
The Terrifying Prospect of Willful Sinning

Hebrews 10:26-31¹

Pastor Tim Nixon

Some sermons are intended to make you feel good. Some sermons are meant to challenge and stimulate your thinking. Some sermons are sad. And some sermons are meant to set you back on your heels and jolt you into the reality of who God is and what God does – setting aside our own assumptions, conceptions and desires.

We have a tendency to believe what we want to believe. “Don’t confuse me with the facts” some might say.

We want to put God in a box and tell him how to think, behave, and respond to our desires.

Well, just like in a movie from years ago that is often quoted, “Nobody puts baby in a corner” – nobody puts God in a box!

To quote R.C Sproul, “The kingdom of God is not *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. There are few things more dangerous than preachers preaching that God loves everybody unconditionally, because the message people hear is: “There are no conditions. I can continue to live just as I’m living, in full rebellion against God, and I have nothing to worry about because there aren’t any conditions that I have to meet. God loves me unconditionally. I don’t have to repent. I don’t have to come to Jesus. I don’t have to leave my life of sin. There are no conditions and no strings attached; God loves me just the way I am. He’s glad that I turned out so nicely.”

Its Fearful Expectation (v.26-27)

The opening words to this paragraph have reminded me of 1 Timothy 1 and its truth about me. Paul’s reminder to me is that I am the worse sinner I know.

And it is sin that we are talking about here.

²⁶ For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Its Conditions (v.26a)

What is our author saying here?

The sin here is **deliberate** - It is when we plan for it, and make room for it, and organize it so that no one will see it. In contrast, we are not going to all the extremes that are necessary to avoid sinning.

The sin here is **continual** - It is sin that has become so engrained in our thinking and doing that its roots are wrapped tightly around our hearts. We have

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modern word for the effect this sin has: we are hooked on it. On-going sin has a horribly enslaving power.

The sin here is **against knowledge** - It is sinning deliberately when we know better. We have received a certain and clear knowledge of what the truth is about this sin. And in spite of that knowledge, we simply go on practicing it.

Certainly, this sinning is the on-going, deliberate rejecting of the gospel when it has certainly been made plain to us what the truth is.

But there is more.

Its Consequences (v.26b-27)

This text sets before us the only possibilities when it comes to the consequences of our sin: there must be judgment or there must be sacrifice.

Before you is placed these two possibilities. **Our sin and sinning has to be judged.** It must be dealt with. God cannot simply pass it by and overlook it as though it has not happened. He must respond and does respond with fearful wrath and anger. Look at the categories under which the righteous and holy God responds to deliberate sinning.

Legal - It is judgment. This is the word for an action in a court. It is God's sentence against sin and its corrupt violation of the purity of God.

Emotional - It is a raging fire. Literally, this means "a zealous burning." It points to the emotion of God. He is trembling with violated outrage and burns with passion anger against you and your sin.

Physical - It is a consuming of enemies. The truth here is that the adversaries of God are swallowed up in suffering forever.

You want to see how terrible deliberate sinning really is? Look at how God responds to it. We need to fill out our understanding of God in our day. We need to hear this. Now we must hear this in the same way we can be terribly frightened of the awesome destructive fury of a massive hurricane. But we had better seek shelter from it and not stand out in its face.

That is why there is sacrifice. That is what this book has been all about. The everlasting sentence of God's court, the massive passionate fury of God, the consuming punishment was all poured out on Jesus Christ, the perfect, innocent substitute. In this sacrifice, there is refuge from the wrath of God.

But there is the possibility of going too far. Now, because of the clear teaching of the rest of Scripture, I believe this only possible for professing, but not possessing, Christians. If you keep on deliberately rejecting the gospel and keep on sinning, you may well cross a line God has drawn in the sand.

If you keep on sinning and you are professing to be a Christian, dear one, wake up. In the face of the doom that hangs over us, this is a terrifying prospect.

Its Cause (v.27; Isaiah 26:11-12)

This last phrase is a paraphrased quote from Isaiah 26:11-12. Isaiah in this Song of Praise says that the zeal of God for His people is one of His motivations for consuming the wicked. When the wicked are punished, the people groups learn God's righteousness (v.9b).

- ¹¹ O LORD, your hand is lifted up, but they do not see it.
Let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed.
Let the fire for your adversaries consume them.
¹² O LORD, you will ordain peace for us,
for you have indeed done for us all our works.

In contrast to those who deliberately keep on sinning, notice what God's people do. They walk in His ways (v.8); they wait for God (v.8); they desire His fame and reputation (v.8); they yearn for God in the night (v.9) and long for Him in the morning (v.9). This hungering and thirsting after God only comes in hearts that treasure Him above all. A hungering after God replaces a passion for sin that causes us to go on sinning with deliberateness when we do know better.

Its Greater Severity (v.28-29)

Remember that our author is writing to Jews who had professed Christ. They were familiar with the Law. What he was about to say would ring true in their hearts. If we are familiar with the immense severity of Law in its "do or die" principle, then we will better understand the vileness of deliberating sinning.

- ²⁸ Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

Sometimes, people want to argue - maybe even some of you are starting to recoil at this vision of God. Particularly, that God would burn with a passion for judgment which would end in everlasting, conscious suffering.

This arguing in and of itself is a cause for concern. Remember Matthew 7 starting in verse 21:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³ And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Do you see it! These people are arguing with Jesus at the judgment!

We see this argument in the God is love argument.

- How can a loving God...?
- A loving God would never...

Or in the "It isn't fair" or "God must grade on the curve" argument

- How is it fair that sinners are eternally punished for only a lifetime of sin?
- But, I am not as bad as

How then does the Author argue for it in this text?

Its Old Covenant Precedence (v.28)

He begins by reminding us that under the Old Covenant, under the Law, people who rejected the Law, who set it aside and refused to acknowledge its binding authority over

their lives by a conscious deliberate rebellion, were put to death. There was no mercy to be shown. They were taken out and stoned to death. God's people cannot have among them those who deliberately and willingly continue to set aside God's rule over them by the Word.

Its New Covenant Reality (v.29)

Here is the *how much more* argument. If they died, how much greater punishment is deserved by those professing faith but whose deliberate sinning is actually like the following? What is really going on when those who profess Christ go on sinning willfully when they know better?

Stomped the Foot on God's Son

The word here means "to raise the foot against." It is an act of rebellion. When we keep on sinning, we treating Jesus like a bug and stomping down hard on the precious Son of God.

Demeaned the Blood of the Covenant

This means to count as not having worth or value. It means to treat the blood of Jesus by which our New Covenant salvation is purchased - to treat it as though it were common and ordinary. It's like drinking the cup at the Lord's Table and saying, "Nice juice" and then going and sinning. (Piper)

Insulting the Spirit of Grace

This is what our sin does. It insults and scorns and offends the gracious Holy Spirit. It is a backhand across the face of the third person of the Godhead.

So this is what deliberate sinning when we know better actually is doing: it stomps on Jesus, spits on the blood and slaps the Holy Spirit. *Is it no wonder then that wrath of God burns with fiery passion to consume those who would do such a thing?*

Why do we do it then? Because we really do not believe this is what our sin is like. And we do not believe this is what God is like.

Its Utter Surety (v.30-31)

We cannot escape judgment because we know exactly what God is like. See how he says this? "FOR, we know Him." We know that God will move against our sinning because we ought to know what God is like.

³⁰ For we know him who said, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

And Deuteronomy 32:35-36

³⁵ Vengeance is mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot shall slip;
for the day of their calamity is at hand,
and their doom comes swiftly.'

³⁶ For the LORD will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants,
when he sees that their power is gone
and there is none remaining, bond or free.

And what God is like in being against our sin is clearly declared in Deuteronomy 32. This is the great Song of Moses in which he closes his last sermon to the people of Israel.

Its Repaying Vengeance (v.30a; Deut. 32:35)

Here is the fury of God against sinners who do not repent. Now these words are spoken to the congregation of the people of Israel. They were a mixed lot. Some were believers, most were not. So, these awful words are spoken about the nations around them and to the people of God themselves. God will exact His vengeance and His anger. He will do so with passion and righteousness. There will be no escaping the wrath of God on that day.

For the way of escape is through Jesus and Him alone. This awful wrath has already been poured out on Him. Has it been poured out on Him for you? You can know that by coming and trusting and bowing to our Sovereign and our Savior.

Its Chastening Judgment (v.30b; Deut. 32:36)

But that is not just what this text is about. It is not just a word of warning to professing Christians. It is not just powerful words to describe the terrible plight of wicked people who deliberately reject Jesus and His blood and His Spirit. This is also a word to God's people.

We are happy to run to the Scripture that makes it clear that, in the end, we will escape God's wrath. Why? Because Jesus took that for us.

But this text is clear – "The Lord will judge his people."

We will be dealt with as children who are loved. It is that holy love that moves against sin in our lives to correct and chasten so that we will have the real, living and practical aspects of holiness applied to our lives.

Now listen—we do not think that sin is serious anymore. We do not like to hear messages against it. We do not like to have people point it out in our lives. We are not fighting sin with all the resources God has given us. And so, we suffer. There were Christians in Corinth who were sick and some were even dead because they did not come to the Lord's table when they should and when they came, they came for wrong reasons and in wrong ways. Ananias and Sapphira died because they lied to the church and to God about their giving. Moses was denied entry to the promised land because of his rebellion.

These are sobering words to us. What conclusion should we draw?

"It is a fearful, dreadful, terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." It is a dreadful thing when people who know better keep on sinning and trample Jesus, belittle the blood and insult the Spirit. It is utterly terrifying to realize that this is the kind of living God with whom we live under.

Now what do we do about it?

Do not run from this kind of God. There is nowhere to go. The best thing to do is to run to this God, for in the center of the whirling hurricane of His fury, there is the calm eye of His mercy in Jesus.

Stop sinning. If you cannot, you need to come to God and plead for His mercy to save you. John assures us that genuine believers do not keep on sinning. If you are utterly and always overwhelmed with your sin, you need the powerful, delivering freedom of saving grace.

Meet together to exhort and encourage one another to stop sinning. I bring you once again to the connection. We must not forsake our gathering together in corporate worship and small groups so that we can stir one another up for love to God and one another that keeps us from sinning when we know better.

Hear and heed the words of our author. In this day where we want a soft, tame God-understand: "it is terrifying to fall into the hands of the living God."