

Persevere, or else! (Hebrews 10:26-31)

The sobering warning in these verses is not intended to encourage speculation about the identity or future of former professing Christians, but to encourage us as readers of this letter to persevere in Christ. It is important for all professing believers to obey the preceding exhortations (vv. 22–25) to help avoid becoming the type of person which this section describes, people who are elsewhere called apostates. They are those who have heard and received the truth, made some profession of faith, but have resolutely abandoned that commitment. Instead persevere in Christ to avoid fiery judgment, as the author argues from three perspectives.

I. *Persevere in Christ, argued from the sole sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice (10:26–27).*

1. *The character of apostasy:*

- a. It is a deliberate, continual sinning. It is like the O.T. “defiant” sin of despising the word of the Lord (Numbers 15:22–31) and likened by parallel expressions in Hebrews 3 to provoking and testing the Lord, going astray, falling away, disobeying and having an unbelieving, hardened heart.
- b. It occurs with full knowledge of the truth. This does not necessarily mean salvation, but like the second soil in the parable (Luke 8:13), it can be those who received the truth and even “believe”, but have no root in them and then fall away under trials. Judas is an example, but also those who had professed faith but left the assembly of believers, because they really were not part of them (1 John 2:19).

2. *The result of apostasy:*

- a. No sacrifice for sin remains (10:26b). Only the death of Christ is an adequate payment for sin. To forsake that leaves no further option for sacrifice.
- b. There is only a fearful expectation of judgment (10:27). Judgment is ordained after death for everyone (Hebrews 9:27), a truth which Jesus Himself had taught (cf. Luke 16:23–24). Those who forsake Christ become adversaries of God.

II. *Persevere in Christ, argued from the analogy with Mosaic law (10:28–29).*

1. *The O.T. situation and its analogous result (10:28–29a):* Using the language of Deuteronomy 17:2–7 and 13:6–10 the author reminds the readers that the death penalty was required for those who rejected the covenant God had made with Israel and sought other gods. If death was required for forsaking the lesser first covenant, how much greater would be the punishment for forsaking the heart of the new covenant.
2. *The character of new covenant apostasy (10:29b):*
 - a. The apostate tramples the Son of God under foot. That means scorning as useless (cf. Matt. 5:13) the One who is so clearly exalted in the first chapters of Hebrews as well as the Father who exalted Him.
 - b. The apostate treats the blood of the covenant as “unholy” or “common”. That means treating the death of Jesus, which is the only way of being set apart from sin unto God, as no different than the death of any other person.
 - c. The apostate insults the Spirit of grace. That means an outrageous denial of the work of the Spirit in gifting believers and affirming the gospel (2:4), warning believers (3:7), witnessing to the new covenant (10:15), and being the means to approach the throne of grace (4:16; cf. Ephesians 2:18). The Persons of the Triune God are witnesses against the apostate, whose condemnation is just for rejecting the new covenant and the efficacy of the blood of Jesus Christ.

III. *Persevere in Christ, argued from the known character of God (10:30–31).*

1. *God avenges.* God will pay back the apostate just as He promised vengeance against the enemies of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:35.
2. *God does not exempt His own people.* God will judge, just as He vindicated the righteous among His people but punished the wicked (cf. Deuteronomy 32:35 and 32:1–43). Claiming to be God's people will not help escape judgment if the heart is not right.
3. *God is a fearsome judge.* Knowing this to be true, those who truly love the Lord will strengthen their trust in the Lord and hold to His one true and final sacrifice for sin.

It is essential to persevere in Christ or face judgment worse than if we had never heard the gospel. But we can help one another do so as we heed the exhortations that precede and follow the warning.

Questions for further thought and discussion:

- Why is it so important that we “follow through” on what we learn and put it into practice? How can we help one another?
- What are some reasons that a person might “apostatize” (cf. Hebr 2:3; 3:12; 10:24; Luke 8:13; Matt 24:11; 2 Tim 4:4)? What are your dangers?
- Why is apostasy so especially offensive to God? In light of what is offensive, what could we conclude would be particularly pleasing to God?