

# The Terrifying Prospect of Willful Sinning

## Hebrews 10:26-31

What is the most terrifying thing you can think of? I can well remember my most terrifying moment. (Relate the story of being attacked by a mad dog.) Loved ones, the most terrifying moment for most will not come in this life. It will come when you awake in eternity and are faced with a God who is burning with anger at your sin.

Do you want to hear all the truth there is about God? Today, few really do. We want our God-talk to be positive and motivational and encouraging. As one preacher said, "And, what's most appalling-though very few regard it as most appalling-is that when it comes to God, all we want to hear is the sweet side-the tender side, the warm side. We believe that the only good motivation comes from hearing about grace, not judgment. And little by little we let that motivational conviction (as unbiblical as it is) creep into our view of God Himself, until we have no categories anymore to understand, let alone love, a God whose wrath is a fury of fire against sinners. But the writer of this book of Hebrews will not be silent about the wrath of God." (Piper)

What is the connection between the following somber words and the hope giving exhortations that have gone before? Why does this paragraph (at least in the original) begin with the word "for"? How we answer that shapes what our gathering together in encouraging and exhorting one another is doing. We are to stir up one another towards love and good works because if we keep on sinning when we know better, we can reach a point of no return. That is the connection. Do you care enough about one another to take the love-driven risks of keeping one another pressing on in hope and moving away from sin?

### Its Fearful Expectation

(v.26-27)

The opening words to this paragraph have rung over and over and over again in my heart this week. They have shaken me to my core and then have become enabling warnings in my own struggles against sin. And it is sin that we are talking about here.

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

### Its Conditions

(v.26a)

Now we must understand all that is said here. We must do that lest we destroy the faith of some or encourage the failure of others.

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 modern word for the effect this sin has: we are hooked on it. On-going sin has a horribly addictive 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 it is not all this passage has in mind.

### ***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 word here should not give us the picture of a consuming that ends in annihilation. This great heresy has awakened from hibernation and now prowls about seeking to enter God's flock. No, the idea 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. You are only assured of God's mercy whenever you can say, "It is Today." If you keep on sinning and you are professing to be a Christian, dear one, I beg you to 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).

## Isaiah 26:11-12

<sup>11</sup> 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.  
<sup>12</sup> 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 hankering 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.

<sup>28</sup> Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> 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. Today, as I have already mentioned, it is being suggested that this is an open question. I say without reservation, that it is a closed issue. Everlasting conscious punishment is clearly taught in the Scripture. Let me deal with two objections to this doctrine at this point.

Objection 1: It is not congruent with the nature of God. God is love. How can a God who is loving condemn a person to eternal suffering? We respond this way: Love is not the central, all-encompassing attribute of God. Holiness is. God's love is a holy love. God's wrath is a holy wrath. Everlasting punishment is an expression of God's holy wrath against sinners and God's holy love for His own.

Objection 2: How is it fair that sinners are eternally punished for only a lifetime of sin? We respond that it is not the duration of sin that the Bible is concerned for, but the glory of the One sinned against. That God punishes eternally for a lifetime of sin is a measure of the incomprehensible glory against whom we have sinned.

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 choosingly 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.

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

And Deuteronomy 32:35-36

<sup>35</sup> 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.'

<sup>36</sup> 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.

Now we are fond of thinking that we have wholly escaped the edge of these texts. Yes, we will never know eternal conscious punishment. Jesus took that for us. But we may well know present conscious chastening. God will judge sin in us. I am convinced that all our sinning as Christians is dealt with in this life. 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 without which none of us will see God.

Lest you think this is not so, look at what happened to Moses. At 120 years old after 40 years of walking with God in the wilderness leading this miserable, stiff-necked, God denying bunch; after these massive three sermons which come to us as the book of Deuteronomy, after this wonderful Song of Praise - on that same day, God takes Moses up to see what he will never enter because he deliberately sinned against better knowledge. *Moses never entered the land.* Now listen-we do not think that sin is serious any more. 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.

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 have to do.

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## Reflect and Respond

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 me, beloved. In this day where we want a soft, tame God-hear these words: "it is terrifying to fall into the hands of the living God." Most of us have the dream in our sleep where we are falling. It is a terrifying experience. But we always wake up and we are safe. As genuine believers, this is the way it is for us. It is a terrifying fall, but the waking up in the safe security of Jesus is sweet.

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## Notes