

Persevering Through Faith

Witnessing In The Midst Of Persecution (vs. 26-31)

My beloved, what would need to happen for you to renounce Christianity and turn your back on Jesus Christ? If our government passed a law that said Christians could not own businesses and you are a Christian business owner, what would you do? Would you trade in Jesus for your business? What if they passed a law that said Christians must promise loyalty to the president and worship him? What if the government told you that all you had to do was bow down and worship the President of the United States and you could continue your life as usual? What if they said you could still worship Jesus but they want you to also worship the President and the government that controls everything and provides its citizens with food, shelter and work? What if the government ordered Christians to deny Jesus or be imprisoned or even be put to death?

The early Christians suffered at the hands of both the Jews and Romans and both governments persecuted Christians. Many had everything taken from them and many even had their lives taken. What would you do if this became the way of the world again? In the first century, there was a price to pay to be a Christian and today the price for being a Christian is increasing. There were more Christians martyred in the 20th century than all the 19 centuries preceding and the 21st century in tracking to exceed the 20th. Our own country founded on Christian principals is turning against Christians. The United States does not want to be held accountable for sin and therefore is denying the existence of God and charging Christians hate

anyone or thing that is not Christian. Therefore, Christians are being considered a danger to society.

Jesus knew this would happen; He knew all that was going to take place. Jesus foretold, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. ¹¹ There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. ¹² But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. ¹³ **This will be your opportunity to bear witness.**” (Luke 21:10-13) The problem in Rome was not Jesus per se. The problem was not that the Christians worshiped Jesus. There were hundreds of other gods worshipped by Rome and the people in its conquered territories. The problem was that the Roman government saw the Christians as anti-Roman because the Christians refused to add other gods to their list. In other words, the fact that they refused to pay homage to the emperor was seen as being disloyal to Rome. If they would have added one little bow or one little prayer or burned one little candle in honor of the Roman Emperor all would have been fine and they could have gone on with life as usual. Does this not sound a little like what is beginning to happen today?

But they held fast and said “No”. The Christians refused to pray and offer incense to Caesar. They refused to say “*Caesar is God*”. They refused because Caesar was not God. Only Jesus is God the Son and Lord and Savior. To renounce their Jesus as Lord may have won them peace with Rome but it would have also meant they would forfeit their souls. There are always consequences to our actions. Sometimes consequences are in the physical world as seen by separation with family or the losing of one’s job or ridicule and on and on. Sometimes the consequences are in the spiritual world, such as losing your soul. What the writer

of Hebrews is encouraging in these 1st Century Christians is to perseverance. We, here today, are beneficiaries of this teaching. We to are called to the spiritual battle against all the is not of God and to persevere.

The human need addressed in this text is the need we all have to persevere in the faith, to hold on to the truths of Scripture even in difficult times. Hold fast to Jesus when everything else is taken. Jesus must be our battle cry. To be a fair-weather Christian is not to be a believer in God's truth. This is why in the preceding passage the writer defined truth; for faith is founded on truth.

Let me try by relating a story in our modern times in the hopes faith and perseverance would be more real for each of us. There was a US special-forces soldier who fought during the Vietnam War clandestinely in Cambodia. After the war ended in 1975 and he returned home where he became a born-again believer in Jesus Christ and in 1977, after which he returned to Cambodia, to the area he knew, as a missionary. At the end of the War there was an estimated 2,000 Christians in Cambodia. As soon as the Vietnam War ended in April of 1975 and new war began as Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge began fighting at the border against Vietnam. Within Cambodia all religions were outlawed. However, the people in this small Cambodian village began responding the Gospel message given by this soldier turned into a missionary. About 2 years after the missionary's arrival the Khmer Rouge invaded the village and rounded up everyone they could find, including the missionary. Many of the villagers escaped and watched from the jungle. The Khmer Rouge began by telling the missionary to deny Jesus and when he refused the shot him in the head in front of the villagers. The villagers were brought forward one by one and told to deny Jesus and if they did not, they were shot. They brought a mother forward with 5 children and told her to deny Jesus and if she did not, they would one by one shoot and kill her children. She refused to

deny Jesus and her children were all shot and then they shot her. Dozens died that day while others looked on from the bush. Because of the testimony of those brave saints after the Khmer Rouge left the remaining villagers came to Christ and then they began witnessing to the nearby villages and soon most of people in the valley were born-again. Today there are over 2 million Christians in Cambodia. Praise God those brave souls did not fail and saw the glory of heaven. What would it take for you to renounce Christianity and turn your back on Jesus?

The implication of this text is that there are those who have remained a while in the church - but are in danger of falling away. Here, we are given a warning not to ever throw in the towel, not to ever swear allegiance to anything or anyone but Jesus.

We will begin in God's Word by examining together what some of the consequences would be if we were to renounce Christ and turn to something else to worship.

As we begin in verse 26 of Hebrews chapter 10, take note, this is the 4th time the writer has warned his readers of the danger of falling away from faith in Christ and the Gospel. Verses 26 to 31, [“For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,](#)²⁷ [but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.](#)²⁸ [Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.](#) (Deuteronomy 17:6)²⁹ [How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?](#)³⁰ [For we know him who said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.”](#) (Deuteronomy 32:35) [And again, “The Lord will judge](#)

his people.” *(Deuteronomy 32:36)* ³¹ **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”** The writer is describing those with shallow faith or no faith, possibly those pretending to be believers. Not making progress, not drawing near to God, not holding on to our confession, not attending church and stirring up one another is **not** persevering in faith. The reality is that these folks may not just be lazy Christians; they may not be Christians at all.

The Holy Spirit wants us to realize that if we disregard the things of God there are no other options for forgiveness. To disregard grace is to align oneself with God’s enemies. God’s enemies will endure judgment, fury and will be consumed and cast into the eternal fiery lake.

Consequences Of Denying Christ *(Hebrews 6:4-6)*

If one turns away from the offer of Christ and the gospel the opportunity for coming to saving faith in Christ diminishes until they are lost forever. Most folks who fall into this category may not initially outright refuse the gospel. They may even be church goers. They may be those who at one time showed an interest in the things of the Lord. They may have even heard and understood the gospel and even though I do not understand how, they may have experienced the Holy Spirit and then turned away from Christ. Reading from Hebrews chapter 6, ⁴ **“For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.”** *(vs. 4-6)*

To renounce Christ means that one will reap consequences. I thought of 7 consequences that relate to this passage. You might think of more.

- 1) **Forfeit forgiveness** – As verse 23 reads, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”
- 2) **Align oneself with God’s enemies** – as we see in verse 27, “but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”
- 3) **Die without mercy** – continuing in verse 28, “Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.” Here the author quotes Moses from Deuteronomy 17:6.
- 4) **Profanes Jesus’ blood** – by living a life that denies Christ as we read in verse 29, “How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?” A life lived in this manner also as we just read -
- 5) **Denies the New Covenant** – “and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.” A life lived that denies Christ and the New Covenant is an -
- 6) **Outrage to the Holy Spirit** – “and has outraged the Spirit of grace?” A life that denies the Triune God and when a person denies the Holy Triune God of all creation, they -
- 7) **Live in fear of God** – as revealed in verse 31, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

The writer warns the church, made up of people that came out of Judaism to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior that to go back to their former life in Judaism and to that system with its rituals fulfilled by Christ would bring with it some extremely serious eternal consequences. To hear the truth and to experience to some degree the work of God and then to turn away will result in eternal

punishment. As my grandmother use to say, “The world is going to hell in a handbasket.” I never fully understood this saying as a boy. However, I discovered that during the California Gold Rush they would lower miners into the shafts in a handmade basket and often they failed with deadly results. So, the truth is when we rely on the things made by man, we may suffer dire eternal consequences.

What we need to think through is the fact that those who turned away resulted in forging their damnation. They may have been in this early church for many reasons, but true loyalty to Christ was not one of them. Their god was not the true and living God but one they had hoped would bring them comfort or prosperity or position or power, which is just like the false religions today, even those who claim to be “Christian”. When the Romans took these things away the “would-be false” Christians turned their backs on Christ and sought after these by conforming to the Roman world. Our time in history is proving more and more difficult to openly remain true to Christ. What will it take to turn from and deny Christ?

Are we the seed of the Living God called to sow and cultivate the Gospel in the world of tares and thorns? Jesus told the parable of the sower in Matthew chapter 13, and then explained it, ¹⁹ “When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, ²¹ yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. ²³ As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word

and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” One can look like the genuine article but when trouble happens those genuinely converted remain and those who are trying Jesus as a means to an end - fall away. Trouble brings to light the reality of one’s heart. Paul spoke of this very thing to the church in Galactica, “Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery.” (Galatians 2:4) This problem is addressed in the gospel accounts and several epistles, which indicates this was not highly unusual. Should we not expect to experience these things in our time? All must be tested against the Word of God!

The tension is that those who are genuinely saved still must persevere. We will experience trouble in this life and we must not fall away. We must live in persistent spiritual battle and not surrender. The Lord will keep His own and at the same time, we must persevere. God is keeping and we are striving and the end result is salvation and heaven. My beloved, we must never give up, we must never surrender!

As believers, we must, by faith, hold fast to Christ all the times. Our faith will be tried in this world but the trials of faith make one all the stronger as one comes out the other side.

Holding Fast To Christ (vs. 32-39)

The writer now shifts to those who are the true faithful and live for the glory of Christ. Reading verses 32 to 39, “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings,³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully

accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵ Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶ For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. ³⁷ For, ‘Yet a little while, (Haggai 2:6) and the coming one will come and will not delay; (Habakkuk 2:34) ³⁸ but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’ (Romans 1:17, Isaiah 26:20, Galatians 3:11) ³⁹ But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” The doctrine being taught here is called the doctrine of *Perseverance of the saints*. Theologian Wayne Grudem defines it as, “*The perseverance of the saints means that all those who are truly born again will be kept by God’s power and will persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.*” (Systematic Theology, 1994, Chapter 40, pages 788-809) God never fails, it is only fallen humans that fail. It is the true believers, true in every sense of the whole of the Bible that defines a “Christian” that perseveres to the end. It is the living of one’s life through all that life brings during one’s journey that exposes the heart as true or false. Some have made a decision based on false beliefs or prayed a prayer or walked the aisle at church or at a revival and were told by someone they were now Christian, but it is the true conversion of the heart and soul that makes one Christian and without that there is no hope. The Bible teaches that those who remain faithful till the end are the believers that belong to Him.

The key to perseverance is for the believer to exercise God given faith. James tells us that faith without works is dead. God keeping His people is His part. He will keep us. We do not keep ourselves, but are to be obedient. Our

role is to persevere. God preserves and we persevere. We fulfill our role in perseverance as we exercise faith lived out in obedience to God's Word.

Carrying Out The Will Of God (v. 32, 34, 36-38)

God reveals to the writer a 3-step plan to help believers persevere. **First**, is “**Remember the Past**”, reading verse 32, “**But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings.**” Why would God tell the writer that these Jews converted to Christianity need to remember who they were before? When we remember who we were prior to Christ - we are taken back to the hopelessness of our lives. I was a mess; I was probably in worst shape than some of you and maybe not as wicked as some of you. I often think about who I was before God saved me and I recoil at the thought of ever returning to that old man. We also remember the details of how God worked and provided just exactly what we needed. Remember when and how God saved us and brought us out of the world. This caused us to rejoice in the miracle of our salvation. I voice along with Paul when he wrote, ¹⁴“**thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.**” ¹⁵For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.” (2 Corinthians 2:14-16) Know, my beloved, without trails God would not reveal the way. Without trails God would not be glorified by giving us what we need to shine His light in the darkness, just as He gave the strength to Stephen that He might be glorified. Sometimes God removes the trial from us and sometimes He gives us the strength to remain in the trial, and sometimes he removes us from the trial. In all of life's experiences we should praise God before all mankind. I declare with Paul and lift you all up in prayer, “**May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in**

believing, so that by **the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.**”

(Romans 15:13)

The *second* step for perseverance is “**Care for Others**” as found in verse 34, “For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.” Another key to our perseverance is that while we are in the midst of struggles, we can still care for others. Some have the attitude that I can’t help someone else because I am in such turmoil myself. It is all about them, so they say, Once I get my life under control then I will help others. I want to challenge you to think biblically. When we are in a trial if we are not careful, we can become self-focused and self-centered. Understand that God is working in the trial and it is meant to cause our faith to grow stronger. We do not grow spiritually stronger during times of ease. Historically, the church has always expanded during persecution. Another way to strengthen your own faith is to be busy strengthening someone else’s. At the end of the day, you can look back and thank the Lord because your trial strengthened the faith of two Christians.

The *third* step for perseverance is “**Live God’s Promises**” as the write directs in verses 36 and 37, “For you have need of endurance, so that **when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.**”³⁷ For, ‘Yet a little while, (Haggai 2:6) **and the coming one will come and will not delay**” (Habakkuk 2:34)

Perseverance brings about the fulfillment of God’s promises. As we endure hardships and spiritually our faith deepens the rock-solid promises of God are ours to live and enjoy and give us peace while living in a world of turmoil. I can endure hardship now because I know there is a day coming when everything will be made right and never again will trials and hardships be endured by the

beloved of God. Sin will be removed and Satan destroyed and my sinful nature overcome by God making me a glorified saint, in heaven all will be made right. So, I endure trials now knowing that the future is bright and glorious. Paul wrote this truth to the persecuted saints in Corinth in his 2nd letter, ¹⁶“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,** ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18) Not only do we wait for heaven but we also wait for Christ’s return. We anticipate Christ’s coming., as verse 37 says, “**the coming one will come.**” Everything within the Bible, God put there to strengthen our faith and encourage us to persevere, as the writer instructs in verse 38 and 39, “but **my** (*meaning Jesus Christ*) **righteous one shall live by faith,** and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those **who have faith and preserve their souls.**” How is a believer to live? By faith, persevering faith, by staying in the battle and pushing ahead to win back territory from the evil one, by never retreating and without hesitation advances into the fray and we can do battle with this attitude because it is the Lord that wins not only the battles but the war!

My beloved, let me encourage all of us to live by faith in every aspect of our lives and persevere to the end. Let us remain faithful even when those around us quit. Run the race of life by faith and receive the prize – eternity with God! Amen!