

Hebrews 10:26-39 "The Need to Persevere"—part one **

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).
 - A. Ponder the seriousness of sinning (26-28).
 1. If we sin deliberately, there's no longer a sacrifice for sins (26).
 - a. Christ's sacrifice doesn't give us a license to sin.
 - b. Christ's sacrifice gives us the ability and desire to get rid of sin.
 2. If we sin deliberately, we have reason to fear the judgment to come (27).
 3. Under the law of Moses, those who did sin deliberately were put to death (28).
 - B. Ponder the seriousness of sinning against Christ (29).
 1. What should happen to a person who stomps on the Son of God?
 2. What should happen to a person who treats Christ's blood cheaply?
 3. What should happen to a person who insults the Spirit of grace?
 - C. Ponder the seriousness of sinning against Christ now and standing before Him then (30-31).
 1. We ought to fear the Lord.
 2. We ought to fear falling into the hands of the Lord.
 3. We ought to thank the Lord that He took away our reason to fear.
- 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).
 - B. Remember what God has promised to do for you in the future (35-38).
 - C. Remember what God wants you to be in the present (39).
 1. We are not to be people who throw in the towel.
 2. We are to be people who exhibit real faith.

Take Inventory: Two simple questions to ask yourself...

1. Am I taking daily steps to get rid of sin?
2. Am I taking daily steps to build my life on Christ?

Jesus Christ gave His life for us. That's why we're here today. Christ came to earth on a rescue mission, chose to die in the cross in the place of undeserving sinners like us, took the penalty for our sin and paid it in full, experienced the wrath of God so we don't have to, offers to us the merit of His perfect life so that through faith in Him we may be credited by God as righteous and fit for heaven, and then verified the sufficiency and finality of His rescue mission by defeating death, rising again on the third day. That's the reason, indeed *He* is the reason why we are here today, and if we've trusted in Him as our Savior and Lord, heading for heaven.

Every so often I'll get the question, "Are you one of those people who believes 'Once saved, always saved?'" And, of course, it's sort of a loaded question because typically the person asking it has the notion that to believe in the doctrine of eternal security is to give people a license to sin without consequence. I don't hesitate to affirm that salvation is forever, that those whom God saves He indeed *saves forever*, that yes, once a person is truly saved that person is always saved. I believe that, of course, because that's what a host of Bible passages teach, such as John 10:27-29, Romans 8:28-39, and 1 John 5:11-13, for starters.

However, I also believe that true Christians are those who, once saved by faith, will indeed work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), and they'll do so because "it is God who works in them" (Phil. 2:13). Yes, I believe that God perseveres to keep His chosen ones secure, and I believe it because the Bible teaches so. But I also believe that those whom Christ has saved are responsible to persevere, enabled by God's grace, for sure, but responsible nonetheless. And I believe it because the Bible teaches so in passage after passage. This morning we come to such a passage, a text that lays before us *the need to persevere*.

Hebrews 10:36 says, "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised." Did you catch that? The Scriptures call God's people, those who profess to believe in Christ, *to persevere*. It's not just in Hebrews that we hear such instruction either...

Jesus said in Matthew 10:22 "All men will hate you because of me, but he who *stands firm to the end* will be saved." Again, Jesus said in Matthew 24:13, "But he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

Paul gave this personal testimony of his own perseverance in 2 Timothy 2:10, "Therefore *I endure everything* for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. Two verses later the apostle applied the doctrine of perseverance to us, stating in 2 Timothy 2:12, "If we *endure*, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us."

James talked about perseverance in James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him."

Once saved, always saved? Yes. And this is what those once saved will do. *Stand firm to the end. Endure everything. Persevere under trial.* Perfectly? No. Yet by the grace of God they will work out what God has worked in them.

Where does perseverance show up in the life of a believer? Where do you see the evidence of it? Hebrews 10 shows us. In Hebrews 10:26-39 we learn that we who know Christ need to persevere in two specific areas. We'll investigate the first area this week, touch on the second at the end of our study and return to it next week, the Lord willing.

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

Let's face the facts. It's not easy to stand against sin, even as a believer. A non-believer can't stand against sin, not in ways that please God. We who know Christ can stand, but to do so requires perseverance.

We've seen in the first nine plus chapters of Hebrews that Christ is superior—that's why we can stand against sin if we know Him. His work on the cross broke the power of sin and death that once bound us (Heb. 2:14-15). He is our high priest who now gives us access to God's throne where we can obtain grace to help in our time of need (Heb. 4:16).

In the immediate context of Hebrews 10:19-25, we discovered that we have two resources and three responsibilities. We have *confidence* to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus—that's verse 19. And we have a *great priest*—that's verse 21. And because of those amazing resources, we have a responsibility to God, to the world, and to each other: to draw near to God (verse 22), to hold unswervingly to our profession of hope (verse 23), and to consider each other (verse 24), specifically to look for ways to encourage each other to manifest love and good deeds that reflect Christ.

That's what we should be doing if we know Christ, coming to God, holding our profession before the world, and considering each other. Here's what we should *not* be doing if we know Christ...

Verse 26 begins, "If we deliberately keep on sinning." The writer extends a warning here (and note that he includes himself in it, "if *we*"), a warning against sinning. This warning which runs through verse 31 invites us to ponder three things about sinning, each of which highlight the necessity of perseverance.

A. Ponder the seriousness of sinning (26-28).

There's a scene in the Andy Griffith show in which Barney is sharing what he learned in church that morning. "What'd the preacher talk about?" he was asked. "Sin," Barney answered. "What'd he say about it?" came the followup. "He said he was against it," Barney concluded.

You say, "We don't need to talk about the seriousness of sin. That's a given for Christians, isn't it?" Not according to the writer of Hebrews. William Barclay observes, "Every now and again the writer to the Hebrews speaks with a sternness that is almost without parallel in the New Testament. Few writers have such a sense of the sheer horror of sin."^[1]

And why such a sheer horror of sin? Barclay offers this assessment, "He lived in a day when the Church had been under attack and would be under attack again. Its greatest peril was from the possible evil living and apostasy of its members. A Church in such circumstances could not afford to carry members who were a bad advertisement for the Christian faith. Its members must be loyal or nothing...The greatest handicap the Church has is the unsatisfactory lives of professing Christians."^[2]

If Barclay is right, then we in the church today ought to be doing a whole lot more of what the writer of Hebrews is doing. We ought to be talking about the seriousness of sinning, and specifically the seriousness of sinning deliberately. We learn three things about such sin here.

1. *If we sin deliberately, there's no longer a sacrifice for sins (26).* "If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left..."

Please notice that we're not talking about one act of sin here. The present tense indicates the writer has in mind repeated acts of sin, an established pattern of sin. And *deliberate* sin, to be precise.

Under the old covenant, there were two basic types of sin, sins of ignorance and sins of presumption, also called "high handed sins." There were no Levitical sacrifices for such deliberate sins. They were punishable by death.

Notice that the writer has in mind people who "have received the knowledge of the truth." These are folks who know better. They've learned the truth about Christ. They know that Christ came to save sinners *from their sin*. It's unthinkable that those whom Christ died to deliver from sin would willfully keep on sinning. Robert Gromacki explains, "Sinning without the impartation of all the facts is bad, but sinning when all of the divine truth has been revealed is worse."^[3]

Please realize that...

a. Christ's sacrifice doesn't give us a license to sin. To the contrary...

b. Christ's sacrifice gives us the ability and desire to get rid of sin. If you are in Christ, you are a *new creation* (2 Cor. 5:17). "You were called to be free," says Galatians 5:13. "But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature."

What happens if a person does? What happens if a person who has come to know the truth about Christ deliberately keeps on sinning? The writer says that when that happens, *no sacrifice for sins is left*. Why not? We'll see in a moment.

2. *If we sin deliberately, we have reason to fear the judgment to come (27).* "...but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God." Most of us don't think enough about what's coming. We've grown accustomed to "bail-out plans." We think we can live however we want and someone will bail us out. We *expect* somebody to bail us out. But for the person who deliberately keeps on sinning, there will be no bail-out at the divine tribunal. The only expectation such a person ought to have is a *fearful* expectation of judgment.

Is the writer saying that true believers can lose their salvation? No. He says the coming fire will consume the *enemies of God*, not His children. But not everyone who has heard the truth and professed to believe the truth are truly His children.

To establish his point, the writer cites case law from Israel's past. He reminds his readers that...

3. *Under the law of Moses, those who did sin deliberately were put to death (28).* "Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." That's a reference to instruction given in Deuteronomy 17:2-7, instruction about what to do if a person in Israel turned from the Lord and worshipped other gods. If that happens, says the Lord, investigate it thoroughly, make sure it's not hearsay, make sure at least two witnesses verify the unthinkable crime of apostasy, then, if it's true, stone the guilty man or woman. Yes, God is merciful, but when a person living in the promised land deliberately violated His law by turning from Him to another god, the penalty was death without mercy.

The writer's point? It's important that we, the people of God, ponder the seriousness of sinning. But he has a particular sin in mind in Hebrews 10 which he identifies next.

B. Ponder the seriousness of sinning against Christ (29). "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?"

Verse 29 makes it clear that the writer has a specific sin in mind, the sin of apostasy. Calvin explains, "He is not dealing here with this or that kind of sin but he is exposing by name those who withdraw themselves of their own accord from the fellowship of the Church. There is a great difference between individual lapses and a universal desertion of this kind."^[4]

I should point out that we've come to the fourth of five sequential exhortations found in Hebrews. Warren Wiersbe explains and summarizes these warning texts, "The believer who begins to *drift* from the Word (Heb. 2:1-4) will soon start to *doubt* the Word (Heb. 3:7-4:13). Soon, he will become *dull* towards the Word (Heb. 5:11-6:20) and become 'lazy' in his spiritual life. This will result in *despising* the Word, which is the theme of this exhortation."^[5]

Apparently, that's what was happening in the lives of some professing Jewish Christians at the time, and that's the person the writer has in mind in this warning. He's talking to folks who came to believe in Messiah Jesus, or so it seemed. But when the hardness of the Christian life settled in, they began to have second thoughts. They started drifting from the Word, then began doubting it, eventually became dull to it, and now are on the verge of despising it and chucking the whole thing.

So the writer isn't talking about just any type of sin here. He has in mind specifically the sin of apostasy. He's talking about the potential scenario of people who once heard the truth and professed to

believe it, but then reneged on their apparent commitment to Christ.

And keep in mind the context. According to verse 25, a key evidence that these folks are heading down a slippery slope is that they have stopped meeting together with God's people. They got distracted and developed the dangerous habit of forsaking the church's public meetings. In time, as we'll see in verse 28, it moved beyond mere distraction to a settled dissatisfaction and eventually a disdain of Christ and His church.

You say, "How could that happen?" In his commentary Raymond Brown points out how the changing social conditions in the first century contributed to this. When the church first began (around the year AD 30), a lot of devout Jews, including priests, were brought to faith in Jesus as Messiah (Acts 6:7). Then the Jewish leaders began an all out assault to stop the spread of Christianity amongst the Jews. Saul of Tarsus led the way (Acts 8:1-3; 9:1-2), that is, of course, until Jesus brought him to his knees on the road to Damascus. Not long after this, some of the Jewish Christians began insisting that followers of Jesus still had to keep the ceremonial Jewish laws. At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the church leadership deliberated and decided, "No, the Gentiles don't need to keep the ceremonial laws to be saved." Paul himself, led by the Holy Spirit, clarified in his letter to the Galatians that a person is justified by faith alone, and not by the works of the law.^[6]

So by the time the epistle of Hebrews was written in the mid 60s, a controversy was brewing and blood had been shed over it. It's not hard to imagine that some folks from Jewish backgrounds who had professed belief in Jesus as Messiah were now fed up with what they considered to be "the lax standards" in the church. They had joined the church with the understanding that they'd still be keeping the Jewish laws, or at least some of them. And perhaps they hadn't fathomed the fullness of the fury they'd receive from those who said they'd abandoned their Jewish heritage. And so in time they *drifted*, then *doubted*, then became *dull*, and eventually *despised* the word they once professed to believe.

To help us appreciate the seriousness of sinning against Christ, the writer invites us to think about a threefold question.

1. *What should happen to a person who stomps on the Son of God?* That's the scenario the writer raises in verse 28, "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot?"

The verb translated "trampled" is a strong one. It indicates we're talking about a person who doesn't merely deny Christ but *disdains* Him, and even *despises* Him.

And specifically, he tramples on the *Son of God*. That seems to indicate that the person in mind is particularly disdaining the truth about Christ's deity. What should happen to such a person, to one who would walk all over the Son of God?

2. *What should happen to a person who treats Christ's blood cheaply?* To a person "who has treated as an unholy thing [Greek *koinos*, something that's common, of little value] the blood of the covenant that sanctified him?"

These words identify a person who shows contempt, not only for the Christ's deity, but also for Christ's atoning work. He can't deny the historicity of Christ's death, but he can discredit it's significance. He treats Christ's blood, a reference to His death on the cross, as an *ordinary* death, no different from the death of any other man.

And who's doing this? Not an atheist, but a person who once claimed to believe in Christ. Here's a person who treats cheaply the blood "that sanctified him." Based on the word "sanctified" here, some Bible scholars believe the writer is here talking about a truly saved person who has backslidden, similar to the person Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 3 where he says, "who will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Cor. 3:15). That's possible, but if the sin addressed here is *apostasy*, I would suggest we're talking about a person who *professed* Christ but never truly *possessed* Christ.^[7]

Think about it. Here's a man who, while in the church, participated in communion services in which Christ's blood was cherished, who even professed to believe in that blood. But now he treats the blood of the Savior as a common thing, and his actions reveal something about his so called faith. As Philip Hughes explains, "His faith has been simulated, not genuine, and his secession from the community of believers reveals that, far from thankfully trusting in the blood of Jesus for forgiveness, he has *profaned* it, or literally, counted it as common."^[8]

3. *What should happen to a person who insults the Spirit of grace?* There aren't many references to the Holy Spirit in Hebrews, for the writer's purpose is to exalt the superiority of the Son. But here's one. "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished...who has insulted the Spirit of grace?" The Holy Spirit has come, as Christ predicted, to convict sinners of their need of Christ and grant sinners saving faith in Christ. He enables the sinner to see that God saves a person by His grace and not by human merit. Consequently, for a person to profess Christ and then turn from Christ is to insult the Spirit of grace.

This is serious, beloved. Consider the warning again. *If we keep on sinning, no sacrifice for sins is left.* If a person living under the Mosaic Law was killed for turning away from the Lord, how much more severely should a person be punished who tramples the Son of God, and treats His blood cheaply, and insults the Spirit of grace?

I met with a couple once who were separated. Both professed to know Christ as Savior. I questioned the man for leaving his wife, for he lacked biblical grounds. He knew it was wrong, but justified himself, asserting that God understood his actions. I said, "Friend, this isn't merely about your marriage. By your actions you are dragging the name of Christ through the mud." A few weeks later, we met again and he confessed he was deeply gripped by that statement. "I hadn't thought about the fact that by my actions I was dragging Christ through the mud."

How about you, my friend? Would you ponder today the seriousness of sinning against Christ, and take inventory of your life? Maybe you're not denying Him openly like an apostate, but are you discrediting Him by willfully doing things that violate His Word?

We've pondered the seriousness of sinning. And more specifically, we've pondered the seriousness of sinning against Christ. Thirdly, the writer of Hebrews invites us to...

C. Ponder the seriousness of sinning against Christ now and standing before Him then (30-31). "For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' [a quotation of Deut. 32:35] and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' [a quotation of Deut. 32:36, also Ps. 135:14]. It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We learn three things from those words...

1. *We ought to fear the Lord.* The Bible repeatedly calls on us to fear the Lord and gives us ample reason to do so...

Psalm 76:7 "You alone are to be feared. Who can stand before you when you are angry?"

Psalm 90:11 "Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you."

Luke 12:5 "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."

2 Corinthians 5:11 "Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men."

Hebrews 12:28-29 "Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'"

2. *We ought to fear falling into the hands of the Lord.* Indeed, the writer says it is a *dreadful*

thing to fall into His hands. That's the same word he used back in verse 27 to indicate what awaits those who deliberately sin, "only a *fearful* expectation of judgment and of raging fire."

You say, "But didn't David say he'd rather fall into the hands of God rather than the hands of men?" Yes he did, in 2 Samuel 24:14. But he could say that because he was a repentant sinner. But to deliberately sin, and to deliberately sin against Christ as an apostate and then to fall into the hands of the Lord you denied, now that's a fearful prospect.

Now, what about a person who professes Christ as Savior, then under persecution renounces Him, yet later repents? Can that person be restored? Indeed. That person isn't an apostate, for an apostate is someone who has professed then later renounced Christ and put his trust in Christ-denying, Christ-demeaning beliefs and practices. Yet even such a person as that, should he repent and truly come to know Christ, is not beyond the reach of the long arms of the Sovereign Lord. As Philip Hughes explains, "Repentance on the part of those who, through human frailty, have collapsed under persecution is itself clear evidence that they were not guilty of the hardheartedness of apostasy."^[9]

And I should add that although this warning is real and severe, the writer clearly tells his readers he *doesn't* expect it to happen to them, for he concludes his argument with these words in verse 39, "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved."

So yes, we ought to fear the Lord, but furthermore...

3. *We ought to thank the Lord that He took away our reason to fear.* Isaac Watts put it this way in 1707 when he described the blessings of Christ as a wonderful banquet, and that we, because of God's grace, are guests at that banquet...

*How sweet and awful is the place
With Christ within the doors,
While everlasting love displays
The choicest of her stores!*

*Here every bowel of our God
With soft compassion rolls;
Here peace and pardon bought with blood
Is food for dying souls.*

*While all our hearts and all our songs
Join to admire the feast,
Each of us cry, with thankful tongues,
"Lord, why was I a guest?"*

*"Why was I made to hear Thy voice,
And enter while there's room,
When thousands make a wretched choice,
And rather starve than come?"*

*'Twas the same love that spread the feast
That sweetly drew us in;*

*Else we had still refused to taste,
And perished in our sin.*

*Pity the nations, O our God!
Constrain the earth to come;
Send Thy victorious Word abroad,
And bring the strangers home.*

*We long to see Thy churches full,
That all the chosen race
May with one voice, and heart and soul,
Sing Thy redeeming grace.*

We need to persevere, brothers and sisters, to persevere by *standing against sin*. But there's a second area where perseverance is necessary which the writer addresses next.

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

We need to persevere *against sin*, and *for Christ*, and especially for Christ as we face the opposition of a world that's against Christ. That's what the first readers of this epistle were facing. To help them persevere, the writer calls on them *to remember* (verse 32), and specifically to remember three things. I'll give you the skeleton and we'll flesh it out next time.

A. Remember what God enabled you to do in the past (32-34).

B. Remember what God has promised to do for you in the future (35-38).

C. Remember what God wants you to be in the present (39). And what's that?

1. *We are not to be people who throw in the towel.* Rather...

2. *We are to be people who exhibit real faith.* Richard Wurmbrand went so far as to say, "A faith that can be destroyed by suffering is not faith."^[10]

You say, "Who's Richard Wurmbrand?" Richard Wurmbrand was born one hundred years ago on March 24, 1909 in Bucharest, Romania, the youngest of four boys in a Jewish family. At the age of 29 he and his wife, Sabina, met a carpenter who led them to place their faith in Messiah Jesus. Then World War II began, and Wurmbrand, now a pastor began evangelizing the occupying Nazi soldiers for which he was repeatedly beaten and arrested. In 1945, the Communists took over Romania and called for a "Congress of Cults" in which many religious leaders came forward to swear loyalty to the new communist regime. At that meeting, Sabina told her husband to "wipe the shame from the face of Jesus." Richard, knowing the cost, stepped forward and told the 4,000 delegates that their duty as Christians was to glorify God and Christ alone. He paid a great price for that stand.

In the years that followed Pastor Wurmbrand (and his wife) was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured again and again for Christ. He was sentenced to 25 years in prison, spending three years in solitary confinement, but was released and sent to the United States in 1965. The following year he testified before a U.S. Senate committee about the treatment of Christians in communist Romania, and even removed his shirt to show the senators his 18 deep torture wounds.

After the fall of communism in Romania in 1989, Richard and Sabina returned to their homeland after 25 years of exile. Richard preached a message of love and forgiveness. In 2000 the Lord called Sabina home to heaven, as He did Richard in 2001, but not before they founded Voice of the Martyrs, a ministry devoted to informing the world of the plight of the persecuted followers of Christ in 52 restricted and hostile nations. Five of these countries—Cuba, North Korea, China, Vietnam, and Ethiopia—have been on VOM's list of restricted nations for more than 30 years.

With that background, ponder again this observation by Richard Wurmbbrand, "A faith that can be destroyed by suffering is not faith." That's why we must persevere both *against sin* and *for Christ*, and enabled by His grace, we can and will.

Take Inventory: Two simple questions to ask yourself...

1. *Am I taking daily steps to get rid of sin?*
2. *Am I taking daily steps to build my life on Christ?*

**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] William Barclay, p. 123.

[2] Barclay, p. 124.

[3] Robert Gromacki, p. 174.

[4] John Calvin, p. 146.

[5] Warren Wiersbe, p. 315.

[6] Raymond Brown, p. 190.

[7] Leon Morris explains, "As elsewhere in this epistle, the idea of being sanctified refers to the initial act of being set apart for God, not the progressive growth in grace it usually means in other NT writings." Leon Morris, p. 107.

[8] Philip Hughes, p. 423.

[9] Philip Hughes, p. 420.

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