



Ministry of the Word

Sunday 31st March 2019

by Vincent Gannon

Scripture: Hebrews 10:26-39

Subject: Part 26 – The Danger of Wilful Sin

The People who read these verses the first-time round, were Jewish people whose hearts had been attracted to the gospel of Christ on some level. Some had made a superficial commitment of faith to Him. They had identified themselves visibly with the true church, and they by reading this book, were aware of the evidence which the writer had presented in vast layers and details. But their enthusiasm was cooling for the cost of being a Christian was becoming too high. They were weighing the cost of the gospel, and some were in danger of becoming apostate.

Last week we saw the writer inviting the reader to approach the throne of God in verses 19 to 22, and in verses 23 to 25, it was to advance the people of God, but now in verses 26 to 39 the mood has changed, admonishing the reader to avoid the Judgement of God. So, in summary – Verses 19 to 25 encouraged the Christian to cling to Jesus and now in verses 26 to 39 it is underlining once again the danger of letting go. It tells us plainly in verse 26

26 For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

This verse starts out with the fourth warning that we find in the book of Hebrews. If you can remember, the first was The Dangers of Drifting in Chapter 2 verses 1 to 4, the second was The Danger of Disobedience and Neglect, in chapter 3 verse 7 to chapter 4 verse 13. The third was the danger of not progressing, not maturing, becoming dull of hearing in chapter 5 verse 11 to Chapter 6 verse 20. Now, the fourth warning we find here is the Danger of Wilful sinning or '*sin wilfully*'.

What does Wilful Sin mean? Does it mean that if you are a Christian and you sin, that you could lose your salvation? If so, then we are all done for! Christians Sin. A believer may sometimes lapse into sin and stray from intimacy with the Lord and with His people. However, the Lord corrects those whom he loves and are his, and the person will go back to the Lord. They'd be under too much conviction to stay away permanently. In the meantime, they are robbed of joy, peace and of many other blessings.

If a believer falls short in his faithfulness to the Lord, the Lord still will not fail in His faithfulness to the believer, for He has promised never to let us go. "He cannot deny Himself," by falling short in His own faithfulness, no matter what His people do. A Christian can become weak in faith and disobedient, which is bad enough but this is not denying the Lord. We have seen throughout this study of the Book of Hebrews, that it is not possible for a Christian to lose their salvation, let's be very clear about that. When we do sin, thank God for Scriptures like 1 John 1 verse 9 –

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

But this is not what verse 26 is about, for it states that *there no longer remains a sacrifice*. The particular issue that it is being addressed here is wilful sin. Wilful sinning is the attitude of total open rebellion and the attitude of an apostate. It is rejecting who Jesus is and what He has done for us. Those who read this first were Jews on the edge of doing this, and going back into Judaism. They were actually toying with the idea that there could be Salvation apart from Christ. Who would do this? Apostates.

Apostasy is an intentional falling away or withdrawal, a defection. Apostasy has two major characteristics: knowledge of the truth of the gospel and wilful rejection of it. Every apostate

is an unbeliever, but not every unbeliever is an apostate. Many people have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel, even in part. They are sinful and, of course, do not believe in Christ, because they have never heard of Him or of His claims. An apostate, however, is well acquainted with the gospel. He knows more than enough to be saved.

Apostates are not made in the absence, but in the presence of Christ. They are bred almost without exception within the church, in the very midst of God's people. It is possible for a person to read the Bible on his own, to see the gospel clearly, and then reject it without direct association with Christians. But by and large, apostates come from within the church. One helpful Scripture in defining apostasy is 1 John 2:19, which says,

"They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."

Apostasy is not new, nor is God's attitude towards it. It is one of the most serious sins, with serious consequences, because it is the most deliberate and wilful form of unbelief. There is no other sacrifice for sin apart from Christ, which is why the text says there is no sacrifice for this sin. It is not a sin of ignorance, but of rejecting known truth. Apostasy is determined by what you leave, not where you go after you leave. After a person leaves God, it makes little difference where they then go. Our Lord was illustrating this in the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:1-9 and 18 to 23). The apostle Paul said that apostasy is going to be a characteristic of the last days.

"The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron"
(1 Timothy 4:1&2)

In the end times, the times in which I believe we are now living, apostasy will become worse and worse. Paul distinguishes between apostates and disobedient fleshly Christians in his second letter to Timothy.

"If we deny Him, He also will deny us," because we will be apostate and willingly will have no part in Him. But, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:12-13).

This terrible offense, that man insults God by claiming, stating, even declaring that Calvary was insufficient, unnecessary, pointless, some go as far as claiming it was untrue. Some even went on to ‘scripturelise’ their position, by misusing the word of God.

Verse 27 tells us the consequences of this sin and I want to read it to you from the AMPC translation here:

[There is nothing left for us then] but a kind of awful and fearful prospect and expectation of divine judgment and the fury of burning wrath and indignation which will consume those who put themselves in opposition [to God].

What a terrifying warning. This is a fearful expectation and it does not hold back by stating, what so many deny, hell and its doctrine. It is awful and fearful because it is certain and it is eternal. Note how judgement precedes the punishment. This was part and remains part of the Gospel. In fact, John the Baptist made clear the consequence of rejecting Christ’s salvation in Matthew 3:12 when he spoke about God sorting out the wheat from the tares on the day of judgement –

His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

Jesus in His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:22 said

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ (empty head) shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire.

Jesus talked to the people about hell more than anybody. Jesus said in Matthew 10:28

– And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

There in the first 10 chapters of Matthew, we find the resulting end of all who reject the gospel. The people who go to hell are not all terrible sinners, living terrible lives, dancing with the devil. They are those who have bought into the lie of Genesis 3:5. Some may even be able to quote the verse, but believe they are gods, and have as much right to do as they please and believe whatever they want to believe, that’s their right. They stone wall the truth of the Gospel. They come from all walks of life and from all different types of backgrounds.

Nonetheless, the picture we see here in our text is that they will surely face the just judgement of God. Then they will experience His Holy Wrath, which is devouring. They may want to go back on what they have said on this earth, but there will be no going back, no defence, no security for them. Every step they make on this earth away from the cross, from God's forgiveness, from God's Grace, from His love, His Mercy, are steps towards solidifying the judgment of God. As the author of this book continues, he compares the judgement under the old economy to that under the new.

28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

What solemn and serious verses! In verse 28 God warned the people under the economy of the Old Testament, that those who rejected Moses' Law, would be rejected. The sin that warranted death had to be on the testimony by two or three witness. Every Jew was brought up to know God's law and learned to keep it. We know that every time they put God to the side and themselves to the forefront, it was trouble and disastrous. The individual was not without knowledge and not without knowing the penalty of disobedience.

Now here, it is put to us that God will reject those who reject the Lamb of God. No two or three people are required because now under the New Covenant the Triune God is witness. We see the reiteration that God will not find it in his heart to forgive, apart from the way He has provided which is through the finished work on the Cross and His Grace. Back in Moses' day, a person rejected God's law, but now they reject the Revelation of God through Jesus. This is why it is so much worse, because they are rejecting God Himself. Warren Warseby said of this verse – **Verse 29 reminds us that our salvation (and the shed blood that purchased it) are held in high regard by God. The Father values His Son; the son shed His blood; the Spirit applies the merits of Grace.**

In verse 29, we are told that these people commit three specific offenses – They Trample the blood of Christ, they count it as common and they Insult the Spirit of Grace.

The person who wilfully sins, as referred to in this context is a well-informed person rejecting and having contempt for the gospel as a whole. When it says to Trample the Blood of Christ

it is like the common expression ‘A Person walking all over you’, we know exactly what this means and how it feels, and this is exactly what an apostate does. They belittle the Son of God. This title Son of God is neither a common title in the Gospels or in the epistles. Jesus used it in reference to Himself both in John 5:25 and 9:35. The disciples in their worship of Him in Matthew 16:15 also used this titled and look at Nathanael’s declaration in John 1:49 –

“Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!”

For the believer, Hebrews 1:3 is very important because it teaches us that at no point did the Son derive His being from the Father. The son always was co-eternal with the Father. To trample the blood of Christ is to trample upon the finished work of the cross and on God himself.

The next crime or offense that these people commit is they *counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing*. Have you ever heard someone say – that Jesus’s death was no better or worse than someone else’s, or what makes his death different from anyone else’s if he did exist? What very contemptuous remarks, calling Jesus’ death on the cross common, because that’s exactly what they are doing. What they are really saying is that the atonement was and is irrelevant to them, it has no value, it was an unnecessary action. His death was common.

The word common here is the same found in Acts 10 when Peter had the vision of the animals coming down from heaven and God told him to eat them and Peter said, “Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean.” And God said to him, “What God has cleansed you must not call common”. Under Levitical understanding of the law what people called common meant unclean, defiled, profane, unholy, polluted. The people in the day which this book was written considered that death by execution of the Cross was common, it was a curse.

But not only that, these things lead to the third offence – insulting the Spirit of Grace. The Spirit of Grace, is the Holy Spirit. He brings us to Christ, He points the way to Salvation, He

convicts us of sin and He testifies truth, what Jesus has done and who Jesus is. He is part and parcel of the justification and sanctification process. Matthew 12:31 tells us –

“Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men.

Therefore, to trample underfoot the Son of God, to call His sacrifice common, to add or to take away from what Christ has done is to reject and insult the Father, the son and outrage the Holy Spirit who imparts grace, the unmerited favour and blessing of God. This is why the Holy Spirit stops knocking on the door of the apostate’s heart, the one who sins wilfully. It also gives us insight into why a blood bought Christian cannot do this, for the Holy Spirit indwells them. It explains that the person who becomes an apostate was never a true believer but a make believer.

³⁰ For we know Him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge His people.” ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Verse 30 opens up with part of Deuteronomy chapter 32 verses 35 and 36. Both are in relation to the Justice and Judgement of God upon those who reject Him. In the Old Testament, it was principally those people who were called to serve and be God’s witnesses, but rejected Him, were called God rejecters. They were full of self-confidence at the time they were rejecting God, but when you read verse 35, and its indicated here, God promised that one day their feet will slip, in time and God will be there ready for them, ready with their judgement.

No-one will escape God nor His Judgment, for God has given an appointed day and time to every single person. It will all happen perfectly on His time, no-one will be late for their appointment and He will never put it off. When a person stands before God, He is not interested in what label they placed on themselves or what identity they told everybody else they were here on earth, nor that they believed there is a God or a Higher Power, for James said in his epistle that even the Devil believes there is a God. It will not be about belief but about Relationship! To fall into the hands of the ultimate Authority in Heaven and Earth, to fall into the Ultimate Power, is certain and no wonder it is a fearful thing.

It reminds me of David in 2 Samuel 24 verse 1 to 17, which is the story not of an apostate but of a man who chose to do his own thing. You have to know that David's heart was after God. Verse 10 tells us that David was stricken in conscience, he acknowledged his sin, in other words he repented. Yet judgement and justice were carried out in verse 13. Three options were presented to him and in verse 14–

And David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Please let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

Had David ran the red light of his conscience, it would have been a disaster for everyone. Yet man today is full of pride, and ignores God altogether. But he will not be able to ignore the judgement that awaits him. It's not God getting revenge out of vindictiveness, but vengeance here is speaking about God's just judgment, retribution and punishment. In Romans 12:18 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8, we see then same sense of vindication of God's Righteousness. From Judgment and warning comes a call for perseverance to those who love the Lord and trust in his finished work on the cross in verses 32 and 33 -

³² But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: ³³ partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated;

"But recall" – this action calls us to remember the former days of spiritual promise when faith in Christ was strong and the trails faced were challenges and the victories won were reasons to rejoice in the Lord. The cost was great hence the words 'great and painful struggle' speaking here of Spiritual Warfare. These people were called to remember how great their Salvation is. We too must remember what God has done for us, what he has saved us from and what he is saving us onto. Remember God's faithfulness through previous struggles as you face new ones, He is still the same God, but hopefully you are not the same person which is the reason you face them. One thing that Jesus promised us, that as believers we will all face at some stage: is trails, criticism, tribulations, persecution and even death.

We see these things in verse 33 listed as things some people will endured directly and some indirectly. Their identification with Christ and His church was total or seemed to be. Suffering for Christ is a topic which many enjoy reading or hearing about but not the participating part.

A preacher who spoke on this subject found his congregation belligerent towards the topic. So, he asked for a show of hand of those who believed they would not mind suffering for Christ. Miles away from the threat of such, most raised their hand. So, he challenged them to meet with him on Saturday afternoon at the shopping centre. Right enough most came and enjoy the chat. All was well till he handed out gospel posters to put on while he preached the gospel. Very soon only three or four remained.

We are called to suffer for God's name. Many verses in the bible refer to this, such as 2 Corinthians 1:7 & 2 Corinthians 11:23, Philippians 3:10, 2 Timothy 2:12 and in Romans 8 verse 17 we read –

and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

& 36 of the same chapter

As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

Yes while it speaks of trials, reproach, tribulation directly or indirectly for His name sake they also speak of the joy and the hope that is set before us in Christ. Echoes of this same thought are here in verse 34 -

³⁴ for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.

There is still enough of Human compassion thankfully around but you do expect to find it more as well as consistently amongst the believing body of Christ. Christ exemplified this even to those who did not believe. We see it many times in all the Gospels. We read when their property was been confiscated, they accepted it joyfully. This is foreign, but the lesson here is who or what has hold of who. Their eyes and heart and mind went higher than on what was around them. We need to be like that don't we? keeping our eyes, our hearts and minds focused on our prize. Now the question is – what is the prize you are looking for?

If it is on Jesus, verses 35 to 38 have a great exhortation, it's a word to the wise -

³⁵ Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: ³⁷ "For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry.

³⁸ Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him."

The writer pleads that they don't throw away their confidence in their faith or belief. It was always under threat. They are exhorted to persevere, to keep going, in spite of all the uphill battles because God will keep His promises. They could, just like we still can, trust God because He is faithful. He is faithful to His people, to His name and to His Word. Endurance was and has always been required from God's people. This endurance and perseverance are possible because of in Whom we trust and the precious hope He has given. The readers of this books were reminded, just like we are, of the glorious truth of Christ's return.

It is of immense interest that during the 70's that this teaching was very popular and it resulted in the rise of missions, great evangelism, as well as prayer and Bible studies. Many churches were founded because many were saved. Then suddenly it seemed to stop and things turned for the worse.

The Imminent return of the Lord is what is being pointed to in this verse. We are taught to expect His sudden return as seen in Philippians 3:20

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

and Titus 2:13

looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ,

and Hebrews 9:28

so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

Do you live with this doctrine as a reality in your life? If you did, would it change your behaviour? Would it changed where you store your treasure? If we live with this, our walk would improve. Note that their lives were marked with persecution. God did not promise us escape from this, only the great tribulation which is the time of Jacob's Trouble (go back to Daniel 9). We are reminded again that Jesus will not tarry to come back for His church.

Verses 38, reminds us that the Just live by faith which is the exact opposite of the Apostates. The spirit of God, has no pleasure in anyone who draws back, such as those who back slide, which you can read about in the Old Testament as well as the new, but in the next verse, which is the last verse of this chapter we are giving an encouraging note -

39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

“But we are not of those who shrink back”, which is the way the amplified version puts it. We will not go back to judgement. Those who are make believers go back to face Judgment, face eternal misery in Hell. But we, who are true believers must press on and be active in telling others about our Faith, about the secure and assured Salvation in Christ Jesus. Those of us who press on, who go forward will face reward.

Faith, Salvation and steadfastness are called for and we are going to be introduced big time to individuals who exemplified these three important traits for us in the next chapter.

Right to the end of this chapter the warning which is given is very clear. The application is simple. What are we going to do in the light of these truths? You know that we have to make a decision before God. No-one else is involved in that decision, but you. The consequence either way are enormous and eternal. Even if we choose not to do anything we have made a choice. It's solemn, I know. We have to be serious in the light of His soon return.

Amen.