

## 22. The just shall live by faith

May 17, 2015

The Word of God, the Bible is absolutely wonderful. It comforts the afflicted and it afflicts the comfortable at the same time without wasting words. It can come to a downcast believer with encouragement and strength to go on, and it also can come to the heart of a backslider with thunder and lightning to wake him up from his spiritual lethargy and slumber.

One such sermon was preached in the afternoon of July 8, 1741, in Enfield, Connecticut. The preacher who preached this sermon was not doing it with thunderous voice and wild gestures. Actually, because of his nearly blind near sight, Jonathan Edwards had to hold his sermon notes very close to his eyes, barely looking at his congregation over his notes. In his almost boring monotone voice, he calmly read his sermon that was titled, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." The unbelievers and backsliders in the church felt like the burning flames of hell were licking their feet, because the Lord was convicting their hearts. Before the sermon was over, people were throwing themselves on the floor and sobbing in repentance by the power of the Holy Spirit. This happened in the middle of the Second Great Awakening Revival in America.

This morning's Scripture portion is from Hebrews 10:26-39. It is not a man's sermon that changes life, rather the power of the Holy Spirit who convicts our hearts.

The portion we are going to study can be divided into two groups:

- 1) **Those who are comfortable in their sins** – v26-31
- 2) **Those who are afflicted for standing firm in their faith** – v32-39

### A. THOSE WHO ARE COMFORTABLE IN THEIR SINS

*Hebrews 10:26-31 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. 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? 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.*

This portion of the Scriptures clearly describes about backsliders. No one can argue about that. There is a doctrine of certain Christian denominations that says that if a believer is backslidden, he loses his salvation. But if you noticed, the pronoun of v26 is "we", not "they." In other words, the author of this Book did not consider the backsliders as unbelievers who do not have salvation at this point. I don't care what that particular denomination doctrine says, the Bible triumphs over any humans' opinions.

Then, someone would wonder, "Who are these people"? The people who were saved, but they now are living the lives that are so carnal that it is almost indistinguishable from unbelievers to them. They even come to the point of defiance to God because they want to live however they want.

You probably noticed that there are stages of backsliding. The believer who begins to “drift” from the Word of God will soon start to “doubt” the Word. That will lead him to become “dull” toward the Word. This will result in “despising” God’s Word.

The evidence of despising is “willful sin.” According to the tense of this Greek word is ‘present’. Yes, that means that the person who has backslidden is continuing in his own defiance against the Lord.

Under the OT, there were no sacrifices for willful sins. They were told to promptly deal with the one who defiantly raised his own will over God’s by expelling him out of the community permanently.

*Numbers 15:31 Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”*

Since the Lord graciously saved my wretched soul in 1987, I came to know many wonderful brothers and sisters in the Lord. Many of them taught me a great deal by the way they live, speak, and associate with others. Whenever I see their admirable godly characteristics, I tend to make mental notes so that I can mimic them.

At the same time, I also encounter many Christian believers whom I knew and loved have fallen away from the Lord. Last Thursday evening in our Midweek Service, as a part of sermon illustrations, I mentioned about a man who was very close to my family, but fell away from the Lord by his own choice last several years. At the 10 o’clock TV news that night, we found out that he was arrested for a murder. Did he not know the Word of God? Oh, yes, he knew it very well, because he was once a Calvary Chapel pastor in some other State.

I don’t know where you are with your sins. You might be struggling with the same sin over and over, because your spirit is weak. Take heart, we all struggle with our sins. Repent from it and ask the Lord to forgive you for your sins. But if you are one of those who willfully and defiantly raise your fist against God and you decided to continue in your sin, don’t think that you will be able to get away with it. God’s patience is deep and wide, but there is a limitation. You don’t want to fall into the Hands of an Angry God.

By the way, backsliding from the Lord is NEVER a sudden thing. It never happens overnight. It happens ever so gradually that the person who is backsliding doesn’t even realize how far he is away from the Lord. He even thinks that all this time he is OK. That is what sin does to us – numb and dumb.

How does the Lord deal with this kind of a defiant backslider? Let’s read what it says in v27:

*Hebrews 10:27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*

Did I mention “Angry God”? Yes, our God is altogether loving, altogether wonderful, and altogether merciful to us, but don’t forget He is a righteous and holy God who hates our sins. God disciplines His children harshly when they continue in their willful defiance in two ways – either He takes their lives or He judges them to live out their lives with the full consequences of their sinful choices. In case some of you think, “No, our loving God will not take my life away just because I willfully continue in my sin,” let me show you a couple of places from the Bible:

*Acts 5:1-5 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. 2 And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? 4 While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." 5 Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.*

*1 John 5:16 If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is sin leading to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.*

The Lord may not always take the life of a defiant backslider, but He always deals with him. It is truly a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

If we could see the spiritual realm of the defiant backslider, it would be as if he tramples the Son of God underfoot, counts the blood of the Covenant by which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and insults the Spirit of grace. This is a complete opposite of what we learned in the last week – holding fast the confession of our hope in Jesus Christ.

Please don't think that you and I would never backslide from the Lord Jesus. We are all capable because we have this strong sinful nature in us. We are only one step away from the first backsliding stage if we don't hold fast in the Lord Jesus. Be aware.

The author of this Book wrote in v26 that there no longer remains a sacrifice for willful sins. Does it mean that it's over? No. Like king David who committed the heinous sins of adultery and murder, a backslider can come to the Lord with a broken heart. It is a fearful thing to fall into the Lord's hands for chastening, but it is a wonderful thing to fall into His hands for cleansing and restoration.

## **B. THOSE WHO ARE AFFLICTED FOR STANDING FIRM IN THEIR FAITH**

*Hebrews 10:32-39 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; 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. 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." 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

The author of this Book changes scenes and his audience from potential divine discipline for the backsliders to actual human persecution against the believers. These first century Jewish Christians had already suffered for Jesus, being rejected by their own families and community and perhaps being counted as dead. All this came after they accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Unlike those backsliders who defiantly rejected their Savior Jesus from their hearts and embraced the carnal world, these Christians stood firm in spite of their material loss, physical threats, even to the point of imprisonment. As time passed along and the persecution continued, some of these Christians were losing their hearts and thinking about giving up their faith.

Can we handle the same kind of persecution? Don't be so quick to answer, "Yes." When you encounter the situation that the government and the people around actually kicking you out of your home with nothing and beating you and taking away your family members because of your faith in Jesus Christ, your answer might be different than the one you answer now.

You may say, "Oh, it will never happen in America." If that is your idea, you don't read newspaper or watch TV news that shows how much this country has become anti-Christianity and turned to pro-muslim. Ohio National Guard practiced a scenario of taking out a Christian group whom they considered homegrown terrorists about a year ago. If the Lord allows the current administration's ways, all the Christians might have to go underground, otherwise, we can be arrested for what we believe.

My brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus, let me remind you of this. Our home is not here. We just have temporary dwelling places for now. Our true home is in heaven where Jesus lives. We have the promises of God for us in this Book, the Bible, that no one can take them away as long as we choose to walk with Him.

"The just shall live by faith" in v38 comes from Habakkuk 2:4 originally. It is also used in Romans 1 and Galatians 3. We are not just saved by faith, but we also must live by faith, not by sight.

In case you wonder what would happen to those who backslide, the Bible is clear for the answers. If they come back to the Lord with truly repented hearts, the Lord will forgive them and restore them back to the family of God, but they still will go through the consequences of their actions. However, those who refuse to repent to their last breath, we also see a clear answer from v39:

*Hebrews 10:39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*

The Greek word for 'perdition' is "apoleia" which means more of "destruction" or "waste."

### **C. QUESTION**

Where are you going in your spiritual life? Are you shrinking back to the wasted life like the time before you accepted Jesus as your Savior because you are backsliding or standing firm in the Lord? What will happen a year from now if you continue on the road you're on?

The friend of mine who was a Calvary Chapel pastor and now has become a murderer probably never thought that he would commit a crime like that. He ignored one very important biblical principle:

*Proverbs 6:27 Can a man take fire to his bosom, And his clothes not be burned?*

### **D. APPLICATION**

**To walk by faith means to obey God's Word and to live for our Lord Jesus Christ.**