

Hebrews 10:32-39 "The Need to Persevere"—part two\*\*

Main Idea: In Hebrews 10:26-39 we learn that we need to persevere in two ways if we're going to endure as we ought.

- I. We need to persevere if we are going to stand against sin (26-31).
- II. We need to persevere if we are going to stand for Christ in the face of suffering (32-39).
  - A. Remember what God enabled you to do in the past (32-34).
    1. You endured public reproach for Christ.
    2. You fellowshiped with others who suffered for Christ.
    3. You suffered with prisoners for Christ.
    4. You joyfully lost your possessions for Christ.
    5. You knew you had something better than what you lost.
  - B. Remember what God has promised to do for you in the future (35-38).
    1. He will reward the one who exhibits confidence (35).
    2. He will reward the one who does His will (36).
    3. He will reward the one who lives by faith (37-38).
  - C. Remember what God wants you to be in the present (39).
    1. We are not to be people who retreat.
    2. We are to be people who have faith.

Make It Personal: Here's something to do each day...

1. Think about what Christ endured for you.
2. Think about what Christ is preparing for you.
3. Think about what Christ wants to accomplish through you.

Did you hear what happened to one of our brothers recently? Listen to the following, taken from the March 2009 issue of *The Voice of the Martyrs*:

'Lateef,' was born and raised in a Coptic Christian family. He became a quiet Christian. In Egypt, where proselytizing is illegal, Lateef rarely shared his faith. Then in 1994, he says he heard God's voice compelling him to tell others about Christ. That is when he zealously began sharing the gospel with Muslims in his Upper Egyptian village.

Soon after, Lateef was arrested and jailed. When released, he returned to evangelizing. He was put

back in jail. This has gone on for the last 14 years, with Lateef's most recent arrest and release occurred in the summer of 2008.

Often when Lateef is arrested he undergoes extreme torture. During one arrest in 1996, an Egyptian state security officer punched him in the mouth and broke two of his teeth.

"He shouted, 'Don't talk about Christ, don't preach, don't evangelize,'" recalled Lateef. "He said, 'This dog will no longer talk about Jesus!'"

Once, he was locked in a toilet stall where guards urinated on him. Repeated electric shocks injured his feet and his lower abdomen was sliced so severely with a knife, his intestines spilled out. Guards allowed jailed Muslim soldiers to extinguish their lit cigarettes on Lateef's arm and shoulder.

But Lateef could not remain silent. Even imprisoned he shared Christ. On one occasion, while he was in jail, incarcerated Muslims asked Lateef to lead in prayers from the Quran. They assumed he was part of a conservative Islamic group, The Muslim Brotherhood. Lateef agreed, but he prayed using Bible verses. He was able to do this for four months. Many Muslims do not know what is in the Quran; they only know what Muslim teachers have told them. One inmate even told how Lateef's prayers were the first time he had heard prayers that were real.

When Lateef was caught evangelizing in prison he was tortured. Once he was tied to a ladder with ropes and the ladder was turned upside down. Lateef said, "Three security officers beat me all over my body with wooden sticks and said I was a kaffir (unbeliever) and deserved the beatings."

"I prayed for my persecutors because they did not know Jesus. I asked God to reveal the truth to them."

Lateef says God has allowed his repeated imprisonments and torture in order to be glorified.

"I'm like garbage. The glory is for the Lord only."

Through VOM's Families of Martyrs fund we gave Lateef a safe place to live. He says because of VOM's assistance he is encouraged to continue his gospel work in Egypt.

"The Lord said they will hate me without reason, but I just cannot stop talking about Him," he says.[\[1\]](#)

I'm not worthy to preach this message, for I've never experienced what we're about to hear from Hebrews 10. I've never been insulted for being a Christian, let alone beaten like Lateef. I've never spent a day in prison for telling people about Christ. I've never had my property confiscated. I've never lost even a dollar for following Christ, and to the contrary, I qualify for clergy discounts if I want them. So unlike the first readers of the epistle to the Hebrews, I've never experienced persecution for my allegiance to Christ, and therefore, based on my lack of experience, I'm not worthy to preach this message.

However, since I'm not called by God to preach my experiences but rather His Word, I will preach this message. Indeed, I must preach it. God wants us to hear what He has said in His Word in Hebrews 10, where in verses 26-39 He lays before us *the need to persevere*.

Richard Wurmbrand, the founder of *Voice of the Martyrs*, put it this way, "A faith that can be destroyed by suffering is not faith."[\[2\]](#) That's because true faith perseveres, and that by the grace of God.

How could it not be so? The Son of God denied Himself, left the splendors of heaven in order to obey His Father's will and become a man, so that He might suffer incredible abuse and scorn, ultimately dying the worst kind of death, death by crucifixion. He suffered for us, in our place, taking the punishment we deserve as sinners. By His stripes we are healed. And now He calls us to believe in Him and demonstrate our faith by following in His steps. Again, how could it not be so? Perseverance is an evidence of true faith.

"But I'm so weak!" you say. That's okay, for the Lord loves to work through people who admit they are

weak.

"I don't have what it takes to persevere!" you insist. Yet if you know Christ, you do and will, for He who began the good work in you will complete it (Phil. 1:6).

The book of Hebrews was written to encourage some first century Jewish followers of Christ who were weary, some even wavering. How do you help folks like that? The writer of Hebrews helped them by spending the first nine chapters demonstrating the superiority of the person and accomplishments of Jesus Christ. Why should I be willing to suffer for Jesus? The short answer is, *because He is worth it!*

Now, where precisely do we need perseverance? In Hebrews 10:26-39 we discover that it's needed in two areas. First, as we saw last time...

### I. We need to persevere if we are going to stand against sin (26-31).

In verses 26-28, the writer calls on his readers to ponder the seriousness of sinning, and specifically the seriousness of sinning against Christ in verse 29, and even more specifically, the seriousness of sinning against Christ now and standing before Him then, in verses 30-31. He's talking about the sin of apostasy, of saying you believe in Christ, and then turning from Christ and dragging His name through the mud. "If we deliberately keep on sinning," says verse 26, "after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left..."

But it's not enough to stand *against* sin. Perseverance involves standing *for* something, too, more accurately, for *someone*.

### II. We need to persevere if we are going to stand for Christ in the face of suffering (32-39).

The tone changes in verse 32 where the writer turns from his negative warning to positive encouragement.<sup>[3]</sup> His admonition has been firm to this point, but now he makes it clear that he believes the best in the case of his readers. They're not apostates, but rather, as Wiersbe explains, "His readers had given every evidence that they were true Christians."<sup>[4]</sup>

Yet if they're going to keep standing for Christ in the battle, there's something they need to do. Verse 32—"Remember."<sup>[5]</sup> Granted, we shouldn't live in the past, but we ought to regularly rehearse it. And if we're going to persevere, we need to use our minds and regularly call to remembrance three subjects.

**A. Remember what God enabled you to do in the past (32-34).** Verse 32—"Remember those earlier days after you had received the light." Notice these readers had *seen the light*. They'd been *illuminated* (KJV). That's the metaphor the Bible regularly uses to speak of conversion. Luke 1:79 says that the Messiah came "to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death." When Jesus commissioned Saul of Tarsus to preach, He told him in Acts 26:17-18, "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light."

And notice it's passive. *You received the light*. You didn't figure it out and patch things up with God. Rather, He turned on the switch and brought you out of the dark and into the light.

Do you remember the earlier days when God did that *for you*? Do you remember how He brought a preacher of His Word into your life—maybe a pastor, or co-worker, or mother—someone who shared the good news of Christ with you? And as you listened to their message, His Spirit took the blinders off of your sightless eyes, causing you for the first time to see the truth about Christ. You received the light!

But there's more to remember. Verse 32 continues, "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering." Once you come into the light you start seeing things that others still in the dark don't see. And they don't always like

hearing you talk about things they can't see. And sometimes they make you pay for it.

*Remember that*, says the writer. *Remember when you stood your ground* (lit. 'when you persevered;' it's "hupomeno" in the Greek, the same root word translated "persevere" in verse 36). These folks knew what persevering was all about, and they'd done it in the past.

In fact, they did it *in a great contest*<sup>[6]</sup> *in the face of suffering*. What kind of suffering? The writer calls to mind several types in verses 33-34. First, remember that...

1. *You endured public reproach for Christ*. He says, "Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution..."

Keep in mind these readers are Jewish. In some ways, it was more dangerous for a Jew to follow Christ than a Gentile in the first century. The Gentiles were polytheists, which added a degree of tolerance to Gentile converts. "You say you've come to believe in Jesus? No big deal. Just put him on the shelf with the rest of our pantheon of gods." But for the Jewish convert, it was a big deal and that's because the adherents of Judaism were monotheists. They believed in *one* God, and it was Jehovah, not Jesus. So for a Jew to confess publicly that he believed in the crucified Messiah Jesus meant he was immediately ostracized by his family and everyone in the village. It dried up his business contacts and alienated him from his neighbors—everything changed when he made it public that he was now a follower of Jesus. When a Jew signed on the dotted line for Jesus, he knew he would pay a price for it.<sup>[7]</sup>

And these readers did. The writer says they were "publicly exposed," and uses the Greek *theatrizo*, from which we get the words "theatrics" and "theater." It means "to put on a stage, to make a spectacle of." The KJV uses the vivid "gazingstock." In 1 Corinthians 4:9, using the same root word, Paul stated, "We have been made a *spectacle* to the whole universe."

Of course, that's what our Lord endured before us. On the cross, He was subjected to the cruel taunts of hateful men (Matt. 27:39-44). He was *publicly exposed*.

And what happened to Jesus is what happened to His followers. As Robert Gromacki explains, "The Christians were viewed as foolish clowns on the stage of life."<sup>[8]</sup> And on that stage they were exposed to both *insult* (that's verbal reproach) and *persecution* (that's the Greek term *thlipsis* which refers to intense pressure and tribulation).

But it wasn't just personal suffering they experienced. Verse 33 says, "At other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated." Remember that, secondly...

2. *You fellowshiped with others who suffered for Christ*. The writer uses the term *koinonoi*. You became *fellowshippers*, *partners*, *sharers* with others who suffered. These folks took fellowship seriously. That doesn't mean they got together to eat and play softball. They took fellowship seriously by standing up for and standing together with their brothers and sisters when they too were suffering for Christ. More specifically, remember thirdly that...

3. *You suffered with prisoners for Christ*. Verse 34 begins, "You sympathized with those in prison."<sup>[9]</sup> First century prisoners were poorly treated, to say the least. They were often beaten and horribly neglected. If the prisoner's family and friends didn't bring food and clothing, the prisoner often went without. And if a person did come to visit a prisoner, that visitor put himself at considerable risk.

That, of course, is what Jesus did for us. We were prisoners, prisoners of sin, and Jesus came to earth to visit us, to sympathize with us, to meet our needs as a servant. Even now, He continues to serve us as our great high priest and as one who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses (4:15). And remember this...

4. *You joyfully lost your possessions for Christ*. Notice verse 34 again, "And joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property." Did you catch that? I don't even like it when I lose my parking place at Wal Mart, but these brothers and sisters lost their property (lit. "the things belonging to you"), their

possessions, their “stuff.” But they didn’t lose it. It was taken from them by force. For no other reason than that they were Christians, their houses were plundered and their possessions confiscated. [\[10\]](#)

And here’s the stunning part. How did they respond to this injustice? Did they call the police? No, that wasn’t an option. Did they write a letter to their senator? No, no one was interested in helping the followers of Christ. Did they think of ways to get back at the thieves who took their stuff? No. The text says they responded *joyfully*, literally “with joy.”

I’ll be honest. I’m way too attached to the stuff I have, and that’s not good. My house, my study, my books, my sleep, my food...I’m way too attached to it all. And once in awhile the Lord exposes my sinful attachment to the stuff in my life by sending someone into my life who isn’t attached to their stuff, someone like these Hebrew Christians. If someone stole your car just for spite because you are a Christian, would you rejoice?

Jesus said we should. Hear His words in Matthew 5:11-12, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. *Rejoice* and be *glad*.” Rejoice? Be glad? Is that what He said? Yes.

James said the same thing in James 1:2, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.” Pure joy? Yes.

In Acts 5:41, “The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.” Rejoicing? Yes.

I read an interesting observation about our society made by commentator Raymond Brown. He noted that we are living in a society in which “people who have never had so much are hungry for more.” [\[11\]](#) Sadly, that mentality has spilled over into the church. Instead of using our stuff for ministry purposes, we cling to it. These folks were robbed, yet rejoiced.

How do you explain that? Simple. They knew something we’re prone to forget. In fact, *they* were prone to forget it, which is why the writer of Hebrews calls them to remember, fifthly, that...

5. *You knew you had something better than what you lost.* “...because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.” There’s the key. Sure, the loss is great, but what’s coming is greater.

“Rejoice and be glad,” said Jesus in Matthew 5:12. Why? His answer, “Because great is your reward in heaven.” We’re living for something better, beloved.

Peter says there is “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pet. 1:4-5).”

Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:1, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”

The stuff we have is going to perish anyway, but if we use it well or lose it well we’re actually making an investment for eternity. Let that sink in. *Use it well*, and God should allow, *lose it well*. Over and over the Scriptures call us to live, not for this world, but for what’s coming.

Matthew 6:19-20 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.”

Colossians 3:2-4 “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

2 Timothy 4:8 “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

Galatians 6:8-9 “The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Hebrews 11:16 says, “Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”

I’m helped by an observation John Calvin made, “Wherever the feeling of heavenly good things is strong, there is no taste for the world with its allurements, so that no sense either of poverty or of shame can overwhelm our minds with sorrow.”<sup>[12]</sup>

If you want to overcome an inordinate attachment to the stuff of this world, then Calvin says you need to make sure the *feeling of heavenly good things is strong*.

Is persecution a bad thing? Yes, but so much good can come out of it. In the case of these Hebrew Christians, their past afflictions resulted in some wonderful benefits, as Raymond Brown points out. One, it had deepened their fellowship. Two, it had increased their compassion. Three, it had demonstrated their resilience. And four, it had sharpened their priorities. As Brown concludes, “Christians need to remember that adversity is rarely a vicious enemy; it is often a valuable ally. It reminds us of the imperishable things which matter most.”<sup>[13]</sup>

So if you’re going to persevere, you need to remember. First, remember what God enabled you to do in the past. But don’t live in the past. Secondly...

**B. Remember what God has promised to do for you in the future (35-38).** We come to the punch line in verses 35-36...

“*So do not throw away your confidence.*” The same word appears in Mark 10:50 to speak of the blind beggar who *flung away* his coat when Jesus called for him. Don’t do that with your confidence, your courage, your boldness (the same word appears in verse 19). If you belong to Christ, confidence is something you *have*, but you can throw it away if you’re not careful. And here’s a truth that will prevent that from happening...

“*It will be richly rewarded.*” The reward is coming guaranteed. But who will God reward? Our text says He will reward the person who does three things.

1. *He will reward the one who exhibits confidence (35).* “So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.”

2. *He will reward the one who does His will (36).* “You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.”

3. *He will reward the one who lives by faith (37-38).* “For in just a very little while, ‘He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.’”

The writer is quoting from Habakkuk 2:3-4. In that book the prophet Habakkuk was disturbed by the wickedness he saw all around him, so he cried out to God to do something. God’s response to him was a call to be patient, with this charge, “The just shall live by faith.”

This text from Habakkuk is quoted three times in the New Testament: in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and here. As Wiersbe explains, “Romans emphasizes ‘the just,’ Galatians deals with ‘shall live,’ and Hebrews centers on ‘by faith.’”<sup>[14]</sup>

That was a timely message for this first century audience. Remember what God has promised to do in the future, my friends, and realize it won't be long now. I love the first words of verse 37, "In just a little while." Kind of reminds me of my high school cross country coach, "Hang in there guys. You're almost done. The workout will end *in just a little while.*"

Not long ago I had a CT scan done at the medical center. There's some apprehension that goes along with lying on a table and listening to a machine whirling around your head. But when the lab tech breaks the silence, "You okay, Mr. Brandt? We'll be done *in just a little while,*" it makes a big difference. Okay, not much longer. I can make it.

Are you suffering for Christ, my friend? It won't be much longer. Which brings us to the third and final subject we must remember if we're going to persevere...

**C. Remember what God wants you to be in the present (39).** And what's that? Verse 39 —"But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." Simply put...

1. *We are not to be people who retreat.* To the contrary...

2. *We are to be people who have faith.* Who *believe* and are saved. That's who we are. That's our identity. We're people who believe in God and His promises and thus are saved. Like Lateef did. Like a whole host of people did in chapter eleven, as we'll see next time.

It really boils down to this. Being people of faith is synonymous with being people who love the Lord Jesus Christ. If we really love Him, we'll stand against sin and stand up for Him no matter what. Thomas a Kempis offers this convicting insight:

"Jesus hath now many lovers of his heavenly kingdom, but few bearers of his cross. He hath many desirous of comfort, but few of tribulation. He findeth many companions of his table, but few of his abstinence. All desire to rejoice with him, but few will suffer anything for him. Many follow Jesus unto the breaking of bread, but few seem to the drinking of the cup of his passion. Many reverence his miracles, but few take the ignominy of his cross. Many love Jesus as long as adversities do not happen. Many praise and bless him as long as they receive any comforts from him. But if Jesus hide himself and leave them for a while, they fall either into complaining or into too much dejection of mind. But they that love Jesus for Jesus, and not for some comfort of their own, bless him in all tribulation and anguish of heart as well as in the highest comfort. And although he should never choose to give them comfort, they notwithstanding would ever praise him and always wish to give him thanks. O how powerful is the pure love of Jesus which is mixed with no self-love or self-interest."<sup>[15]</sup>

That's what's needed... to *love Jesus for Jesus.*

Make It Personal: Here's something to do each day...

1. *Think about what Christ endured for you.* A friend's betrayal. Gethsemane. Pilate's court. Golgotha. Drops of blood. Hell's torment. His Father's wrath. For you, beloved, and for me. If you want your love for Christ to increase, think about what He endured for you. Then...

2. *Think about what Christ is preparing for you.* A place at the banquet table with Him. An eternal home with Him. A glorified body so you can enjoy Him forever!

3. *Think about what Christ wants to accomplish through you.* If He wanted you in heaven right now, He'd take you. If since He's left you here, it's because there's something He's wanting to accomplish both in and through you.

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[1] *Voice of the Martyrs*, March 2009, pp. 4-5.

[2] Information taken from *Voice of the Martyrs*, March 2009 magazine and insert.

[3] The NIV omits the first word of verse 32, “But,” which indicates the contrast.

[4] Warren Wiersbe, p. 316.

[5] The sense of the present tense verb is actually, “Keep on remembering.”

[6] “Great contest” is *athlesis* in the Greek, from which we get “athletics.” One of the reasons I love athletics is because it teaches us about the value of perseverance.

[7] This helps explain why Paul insisted that the Gentile Christians take an offering to help their Jewish brothers down in Judea when famine hit, for the Jews’ neighbors and family members certainly weren’t going to help.

[8] Robert Gromacki, p. 178.

[9] The KJV says, “For ye had compassion of me in my bonds,” referring to the writer.

[10] Hebrews 12:4 says, “In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.” That seems to indicate that the persecution hadn’t resulted yet in the loss of life.

[11] Raymond Brown, p. 194.

[12] John Calvin, p. 153.

[13] Raymond Brown, p. 192-3.

[14] Warren Wiersbe, p. 317.

[15] Thomas a Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* II.xi., quote taken from Philip Hughes, pp. 433-4.