

The old Bible commentator J Vernon McGee said, “This is a passage that can make your hair stand on end”. It does! And I can’t change that! In many churches today, warnings like this are effectively redacted from the Bible, never taught, or read. But it is always a serious mistake to ignore the Holy Spirit.

\*God’s purpose in warning us is to keep us NEAR to him. He wants our happiness and salvation!! He warns us so that terrible things may NOT happen to us.

Last year, in just 8 days, 3 people fell hundreds of feet to their death at the Grand Canyon. There are warnings! “Do not climb over the barriers! Stay at least 6’ from the edge of the rim”. But some climb out to the very edge and fall to their death. Others see the shear drop off, the rocks hundreds of feet below, and stay back far enough to enjoy the beauty of the canyon. Adolf Saphire said “The believer sees the precipice of apostasy, and clings to God”. IE we see the disaster of falling away from God and we cling all the more to him!

The warnings of the Bible are to make us soberly, say, I am NOT going there. I don’t want ANY part of that! This sober caution is always found in those who walk in happy and close communion with God. It is almost never found in those who fall away from God.

\*The warnings are so strong precisely because the dangers are so terrible. Adolf Saphire “To keep people from falling over a precipice, we do not put up a slender and graceful hedge of flowers, but the strongest barrier we can..” We should thank God that he loves us enough to put up a strong barrier of warning for our well being. When I was looking for the statistics of deaths at the Grand Canyon I read an article titled, “It takes one bad step; people die at the Grand Canyon because it is a beautiful and dangerous place”.

The Bible reveals that life is beautiful and dangerous. There is the incredible beauty of salvation and the terrible danger of eternal destruction. We need to know about both.

There is tremendous push back to any mention at all of God's righteous anger, wrath and judgment today. But if our sins have NOT put us in a position to deserve God's wrath and judgment, then the mercy and grace of God in saving us from that judgment, is meaningless. If we deny a God who judges we might as well deny salvation, forgiveness, grace, love, favor and the blood of Jesus.

J I Packer "Would a God who took as much pleasure in evil as he did in good be a good God? Would a God who did not react adversely to evil in His world be morally perfect?" IE would God be good if he was indifferent to rape and hatred and jealousy and greed? Sam Storms said God's wrath is "his antagonism toward all that is unholy". "God's wrath is his love for holiness and truth and justice. It is because God loves purity and peace and perfection that he reacts angrily toward anything or anyone who defies them".

Jesus said something that helps us understand our passage, this morning. He said, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." I have never farmed but I get this image. You grip the plow in your hand and you look ahead and you plow that ground all the way to the end of the line. You don't let go and you can't look back! Jesus invites us to attach ourselves to him like we would put our hand to the plow. He does not invite us to a "come when you want, leave when you want, kind of relationship".

We enter the kingdom of God by a “faith hold” on Jesus that inherently means we turn our back on the world, and turn toward Jesus. And departing from Jesus becomes unthinkable.

There is an old spiritual that goes like this:  
If you want to get to Heav'n I tell you how  
Just keep your hand on the Gospel plow  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on  
If that plow stays in your hand  
Land you straight (in) the Promised land  
Keep your hand on the plow, hold on

If we are followers of Jesus, we have put our hand to the plow and we don't look back. Hebrews 10:39 says, “We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls”. The purpose of Hebrews is to stiffen our resolve so we can say boldly: “We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, But we ARE, OF, THOSE who have faith and preserve our souls.”

This message of holding fast, has been forcefully stated throughout the book of Hebrews. In 3:6 We are God's house, “if we hold fast our confidence, boasting in our hope firm until the end”. 3:14 “We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.” 4:14 “Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.” 10:23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering.”

Paul said, God will “present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.”

(Colossians 1:22) Holding fast to Christ and our hope in him is a part of genuine saving faith. Christ holds us fast, AND we hold fast to him. There is no such thing as salvation where Christ holds people fast and they deliberately and continually turn from him to live in sin and unbelief.

The exhortation to hold fast, is so needed because in almost any group that calls themselves Christians there are those who are thinking about turning away and departing from Jesus. They appear to be in the company of the saints. But they don't last. As Jesus said, when trouble comes they fall away. Something will come along and they will shrink back. The warning of Hebrews is don't let be the case with any of you. Hebrews 3:12 "Take care, brothers, lest there be in ANY OF YOU an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God."

The author of Hebrews was concerned about Jews who had "received the knowledge of the truth" about Jesus, but instead of holding fast to Jesus, were turning away to go back to the old sacrificial system of the law.

Some of you may have seen the recent interview Aaron Rogers put out, in which he renounced his Christianity. He said he had grown up in the church, went to Young Life meetings, even did mission work to homeless people. But he now has rejected his Christian faith and no longer believes in God. This scripture says that people who willfully and deliberately turn away from Christ have put themselves in a frightful status before God!

Rejecting Jesus is a grave offense against God. It is also turning away from the ONLY way God's judgment against our sins can be removed from us. If we repudiate the only way of salvation, then the

only thing that can remain is a fearful expectation of judgment! That's what verse 26 says, "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."

If you had to jump out of an airplane and you refused to put on a parachute to save yourself, the only thing that remains is a terrifying expectation of self destruction when you hit the earth. There is no other parachute than Christ. Acts 4:12 says "Salvation exists in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

The author of Hebrews is not talking about those who are caught in a sin, even a big sin. He is not talking about those daily faults and sins in which James says we all stumble in many ways. He has already told us that Jesus is a merciful high priest to us when we sin, because he was tempted just as we are, yet without sin. And 1 John 2:1 If we sin we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ..."

To "go on sinning deliberately", in this context, means deliberately choosing the sin of unbelief. It is willfully turning away from Jesus.

The author makes the point that the greater the grace God has offered us, the greater the punishment for spurning it. God gave Jesus as our perfect high priest to offer up himself as a perfect and lasting sacrifice for our sins. God has provided for the complete cleansing of our sins, the perfect cleansing of our consciences. Through the blood of Jesus, everything and anything that would hinder our nearness to God has been removed. Now in light of this

great privilege, we are warned that the consequences are terrible for those who spurn this or repudiate this!!

As Hebrews 2:3 says “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”

The Israelites were incredibly privileged under Moses. God spoke directly to Moses. The law came with smoke and fire, and miracles and powerful manifestations of God. But with this astonishing privilege came severe loss for those who turned their back on it. Verse 28 “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 trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?”

How shall we escape God’s judgment if we profane the blood of Christ that opened the way into the very presence of God? This phrase means to consider the blood of Jesus as common, or without any special value. How shall we escape if we trample underfoot the one who gave his own life to pay for our sins? We trample mud and garbage underfoot. God sees spurning Jesus as treating him like dirt! How shall we escape if we outrage or insult the Holy Spirit who calls us to God and who alone can produce in us all the inward effects of salvation? The answer is that no one will escape who treats Christ in this way!

And to reinforce this message about the dangers of abandoning Christ, the author reminds us of WHO God is, and WHAT he has said. Verse 30 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.” Notice this phrase, “We know him who said..” or the God we know has said that vengeance is his prerogative and he will pay back for evil. The God who we know has TOLD US that he WILL judge his people. And it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”.

No Being is more loving than God, but he also judges willful, persistent rejection of his Son. The gospel is a two edged sword! Paul said it is an aroma of life to some and of death to others. Adolf Saphire said, “The world does not know the sweetness of God’s love, nor does it stand in awe before God’s wrath”. As believers, we know the precious love of God, poured into our hearts; WE ALSO KNOW that God is a consuming fire. We love God AND we stand in reverential awe of him.

One common characteristic of many who turn away from God is that they DENY that God could ever judge anyone. Aaron Rogers “I don’t know how you can believe in a God who WANTS to condemn most of the planet to a fiery Hell.” Many have turned from God because of this same slanderous thought toward God. To put it like that is a terrible distortion of the God we know. God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes in him would not perish but have eternal life. We were ALREADY condemned by our sin and rebellion and God in his love came to us in Christ to bring us to himself. It is true that there will be a fiery judgment for those who spurn God and his Son, Jesus Christ. But God is not willing for any to perish but that all should come to repentance.

The author immediately follows up this severe warning with words of encouragement. He goes on to remind the Hebrews of the cost

they had already paid in being associated with the company of the saints. Some were evicted, some put in prison, and they all suffered the shame of being a part of this persecuted minority.

He tells them in verse 35 “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.” He said, “Keep going on! Finish the race! Great reward is ahead!” Verse 37 “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay”. Christ is coming soon with massive reward and massive glory for the saints. As the old hymn says, “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus!”

Verse 38 “My righteous one shall live by faith,” Faith is not only something to get you into the kingdom it is HOW YOU LIVE LIFE. You get up in the morning and you say, “O my God, in YOU I trust!” FAITH IS WHAT GOD WANTS FROM YOU NOW! You live by faith and you KEEP living by faith-faith in Jesus, faith in God, faith in the Holy Spirit, faith in the blood, faith in the Word of God, faith in God’s goodness, and his nearness.

Verse 38 goes on, “if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.” Shrinking back is an action of retreat, fear, refusal to trust, of going back away from God to some other alternative. Your confidence in God is what pleases him! Hebrews 11:6 says, “without faith it is impossible to please God”.

Then the author ends on this confident, declaration of faith. “But WE are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

Everything in this passage is written to draw forth from the Hebrews, and from us, this unwavering declaration! Take this statement and make it your own personal confession! Write it on your chalk board! Write this on your heart! “We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, But we ARE, OF, THOSE who have faith and preserve our souls”. We are going on! We are not taking our hand off the plow!

We are not of those who trample underfoot the Son of God; we are of those who love and obey and worship the Son of God. We are not of those who profane the blood of Christ; we are of those who consider the blood of Jesus exceedingly precious and understand that our souls have been purchased by that blood. We are not of those who insult the Holy Spirit; we are of those who honor the Holy Spirit and listen to the Spirit’s voice and desire to be filled with the Spirit! And we are holding fast our assurance firm until the end. We are going on to SALVATION!

I want everyone here to be able to say that with a sincere heart. If you are not in the company of those who are holding fast in full assurance of faith, why not come into that company this morning.

Prayer: God, You have given us such a precious gift in Jesus! We hold fast to Him, and we boast in Him! Strengthen our hearts, and our faith to finish strong.