

Hebrews 10:26-39
June 5, 2016

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: Have you ever made a commitment to make your life better, made a good start, then when your plans became hard to execute, you just quit? What are some examples of this?

- I need to lose weight, started a plan, and gave up;
- I need to read the Bible daily, started a reading plan, got so behind, and gave up;

Q: Why do you think it's so easy to quit? [We want the path of least resistance; we want immediate gratification, we live with the illusion that life should be easier, etc.]

It is human nature to desire a life of ease, and it's only natural to work toward a goal and desire to see immediate results. Who doesn't want a life like that?! But life is not easy.

Q: What are some Scriptural teachings that come to mind that remind us that life was not going to be easy? X-Ref the following verses:

- Jesus said, "If they will persecute me, they will persecute you." (John 15:20)
- 2 Tim 3:12 "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."
- Matt 6:34 "Do not worry about tomorrow...each day has enough trouble of its own."
- Ps 23:4 "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..."
- Rom 8:17 "If we are His children, then we're His heirs...co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory."
- 1 Peter 4:12-16 "Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering..."
- James 1:2-3 "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."

Transition: It's easy to read this and say, "I know life is hard." What else is new? Here's the problem. It's easy to forget in the midst of pain and suffering that there is *great value* in suffering and persevering. We also forget that God promises to *richly reward us* for exhibiting our faith in Him while we are going through hard circumstances.

The writer of Hebrews wants to exhort his fellow believers to NOT quit! In fact, the author paints a poignant word picture for those who might choose to "shrink back" or walk away from their faith in Christ. It's hard to read, but his goal is to get their attention. But he doesn't leave them there. He finishes his message with strong words of encouragement that become words of encouragement to us. As we read today's text, I believe **All of us CAN live by faith when life gets difficult BY following the author's RECOMMENDATIONS listed at the end of today's passage.** Let's begin.

BOOK (NIV 1984): [Read Hebrews 10:26-39]

V.26:

- If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left,

V.27:

- but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

V.28:

- Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

V.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?

V.30:

- For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”

V.31:

- It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

V.32:

- Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering.

V.33:

- Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated.

V.34:

- You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.

V.35:

- So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

V.36:

- You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

V.37:

- For in just a very little while, “He who is coming will come and will not delay.”

V.38:

- But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.”

V.39:

- But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

Background v.26-31: The author gives the Hebrew Christians a forceful way to look at what they would really be doing if they went back to the old sacrificial system. He does a compare/contrast between the Old Covenant (Mosaic law) and the New Covenant (Christ).

Explain v.26 “keep on sinning”: This exhortation is not dealing with one particular act of sin, but with an attitude that leads to repeated disobedience. Under the Old Covenant, there were no sacrifices for deliberate and willful sins (Ex. 21:12–14; Num. 15:27–31). Presumptuous sinners who despised Moses’ Law and broke it were executed (Deut. 17:1–7).

Said another way (v.26): A person who turns from the one and only sufficient sacrifice of Christ has no real sacrifice to which he can turn!! Good luck with that!

Q v.26-28: Under the Old Covenant, what could an Israelite expect if he “continued in sin?”

Q v.29: Under the New Covenant, what vivid word picture does the writer paint to describe what these Hebrew Christians would be doing if they decided to go back to the old sacrificial system? [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? It is as though he trods Jesus Christ underfoot and cheapens the precious blood that saved him]

Q v.30-31: The writer establishes in v.29 that those who trample the Son of God under foot have set themselves up to be severely punished. What Scripture does the writer quote to help his readers think twice about turning back to Judaism? [“It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and “The Lord will judge his people (Deut 32:35-36)]

Observation v.31: I picture a child who knows they are in deep trouble who has been swooped up by his father and being taken to the shed. The child is begging not to be taken there, but discipline is getting ready to happen. “It’s a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!”

But let’s understand this: It is certainly fearful to fall into the Lord’s hands for chastening, but *it is a wonderful thing to fall into His hands for cleansing and restoration.* X-REF: I Chron 21:13 When David was chastened by God, he said, “Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies.”

Q: Are there ways that we can trample Jesus under our own feet or insult the Spirit of grace? [Let people process this.]

Transition: The author has painted a picture that should cause all of his readers to consider with serious caution whether they should turn back to the old sacrificial system. But now he becomes their top cheerleader! I suggested that All of us CAN live by faith when life gets difficult BY following the author’s RECOMMENDATIONS listed at the end of today’s passage. Let’s look for his RECOMMENDATIONS.

Q v.32: What is the first recommendation you see? [Remember those earlier days after you had rec’d the light.]

Q v.33-34: What examples does the writer offer to help the Hebrew Christians “remember their earlier days?” [They had been willing to suffer persecution, even to the spoiling of their goods.]

When they were not being persecuted themselves, they courageously identified with the other Christians who were in danger, even to the point of sharing their bonds (imprisonment). At that time, they had great confidence and hope.]

Q v.35-36: What other recommendations do you see to overcome discouragement? [Do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. Second, persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. Don't throw in the towel!!]

Q v.38-39: The author has one more inspirational message for his readers. What do you see? [The just shall live by faith without shrinking back. We won't be ones who are going to shrink away, but ones who believe and are saved.]

LOOK:

Remember that we are assured of being richly rewarded for staying confident in our faith. We will receive what He has promised us when we persevere and continue to do the will of God. So as much as the Bible makes clear that life was never going to be easy, God's Word is just as clear that there is a happy ending for those who endure persecution and suffering:

- Job 36:15 "Those who suffer, He delivers in their suffering; He speaks to them in their affliction."
- Matt 5:10 "Blessed are those who are persecuted." [A state of being]
- Rom 5:3-4 "We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance,..."
- Rom 8:17(b) "We share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory."
- James 1:4 "Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."
- James 1:12 "Blessed is the man who perseveres"
- James 5:11 "We consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy."

All of us can live by faith in times of great discouragement and difficulty by following the writer's recommendations:

1. Remember past difficult experiences you've had when God proved Himself faithful.
2. Don't throw away your confidence in Christ.
3. Persevere during the hard times to do God's will so that you'll receive what He has promised.
4. My righteous ones will live by faith.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 315–317). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

A solemn exhortation (vv. 26–31). This is the fourth of the five exhortations found in Hebrews. It is written to believers and follows in sequence with the other exhortations. 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* toward 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.

The evidence of this “despising” is willful sin. The tense of the verb indicates that Hebrews 10:26 should read, “For if we willfully *go on sinning*.” This exhortation is not dealing with one particular act of sin, but with an attitude that leads to repeated disobedience. Under the Old Covenant, there were no sacrifices for deliberate and willful sins (Ex. 21:12–14; Num. 15:27–31). Presumptuous sinners who despised Moses’ Law and broke it were executed (Deut. 17:1–7). This explains why David prayed as he did in Psalm 51. Because he deliberately sinned “with a high hand,” he should have been slain; but he cried out for God’s mercy. David knew that even a multitude of sacrifices could not save him. All he could offer was the sacrifice of a broken heart (Ps. 51:16–17).

How does an arrogant attitude affect a believer’s relationship with God? It is as though he trods Jesus Christ underfoot, cheapens the precious blood that saved him (“an unholy thing” [Heb. 10:29] = “a common thing”), and insults the Holy Spirit. This is just the opposite of the exhortation given in Hebrews 10:19–25! Instead of having a bold profession of faith, hope, and love, a backslidden believer so lives that his actions and attitudes bring disgrace to the name of Christ and the church.

What can this kind of a Christian expect from God? He can expect severe discipline. (Chastening is the theme of Heb. 12.) There is no need to “water down” words such as “judgment and fiery indignation” (Heb. 10:27), or “sorer punishment” (Heb. 10:29). We have already seen from the history of Israel that hardly anybody who was saved out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb entered into the promised inheritance. Nearly all of them died in the wilderness. “There is a sin unto death” (1 John 5:16). Some of the Corinthian believers were disciplined and their lives taken because of their presumptuous sins (1 Cor. 11:30, where “sleep” means “died”).

God does not always take the life of a rebellious believer, but He always deals with him. “Vengeance belongeth unto Me” was spoken to Israel, God’s people. “The Lord shall judge His people!” (Heb. 10:30, quoted from Deut. 32:35) “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

The major theme of Hebrews is “God has spoken—how are you responding to His Word?” When the nation of Israel refused to believe and obey His Word, God chastened them. Paul used this fact to warn the Corinthians against presumptuous sins (1 Cor. 10:1–12). Note that the examples given in this passage involve people who died because of their willful sins. When we study the subject of “chastening” in Hebrews 12, we will get greater insight into this awesome aspect of God’s dealings with His children.

In stating that this exhortation applies to believers today, but that it does not involve loss of salvation, I am not suggesting that chastening is unimportant. On the contrary, it is important that every Christian obey God and please the Father in all things. Dr. William Culbertson, late president of the Moody Bible Institute, used to warn us about “the sad consequences of *forgiven*

sins.” God forgave David’s sins, but David suffered the sad consequences for years afterward (2 Sam. 12:7–15). David had “despised the commandment of the Lord” (2 Sam. 12:9) and God dealt with him.

What should a believer do who has drifted away into spiritual doubt and dullness and is deliberately despising God’s Word? He should turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. There is no other sacrifice for sin, but the sacrifice Christ made 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 now into the hand of the Lord; for very great are His mercies” (1 Chron. 21:13).

An encouraging confirmation (vv. 32–39). Lest any of his readers should misinterpret his exhortation, the writer followed it with words of encouragement and confirmation. His readers had given every evidence that they were true Christians. He did not expect *them* to despise God’s Word and experience the chastening of God! In fact, as in Hebrews 6, the writer shifted the pronouns from “we” in Hebrews 10:26 to “he” in Hebrews 10:29 and “them” in Hebrews 10:39.

The readers had been willing to suffer reproach and persecution, even to the spoiling of their goods. When they were not being persecuted themselves, they courageously identified with the other Christians who were in danger, even to the point of sharing their bonds (imprisonment). At that time, they had great confidence and hope; but now they were in danger of casting away that confidence and going back into their old religion.

The secret of victory was in their *faith* and *patience* (“courageous endurance”). We have met this combination of graces in Hebrews 6:12, 15. It is here that the writer introduced the “text” around which Hebrews is written: “The just shall live by faith” (Heb. 10:38). The quotation is from Habakkuk 2:4, and it is also used in Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11. Romans emphasizes “the just,” Galatians deals with “shall live,” and Hebrews centers on “by faith.” We are not just *saved* from our sin by faith; we also must *live* by faith. This is the theme of Hebrews 11–13.

The believer who lives by faith will “go on to perfection” (Heb. 6:1). But the believer who lives by sight will “draw back unto perdition” (Heb. 10:39). What is “perdition” in this context? The Greek word translated “perdition” is used about twenty times in the New Testament and is translated by different words: “perish” (Acts 8:20), “die” (Acts 25:16), “destruction” (Rom. 9:22), and “waste” (Matt. 26:8). The word *can* mean eternal judgment, but it need not in *every* instance. I personally believe that “waste” is the best translation for this word in Hebrews 10:39. A believer who does not walk by faith goes back into the old ways and wastes his life.

“The saving of the soul” is the opposite of “waste.” To walk by faith means to obey God’s Word and live for Jesus Christ. We lose our lives for His sake—but we save them! (see Matt. 16:25–27) In my own pastoral ministry, I have met people who turned their backs on God’s will and (like Israel) spent years “wandering in the wilderness” of waste.

But we can be confident! As we walk by faith, our Great High Priest will guide us and perfect us!

Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 805-807). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

2. THE RENEWED WARNING (10:26–31)

10:26–27. The KJV translation here, “if we sin willfully,” is superior to NIV’s **if we deliberately keep on sinning**, as the words “keep on” overplay the Greek tense. As the context

shows (cf. v. 23), the author was concerned here, as throughout the epistle, with the danger of defection from the faith. Most sin is “deliberate,” but the writer was here influenced by the Old Testament’s teaching about sins of presumption (cf. Num. 15:29–31) which lay outside the sacrificial provisions of the Law. Apostasy from the faith would be such a “willful” act and for those who commit it **no sacrifice for sins is left** (cf. Heb. 10:18). If the efficacious sacrifice of Christ should be renounced, there remained no other available sacrifice which could shield an apostate from God’s **judgment by raging fire**. A Christian who abandons “the confidence [he] had at first” (3:14) puts himself on the side of God’s enemies and, as the writer had already said, is in effect “crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace” (6:6). Such reprehensible conduct can scarcely be worthy of anything but God’s flaming indignation and retribution. This, however, as stated earlier (cf. comments on 6:8), is not a reference to hell (cf. comments on 10:29).

10:28–29. Under the Old Covenant, if an Israelite spurned the Mosaic Law and at least **two or three witnesses** verified his actions, he was put to death. This being true, the author then argued from the lesser to the greater. If defiance of an inferior covenant could bring such retribution, what about defiance of the New Covenant which, as he had made clear, is far superior? The answer can only be that the punishment would be substantially greater in such a case.

In order to show that this is so, the writer then placed defection from the faith in the harshest possible light. An apostate from the New Covenant **has trampled the Son of God underfoot and has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant** (cf. “blood of the eternal covenant,” 13:20) **that sanctified him**. The words “sanctified him” refer to true Christians. Already the writer to the Hebrews has described them as “made holy (Gr. ‘sanctified’) through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10) and as “made perfect forever” through this sanctifying work (v. 14). Some seek to evade this conclusion by suggesting that Christ is the One referred to here as “sanctified” or that the person only *claims* to be sanctified. But these efforts are foreign to the writer’s thought and are so forced that they carry their own refutation. The author’s whole point lies in the seriousness of the act. To treat “the blood of the covenant” (which actually sanctifies believers) as though it were an “unholy” (*koinon*, “common”) thing and to renounce its efficacy, is to commit a sin so heinous as to dwarf the fatal infractions of the Old Covenant. To this, an apostate adds the offense of insulting **the Spirit of grace** who originally wooed him to faith in Christ. This kind of spiritual rebellion clearly calls for a much worse punishment than the capital penalty that was inflicted under the Mosaic setup.

But again the writer was not thinking of hell. Many forms of divine retribution can fall on a human life which are worse than immediate death. In fact, Jeremiah made just such a complaint about the punishment inflicted on Jerusalem (Lam. 4:6, 9). One might think also of King Saul, whose last days were burdened with such mental and emotional turmoil that death itself was a kind of release.

10:30–31. No one should regard such a warning as an idle threat. God Himself has claimed the right to take vengeance and to **judge His people**. In saying this, the author quoted twice from Deuteronomy (32:35–36), a chapter which most vividly evokes the picture of God’s people suffering His retributive judgments (cf. esp. Deut. 32:19–27). Those familiar with this text, as well as other descriptions of God’s wrath against “His people,” agree: **it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God**.

3. THE RENEWED ENCOURAGEMENT (10:32–39)

But as was his custom after the most severe admonitions, the writer chose to conclude his warning with a distinct note of encouragement.

10:32–34. An effective way to fortify people against future trials is to remind them of the courage they displayed in past ones. This is precisely what the writer did. His readers knew what it was to stand their **ground in a great contest in the face of suffering**. (The words “stood your ground” [*hypemeinate*] render the verb usually translated “persevered,” as in, e.g., v. 36). They knew what it was to be publicly shamed and persecuted, and also to support others who had such experiences (v. 33). They had shown sympathy for brethren who had been imprisoned, and they had suffered property loss with joy because they had an assurance of possessing heavenly wealth (v. 34). They would do well to recall now their steadfastness in the past. Whatever they might now be facing—and the writer suggested it might be something similar—they would be helped if they would **remember those earlier days after they had received the light** (cf. “received the knowledge” in v. 26 and “enlightened” in 6:4).

10:35–36. This was no time for them, then, to **throw away their confidence** (*parrēsia*, cf. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19). As the author’s exposition of the eternal inheritance—the glory of the many sons—had sought to show, that confidence, if retained, **will be richly rewarded**. What the readers needed, therefore, was just what the writer had often said and implied: **to persevere** (lit., “you had need of perseverance,” *hypomonēs echete chreian*) so that by thus doing God’s **will** (cf. v. 9) they would **receive what God had promised**. As much as anything, these words express the central exhortation of the Book of Hebrews.

10:37–38. If their concern was about the delay of the Second Advent, they should rest assured that **in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay**. These words and those that follow were adapted by the author from the Septuagint of Isaiah 26:21 and Habakkuk 2:3–4. But they were used freely and were not intended as a precise quotation, since no words such as “He says” introduced them. In the phrase **My** (or “the”) **righteous one** (only a handful of Gr. mss. read “My”), the author employed Paul’s description of a person who is justified by faith. It is likely that the writer of Hebrews understood it similarly. A justified person ought to **live by faith**, which is what the writer had been urging his readers to do. But, **if he shrinks back**, that is, if the “righteous one” commits apostasy, denouncing his Christian profession, God’s favor cannot rest on his life. By understating the serious consequences, the writer softened his words so that he would not distract from his predominant note of encouragement.

10:39. Then he affirmed, **But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed**. Here the original text has an emphatic “we,” which the writer might have intended as an “editorial we,” of which he was quite fond (cf. 2:5; 5:11; 8:1; etc.). Then he would mean: “As far as I am concerned, I am determined not to shrink back and experience the ruin which divine retribution would bring.” The words “are destroyed” reflect the Greek *apōleia*, which can refer either to temporal or eternal ruin. In this context the former is correct. Instead of the ruin which an apostate invites, the writer intended to be among **those who believe and are saved**. The NIV rendering should not be misread as a reference to conversion. Though the author’s own normal word for salvation does not occur here, the expression “and are saved” somewhat freely translates *eis peripoiēsēsin psychēs*. A viable rendering of the last half of verse 39 would be: “but [we are] of faith leading to the preservation of the soul” (cf. comments on 1 Peter 2:9). But “soul” here should be understood in the Hebraic sense of the person himself, or his life, and refers in this context to the way in which persistence in the faith preserves an individual from the calamities that overtake those who “shrink back.” Even if the writer was speaking primarily of

his own purpose of heart, he clearly intended that to be shared by his readers. Thus the concluding statement of his warning passage (10:19–39) amounts to a call for determination and perseverance.

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pg. 1834). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

10:28–29 Some point out that these verses describe an injustice because they say that those who disobeyed the OT were put to death and that it will be much worse for those who reject Jesus. But there is no injustice here. Under the new covenant, those who reject God's work of grace achieved through His Son face much more serious retribution than mere physical death because they have committed a sin with eternal consequences.

10:37 Christ will return in accordance with God's timetable and perspective and not ours.