

The Penalty of Apostasy Part 2

a sermon in the series
Hebrews: An Epistle of Encouragement

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Hebrews 10:26-31

For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, 27 But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. 28 He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: 29 Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

In light of the events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, I want to share about an even greater terrorism than what this nation has experienced or suffered. Perhaps you will think using the tragedy of this past week as an illustration is indecent and inconsiderate. I am sure I will appear as a profiteer on others' tragedy. I am willing to risk appearing so in order to burn upon our minds the seriousness of faith and just what is at stake.

It seemed surreal as I watched the terrible images of the devastation of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on the television screen in my office. However, there are evil forces arrayed against the Christian that are much crueler and more dangerous than those who perpetrated the vicious and wicked acts of terrorism Tuesday.

The writer of Hebrews repeatedly warns against the terrorism of sin and temptation. His most insightful warning is found in chapter three and verse thirteen, "But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." This is a repeated theme throughout the book. Again, in our text today he warns of the danger of not taking seriously the "deceitfulness of sin." Just as devious and covert, and more so, as the terrorists' attack Tuesday is sin's temptation. A terrorist may take your life but sin will take your eternity! What is the "deceitfulness of sin," and what is its ultimate objective?

The "deceitfulness of sin" is the lie that you know better than God what is best for you. Sin realizes that we are somewhat willing victims. Yes, we are willing victims of sin. We have such overpowering egos that we want to think we can do it on our own. We already have an overinflated image of ourselves without the help of anyone or anything else. We are easy marks when sin lies

at our doorstep and tells us we can make a decision in the situation confronting us that is wise even though it doesn't exactly go along with Scripture. Our inherent nature loves to think that God has nothing on us; that, in fact, we can do a better job of determining what is better for us than our Lord can. Sin crawls up to you in the form of a mental suggestion and whispers, "the Bible may say that you shouldn't gossip, but this is okay because it is the truth." Sin says, "God may have said adultery is wrong, but your husband is not meeting your needs, therefore, He will understand. Besides you can ask Him to forgive you afterwards." It lies when it suggests, "You will feel better after you let the anger out, so go ahead let them have it." So the deceitfulness of sin is the subtle attack against faith in God. The suggestion that you and I can determine better than God what is pleasurable and good is to undermine trust in God that He knows what will bring us the greatest good and pleasure.

When Eve was tempted in the garden, Satan suggested to her that God was the one who had lied and did not have her best interests in mind. The devil said, "Ye shall not surely die." He first created doubt in Eve's mind that God could be trusted, and then He said, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." In other words, "Eve, you can't trust God when He says evil will come from not obeying Him. You are your own person who can determine for yourself what is good or bad; pleasant and unpleasant."

The Bible then records that most terrible moment when the human race departed from the Lord and set its course in rebellion. It says, "And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." Eve looked through her own eyes and determined, apart from God, that the fruit was good and pleasant. She made the decision based upon what she thought what was good and pleasurable and refused to trust what God said would be good for her and her husband.

Apostasy always begins with a single decision that usually appears to be an insignificant decision; a small departure from the exactness of God's expressed command. In that moment of temptation, we will either choose to trust God's Word that He knows what is best for us and will reject sin's offer for pleasure, or we will reject God's wisdom choosing to trust our own. That is the deceitfulness of sin. And that is the beginning of apostasy.

Last week we learned about the horrendous sin of apostasy. Apostasy is a despising and rejecting of Christ. The worst form of such is a public recanting of Christ and a deserting of the church. But there are degrees of apostasy. Persons could be apostate and never publicly recant their faith. They just stop living what they profess.

The writer of Hebrews discussed apostasy in three phases. First, "Who hath trodden under foot the Son of God." This in essence says Christ is worthless and irrelevant. Second, he says, "Hath counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing." This is saying that Jesus was just a man and that He died a death as any other condemned criminal. It is to say His blood sacrifice has no sav-

ing merit. And third, "Hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." The word "despite" means insult. These folks have despised, or insulted, the gracious, loving Spirit of God. They have slandered the veracity of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Holy Spirit is grieved when He is not believed. When the Holy Spirit convicts of sin and is rejected, it is none other than insulting Him as not being honest in His assessment of the sinner. It is to call Him a liar. Friends, that is slander, and that is an insult to God. Doing despite to the Spirit of God is to deny the truthfulness of the Holy Spirit when He points you to Christ and says, "He is the only way to eternal life." It is to call him a liar and to say, "No, there are many other ways. My righteousness is sufficient, my goodness, my form of religion is sufficient."

Today, I want us to look at what the judgment is that shall come upon those who have done these three acts of apostasy. The promise of God is this, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

JUDGMENT DISPENSED

First, I want us to see from our text a judgment is dispensed. In verse twenty-seven the writer calls it a fearful judgment.

But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries (Hebrews 10:27)

Fearful Judgment

The writer of Hebrews begins by saying of this judgment that it is a fearful judgment. A fearful judgment is going to come on those of you in my audience who reject Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It doesn't matter if you have made a profession of faith or not. Judgment, I believe, is worse for the apostate. The Bible tells us that there are different degrees of Hell. If a man dies, who has never heard the gospel, he goes to Hell. He will not escape the judgment of God. But the Bible says those in Hell will be judged based upon their light or knowledge of God's will. This is the teaching of Jesus in Luke twelve and verses forty-seven and forty-eight.

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not [himself], neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many [stripes]. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few [stripes]. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47-48).

Hell has different degrees of punishment. But, friend, even in the least terrors of Hell it will be so severe that you will wish that you were not there. Hell in its mildest form is worse than anything that you could ever experience or imagine. It is not to be laughed at. If you do not know Christ, the Bible in our text describes what is awaiting you, a certain fearful expectation for judgment. You can be certain that there is coming a day of reckoning where all people will stand before God, and they will be searched by the penetrating righteous eyes of God. Every sin about them will be exposed in the light of His holiness. It is a fearful judgment!

In verse thirty-one the author, within the very same breath, repeats himself and says, “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” He can’t finish the paragraph without warning again. Oh, friend, please don’t forsake God’s people; don’t quit exhorting and being exhorted because to do so is to forsake Christ and to forsake Christ is a fearful thing. Understand the import of and the danger in what I am saying this morning. As I look upon you, do you really understand the peril that you are in today if you are really not born again, loving God, a child of His? Do you understand what it means to stand before God in all of His glory and all of His power? I pray before I am done this morning you will. The kindest act of compassion I could extend to you is to hold nothing from you concerning the truth of God’s judgment and Hell’s terror.

Fiery Indignation

Second, not only is it a fearful judgment but also the author calls it a “fiery indignation.” The word “indignation” is used to describe a hardened anger. It is the same word we find in Acts chapter five in verse seventeen. When the high priests and those with them were angry with the disciples for preaching and teaching about Jesus, it is said they were full of indignation. “Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation (Acts 5:17). They hated the apostles. This word “indignation” or anger is used to describe an anger that is fierce and wants to lash out and inflict pain. God also has a fiery indignation, a red hot anger that wants to lash out and inflict pain on those who have rejected His Son.

In Psalm chapter seven and verse eleven the Bible says “God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.” Because God is holy and just, He must be angry with sinner. Now this is so contrary to our modern view of God. We say it this way, “God loves the sinner and hates the sin.” But the Bible does not say this. It says He is angry with the sinner who commits sin. But we reject this Biblical view of God. We desire a God of our own creation, a God who can be manipulated; a God who is a benevolent grandfather who never does anything that would inflict pain on any. But this view robs God of His glorious righteousness and renders Him an unjust God.

This week all of us have experienced an anger that says those responsible for this great wickedness must be brought to justice. If we who are imperfect in our sense of justice can be angry, then how much angrier must He be whose justice is perfect?

If God is not angry with the sinner who commits the sin, then He is no longer holy and just. He must be angry with sin. To hate sin is the most perfect, righteous thing that God can do. What about the sinner? Does He still love the sinner? This is a remarkable and an amazing thing about God that you and I cannot do. God has the emotional and intellectual capacity to both love and hate the same creature at the same time. There is a sense in which God loves us all as His creation. He wants the best for us, which is to know Him in all of His glory and splendor and His Son Jesus Christ. But in another sense God must also hate or be opposed to the sinner. God is a holy, righteous, pure, and a loving God. His love of righteousness, which is a love for His own self, can never be denied. He must be opposed to all who sin against Him.

Sin is literally a man or a woman hijacking their life and using their life like a terrorist against God. It is exactly what we saw played out before our eyes on television, only in a spiritual sense. All of this week we have experienced an anger that says these people who have done this great wickedness must be brought to justice. We demand justice, and we can only pray that it will be satisfied.

Anger is not wrong nor is the seeking of justice. The Bible does not forbid anger; rather it forbids the misuse of it. In fact, the Bible says to be angry and sin not, which tells me that of all the God-given emotions that we have, anger is probably the most dangerous. One must be careful with anger. We are never exhorted to love and sin not, or to grieve and sin not. But this is the commandment concerning anger. It is the hardest emotion to experience without crossing the line and sinning. There is in every one of us something called the image of God, and although it is marred, when an injustice has been committed there is immediate anger concerning the injustice.

What would we say of our president if on Tuesday he stood before this country and said a great injustice has been done to our nation but because we in America believe in the Bible, and because our nation was founded on the Bible, we are going to practice forgiveness and forgive those who have done this. We will not seek any type of justice, we will not pursue the perpetrators of violence, and we will not call them to answer for their deeds. Why, anarchy would erupt. If the president survived until his election he would be soundly defeated and rightly so. We would say this is the most unjust president to ever occupy the office. Dear friend, how can you say God so loves that He cannot judge your sins? How can you say that God is so kind and so forgiving and so merciful that He will not cause you to be accountable for your treason against Him? To say that God must love the sinner and not be against him or her is to say God is an unholy and evil God. No sir! God must be angry with the sinner.

Another word that this word “indignation” is also translated to mean is “zeal.” In fact, in John chapter two and verse seventeen, the Bible says of Christ after He had overturned the money tables in the temple “the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” It is the same word for indignation that is in our text. God’s indignation is a passionate anger. It is anger on mission to destroy all who oppose Him. I would not have you to misunderstand me to say that God has no mercy and that He thrills himself with His judgment. That view of God is not biblical either. Listen to God’s plea to the wicked,

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

But dear friend, because of His justice, He can’t absolve or ignore your unrighteousness, and so the Bible says with a fiery indignation He will judge sin and sinner alike. Notice the adjective here, “fiery.” Throughout the Bible God’s judgment is compared to fire. We were told that the twin towers of the World Trade Center were not brought down by the act of the actual impact of the aircraft. An engineer who helped design the towers said that those buildings were designed to withstand an earthquake of a large magnitude, and the impact of those planes was about 2.5 on

the Richter scale which is far less than an earthquake. What brought those buildings down that day was the fierce, terrible, red-hot fire of the jet fuel being burned. It literally melted the steel structure of that building and caused it to come tumbling and crashing down on those who occupied it.

The Bible says the judgment of God is like a fire consuming to all who stand in its way. If there is such a fire on this earth that can literally melt steel beams that hold up one of the world's tallest buildings, what must the fire of God be like? There are many theologians who say when the Bible talks about fire in Hell, it really doesn't mean a real fire. I personally believe it does. But let me take those theologian's point and say if they are correct, then it must mean the word "fire" is symbolic of something terribly worse than fire. Since the writer could only explain God's judgment in human realities, he used the severest thing we could fear in order to express the horrors that await the guilty. Fire tends to be one of the worst things we fear. On Tuesday morning, September 11th, I saw people jumping fifty and sixty stories out of those burning buildings. Do you know why they did that? Because they made a decision that they would rather die by falling than burning. There is a fear in every one of us of fire. To die by fire is a terrible death. My grandfather died by burning to death. He didn't die instantly, he lingered for three days. It was a terrible, terrible, agonizing death. And if fire is only symbolic of the judgment of God, dear friend, have mercy upon you if you enter into this fiery indignation of God.

Devour Adversaries

Third, he says God will devour His adversaries. Notice the word "adversaries." If you are one who has treated His Son as an irrelevant matter and insulted the Holy Spirit, you are an adversary of God; you are the enemy to God. He considers you thus. In Isaiah chapter one and verse twenty-four it reads, "Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies." Isaiah fifty-nine and eighteen, God said, "According to [their] deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence." Today, if you are not a Christian, you are an adversary of God. You have literally taken your life that belongs to God and you have turned your life against Him and have aimed it at His heart. You have rebelled and hated God so much that you are consuming your life for your own glory and pleasure.

Punishment Worse Than Death

Fourth, the writer of Hebrews says of this judgment yet to be dispensed that it is a punishment worse than death. He says in verse twenty-eight "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy ...?" He is giving us a lesson of the severity of God against sin. Because God is so holy that He cannot tolerate sin, He has literally turned the whole earth into one large cemetery since the first sin in the garden. But God has said there is a punishment even worse than death on this earth. He is the judge to which all of the living and the dead shall give an account. The Bible tells us the same Master, the very one who came to this earth because He loved sinners

and wanted to save sinners, is also the one who will judge sinners. I speak of none other than Christ Jesus who associated with the most terrible of sinners. Tax collectors, prostitutes, and all the ones which most of us would not want to be associated with, those were the very ones He went to save. What condescension! What humility! What compassion! This is the same Lord who touched the lepers and made them well. He is the one who looked at the woman and said “Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). Yet, the Bible says that the Father shall commit to this same tender Savior the righteous judgment of all men. On that day, seated upon the Great White Throne of judgment will not be God the Father, it will be God the Son. The same compassionate merciful Son who healed the sick, raised the dead, and died for sinners, it is He who will judge sinners.

Dear friend, please do not believe the lie that most of modern Christianity is teaching you today that God is so loving that He will never send anybody to Hell. That is a lie that has deceived this generation. Everybody that is in Hell was sent there by God as an act of His justice. You may say sin sent them there but not God. Certainly sin is the cause of their eternal torment, but you can say every prisoner in Eddyville State Prison is there because sin put them there, yes, but a judge had to sentence them. Do you think they would be there of their own free will? Absolutely not. Do you think the sinner is going to waltz into Hell rejoicing that this is his final residence? Do you think he will be delighted that he finally made it within Hell’s gates? No sir, the sinner goes there because God sent him there, and the angels of Heaven will drag them and throw their souls into the fiery furnace of God’s indignation forever and ever and ever. It is a punishment much worse than death. Jesus described it as a place of darkness, of outer darkness. No partying with friends, but a place of gnashing of teeth and a fire that cannot be quenched.

JUSTICE DELIVERED

Lastly, in verse thirty, you need to know that justice will be delivered. You can’t escape. Verse thirty says

For we know him that hath said, Vengeance [belongeth] unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people (Hebrews 10:30).

The word “vengeance” is defined in the dictionary as a word meaning “infliction of punishment in return for a wrong committed; retribution.” Normally we think of vengeance as somebody taking the law into his or her own hands and returning wrong for wrong. But God says He will have vengeance. In other words, vengeance is not wrong. It is wrong when you and I try to exact vengeance. There are only two parties who can exact or fulfill vengeance, The civil authority that God has placed on this earth, and God Himself. God’s vengeance will satisfy a holy justice and go beyond what human, earthly judges can do. Justice will happen! If you do not believe in Christ to the committing of your life to Him, then God will seek you out and visit His vengeance upon you. If you have professed faith and your lifestyle is not demonstrating the love of God nor the Spirit of Christ in you, beware.

The sinner is a condemned criminal. If I am speaking of you, then know you are condemned. You are a marked target. Like a game bird, you flutter from here to there singing your song, "I am free, I am free, and God has nothing on me." But little do you know that the hunter of Heaven has His aim on you. You are marked and, my friend, God does not miss. It may not be today and it may not be tomorrow, it may be next month, it may be next year or twenty years from now, but you will not escape. Should it be fifty years from now when God pulls the trigger and death stills your life, what is that to God? The Bible says that a thousand years is like one day to God.

You do not know the danger you are in for Heaven's Hunter is stealthy and a perfect marksman. His aim is on you right now. There is no escaping His weapon. Statistics prove that one out of every one person dies. You will not be able to escape. Even now His finger is on the trigger.

Of the thousands who died Tuesday, how many of them awakened that morning with the certain knowledge that they would never be returning home? I can safely say, none of them. I heard that one of the passengers on one of the doomed hijacked planes wrote on her husband's pillow before leaving that morning that she would be thinking of him that evening and would see him again Friday. But neither she nor anyone else on that plane shall ever again see a love one on this earth. Friday did not come for her for death has claimed her, as it will claim you.

I ask you, how do you think you will escape? What madness must have consumed your mind and destroyed your reasoning! Why do you think you will outfox the Hunter when no one else has? His weapon of choice may be the hand of a terrorist or it may be cancer, but you will be no less dead. After death you will face the terrible and awesome judgment of a righteous Judge. "For it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment."

It appears to me you are the one that is on a suicide mission. You are hell bent to die for your cause. You seem willing and glad to give your eternal life to prove your sovereignty over God. Do you really think that giving your life for your sin will terrorize God? Do you think by hijacking your life, not giving God the control, and crashing into hell will cause Him to change His mind and will create fear in His heart? O foolish man! Your cause will die with you for then you will fall into the hands of a living God. And I remind you again that I might gain you, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God." Amen.