

# The Atrocity of Rejecting Christ

Hebrews 10:26-31

Halifax: 18 June 2023

## Introduction:

Today, we are returning to our sermon series in Hebrews.

- We have come to Hebrews 10:26-31.
- This passage grows out of the previous one, Hebrews 10:19-25.
  - With that passage, we moved from the part of Hebrews that tells us about the excellence of Christ to the part that exhorts us how to respond to Him.
- In short, we saw that since Christ by His saving work has given us access to God, so that we can commune with Him...
  - We ought to come near with boldness, resting in Jesus' saving work...
  - And we ought to hold on to our confession without wavering despite challenges...
  - And we ought to consider one another so that we help each other to press on.
  - In order to do this, we need to be faithful about assembling together for church where these things are especially done.

It is clear that our text today (Heb 10:26-31) ties in directly with this.

- It is a warning about rejecting the beautiful way that Christ has opened for us by which we have communion with God.
- There is a real danger that some of us will drift away and even end up utterly renouncing Christ. This letter is written to those who were in danger of doing that.
- This passage sets before us the atrocity of doing that.
  - Listen now, I will read it to you. Hebrews 10:26-31:
  - This is the holy Word of God.

**Hebrews 10:26-31: For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on *the testimony of two or three witnesses*. <sup>29</sup> Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has**

**trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 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.**

There we end the reading of God's word.

- These are frightful words.
  - How atrocious it is to reject Christ and the beautiful way He has opened for us to come to God.
  - They are frightful words, but they are wholesome words.
    - They are words that we need to take to heart.
  - It is true that those who know Christ in a saving way will not depart from Him,
    - But it is also true that one of the ways God preserves us is by giving us passages like this that He uses to keep us from turning away. True believers heed them.
    - Just as those He saves come to Him by believing the gospel, so those He saves continue in His grace by taking both the promises and the warnings to heart.

- Reminders about the atrocity of rejecting Christ also help us to be useful to others.
  - They make us realise the peril that our children and our Christian friends are in if we see them hardening their hearts and they compel us to do what we can to help them. They help us to not be indifferent about the souls of others—as if Christ is just a nice personal option!
  - And not only that, but they give us a burden for those who are outside of Christ too so that we will endeavour to lead them to Christ.
- And so I urge you, take heed to these words, frightful though they be.
  - The Lord has been kind enough to give them to us, and they will greatly benefit us if will be take them to heart.

In this text, the atrocity of rejecting Christ is presented to us in three ways.

- I. Rejecting Christ is atrocious because it leaves you entirely without hope.**
- II. Rejecting Christ is atrocious because it is such a wicked thing to do.**
- III. Rejecting Christ is atrocious because it will incur God’s most severe vengeance.**

That is what is set before us in our text.

- Let’s look at each of these. First...

- I. Rejecting Christ is atrocious because it leaves you entirely without hope.**
  - This is set forth in Hebrews 10:26-27: **For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.**

A. This makes sense, does it not?

1. We have seen that Christ is the way of salvation—the beautiful and only way.
  - We are all guilty of sin.
    - In Adam’s sin, we all made ourselves into adversaries of God.
  - But God sent His only Son to save us from our sins. That’s the reason He is called Jesus—His name means “Jehovah is salvation.”
    - He came from heaven to be our priest, taking human flesh and spirit, and He lived without sin. Then He made a sacrifice to atone for our sin by giving Himself as the sacrifice.
    - Now He is reigning at God’s right hand where He exerts His power to gather His people to His precious salvation and to keep them by His Spirit.
      - He brings us back to God.
  - What a change ensues!
    - We, who were guilty—without God, without a way, without hope—are fully restored to God forever, to His favour, to His blessing, to His service, to communion with Him, which will be fully revealed at the Last Day.
      - We are brought from eternal condemnation to eternal blessing.
2. But obviously, if we reject this way of salvation, we have no other recourse.
  - Where else will we find a sacrifice that can take away our sin?

- Where else will we find a divine Saviour who is willing to save us?
- Where will we find a Saviour who is able to transform us that we might be fit to come into God's presence at last?
- As it says from the middle of verse 26, **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.**"
  - How awful the thought of being destitute of all hope—of having no way of escape, no place to turn, no way to deal with our sin.
  - To have only the certain prospect of judgment and fiery indignation that will devour all of God's enemies.
    - We are all enemies of God until we are reconciled by Christ.
    - What could be worse than to be without His salvation?

TRANS> This is dreadful.

B. But what is the sin that is described here when it says, "If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth"?

- We need to be clear about what this sin entails.
- 1. Surely, there is not a one of us who can say that we have not sinned (even though we knew better) since we came to know Christ.
  - In my first year as a believer, I was shown this text by a cult.
    - They told me that if I had sinned since my baptism, I was no true Christian and had not received true baptism.
    - I spent sleepless nights fretting over these words.
    - I knew that I had sinned on purpose since professing Christ.
      - This group said I needed to be baptised by them to be truly saved because they held to the truth of God's word.
- 2. Over time, I came to understand what these words mean.
  - They are not speaking of merely sinning voluntarily.
    - They speak of a settled, malicious, obstinate, renunciation of Christ.
    - They speak of the sin of rejecting Him.
  - And not just a temporary rejection of Him like Peter's denial, but a settled state of renunciation.
    - They speak of deliberately rejecting the Lord from a settled disposition of heart. A resolve to no longer have Him.
  - We all sin in many ways, but this is the sin of a deliberate departure from Christ.
- 3. Note well that it was after coming to a knowledge of the truth.
  - The word translated *knowledge* is the Greek word *epi-gnosis*, a strengthened form of *gnosis* which is also translated *knowledge*.
    - It refers to knowledge that is obtained by the mind and that gives one a true and intimate understanding of the subject.

- Those who have come to a knowledge of the truth have received the gospel with conviction that it is true. They have made an outward profession of faith.
  - They have some sense of the power and excellence of Gospel that brings them to embrace it; but then, at some point, they repudiate it all.
- 4. Here is how Matthew Henry describes it:
  - “The sin here mentioned is a total and final apostasy, when men with a full and fixed will and resolution despise and reject Christ, the only Saviour,—despise and resist the Spirit, the only sanctifier,—and despise and renounce the gospel, the only way of salvation, and the words of eternal life; and all this after they have known, owned, and professed, the Christian religion, and continue to do so obstinately and maliciously. This is the great transgression: the apostle seems to refer to the law concerning presumptuous sinners, Num. 15:30-31. They were to be cut off.”
- 5. It is the rejection of truth once believed. I have summarised it simply as “rejecting Christ.”
  - This summary is warranted by the parallel summary of the lesser offense mentioned in verse 28 of “rejecting Moses.”

TRANS> This brings us to the second way rejecting Christ is shown to be atrocious.

## II. Rejecting Christ is atrocious because it is such a wicked thing to do.

A. Rejecting Moses was wicked enough, but rejecting Christ is even more wicked.

1. Look at verse 28 & 29: **Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.** [that was monstrous] <sup>29</sup> **Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?** [that is much more monstrous.]
2. Brothers and sisters, we need to consider what a great wickedness it is to reject our dear Lord so that we will abhor this sin.
  - We are every one of us guilty of pulling away from Him at various times and to various degrees.
    - There are many things we do that separate us in our affection, service, and commitment to Him as our precious Saviour.
    - It can be illustrated with marriage—
      - Jesus said not to separate what God has joined together.
      - As believers, we do not divorce without legitimate reasons, but every day we are guilty of doing things that pull us apart from our spouse.
      - Hopefully we do many things that draw us together, but we also do sinful things that separate us.
        - So it is with Christ.
  - We need to be ashamed and deeply humbled by such wretched conduct.
    - We need to cast ourselves on Him for every hard thought toward Him, every denial, every resistance to His will, for lightly esteeming Him.

- Thank the Lord if we have not utterly and permanently renounced Him—as described in our passage—and would find it abhorrent to do such a thing,
    - but let us abhor this sin much more than we do so that we will not participate in it by degrees.
    - This passage is meant to help us to abhor this sin much more than we do.
- B. In our text, the wickedness of this sin is set forth to us in three ways.
1. First, that it involves a wicked action: *trampling the Son of God underfoot*.
    - Think of that and be appalled!
    - a. Here is the kindest, most gracious friend of all—the one who did what every fibre in His being abhorred—set Himself forward to be charged with all of our sin and to bear all our punishment that we might be restored to the Father.
      - He took us, ruined and defiled, to be His bride. He paid our debt in full. There is no greater love, no greater compassion, that has ever been exhibited—that a man should in this way lay down His life for His friends.
      - He came to us with the sweet offer of the gospel, even pleading with us to come to Him to be saved—and He welcomed us and took us in and spoke comforting words to us and provided for us all that we need—Christian fellowship, the word, the Holy Spirit, enabling grace, assurance of His love.
      - He bears with us in our ongoing weakness and sin.
      - He has compassion on us as a gracious priest and rescues us again and again, going after us when we stray and correcting us.
    - b. To reject Him is to trample Him underfoot.
      - Robert Martin says, “As used here, the expression ‘tread underfoot’ describes treating with the utmost disrespect something which one regards as valueless... The apostate is guilty of scorning the Son of God, though once he professed to hold Him in highest honour.”
      - It is to crucify Him again. To treat this gracious, holy, majestic, noble Saviour as an object of abhorrence and contempt.
      - What could be a greater sin than this? What does such sin deserve?
        - I say, learn to abhor every form of rejection of Him.
  - Rejecting involves this wretched trampling of Him underfoot. That is the first thing.
  2. Second, it involves a wretched evaluation: *counting the blood of the covenant a common (ordinary) thing*.
    - a. It is to look at that blood, that life that was poured out, that high cost of redemption required to atone for our sin, and to count it as rubbish!
      - To look at it as Paul looked at his own works once he came to know Christ.
      - As something worthless, useless, of no value.

- That is what the apostate thinks of that precious blood that was shed for our sins. That is what he thinks of that blood that will never lose its power.
- b. This is the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified.
- By which *who* was sanctified? It can be taken in two ways...
  - Either Christ or the man that professed—
    - If it refers to Christ who was sanctified, then it means that His blood is what sets apart His sacrifice from all others as blood that saves.
    - If it refers to the individual who professes, it speaks of how this blood of the covenant is the offering by which we come to God.
  - It is really the same either way—and it is this blood that sanctifies that is counted as worthless by the apostate.
    - He looks at it and he says, like Esau said of his birthright, “Of what use is that to me now?”
    - “I have no need of a dead man. I have no need of a crucified man.”
    - “What good is that to me?”
- c. I hope that all of you have the highest esteem for the blood of Christ.
- I plead with you to consider its value, its power. Here is the blood that washes away our sin.
    - Be ashamed of how lightly you esteem it.
    - Go to your merciful Saviour and ask Him to give you a right assessment of His precious blood—
      - an assessment that is precisely opposite to the assessment of the apostate, who counts it as common—as merely blood!
- Now we come to the third indictment of the wickedness of apostasy.
3. Third, it involves a personal affront: *insulting the Spirit of grace*.
- a. It is the Holy Spirit who has opened our eyes and brought us to the knowledge of the truth.
- He is the one who convicted us of our sin.
  - He is the one who enables us to understand how Christ satisfied for our sin.
  - He is the one who moved our hearts to profess Him.
  - He is the one who continues to cause the light to shine in our hearts, who keeps us, who transforms us and makes us holy.
  - He is the one who gives us gifts to serve the Lord and His people, and who enables us to benefit from the gifts that He gives us.
  - He is the one who burdens us for the lost.
  - He is the one reveals to us the glory of God and the glory of His Son, and who cultivates love for Him and for His truth.
- b. As we saw in Hebrews 6, the apostate is one who was a partaker of the Holy Spirit and of His illuminating grace and power. He shared in it in the church.

- But in renouncing Christ, the apostate insults Him as if all of the light and power from Him were either (as Owen says) diabolical delusions or fanatical misapprehensions.
  - He dishonours the Spirit to outsiders, having been an insider, and now saying that it was all false.
  - This is the sin against the Holy Spirit that can never be pardoned.
    - It is to be shown the truth, convinced of the truth and of its value by Him, and to turn against it and call it lies and falsehood.
  - Paul spoke against Christ and persecuted His followers, but he was pardoned because he did it ignorantly and in unbelief.
    - These apostates know that it is true, but they deny it and reject it.
- c. Again, see how abhorrent this sin of apostasy really is!
  - Hate it with a holy hatred. Abhor it with the abhorrence that it deserves.
  - Ask the LORD for mercy that you might love the Holy Spirit, that you might delight in the light that He gives you, and in the power and grace that He imparts that you might serve the Lord.
  - What a grand thing to have this Holy Spirit who takes Christ and shows Him to us so that we can know Him and love Him and serve Him as we ought.
  - Come Holy Spirit and be our guide. Come and show us the truth. Come and do your gracious work in our hearts that love may abound in us for you, for the Father, and for Jesus, the Son of God.

TRANS> How atrocious it is to reject Christ and His beautiful way of salvation.

- We saw first that it is atrocious because it leaves us without hope.
- We saw second (just now) that it is atrocious because it is such a wicked thing to do.
- Now we come to third way that rejecting Christ is atrocious.

### **III. Rejecting Christ is atrocious because it will incur God's most severe vengeance.**

- We just saw that rejecting Him is deserving of much greater punishment than rejecting Moses.
  - Now we are told that it will in fact bring about much greater punishment.
- Look at verse 30 and 31: **For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 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.**

A. Our God is a holy God of justice.

1. We know Him as the one who says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay."
  - He has revealed Himself as the one who will not allow any wrong to stand.
    - He will repay every sin with exactly what it deserves.
  - Of all people, those who know the gospel know Him thus.
    - We have seen what had to be done for our salvation—that He might be able to pardon us without committing an injustice... that He might be able to justify us or declare us righteous without compromising justice.

- We have seen that there can be with Him no compromise whatsoever of justice.
    - Jesus had to pay the full penalty of our sin.
    - There could be no pardon unless there was a just payment for our sin.
    - We know the one who says: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay.”
    - We know, therefore, that every sin will be fully avenged.
2. We also know that He does not allow anyone else to carry out His vengeance.
- Yes, He has appointed magistrates to punish criminals in order to restrain wickedness in the world—and they wield His sword.
    - but that is only temporary judgment.
    - That is what we read about with Moses, how those who rejected Moses were executed upon the testimony of two or three witnesses.
  - But the LORD Himself is the only one who can render final judgment.
    - We are not capable. We would botch it up.
    - We are not righteous ourselves and we cannot see things clearly, nor can we see what is in the heart of man—but even if we could, we would not know how to carry out justice.
      - We know the LORD who will do this. We know that vengeance belongs to Him.
  - He will do execute His vengeance on the day that He has appointed.
    - His beauty and glory will be seen when His judgment is manifested.
      - We will see that there is no injustice in Him whatsoever.
      - We will see this clearly and we will worship and adore Him.
      - We will see more than ever how much Christ had to do to take away our sin.
- B. But here is the terrifying thing about apostasy.
1. There is no sin that will bring about more of God’s wrath and vengeance than sinning wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth...
    - This sin of knowing Christ and His salvation and then renouncing Him...
      - trampling Him under our feet, counting the blood of the covenant by which He was sanctified as common, and insulting the Spirit of grace.
    - What could be worthy of more punishment than this?
  2. What a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Almighty!
    - What does it mean when it speaks of falling into His hands?
      - It means that He takes complete control of what becomes of you.
      - It means that He does with you exactly as your sin deserves.
      - It means that, in the case of renouncing Christ, that there is no mercy—that you get what you deserve for rejecting so great a salvation.
  3. We cannot begin to grasp the horror of this thing.
    - It would be better to have been and idol worshipper who burned your children to idols than to be someone who came to a knowledge of the truth and then repudiated it all with malice and contempt.



- Let us grasp the horror of it all that we might flee from the wrath to come and that we might urge others to flee from it.
  - I know that I grasp far too little of this.
  - May the LORD grant to us a true understanding of His vindictive justice that we may abhor apostasy and keep far from it.

**Final thoughts:**

We have seen the atrocity of rejecting Christ.

- It is atrocious because it leaves us without hope, it is atrocious because it is such a wicked reprehensible sin, and it is atrocious because of the terrifying judgment it incurs.
- We are to hate this sin and to keep far from it.

But let us not forget the reason that it is so atrocious.

- It is so atrocious because Christ and His salvation are so excellent!
  - It is His excellence that makes rejecting Him such an offensive thing.
- He is the one who takes sinners like us and eternally reconciles us to His Father.
- We have this gracious excellent High Priest who gave Himself for our sins, who is exalted to God's right hand, who ever lives to make intercession for us, and who ministers to us with compassion and tenderness. We have such a high priest, eternal in the heavens.
  - Let us cling to Him with joy and hope.
  - Let us labour to know Him in all His majesty, perfections, and grace!
  - Let us fall into His hands with utter abandonment to His saving work in us that we might become adoring worshippers who draw near with full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast our confession of hope without wavering and let us consider one another to stir up one another to love and good works.
  - Yes, let us fall into His hands not for judgment, but for salvation and let us continue in those gracious nail-pierced hands!
    - Who could reject Him?