stop there for a moment and walk you through this a little bit, because verse 28, sounds a little confusing when you first read it. But the author places that here in order to give you a principle from the Old Testament, because Deuteronomy 19 says, the people of Israel couldn't punish a man, if only one person saw the crime, like it is in our judicial system, they had to have two or three witnesses. And the argument is, if that's the case, how much more do you think God will punish a man who does this and trampled underfoot the Son of God. And this phrase is the first of three statements that are used in here back-to-back in order to show you how wicked the act of rejecting Christ is. Because he says it's like a trampling, which means it's like walking all over Jesus or throwing His name in the mud, which is a horrible thing to do. Because when you receive the knowledge of the truth, and reject it, it's like a slap in the face to Him. He's been so gracious to you, He's been so kind and revealing Himself, He's been so merciful and dying on the cross all these things, and for you to say, no - it's horribly offensive. The word for trample here and it's used in Matthew seven, when Jesus says,

Do not give dogs what is sacred, or throw your pearls before pigs, or else they will turn and trample them under foot.

And now this passage is repeating the same word to say when you act like this, this is what you're doing to the cross, you're treating it like a bunch of pigs who trample over everything in its path. You're trampling over God's mercy, you're trampling over His grace, you're trampling over His patience. And to add to that, the author goes on to say in the same verse, "who has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified." So, first is the trampling now it's regarding the blood of the covenant is unclean. And that's a reference to the blood of the new covenant or the promise God made with the church.

Earlier in Hebrews nine, it said the Old Covenant was ratified with blood, you might remember that. Because when it was time to inaugurate it, the Lord told Moses to sprinkle blood on everything, he sprinkled it on the law, he sprinkled it on the people, he sprinkled it on the tabernacle. And then the New Covenant was set up the same way. Except in this covenant, God didn't sprinkle us with the blood of animals, He sprinkles us with the blood of Christ, which is being regarded as unclean when you reject it. Because when someone tramples on Jesus like this, they're viewing His death as if it's normal. They're saying it could have been anybody dying up there on the cross, could have been the guy next door for all I care, because His death has no special meaning for them. And then, finally, verse 29, wraps this up when he says, how much severe punishment do you think he will deserve? Who has done all these things and insulted the Spirit of grace. And that's the last of the phrases. And it's interesting because it brings another person into the discussion, and that's the Holy Spirit. Because this behavior doesn't just insult Christ, it insults Him. And as a result of verse 30, says this

For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And that's a reiteration of what he said earlier when he talks about judgment, because this is what God's judgment looks like, it looks like vengeance. And as you can see this statement in verse 30, it's in quotation marks, because it's a quotation from Deuteronomy 32, where Moses spoke to Israel right before he died, and he told them to be faithful to Yahweh. Why? Because if you don't, Yahweh will seek vengeance on you - on you, he said. You who claim to be His people. If you're not faithful to Him, even though you're Jewish God will make you pay. Because it says it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. And that's what's known as an anthropomorphism. If you're taking notes, you can even write that word next to the passage here. It is the act of giving human qualities to a non-human person because we understand that God doesn't actually have hands. And the Lord doesn't have a physical body with arms and legs and shoulders because he's a spirit. So, when it talks about falling into his hands, it's a metaphor for falling into his custody. You don't run there when you go to hell, you fall there, and you don't go willingly, necessarily you go against your will. But it doesn't matter because you still go. Because God is the one who's hurling you there. He's the one who's pushing you in that direction. You know, I just told you I often heard this saying, growing up that the worst thing about hell is the fact that God isn't there. But the problem with that statement is that if God isn't in hell, who's the one doing the punishing? The devil? No, he's being punished there. The demons? No, it's the same way with them -they're being punished in hell. Other people, no, other sinners, no. God is the one who's in control of hell. It says it right here. You're falling into His hands when you go to that place. And verse 31 says He's alive in hell. Because it says it's a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God, which means He's not asleep in hell, He's not dead., He's active, alert, and watchful. And it says He's terrifying, which means he's frightening. Hell shows you a side of God that makes you tremble. It displays an aspect of his character that you don't ever want to see. But it all goes back to the thing we talked about earlier in this passage and that's the issue of judgment. Verse 29, says how much severe punishment do you think he will deserve who does all this? Because God takes it personally when you deny His son.

Now I really think this is an important subject for us to consider today, because you hear people say, from time to time, that I don't think God does this anymore. You guys ever heard that? I don't think God sends people to hell because I believe in a God of love, anybody heard that before? Well, let me tell you something, if that's you, you don't believe in the God of Scripture, because that's what He does in this book. Because it says "vengeance is mine, I will repay" I didn't say that God did. We didn't make that up or quoting it from the book. You also hear other people say, "well, that's the God of the Old Testament, I follow the God of the New Testament and he never punishes sinners that way." But friends, don't you see, we're quoting from the New Testament this morning. Because it says God punishes sinners there too. And the most alarming thing about this passage is that he does it for those who call themselves Christians, but they're not. They're faking it. Because if you notice, in this whole passage, the Lord is not punishing people for lying here, or stealing or committing adultery. Even though He does that. He does it for those in the context of the chapter, who failed to enter the Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, that's the context. He's sending people to hell who refuse to draw near with

a sincere heart by the new and living way, which he inaugurated for us through His flesh. That's what makes this text so frightening.

And it brings us to some better news and the passage here, it brings us to another warning against the act of sinning willfully and that is a warning to remember the former days. So, we're just following along in the text here. But a third warning against the act of sinning willfully is a warning to remember your former days. And that means if you're a Christian this morning, and you find yourself struggling in this area, one way to avoid the sin of unbelief, that's being addressed here is to go back to the past and recall all the wonderful things God has done for you. And as we approach this next section here, it might come as a surprise, because the author has been very negative up to this point. But now he's going to turn things around and look at this from a positive angle when he says this in verse 32, he says,

but remember the former days, when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings.

Now, I just told you, we don't know much about the background for Hebrews, because we don't know who the author was and we don't know who the audience was, because this is an anonymous letter. But one thing we learned from verse 32, is that whoever they were, this was an older church, because it tells them here to remember the former days. Which means this is a church that had previous years behind its belt. At this time in history, there weren't a lot of churches like this. Most of the churches were new, that people had just gotten say the church had just gotten started. But these people were some of the first ones to receive the Gospel message and in order to avoid the sin of apathy, he tells them to remember the former days, when after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of suffering.

Now if you look in your Bible there, that word sufferings is plural, which means they didn't just suffer a little bit, whoever these people were, they suffered a lot. He was just suffering after suffering after suffering for them in the past. And as you see, if you go through this the writer divides their sufferings up into some categories, when he says they were made into a public spectacle in verse 33. We don't know what that's referring to, but other than to say that whatever it was, it was out in the open, something happened to them that was visible for all to see. It occurred also it says through reproaches and tribulations and jail time, because verse 34, says, "for you showed sympathy to the prisoners." And that means the prisoners in church or those who got arrested from your congregation, because apparently, their newfound faith got them in trouble with the authorities, and they lost their freedom over it. It also says in these passages here, that they joyfully accepted the seizure of your property. And that means they had their belongings confiscated because when they were arrested, they were seen as an enemy of the state, the state swooped in and took their belongings away. But verse 34, says they accepted it joyfully, because they knew they had a better possession to come. And here's the application to this now, verse 35, says, "therefore do not throw your confidence away, which has a great reward." In other words, what he's telling them here is that remember the place you started from, so you can get back on track and restore some of your former passion, because I'm afraid you're losing it now.

I'm afraid you guys are becoming apathetic and careless and drifting off into unbelief. So, you need to remember where it all began. And the way he says this is touching, because it's almost as if he's saying to these people, you guys started off so well, what happened to you? And you are running the race so passionately for Christ, where did it go wrong? Because when you first got saved every time you open your mouth, it was Jesus, this, and Jesus, that. And when you first became a Christian, every time you talked, it was the God did this for me and God did that for me, even when they locked you up. You're like a walking talking Bible. Now you've become so cold, you hardly even talk about Him at all. Why? What went wrong? For others of you, he's telling them you used to read your Bible all the time, you will get up at 5am and study it everyday coffee or not. You would worship God before the sun came up. Now, we can't even get you through the church doors at 9:30, coffee or not. We can't drag in here before noon. He's asking them how did you become so indifferent? What stole away your joy? Because let's be honest, friends, this is what happens with older Christians. And we get lazy knowing they might know what I'm talking about, we start to lose some of our former joy, and we get into bad habits. So, when the government steps in and says you can't tell people about Jesus anymore, we say okay, we'll just be silent. We'll do it in a corner. Or when our coworkers approached us at work, and they tell us, you can't read your Bible on the job site, because it offends people. And it makes them mad, we say okay to that, too, don't we? Until we get to the point that we don't even read it at all. And the point of this passage is that if you see yourself going down that road, you want to stop before it's too late. Apathy is a gradual thing. It doesn't happen overnight; it creeps on you slowly. But it all begins when you start to compromise on the things you knew at first.

I'll never forget the time a pastor friend of mine, gave into sin and ruin his ministry as a result, because he blew up at someone in the office and lost his temper and they fired him. When I asked him why? He said this, he said it was because I stopped praying. I got so far gone from Christ, that I hadn't talked to Him in years. I didn't mean to, I wasn't planning on it, it just sort of happened. Friends, I want to tell you, the same thing could happen to you as well if you're not careful, so that the author is reminding you here to keep up your guard against that.

And it brings us to one more warning against the act of sinning willfully in here. Just to review these other ones, the first one is a warning of judgment. And the second one is a warning of punishment, which are very negative warnings, they're very strong ones to bring fear into our hearts to remind us of the damage that can happen if we do this. Thirdly, you see a warning against forgetting the former days, which is something we're all prone to do from time to time. You know it's been said the devil has killed more Christians or more churches with a pillow than he ever did with a whip. And it's so true, how many Christians ruined their testimony just because they became sleepy. And it brings us to one more warning against this act of sinning willfully and that's a warning to endure. A fourth warning against the act of sinning willfully in the passage is a warning to endure. Which means that after saying all these things, the author warns us not to quit because we'll see the Lord if we just persevere. And as I just told you, as you come to the bottom of this, that the author is going to transition from a negative approach to a positive one because after giving you this strong rebuke at the beginning, he's going to soften the blow.

And if you look in verse 35, he says it like this, “therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward for you have need of endurance.” And the word he uses for endurance here, it's a very interesting one. It's the Greek word *hypomone* it's a compound word from *Hupo*, under and *Monet* abiding, and it means to abide under something and bear the weight of it without complaint. It gives the idea of a person who carries a heavy load and a heavy pressure, but he doesn't stop and he doesn't quit, because he knows that the weight is worth it. That's how he tells you to go through the Christian life. Because you do this so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what was promised. And that's a reference to all the promises God gives us under the New Covenant. The promises of grace and mercy and forgiveness and salvation. That's all available to you but only if you persevere and endure. You don't get it if you stop somewhere in the middle of the race and check out on Him. And after saying that, verse 37 says this

for yet and a little while he was coming will come in will not delay. But my righteous one shall live by faith. And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.

If you notice this passage is in quotation marks, because it's another reference to the Old Testament, this one from the book of Habakkuk. And the setting is helpful, because it's given right before the Babylonians capture the city of Jerusalem and raise it to the ground, which would have devastated Habakkuk. As he's thinking about that horrible event, the thought of it left him reeling, because he wondered, why would God do that to his people? And the answer the Lord gives him is that “the just shall live by faith.” In other words, God says, I don't need to explain myself to you, Habakkuk, and give you all my reasons for destroying Jerusalem, you need to take it all in faith and trust Me. And here's why, because if you shrink back, my soul has no pleasure in you. It's not enough, He says, for you to believe in me today, Habakkuk, you have to do it tomorrow. And it's not enough for you to trust in me tomorrow, you have to deal with the day after that and the day after that, and the day after that. That's the way it works. You can't just start the fight, you have to finish it, you can't just begin the race, you have to cross the finish line. Because Jesus said, “he who endures to the end, shall be saved.” And he also says right above this “for yet in a little while he who was coming will come and will not delay,” which means the Lord is returning soon. And then the author sums all this up this way in verse 39, when he says this,

but we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but to those who have faith, to the persevering of the soul.

Now, if you're wondering why he says this at the end, the key word here is the word *we*. Because if you notice, the author doesn't say for I am not of those who shrink back, or some of you are not of those who shrink back or a few of you are not of those who shrink back while the rest of you are lost. He says *we* are not of those who shrink back, because he's putting himself in the same category with the audience here, because he believes these people are saved. The reason I point that out to you is because he's been pretty harsh with them so far. And his passage has been a pretty tough one to read through. He's given

them warning after warning after warning. And he's talking about hell and judgment and vengeance and wrath and fire and fury. So, he takes a moment at the end in order to buffer that a little bit and tell them but listen, I don't think this is talking about you. I don't believe you are going to face God's wrath. I think you'll face something better. Which is something that I really want you to take home this morning. You need this reminder just as much as they did, because I've met people who have told me that the book of Hebrews is the scariest book in the Bible for them so you might know what I'm talking about. It's the most frightening thing to read, because they think it's describing them here. And they read a passage like Hebrews 10. And they think they're lost and doomed and on their way to hell, because they've sinned and they've made mistakes. But when I hear that, I have to remind them, I don't think so that's not the way it's written here. This wasn't written to show you that you're lost, it was written to show you that you're saved. It's just giving you a warning not to go down that road. There was some this was written to build you up, not tear you down. And besides, if you were lost, you wouldn't be worried about all that. This is written to lost people who don't care. And if that bothers you, it means you care.

In fact, to prove this next time, we're going to start looking at the most famous chapter in the book of Hebrews and that's Hebrews 11, or the great Hall of Faith, in order to show you that you belong there. The whole reason that chapter is placed where it is in the Bible, is to demonstrate you have a place right alongside these other saints. Because it's not as if they got into heaven one way, and you got in another. And it's not like they were saved by works and you were saved by faith. It's always been about faith, the Old Testament and the New. Because if you look in your Bibles, after saying in verse 39, that we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the persevering of the soul. The very next verse says, "now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." And then it goes on and says, by faith, we understand that the whole world was prepared by the Word of God. And by faith, Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain. And by faith Enoch was taken up so that he would not see death. And by faith, Noah was called to build an ark. And by faith, Abraham, when he was called, went out, not knowing where he was going. And the reason he repeats that phrase, by faith, by faith, by faith, is to tell you that they're saved just like you. You're part of the great story of redemption that they started. Your name belongs at the end of that chapter. So, you need to be encouraged by all this. Because the idea is that yes, you're a nobody. But so were they. And yes, you're nothing but so are they. And yes, you're a rotten, stinking sinner who has saved by grace, and not by works, but it was the same way with them.

I heard one commentator say the Hall of Faith could be called the Hall of flaws because it's full of flawed people. So don't let this passage in Hebrews 10 drive you to despair, that was not the intention of it, it was made to have an opposite effect. It should convict you; it should remind you not to act like this. But after it does that you need to move on. Because we believe that once saved, always saved as a church, amen. We hold to the perseverance of the saints. In fact, just to wrap up our time this morning, and bring this all together. The story is told at the time, when the writers of the Westminster Confession, were putting that famous document together in the Jerusalem room of the Westminster Abbey in London. And they were trying to decide which doctrines to put in the list because they couldn't put them

all in there. Just too many things in the Bible to talk about, as they were going around the room and trying to figure out which ones they would like to discuss. And one doctrine that was at the top of everyone's list was the doctrine of eternal security, or the perseverance of the saints, or once saved, always saved. And when it came time to explain it, this is what they said. The Westminster Confession says this, it says they whom God hath accepted, in His beloved Son effectually, called and sanctified by His Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from a state of grace, but shall certainly persevere there into the end, and be eternally saved. Weren't they good? And it's a wonderful way to summarize this. They whom God has accepted will never fall away. That means you, that means me, that means all the saints that we just talked about in Hebrews 11. That means that the audience of this book, all those who put their faith in Christ will never be lost. That means they won't be lost when this world is lost. They won't be lost when this culture goes crazy. They won't be lost when everything around us falls apart, God will preserve them to the end. Do you believe that today? You should. You have every reason to.

And let me close this in a word of prayer and ask the Lord to drive this message home to our hearts. Heavenly Father, we have looked at some serious things today. Anytime you talk about the subject of hell, it's one that makes us all shudder and tremble at the horrors of it. And the thought that there are people in the world that are going there. There are times when we look at our own lives and wonder what's going on in the state of our souls because we sin and we do so many horrible things that we shouldn't do, Lord. But yet that's why our hope is in Christ, our hope is not in us. Our salvation does not depend on our behavior, or our merits, or our good deeds, or any of these things. It's dependent on our blessed Savior. And Lord, we thank You that Hebrews 10 comes right before Hebrews 11, to remind us that, it's all by faith. And as we talk about faith in the months to come, Lord, I pray that you would grow the faith of grace fellowship in this congregation, that our faith would drive us closer and closer to the cross, and that our salvation would be based on Him alone. For those here, Lord this morning, you hear about apathy in the here about the sin of carelessness and unbelief. And they say that is me that's describing my life. Lord, I pray that you would remind them that they can be saved right now. They don't have to go out and do a bunch of things first, they don't have to do the mass or go to confession or anything kind of ritualistic works like that. They can just call out to Jesus right where they are, and He will save them. Lord, thank you for such a Savior. Thank you for such a message that we've learned in this book, by Christ be glorified as we continue to study it. And may you continue to open our eyes to new and wonderful things. In Your Word. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.