

**Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time***

## **Apostasy: The Negative Response to the New Covenant, Part 2**

Scripture: Hebrews 10:28-39

Code: 1625

Let's pray. Father, we thank You for the wonderful love that does call us. We thank you that when we were without God and strangers from the covenants of promise, You did call us to Yourself. We're so grateful, Lord, for such a call. And an effectual call it was indeed, for we heard it and we responded. And, Lord, we know that even tonight, You, yet, are calling some who are in our midst. Maybe some, who like those we shall study tonight, have come all the way up to the edge and they've not quite come. They've not quite totally committed themselves to You and the call is still extended to them. We pray, Father, that the call might be heard tonight, clearly, decisively, that this might be the great night when they come to know Jesus Christ in a personal way. Father, we pray that as we look at the text, that we might be able to see the Word of God clearly, that we might be able to hear what it is You're

saying to us and that we might be able to respond in our hearts. Teach us, Father. And teach us so that we change the pattern of our living because of what we've learned. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

We are now in Part 2 of our message here in the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews. So if you have your Bible, I'll ask you, if you will, please, to turn to Hebrews 10. We're going to be studying Hebrews chapter 10 and it's indeed a very serious passage. We began last time to study Apostasy: The Negative Response to the New Covenant. We saw that the new covenant was presented to Israel, to this community of Jews, clear through verse 18 of chapter 10. Through all of those things, the writer of Hebrews is presenting the fact that Christianity is the answer to everything, that the new covenant far outshines the old, that it's a better priesthood with a better priest who is a better mediator who made a better sacrifice, which sealed a better covenant. And he urges them to respond to the new covenant in faith.

There are only two choices. The first one he talks about in verse 19 to 25 where he tells them, be positive. Respond to the new covenant by coming to Christ. The second is negative...if you don't, here's what happens. And we've begun to study that negative response to the new covenant. What happens when an individual rejects the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

I thought to myself, we could well title this message tonight The Tragedy of Getting Over It, because the subject concerns people who were brought face to face with the Son of God, but were getting over it...people whose hearts had been warmed toward the gospel of Christ and who had made a

superficial, but nevertheless, a manifest commitment of faith in Christ. They had said they believed. They had identified themselves, at least visibly, with the true Church. But the warmth of it all was wearing off and the excitement of it was kind of petering out and it was getting to be a little bit of a drag and they were getting over it. And they were in danger of going back.

You know, this is a very interesting thing in life because normally a man's life, its success and failure, is dependent upon what he's able to get over. For example, some people never get over sorrow and it wrecks their life. Tears are healthy things within certain limits because they tend to cleanse the soul of grief. They release tension and they begin the process of healing. And God recognizes that we need to express sorrow. In the book of Deuteronomy remember that when Moses died, God appointed 30 days for the children of Israel to cry. And the Bible says, "And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab 30 days." The apostle Paul accepted and participated with the elders at Ephesus in a little weeping ceremony when he was leaving. So tears are healthy. Jesus looked over the city of Jerusalem and He cried. And He looked at the grave of Lazarus and He cried. God's not against sorrow; that's part of life. God's even involved in it. But some people never get over sorrow and it ruins their life. Some people have a morbid kind of sorrow over something that they have never been able to shake.

There are other people who can't get over guilt. It's always there, I mean, because we're always sinning and guilt is always a factor. But some people have this lingering morbid sense of guilt that makes them bear around all the time some kind of a moral corpse and they never seem to get any relief because they're always agonizing over some past sin and it ruins their life and it steals their joy and it robs them of happiness.

Other people never get over the past. Some people live their whole life in the past. In the good old days we did it this way. What's happening to our world? And of course, if you go to a typical Freudian psychiatrist or psychologist today, they'll throw you back in the past again. They'll tell you that your problem isn't really yours, that your mother locked you in a closet when you were one and that's why you're like you are with that strange twitch (laughter). Somebody in your past messed you up; you didn't mess yourself up. Some people always live in the good old days. You know, Sam Jones, one time was preaching on sin. And to make a point he said, "Is there anyone in this congregation who's perfect or knows a perfect man?" He never expected any kind of response. A little guy popped right up in the middle of the crowd (laughter). And Sam Jones said to him, "Do you mean to tell me that you know a perfect man?" And the man replied, "Well, I don't know him personally, but I hear about him all the time. He was my wife's first husband." (Laughter) Some people never get over the past. Israel never got over the past. Israel got out in the wilderness and which way did they look...toward Cana?...toward Egypt. They started crying about the leeks and the garlicks and all the things they had in Egypt and as a result of that they died in the wilderness and never inherited the Promised Land...that generation didn't. Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. It's very often what we don't get over that destroys us.

But, you know, the sad thing is, there are some things that we shouldn't get over that we do get over and very often one of those things is the conviction of the Gospel when we hear it initially. Some people get over that. Some people have heard it so much that it's water off a duck's back. It doesn't register. And this is even true in the lives of many Christians. There are some of you people who are Christians only by the hair of your chinny-chin-chin, you know. I mean, you're in, but that's about it. But in terms of discipleship, you've heard it too long to respond to it anymore. You've gotten over all that. You've gotten over the penetration of the Word of God. And so there are people who come to Christ, up to the edge, and they hear it and they're warm toward it and it sounds good. And they learn the truth and they're drawn to Christ and they're initially convicted of sin. And they maybe even profess to believe and they profess to belong and they mingle with Christians, but they never get saved. And pretty soon, it gets to be old stuff and then they just kind of fade, you see. And they're gone because it never was real to begin with. And the interest begins to wear thin and the pressures of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, which have never been lessened by the power of the indwelling Spirit, because they've never really been saved, overwhelm them finally. And the pressure of a persecuting world overwhelms them and finally they just disappear. They get over it. But some of them are apostates. And that, nobody ever gets over.

Now, in our study last time, we saw this subject beginning to be explained...the unforgivable sin of knowing the truth, having full revelation, professing to believe, then getting over it and walking away. And the Bible calls this kind of a person an apostate. It's the sin that becomes worthy of the severest Hell. To know everything there is to know about the gospel and to identify as a part of it, manifestly or visibly, and then to walk away, never having really been saved, that is to become an apostate. And for the sin of apostasy, there is no forgiveness. You say, well, how do you know when somebody's done that? You don't. Only God knows. And ours is not to speculate as to who's an apostate and brand them thus and leave them alone. Ours is to pray diligently and faithfully for every individual as far as we know and allow God to determine who the apostates are. That's not for us to determine. Only God knows. Don't you ever make the judgment, either that the individual knew everything in the first place, and thus reacted against full knowledge, or secondly, that his rejection is final. Only God knows that.

Now, I suppose the most familiar case of apostasy or getting over Jesus is recorded when He was on earth. Now, there are all different forms of apostasy. There's apostasy in the Old Testament, apostasy in the time of Christ and apostasy today. And in each case, there are unique characteristics of apostasy. But perhaps the most familiar case, if we want a case study for apostasy, is recorded for us in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew and I'd like you to look at it with me for just a moment tonight as an introduction.

You remember that when Jesus first began His ministry, everybody flocked around Him. He had great crowds following Him everywhere. And they were remarking this and that about His power and the

wonder of His ability and they were trying to crown Him a king. In Galilee they thought He was so wonderful. And it says that He went to Jerusalem, you know, in John 2 in the time of the Passover and many, many believed on His Name. And He was so popular. And there were miracles being done. All of this was going on. At the age of 12, He wandered into the temple on the time of the Passover and sat there and astounded the learned doctors. But you know what? They got over Him. Boy, did they ever get over Him. Matthew 12:22 tells us what they finally came to in their evaluation. Let's read through the text. I'll make some comments as I go.

"There was brought unto Him one possessed with a demon, blind and dumb. And He healed him insomuch that the blind and the dumb both spoke and saw." It's interesting the demons affected this man in terms of physical problems...blindness and an inability to talk. Jesus healed him "And all the people were amazed and said, 'Is not this the son of David?'...the Messiah. "But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, 'This fellow doth not cast out demons but by Beelzebub, the prince of demons.'" Beelzebub was the popular name at that time for Satan. He's of Satan. Now, that was their conclusion. Now, I'd say, offhand, they got over Jesus. They got over Him so much that they had come all the way full course and decided He was from Hell. "And Jesus knew their thoughts," verse 25, "and said unto them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. If Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself. How shall then his kingdom stand?'" He says, you guys can't be that dumb. If Satan went around casting demons out, he'd be defeating his own cause. And 27 states it: "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out?" Are you setting yourself up as higher than Me? "Therefore, they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you." If I'm for real and I'm doing it by God, you better look up, because the kingdom is here and I'm the King. And He says, you better make a decision. Jump to verse 30: "He that is not with Me is against Me." You better make a decision about Jesus Christ. You don't stand on the fence. You either come to Him or you're against Him. Then He makes this statement, verse 31. "Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven against men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him, but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come." Now, we'll stop there.

This has commonly been called the unpardonable sin. And people have asked for years what this means. Let's see if we can't see what He's saying. Verse 31: "Therefore, I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men." God is a forgiving God. He forgives sin and He forgives blasphemy. He better, because we've all sinned and at one point blasphemed. Watch. "But the blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven men." You say, what is the blasphemy against the Spirit? Watch. What had they just done? They had just attributed the works of Christ to whom?...Satan. Who was it really working through Christ?...the Holy Spirit. Whatever Christ did, He did by the energy of the Spirit. He said, if you attribute the works of the Spirit to Satan, you will not be forgiven. Why? Because if they had seen all those works that the Spirit of God had done and after all

the miracles and all the revelation they had seen and heard, they had concluded that He was from Hell, they were hopeless. You see? It's one thing to say that about Christ when you don't know anything; it's another thing to conclude that when you have all the evidence. In effect, they were saying we've watched You, Jesus, for three years or for however long it had been at this point, not that long perhaps. But we've watched You long enough to make a decision. Our decision is this: You're from Hell. Now, they had seen miracle after miracle after miracle after miracle. They had heard him speak. They had heard Him teach. They had heard Him preach. They had heard the disciples in conversation with Him. They had confronted Him face to face. All this had gone on and their conclusion is, He's from Hell. And He says, guys, you can never be forgiven. Why? Because there's no repentance when you see the Truth. You see? This is not just some arbitrary statement, well, you said a few things against me. That's it for you; you're damned forever. That isn't the point. The point is when a man has all the revelation that can come from the Spirit of God...that is divine revelation, miraculous revelation...and he concludes that it's out of Hell; he is at the other end of the world from the Truth; there's no way he can be saved. You see, all of this evidence was the work of the Holy Spirit to convict men of the fact that Jesus was God. Do you see? And if a man didn't convict after all that evidence, there was no way he'd be saved because there's no way he'd ever repent. But watch 32: "But," and the word *kaican* mean but, and, even, also, etc..."But, whosoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him." Now watch this. The Son of Man is a term that designates Jesus' humanity...right? The Son of God emphasizes His deity. The Son of Man emphasizes His humanity. If an individual said something against the human Jesus, that's one thing, because in the humanity of Jesus, there may not be a total divine revelation. You understand? If a man simply saw Jesus as a man and spoke against Him, that's one thing. But if an individual sees Christ in all of the display of His deity and thus concludes He's from Hell, that's something else. And so He says, if you have a word to say against the Son of Man, if you have something against the humanness of Jesus, that can be forgiven. But when you have all of the deity of Christ presented without possibility of contradiction and you conclude He's from Hell, for that there can't be forgiveness. You see, a man could speak against the human Jesus. They did at the very beginning. Remember they said, eh, can anything good come out of...what?...Nazareth. What is this? A carpenter's son \_\_\_\_\_. Who's He? Oh, they said, He companies with drunks and prostitutes. They were speaking against His humanness. That was forgivable if they had no manifestation of His deity. Right? But once the Spirit of God had begun to put display...put deity on display, they became responsible. And all of His deity was displayed a multitude of different ways. The evidence was all in. They concluded He was from Hell. And, thus, does Jesus say, with the evidence of deity and that conclusion, you render yourselves impossible to be saved. That's the point. And in verse 32 He says, "whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him." With all the evidence in, if a man rejects the conviction of the Spirit of God, there's nothing God can do.

Now, you say, can that sin be committed in this age? Not as such. Why? Because Jesus isn't here. This sin, this apostasy, this very special brand of apostasy belonged in the day in the Jesus was alive. That was to see the works of Christ that manifested His deity and say Satan was doing it. That

was a very special kind of thing. And this idea that people are propagating today that if you say a word against tongues, you've blasphemed the Holy Spirit and can never be saved is absolutely beyond the possibility of Scripture. Or if you ever depreciate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in any way, shape or form, you're lost forever. That isn't the issue either. The issue here was to see the works of Christ done by the Spirit, which proved Him to be Messiah, and conclude they were done by the devil himself. Now that can only be committed when Christ is on earth. That's why it says this: "It shall not be forgiven him, neither in this age, neither in the age to come." Now, to the Jew, what was the "age to come"...the church age? He had absolutely no concept of the church age whatsoever. What was the age to come?...the kingdom. Then during the kingdom where is Christ?...on earth again. That sin will be able to be committed again on earth when Christ is here. It is a sin that cannot be committed in this age in its special character as indicated right here.

Now, that doesn't mean that there can't be an apostate today because, indeed, there can be. But his apostasy today is not to see the works of Christ living on earth and attribute them to Satan; his apostasy today is to hear all the truth of God that is revealed, to know it fully with all of his mind and to make some kind of a mental assent to it and then turn around and walk away and stay away forever. That's the apostasy in this age. But it all comes out the same in the wash. It's a rejection against full light, isn't it?

Now, you'll note, for example, Judas never attributed the works of Christ to Satan, did he? No. He didn't make that particular thing, and yet he was an apostate if ever there was one because he lived in the light of Jesus Christ, he attached himself to Jesus Christ; he was never saved. He was never saved. Jesus looked at His disciples one time and said, "one of you," John 6:70, "is a devil." And He said it early in His ministry. Judas was never saved. Jesus said "it would have been better for that man if he'd never been born." But he attached himself to Jesus. He was closer to the light than any man who ever lived who didn't come to the light. And one day he turned around and walked away. And he never attributed the works of Christ to Satan; he just walked away. That's apostasy in this age.

You say, why is it unpardonable? Why is apostasy unpardonable? Because apostasy is to have all the revelation and not come to Christ, therefore, there's nothing God can do. You say, what about the guy who reconsiders? Okay, the guy who reconsiders didn't make a total rejection. It's the total rejection we're talking about. It reveals an attitude of heart that is deliberate and there's no repentance...the hard heart. Judas was an example and there have been many examples and are many examples even today. I think Judas...it would have been bad enough if Judas was the only one of his kind, but there have been a million Judas's since then...Judas's, you know, who bask in the light of Jesus Christ and the new covenant. They feign love for Christ. They sing the songs, talk the talk, mingle with the saints then betray Jesus Christ and walk away and they're gone. That's apostasy. There's no forgiveness for that. "There remaineth no more sacrifice...," He says simply in the book of Hebrews, but only "...a certain fearful looking for of judgment."

Now, go to Hebrews 10. Chapters 10 warns us about apostasy and let's just look at this together. Through the first 10 chapters of Hebrews, the new covenant, salvation through Christ has been presented. There's only two ways a man can respond. He can either respond positively and accept Christ or negatively and reject Him. But these people were in danger of apostasy if they rejected because they had full knowledge. Back in chapter 2 it says that the Lord first spoke the gospel, but it was spoken to them by those that heard the Lord and confirmed to them by signs, wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit. They had seen a miraculous revelation of the gospel. They had all the evidence they needed. They had all the light. Added to that, they had this marvelous letter of Hebrews which explained detail by detail everything. This is one of the greatest doctrinal treatises that has ever been written. It may be the greatest in all the Bible! And to have all of that knowledge plus seeing miracles and signs and wonders and gifts of the Spirit and hearing the very apostles themselves, these people were totally responsible and if they turned their back and walked away, they'd be apostates and there's no hope for them ever being saved. The writer of this book of Hebrews says in the sixth chapter of such and one walks away it is impossible to renew him again to repentance. It's impossible. Why? Because he's crucified the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. He's agreed that the crucifiers were right; he deserved death. And if you come all the way up to Jesus Christ, turn around and walk away, you stand with the crucifiers. You're as guilty as the man that hammered the nail in His hand.

The positive response...what has he said? Come to Christ. Verse 22: "Let us draw near." Verse 23: "Let us hold fast." Verse 24: "Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together." Stay, stay, stay. Come all the way to Christ. Come all the way. That's what he's saying.

But then there's a negative response, too, and we cannot pass up the negative response. We've got to see it. Some people get under the pressure of persecution, false teachers, temptation, worldliness, neglect, hardened unbelief, clinging to the old religion, you know, and they come nearly to Christ and they hang on the balance and then something happens and they go. And they know what they're rejecting and they do it willfully and they do it consciously. And they decide in their minds; I don't want this. I know everything there is about it; I don't want it. And they walk away. That's apostasy...the conscious, willful and final rejection of the truth of the gospel when you know it and understand it. For that there's no forgiveness.

Now, let's begin by just looking where we kind of left off last time at the nature of apostasy. It is defined in verse 26. This is first point: the nature of apostasy. "For if we sin willfully" ...willfully, of one's own accord, "after we have received the knowledge of the truth..." Now we'll stop there. That is the nature of apostasy. The word knowledge I told you last time, *epignosis*, full knowledge...full knowledge...to have it all. Now, this doesn't mean you're saved. It's all in your head. Verse 32 says "in which you were illuminated." Mentally, you knew. To have all that knowledge, to receive the

truth...that's the first characteristic of an apostate; he knows the truth. He receives it fully. He understands it as best the natural man can understand it with the light of the Spirit that comes in apprehension of these truths...illumination. The second point: he rejects it, willfully sinning. The word indicating "we sin" is in the linear, which means continuous state of rejection. Apostasy, then, is a deliberate and continual sin against light. The apostate is one who willfully, by his own choice, willfully departs and continues to remain departed from the living God he once professed to know and love.

You say, well, John, if a person persists in the deliberate and willful sin of rejection, was he ever really a Christian? And I say to you, I do not believe he ever was. And I've said this many times. Let me say it again. True believers always do what?...continue. True branches always what?...abide in the vine. And in 1 John, we have clearly this statement...2:19. I've read it many times. Let me refresh you. "They went out from us but they were not of us. If they had been of us, they would have continued with us." You see? "But they went out that it might be made manifest that they were not all of us." Chapter 3, verse 9, watch this. "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin continually," least of all the sin of rejection, "for His seed is in him and he cannot sin because he's born of God." He can't live in a sinful rejection; he's born of God. He's got a new seed of life within him that this allows that possibility. So if a man goes away, I don't think he's ever saved. You say, well, boy, he sure looked like he was. He did all the things. That's exactly, typically characteristic of an apostate. And we've all had those kind of people in our lifetime, haven't we? And they were in the church and they were doing this and doing that and they seemed to be so...you know, and phew, they're gone and never back again. That's an apostate. Now, there may be some Christians who have drifted away a little while and they come back. That's different. The truly saved enter in, remain in. The truly apostate go out, remain out. And only God knows when a man or a woman has become an apostate. We don't know. Just pray and let God be the judge whether they've made a full and final rejection and, thus, been eliminated from grace. So we saw the nature of apostasy. Quickly, secondly, the results of apostasy.

And here we read the strongest statement in the book of Hebrews. If this is true...the middle of verse 26..."there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. Adversary is a name for Satan. Notice he lumps the apostates in the same bag with Satan and gives them the same name because, you know, Satan is the classic apostate. Satan, that beautiful angel, so close to God, apostatized, didn't he? "And there remaineth no sacrifice." If a man is an apostate, there is no possibility of forgiveness. It is impossible to be renewed again to repentance. Hebrews 6:4-6, it's all right there. If he rejects the sacrifice of Christ, he's doomed. And so what's he saying? Don't go back to Judaism; there remains no more sacrifices. Those sacrifices are over. Remember what I told you last week? That system is out. It's over. Peter said, "neither is there salvation in any other." It's only Christ he said to the Jews in Acts 4. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father"...what?..."but by Me." There is no other way. A few years after this book was written...the book of Hebrews...God proved that when He destroyed the whole sacrificial system in the sack of Jerusalem. And you want to know something? Since 70 A.D. no Jews have offered sacrifice. The whole ritual has become

symbolic. And it's an interesting thing to me that God knows why they don't have sacrifices anymore...because none of them are efficacious. If a man turns from the sacrifice of Christ to some other sacrifice, he's finished. "There remaineth no more sacrifice."

What does remain?...a recompense of judgment. Verse 27: "a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries." Judgment. A man who walks away from God like that becomes the bull's eye for God's guns of judgment. He becomes, in the total sense, the child of wrath that Paul talks about in Ephesians 2, verse 3. He is the object of God's judgment forever. When there's nothing to take away sin, the only thing left is judgment and God sees that man as an object of wrath and fiery indignation devours him. Now, I believe that happens immediately when an unbeliever dies. I believe that when an unbeliever dies, he goes immediately into Hell. And certainly, you'll remember the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man being in Hades in torment lifted up his voice after asking for water to cool his tongue and so forth. In Luke 16 the Bible tells us some fearful words in regard to that. "And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, seeth Abraham afar off and Lazarus in His bosom...cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me. Send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, cool my tongue, for I am tormented'...watch..."in this"...what?..."flame." I believe that there's a very real Hell and that it is instant upon the death of a man and it is forever. I don't believe in purgatory. But I believe that not only the fiery indignation of Hell is in view here, but the fiery indignation of the return of Jesus Christ is here. So the only thing an apostate has to look for is judgment. There's no sacrifice for sin. There's no hope of his being released from the punishment and the judgment of God. And, thus, it's a sad thing.

To support this statement that he's just made, look at verse 28. He makes a comparison. He says, even in the old economy, which of course, we've seen now for 10 chapters, isn't as good as the new one. Right? It isn't as demanding as the new one, but look here. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy." You got that? Even the man who despised the law of Moses...if a man lived in disobedience to the law of Moses and two or three witnesses confirmed his disobedience, that man died. In Numbers, chapter 15, verse 30 says this: "But the soul that doeth anything presumptuously, whether he is born in the land or a sojourner, the same reproacheth the Lord and that soul shall be cut off from among his people"...that means, if he does it willfully, premeditated and knowingly..."Because he hath despised the Word of the Lord...broken His commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off. His iniquity shall be upon him. And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day." You say, big deal. "And they found him gathering sticks, brought him unto Moses and Aaron and unto all the congregation. And they put him in prison because it was not declared what should be done to him. And the Lord said unto Moses, 'The man shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.' And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones and he died as the Lord commanded Moses." You say, you mean he was executed for picking up sticks? Yes. And if God, under the law of Moses, will execute a man for picking up sticks if it breaks His law, you better believe He's got some kind of punishment in mind for the man who rejects Jesus

Christ. And when the Bible says it's "a fearful looking for of judgment," that's exactly what it means. When God makes a law, God expects that law to be obeyed. You say, well, I've broken a few in my time. Praise God for grace! But if you're gonna live outside of grace in Christ, you're gonna live in law.

Now watch. "He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses." Watch. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God." Listen, if a guy got stoned for picking up sticks, imagine what's gonna happen to the guy that tramples Jesus Christ under his feet. Imagine. "And hath counted the blood of the covenant, with which he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" You say, I thought in this age God was a little easier, He didn't deal with sin so strongly. Let me tell you, God deals stronger with sin in this age, the age of grace, then He did in the age of law. God even winked at sin, Paul says, a little bit, just kind of turned His head for a while until He could provide a full expiation in Christ. Listen. There is nothing in Old Testament times to compare to the severity of judgment revealed in the New Testament. You got that? Nothing! People will say, oh, in the Old Testament God's so harsh. They didn't even begin to see what God would provide in terms of punishment as we see in the Old Testament. "How much sorer punishment...shall he be thought worthy that hath trodden under foot the Son of God?"

Now, there are degrees of sin. You know that? There are degrees of sin. There's no question about it. The Bible talks about the fact that there are degrees of sin. If you look, for example, and I'll read it to you; you don't need to turn to it. In the gospel of John, some of you will remember this from our study there, in chapter 19 and listen to verse 11. "Jesus answered, 'Thou couldest...'...he's talking to Pilate here who assumes he's got ultimate power..." "Thou couldest have no power at all against Me except it were given thee from above. Therefore, he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin." Jesus, there, acknowledges that there are degrees of sin. And what does He say is the greatest sin? Pilate, you've had a bad sin. I'll tell you who had a worse one. Judas. You are an unbeliever; Judas was an apostate. And there are degrees of punishment to go along with degrees of sin. In Luke chapter 12, verse 47, "And that servant who knew his lord's will and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not and did commit things worthy of stripes shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required." What is He saying? There will be some punishment for the man who didn't know as much but there will be many stripes for the man who knew his master's will and didn't do it. "Of how much sorer punishment" shall ours be who have the full light of the new covenant and the revelation of God and tread on it. Oh, there was definitely a doctrine of punishment in the Old Testament, but it's very hazy because they weren't sinning against full light. They never really had a full manifestation like we do. And God judged them very severely, but not nearly as severely as He judges the man today who comes to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ mentally and never makes a real decision to commit his life to Jesus Christ. That man will find himself in the Judas portion of Hell, the severest punishment God has ever reserved. If I have been favored with the knowledge of the gospel, if I have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, if I have professed to be a Christian and then despised His Lordship,

denied His authority, broken His commandments, walked with His enemies and I've done it all willfully, what is that but another Judas kiss with which I have polluted the face of Jesus Christ and thus deserve to be with Judas in his place. It's a privilege for you to be here tonight and to hear the truth of Jesus Christ as it's been a privilege every time you heard it. But don't ever mistake privilege for security. Privilege can give you the severest kind of damnation if you don't receive the privilege that God has granted. The tragedy of Judas is what he might have been and that's the tragedy of every man who comes to a full knowledge of the truth, turns around and walks away. God is not more tolerant of sin today; He's less tolerant, because men have no excuse today. In Acts 17:30 I read you this: "And the times of this ignorance God overlooked..." You know in the Old Testament, God overlooked a lot of things because they didn't have the indwelling Spirit and they didn't have a full revelation, but listen here. "And the times of this ignorance God overlooked"...hear this..."but now commandeth all men everywhere"...what?..."to repent." God's not overlooking sin anymore. "Because He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world." Judgment. Yes, in the Old Testament God wiped out whole groups of people sometimes in punishment. Maybe on some occasions some of them were believing people and they're today in Heaven and their punishment was chastisement. Maybe some of them were not believing people. We know some of them were not and they're in a hell that is nothing like the hell of those who are apostates. Even though God may have wiped out whole peoples in the Old Testament, the hell that they experience will not be the same as those who lived in defiance of God and rejection of His Son.

Now, this kind of rejection is classified in three statements. Notice them in verse 27, uh, 29. First of all, these people have trodden under foot the Son of God. Now, here the term is the Son of God because it speaks of His exaltation. "This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," said God. Philippians 2:9-11: "God hath highly exalted Him and given Him above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow..." etc., etc. So He's seen as exalted. Revelation: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive glory and honor and power and riches and wisdom..." and all this, whatever it is. But here He's glorified..."trodden under foot the Son of God," the second person of the Trinity. A man who knows the truth of Christ, turns around and walks away, is stomping all over the second person of the Trinity. What does it mean to "tread under foot"? It signifies scorn. It signifies an object as worthless. If a guy is walking down the street and he sees a coin; he bends over and picks it up. If he walks along the street and he looks down and what appears to be a coin is a slug; he walks right by. Essentially, that's exactly what this is saying. There are men who walk along and they look at Christ and they assume it's just a slug and walk off. That's a worthless thing, not even worthy to be bent over and picked up. That's to tread under feet the Son of God. Don't even bother to stoop to pick it up. Don't pay it any attention. Spurn it. It is worthless.

I think it's Matthew 7, verse 6 which says...yes..."Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn again and lacerate you." Now, that is a fearful statement, but again, a characteristic of some rejecters who would trample over that which is valuable and consider it as a worthless thing. To reject with full knowledge is to

trample God's exalted Son under your feet as a worthless thing. What a horrible mistake. That's a sin against the Father because it was the Father who exalted the Son and so if you're treading on the Son of God, you're affronting the Father who said "This is My beloved Son; hear ye Him." And so to tread on Jesus Christ as a worthless thing, to walk right on by or to say, I've looked it over, I've considered it, it's worthless, is a sin against the Father. It's a sin against His law and it's a sin against His revelation. But it's also a sin against His love because the Bible says "God so loved the world that He"...what?..."gave His Son." You see, you're sinning against His love.

In the days of Hitler there was a man who was turned in for being antagonistic to Hitler. He was reported. A Gestapo came and took him and put him in a concentration camp. There, they semi-starved him and beat him continuously. He was tortured. Finally, the war ended and it was time to release the prisoners. And this man had been gallant, courageous, had remained erect. Nothing that they had done to him in that confinement had affected him. He was finally released and he was unbroken. It was only a matter of days after his release that he found out some interesting information. He tried to find who it was that turned him in and he found out that it was his own son. And the writer said that he, within a day, died. You see, the attack by an enemy he could bear. The attack by the one he loved killed him. When Caesar was murdered, he faced his killers with disdain and courage, but when he saw Brutus with a knife ready to strike, he wrapped his head in his robe and died. And so, once Christ had come, the awfulness of apostasy lay not so much in breaking the law, but in trampling the love gift of God underfoot as a worthless thing.

The second phrase: "...hath counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing." The second thing that an apostate does is that. Now let me read that to you again and make one change or one clarification. "...hath counted the blood of the covenant with which"...capital H...He...referring to Christ..."was sanctified" an unsanctified thing. Now let me explain that. I believe that he's talking here about Christ with the pronoun He. He's not talking about an apostate, because an apostate has never been sanctified by the blood, has he, or he wouldn't be an apostate. He would never depart. So he's talking about Christ. Christ was set apart. The word sanctified means "set apart." The word holy means "set apart." *Hagias*, the same word, just means set apart. Now watch. John 17:19 says this...Jesus is praying in the garden, He says, "And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself that they also might be sanctified." Christ said I set apart Myself that they may be set apart. And how was it and with what did He set Himself apart?...with His blood. And read it now and you understand it. A man who is an apostate counts the blood of the covenant with which Christ set Himself apart an unholy thing. The blood of the covenant was sacred. It was the blood shed on the cross by Jesus Christ. By that shed blood Christ was set apart to God as the perfect sacrifice. You remember He entered into the Holy of Holies and, there, having borne the perfect sacrifice, shedding His blood, He then entered into the Holy of Holies even as the priest did and sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat. Christ, bearing His blood, as it were, and finalizing that great sacrifice and establishing the new covenant. So it was the covenant sealed in blood and these are men who count that blood set apart to seal the covenant as an unholy thing. What are they saying, then? They're rejecting the covenant.

And you know what? The first statement was a rejection of God who exalted the Son; this is a rejection of Christ who set Himself apart as the perfect sacrifice. So the apostate rejects God and he rejects Christ.

Third thing that an apostate does, he does "despite unto the Spirit of grace." He rejects God, he rejects Christ and who else?...the Holy Spirit. Now that's apostasy: total rejection. It's the rejection of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now, you notice something very interesting? The Bible never says that when you reject, you reject the system of religion. You never reject the system; you reject the Person because Christianity is not a system, it's a relationship. Right? And a man who rejects it rejects God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. He rejects the Trinity. He personally rejects them. Now, notice the word despite..."hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace." That's the word for insult. He insults the Spirit. This is the act of a man, you know, who has allowed the Spirit of grace to lead him along in the pre-salvation work of conviction. And the Spirit has energized him toward repentance. And the Spirit does all of this, then the man turns his back and walks away and insults the Holy Spirit. He rejects the gracious work of preparation done by the Spirit in his heart. And that's the sin of the apostate...to know the truth and reject it. Treading under foot the Son of God, he rejects God the Father, counting the blood that is so holy as unholy, he rejects the Son, and insulting the gentle, gracious leading of the Spirit, he rejects the Spirit. No wonder it says, "of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy."

All right, this is a serious thing and all I can say to you tonight is hear what God is saying and ask yourself what you're doing with Jesus Christ. Verse 30 takes it a step further. "For we know Him that hath said, 'Vengeance belongeth unto Me; I will repay' saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people." Here he quotes from Deuteronomy 32: 35 and 36, two Old Testament passages that talk about the vengeance of God. Now, if God had vengeance on His own in the Old Testament when they broke Moses' law, what kind of vengeance is He going to have on those who violate Jesus Christ? That's what he's saying. Vengeance belongs to God. Oh, He "is longsuffering...not willing that any should perish...that all should come to repentance," but if a man turns his back and walks away, vengeance is left. And I say to you, tonight; be warned, dear one; be warned. Verse 31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

We Christians know what it is to be in His hands because the Bible indicates that we're in the hollow of His hand. That's far different than the apostate falling into the hands of judgment. And so we see the nature of apostasy and the results.

Now, let's look thirdly and just briefly at the deterrent to apostasy. You say, I don't want to be an apostate. What do I do? Two things and here is a positive encouragement not to go back if you know the Truth...two things. Number one, remembrance. The first thing you do is remember. Verse 32: "But call to remembrance the former days..." Hey, do you remember when you first came to Christ and it was...you came to the fellowship of believers and you heard about Christ. And I'm not talking about

being saved yet, but just the facts. And you knew it and it was exciting it was kind of neat and it was warm and something was real going on there and you could sense it and you showed up and you liked it. Hey, he says, *anamimnesko*, you know, remember those things. Look back and pick them up again. Run over in your mind, the word means one by one, the things you felt when you first came, how exciting and how fresh and how real and how, oh, it seemed like maybe this was answer to your problems. And little by little you grew cold and indifferent and begin to fade. And even that, he says, remember that you even endured a great fight of affliction. You even got persecuted along with the rest of us. I mean, you were so visibly identified with us, you got some of the abuse that we got. Remember that? Interesting word for fight there...*alathis* from which we get athletics...*athles*, I should say, from which we get athletics. I mean, you went through all the rigors with us. It's so common when Christianity is fresh, people come and they don't worry about what others think. I always say it's interesting how bold new Christians are. They haven't learned to be cowards yet. It takes a while. They come to Christianity and it's fresh and exciting and they like it, you know. And they get into the swing of it a little bit and then the pressure mounts up and it gets to be old hat. And they really don't want to come to Christ because they like their sin and etc., etc., and they fade. And so the writer says remember. Remember those fresh days, those exciting days when it all began? The first time you ever heard it? Remember.

Verse 33, he says, hey, you guys were in the affliction "partly while you were made a gazingstock..." Interesting...from the Greek word *theatrizo* from which we get theater. You were out on stage. You were a spectacle just with the rest of us. You weren't ashamed then. What's going on? You weren't ashamed. You used to stand with us. I know the persecutors have gotten to you, but remember what it was when you first began, how fresh and how wonderful and you weren't afraid. You had such a good start. Don't fall now. "...you were made a gazingstock, both by reproaches and afflictions and partly, while ye become companions of them that were so used." I mean, just hanging around with us got you in some trouble.

Verse 34: "For ye had even compassion on me in my bonds." Now, here the writer gets personal. He says...apparently, they had communicated somehow to him in some kind of prison situation. They had known about this writer being in a situation of confinement and had showed compassion. He says you people even showed compassion on me. "And you took joyfully the spoiling of your goods..." The word spoiling, violent seizure of property. I mean, you took a lot of stuff in those days. I mean, it was exciting in those days. Remember? "...knowing in yourselves that you have"..."in heaven" is not in the best manuscripts so just drop it there and just read it this way. "...in yourselves that you have a better and enduring substance." I mean, you at least knew that there was something better than the worldly goods and you didn't mind giving them up. I mean, they were taking your property and you were a gazingstock, you were a spectacle, and this was going on, and all of the time you were really willing to be this. Remember? And you kept looking away to something better. "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence." Hey, it was good then; don't throw that down the drain. You were confident then; don't lose out. You looked ahead and you thought, wow, this deal's got

something good in it, hang onto it. So the first deterrent is remember.

The second one is reward. Verse 35: "...which hath great recompense of reward." Hey, remember that if you really come to Christ and you stick in there, God's got some wonderful things in store for you. So he says, look back and then what?...look forward. And there's a very good point here. The one place he didn't want them to look was right where they were at because that's when they got hassled. Quit looking at your problems. Quit looking at the persecution and all the junk that's cluttering up your mind. Look back and remember how wonderful it once was and look ahead and remember how wonderful it's gonna be. Reward.

Verse 36: "For you have need of patience..." You're getting uptight. You gotta be patient. "...after you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise." The might there doesn't mean it's possible. It's an exacting statement. "After you have done the will of God, you might receive the promise." And it means you will receive it. And so he says, just hang on. All you need is patience. Don't can the whole deal now because you got a little trouble. Come on, you just need patience.

Verse 37: "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come and will not tarry." Hey, don't get discouraged. The Lord will be here. Just be patient. Just be patient. You may suffer a little bit. Hold on. Hold on because the Lord will be here. That's the promise and we believe it.

And so there you see that there is a great warning against apostasy. He tells them the nature of it, the results of it and the deterrent to it. Look back. Look forward. Just don't get trapped in looking at your problems. And he closes this great, great passage in 38 and 39 with a simple call for a response. Listen to it. Verse 38: "Now the just shall live by"...what?...faith." Hey, what is he saying? Keep the faith. You've come this far. Come on; believe all the way. Right? They hadn't really gotten the faith yet, but hand onto what you've got and believe all the way. He's saying if you want to be just, you're gonna have to believe. "But if any man draws back my soul shall have no pleasure in him." You know how to hold fast?...by faith. How do we live our life?...by faith. We're constantly living by constant faith. No man who draws back has saving faith. Saving faith is continuing faith. The just lives by what?...faith. If a man is really just, what does he live by?...faith. If a man doesn't live by faith and he doesn't really believe God, then I say he's never been just because the just shall live by faith. We have to trust God, don't we? I have never seen God yet. I have never seen Jesus. I have never seen Heaven. I have never seen Hell. I have never seen anybody who ever wrote any page on this Bible. But you know something? I believe it as much as I believe I'm standing here. But I believe it not by sight, but by what?...I live by faith. My whole existence is by faith. And he's saying to them, come on; believe this. Believe what I've told you. Believe what you've seen is from God. Believe it and live by it. Don't go back 'cause if you go back, God has no pleasure in you. And the ones He has no pleasure in, He removes from His presence.

Then 39, and this is positive. "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition"...or judgment or damnation..."we are not of them who draw back, but [we are] of them that believe to the saving of the soul." You see what he's saying? Don't go this way. We're not of those that go back; we're of those that believe to the saving of the soul. It's one thing to believe; it's something else to believe to the saving of the soul. Lots of people believe. The Bible says the devils even believe and tremble. He says don't fall back; go forward. "We are not of them that draw back...but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." It ends on a positive note.

What is it saying to us? It's saying Jesus Christ provided salvation. You have two choices: take it or leave it. Let's pray.

Father, we are thankful that the offer of salvation is to all who come, that Jesus said "him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." But Father, we do feel deep down in our hearts that there is a terrible, painful thing that constantly creeps into our thoughts and that is the reminder that for some men, there is nothing to look forward to but a "terrible, certain, fearful looking for of judgment"...that there are some who are going to feel the vengeance of God and experience just exactly what it means when it says "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Oh, Father, I pray tonight that there would be no one who would be that kind of a man or that kind of a woman or young person...that there would be no one who would leave the hallowed presence of the Spirit of God who has dwelt with us even in this place tonight and turn their back on the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Father, and thus be treading "under foot the Son of God, counting the blood of the covenant with which [Christ] was sanctified an unholy thing and doing despite unto the Spirit of grace." God, may it not be so. May there be no one who walks out of this place who has not come in saving faith and begun to live by that faith. God, may it be that "we are not of they that draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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