

“BE Holy & Hold On... Or Else!”

5 Warnings of Hebrews

May 6, 2018

INTRO: Let me ask you a question as we begin: **What are...
the most beautiful & loving words in the Bible?**

- Invitations? *“Come to Me all who are...”*
- Promises? *“For God so loved the world...”*
- Descriptions? *“the kingdom...like a treasure”*
- Prayers? *“...that they will be one...”* **John 17**
- The Gospel? *“saved by grace thru faith...”*

T/S: Hold that thought... we’ll come back...

CONTEXT:

- **2018** = the year of **REVERENCE** (*fear, awe, respect*)
- **Leviticus:** Love letter... restoration for the rebels
- **Hebrews:**
 - 3 week introduction/**premise** of the book
 - last week established Hebrews’ **purpose**
 - **next week** we’ll **preview** Hebrews’ overall
 - God gave Hebrews/Bible for same 3 reason
 - **INFORM** of God’s glory, grace, & gospel
 - **INSPECT** our hearts, hopes, & healing
 - **INSPIRE** our worship, works, & witness
 - **Today:** 5 foundational/structural **PILLARS**

Many believe Hebrews was written & shared as a sermon vs. a letter... with **5 warnings serving as 5 structural pillars...**

Hebrews = warnings... 80 of 303 verses = **over 25%**

Notice **ALL** warnings are **built on 1:1-4**

BIG IDEA: How one **relates & responds** to redemptive **WARNINGS** reveals their heart. - JDP

Sadly... warning are unwanted...

T/S: What's the difference between a threat & a warning?

Answer: the HEART!

BIBLICAL Warnings ABOUND!

Garden of Eden

Psalm 1

All the Prophets...

Jeremiah 1-2

Ezekiel 33

Malachi on tithing...

Satan... 1 Peter 5:8 & 2 Corinthians 4:4

- The Devil & demons disguised as an angel of light...

Demonic... wolves disguised in sheep's...

False teachers... (Titus 1 & Jude)

False friends & false converts... 1st John

Paul: Acts 20:30 & 2 Tim. 4:3 & beware of Alexander, Demas..

Peter: 1st Peter (beware from outside) & 2nd (beware within)

James 4:4

Jesus...

- * Direct Teaching:
- * “...to whom much has been given
- * “Be as shrewd as a serpent & as innocent as a dove”
- * “...just righteously...”
- * “beware the hirelings vs. the shepherds...”
- * BE ready & stay focused... “bridesmaids & lamp oil”
- * “...a little levin levins the whole loaf...”
- * Parables overall (talents, forgiveness, mustard seed)
- * Rich young ruler encounter
- * Time in the Temple clearing house...

T/S: **Illustration:** Warning church goers is like selling hearing aides door to door....

PREVIEW:

- Don't DRIFT
- Don't DISCONNECT
- Don't DILLY-DALLY
- Don't DISOBEY
- Don't DEFY & DENY

T/S: *Some of you need to be lifted up out of your trenches... Others of you need to be knocked down off your perches.* - JDP

I. Don't DRIFT

Hebrews 2:1

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.

VIDEO: “Unbelief Warning #1”

Gospel is a WARNING... The Word of God IS a WARNING!

II. Don't DISCONNECT

Hebrews 3:12-14

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. ¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

- ~ Discontent **reveals** a bad heart
 - Temporary trophies consume hearts
 - Timeless treasure is devalued
- ~ Disobedience **hardens** bad hearts

VIDEO: “Unbelief Warning#2”

*Sadly, many ministries & minions of Satan are working hard to get you to just “hang out” with them down here...
But the Great Commandments & Great Commission command ALL Christians to remain committed to the TREASURE of the kingdom (which, by definition, includes BOTH, worshipping Christ, AND working out your faithful-following).*

III. Don't DILLY-DALLY

Hebrews 6:7-9

For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. ⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. ⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation.

~ Dysfunctional developmentalism

The Christian life is a mission trip. - Daniel Knox

~ Big disciples in baby's diapers

IV. Don't DISOBEY

Hebrews 10:26-31

For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries... ²⁹ 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?... ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

~ “trampled underfoot the Son of God...”

~ “profaned the blood of the covenant...”

~ “and has outraged the Spirit of grace...”

T/S: *Warnings are like smoke alarms...
(are your batteries in?)*

VIDEO: *“Conscience Warning”*

*I’ve watched **too many** slowly **kill** their consciences!*

v. Don’t DEFY & DENY

Hebrews 12:25

See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?

- ~ Refusing & rejecting God
- ~ Telling God “No!” (in action or attitude)

*** VIDEO: “Normal Church”

The more you ignore alarms...
the more alarms you ignore. - JDP

REVIEW:

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| I. Don't Drift | 2:1 |
| II. Don't Disconnect | 3:12-13 |
| III. Don't Dill-dally | 6:7-9 |
| IV. Don't Disobey | 10:26-27, 29, 31 |
| V. Don't Deny & Defy | 12:25 |

CLOSE:

The Word of God is God's WARNING! - JDP

True Christians are walking warnings. - JDP

Apostle Paul: *“am I now your enemy for telling you the truth?”*

NOTE: Those who bristle & take offense to the call to take heed & personally work thru God's warnings, prove themselves, in their pompous resistance to be the most needy & appropriate recipients of God's warnings. - JDP

Let's PRAY...

Let me leave you with the greatest illustration, application, & celebration of this sermon... that I could EVER offer you...

*This is the **POWER** of **warning, witness, & WORSHIP!***

Amen & AMEN :-)

***** VIDEO: *Monet's baptism* *****

Research & consider “the “lapsi” of the early Church... (those whose faith & witness lapsed in the face of persecution). Herein we will find an illustration of the Hebrews’ message’s validated need & purpose...

Truth in principle & the Bible in whole...
HEBREWS: (5X shape & form the letter)

Where & what would you say are the most powerful & prolific warnings in the Bible?

A. Positive = we should be like elementary school children who instantly respond “with child-like faith”

B. Negative =

1. Too many of us pull the batteries out of our alarms...
OR... if I can mix my metaphors just a little bit... we hit the snooze button on our alarms & drift back to sleep... thinking: “It’s ok... I’ll get up & respond (“I’ll deal with it”) in a little while.”

2. False alarms! There are so many false alarms in people’s lives that distract and desensitize folks to the real thing

See reality of 2 Corinthians 5:10
2 Peter 3:3ff... arrogant scoffers...

*** Note the role of warnings in the context of the 3 different audiences within the Jewish Christian church of the first century.. AND... the traditional & cultural church of our day.

Broad Hebrews Outline:

Key in on “better” or “superior” pivot points
- See the “Substance” vs shadows dynamic

Key in on “warning” passages

- I. 1:1-4a. INFORM
 - A.
 - B.
 - C.

(13 weeks in Leviticus)

- D.
 - E.
- II. 1:4 - ch.10. INSPECT
 - A. Ch.1-2
 - B. Ch.3-4
 - C. Ch.5-7
 - D. Ch.8-10
- III. Ch.11-13. INSPIRE
 - A. Ch.11

B. Ch.12
C. Ch.13

T/S: Notice that ALL warnings are built on 1:1-4a!

The 5 Warnings of Hebrews:

1. 2:1-4

Drifting & disregarding the Son's message

Hebrews 2:1-4 (ESV)

¹ *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.*

² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,

³ *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,*

⁴ *while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*

2. 3:7-4:13

3:7-11

3:12-19

4:1-13

Discontentedness & disobedience

Hebrews 3:7-19 (ESV)

⁷ *Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, “Today, if you hear his voice,*

⁸ *do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,*

⁹ *where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.*

¹⁰ Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’

¹¹ As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

¹² *Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.*

¹³ *But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*

¹⁴ *For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.*

¹⁵ *As it is said, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.”*

¹⁶ *For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses?*

¹⁷ *And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness?*

¹⁸ *And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?*

¹⁹ *So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.*

Hebrews 4:1-13 (ESV)

¹ *Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*

² *For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.*

³ For we who have believed enter that rest, as he has said, “As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest,’” although his works were finished from the foundation of the world.

⁴ For he has somewhere spoken of the seventh day in this way: “And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.”

⁵ *And again in this passage he said, “They shall not enter my rest.”*

⁶ *Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience,*

⁷ *again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

⁸ For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.

⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,

¹⁰ for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.

¹¹ *Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

¹² *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

¹³ *And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.*

- ~ Discontent reveals a bad heart
 - Temporary trophies consume hearts
 - Timeless treasure is devalued
- ~ Disobedience hardens Bad hearts
 - See the anatomy of a conscience...
 - See the process of conscience searing

3. 5:11-6:20 (end at v.8 or v.12 or v.20)

5:11-14

6:1-8

Dull in hearing & disinterested in heart

Hebrews 5:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ *About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.*

¹² *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food,*

¹³ *for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.*

¹⁴ But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

Hebrews 6:1-20 (ESV)

¹ *Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,*

² and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

³ And this we will do if God permits.

⁴ *For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,*

⁵ *and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,*

⁶ *and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*

⁷ *For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.*

⁸ *But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned.*

⁹ Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things

that belong to salvation.

¹⁰ For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do.

¹¹ And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end,

¹² so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,

¹⁴ saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you."

¹⁵ And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise.

¹⁶ For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.

¹⁷ So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath,

¹⁸ so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us.

¹⁹ We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,

²⁰ where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

~ Dysfunctional developmentalism

~ Big disciples in baby's diapers

4. 10:26-39 (begin at v.19 or v.26)

Deliberate sin & unfaithful shrinking back

Hebrews 10:19-39 (ESV)

¹⁹ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus,

²⁰ by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh,

²¹ and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

²² let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

²⁶ *For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

²⁷ *but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*

²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

²⁹ *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?*

³⁰ *For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” And again, “The Lord will judge his people.”*

³¹ *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,

³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.

³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.

³⁷ *For, “Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay;*

³⁸ *but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.”*

³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

~ “trampled underfoot the Son of God...”

~ “profaned the blood of the covenant...”

~ “and has outraged the Spirit of grace...”

5. 12:25-29 (begin at v.14 or v.25)

Defiant denial

~ Refusing & rejecting God

~ Telling God “No!” (in action or attitude)

Hebrews 12:25-29 (ESV)

²⁵ *See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.*

²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ***“Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”***

²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸ Therefore, [let us](#) be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus [let us](#) offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,

²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

*** Close by showing the progressive nature of the warnings, which are dealing with the progressive risk of apostasy...

Define “apostasy” in introduction to help...
Show parallel to searing of one’s conscience

Audience

There are no references to Gentiles in the book. Problems between Gentiles and Jews in the church are not mentioned or reflected here, indicating almost certainly that the congregation being addressed was strictly Jewish. To these suffering Jewish believers—and some unbelievers—are revealed the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ and the New Covenant, in contrast to the Old Covenant, under which they had so long lived and worshiped.

We do not know the exact location of this group of Hebrews. They were perhaps somewhere near Greece. We do know that this community had been evangelized by apostles and prophets (2:3-4). By prophets, of course, is meant New Testament prophets ([Eph. 2:20](#)). Evidently this church had been founded fairly soon after Christ’s ascension. By the time the letter was written, a small congregation of believers already existed there.

Also addressed in the letter are unbelievers, who evidently were a part of this Jewish community. Unlike many Jews in Palestine, these had never had opportunity to meet Jesus. Anything they may have known about Him was secondhand ([Heb. 2:3-4](#)). They of course had no New Testament writings, as such, as a testimony, for it had not yet been brought together. Whatever they knew of Christ and His gospel they knew from believing neighbors, or perhaps directly from the mouth of an apostle or prophet.

The letter had to have been written after Christ's ascension, which was about A.D. 30, and before the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, since the Temple must still have been standing. I believe it was probably written close to 70, perhaps as early as 65. We know that there were not any apostolic missionaries from Jerusalem until at least seven years after the church there had been founded. Likely it was some time later that they would have reached this Jewish community, perhaps many miles away. And, after they had been reached, the believers would had to have had a certain amount of time to have been taught, as reflected in the letter itself.

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for some one to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. (5:12)

He says, **in other words, "You've had enough time to become mature, but you are not."**

We must understand that *three basic groups of people are in view throughout this epistle.*

If one does not keep these groups in mind, the book becomes very confusing. If, for example, as some have said, it was written exclusively to Christians, extreme problems arise in interpreting a number of passages which could hardly apply to believers. **And because it so frequently addresses believers, it could not have been written primarily to unbelievers either.** So **it must have been written to include both.**

In fact **three basic groups in this Jewish community are addressed.** Here is the critical basis for understanding the epistle; and here is where people often get mixed up, especially in interpreting chapters 6 and 10.

Group I: Hebrew Christians

First of all, there was in this Jewish community a congregation of true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They had come out of Judaism, in which they had been born and raised. Now they were born again. They had received Jesus Christ as their personal Messiah and Savior. They had become His followers. The frequent result was tremendous hostility from their own people—ostracism from their families, persecution and suffering of many sorts, though not yet martyrdom (10:32-34; 12:4). **They suffered greatly, persecuted not only by their fellow Jews, but also perhaps by Gentiles.**

They should have anticipated as much and have been mature enough to deal with it. But they had not and they were not. **They lacked full confidence in the gospel, and consequently in their Lord. They were in danger of going back into**

the standards and patterns of Judaism—not of losing their salvation but of confusing the gospel with Jewish ceremony and legalism and of thereby weakening their faith and testimony.

They could not bring themselves to accept the clear-cut distinction between the gospel, the New Covenant in Christ, and the forms, ceremonies, patterns, and methods of Judaism. **They were still hung up, for example, on the Temple ritual and worship. That is why the Spirit talks to them so much about the new priesthood and the new Temple and the new sacrifice and the new sanctuary, all of which are better than the old ones.**

They had gone beyond Judaism in receiving Jesus Christ but, understandably, **they were tempted to hang on to many of the Judaistic habits that had been so much a part of their lives.** When their friends and their countrymen began to persecute them in earnest, the pressure led them to hold even tighter to some of the old Jewish traditions. **They felt they had to keep a foothold in their old and familiar relationships. It was hard to make a clean break.**

With all that pressure, together with their weak faith and spiritual ignorance, **they were in great danger of mixing the new with the old.** They were in great danger of coming up with a ritualistic, ceremonial, legalistic Christianity.

They were a whole congregation of "weaker brothers"

(cf. [Rom. 14:2](#); [1 Cor. 8:9](#)),

...who were still calling "unclean" what the Lord had sanctified ([Mark 7:19](#); [Acts 10:15](#); [Rom. 14:12](#); [1 Tim. 4:1-5](#)).

The Holy Spirit directed this letter to them to strengthen their faith in the New Covenant, to show them that they did not need the old Temple (which in a few years would be completely destroyed by Titus Vespasian anyway, showing that God had brought an end to that economy; cf. [Luke 21:5-6](#)). They did not need the old Aaronic-Levitical priesthood. They did not need the old day-in, day-out, day-in, day-out sacrifices. They did not need the ceremonies. **They had a new and better covenant with a new and better priesthood, a new and better sanctuary, and a new and better sacrifice.**

The pictures and symbols were to give way to the reality.

(The shadows were replaced with the Substance of the Christ! – JDP)

The book of Hebrews was written to give confidence to these floundering believers.

The Lord was speaking to Christians and telling them to hold to the better covenant and the better priesthood, and not go back into the patterns of Judaism, either to that priesthood or to that assemblage.

They must steadfastly and exclusively live in, and live out, their new relationship in Christ.

Group II: Hebrew Non-Christians Who Were Intellectually Convinced

- 2:1-4
- 6:4-6
- 10:26-29
- 12:15-17

We have all met people who have heard the truth of Jesus Christ and who are intellectually convinced that He is indeed who He claimed to be, and yet are not willing to make a commitment of faith in Him.

In the group of Hebrews to whom this epistle was written, there were such non-Christians, as there are in many groups today. It is likely that every church group since Pentecost has had people in it who have been convinced that Jesus is the Christ but who have never committed themselves to Him.

These Hebrew non-Christians, intellectually convinced but spiritually uncommitted, are the object of some of the things that the writer has to say. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, spoken of in the Jewish Scriptures/Old Testament, but they had not been willing to receive Him personally as their Savior & Lord. Why?

Perhaps, like those described by John, they believed in Him, but they loved the approval of men more than the approval of God ([John 12:42-43](#)). They were not willing to make the sacrifice required. And so they are exhorted by the Holy Spirit to go all the way to saving faith; to go all the way to commitment to the lordship of Christ.

In chapter 2 is one of the special statements to this group of the intellectually convinced but spiritually uncommitted:

For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? ([2:1-3a](#))

They were at the point of acknowledging but not of committing. They were guilty of the great sin of neglecting to do what one is intellectually convinced is right. The truth of the gospel had even been confirmed to them by the apostles, with all the miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit (v. 4).

In chapter six this group is addressed again.

For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God, and put Him to open shame. (6:4-6)

Here is a warning to the merely intellectually convinced not to stop where he is. If he stops after having received full revelation, and especially after he is convinced of the truth of the revelation, he has only one way to go. If, when a man is totally convinced that Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be, he then refuses to believe, this man is without excuse and without hope—because, though convinced of the truth of the gospel, he still will not put his trust in it. He is here warned that there is nothing else God can do.

What is the greatest sin that a man can commit? The sin of rejecting Christ.

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins. (10:26)

If a man has heard the gospel, understands it, and is intellectually convinced of its truth, but then willfully rejects Christ, what more can God do? Nothing! All God can now promise this man is "a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries" (v. 27).

The warning continues:

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood

of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (10:29)

When you know the truth of the gospel and reject it, the consequences are terrible and permanent.

In chapter twelve, verse fifteen, is still another warning.

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears. (12:15-17)

This is the tragedy of being too late—with no one to blame but ourselves.

These are controversial passages, and we will deal with them in detail at the proper places.

Group III: Hebrew Non-Christians Who Were Not Convinced

Not only does the Holy Spirit in this book speak to Christians in order to strengthen their faith and to the intellectually convinced in order to push them over the line to saving faith, but **He also speaks to those who have not believed at all, to those who may not yet be convinced of any part of the gospel.**

He seeks to show them clearly that Jesus is in fact who He claimed to be, and this truth is the main thrust of chapter nine.

For example, in **9:11** He says:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation. (9:11)

And He goes on to explain Christ's new priesthood:

How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance....And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment, so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many shall appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him. (9:14-15, 27-28)

These messages speak directly to unbelievers, not to Christians and not to those who are already convinced of the gospel intellectually. They are given to those who first need to know who Christ really is.

These, then, are the three groups in view in the epistle.

The key to interpreting any part of Hebrews is to understand which group is being addressed. If we do not understand that, we are bound to confuse issues.

For example, the Spirit is surely not saying to believers, "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (9:27). **We must always understand what group it is to whom He speaks.** As we study the book of Hebrews, we will relate each text to one of the three groups.

The primary message is addressed to believers.

Periodically there are interspersed warnings to the two unbelieving groups. In a masterful way, in a way that could only be divine, the Holy Spirit speaks to all three.

He meets every one of their particular needs and their specific questions in this one supernatural masterpiece.

In Hebrews there is confidence and assurance for the Christian. There is warning to the intellectually convinced that he must receive Christ or his knowledge will damn him. Finally, there is a convincing presentation to the unbelieving Jew who is not intellectually persuaded that he should believe in Jesus Christ.

To these three groups Hebrews is a presentation of Christ, the Messiah, the Author of a New Covenant greater than the one God had made in the Old Testament.

The old one was not bad or wrong; it was God-given and therefore good. But it was incomplete and preliminary. It set the stage for the new.

- MacArthur New Testament Commentary – Hebrews.

THE FIVE WARNINGS OF HEBREWS

(BIBLE.ORG)

INTRODUCTION

Washington, D. C. is one of the few cities in the world that was completely designed before any streets were made or buildings erected. What once was a marshy wilderness now stands one of the most beautiful capitols in the world. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, an engineer in the Continental Army, being recommended by President George Washington for the task, designed the entire city. Capitol Hill was selected as the focal point, and broad avenues were laid out which radiate like spokes of a wheel from centers placed within the rectangular pattern of the streets.

For anyone visiting our nation's capitol, the first point to visit should be the Washington Monument. From this vantage point of beautiful white marble, forty stories above the

city in the tallest masonry structure in the world, may be seen a panoramic view of four of the most picturesque scenes upon which the human eye may gaze.

Looking east at the end of the mall on Capitol Hill stands the Capitol building with its magnificent dome glistening in the sun. At the right and left stand the House and Senate buildings covering a square city block. Behind the Capitol to the right is the massive Library of Congress, and at the left is the white structure of the Supreme Court of the United States. In the foreground may be seen the National Gallery of Art and the Smithsonian Institute.

A diagonal street may be seen running from the Capitol building. As we move north we see that this street is the famous Pennsylvania Avenue which connects the Capitol with the White House. Here we view the President's home and the Treasury Building to the right.

The western view gives us a picture of the Reflecting Pool and the Lincoln Memorial. Beyond the Potomac River we view Arlington National Cemetery with its Tombs of the Unknown Soldiers and the Marine Memorial.

Looking south the Tidal Basin lined with cherry trees is seen with the Jefferson Memorial on the far side. And across the Potomac, the massive Pentagon building is visible. If time permitted many other important landmarks could be pointed out by our guide.

Now we are ready to descend the Washington Monument on to busy Constitution Avenue and see each building individually. Why? Because now we know the relation of one building to another; we have viewed the design of a planned city. We have seen what no amount of hours spent on the busy and crowded streets could have given us. We have seen the city—our Nation's Capitol—and we draw back in amazement at what we have just viewed.

God's Word is identical with this. Each book is a magnificent city designed by the greatest Architect. Avenues of truth run throughout in beautiful symmetry. Monuments are erected by the sterling character of its men. Beautiful scenes catch our vision every direction we look. We see on every hand the grandeur and glory of the Person of our God.

We may wander for days along its streets and through its buildings, and yet never see the relationships of one aspect of truth with another. Our need is first to rise far above the whole picturesque scene, as beautiful as any one spot may be, and receive a panoramic view of the entire landscape. We need to see the design that was in the mind of the Designer, the over-all plan and purpose of this city we are about to view and whose laws are to govern all our lives.

No book in Scripture was written without design: Each was written with specific purpose and aim in mind. This is especially true of the book of Hebrews which we are about to consider. There is a plan and purpose which can never be seen by traveling on its broad avenues or passing through its magnificent structures. It was written that one fact and one fact alone would be in the mind of the Hebrews as they finished reading this letter. This one fact is: Christ alone can qualify to provide perfect salvation. This message is a timeless message. It is just as pertinent today as it was the day this letter was inscribed on parchment and sent by a messenger on to its destination.

...Where once was a marshy wilderness stands one of the most beautiful capitols in the world. Where once there stood a creation ruined by the fall, blighted by sin and under the verdict of death, now has been raised a new creation created in the beauty of holiness and clothed with the perfect righteousness of the Son.

All who “will” may enter in, but there is only one way of approach. This is through the Son. What are you going to do with God’s perfect provision for sin? If you reject God’s way, there is no other way. If you accept God’s provision., you have perfect salvation for He is the Author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him. And this is God’s will, that we “believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ.”

Incorporated within the very framework and message of the book of Hebrews are five danger signals. These are like stop signs on the boulevard of backsliding. They are warning posters placed on the freeway of disobedience.

1. Chapter 2 The danger of drifting.
2. Chapters 3-4 The danger of not entering into rest.
3. Chapters 5-6 The danger of not going on to maturity.

4. Chapter 10 The danger of willful sin.

5. Chapter 12 The danger of indifference to the point of denial.

There is a progression in these warnings. It starts with being careless about salvation and indifferent to spiritual things until finally one comes to be *perfectly satisfied* with being indifferent.

W. H. Griffith Thomas has stated for these five warnings: “Don’t drift, disbelieve, degenerate, despise, depart.” For our study we will follow the following order.

1. Drifting (2:1-4)

2. Doubtings (3:7–4:13)

3. Deformity (5:11–6:20)

4. Despising (10:26-31)

5. Denying (12:15-29)

Each one of these danger signs is part of the truth of this Epistle. The author stops in each case to apply the truth he has already presented to the lives of his hearers. It is not enough to know. There must be a performance of what is known. Knowledge bears responsibility.

Keys to include:

Shadows vs. Substance

Jesus Christ is the focus but exhortation of His Church is the purpose!

Hebrews has 303 verses... _____ of those verses are in the form of WARNINGS!

THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE WARNING PASSAGES IN THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

STANLEY D. TOUSSAINT

The prophetic portions of the warning passages in the Epistle to the Hebrews contain broad hints as to whom these admonitions are addressed. The notices of judgment and the warnings of failure do not deal with rewards for Christians but with eternal judgment and the missing of millennial blessing.

* * *

INTRODUCTION.

THE Book of Hebrews fairly bristles with a number of large and perplexing problems, such as authorship, destination, the nature of the work, and the writer's use of the OT. At or near the apex of questions concerned with the interpretation of this work is a consideration of the warning passages. Are they directed to believers, advising that there may be a loss of reward, or do they warn professing believers about the danger of apostasy? Even if the warnings are only hypothetical, the reader ultimately is driven back to these two alternatives. It is quite clear the book is addressed to a specific readership in a particular location with a definite situation in view (cf. 10:32-34; 12:4; 13:3, 23). Because the epistle is so specific it can hardly be said that one warning passage is directed to one group and another warning to a different group. It seems that the writer is addressing all the warnings to the same readership.

One great aid in determining the target of the warning passages is the eschatology in these passages. In other words, do the passages threaten loss of reward or the missing of salvation? If the former is correct, the paragraphs in question are addressed to believers; if on the other hand the eschatology deals with eternal damnation or eternal salvation, the passages are aimed at professing believers. **It is the thesis of this article that eschatology is a determinative factor in coming to the conclusion that the passages in question are concerned with the danger of apostasy. There were some in the readership who had made a profession of faith in Christ but were seriously considering returning to Judaism. It was not a case of the Galatian heresy where some were attempting to unite Christianity with Judaism; on the contrary, these people were about to abandon Christianity to slip back to the works system of Judaism.**

HEBREWS 2:1-4

A crucial point in this section is the meaning of "salvation" in v 3: ". . . how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" Does it refer to believers' rewards or to ultimate salvation? For several reasons, the word must be understood eschatologically and soterio-

logically.

First, the same noun is used in 1:14, where the writer says angels are rendering service for the heirs of salvation. It is obvious that the noun *swthri<a* is used in 1:14 in the ultimate sense.

The salvation here spoken of lies in the future; it is yet to be inherited, even if its blessings can already be enjoyed in anticipation. That is to say, it is that eschatological salvation which, in Paul's words, is now "nearer to us than when we first believed" (Rom. 13:11) or, in Peter's words, is "ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Pet. 1:5). Our author does not need to explain to his readers what he means by this salvation; the term and its meaning are familiar to them already. What they do need to understand is the fearful danger to which they will be exposed if they treat this salvation lightly.¹

However, someone may object that the question is not the meaning of "salvation" in 1:14 but in 2:3. This criticism sounds valid, but it must be noted that the author of Hebrews often uses "hook words," i.e., vocabulary that is employed both at the end of one paragraph and at the beginning of the next to link units of thought together.² It appears that "salvation" is one of those hook words. (This is confirmed by the use of *dia> tou?to* in 2: 1.) The noun *swthri<a* in 2:3 must then have the same meaning as it does in 1:14, that is, eschatological deliverance. Buchanan agrees with this concept: "Salvation" in the Old Testament usually refers either to deliverance of a nation from the power of the enemy at war, or to receiving a pardon or verdict of "not guilty" in a court case. For the author of

¹ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 25-26.

² Neil R. Lightfoot, *Jesus Christ Today: A Commentary on the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); 48-49.

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Hebrews it refers to the deliverance that the Son provides when God makes his "enemies a footstool for [his] feet" (1:13), and the Son utilize "the staff of justice" (1:8) to rule over his people.³

There is a second reason why the salvation must be eschatological; v 5 clearly defines it in such a manner. In that passage the writer

refers to ". . . the world to come, concerning which we are speaking." The salvation certainly involves an eschatological age. In discussing the phrase *th>n oi]koume<nhn th>n me<llousan*, Westcott states:

the phrase is not to be understood simply of 'the future life' or, more generally, of 'heaven'. It describes, in relation to that which we may call its constitution, the state of things which, in relation to its development in time, is called 'the age to come' (*o[me<llwn ai]w<n*), and, in relation to its supreme Ruler and characteristics, 'the Kingdom of God,' or 'the Kingdom of heaven,' even the order which corresponds with the completed work of Christ.⁴

Michel in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says, "Hb. 2:5 clearly represents the old apocalyptic phrase *xBAha MIAOf*."⁵ There is a third factor that enters into the understanding of salvation in Heb 2:3. This is found in the clause of the same verse, "After it was at the first spoken through the Lord. . . ." The Greek text has *h!tij a]rxh>n labou?sa lalei?sqai dia> tou? kuriou?* "This singular made of expression suggests somewhat more than the simple fact of having first been spoken, and implies that the teaching of the Lord was the true origin of the Gospel."⁶ This can hardly be the doctrine of justification by faith. That truth had been in effect Since man sinned (Heb 11:4; Gen 15:6; Ps 32:1; Hab 2:4). Nor can it refer to rewards, for this doctrine also is found in the OT (Dan 12:3). The salvation which received a beginning in the preaching of Christ was the kingdom and its nearness. Bruce comments:

It had, of course, been proclaimed in advance by the prophets; but not until the coming of Christ, when promise gave place to fulfillment, could it be effectively brought near. The note of fulfillment was heard when Jesus came into Galilee after John the Baptist's imprisonment, "preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14f), and when, as in the synagogue at Nazareth, He read the words

³ George Wesley Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1972) 25.

⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 42.

⁵ *TDNT*, s.v. "*oi]koume<nhn*," by Otto Michel, 5 (1967): 159.

⁶ Westcott, *Hebrews* 39.

of Isa. 61:1f. which announce "good tidings to the poor" and "release to the captives", and proclaim "the acceptable year of the Lord", and followed them with the declaration: "Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:18ff).⁷

The kingdom was based on the death and resurrection of the Messiah, but it is not limited to that. The writer is looking beyond forensic imputation to the age to come so graphically proclaimed by the Lord Jesus. That is the salvation which is in view.

The fourth evidence in favor of seeing the salvation in this passage as being eschatological is the usage of *swthri* in Hebrews. It is found seven times in the book (1:14; 2:3, 10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 11:7). The occurrences in 1:14 and 2:3 quite clearly are prophetic in nature. The reference in 2:10 is in the context of bringing sons to glory, an obvious reference to the Christian's future life. In 5:9, the salvation is described as "eternal." The meaning in 6:9 is not so clear; it may, however, look at eternal salvation. The author expects the readers to bear fruit in their lives as those who are heirs of salvation. In 9:28, *swthri* is the goal of Christ's second coming. In 11:7, it is used of Noah's deliverance in the flood and therefore does not relate to the subject at hand. Quite clearly then, the writer of Hebrews looks at salvation as being eschatological. The occurrence in 11:7 does not pertain to Christians. The only debatable uses are in 2:3 and 6:9, both of which probably refer to ultimate deliverance.

It should be noted that the salvation in view cannot refer to believer's rewards. The context has retribution in view in contrast to salvation. The argument is a *fortiori*. If disobedience to the angelic message brought just recompense, how much more will there be judgment on those who disregard the good news of a salvation that bears fruit in the coming age? At the judgment seat of Christ there will be no remembrance of sin (Heb 8:12; 10:17; Jer 31:34; Ps 103:12). The paragraph is looking at eschatological salvation and therefore is a warning to the professing readers of Hebrews not to jettison Christianity in favor of Judaism.

HEBREWS 3:7-4:13

The warning here is for readers to fear coming short of the promised rest. The *crux interpretum* is the meaning of "rest." The vocabulary used is *kata* (3:11, 18; 4:1,3 [twice], 5, 10, 11), *katapau* (4:4, 8, 10) and *sabbatismo* (4:9). The noun *kata* was employed in classical Greek to mean "a putting to rest, causing to

cease," but in the LXX and NT it lost its causal sense and simply

⁷ Bruce, *Hebrews*. 29.

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meant "rest, repose."⁸ The verb *katapau<w* has a transitive meaning in Heb 4:8, where the writer refers to Joshua's failure to give Israel rest. In Heb 4:4 it takes an intransitive sense, where God is said to have rested from his creative work. The noun *sabbatismo<j* is an NT hapax legomenon and means "Sabbath rest, Sabbath observance."⁹ As one studies the passage he comes to the conclusion the writer of Hebrews is looking at several facets of rest. First, there is the seventh-day rest of God when he ceased from his creative work (4:4, 10). There is a second aspect of rest, the rest which involved Israel's taking the promised land (3:11, 18-19). That the conquest of the land was viewed as a form of rest is seen in such passages as Deut 3:20; 12:9; 25: 19; Josh 11 :23; 21 :44; 22:4, and 23: 1. The third facet of rest in Hebrews 3 and 4 is the promised rest. Here is the difficulty. What is being promised?

There are a number who take the promised rest to be eternal bliss,¹⁰ and several factors support this position. First, the promise of entering the rest (4: 1) implies that the blessing is a future one (cf. 4:11). Second, the heavenly estate described in Rev 14:13 refers to rest.

Others say that the rest in view is the present Christian experience of peace.¹¹ Some who hold this position say that the existing rest for the Christian finds its ultimate completion in eternity. Several lines of evidence are used to support this interpretation. For one, the verb *ei]serxomeqa* in 4:3 is present tense, which implies that this is to be the present experience of believers who walk with God. However, this may well be a futuristic present such as one finds in Matt 17:11; John 14:3; and 1 Cor 16:5. Turner affirms that such Occurrences are ". . . confident assertions intended to arrest attention with a vivid and realistic tone or else with imminent fulfillment in mind. . . ." ¹² Quite

⁸ G. Abbott Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), 237.

⁹ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon C?f the New Testament and Other Earlv Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957),746.

¹⁰ Representative of this group are Bruce, *Hebrews*, 77-79; Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 89; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 161-62; Homer A. Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 86-87; Lightfoot, *Hebrews*, 96-97; Westcott, *Hebrews*, 98-99.

¹¹ Representative are W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Let Us Go On* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), 45-50; Clarence S. Roddy, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 46-48; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible New American Standard Translation* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 1841; R. B. Thieme, Jr., *The Faith-Rest Life* (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., 1961), 22-49.

¹² Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, James Hope Moulton, ed., *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), 63.

obviously, this kind of use in Heb 4:3 would catch the reader's attention.

There is a second line of support for taking this to be the peace of God in one's heart as he walks with God. It may be that the invitation of Christ Jesus in Matt 11:28-30 parallels this passage. Of course, the Lord's solicitation in Matthew 11 is a call to rest, but does that prove that this is the meaning in Hebrews? The idea of peace in the Christian's walk is completely biblical, but this by no means confirms that concept here.

The third support for taking this to be the Christian's present experience is typology. Thus, the Exodus is said to portray redemption, the wilderness wanderings illustrate the pre-rest walk of the believer, and being in the land looks to the faith-rest walk. This line of evidence has its own seeds of destruction in it. The writer of Hebrews specifically notes that neither Joshua nor David, who were in the land, gave the people rest (Heb 4:7-8)! Not only does every support for this view lose its force when fully considered; there are formidable objections to it. For one, the words of Heb 4:12-13 oppose such an interpretation. These verses are not words of assurance but warning. That they explain the preceding verse is obvious from the yap with which v 12 is introduced. It is an admonition which predicts judgment for those who do not enter rest. A second objection rests on the instruction of 4:10. There the writer says that the readers are to cease from works as God did. The clear implication of the faith-rest view is that God's works were bad! In other words, the viewpoint which takes this passage as referring to the Christian's intimate walk with God and the peace which results from it enjoins the Christian to cease from his law-works, his striving, his fleshly

labors, and simply to trust in God. If the parallel is carried out in 4:10, then God's works were also carnal and fleshly strivings. A third interpretation takes this rest of 3:7-4:13 to anticipate the coming millennial kingdom age.¹³ A number of factors point to this as the best interpretation.

First, in Heb 4: 1, the promise to enter God's rest remains for those who receive it. The promise implies that it is futuristic in application.

Second, Psalm 95, the basis for the entire warning section and the source of the admonition concerning rest, is an enthronement Psalm.¹⁴ Regarding this type of psalm Kaiser says, "Therefore, each

¹³ Representatives of this viewpoint are Buchanan, *Hebrews*, 64-74; G. H. Lang, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Paternoster, 1951), 75-80; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Promise Theme and the Theology of Rest," *BSac* 130 (1973), 138-50.

¹⁴ Christoph Barth, *Introduction to the Psalms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 21.

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of these psalms alike tells the story of a divine kingdom which is yet to be set up on the earth."¹⁵ In other words, the theme of the enthronement psalms is clearly eschatological and anticipates the rule of the Lord on this planet (cf. Ps 93:1-2; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). The "rest" of Psalm 95 must therefore anticipate the millennium.

Third, the concept of sabbatism (Heb 4:9) was used in Jewish literature to refer to the kingdom age. This has been noted by many.¹⁶ In the Jewish prayer after sabbath meals the petition is made, "May the All-merciful let us inherit the day which shall be wholly a Sabbath and rest in the life everlasting."¹⁷ Buchanan asserts that the Epistle to the Hebrews is so steeped in the OT that the concept of rest cannot be limited to a spiritual interpretation but must include national and earthly concepts; in fact, he feels that any other interpretation is inconsistent.¹⁸

Andreasen's view is an illustration of this.¹⁹ While he acknowledges the OT expectation of a Jewish earthly kingdom in the term "rest," he goes on to give the word a limited spiritual meaning in Hebrews. Westcott does the same. He says, "The Jewish teachers dwelt much upon the symbolical meaning of the Sabbath as prefiguring 'the world to come'."²⁰ But having said this he goes on to take this to be eternity. It certainly is more logical to say that the NT theology of rest is founded on OT doctrine.

A fourth factor supports the idea of a millennial rest as being in the mind of the writer of Hebrews. The OT refers to the kingdom age as being a time of rest (Ps 132:12-14; Isa 11:10; 14:3; 32:18; 34:15).

Fifth, the "rest" spoken of in Psalm 95 clearly involved Israel's dwelling in the land; therefore, the promised rest can scarcely be divorced from settlement in the land.

Sixth, Heb 4:8 speaks of another prophetic "day." This clearly is a *period of time* and is explained in 4:9 as the sabbath rest.

Seventh, the rest was prepared from the foundation of the world (Heb 4:3-4) just as the kingdom was (Matt 25:34). This explains why Christ was employed in healing on the Jewish sabbath in John 5. The ultimate sabbath had not yet come so Christ with his Father was working to bring in that ultimate sabbath or kingdom age. It should

¹⁵ Kaiser, "Promise Theme," 142.

¹⁶ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 98-99; cr. Bruce, *Hebrews*, 75; Buchanan, *Hebrews*, 73; Hughes, *Hebrews*, 161.

¹⁷ *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, S.v. "Sabbath (Jewish)" by I. Abrahams (1930): 891.

¹⁸ Buchanan, *Hebrews*, 64-65, 72-74.

¹⁹ Neils-Erik Andreasen, *Rest and Redemption* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Andrews University, 1978), 109-15.

²⁰ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 98.

be noted that this idea of a sabbath day being the millennial age is no recent, innovative interpretation. It dates back at least to the Epistle of Barnabas in the early second century.

By way of conclusion to this section it may be said that there are three "rests" in these paragraphs of Hebrews. First, there is God's cessation from His creation work. This rest will be manifested in the kingdom age when redeemed mankind enters His inheritance. The second rest was Israel's conquest and possession of the promised land under Joshua. This is a picture of the kingdom rest. The third rest is the promised rest which actually is God's rest which comes to man in the millennium.

Here then is the warning. If the readers were mere professors and rejected Christ in order to go back to the works system of Judaism, they would be excluded from the promised kingdom age or God's rest.

This warning, infamous for its difficulty, has little to say eschatologically. The only prophetic statement is made by illustration and implication in vv 7-8. There the writer warns, "For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."²¹

Obviously, some kind of judgment is in view here. But is it a judgment to determine believers' rewards or is it the condemnation of the lost? Those who claim the former position point to the consumption of the Christian's works by flame in 1 Corinthians 3 as being parallel with v 8 here. Is this, however, the best interpretation? There is no solid evidence that the picture portrays the damnation of the lost. No comfort can be derived from the clause "close to being cursed" in v 7. The same vocabulary is employed in 8:13 for a certain and imminent doom. In other words, the worthless ground was destined to be cursed soil, scarcely the kind of vocabulary to be used of a Christian, even if he was carnal! Furthermore, the contrast between the two verses seems to portray the condition of the earth before the fall and after. In its Edenic state it was blessed and productive; after the sin of Adam it was cursed and in need of redemption.²² Bruce compares the analogy to the vineyard song of Isaiah 5.²³ In either case the figure graphically portrays Israel. It had

²¹ NASB. All extended quotations are from the NASB.

²² Buchanan, *Hebrews*, 110.

²³ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 124-25.

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received the blessings of promises, covenants, the law, the Scriptures, and the name of Jehovah. If, however, the people failed to respond to the Messiah, the only destiny was eternal perdition. Kent comments, "The whole tenor of the passage demands retribution and destruction as the emphatic point."²⁴ Also, as Hewitt notes, "The context does not favour the suggestion that the piece of ground should be burnt by man to improve it. . . ."²⁵ The threefold progression in v 8 of worthless, cursed, and burned hardly looks at the life of a believer in Christ. Finally, the contrast with v 9 implies that a distinction is being drawn between the future of the lost and saved. As was noted before, *swthri<a* in Hebrews when used of Christians anticipates eschatological salvation.²⁶ This is the destiny of the redeemed; v 8 looks to

the future of the damned.

HEBREWS 10:26-39

This fourth warning section has a great deal to do with future judgment and some with the promise of future blessing. In this paragraph the writer declares:

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and **THE FURY OF A FIRE WHICH WILL CONSUME THE ADVERSARIES.**

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

For we know Him who said, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY." And again, "THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE."

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly, by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated.

For you showed sympathy to the prisoners, and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and an abiding one.

²⁴ Kent, Hebrews, 115.

²⁵ Hewitt, Hebrews, 109.

²⁶ Cf. p. 68.

Therefore, do not throwaway 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 was promised.

FOR YET IN A VERY LITTLE WHILE, HE WHO IS COMING WILL COME, AND WILL NOT DELAY.

BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIFE BY FAITH; AND IF

HE SHRINKS BACK, MY SOUL HAS NO PLEASURE IN HIM.

But we are not of those who shrink back to destruction, but of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.

This paragraph is the most severe of the five warning sections. Perhaps this is due to the degree of sin and the descriptions of the rebellion committed by those who fall into the peril of the warning. They are guilty of willful sin, outright defiance of God (v 26; cf. Num 15:30-36). The disannulling of the law of Moses described in v 28 looks back to Deut 17:2-6. The context of that OT passage deals with Israelites who abandoned the worship of Jehovah to go into idolatry or the veneration of other gods. In v 29 the writer of Hebrews describes the sins of those who apostatize as trampling under foot (katapate<w) the Son of God, of regarding (h[ge<omai, a sin of the intellect) as unclean the blood of the covenant, and of insulting the Spirit of grace. In this last sin the verb is e]nubri<zw, a compounded verb which describes the awesome violence of God's holy name by insolence.²⁷ It here parallels the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:32; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:10).

Sprinkled throughout these descriptions of sin and rebellion are allusions to eschatology, particularly the coming of judgment and the promise of blessing.

In several verses there is the prediction of judgment. The first allusion to this judgment is found in the connective yap in v 26. Quite clearly this particle introduces an explanation of the significance of the approaching day referred to in the preceding verse. That day, while it will be a time of vindication and deliverance for God's people, will bring condemnation for the lost as is seen in this passage. Westcott succinctly asserts, "The mention of 'the day' in v. 25 calls out the sad severity of the warning which follows."²⁸

The judgment is described more fully in Heb 10:27, the verse which follows. The description is very interesting and significant. To explain what the judgment involves the writer of Hebrews quotes

²⁷ The only occurrence of e]nubri<zw in the LXX is in Lev 24:11 where it describes blasphemy.

²⁸ Westcott, *Hebrews*, 327.

from Isa 26:11, a passage which contrasts the righteous with the

wicked. Specifically, the lost are referred to as "enemies." The Greek term *u[penanti<oj* describes what is "opposed to, opposite or contrary to."²⁹ This assize can hardly be a reference to believers' rewards! The awesomeness of this judgment is emphasized by the vocabulary. "The terror of the expectation is brought out by a more literal rendering of the words, 'a certain fearful expectation of judgment' (ASY); the indefinite 'a certain' leaves it somewhat open to the reader's imagination to fill in the gruesome details of that judgment."³⁰ Certainly, as Westcott puts it, "Such a judgment (c.ix.27) would be, for those whom the Apostle describes, condemnation."³¹

This future judgment of the lost is further described in v 29 where the writer uses an *a fortiori* argument. The punishment inflicted for highhanded or willful disobedience was death (Deut 17:2-6). If this was true in the OT for defiance of the law, how much worse will be God's judgment for scorning the Son of God (cf. 2:2)? What would be worse than physical death but eternal perdition? "The judgment awaiting those who will not trust for their salvation in the sacrifice of Christ must consist of eternal loss in hell. It is pictured as a fire that is almost personified and is possessed of zeal which is about to consume the opponents of Christ."³²

The quotations in v 30 taken from the Song of Moses in Deut 32:35-36 first sets forth the principle that God avenges his enemies. This first quotation is not taken directly from the Hebrew or LXX and may be a well-known proverb adapted from Deut 32:35.³³ While the objects of the warning in Deut 32:35 are Israelites, unbelieving Jews are in view. As Hughes asserts, "This God whom they have confessed as the God of grace and mercy is also the God of holiness and justice: faithfulness to his covenant leads to blessing, but rebellion means retribution."³⁴ The second quotation from Deut 32:36 predicts God's vindication of his people, Israel, in a still future day. The two passages together describe the deliverance of believing Israel and the judgment of those who do not trust in Messiah. Bruce comments, "This certainly means that He will execute judgment on their behalf, vindicating their cause against their enemies, but also that, on the same principles of impartial righteousness, He will execute judgment against them when they forsake His covenant."³⁵

²⁹ The only other NT occurrence is in Col 2: 14.

³⁰ Lightfoot, *Hebrews*, 194.

³¹ Westcott, 329.

³² Kent, *Hebrews*, 205.

³³ The same saying is found in

³⁴ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 425.

³⁵ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 262-63.

Further reference to judgment is found in v 31 of Hebrews 10. While the verse parallels David's statement, "Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great" (2 Sam 24:14), the context is pointedly judgmental. For a believer it is a merciful thing to fall into the hands of a loving God, but for apostates it is punitive and terrifying.

Not until Heb 10:37-38 is the next reference to judgment given. It is a quotation from Hab 2:3-4. In an article of this length it is quite impossible to discuss the problems of quotation in this passage. It may be summarized by saying that the writer of Hebrews introduces the Habakkuk quotation by using Isa 26:20, "For yet in a very little while." The passage from Habakkuk is a free citation of the LXX text. In the use of the quotation, the NT writer refers to the one who draws back. The nature of this failure is not spelled out; however, it is quite clear that it refers to an apostate. In such a one God takes no pleasure.

V 39 portrays the destiny of the one who "shrinks back." For him the end is (i,7tWAEtav. Concerning this noun Kent simply states that it

. . . means destruction or ruin, and is commonly used in the New Testament of eternal destruction. Such passages as Matthew 7:13; Romans 9:22; Philippians 1:28; 3:19; and 1 Timothy 6:9 reveal this aspect of the word. Both Judas and the Antichrist are called 'the son of perdition' (John 17:12; 2 Thess. 2:3), because of the eternal torment and ruin which their heinous deeds will bring. The usage of *apoleia* here makes it clear that the judgment described in this context is not just a chastening of God's people but the final destruction of apostates.³⁶

This fourth warning section not only contains eschatology anticipating judgment; it also looks ahead to promise. The first reference to this blessing is found in 10:34 where there is mention of a better and abiding possession. As the Lord had promised in Matt 6:20, they had laid up treasure in heaven. Peter also describes the imperishable quality of the Christian's inheritance (1 Pet 1:4). The Hebrew believer's eschatology in this time of persecution would be a real source of encouragement to him.

V 35 refers to the reward that comes from confidence. This is not the same as the rewards given in I Corinthians 3 and 2 Corinthians 5.

Very interestingly, *misqapodosi* occurs only in Hebrews (2:2; 10:35; 11:26). In 2:2 it is used of punishment and in the other two references it has the positive idea of blessing. This noun, derived from *misqoj* and *apodi*, looks at a payment of wages. Quite clearly, this is the glory

³⁶ Kent. *Hebrews*, 215.

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which awaits God's child (Rom 8:18). Hughes explains, "The relationship of the present pilgrimage to the future reward is the relationship of faith to hope, as the quotation which follows teaches (vv 37 and 38) and the next chapter so amply illustrates."³⁷

What the reward involves is stated more clearly in 10:36. It consists of receiving "what was promised." The Greek literally says "the promise." The verb used in this verse, *komi*, is used with the promise in 11:13 and 39. This can hardly be accidental. In both of the occurrences in chap. 11 this vocabulary anticipates the millennium. The promise then looks ahead to life in Christ's earthly kingdom.

V 39 explains this as "the preserving of the soul." Bruce interprets the phrase *ei j peripoi* " . . . a variant expression for *zh* in the Habakkuk quotation in v. 38."³⁸ "To possess and preserve one's soul is the essence of salvation."³⁹

In summary of the eschatology of the fourth warning it may be said that the promise of life is made and the warning of eternal perdition is issued for apostates.

HEBREWS 12:25-29

This fifth warning section is based on Hag 2:6, a passage which is predictive and eschatological. The argument here is another *a fortiori* one. The writer is looking back to Mount Sinai where God spoke to Israel through Moses. The voice came from Mount Sinai, so it was "on earth" as v 25 states. Today Christ who is in heaven warns through his earthly messengers. If the voice *on earth* brought inescapable judgment, *how much more* the voice from heaven (cf. 2:2-3). From what those who were disobedient did not escape is left unstated. It could be the judgment of death for flagrant disregard of the law or it may be the failure to enter the promised land. Probably it is the latter alternative since that entire generation failed in this

regard.

To make the point even more forceful and vivid Hag 2:6 is quoted, "Yet once more I will shake not only earth, but also the heaven." That passage looks back to the shaking of Sinai.⁴⁰ The primary problem here is how literal one is to take the future shaking of earth and heaven. Kent has a good word on this:

Although some interpret the prophecy metaphorically as referring to the upheavals accomplished by Christ's first coming in its effect

³⁷ Hughes, *Hebrews*, 432.

³⁸ Bruce, *Hebrews*, 275.

³⁹ Kent, *Hebrews*, 215.

⁴⁰ Cf. Exod 19:18; Judg 5:4-5; Ps 68:8; 77:18.

upon Jewish worship and politics, the parallelism with the former shaking makes this view unlikely. The first shaking was physical and geographical at Sinai. There is no good reason to take this second shaking of the earth and the heavens above it in any less literal sense.⁴¹

The writer goes on to say that the only things which will remain after this are those things which cannot be shaken. This is not looking at the judgment seat of Christ where the believer's works and motives are to be tried by fire. The contrast is between the saved and lost. This fits with the conclusion in v 28. It is a kingdom which the Christian will receive, not simply rewards in the kingdom.⁴²

Finally, the concept of God as a consuming fire fits the idea of the judgment of condemnation. Hewitt affirms, "At the second advent of Jesus Christ, just as the material and transitory will disappear and the eternal and permanent will remain, so what is false and vile will be revealed in the fire of God's holiness and those whose characters are such will be consumed by the fire of His judgment."⁴³

CONCLUSION

In all five warning passages of Hebrews the thing to be avoided by the original readers of that discourse was not loss of believers' rewards but loss of salvation. Quite clearly the writer knew of a group in that early congregation who had made professions of faith in Jesus Christ but were in peril of jettisoning their confessions to apostatize and lapse back into Judaism. The prophetic elements in the warnings

confirm this interpretation.

⁴¹ Kent, *Hebrews*, 275.

⁴² The present participle *paralambanontes* is both present and futuristic. The kingdom is received in the present time by faith; its realization is future. Cf. II :39-40.

⁴³ Hewitt, *Hebrews*, 204.

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Grace Theological Seminary
200 Seminary Dr.
Winona Lake, IN 46590
www.grace.edu

Warning Passages Ahead

JANUARY 9, 2012 | [Collin Hansen](#)

The Book of Hebrews daunts even the most gifted preachers and scholars. For one thing, we don't know the author. He quotes the Old Testament at length and repeatedly, but his method of interpreting these passages doesn't always make sense to readers. His arguments about angels, Moses, and the temple require more than cursory understanding of the Hebrew Bible.

And then there are the so-called warning passages. It might be hard at first to grasp the significance of the priest Melchizedek, but many Christians viscerally understand the practical importance of these warnings. Can I lose my faith? What if I doubt? Fail to overcome sin?

To answer these questions and more, I turned to the acclaimed scholar Peter O'Brien, professor emeritus at Moore College in Sydney, Australia. Many who have studied [Ephesians](#), [Colossians](#), [Philemon](#), and [Philippians](#) have benefited from his rich, insightful, and faithful commentaries. He has also written an immensely helpful [commentary on the Letter to the Hebrews](#). He draws on some of that study to help us understand the famous warning passages in their immediate and canonical context.

Some Reformed teachers find it hard to teach the five warning passages of Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29). How do we reconcile our theology with what appears to many to be the plain meaning of these passages, that believers can lose their faith?

The warnings of Hebrews have presented many challenges to believers throughout Christian history. And the misapplication of them has caused pastoral problems for Christians of all traditions, including the Reformed.

These warnings have troubled earnest Christians by raising doubts about their assurance of salvation, an assurance that is so clearly affirmed, for example, in [Romans 5:1-11](#) and [Romans 8:18-39](#), and in Jesus's promises for his disciples in [John 6:39-40, 44](#) and [John 10:25-30](#).

Even within Hebrews itself there are powerful words of encouragement and assurance based on God's faithfulness to fulfill his promises to his people ([Heb. 2:10; 6:10-20](#)), and so because of the finality of Christ's sacrifice ([Heb. 9:11-28; 10:14-18](#)), and his permanent high priesthood by which Jesus is able to save his people completely and eternally since he always lives to intercede for them (7:25; cf. 9:24).

Does Hebrews show us how we might resolve our theological and pastoral difficulties?

A key to addressing the tension between the severe warnings and the seemingly contradictory promises and words of encouragement lies, first, in recognizing the distinction Hebrews makes between “a kind of transitory faith, a form of conversion which, like the seed sown on rocky places [in the parable of the soils, Mark 4], has all the signs of life, but which does not persevere.” [1] Such faith is spurious; by contrast, genuine faith is tied to perseverance.

The conditional sentences of [Hebrews 3:6](#) and [14](#) fit an *evidence-inference* category, in which “the observation of a piece of evidence leads the observer to infer a certain logical conclusion.” [2]

We are his [God's] house, *if indeed* we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory ([Heb. 3:6](#)).

We have come to share in Christ, *if indeed* we hold firmly till the end our original conviction ([Heb. 3:14](#)).

Accordingly, the author maintains that the listeners' continuance in faith to the end will demonstrate that they *are* members of God's household, not that they will become this in the future (v. 6). Similarly, holding on to their confidence will reveal the reality that they *already* share in Christ, not simply that they will share in him on the final day (v. 14).

The listeners' perseverance is the evidence of what has taken place in the past and is an essential ingredient of what it means to be a Christian, a partaker of Christ. So Hebrews “virtually defines true believers as those who hold firmly to the end the confidence they had at first.” [3]

This distinction between genuine and spurious faith is clearly evident elsewhere in Hebrews. This indicates that the author's “word of exhortation” ([Heb. 13:22](#)) is addressed to a mixed audience: there are two kinds of soil with dramatically different responses to the frequent showers of God's blessings ([Heb. 6:7-8](#)), two kinds of hearts ([Heb. 3:12; Heb. 10:22](#)), and a distinction made between “we” who

“have faith and are saved,” and “the one” who belongs “to those who shrink back and are destroyed” ([Heb. 10:38-39](#)). Also the author has concerns for certain individuals within the community who may be in particular danger of apostasy (“any one,” “someone”: [Heb. 3:12, 13](#); [Heb. 4:1, 11](#); [Heb. 6:11-12](#); [Heb. 10:24, 25, 28](#); [Heb. 12:15-16](#)).

Hebrews is not alone in describing true believers as those who hold their confidence firmly to the end. In other New Testament documents there are warnings against or descriptions of spurious faith ([Matt. 7:21-23](#); [John 2:23-25](#); [Col. 1:22-23](#); [1 John 2:19](#); cf. [2 Pet. 1:10-11](#)). Our Lord's parable of the sower (or the soils) makes a similar point ([Mark 4:1-29](#) and parallels). The initial growth of the seed scattered on the rocky ground and among the thorns appears to all observers, except God himself, to promise the best harvest. But it does not bear fruit. It has the signs of life but does not persevere. This spiritual life proves transitory (Carson 2000: 266).

So how does Hebrews address the audience with its warnings and encouragements?

In view of Hebrews' distinction between true and spurious faith, and its definition of genuine believers as those who hold fast their confession of Jesus Christ to the end, we consider that the images describing the audience in the warnings point to an *initial* work of grace in the lives of the congregation members.

The author knew that the audience had been exposed to the preaching of the gospel and that God had done a mighty work within the congregation ([Heb. 2:1-4](#)). It is evident that some had been truly converted and had genuinely appropriated Christ's saving work for themselves. How many and who they all were, the author does not know exactly. But he addresses the whole congregation on the basis of what he has observed, and urges them to hold firmly to their confession of faith in Christ, their Christian hope without wavering, and their confidence in God ([Heb. 3:6, 14](#); [Heb. 4:14](#); [Heb. 6:18](#); [Heb. 10:23](#)).

Significantly, however, even when the author refers to those who commit apostasy he uses the third person plural rather than the second (e.g., “those *who* have once been enlightened . . . and *who* have fallen away,” [Heb. 6:4-6](#)), and does not explicitly identify them with his listeners. Though some are apparently in great danger he does not assert that they have committed apostasy. The warnings, like the divine promises, are intended to prevent this from happening.

The descriptions of the audience in vv. 4-5 (“those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age”) point to an initial experience of the gospel. The vivid agricultural imagery of [Hebrews 6:7-8](#), which is integral to the warning of vv. 4-6 and clarifies its meaning, stands between the warning and the expression of confidence in vv. 9-12. It depicts *two* kinds of responses that can be made to the warning, *not simply one*, and thus fills out and completes the picture by including both those who *do not fall away* and those who *commit* apostasy.

The effects of the rain on each piece of land differ dramatically: in the case of one, the presence of fruitful crops at the end time harvest is evidence of those who had a genuine experience of salvation (vv. 7, 9). But the land that has been well watered and nurtured, and produces only “thorns and thistles” shows that it is worthless, and does not stand the test at the final judgment (vv. 6, 8). The faith of those represented was only transitory (cf. [Heb. 10:38-39](#); [Heb. 12:25](#)). They were never true believers, whatever signs of life they may have shown initially.

What is the nature of the sin threatening the community?

From a historical perspective, the nature of the sin referred to involves reverting to Judaism. The listeners are apparently in danger of returning to a reliance on the cultic structures of the old covenant in Judaism.

Although the warning passages of Hebrews describe the sin threatening the community in a number of ways, since there are various facets to it, ultimately it is irreversible apostasy from the living God. It is the utter rejection of an entire position and stance that had once been professed.

This sin is Trinitarian in its scope, for it involves a persistent and culpable refusal to obey the voice of the living God who speaks in his Son and warns from heaven ([Heb. 1:1-4](#); [Heb. 12:25](#)). It treats Jesus with utter contempt by crucifying him again, subjecting him to public disgrace ([Heb. 6:6](#)), and rejecting his new covenant sacrifice by which the work of atonement was completed ([Heb. 10:29](#)). And it arrogantly insults God's gracious Spirit through whom Christ offered himself to God and who applies the definitive forgiveness of sins to believers ([Heb. 10:29](#)). The fact that it is willful, persistent, and committed in view of the knowledge of the truth rules out the possibility that it is due to ignorance ([Heb. 10:26](#)).

Unlike other sins, offenses, and weaknesses of believers referred to in Hebrews that have been wonderfully atoned for through Jesus' new covenant sacrifice and high priestly ministry, there is no provision for the sin of apostasy. For those who utterly reject God's gracious plan of saving people and bringing them to glory "there remains no more sacrifice for sins" ([Heb. 10:26](#)).

In the light of this, the special character of the sin of apostasy must be understood clearly and not confused with other sins and weaknesses of Christians, as has often been the case throughout church history. Since this offense constitutes a total renunciation of everything that is distinctively Christian and which the person had previously professed, it is not the sin of the outsider or the one who is on the edge of church life.

Those who are anxious about having committed this sin, and are troubled that God will not receive them into fellowship with his Son because they believe their sin is too great, are urged by Hebrews to come with boldness to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help in their time of need ([Heb. 2:18](#); [Heb. 4:14-16](#)).

By contrast, apostates defiantly and deliberately reject the Son of God and his salvation, showing neither anxiety nor concern, since they would feel justified in their determined and fixed resolve.

Given Hebrews's distinction between authentic faith as that which perseveres to the end, and spurious faith that may initially show some signs of life but does not endure, the person who commits apostasy is not an authentic Christian and never was one, whatever their first responses to the gospel may have been. And since genuine faith is tied to perseverance that endures to the end, the believer who perseveres in the race marked out for them, with their eyes fixed on Jesus ([Heb. 12:1, 2](#)), shows that he or she is a member of God's family and has already been a sharer in Christ.

What are the consequences of committing apostasy?

The consequences of the danger threatening the community to which Hebrews was written have been interpreted in various ways since early times, depending on the nature of the sin that is being described. Those who say this offense falls short of apostasy and is probably some kind of spiritual lethargy that has been manifested in the congregation understand the consequences to be a form of discipline resulting in physical death or the loss of rewards.

But these suggestions do not do justice to the strong language of [Hebrews 6:6](#) or [Hebrews 10:26-31](#). A synthetic examination of the five warning passages shows that the consequences are a “just punishment” (2:2) or no “escape” (v. 3), perishing, missing out on God's promised rest, the tragic loss of their inheritance ([Heb. 4:1, 11](#)), the impossibility of being brought back to repentance ([Heb. 6:4, 6](#)), which corresponds to the apostate being like land that is “worthless, under a curse, and destined to be burned” (v. 8).

This punishment is not some restorative or disciplinary process but is associated with the severity of the eschatological judgment that will consume God's adversaries. The fourth warning describes the irreversible consequences of apostasy in terms of its severity (it is “terrifying” and “a raging fire”) and its finality (it is “inevitable” and “eschatological”). Apostates are cast as God's enemies (v. 27) who are deserving of “far greater punishment” (v. 29) than what the Mosaic law prescribed for rejection of the old covenant, that is, a punishment more severe than merely physical death. Those who shrink back are destroyed which in this setting of final judgment signifies eternal destruction.

The author of Hebrews has not asserted that his listeners have committed apostasy, though he is obviously concerned that some are in significant danger of falling over this precipice. He has warned the whole congregation of the irreversible consequences of apostasy. His warnings, along with other elements in his exhortatory material, together with his doctrinal expositions that provide the presuppositions for the exhortations, are intended to prevent these disastrous consequences from occurring.

In the light of these warnings what does Hebrews exhort them to do?

The listeners are to “hold firmly” to their confession of Christ ([Heb. 4:14](#); [Heb. 10:23](#)), and to respond to God and his promises in persevering faith ([Heb. 6:12, 15](#)) rather than in unbelief and apostasy that leads to destruction. They are told that they have need of endurance ([Heb. 10:36](#)), and so they are to run with perseverance the race that is set before them, fixing their eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith who *endured* the cross, and despised its shame in fulfillment of God's will ([Heb. 12:1-2](#)).

What assurances do believers have of their eternal salvation?

The encouragements to the members of the congregation to hold firmly to their confession of faith in Christ and to endure patiently whatever trials they may face, are securely based on God's faithfulness to fulfill his stunning promises (cf. [Heb. 6:12-20](#)). His purpose is to lead his children to glory, and to that end he has made Jesus, the pioneer of their salvation, perfect through suffering ([Heb. 2:10](#)). While the exhortations for them to persevere in the context of trials, persecution, public abuse from opponents, disappointments, and the tendency to lose heart ([Heb. 12:5](#)) may seem awesome, even overwhelming, they are not left to their own devices.

Christ's once-for-all perfect offering of himself is utterly acceptable and efficacious; he has blazed the trail for his people into heaven itself, and won for them an eternal redemption. As the Son who lives forever, his priestly ministry on his people's behalf is never ending; he is “able to save completely and eternally those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” ([Heb. 7:25](#)).

Ultimately, the believer's security rests not with the believer but with the living God. His final promise in the letter, “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you,” is wonderful assurance indeed. So then, “we may say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid, What can mere mortals do to me?”” ([Heb. 13:5, 6](#)).

Where would you suggest we turn to learn more about interpreting the warning passages in Hebrews?

D. A. Carson, "[Reflections on Assurance](#)," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 247-276.

Herbert W. Bateman, ed. *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007) particularly the section by Buist M. Fanning, "A Classical Reformed View" (172-219).

And for a more technical treatment, C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* (New York: Lang, 2008).

[1] D. A. Carson, "[Reflections on Assurance](#)," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 247-276, esp. 267.

[2] C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* (New York: Lang, 2008), 184-185. Cf. Carson, "Reflections," 264, 267; and Buist M. Fanning, "A Classical Reformed View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, ed. by H. W. Bateman (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 172-219. The majority view, however, understands the conditional sentences in terms of *cause* and *effect*.

[3] Carson, 'Reflections', 267.

Collin Hansen serves as editorial director for The Gospel Coalition. He is the author of several books, including [Young, Restless, Reformed: A Journalist's Journey With the New Calvinists](#) and [A God-Sized Vision: Revival Stories That Stretch and Stir](#) (with John Woodbridge). He earned an MDiv at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and an undergraduate degree in journalism and history from Northwestern University. He edited [Our Secular Age: Ten Years of Reading and Applying Charles Taylor](#) and [The New City Catechism Devotional](#), among other books. He and his wife belong to [Redeemer Community Church](#) in Birmingham, Alabama, and he serves on the advisory board of [Beeson Divinity School](#).

The Five Warning Passages of Hebrews

by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

(NOTE: this is a WRONG, Arminian perspective)

Some of the more difficult and troubling aspects of Hebrews are the sometimes sharply worded warnings to the readers in five separate passages.

Passage

1. Hebrews 2:1-4
2. Hebrews 4:12-13
3. Hebrews 6:4-8
4. Hebrews 10:26-31
5. Hebrews 12:25-29

On a plain reading they seem to imply the possibility that Christian believers can commit apostasy, that is, fall away from Christ and faith. This, however, hits squarely at one of the noisiest and sometimes bitter debates between Christian factions:

- Calvinists deny that true Christians can commit apostasy and lose their salvation, stressing the final perseverance of the saints.
- Arminians agree that true Christians can indeed commit apostasy and lose their salvation, stressing the free will of man.

As I. Howard Marshall suggests, advocates of one position or the other tend to base their doctrine "on philosophical and dogmatic grounds."* The way forward for us is not to carry on the debate, but to sincerely and humbly consider the warnings in Hebrews -- in the context they are given -- and then try to form tentative conclusions.

We won't all agree in our conclusions. Fair-minded, Christ-loving, Spirit-filled believers differ on these matters. Instead of trying to bash the other side, we will pursue humility towards one another, humility as we approach the Letter of Hebrews, and humility before God. In that humility and love, we will grow in our faith and exemplify the love we profess in Christ.

For your benefit, I'll include each of the shorter passages in the NIV translation here so you can compare them. For discussion, see the appropriate lessons in which they are discussed.

1. Hebrews 2:1-4

"¹We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ²For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will."

*** A Warning against Ignoring Christ's Salvation (2:2-3a)

Having exhorting his readers about paying attention and the danger of drifting, he warns them of the seriousness of ignoring God's word. The Law given to Moses was understood by the readers of Hebrews to have been given through angels (Galatians 3:19; Acts 7:53).

"For if the message spoken by angels was binding,¹⁹ and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,²⁰ how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (2:2-3a)

This is the first of the [five warning passages in Hebrews](#). The author's logic is this, drawing on chapter 1, where he argued that the Son is far superior to angels. If the Law given through angels was binding, with severe punishments for disobedience, how much more the salvation brought about by the Messiah who is God's exalted Son.

Ignoring this salvation is the danger. "Ignore" (NIV), "neglect" (NRSV, KJV) is the verb *ameleō*, "to have no care for, to neglect, be unconcerned."²¹ A casual attitude toward the gospel isn't faith. It leads inevitably to drifting away with the current generated by the culture around us. The gospel offers great salvation from the "just punishment" from breaking the Law. But the opposite -- neglecting this salvation -- cuts off any hope of escape²² from the terrors of punishment.

2. Hebrews 4:12-13

"¹²For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

*** The Living, Active Word of God (4:12-13)

Finahe writer points us to the seriousness of the Word of God. This is the second of the [five warning passages in Hebrews](#). If ignoring and rebelling against the Word kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land, we must take it seriously. Moreover, the Word has a way of uncovering our tendencies to go astray and our weaknesses.

"¹²For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." (4:12-13)

Our author describes the Word as "living" and "active." "Living" (NIV, NRSV) and "quick" (KJV) is from *zaō*, "to live." Here it could mean, "to live in the transcendent sense," "to be full of vitality, be lively," or may carry the idea "to be life-productive, offer life."³⁵ "Active" (NIV, NRSV) and "powerful" (KJV) is *energēs*, from the same root as our word "energy." It means, "pertaining to practical expression of capability, effective, active, powerful."³⁶

Then our author compares the Word to a razor-sharp³⁷ sword (*machaira*), "a relatively short sword or other sharp instrument, sword, dagger."³⁸ It is not only sharp, but double-edged,³⁹ that is, powerful and dangerous.

It also penetrates or pierces (*diikneomai*⁴⁰) deep into the person, "even to dividing soul and spirit, joints⁴¹ and marrow."⁴² The soul (*psuchē*) is the seat of the inner life,⁴³ while the spirit seems to be that part of the human personality that contains the "breath" of life and relates to the Divine Spirit.⁴⁴ Only here and in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 are they distinguished from each other. The idea, therefore, may be that God's Word is so powerful that it can separate the inseparable and scrutinize the inscrutable.

While the Hebrew Christians may justify themselves -- and we may justify our actions before God -- it is God's Word that will be the ultimate Judge, since it can discern⁴⁵ what cannot be seen from the outside -- the hidden thoughts⁴⁶ and intentions⁴⁷ of the heart.

In other words, Hebrews is saying, don't ignore the message of salvation, the Word of God to you. For if you do, God's Word will pierce through all your defenses and expose your true motives.

This passage is a sober exhortation, a sober reminder, of the consequences of unbelief. Dear brothers and sisters, lay hold of Christ and his word -- and hang on -- that you might finally enter his rest, the "Promised Land," heaven where Christ dwells.

Prayer

Father, we so need to enter into the rest of faith now -- and look forward to entering into your rest in heaven. We trust you. Keep us from straying and pull us back when we get off the path. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

3. Hebrews 6:4-8

"⁴It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, ⁶if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

⁷Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned."

*** Spirit-Filled Believers? (6:4-5)

Now we come to one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the Bible, the third of the [five warning passages in Hebrews](#). Even those who disagree with each other about the application of the passage struggle with it. One question any interpretation must answer: Why can't people be brought back to repentance? But let's have a start.:

"⁴It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, ⁶if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." (6:4-6)

First, let's consider the writer's description of people who might "fall away" He calls them (using Aorist tense verbs to refer to a point in the past):

1. "Enlightened" is *phōtizō*, with the basic meaning of "to shine, to give light to." We get our word "photon" from this root. Here, it is used figuratively in reference to the inner life, "enlighten, give light to, shed light upon."¹² "Once" is *hapax*, which means, "pertaining to a single occurrence, once." Here probably "once and for all."¹³ The writer is talking about a once-for-all enlightenment that these people have experienced at a particular time in the past. Bruce says, "The light of the gospel has broken in upon these people's darkness.... To give up the gospel would be to sin against the light, the one sin which by its very nature is incurable."¹⁴

2. "Tasted the heavenly gift." "Tasted" (*geuomai*) means more than "sampled," like we might do by touching something to the tip of our tongue. The word is used figuratively here to mean, "to experience something cognitively or emotionally, come to know something."¹⁵ Thayer says that from Homer on down the word is equivalent to "to feel, make trial of, experience."¹⁶ See its use in Luke 14:24. "Tasted" occurs in both verses 4 and 5. Scholars aren't sure exactly what "heavenly gift"¹⁷ refers to. It could refer to baptism (described by later Christian writers as "enlightenment"), the Eucharist (drawing on the symbolism of "tasted"), or be another way to refer

to the Holy Spirit, mentioned in the next clause. Whatever it is, they haven't just sampled it, but fully experienced and entered into it. They aren't mere outside observers.

3. "Shared in the Holy Spirit." "Partakers" (KJV) or "shared in" (NIV, NRSV) is the noun *metochos*, "sharing in, participating in," from the verb *metecho*, "share, participate, partake with someone."¹⁸ Some try to soften this to mean something like "shared in the Spirit's gifts and operations" (as in Matthew 7:22-23), but the text says that they shared or participated in the Holy Spirit himself. Later in Hebrews, the writer talks about people who have "outraged the Spirit of grace" (10:29).

4. "Tasted the goodness of the word of God." "Word" here is *rhēma*, "that which is said, word, saying, expression, or statement of any kind."¹⁹ They had "experienced" the good effect of the Word of God in their own lives (1 Peter 2:3; 2 Peter 2:20; Matthew 13:21-22).

5. "Tasted ... the powers of the coming age." "Powers" is *dunamis*, "power, might, strength, force," here specifically, "a deed that exhibits ability to function powerfully, deed of power, miracle, wonder."²⁰ They had experienced the miracles (2:4) expected in the Last Days, the age of the Messiah (Matthew 12:28). Jesus himself warned:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23)

The people he writes of were enlightened, knowledgeable, Spirit-filled (NO! – JDP) , involved with in-depth Bible study, and had experienced miracles. I've known many people I could describe that way. It sounds pretty clear the way the writer of Hebrews paints it. Of course, some, fearing that this passage might conflict with their doctrines, have sought to soften or explain away the plain intent of the passage.

Impossible to Restore to Repentance (6:4-6)

Now the hard part. What does the writer mean when he says it is "impossible" to restore them to repentance if they fall away?

"⁴It is impossible ... if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." (6:4, 6)

Let's examine some of the words here.

"Impossible" is *adunatos*, "incapable of happening or being done, impossible."²¹ **"Fall away"** (*parapiptō*) means, literally, "fall beside," then "go astray, miss." In the papyri it means mostly, "become lost." Here the sense is: "to fail to follow through on a commitment, fall away, commit apostasy."²² A.M. Stibbs characterizes this as "nothing less than a conscious,

deliberate and persistent abandonment of the Christian way of salvation, an abandonment which involves nothing less than apostasy from the living God."²³ Robertson says, "It is a terrible picture and cannot be toned down."²⁴

In what sense is it impossible to restore²⁵ them to repentance?²⁶ The author isn't stating a theological doctrine so much as a practical truth. Bruce says:

"He is not questioning the perseverance of the saints; we might say that rather he is insisting that those who persevere are the true saints. But in fact he is stating a practical truth that has verified itself repeatedly in the experience of the church. Those who have shared the covenant privileges of the people of God, and then deliberately renounce them, are the most difficult persons of all to reclaim for the faith."²⁷

The Scandal of Apostasy (6:6)

Lest his readers fail to grasp the terrible implications of turning back from Christ to their former Judaism, the writer characterizes it thus:

"... To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace." (6:6)

To turn away from their Savior to the Judaism that rejected Jesus and his salvation places them in the same company as those who crucified him²⁸ and subjected him to the public disgrace²⁹ of crucifixion.

While it is true that God forgives even the worst sins, and that as long as apostates reject the Savior there can be no salvation for them, Bruce notes that this passage

"... indicates *why* it is impossible for such people to repent and make a new beginning. God has pledged himself to pardon all who truly repent, but Scripture and experience alike suggest that it is possible for human beings to arrive at a state of heart and life where they can no longer repent."³⁰

Of course, we can take comfort in the fact that what is impossible to man is still possible to God.

Crops and Thorns (6:7-8)

Now the author employs an agricultural parable to indicate the final end for apostates.

"⁷Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. ⁸But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned." (6:7-8)

He compares believers to a well-watered and abundant harvest, while apostates are compared to a land that only produces thorns and thistles. To make the land usable

and get rid of the thistle seeds, the field will need to be burned rather than harvested -- a sad reminder of hell.

4. Hebrews 10:26-31

"²⁶If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

*** Warning Against Deliberate Apostasy (10:26-31)

Now comes a stern, fearful warning intended to frighten the readers -- Jewish Christians who were flirting with the possibility of returning to their former Judaism. This is the fourth of the [five warning passages in Hebrews](#). The passage has also frightened many faithful Christians in our day who misunderstand its meaning and intent:

"²⁶If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' ³¹It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (10:26-31)

Let's examine it carefully so we can find out what our author is actually referring to.

First, there are two qualifications to sin: (1) deliberately and (2) continually. "Deliberately" (NIV, RSV), "willfully" (KJV, NRSV) is *hekousiōs*, "willingly, without compulsion," that is "deliberately, intentionally." This is probably something like sinning "with a high hand" (Numbers 15:30), which we discussed above under 9:7b in chapter 7 of this study. The NIV ("keep on sinning") and NRSV ("persist in sin") interpret the present tense of the participle for sin (*harmartanō*) as a progressive present that "signifies action in progress or state in persistence...."¹⁴

Some Christians, thinking about sins and weaknesses of character that trip them up again and again, have read this verse with despair. In the ancient Church, some Christians (including Emperor Constantine) put off baptism as long as possible thinking that this way they could avoid going to hell for some post-baptismal sin.¹⁵ That is certainly not what our writer has in mind! He is not speaking of occasional or even persistent sins due to the weakness of our sinful nature such as lust, drunkenness, theft, anger, and the like. These kinds of sins, while serious before God (1 Corinthians 6:9-11), are what the Apostle Paul refers to as being "caught in a sin" (NIV) or "overtaken in a fault" (KJV, Galatians 6:1). Elsewhere, our author rejoices in forgiveness of sins through the mercy and sympathies of our great High Priest (4:15-16). Praise God, there is full and complete forgiveness for our sins!

Rather, our author is referring to a sustained defiance towards God -- apostasy -- as he was in 6:4-8, that is, turning deliberately away from faith in Christ and returning to their former Judaism, as if Jesus were not the Messiah at all. This is not your garden-variety sin, but flagrant, deliberate apostasy. The reason we can be sure of this is the harsh way he describes the sin of apostasy in verse 29:

- Trampled¹⁶ the Son of God under foot.
- Treated as an unholy thing¹⁷ the blood of the covenant that sanctified him.
- Insulted¹⁸ the Spirit of grace.

It's as if a benevolent aunt gave a beloved nephew a precious, expensive gift to meet his need, but rather than thanks he heaped upon her scorn, disdain, insult, and total lack of appreciation of the gift -- not just on a single occasion (a bad day), but as a sustained snubbing. Now substitute the benevolent aunt for the Living God as the Giver, and you get the picture.

The writer compares this deliberate, defiant sin to "rejecting the law of Moses" (10:28). In this case it is rejecting the Savior himself, so that there "no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (10:26). If a person rejects the sacrifice of the Messiah himself for his sins, what sacrifice is there left that can save him? Can the blood of bulls and goats remove human sin (10:4)? No!

To such an apostate person our writer calls down God's terrible vengeance and judgment, and concludes: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Why is it "fearful" or "dreadful" (*phoberos*¹⁹)? Because God is indeed Living. He cannot be trifled with!

My dear Christian friend, if you have struggled with this passage thinking that you have somehow committed the unforgivable sin, take heart. The writer of Hebrews isn't talking about your sins of weakness. Jesus died to forgive them. You call upon Jesus because you *believe in and rely on* his forgiveness. The writer of Hebrews is talking about those who *reject* Jesus and his forgiveness. For them, and for them only, there is no longer any forgiveness.

5. Hebrews 12:25-29

"²⁵See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." ²⁷The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken--that is, created things--so that what cannot be shaken may remain."

*** Shaking and Fire (12:26-29)

Finally, he displays God as the one who shakes and who consumes by fire:

"At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' The words 'once more' indicate the removing of what can be shaken -- that is, created things -- so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'" (12:26-29)

This is the last of the [five warning passages in Hebrews](#). God is the one who shakes, with a quote from Haggai 2:7. One of the words used here is *seiō*,⁴¹ from which we get our English word "seismic." Israel sits astride a major fault line, which divides two continental tectonic plates (the Arabian plate and the African Plate), that runs along the Jordan Valley Rift and the Dead Sea Rift. As those plates keep moving, from time to time things shake! God shakes both the earth and political systems. Thus the value of the "kingdom that cannot be shaken," the Kingdom of God.

God is also the one who consumes with fire, a reference to Deuteronomy 4:24. He is not one to be trifled with! Rather than buck his authority and refuse him, three attitudes are appropriate or pleasing to God:⁴²

Thankfulness. "Be thankful/give thanks" (NIV, NRSV), "have grace" (KJV) is *charis*, which has the basic meaning of "grace, graciousness." Here it refers to a "response to generosity or beneficence, thanks, gratitude."⁴³

Service. "Worship" (NIV, NRSV) or "serve" (KJV) is *latreuō*, "serve," in our literature only of the carrying out of religious duties, especially of a cultic nature, by human beings.⁴⁴ The priests carried out their service of worship in the tabernacle according to prescribed rules. For us, our service of worship isn't confined to religious duties, but a whole life. Paul exhorts with the noun form of this verb:

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship (*latreia*)." (Romans 12:1)

Reverence. Two nouns express this attitude. "Reverence" (*eulabeia*) is "a cautious taking hold and careful and respectful handling: hence piety of a devout and circumspect character."⁴⁵ This is joined with another word, "awe" (NIV, NRSV) or "godly fear" (KJV, *deos*), "fear, awe" ... "apprehension of danger," as in a forest.⁴⁶

We aren't to live in terror of God, for that kind of fear is the opposite of faith (1 John 4:18). Neither are we to be flippant or casual towards him. I have a rule when driving: Don't mess with buses and big trucks. Throughout the Bible, the phrase "feared God" described a believer in Yahweh. That is, those took obedience seriously and feared the consequences of rebellion -- contrary to many of their contemporaries.

We conclude as we began: appreciating the discipline of the Lord, and having learned from it, seeking to live our lives before him with thankfulness, service, and reverence.

CHRISTIAN LIVING

Warnings from Hebrews

JANUARY 14, 2011

The book of Hebrews was written to people who are likely second-generation Christians who are still struggling with the tensions between the traditions of Judaism and the teachings of Christianity. Many had, currently or at one time, relatives who would have seen Jesus as a false teacher. They would have had family and friends reject them, and the temptations would have been great to slip back into the traditions of their past. In this light, the Hebrew writer includes five warnings in his epistle to these struggling Christians.

Neglect

Hebrews 2:1 encourages them and us to give all the more earnest heed to the teachings of Jesus and His inspired apostles, confirmed by signs and wonders from God, lest we drift away in neglect.

Hebrews challenges us to ask ourselves how we plan to escape judgment if we neglect and reject so great a salvation, a salvation planned from the foundations of the world.

John 20:30-31 concludes that the miracles and signs recorded in that gospel are for confirming our faith. Like those steps overviewed every time we get on a plane, have we heard God's word so much that we filter it out? Ephesians 2:8 reminds us of the role grace plays in our salvation. While we were sinful, vile, and disobedient, God sent His Son as an unmerited gift of propitiation. God has given us a gift in salvation and eternal life in His Son, and the Hebrew writer makes sure we understand that we should not neglect so great a gift.

A Hardened Heart

In Hebrews 3, the author repeatedly quotes the 95th Psalm, saying, "Today, if you hear His voice..." He calls on us, in verse 12, to take care we do not develop an unbelieving heart, and he uses the next several verses to help us overcome unbelief – exhort each other, share in Christ, hold confidence, even to fear failure. We need to be aware that it is possible to harden our hearts and miss salvation.

We may simply choose unbelief, but I Corinthians 10:6-13 warns us to learn from the mistakes of those who came before us, lest we be overconfident in our faith and slip into arrogant disobedience. This is why the Hebrew writer warns us against becoming hardened to God's word, for it can happen without us realizing it.

Immaturity

No one likes being called immature, and, when we most dislike it is when we are most guilty of it. In Hebrews 5:11-14, the author does just this. He admonishes his readers for being too spiritually immature to understand some things they should. He goes on in chapter 6 to then encourage maturation, so they and we do not fall away despite having tasted of the heavenly gift.

When we are not growing spiritually, skepticism, indifference, and apostasy may find room to creep in. An arm kept in a cast for several weeks quickly becomes smaller and weaker than the arm being used every day. Growth takes effort on our part, and it is something we should be working toward every day.

Falling Away

In Hebrews 10:26-31, the author addresses the dangers of deliberate sin, specifically quoting from Deuteronomy 32. Again, these are things his readers are familiar with from Moses' teachings, but now it is being applied to rejecting Christ's sacrifice, a sacrifice sealing a covenant greater than the one brought by Moses.

Refusal

The author uses the illustration of Esau in Hebrews 12:16-17, who refused to acknowledge the worth of his family birthright. This is compared to our own spiritual birthright, standing before the holy mountain, and we are warned, in verse 25, to not refuse the one who speaks to us now (Jesus Christ according to chapter 1:1).

Conclusion

In Jeremiah 44, after God calls on His people time and again to listen to His word, the prophet makes a final appeal. In verse 16, though, the people state they will not listen. Rather than refusing the word of grace, we should receive it gratefully, knowing the promises and gifts that come from our God who delivered Him.

God's word can work in our lives if we avoid turning our back, hardening our heart, and closing our hearts to it. His word can change us from sinful creatures without hope into sanctified children with the hope of eternity. No one can force us to soften ourselves to His word, though. It has to come from within. We need to heed these warnings just as much as those second-generation Christians, holding to our faith despite anything that might try to take it from us.

lesson by Tim Smelser

Lapsi

Latin word for the "lapsed" who abandoned the faith in persecution. Some early Christians escaped by bribery, others by flight, but apostates were few until Decius's persecution (250-51), when especially in Africa many offered sacrifice or incense (*sacrificati, thurificati*), procured false certificates of conformity, or volunteered professions of compliance, apostasy, or paganism (*libellatici*). Their reconciliation was complicated by letters of recommendation (*libelli pacis*) issued by prestigious confessors. Cyprian* wrote numerous letters and a treatise on *The Lapsed*, and steered the Council of Carthage* (251) into decreeing that penance be proportioned to the gravity of the offense, a policy followed also at Rome, where it occasioned Novatian's rigorist protest. The African *traditores* were among the lapsed dealt with in councils following the Great Persecution. Lapsed clergy were normally readmitted only as laity or merely titular clergy.