

The Just Shall Live By Faith

In Sue's last lesson, Paul concluded the presentation of his case proving Christ's superiority over angels, Moses, and the Old Covenant with its priests and animal sacrifices. In the remaining chapters of Hebrews, Paul will be trying to show them there is a much better life available if they will fully follow Christ.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Paul mentions two advantages we have as believers, the first being that we have access to the Holy of Holies and can enter with boldness. On the Day of Atonement, the priest entered the holiest place of all with fear and trembling, knowing that if he neglected the smallest point prescribed by law, he could expect nothing but death. Leviticus 22:9 warned, *"They shall therefore keep My ordinance, lest they bear sin for it and die thereby, if they profane it: I the LORD sanctify them."* Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu were a prime example of what could happen. When they took their censers, put fire in them and added incense they offered strange fire before the LORD, contrary to what He had commanded. The result: God sent down fire and consumed them. So the priests' fear was warranted.

However, we can enter boldly into the presence of God because of Jesus. Before Christ, the veil in the temple separated us from God's presence. When you think about it, the veil was really there as a protection for man because no sinful man could enter God's presence and live. The veil was probably as high as the temple which would be about 30 ft. But when Jesus was crucified, the veil was torn from the top to the bottom, something no man could physically do. Only God would be able to tear it from top to bottom. The tearing of the veil signified that we could now approach God ourselves; Jesus opened the door to give us access to the Father: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."*

We enter *"by a new and living way"*... *prosphatos* which means lately slaughtered, freshly killed, recently made. The sacrifice of Jesus is always *fresh* on the mind of God. Even though it happened centuries ago it is not stale or invalid. The *living* Jesus takes us into the presence of God. Under the Old Covenant, which was *growing old* and ready to *vanish*, the priest had access because of the blood of a dead animal. Under the New Covenant, which is *recent* and *fresh*, we have continual access (no priest needed) because of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus who rose from the dead..

Our second advantage is that we have a High Priest who is over the house of God. Paul already identified what that house is in Hebrews 3:6, "whose house we are." As he explained in Ephesians 2, *"Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit."* Jesus Christ lives in us. We have a completely available and perfectly able priest in control of the house, "whose house we are." Because Christ lives in us, we are exhorted to do three things: (the Let us phrases)

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water

- A Sincere Heart

He tells us to draw near with a sincere or true heart. When we're in a time of trouble or testing, most of us can sincerely draw near to the Lord: we need help! We should come to Him with our worries but God desires more than that. He wants us spend time with Him, enjoy being in His presence, share our whole life with Him -total fellowship. He is also worthy of our gratitude and worship.

- Full of Faith

Knowing He loves us as His own child, we can put our faith in Him and totally trust Him. Our dependence no longer rests upon the weak abilities we have as frail humans; our dependence now rests upon the power of the Spirit of the living God who dwells in us! He will always be there for us and nothing or no one can take us from His hand. Having the assurance that God in us will be able to accomplish everything that needs to be done in our lives should make us full of faith!

- Cleansed of Guilt

A guilty conscience robs us of our joy and takes away our peace. Can we rightly approach God when we lack joy and have no peace? Of course we can, but it's better when we can draw near to him with a clear conscience, with our hearts made clean. Shame loads us down, but through Jesus our hearts are sprinkled clean. The guilt is gone and our conscience is clear.

- Washed Pure

Jesus not only cleans our guilty conscience - He also washes our whole bodies clean. He makes us pure, both inside and out. Our outward life has been cleansed, rearranged, and changed by our new life in Christ.

The encouragement to draw near wouldn't have been mentioned unless it was necessary; Paul knew the Hebrews were discouraged by persecution and hard times - they focused on that rather than turning to God for help; they forgot about Christ's complete sacrifice and were ready to go back to animal sacrifice. Often we pull away from God when we are discouraged but that is the exact time we need to go to Him; we need to draw near in full assurance that the price that Christ paid for our sin at Calvary is paid in full and entirely sufficient.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful

- Discouragement made them waver from the truth; Paul is encouraging them to stand strong: to stop thinking about going back to Judaism and remain firm in their relationship with Jesus; he was not telling them to hold on to their salvation but to hold on to their confession of faith

- James 1 tells us that he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind - unstable in all his ways

- In Hebrews 2, Paul told them to take more earnest heed to the things they had heard so they wouldn't drift away; to hold fast to the truth.

- You can put your trust in God and His promises because He is faithful to keep His Word ; Numbers 23:19 (NLT) reassures us: *"God is not a man, so He does not lie. He is not human, so He does not change his mind. Has He ever spoken and failed to act? Has he ever promised and not carried it through?"*

Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together

"Consider one another"; don't just think about yourself. Look around. *Is someone you know depressed? Discouraged? Downhearted? Struggling with temptation?* If we take little notice of others, how can we serve them?

"Stir up", which means to incite or provoke or stimulate but in a good way. We should "stir up" and provoke each other toward godliness. Our lives should exemplify knowing Christ. The result of our example should be love and good works in the lives of other believers.

One way to achieve this is by not neglecting to meet together. Our times of gathering should bring us closer together as the body of Christ and be a time of exhortation. Some of the Hebrew believers had already started to be absent from church fellowship - avoiding it when they needed it most. These gatherings should be encouraging, a time to come alongside other believers in a way that will strengthen them in Christ. Encouragement may mean bearing a load for them. It may mean prayer, companionship, or sharing how God has proved Himself through

experiences in your own life. Paul made this point in Hebrews 3:13, *“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”* We need each other in our Christian walk.

Paul also emphasizes that our need for fellowship is going to increase as the Day of the Lord’s return approaches. As evil becomes more subtle, it is going to become harder to distinguish between truth and error, good and bad, right and wrong. We already see deceitful lies and false concepts that deny the truth of the Word of God - even in the church. It is only going to increase, so in these end times we need to stick together and be there for each other even more.

Hebrews 10:26-31

We now come to the fourth warning in Hebrews. It is more intense than the previous three, involving willful sin, fiery judgement, and severe punishment. In a sense, *every* sin is a willful sin because we choose our way instead of God’s. But to **sin willfully** speaks of a continuing action - to deliberately keep on sinning. It is not a sin committed out of ignorance or weakness but sin that is planned out, determined, and committed with forethought. Under the Old Covenant, there were no sacrifices for deliberate and willful sins. Those who despised Moses’ law and broke it were executed. A perfect example of this would be David. The whole affair with Bathsheba was planned from having her brought to the palace, to trying to cover up her pregnancy by having Uriah brought back from battle, to plotting Uriah’s murder. That’s why David prayed as he did in Psalm 51 after Nathan confronted him with his sin. Because he had deliberately sinned with a high hand, he should have been slain but he cried out for God’s mercy. David knew even a multitude of sacrifices could not save him. All he could offer was the sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit.

How does an arrogant attitude affect a believer’s relationship with God? It is as though he:

- Treads Jesus Christ underfoot rejecting His greatest work and devaluing His sacrifice
- Cheapens the precious blood of Jesus that saved Him by making it of no greater importance than the countless animals sacrificed
- Offends the Holy Spirit, whose purpose is to present Jesus and His work to us
- Instead of having a bold profession of faith, hope and love, a backslidden believer’s actions and attitudes bring disgrace to the name of Christ and the church.

So what can this kind of Christian expect from God? He can expect severe discipline: “judgement and fiery indignation” “sorer punishment.” We already see in the history of Israel that hardly anyone who was saved out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb entered into the inheritance. Even Moses was not allowed because he disobeyed the Lord’s instruction. Some Corinthian believers were disciplined and their lives taken because they took communion in an unworthy manner. Annanias and Sapphira fell down dead for lying about the profit they made selling property to give to the church.

God does not always take the life of a rebellious believer, but he always deals with him. Consider how God dealt with David. David’s sins were forgiven but he suffered the sad consequences for years after.

- “The sword shall never depart from your house.” The rest of David’s days would be filled with the worst of domestic strife. He would never again have peace and his life would forever be filled with great heartache. God shattered the peace and stability David had spent a lifetime establishing, as his kingdom was torn apart by two civil wars.
- “I will raise up evil against you out of your own house.” David’s family fell apart. One son assaulted his half-sister. Another son killed that son. Absalom spent the next four years secretly plotting to overthrow his father, David, and take the throne. In fact, Absalom wanted to kill his own father and become king.
- “The child . . . shall die.” The baby conceived by David’s sin died seven days after he was born.

So what should a believer do if they have fallen into willful sin? Run to God for mercy and forgiveness. There is no sacrifice for sin other than the sacrifice Jesus made that is sufficient for all our sins. It is a fearful thing to fall into the Lord's hands for chastening but it is a wonderful thing to fall into His hands for cleansing and restoration. David said, "Let me fall into the hand of the Lord: for very great are His mercies." (I Chronicles 21:13)

Hebrews 10:32-39

Paul closes this chapter with words of encouragement and confirmation. He asks them to "*recall the former days*" when they first followed Christ. Their early Christian years were marked by love and joy and hope, despite hardships and persecution. They had followed Christ at cost to themselves, even when their own will would have been different. They were living by faith even though "*they were made a spectacle by reproaches and tribulations.*"

The word "*spectacle*" carries the idea of theater. These Christians were put on a stage of intimidation and ridicule. Persecution of believers was a theatrical event for the entertainment of non-believers. They became a public spectacle: persecution by shame. "*Reproaches*" means that these believers suffered verbal abuse by public jeering and scoffing. "*Tribulations*" may refer to persecution or it could mean pressure. We do know they were weighed down with troubles. When they were not being persecuted themselves, they stood with other Christians who were, even to the point of imprisonment. They have also "*joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods*" knowing earthly possessions couldn't compare with what awaited them in heaven.

The point Paul was making is that they had already faced these things and emerged victorious. They had made it through once and they could do it again! Don't throw away your reward - finish strong! But in order to get past the present discouragement they needed to have endurance. All of us have "*need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.*" Some of the toughest and most discouraging trials occur when we have obeyed God and then have to wait for the fulfillment of His promise. We're much better with "instant" and "now" rather than "rest" and "trust" and "wait patiently." This is why we need endurance. And we all know how we build endurance: through trials and the testing of our faith. (James 1:2-4)

Lastly Paul reminds us that "the just shall live by faith." We are saved from our sin by faith but then we must also live by faith. II Corinthians 5:7 tells us, "*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*" It is a continual process and the believer who lives by faith will mature and "*go on to perfection.*" (Hebrews 6:1) But the believer who lives by sight will "*draw back to perdition.*" The Greek word "perdition" is used about twenty times in the New Testament and is translated into different words: "perish" (Acts 8:20), "die" (Acts 25:16), "destruction" (Romans 9:22) and "waste" (Matthew 26:8). It can also mean "eternal judgement." In this instance, "waste" would seem to fit best. A believer who does not live by faith goes back into the old ways and wastes his life; there will no rewards when he appears before Christ at the Bema Seat. That has been Paul's mission in writing this letter: "Keep your rewards, don't give up now and lose them. Rest in the Lord, run with endurance, live by faith, and finish the course!" May we all do the same!

"...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light."

Colossians 1:10-12