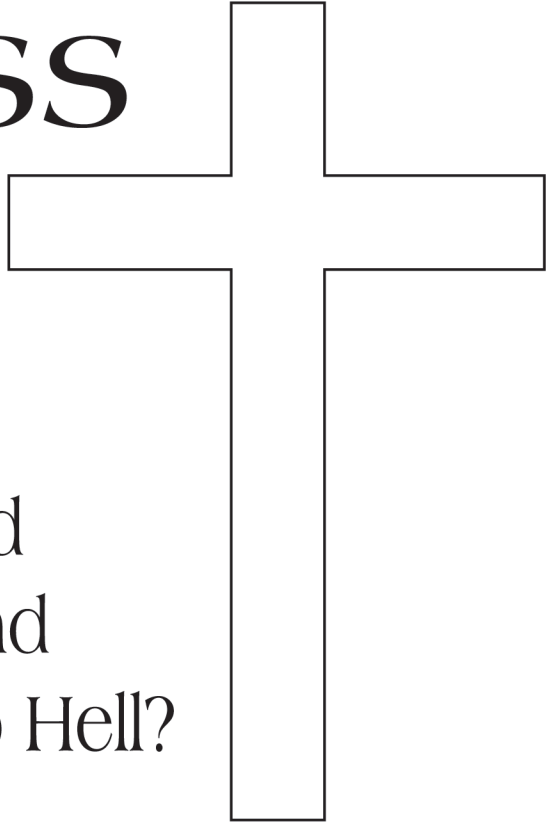


REJECTING the Cross



Would God
Really Send
Anyone to Hell?

Gil Rugh

***Rejecting the Cross:
Would God Really Send Anyone to Hell?***

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Rejecting the Cross

When we discuss the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we often stress the great blessings that come to the one who believes, and rightfully so. When a person trusts in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, that person is immediately forgiven of his sins. He is declared righteous in the sight of God. He becomes a child of God and is an heir to heavenly blessings. Those are marvelous truths and truths that we must talk about and dwell on.

There is, however, another side to the Gospel message—a side that is not so pleasant. Put simply, there is an awful destiny awaiting those who do not place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. As wonderful as the Gospel is to those who believe, it is equally awful to those who scorn or ignore the Gospel message. It is this side of the Gospel message that I want to discuss in this booklet. The primary text for this study will be Hebrews 10:26-31.

Introduction to Hebrews

Before looking specifically at Hebrews 10:26-31, it is useful to survey some of the basic truths found in the Book of Hebrews. Hebrews is a letter written to Jews who had professed faith in Jesus Christ but were considering a return to Judaism. They were entertaining the idea of returning to their family heritage and their family religion. The writer, however, points out the great danger in doing this. A return to Judaism, he stated, is a rejection of Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. The decision made on this matter is of utmost importance. Eternity hinges on it.

To convince these Jews of their need to stay committed to Christ and not return to Judaism, the writer of Hebrews set forth the vast superiority of Jesus Christ. He wanted to clarify that Jesus Christ is superior to everyone and everything, including the Mosaic system of Judaism. The

writer knew that his readers were struggling with leaving their family religion. Such a move probably brought serious consequences including persecution, social ostracization, and loss of family and friends. Likewise, many today face this same dilemma: “Do I choose Christ and lose my family and friends or do the comfortable thing and stay with the religion I was raised in?”

The Jews had an established religious system dating all the way back to Moses. They had their sacrifices and their regulations as set forth in the Mosaic Law. Now it was being declared to them by this new group of Christians that Jesus Christ is vastly superior to anything they had been involved with. They were being told that there was no longer any need to adhere to the Mosaic Law or to offer sacrifices because Jesus Christ was the perfect sacrifice for their sins. They were called to accept Jesus Christ as the only Savior. This, no doubt, was a radical thing to accept.

The Importance of a Sacrifice

The letter to the Hebrews is also about blood sacrifices, something the readers would have known about. Hebrews 9:22 states: “And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” The shedding of blood [i.e. death] is the issue that must be properly dealt with. The shedding of blood is necessary for forgiveness of sin and having a right relationship with God.

In the first part of Hebrews 10, the writer referred to the sacrificial system of the Jews. They offered sacrifices continually because of their sins, yet there was no final and permanent forgiveness in those sacrifices. All those sacrifices could do was remind the people that the wages for their sin was death. Every time a Jew brought an animal to be sacrificed, there was an implicit declaration that, “You deserve to die. The penalty for your sin is death.” All they could do was cast themselves on the mercy of God and believe that God would graciously forgive them as they placed their trust and confidence in Him.

Hebrews 10:3-4 states, “But in those sacrifices there is a reminder of sins year by year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The repetitiveness of the sacrifices was a reminder that

the last animal sacrifice offered did not get the job done. Those offerings could never permanently take away sin. That is why God provided His Son as a sacrifice. He had His Son step from the glories of heaven and become a human being. Hebrews 10:14 states, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.” Christ’s sacrifice was far superior to all the animal sacrifices put together because it was a perfect sacrifice. It forever cleanses those who trust in it. Because it was a perfect sacrifice there is no longer any need for further sacrifices. That is why the Roman Catholic Mass with its repeated sacrificial system is so heretical. As verse 18 states, “Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin.” There is just one sacrifice offered for all times—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

False Things People Trust In

I mentioned Roman Catholicism and its errant view of Christ’s death, but many Protestants are on no more solid ground because they, too, base their salvation on things other than the finished work of Christ. Many erroneously think they are saved because they go to church regularly, do good works, keep the Ten Commandments, were baptized, take communion, or get confirmed. They think these things will make them acceptable to God.

We must, however, make sure that we are thinking correctly on this matter. The wages of sin is death and there is only one sacrifice for sins for all time—the sacrifice of Christ. Christ’s death is an expression of God’s infinite love, mercy, and compassion. He did for us what we could not do ourselves. He provided a perfect sacrifice. The resurrection of Christ validated His work on the cross.

Hebrews 10:26-31

When we come to verse 26, the writer of Hebrews speaks about the danger of not believing in Jesus Christ. We must understand that believing in Jesus Christ is not a sentimental event. It is not something you just mentally think about and then just move on as if nothing happened. Believing in Jesus Christ means trusting wholeheartedly in Him as Lord and Savior. It also means believing that His death on the cross paid the penalty for your sins.

The issue of Jesus Christ is a dividing line for every person on the face of the earth. The division is between heaven and hell; the love of God and the wrath of God. It is like the proverbial “line in the sand” and you cannot be on both sides of that line. You are either on one side or the other and where you stand is of eternal importance and significance. A hundred billion years from now the only issue that will matter for you is where you stand with Jesus Christ.

God provided a perfect sacrifice and He calls on all to believe in His Son as Savior. The Jews being addressed by the writer of Hebrews were on the brink of falling on the wrong side of this issue. They were thinking of turning from Christ and going back to Judaism. Their argument may have been, “Look, Jesus Christ is fine. You have your religion we have ours. But Judaism is our religion. Besides, we have family who would be upset if we believed in Jesus.”

But Hebrews 10:26 states, “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” The issue here involves people who know the truth about Jesus Christ. They have heard the Gospel. They know that by His death, Jesus paid the penalty for their sins. If these same people continue to refuse to place their faith in Jesus Christ, there no longer remains a sacrifice for their sins. If Christ’s sacrifice for sin was perfect and final, yet these people do not accept it—there is no other sacrifice to turn to for forgiveness of sins. They can do all the animal sacrifices they like. They can be baptized until their skin shrivels up. They can give money to good causes until they have nothing left. They could even join a church and teach Sunday school. But none of those things are acceptable as a payment for sins. There is only one sacrifice; and that sacrifice was the Son of God. If there was any other alternative, would God have hung His Son on a cross to suffer and die so horribly? God takes it personally when someone refuses to believe in His Son.

Jesus—The Only Way

If a person rejects the sacrifice of Christ, there simply is no other sacrifice that can save him. Reliance on anything else is just a deception. In 1 Timothy 2:4-6a, Paul wrote that God “desires all men to be saved

and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all.” Note that there is just one God and just one mediator between God and men—Jesus Christ. This is a great truth. Imagine if there were one God, but no mediator between God and men. We would be left in our hopeless, lost condition. But praise God there is a mediator. Jesus Christ is all we need. Acts 4:12 states, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

The Wrath of God

Contrary to what many believe today, the Bible holds no hope of salvation outside of Jesus Christ. In addition to there being no other sacrifice for sins, there is also a certain “terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (Hebrews 10:27). For those who reject Christ, all that awaits them is the unbridled, awful wrath of God. All that awaits is the eternal fire of hell, which will consume all who do not believe in Jesus Christ.

There can be no greater contrast anywhere on any issue when one compares God’s infinite love, kindness, and mercy with His wrath. God says, “If you believe in Me, I will make you My child and give you the riches of heaven for eternity. But if you decide not to believe in My Son, I will pour out the fullness of My wrath upon you in a fire that will torment you every second of every day for eternity.”

Sometimes we get so sentimental in our thinking about the love of God that we think it washes over everything. We at times convince ourselves that this God of love and mercy could never pour out His undiluted wrath on anyone. But we should not be deceived on this issue. The true God is the God of the Bible, not a god of our own invention.

Let us look further at the consuming wrath of God. We are told in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.” Notice the contrast—“shall not perish” with “have eternal life.” Why did Jesus Christ suffer and die? He suffered and died so you and I would not face eternal death but have eternal life. John 3:36 states, “He who

believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

What a contrast! The love of God can be your portion, or the wrath of God can be your portion. That is the dividing line of Jesus Christ. There is a heaven and there is a hell—everyone is on their way to one of these two places. Some people say that they want to stay neutral on this matter but there is no such thing as being neutral regarding Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me” (Luke 11:23). People may say, “I don’t have a strong opinion one way or the other.” But the fact is—God does. He says there is no middle ground because everyone who claims they are on middle ground is really on the wrong ground. There can be no passive indifference concerning Jesus Christ. God will not allow it. Every person, apart from active belief in Jesus Christ, is on the road to hell (see Matthew 7:13-14). To remove yourself from the path to hell you must turn from your sin and let go of everything you are trusting in and take hold of Jesus Christ by faith. Unless you do this, you are perishing and are under the wrath of God.

To many this truth may be hard to accept. While it may be hard to accept, it is simple to understand. God did not complicate what it takes to be saved. He did not say, “Well, take your guess. Just try one of these many roads and perhaps some of you will make it to heaven.” Rather, He has simplified the matter. He has marked the way clearly. Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me” (John 14:6). Jesus could not be clearer. He is the only way to eternal life—all other roads lead to hell. We should be grateful to God that on a matter so eternally significant, we do not have to guess which road leads to heaven.

The way God deals with us sometimes parallels how we deal with our children on important matters. Those who are parents understand that at times it is necessary to impress upon our children the importance of something. For instance, parents tell their children, “Don’t talk to strangers. Don’t get in a car with a stranger.” Our children may nod in agreement, but we stress this truth with them again and again to make sure they really understand. Why do we do that? We do it because it is very important. In a sense, that is what God does to us. He calls us to

believe in Christ and inherit the blessings of heaven. He also warns us of the great wrath that awaits those who do not come to Him. Over and over He tells us there is a heaven to gain and a hell to avoid. Now people may not grasp the significance of this truth or they may ignore it, but the reality of it does not change.

Hebrews 10:28 states: “Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” This statement refers to Deuteronomy 17:2-6. According to the Mosaic Law two or three witnesses were needed to convict someone of a sin. If the sin was a capital offense, the person who committed the sin was taken out and stoned to death. That was a clear indication of how serious God was about the issue of sin. There is a penalty for sin and that penalty will be paid.

The Seriousness of Rejecting Jesus Christ

Hebrews 10:29 reads: “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?” Here we get a glimpse of how serious it is to reject Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for sin. There is a three-fold description here and we need to understand it from God’s perspective. First, how much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled underfoot the Son of God. The expression, trample under foot, means to treat something as if it had no value, to show contempt for something. For example, what would you think if you gave someone a present and they immediately threw it on the ground, stomped on it, and declared, “That’s what I think of your gift”? That would be an example of trampling your gift under foot. That person’s actions would indicate that he considered your gift with disdain and worthy of rejection. In effect, they would be saying, “Your gift has no value and means nothing to me.” That is exactly how God takes it when people reject His Son Jesus Christ. When people refuse to believe in the gift of Jesus Christ it is as if they take this gift, throw it on the ground, trample it, and say, “God, that’s what I think of the death of your Son.”

Now when some people hear this, they may say, “That’s not what I

mean. I don't believe in Christ but I'm not rejecting Him either." But God does not accept that approach as an option. God says that when you refuse to believe in His Son, you have figuratively thrown Him and His death on the ground. And for that there will be a day of reckoning.

Second, the person who has rejected Christ is seen as one who has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified. The word translated "regarded" refers to a settled condition of the mind. For the person who has rejected Christ, the evidence has been weighed and a decision has been made. It has been decided that the death of Christ is of no good or value. God went through the wrenching experience of sending His Son to die a horrible death on our behalf, and that person says, "It's nothing to me." Again, people may say "I don't mean that." But if you have heard the Gospel and have not trusted in Christ, that is exactly what you are saying. If you know that the Son of God died for you, why have you not yet believed? If you do not believe, you are in effect saying that His death is no more valuable than anyone else's death.

Notice that we are told that it is through the blood of the covenant that we are sanctified. There is an intensely personal issue here. Jesus Christ did not come to die for the sins of the world in a generic, sweeping way. He came to die for the sins of every single person in the world. When dealing with the issue of salvation it is as if it were just Jesus Christ and you. He died on the cross because of you. Now God says, "I demand your response." If a person says, "Well, I'm not ready to believe," God takes it personally and says, "You are treating the death of my Son as if it has no value." There is no middle ground.

Insulting the Spirit of God

The unbeliever has also insulted the Spirit of grace. The word insult denotes an insolent, self-assertion. When a person does not believe in Christ, he has lifted himself up in arrogance to stand against the Spirit of God.

All three members of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are involved in salvation. Plus, all three members of the Godhead are offended by our refusal to believe.

The writer of Hebrews mentioned the word grace. Grace is something that is undeserved. In Jesus Christ, God has provided for us what we could not merit on our own. When we think about it, it is God's grace that we should be seeking, not His justice. If we got what we truly deserved, all of us would receive condemnation. We should not seek justice for ourselves since we deserve condemnation.

God's grace is provided by His Son's death through the ministry of the Spirit of God. The Spirit calls out to us, "Come and trust in Christ." But those who refuse to believe in Jesus Christ answer back, "I will not." In doing so they insult the Spirit of God.

Falling into the Hands of the Living God

What is the fate of those people who trample underfoot the death of God's Son? What kind of punishment do they deserve? Hebrews 10:30-31 states: "For we know Him who said, 'vengeance is mine, I will repay.' And again, 'the Lord will judge his people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Those who reject Jesus Christ will find themselves standing before the God who is terrifying and awesome in His holiness. They are objects of His wrath.

Scripture is clear concerning God's wrath for those who reject His Gospel message. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28: "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." This destruction is described in Revelation 14:10-11: "He also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

God's love is infinite and immeasurable; but this passage tells us that His wrath is also infinite and immeasurable. For those who have rejected God's grace and mercy by refusing to believe in Christ, there will come a day when they will experience the wrath of God in its full strength. They will be tormented forever and ever. They will have no rest

day and night. We cannot fathom the awfulness of an eternal hell, but we must believe it because God has told us about it. The God who cannot lie or go back on His Word has said that eternal torment awaits those who reject His Son.

What more important issue is there? What can be compared to this truth? Many people today are concerned about what kind of house they live in, what kind of clothes they wear, what their retirement account is, but they give little or no thought to their eternal destiny.

Revelation 20:11-15 describes the terrible Great White Throne Judgment. At this judgment all unbelievers of all times are brought before Jesus Christ for sentencing to the lake of fire. Verse 15 states, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." Could God's Word be any clearer? Those who are not believers in Jesus Christ are thrown into a burning lake of fire. From this torment there is no relief.

Choose Eternal Life

Hebrews 10:26-31 has made it clear that all people have two choices regarding their eternal destiny. They can trust in Christ and choose an eternal heaven, or they can choose not to believe in Christ and end up in the eternal lake of fire. Still, some people refuse to believe this truth. Some say, "Oh, I just can't believe in a God who would send people to an eternal hell." Or, "I just cannot accept that God would be so angry that He would punish people every moment for all eternity." But do you want to know what is even harder to believe? It is harder to believe that God can offer us salvation freely, yet people reject it. That is the real problem. In Revelation 22:17 God says, "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." God's salvation is open to everyone without cost. All you must do is come. Lay down your sin, trust in Jesus Christ. By simply believing you can share eternity with Him forever. It is sad, however, that so many say, "Don't bother me with that. I'm busy with the things in my life and have more important things to do."

Mark it down. Judgment day is coming. The decision you choose

today concerning heaven and hell will affect where you spend eternity. There are only two options. You either accept Christ or reject Him. At the judgment day there will not be a third group to whom God says, “I don’t know what to do with them; they are neither with Me nor against Me. They don’t belong in heaven or hell.” That is not reality. The issue is black and white. God says, “There’s the line. You are either on one side or the other.” Where do you stand with Jesus Christ?

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