

Lesson Eighteen

(10:26-39)

THE GOD WE SERVE

26 For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire which will consume the adversaries. ²⁸A man who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy at the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? ³⁰For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

32 But recall the former days when after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴For you had compassion on the prisoners, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. ³⁵Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. ³⁶For you have need of endurance, so that you may do the will of God and receive what is promised.

³⁷"For yet a little while,

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and the coming one shall come and shall not tarry;
³⁸but my righteous one shall live by faith,
and if he shrinks back,
my soul has no pleasure in him."

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

The term "god" can and does mean most anything to peoples of the world, including us in America. Some may have in mind a "higher being," perhaps on the order of a superman; others conceive god to be a non-entity, merely a mythical figure; others suppose that the name includes several entities, some good, some bad. When Hebrews was written, all the above views were extant, plus the Jewish view of God, and that of the Christian.

In our day, God is accused of being everything, from capricious to a tree. Even Christians have varying and sometimes conflicting views of God. J. B. Phillips' book *Your God Is Too Small* brings out many of the prevailing concepts of God. As we study our lesson text then, let us specially focus on our concept of God. Some points about God have been previously mentioned, which need to be remembered as we study our present text.

10:26 — **if we sin** — Nowhere does the Bible teach that Christians never sin. Many passages assume the contrary, that Christians do sin. In fact, such texts as I John 1:8-10 teach explicitly what is to be done by Christians in that event. Obviously, Hebrews 7:25 is pertinent to this point also, and actually provides a backdrop for our present text as well.

deliberately — The Greek text reads *ἐκουσίως . . . ἀμαρτανόντων*. Both words are to be considered carefully. Generally, *ἐκουσίως* has the idea of intentionally, deliberately, willfully, voluntarily, etc. I Peter 5:2 has it, as does Philemon, v. 14. In each case, the opposite of *ἐκουσίως* is the idea of constraint, compulsion, against one's will. The word *ἀμαρτανόντων* is a present participle, which in Greek carries the idea of habitual, a manner of life, constantly, etc. The same idea was attached to the present participles in 6:6, which indicated a "set of the mind," a life-style.

In context of the Hebrew epistle, the efficacy of the Christian religion has been contrasted with that of the Mosaic system (and implicitly, any other system) of redemption. It has been established that anyone who becomes and remains a part of the Christian system can be cleansed from any sin, and the consciousness connected with it, because Jesus is able to save to the uttermost those who came to God through him.

Within this background, the present text appears. As was intimated in the discussion of 6:4-6, the point is this: believing in Jesus vs. believing in something/someone else for salvation. If one decided to leave Jesus,

according to our epistle (and the whole New Testament), no other sacrifice and system is available to remove sin, or is acceptable to God. As a consequence, said person is lost, doomed to die for his sinfulness. The same point is in our text. If one decides to lead a sinful life (as opposed to serving Jesus as an obedient person, 5:9), then said person has no means of redemption. The only thing that is left is judgment at God's hands, the subject of vv. 27-31.

Generally, any discussion of this verse gets into the area of some specific sin that is repeated in one's life. While that ought to be a cause for concern, that is not the issue here. The fact is that most, if not all, sins are repeated. Few if any sins are unique or new. Covetousness, for instance, can take many forms; idolatry likewise. The whole moral system hangs upon two basic laws, love for God and man. Any sin is a transgression of one or both of these basic laws. For this reason, every Christian breaks the same basic law many times in the course of life. Hence, it is superfluous to talk about one sin that is repeated. The total commitment to Jesus vs. someone/something else is the issue.

V. 27 — For the one who rejects the salvation to be found in Christ, he must stand before God with no means of redemption. While it is true that God is both loving and merciful, it is also true that these attributes are expressed in light of his justness. (Note the comments on 3:10; 6:9-12.)

V. 28-29 — Still contrasting the covenants, the first readers were reminded that the Mosaic law, even though displaced by the Christian dispensation, yet was from God. As such, whoever broke it was punished accordingly. The New Covenant also has its punishment for those who break it (in this context, the thought is of rejecting the covenant, in toto, rather than transgressing some particular command). While the New Covenant is characterized by grace, yet it has its limits. The text asserts that the person who rejects the New Covenant does so regardless of all that has been done for him (much more than was true in the Mosaic times), and will be punished accordingly. Robert Shank observed correctly that the Scripture never pictures people who have been abandoned by God to the fires of hell, living out the remnant of this life with no prospect of God's acceptance. Rather the picture is of a God, gracious and long-suffering, who is rejected by people. For such as these, our text is to be applied. The person who would have been in mind under the Mosaic dispensation would not have been the person who sinned, per se. All of the Jews, including Moses and Joshua sinned. God had provided sacrifice to be offered to remove the sin and guilt. The person in mind is the one who, knowing the law and its requirements, would reject the whole system, and leave Judaism for some other religion. This person is probably the one such as is mentioned in Num. 15:30-31.

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The Mosaic law made provision for forgiveness of all kinds of sins (cf. David & Bathsheba) as long as one remained under the law and acted as the law prescribed in reference to sin. The law was good only for those who remained under it, however.

V. 29 — **spurned . . . profaned . . . outraged** — These terms are meant to apply to the person who has become Christian and then volitionally went back to a life of sinning, rejecting Jesus' lordship and the salvation in him.

V. 30 — The text is a quote from the general sentiment expressed in Deuteronomy 32:35-36, where God promises to judge the enemies of Israel, and by implication, to judge all who are against him. God will also judge his own, I Peter 4:17-18, but not from the same perspective as those not his own.

V. 31 — **It is a fearful thing** — As mentioned before, all are sinners and, as such, under the wrath of God. If by faith people live for God, they are able to escape his wrath. If not, then God has promised a sure punishment for everyone not faithful. It is not scriptural to paint a picture of (a) God who does not punish sinners. On the contrary, the total Bible picture is of a just God, who rewards those of faith, punishes those unbelieving, both in this life and in the life to come.

After having exhorted his readers in vv. 19-25, and warned them in vv. 26-31, the author turns to encouragement, recalling their past life of faith, which was another reason to remain a Christian, confident in God.

V. 32 — **recall** — Sometimes memories are painful, but necessary. In the case of the first readers of this book, though their Christian past had not always been pleasant, it had been marked by continued adherence to Christ. This same life-style needed to be maintained. Especially in view of the habits of some (v. 25) or the tendency of others (5:11-14), they needed to press on, 6:1.

V. 33 — **publicly exposed** — Just what this means is open to question, but evidently it was not to be desired. Paul remarked in I Corinthians 4:9ff. that the apostles had been treated thusly. Jesus was so displayed, John 19:1-5. Others had been abused and reviled, ill-treated and afflicted, and they had not deserted those so treated, but rather had acted as partners (the Greek term *κοινωνία*, the common word for fellowship, to share together, etc.) with all such, as v. 33 states.

V. 34 — **the plundering of your property** — As was/is common in times of persecution, not only were Christians physically and personally persecuted, but they also had their property confiscated and/or destroyed, etc. Plainly the recipients of this letter had received such treatment, cheerfully accepting it because they knew that one's life "does not consist in the abundance of things possessed," Luke 12:15, but rather consists of having Jesus, in whom are hidden all of God's riches, Colossians 2:3. Recall I John 2:17.

V. 35 — **therefore** — On the basis of these great facts out of their past life, they have no reason to give up. As 12:4 shows, none had been killed yet, and as ch. 11 details, all must keep on believing. Moreover, God had not changed. All of which provided plenty of reasons for them to “hang in there.”

great reward — Sometimes, like those in ch. 11, the reward was not received in this life but in the next life. Abraham received many promises from God, even including a promised land; yet he died without possessing much of what was promised, for God had other and better things in mind.

V. 36 — **endurance** — The Greek term is *ὑπομονή*, which is a word of great importance. The word occurs about 45 times in the New Testament scriptures. It would describe the veteran not the recruit; the bristle cone pine not the mimosa; the attitude of a joyful expectancy rather than a grim waiting. Faith produces this, James 1:3 and it makes us mature (perfect/complete), v. 4, and produces hope, Romans 5:4. It was an attribute for which Paul commended those in Thessalonica, II Thessalonians 1:4, and characterized those in the book of martyrs, Revelation 1:9; 3:10; 13:10. It produces a quality in Christian people that prepares them for judgment, Romans 2:7; James 1:12. As Chrysostom is quoted as saying, “It keeps one on his feet with his face to the wind.” Hence, they had need of it, for it would bring obedience to God, and receiving what God had promised (such as a rest, 4:9. Ref. Acts 13:32-33; 26:6). See this term in 12:1.

V. 37 — Perhaps the greatest promise ever given was that of a deliverer from sins. All through the Old Testament, the people of trust looked for the fulfillment of God’s promise. Jesus did come, as promised, and those who so trusted God were vindicated. Jesus ascended to heaven with a promise of return, Acts 1:11. All through the New Testament scriptures, his second coming is kept before the believers, such as in Hebrews 9:27-28. Since the first promise was kept, and faith rewarded, just so will this promise be kept and faith rewarded. On this solid foundation, then, the author urges continued trust.

V. 38 — **my righteous one** — The text is a quote of Habakkuk 2:3, which is also quoted by Paul in Romans 1:17 and Galatians 3:11. (Further comment upon this in the next lesson.)

if he shrinks back — Only those whose theology is such that they do not believe that a Christian can be lost have trouble with this verse (or 6:1-6; 10:26). It is clear that one can put a hand to the plow but decide to look back. The word translated “shrink back” is *ὑποστέλλω*, found in Acts 10:20, 27; and Galatians 2:12.

no pleasure — See again 3:7ff. As in the days of Habakkuk, those who trusted God were rewarded, but all who refused to continue trusting fell into the hands of destroyers.

V. 39 — **we are not of those** — See again on 5:11 — 6:10. The author

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is somewhat apprehensive at times, yet encouraging and complimentary at others. (Sometimes in considering the character of the first readers and then considering the general run of congregations today, it seems that times and people have not changed, doesn't it?) It is evident, though, that the original readers were yet Christian, but needed as a group to do better. Fit this verse into v. 26.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 18:

164. Why not try to write down the concept of God that you have?
165. List the explicit statements about God in our text.
166. What is your understanding of v. 26 in its context?
167. Is there any possibility of escaping God's judgment if one rejects Christ?
168. Detail the past life of the first readers as our text describes them.
169. Of what did they have need?
170. What were they to keep and not throw away?
171. Endurance produces what?
172. How shall the righteous live?
173. In what way does the writer describe those to whom he addressed this letter?