

"A Serious Warning"

As we continue our sermon series based on Hebrews Chapter 10, today we get to a section that has quite the "Lenten feel." Over the past few weeks we have explored verses that have encouraged different kinds of behavior in our Christian lives because of the great proclamation made in verse 10— that Jesus has offered a sacrifice once for all sin and for all time. We heard that in response His final sacrifice, we are to draw near to Him in confidence with the full assurance of faith; we are to stir up one another to love; and we are to hold on to our confession of faith without changing our minds. And while these past few verses have certainly helped us see the great implications of Christ's work for God's people in how we live each day, in our reading from Hebrews this morning, the writer seems to slam on the breaks, just in case we are getting too comfortable, and gives a serious warning. "For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin but a fearful expectation of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."

See what I mean by a Lenten feel? These verses stare us down and force us to confront the reality of willfully rejecting the faith. Trust me, I've never seen a picture of with the words of Hebrews 10:26-27 hanging on the wall of someone's home or office. John 3:16, yes! Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," yes, I've seen quite a few of those. But "If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin but a fearful expectation of judgement," no. I doubt anyone is looking for a daily reminder with such a stern warning of being lost forever.

But in all seriousness, this one probably should make it on the wall, or at least make it on our list of favorite verses in the Bible, not because it is uplifting and joyous, but precisely because it speaks of the terrible reality of deliberate sin.

Now of course, in order to understand what the writer was doing here, we need to remember the context of this letter. It was written to 1st-century Jewish Christians. They were new to the faith, but they were very familiar with the Old Testament writings, especially the first five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

These new Christians knew what God allowed and what he forbid. They knew what He expected of them because they knew the law. In fact, the writer of Hebrews had Deuteronomy on the mind as he wrote verses 26-31. Listen to these words from the 17th chapter of Deuteronomy: "If there is found among you a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing his covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshipped them, you shall bring out that man or woman who has done this evil thing and stone them to death. On the evidence of two or three witnesses, the one who is to die shall be put to death so you shall purge evil from your sights" (vs. 2-7). Yikes! Go against what God has revealed, worship other gods and your life is over; it's done. That's bad enough but in relation to these verses in Deuteronomy, hear how the writer of Hebrews puts it. "Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses" (v.28). That's sounds a lot like what we just heard in Deuteronomy doesn't it? But then the writer of Hebrews takes it to another level. "How much more severely do you think a person deserves to be punished who had 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. 29 NIV).

To the writer, persistently doing what is wrong after hearing the truth, or to put it another way, confessing your faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning death for sinners, and then living like his death and subsequent resurrection doesn't matter at all, proven by your deliberate and willful sin indicates a real problem. And that problem is God's judgement. The whole section is a serious warning to Jewish Christians— a warning that ends with the chilling words, "It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God " (v. 31). And it's a warning for you and me today.

Now, I know this is not the feel good message you probably wanted to hear today, but as one of your pastors, I am called to preach the Word of God and His word contains both Law and Gospel. The Law makes demands of us. The Gospel make no demands whatsoever. The law tells us what to do. The Gospel demands nothing but gives all. The law uncovers those places in our lives that show where we are against God. The Gospel reveals to us only what God is doing. Well, I think you know by now that our passage from Hebrews is pure Law. It makes a demand of us and definitely uncovers a potential place in our lives where we could find ourselves going against God.

"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin but a fearful expectation of judgement " (v. 26-27). Deliberate sin is a real problem and God is not Ok with it! Purposely going against God

with absolutely no regard for the work of Jesus Christ is absolutely wrong! It's that simple. "Well, what about grace through faith," you might be thinking? "You guys are always saying that Jesus died for all of our sins." Yes, we are. Jesus died once and for all. His sacrifice was the final sacrifice, but that doesn't mean God has checked out and doesn't care about deliberate sin; that now, he's just hanging out relaxing because everything is cool! Trust me, God's not like, "Johnny is having another affair! Oh, that's so Johnny— glad I came into my own creation as a child and grew up to take the sins of the world upon myself to point of death on a crude cross outside of Jerusalem so that he can deliberately break his marriage vows and cheat on his wife as much as he wants." Yet when we deliberately sin, as silly as what I just said sounded, it is kind of what we expect. We want God to act like he has somehow gotten over our deliberate sin and doesn't really care about it the way he used to. We want things our way with no consequences but there are consequences and those consequences aren't good. Remember this? "It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of living God " (v. 31).

Now, if you are squirming in your seat right now, wondering if you have already messed up to the point of no return, hear this: All of us deliberately sin now and then. We all do or say things purposely and intentionally and it's usually to get what we want. We all hurt others with our words and actions. We all mess up deliberately now and then for sure. But at the end of the day, the guilt and the pain of those deliberate sins hopefully convicts us to the point that we beg for God's forgiveness on account of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This is what repentance is all about and as Christians, it's a vital part of the everyday life we all lead. We are convicted on the inside; we share our sorrow with God; He hears it and on account of our faith in Jesus Christ, declares us forgiven.

And even though sin will always be a part of our lives, until we take our last breath or Jesus returns, when we deliberately sin in all of those ways we are so tempted to in this world, and that guilt and that pain that used to convict us becomes less and less to the point that it is completely absent, and we stop sharing our sorrow with God because our hearts are hardened, then we have a problem.

During this season of Lent, as we ponder our lives of faith, I encourage you to take this warning from Hebrews seriously. Do you feel remorse when you deliberately sin? Does the guilt consume you forcing you to confess your sin to God asking for His forgiveness? Or is your heart beginning to harden and your deliberate sin triggers no remorse and no guilt? Be honest with yourselves.

Be honest and then be assured that there is still hope. Jesus Christ shed his blood once and for all. He died for those deliberate sins that can take you away from God. This is the news of the Gospel, the good news about Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection saved you and me from sin and death. And this relationship, which we freely participate in through our faith in Him, redeems and restores us forever. May God grant it so for all of us. **Amen.**