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

The Danger of Defection
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
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One of the responsibilities that a pastor has is the responsibility of warning his people. The Apostle Paul wrote to the...well, actually spoke to the elders of the church at Ephesus that he had not failed over a period of three years to watch and warn them with tears night and day.

Part of the ministry is a warning emphasis. And one of the things in which you must be warned is the danger of spiritual defection. This is something that has been of grave concern to God for a long time. But it is nonetheless true even today that there are some people who come very close to a true knowledge of Christ, there are some people who come very close to the reality of eternal life. There are some people who come very close to knowing God, some people who come very close to having their sins forgiven, but never are truly saved. Those people turn and fall away. They are defectors. Sometimes they are called apostate, knowing the truth they depart from the truth. They may depart on their own, they may become victimized because of their own failure to believe by other things that push them away from true saving faith, but nonetheless they are defectors. There is always a great danger in defection and always very serious and eternal consequences.

To show you how God feels about this matter of spiritual defection, knowing the truth and turning from it, we could go all the way back to the first set of books ever written, the Pentateuch authored by Moses, and in in the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 13 we read this, beginning at verse 12, "If you hear in one of your cities...God says to His people Israel...which the Lord your God is giving you to live in, anyone saying that some worthless men have gone out from among you and have seduced the inhabitants of their city saying, Let us go and serve other gods whom you have not known, then you shall investigate and search out and inquire thoroughly. And if it is true and the matter established that this abomination has been done among you, you shall surely strike the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying it and all that is in it and its cattle with the edge of the sword. Then you shall gather all its booty into the middle of its open square and burn the city and all its booty with fire as a whole burnt offering to the Lord your God. And it shall be a ruin forever. It shall never be rebuilt. And nothing from that which is put under the ban shall cling to your hand in order that the Lord may turn from His burning anger and show mercy to you have compassion on you and make you increase just as He has sworn to your fathers. If you will listen to the voice of the Lord your God, keeping all His commandments which I'm commanding you today and doing what is right in the sight of the Lord your God."

Now the point of this text is this, if anyone comes along and leads you astray from what you know is the truth and leads a village or a city to worship a false god...slaughter all the people, destroy the city, kill all the cattle, burn all the booty and don't take anything out of that place for your own so that God will not continue to be angry with you. That's how God feels about spiritual defection. Destroy everybody involved with it.

In chapter 17 it moves from being a corporate issue in a city to being a personal matter. Deuteronomy chapter 17 and verse 2 says, "If there is found in your midst, any one of your towns which the Lord your God is giving you, a man or a woman, in any of the towns at all, who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God by transgressing His covenant, that is the outward covenant to worship the true God, and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them or the sun or the moon or any of the heavenly hosts which I have not commanded, and if it is told you and you have heard of it, then you shall inquire thoroughly, search it out, and behold, if it is true and the thing certain that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, then you shall bring out that man or that woman who have done this evil deed to your gates, that is the man or the woman, and you shall stone them to death." Kill them. If it is a town that is defected from what they know is true, burn it after you've slaughtered everybody with a sword. If it is an individual in any city, stone them to death for their spiritual defection. I want people to understand how serious it is to know the truth and to depart from it. It is a very serious matter.

Now with that in mind, I want you to go to Hebrews chapter 10...Hebrews chapter 10. And in the New Testament we find a very very important parallel. Hebrews chapter 10 and look with me at verse 28, Hebrews 10:28, "Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses." Now that is an Old Testament principle, anyone who sets aside or defects from the law of Moses which included the worship of the true God and the true God alone and no other God, anyone who defects from the law of Moses after proper investigation and the confirmation of two or three witnesses that such defection was indeed true dies without mercy. Now if that is true, if God says when they violate the law wipe out the whole village, if God says when an individual defects from what they know is the truth and what they have outwardly covenanted to, if they defect to false gods, stone them on the spot, if that is the punishment for a defection from the law of Moses, then notice verse 29, "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?" That's a question, did you notice the question mark at the end of the verse?

Isn't it reasonable to assume that if a defection in the Old Testament which was a violation of the law of Moses brought about instantaneous death there would certainly be deserved a far severer punishment for trampling under your feet the Son of God. Defecting from the law of Moses is one thing, trampling the Son of God is a severer thing. Now that's the point that I want you to focus on. And I want to speak to you this morning on the danger of defection.

I have noted in our church over the last number of years and even particularly over the last number of months that there are people who have been with us for a while and very often I have questioned the reality of their salvation. And then all of a sudden they have disappeared. And I have this nagging fear that the reality is they came and they outwardly identified but they never really knew Christ. And that that has shown up in their defection...unless some should say there was not sufficient warning, I would like to take this morning's hour to warn you about the danger of such defection.

There are only two possible responses to the gospel. All right? Just two. One is to go on to saving faith, the other is to fall back to defection, those are the only two responses. If you have heard and understood the gospel, either you believe or you reject. If you believe unto salvation, you know that God then promises you eternal heaven. If you defect and reject then God promises you eternal hell. Those are the only two responses.

In this tenth chapter of Hebrews the writer of Hebrews has been talking about the gospel. In fact, earlier in the chapter it's very clear what he's been saying. He says, for example, in verse 10 that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And there he focuses on the gospel, the death of Christ for sin. In verse 12 he says that Christ having offered one sacrifice for sins for all times sat down at the right hand of God. In verse 14 he says, "For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified." So several times he looks at the cross and the saving work of Christ done there. That's the essence of the gospel.

And the writer is saying it is the work of Christ that has provided for salvation. In fact, in verse 18 he says that out of the work of Christ comes the forgiveness of sins. Verse 17 says that God will remember our sins no more when they are covered by Christ's death. So he's been talking about the gospel and the saving work of Christ.

But the readers of this epistle to the Hebrews fall into two categories. There are those who believe to salvation and there are those who reject to damnation. In both cases they know the gospel. They understand it, they comprehend it. That is why in verse 29 he says, "You have trampled under your feet the Son of God. You have treated or regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant and you have insulted the Spirit of grace." Why? Because they had seen the working of the Spirit, they had understood the shed blood of Christ and the covenant which it purchased and they understood who the Son of God was. So in knowing the gospel they had two options...believe unto salvation, reject unto damnation.

But the thing that makes this so important is that when you know the gospel and you understand who the Son of God is and you understand what the blood of the covenant is and you have seen the working of the Holy Spirit and you reject, reserved for you is the more severe punishment...more severe than the Old Testament populous...the people who lived under the old economy will not suffer

in hell, even the unbelieving ones I'm referring to, even the unbelieving of the old covenant will not suffer in hell the way the rejecting defectors of the new covenant will suffer, that's what he's saying. It is the more severe punishment.

And so, we are pressed then to face the fact that knowing the gospel is the greatest blessing on the face of the earth and through all eternity. Or it is the severest curse on the face of the earth and through all eternity. And those of you who know the gospel are either in line for the most profound richness or in line for the most severe vengeance from almighty God.

Now let's look at those two options. Having given the gospel through verse 18, the first part of the chapter, he then applies it beginning at verse 19 and moving through. Starting then in verse 19 we see option number one of accepting Christ. He begins, "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil that is His flesh and since we have a great high priest over the house of God, let us draw near." Now stop right there.

That's an invitation...that's an invitation. The invitation is let us draw near, that's the main verb here. That's the idea. Draw near. What do you mean by that? Come to God. James 4, "Draw near to God, He'll draw near to you." That's what he's saying. Draw near to God, come to God. You say, "How can I come to God?" And certainly the Jew is going to say, "How can I go into the presence of God? How can I draw near to God? How can I enter into God's presence?" And so in verse 19 he says, "We have confidence to enter the holy place where God is by the blood of Jesus. Because through His sacrifice He has made the way and it is...verse 20...a new and a living way and He has inaugurated it so that we can go through because the veil now is His flesh and we're in Him and He is our great high priest and He ushers us in." He made the way. He opened the way. He shows the way. He is the way. He leads the way. And God is now available to us. The way is open.

And so, the writer says, "Since the way is open, the sacrifice for sin is accomplished, the holy place is accessible, God's presence is unveiled, and He waits for sinners to come and Christ will even take you there, then he says, draw near. What are you waiting for? God is there. He's waiting for you. The way is prepared, draw near." You might underline that little opening phrase in verse 22, that's an invitation to salvation. Let us draw near...let us draw near.

But will you notice, please, that drawing near has some basic elements to it? And here he defines the character of a true conversion. First of all, let us draw near with a sincere heart. You know what that means? Pure motive...pure motive. And what is the true motive for salvation? What is it that genuinely and honestly compels a person to come to God through Christ? I'll tell you what it is. It is the desire to experience the forgiveness of sins. That's the compelling issue. It is the bearing of the burden of sin and guilt and its inevitable consequences, both in life and eternity. And so we could say that a sincere heart rises out of a sense of sinfulness, it rises out of the soil of repentance and confession. You're

coming with no ulterior motive here. You're coming without superficiality. The word alethinos means genuine, real, sincere, honest. You're coming to God because you are desperately in need of the salvation God provides. And you're genuinely concerned about it. That's why the description of the heart in the beatitudes is so good, you come with a certain bankruptcy of spirit, you come with a certain meekness, but you come driven by a hunger and thirst for what...for righteousness. That's the sincere heart, sick of sin, repentant and longing for salvation.

Second feature, he says, you come in full assurance of faith. You come not only with a great awareness of your sin but you come in a full confidence in the gospel as believable. You come affirming without equivocation that the gospel is true. It's what Jeremiah said in Jeremiah 3:10 is to come with all your heart, or Jeremiah 24:7 where he says with your whole heart, or Paul in Ephesians 6:5 with sincerity of heart. You're committing everything to this because you have a certain desperation about your sin and because you fully believe the gospel. This real faith, by the way, is a gift of God, not of works. So God the Spirit produces in you repentance. That's the work of the Spirit, isn't it? Isn't the Holy Spirit who will convict the world of sin? John 16:9. Yes. It is the Holy Spirit, 2 Timothy 2:25, who grants you repentance. The Holy Spirit convicts, the Holy Spirit grants repentance. And so, those are factors, those are features, elements within this proper drawing near.

And then in drawing near he mentions a couple of things that happen. Verse 22, "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, having our heart literally cleansed from an evil conscience. When you truly draw near with a genuine repentance and a confident faith, God then cleanses your heart from an evil conscience. You say, "What is conscience?" The simplest way that I know to define conscience is simply this, it is a sense of moral responsibility. It is a sense of moral responsibility that squares with the Word of God, okay? And unregenerate people do not have a proper sense of moral responsibility.

I talked to a man not long ago, a young man, he said he lived in fornication, he lived...he lived, in one sense, to fornicate, that was his life. I said, "Did you feel guilty about it?" He said, "Guilty? I never thought a thing about it, it was a way of life, we all did it, I never felt guilty about it particularly at all." The unregenerate man has an evil conscience.

In other words, he has no real sense of moral responsibility or his sense of moral responsibility is skewed. An unregenerate person has a skewed conscience, a warped sense of moral responsibility. But when a person comes to God and draws near and has a pure motive, repentance and has true faith, saving faith, the faith that is genuine, then God puts within him a cleansing work that washes out that evil sense of morality and replaces it with a righteous kind of morality. And a Christian then can function by his conscience. We are to have a clear conscience. Can you trust your conscience? Yes, if you're a Christian, because it is a Godgiven sense of moral responsibility and it will square with the Word of God. And a true Christian is going to see morality for what it really is.

And then he also says in verse 22 that our bodies will be washed with pure water. Now all of this is the work of God. When a person draws near, God gives them a sincere repentant heart, God gives them a sincere genuine faith, God washes the inside evil conscience out and plants in a good conscience that is in a tune with the Spirit of God. And then God washes the outside with pure water. What does that mean? Well, this is a beautiful picture, it was the picture used of a bride who had a ceremonial bath before her wedding, symbolic of her cleanliness and her purity. And what it's simply saying is God not only puts new sense of moral responsibility in you, but He washes you of all the filth you accumulated while you were living under your evil conscience. So he's talking really about what He does in creating in you the new holy nature and what He does in terms of washing away all the filth and stain of your sin.

Then go to verse 23, here are a couple of other elements in this true conversion, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering for he who faithful...he who promised is faithful. Let us draw near and having drawn and been converted let us hold fast the profession. This is another element. True salvation is marked by a sincere heart, a confident faith, an internal cleansing, the washing away with all sin and of perseverance, that's what verse 23 is saying. The person who draws near stays there and holds fast. That's the human side of sovereign election. God chooses you and makes you secure and you persevere. From God's side, we're eternally secure because He secures us. From our side, we're secure because we persevere. True Christians continue in the faith, John 8, "If you continue in My Word you're a real disciple." So he says persevere, continue under the faithful God who promised to keep you.

And then one other element, verses 24 and 25, "Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Here's another element. Conversion, a sincere heart, a confident faith, a cleansed inside, sins all washed away, a persevering faith and listen to this, a love of the fellowship...a love of the fellowship. When true conversion occurs in the heart there will be an assembling together, there will be a mutual stimulation of one another to love and good deeds and there will be an encouraging of one another and all the more as you come closer and closer to the time of the drawing near of Christ.

Now let me sum it up. The writer says the way is open. He's pleading with these Jews reading this letter who know the gospel but they haven't come to Christ. They've just stood on the edge and they know it's true. And he's saying the way is open. Access to God is available. The veil is removed and there's a new and living way, draw near...he says...draw near, come out of true conviction, true repentance, genuine faith, and be washed and cleansed inside and out that you might persevere and that you might enter in to God's company in fellowship. That's the right thing to do.

And so, I say to you what the writer of Hebrews says, if you have known the gospel, you've heard the gospel, you've understood the gospel, it is possible that you may even affirm that it is true and you've outwardly identified with the church and you've sort of lined up with what's going on, but there's something holding you back from coming to Christ and coming in sincere conviction and repentance, coming with a confident genuine faith, may I say to you what the writer said? Please draw near...please draw near. And I plead with you because of verse 29, the severest punishment that will be known in hell will be known by those who knew the truth and rejected it.

Now let's go to verse 26 and see the other option, rejecting Christ. This is tragic. And here we face the situation of people who have heard the gospel, come face to face with the claims of Christ, they've even been associated with the church but they defect. Their hearts have been warmed by the gospel of Christ. They may even have made a superficial commitment. They may even have joined the church. They may have become identified with the visible body but they weren't sincere. They didn't have a pure motive, a genuine repentance, a true faith. They weren't cleansed in and out. They do not persevere. And they fall away even from the fellowship. I want you to understand how serious an issue this is...very serious.

Let me stop at this point before we look into the text just briefly and say to you there are some things that pull people away. Let me give you a little list. What makes people defect? What pressure comes to bear on people who know the truth that makes them defect from it without believing. Number one, persecution. It is a very real possibility that when there is a high price to pay for naming the name of Christ, some people will defect. They're not willing to pay the price. And when they think about the fact that Jesus said some people will kill you and you'll be hated by all nations on account of My name, they say not for me and that's why in Matthew 24 He said at that time many will fall away. People fall away because they don't want to pay the price of persecution. The cost is too high. They say it's true but I'm not willing to make the sacrifice.

The second thing that leads people into apostasy that pushes them to defect is false teaching...false teaching. Do you remember what happens in 2 Timothy 4? Timothy says the time will come when they'll stop enduring sound doctrine. Why? Why would they turn against sound doctrine? Because, here's why, "Teachers will come who will turn away their ears from the...what?...the truth and will turn aside to myths."

So many times you've seen it. A person affirms the gospel. They're just being led along and some cult, occult, some yogi, some whatever it is steps into their life and begins to pull them into confusion. That's another thing that pulls them to defection. Just like we saw in Deuteronomy where somebody comes along and tells them about another deity that they can worship and they go off after this other deity.

Thirdly, temptation....temptation. We could actually call it the love of sin. They start to come to true repentance, they start to come to genuine confession of sin, they begin to feel a longing for cleansing and then comes the heat of temptation and those sins that they love so much, and so says Jesus in Luke 8:13 that they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away. They decide that they love their darkness rather than what? Than the light.

Number four is worldliness...worldliness. Jesus in the parable of the soil says that it looks like they believe but the care of this age, the cares of this age, they are into the world. Second Timothy 4:10, "Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world." Worldliness.

Fifthly, not only does persecution, false teaching, temptation, worldliness cause people to defect, but fifthly, neglect. Just neglect. Hebrews 2:3, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" It's been confirmed to us, he says, and we just neglect it.

In Hebrews 3:12 we have another cause of defection. Hebrews 3:12 says, "Take care lest there should be in any of you an evil unbelieving heart in falling away from the living God." And then in the next verse he says, "Don't harden your heart by the deceitfulness of sin." It's a hardened heart. Persecution, false teaching, temptation, worldliness, neglect and hardened unbelief, you just become hard. And if you sit under the message and sit under the message and sit and sit and sit and sit and never respond, you will get harder and harder and harder and harder.

One other thing that I think keeps people from coming all the way to Christ and causes them to defect is religion. How many people do you know of who have grown up in some religion, been presented the claims of Christ and what keeps them from coming to Christ is that they are stuck with the traditions of their former religion and they can't get out of it, or they won't get out of it. Now those are the kinds of things that come to play in a person's life to keep them from coming to faith in Christ.

Now let's look at verse 26. And here we have a definition of this defecting apostasy. "For if we go on sinning willfully," and by the way, would you note that that's the characterization of an unregenerate person? An unregenerate person is characterized as a person who goes on all the time in an unbroken pattern of continual willing sin. Okay? You say, "How is that different than a Christian?" A Christian does not have an unbroken pattern of sin, we sin but the pattern is broken with righteousness. And we sin but it is not the expression of the deepest will of our heart, right? But the unregenerate go on continually in an unbroken pattern of sin willingly...willingly. So the first characteristic of the apostate, the defector, is willful sin. They do not break the pattern of sin. They just go on willingly. And, you know, the idea here is they've heard the gospel, they know the way is open. They see the access through the blood of Christ. They recognize the holy place, the presence of God is available, they can go on in. But instead they turn from that and go back to the pattern of sin.

The second element he follows up with in verse 26, "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth." And there it is. The characteristic we're dealing with here is someone who has the knowledge of the truth, turns his back and walks away. Those are the two characteristics. Very simple, they know the truth, they reject it for an ongoing continual pattern of sin. The truth here, by the way, means the gospel, the new covenant truth, the saving truth.

Now how close can these people get? I'll tell you, they can get real close...real close. These defectors can get so close you can't tell them apart. And you want to know something? They can get so close the world can't tell them apart. Do you know there are some nonChristians being persecuted as if they were Christians they're so close? They outwardly identify with the church, they look like Christians and when somebody goes after the church they go after them cause they can't tell the difference. And that was true then.

I want to show you something very interesting. Go down to verse 32...verse 32. Remember, this is...now writing to these people right on the edge, you haven't come to Christ, endanger of spiritual defection, and in danger of the severest punishment hell can bear, but verse 32, "Remember the former days." He says, "Now look back, when after being enlightened." What does that mean? What does it mean to be enlightened? It means to understand in your mind, right? It doesn't say converted, it says enlightened. "After you had been enlightened you endured a great conflict of sufferings." You know, these people weren't believers, but they knew the gospel in their mind, they outwardly identified with the church so much so that they suffered the persecution the church suffered. Kind of silly, really, why get penalized for being a Christian if you aren't one?

And then he says in verse 33, "You were partly partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations and partly be becoming sharers with those who were so treated." Just because you identified with Christians you got what they got, you got the heat and the persecution, the tribulation, the trouble that they got.

Furthermore he says in verse 34, you even showed some ministry. You were sympathetic to prisoners and you even accepted joyfully the seizure of your property. That's how close they get. They get so close, they look enough like Christians to the Christians because they do the compassionate things the Christians do. And they look enough like Christians to the world that the world will persecute them along with the rest of the Christians. That's how close they get.

But they fall back. Verse 39 says, "We're not like those who shrink back to destruction." They get that close but not close enough and they fall back. And it isn't because of weakness. No. They don't fall away out of weakness and they don't fall away out of ignorance, they fall away willingly, back to verse 26...willingly of their own accord...of their own accord. It's first degree, plotted, premeditated, planned defection. Some people do fall short of salvation by ignorance, some fall short of salvation out of

weakness, but not these. It's willing...it's willful, it's planned, it's premeditated.

So there you have it, two choices. If you opt for choice two where you understand and maybe you're outwardly identified for a while, so much so that the church and the world thinks you belong so that they take you when they go visit the prisoners and the world persecutes you when it persecutes the true Christians. If you're that close and you look that real and you defect, I want you to know something, the results are frightening...frightening. And I want to show you the results, verse 26, the end of the verse, two results. Result number one, "There's no longer a sacrifice for sins." Now listen to this. There were sacrifices and sacrifices and sacrifices by the millions in the Old Testament and if you missed out on one you could always pick up another one. But when Jesus died, there was one sacrifice and if you reject the sacrificial offering of Jesus Christ by which He opened the way to God, there is no other provision for your sin. What does that mean? It means you have no other hope. There's no sacrifice, absolutely none. There was only one. And if you reject Christ there is no salvation in any other name, right? Acts 4:12, no other name. There is no other sacrifice, absolutely none. That is a profound word, folks. You see, that's why Hebrews 6 says that if you know all these things and you reject them, it is impossible for you to be renewed to repentance. Why? Because you've rejected the one offering, that's what he said didn't he back in verse 12? He had one sacrifice for sins and after that what did Christ do? He sat down. Why did He sit down? The work was done. If you reject Christ there's no sacrifice for your sins, you will die in your sins, Jesus said it in John's gospel chapter 7, you will die in your sins and where I go you will never come. So there's no hope for you, no sacrifice. There's only one way.

Second result is judgment. Verse 27 says, "A certain terrifying expectation of judgment, a judgment that is the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries, or the enemies." There's no sacrifice but there is judgment. Would you notice the word "adversaries"? Isn't it sad to think about it? These were people who understood the gospel, understood the Son of God, who He was, understood the blood of the covenant, what it was, understood the working of the Holy Spirit, they had seen the signs and the works of the Spirit of God. These are people who got outwardly identified to the church to the point where they may have been persecuted on the one hand and they may have been accepted into the fellowship to show deeds of mercy to prisoners, they were that close. They looked like they belonged and the fact of the matter is that those who looked the most like friends turned out to be the enemies of God. He calls them His adversaries or His enemies. Unbelievable.

Let me ask you a question. Who of all people who ever lived in the history of humanity was the one who became the closest to Christ and defected? Who? Judas...and hell will be hottest for Judas Iscariot because the closer you are the greater the level of responsibility and the severer the punishment. So, he says, you are looking then, you are looking for a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, a fury, a fire that will consume the adversaries. That fire is described in 2 Thessalonians 1 as a flaming fire when Jesus returns, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

So the result, no more sacrifice, only judgment...only judgment. And that brings us to the text where we started, verses 28 and 29. "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...I think the He there is capital H by which Christ was sanctified...and has insulted the Spirit of grace."

So, God's going to deal with you stronger than He dealt with anybody in the Old Testament. None of the Old Testament unbelievers, none of those who died without God in the Old Testament will experience the degree of punishment that those who have rejected the knowledge of Christ will experience. By the way, there are degrees of punishment. You can read again Luke 12:47 and 48 where Jesus talks about certain slaves receiving few stripes and other slaves receiving many stripes. If you have been favored with the knowledge of the gospel, if you have been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, if you have been around the truths of the new covenant, if you have been around the church and in the midst of that somewhere along the line failed to believe, turned your back, despised His lordship, denied His authority, broken His command, walked with His enemies, gone on in an unbroken willful sin then you have placed on the cheek of Jesus a Judas kiss and you shall receive what Judas received who went to his own place...the place God sends those who reject His Son even though they feign affection to Him.

Now somebody says, "Well now wait a minute, I thought this was the age of grace. Isn't God going to be kinder to people now than He was under the old covenant?" No, He overlooks some things in the old covenant. You say, "But wait a minute, whole groups of people were wiped out...wait a minute, people died...wait a minute, the ground opened up and swallowed people alive into Sheol." Yes. God brought very traumatic serious physical death and in the New Testament spiritual defectors and apostates God might not kill in acts of physical death but He will punish more severely in acts of spiritual punishment. That's the difference. While the death physically of those in the Old Testament time may have been more traumatic, their experience in hell will not be as severe as those in the new covenant.

And why such severe punishment? Verse 29, "Because they trample under foot the Son of God." The Son of God speaks of Christ in His exaltation. God has highly exalted Him, given Him a name which is above every name which, by the way, is the name Lord. And He has commanded everyone to bow. He says this is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, listen to Him. He calls for us to accept His Son, acknowledge His Son, believe on His Son, and if you just walk across Him, stepping on Him under your feet in terms of derision and counting Him as worthless and useless and of no regard, not even worthy to be picked up, then you have spurned the most worthy object and you have caused it to be called worthless. You have done the very opposite of what God required and thus you have experienced the severest rejection and will experience the severest punishment. You have done, in a

sense, what Matthew 7:6 says, you as a swine have trampled the pearl. That's a horrible thing. It is a sin against God who gave us His Son.

Secondly, he says, "You have regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant." The perfect spotless lamb of God who shed His perfect blood on the cross as an offering and an atonement for sin, you have literally regarded as unclean, treated it as if it were nothing, counted it as an unholy thing, it isn't holy, isn't sacred, it isn't significant. And in so doing you have despised the Son. First you despise the Father by trampling on His Son. Second, you despise the Son by counting as unholy His blood.

Thirdly, verse 29 says, "You have insulted the Spirit of grace." And so you've trampled the trinity when you reject the gospel. The Spirit, the Spirit is the one who made the truth understandable, the Spirit is the one who illuminated the mind, the Spirit is the one who by virtue of spiritual gifts allowed the gospel to be preached with power and effectiveness and so you have insulted the Spirit. You have trampled the Father, you have trampled the Son, and you have trampled the Spirit.

As a result, you'll have a severer punishment. And so verse 30 says, "For we know Him who said, Vengeance is Mine," and He said it in Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay." And again He said in Deuteronomy 32:36, "The Lord will judge His people." And then this, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

So I say to you, be warned, be warned. For if you know the truth and you're being lured away from it, you are in danger of falling into the hands of the living God who will bring about the severest punishment. The psalmist cried, "Enlighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death."

It's a tragic passage, isn't it? But it must be preached. Even though we have considered that we who are saved are saved because we're chosen by God, even though we know we are elect, that in no way diminishes the compelling need to cry out to people to draw near and to warn them that if they fail to do that they themselves will enter into severe punishment for their unbelief. We are compelled then, aren't we, to be faithful. I have two messages this morning, draw near if you're not saved. And if you are saved, thank God that He drew you near and make sure that if you know someone in your life and you're not sure that they have come with a sincere heart and a confident faith and been given a true sense of godly moral responsibility and had their sins washed away, and are persevering in faith and are part of the fellowship, if you're not sure they're saved then take this message to them. Let's bow in prayer.

I want you to stay right where you are, just remain seated as we close. The seriousness of this message is obvious. It is unmistakable. And it is, to put it mildly, frightening. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ, would you thank Him for His grace? If you know the Lord Jesus Christ, would you ask Him perhaps to show you someone in your life that might be on the edge of the severest punishment that hell will ever know and ask Him to show that person to you and give you an opportunity to speak

to that person? If you don't know Christ, if you're standing on the edge and because of the fear of persecution, because of worldliness, because of the love of sin, because of false religion, false teaching, whatever it is you're being pulled back, will you plead with the Spirit of God to save you? In your heart will you just cry out, "O God, save me. I give my life to You." Will you accept the work of Christ for you? Come with a sincere heart and a ??? faith, ask the Spirit of God to work that work in your life.

Father, work Your work in the hearts of all of us, a work of thanksgiving and praise and a work of responsibility to proclaim this truth to others in the hearts of those who are Your own and a work of salvation in the hearts of others. May there be none who will defect, but may they draw near and receive the gifts of Your grace in Jesus name. Amen.

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