

I would like to start tonight by reaching back to **10:18**: “Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” Last week I mentioned that this is a set up verse for our very difficult and probably one of the most menacing sounding passages in the book of Hebrews: **10:26-31**. Basically, we are to start with this understanding: since we are forgiven for all time by the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, all other offerings and sacrifices for sins have been abolished. In other words, when Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” He was dead serious. There are no exceptions.

Thus, going back to the Levitical system (or the religious system of your choosing) is futile, meaningless, and entirely pointless. It will do nothing for you no matter how sincere you are in offering your “sacrifices.” Furthermore, as a believer it is a very dangerous thing to do as the implications for your own life are far beyond what you or the average believer could ever imagine.

Hebrews 10:26-31

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged 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 fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Let's first remember the context of this passage. During this time believers were under such physical, emotional and psychological coercion that they were contemplating giving up the fight and going back to Judaism (at least in some pretense) in order to get some "peace" into their lives. Everyone in Jerusalem and Judea were against them, hunting them, persecuting them, and nowhere could they find a safe place to just live peacefully as believers.

In Chapters **9** and **10**, the Spirit explained even more in detail about what a great salvation they have been given and how they are so privileged to come into the presence of God anytime they want because they have been sprinkled clean by the blood of Jesus. He told them that when the story is said and done, God will not remember their sins and lawless deeds (**10:17**). In other words, they would not face the eternal judgment of damnation as do those whose sins have not been forgiven but whose sins will remain with them throughout eternity.

The Spirit also said that when Jesus returns for believers it will not be to deal with sin but to bring salvation to all those who eagerly wait for Him (**9:28**). So we know, based on what the Holy Spirit has previously said, this passage cannot be dealing with eternity and damnation. Besides, we have as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Our hope is eternal and our access to the true holy of holies has been made open and accessible to us by Jesus Christ; and God has confirmed this promise with an oath and, as we know, it is impossible for God to lie (**6:9-20**).

So what I believe is being addressed in this harrowing passage (and I believe it is supported by the details of the language) is the practical (and sometimes severe) judgment that God brings, *in this life*, for believers who turn from Him and choose to treat their great salvation as if it is in essence worthless to them (which these believers would be doing if they were to give up, retreat, and return to Judaism).

Now let me first address that the reference to the person who has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified. In context, Chapters **9** and **10** made it clear that only true believers have been sanctified by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ; whereas all others still stand in their sin; sin which cannot be removed by the sacrifices of goats and bulls (**10:1-10**). Thus, it would be oh so wrong to try and insert into this passage some broad or generalized understanding of what it means to be “sanctified” as if to include the run of the mill Jew or anyone else for that matter.

Accordingly the phrase “he was sanctified” is in the 3rd person, Aorist Passive Indicative of the Greek word “*hagiazō*”—which means to be made holy.

- 3rd Person – he was made holy by another person (Jesus is the only one who can make a person holy)
- Aorist – in this use of the Aorist, it indicates that he was made holy sometime in the past
- Passive – he was made holy by the 3rd person; and he did nothing to make himself holy
- Indicative – it is certain or realized; it is a fact.

Therefore, I think we can safely settle on the fact that this passage is talking about true believers and is not addressing unbelievers.

Now, as far as the **temporal** nature of this judgment, sinning is in the present active tense, receiving the knowledge of the truth is in the past tense; and since there is no other sacrifice for sins to which they can turn, they are left with a fearful expectation of judgment. This fiery zeal or fury of fire will (in the present active) consume (in the present active) those who are adversaries. So nothing in the context of this passage points forward to a future judgment or damnation in eternity; but it all points to the here and now—the expectation of what we can expect to experience **in this life**.

With regard to the reference to God's adversaries, we know that our *Old Sinful Nature* is an enemy of God. That is why those who live by their *Old Sinful Nature* can never please God (***Romans 8:7-8***). Thus, if we surrender control of our life to our ***Old Sinful Nature***, and thereby quench the Spirit of God in our life, we will practically live as God's adversaries.

Further, we know that the desires of the ***Old Sinful Nature*** are pitted against the desires of the Spirit (***Galatians 5:17***); they are not friends. Moreover, according to ***James 4:4*** those who have present and actively chosen to be friends of this world are presently and passively an enemy of God; in other words, the world and the devil who controls the *Old Sinful Nature* has by default made them an enemy.

Again, the point being is that according to the language of the text we are dealing with a judgment that is not eternal but temporal and it is presently and actively brought into the life of a believer who has chosen, with full knowledge, to

profane the blood of the covenant by (at least in this example) looking to another religious system for redemption, the forgiveness of sins, or to somehow “find” God. I am sure there are other examples of when this kind of scary judgment comes on the life of believers because it clearly makes a point of addressing those who willfully sin (those who willfully choose to not trust themselves to Jesus); but again in this instance it is dealing with a believer who looks to make themselves right with God through any other means other than the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

This judgment is also to be understood as certain. With just 2 or 3 witnesses people were judged for violations of the Law of Moses, and that without mercy. It was what we call in the legal field, “strict liability.” If it is proven that you did the “deed,” you will pay the penalty. The Spirit uses this as an example to help us realize what a serious issue it is to turn our backs on the grace of God and seek some other way to be “right” with Him.

After all, He gave up His only Son for you. The Father sent His Son from heaven to earth where He took on the form of man so that He could experience everything that you and I experience (and more)—yet without sin—and become for us the perfect sacrifice for our sins. He was beaten, mangled, brutalized, and pierced for you. His blood was spilled for you and His life exhausted for you.

And more than that; consider what we learned in Ephesians. You were chosen from before the foundations of the world to know Him and to belong to Him; you are part of a few who have been chosen from many to belong to the family of God. Can you start to understand why the Father takes this so seriously and why

He is willing to bring about judgment upon His own people who disregard what Jesus has done for them?

Now the phrases "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" and "The Lord will judge his people" both come from a song of Moses found in **Deuteronomy 32:1-43** and are quoted from verses **35-36**. And I think you should go home tonight or tomorrow and read this song. I think it frames this whole concept of why God judges His own people. This song starts off with this phrase: "He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is! (**Deuteronomy 32:4**).

Thus, we cannot read this passage in Hebrews as if God is mean and He is a bad God to bring judgment on His own people for everything He does is just and fair and all His deeds are perfect. Therefore, we need to understand 1) what would cause our God to bring judgment, 2) what are His purposes in bringing this judgment, and 3) what He hopes to accomplish in bringing this judgment.

As far as the "what" would cause this judgment, it is the rejecting, with full knowledge, the work of redemption which Jesus has already done in your life and turning to someone or something else as a replacement for Jesus (this is what is described in **Deuteronomy 32:15-21** as the reason for judgment). It is essentially what we would call in the Old Testament some form of idolatry.

As far as His purposes in bringing this judgment and what He hopes to accomplish we must first go back to what we know to be true about God's character and nature. According to **1 John 4:8;16** God is love; therefore, everything that He does is an expression of that love—even His judgment.

With that said, in the song of Moses He also says: “Look now; I myself am he! There is no other god but me! I am the one who kills and gives life; I am the one who wounds and heals; no one can be rescued from my powerful hand” (***Deuteronomy 32:39***)!

He wounds but He also brings healing; in fact, we will find out that He wounds for the purpose of bringing true permanent healing into our souls. He wounds in order to rid us of our rebellion and sin; and this is a great act of love. When we give ourselves over to the kind of willful sin that profanes the blood of Christ, He will bring judgment and wound us for the purpose of making our existence without Him so horrible that we finally decide to come back and live with Him in the blessing of His presence. We can see this attitude and intent in the Old Testament stories of the judgments He brought on Israel. Consider these verses:

Isaiah 27:8-9

“No, but he exiled Israel to call her to account. She was exiled from her land as though blown away in a storm from the east. The Lord did this to purge Israel's wickedness, to take away all her sin.” (See also ***Ezekiel 22: 13-15; 23:46-49***)

Jeremiah 31:20

“Is not Israel still my son, my darling child?” says the Lord. “I often have to punish him, but I still love him. That's why I long for him and surely will have mercy on him.”

Jeremiah 46:28

"Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant, for I am with you, says the Lord. I will completely destroy the nations to which I have exiled you, but I will not completely destroy you. I will discipline you, but with justice; I cannot let you go unpunished."

Jeremiah 42:10:

I am sorry for all the punishment I have had to bring upon you.

Isaiah 22:4-5:

That's why I said, "Leave me alone to weep; do not try to comfort me. Let me cry for my people as I watch them being destroyed." Oh, what a day of crushing defeat! What a day of confusion and terror brought by the Lord, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, upon the Valley of Vision!

Isaiah 30:18-26:

"So the Lord must wait for you to come to him so he can show you his love and compassion. For the Lord is a faithful God. Blessed are those who wait for his help. O people of Zion, who live in Jerusalem, you will weep no more. He will be gracious if you ask for help. He will surely respond to the sound of your cries. Though the Lord gave you adversity for food and suffering for drink, he will still be with you to teach you. You will see your teacher with your own eyes. Your

own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, "This is the way you should go," whether to the right or to the left.

Then you will destroy all your silver idols and your precious gold images. You will throw them out like filthy rags, saying to them, "Good riddance!" Then the Lord will bless you with rain at planting time. There will be wonderful harvests and plenty of pastureland for your livestock. The oxen and donkeys that till the ground will eat good grain, its chaff blown away by the wind. In that day, when your enemies are slaughtered and the towers fall, there will be streams of water flowing down every mountain and hill. The moon will be as bright as the sun, and the sun will be seven times brighter—like the light of seven days in one! So it will be when the Lord begins to heal his people and cure the wounds he gave them."

The Lord clearly wounds us in order to cause us to return to Him for healing. He does not just cause pain for pain's sake or because He is all ticked off and wants to see us bleed. He loves us and it is clear from all these passages that it totally grieves Him to have to hurt us; but He knows it is what we need. He knows it is the only way we will ever come to our senses and find our refuge in Him. In our flesh (or our *Old Sinful Nature*) we are so stubborn and rebellious that it often takes great pain before we will ever turn our attention back to our loving God.

Remember, Jesus has gone through so much in order to redeem us that He desperately desires His children to be safe and secure; but as long as we are giving ourselves to someone or something that is controlled by the enemy we are not safe and we are not secure. So, at times, we force Him to take extreme

measures in our life in order to bring us back to safety. He removes our covering of protection so we experience the full impact of our choice to reject Him. Look at this passage in ***Jeremiah 24:3-7*** where God explains a vision He gave Jeremiah regarding the time when He sent His people into exile in Babylon.

Jeremiah 24:3-7

Then the Lord said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I replied, "Figs, some very good and some very bad, too rotten to eat." Then the Lord gave me this message: "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: The good figs represent the exiles I sent from Judah to the land of the Babylonians. I will watch over and care for them, and I will bring them back here again. I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them hearts that recognize me as the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me wholeheartedly.

So again, despite the fact that His measures were beyond extreme in exiling His people into Babylon, His purpose, His heart, His intent in the temporal judgment of believers is restoration such that their hearts return to the Lord. He wants His children to live knowing they belong to God such that they let God be their God in every area of their life. This is His loving plan and purpose. He describes it as follows in Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 29:11-14

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you," says the Lord. "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land."

Jeremiah 32:36-43

But this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I will certainly bring my people back again from all the countries where I will scatter them in my fury. I will bring them back to this very city and let them live in peace and safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart and one purpose: to worship me forever, for their own good and for the good of all their descendants. And I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will never stop doing good for them. I will put a desire in their hearts to worship me, and they will never leave me. I will find joy doing good for them and will faithfully and wholeheartedly replant them in this land. "This is what the Lord says: Just as I have brought all these calamities on them, so I will do all the good I have promised them.

And while the restoration is amazing and so loving, believe me the judgment of God is not something you want to have to endure. Don't go there. Remember what He has done for you and delight in your great salvation. Choose to let Him

be your God for real in your here and now. Don't test Him on this one. Clearly, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

So I was thinking about what this judgment actually looks like. Clearly the language is disturbing—fiery zeal that consumes and devours—but I think the possible manifestations of this judgment are endless. And, although these judgments are pictured as the fire of God, which brings up Old Testament images of fire coming from the Ark and consuming Nadab and Abihu, I believe they are most often played out in the realm of what we would consider to be “natural” causes.

In the case of Saul, he seemed to have gone crazy and totally lost his mind. In the case of David, he was made physically sick as his sin burned in his bones. In the case of the Israelites who did not believe God in that initial exodus journey, they were never allowed to enter the Promised Land and instead wandered around the wilderness until they died (according to *Ezekiel 20:36*, this was their judgment). In the case of the Israelites who had given themselves over to idolatry for centuries upon centuries, He handed them over to foreigners to be terrorized and plundered. They were killed by the sword, stoned, stripped naked, their houses were burned, they were scattered, held as prisoners, forced to labor under the oppressing hands of their captors, and they died from famine, disease, pestilence and so on.

What they endured was nothing short of horrific, for sure, but again it was all what we would otherwise consider to be “natural” causes. To those who were being judged and to those who brought the judgment, it all seemed to be just part of how this world turns. But no! Make no mistake; it was the hand of the Lord!

How have you experienced this judgment in your life? Has it come in the form of physical suffering from diseases or sickness, depression, anxiety, sleeplessness? Has it come in the way of undue persecution at work, at church, or in your private life? Has the tension and terror come through friends, family, your boss, or those you have most trusted? Now I know that none of us have been dealt by God as we deserve; I shudder as I think of what our lives would be like if He let the full weight of our sin rest on our shoulders. Thank God for His mercy.

But we have to remember that we are spiritual beings who live in a physical world. This physical world is just the field upon which the spiritual realities are played out. Thus, when we consider the practical difficulties that we endure in this life we have to know that they are there to teach us to trust ourselves to Jesus in every area of our life.

Sometimes those difficulties are just nudges and other times those difficulties are His fierce hand of correction over our lives as He acts to bring us back into the safe fold of His loving protection. But either way, it is all played out in our physical lives and it is all for the purposes of causing us to once and for all trust ourselves to Jesus in the depths of our soul that we might believe that He is our God, that He is in full control of our life, that all that He allows in our lives (even if we don't understand it) is an expression of His love. He wants us to trust ourselves in full belief to all that He has done for us and will do for us.

After this intense exhortation, the Spirit reminds these believers that they have already suffered a lot and had previously handled things the right way because they were focused not on the rewards of this life but of the life to come.

Hebrews 10:32-36

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding 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 is promised.

The Spirit commands them to remember the former days (recall is an imperative). The days after they had been enlightened (which is a euphemism for the time they were saved by Jesus (“enlightened” is in the orist passive tense, meaning God did it to them in the past), when they successfully endured their troubles and afflictions.

I can imagine that after they had been saved and forgiven of all their sins, like most of us, they were totally stoked. They were all ready to fight for Jesus and live for Him no matter what. It did not matter that they were publically embarrassed, thrown in prison, had their property unlawfully taken away, and had to watch their friends suffer in like manner; they knew that Jesus would be coming soon and they were ready for the reckoning.

But as time passed and bad things happened, and continued to happen, and continued to happen to them, and Jesus had not returned yet, they became exhausted and just wanted some relief. I am sure many of you have felt this same

way; I know I have. Eventually, however, things got so bad that they were borderline ready to quit and give up; they were sick of the way God was letting all of these bad things happen to them. They did not understand why it was necessary—they lost their eternal perspective—and I am sure they felt that the Lord had abandoned them.

I believe it was the intensity of this situation that caused Peter to write so much about suffering to those living in Jerusalem and Judea. They needed a serious perspective shift.

1 Peter 3:13-18

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

1 Peter 4:1-2

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,

so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.

1 Peter 4:12-19

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

1 Peter 5:10

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Suffering is no fun for anyone (we all hate it), but it is a big piece of what is appointed for us in this life. Therefore, don't let anyone deceive you with promises of health, wealth, and prosperity. Clearly Peter and the writer of Hebrews did not preach that false doctrine.

I hate to say it (I really do), but suffering is part and parcel with knowing Jesus as a person and **sharing with Him** in His experiences (***Colossians 1:24***). In addition, it's the tool the Lord uses to disconnect us from our affections and attachment to this world, as well from as all the reasons we have for not trusting ourselves to Jesus.

Unfortunately suffering is necessary; that is why the Spirit exhorts them to remember the joy they had once experienced as they focused not on their suffering but on their reward—a reward which is not only better than anything this world has to offer but one that is abiding. This world and all its wonders and rewards will pass away, but our hope is reserved for us in eternity (***1 Peter 1:3-5***).

Therefore, in our times of suffering and difficulty, we must let our hope of eternity with Jesus be to us that strong and trustworthy anchor in the storm (***7:19***). And we must remember that although Abraham waited patiently he received what God had promised (***7:15***); and so will we. Therefore, we must not throw away our confidence. And no matter how bad things get, we must remember these truths.

I often think of how much we complain and moan and groan, I just hope that we (or our children) are truly prepared for the end times and the coming of Jesus; for in those days things are going to be bad—real bad. And like those living in

Jerusalem and Judea, ***we need endurance*** so when we have done the will of God we will (literally in the Greek) carry off our reward—the reward which is already ours. The phrase “may receive” or as I said “carry off” is in the aurist middle tense; and, in this application, the aorist means that this reward is already ours.

The Spirit tells us this to motivate us, encourage us, to excite us to courage in order that we might do all that is necessary to endure the present troubles and trials that we must all face. Remember, we suffer with a purpose; and despite what it feels like, it is not wanton or aimless. Therefore, we must not throw away our confidence.

The Spartan women of old, when they presented the shields to their men going to battle, would say: "Either bring this back, or be brought back upon it;" alluding to the custom of bringing back a slain soldier on his own shield, a proof that he had preserved it to the last and had been faithful to his country. They also used to excite the courage of their sons by delivering to them their fathers' shields and saying: "This shield thy father always preserved; do thou preserve it also, or perish."

Our great salvation—our confession of faith—is our confidence; don't cast it away. It will be your shield, your defense and with it you will extinguish every fiery dart of the enemy—every lie with which he attempts to slay you. As we suffer through this life we need to either bring this shield of faith back with us or we need to be brought back on it, proving that we have fulfilled the will of God in our lives and have been faithful to our call.

Similarly, I want to say to my children, and I hope you can say to yours: this shield of faith—this great confession—by the grace of God, has protected me;

keep it or you should expect to perish. As such this passage in Hebrews is to be both a warning and a word of great encouragement to provoke us to courage and strength in our personal and collective trials and tribulations.

We will finish off this chapter next week and start our venture into the hall of faith and read about all those who held to their confession of faith firm until the end.

Let's Pray