

Chapter 15 – Inheritance is through confident faith - Hebrews 10

Hebrews chapter 10 concludes the proof that Christ is necessary and sufficient for our inheritance. This chapter is all about confidence – confidence in Christ cleansing us from the guilt and shame of sin, confidence in drawing near to God through Christ and confidence in the present hope of inheriting the promises. The foundations for that confidence in the history of Israel and in the Law of Moses has been explored. Now we must live it out in our daily lives. The promises long hoped for have now been realised – to live as if they are still a distant future hope is, in fact, a rejection of Christ's accomplishment.

Prayer

Try using the *thanksgiving, remembrance, confidence* model of prayer as you think over what you have learnt from Hebrews chapter 9 and look forward to studying chapter 10.

Questions & Surprises

Let us start our study of chapter 10 by reading through and noting any questions or surprises. These are the things that strike me in chapter 10.

- V3 Does the breaking of bread not serve the same function of reminding us of our sins?
- V10 In what way have we been made holy?
- V13 How are His enemies defeated?
- V14 How can we be *now* perfect forever and at the same time *being* made holy?

- V19 How does confidence or boldness before God tie in with godly fear, reverence and awe?
- V22 What is this washing with pure water?
- V26 Does this mean there is no forgiveness for our wilful sins?
- V29 Who is he writing about?
- V31 How might we “fall into the hands of the living God”?
- V35 Confidence in what?
- V39 Do believers who shrink back lose their salvation?

We will try to address these issues as we examine the detail.

Background

Before proceeding we should familiarise ourselves with Ps 40:6-8 (quoted in vv5-7), Num 28 (the repeated offerings), Ps 110 (quoted in vv12-13), Jer 31:33f (quoted in vv16-17), Num 5 & 15:30 (unintentional/wilful sin), Deut 19:15 (two witnesses required), Deut 32:35-36 (quoted in v30), Hab 2:3-4 (quoted in v 37-38).

Structure

My medium-brush structure for this chapter was: ¹

10:1-18 Christ’s death is a superior offering, being effective forever for all.

Hebrews 10:19-13:25 Exhortation and warning to live by faith.

¹ See chapter 4

10:19-25 Make use of our new access to God to hold fast to God's promises.

10:26-39 Warning against unbelief.

Chapter 10 concludes the proof that Jesus' death marks the end of tabernacle worship and returns to the theme of exhortation to faith that the author began with. Indeed, if chapters 5 to 10:18 were missing we would hardly realise since the exhortation and concerns of chapter 4 are picked up again in the middle of chapter 10.

My fine-brush structure is:

- V1-4 The continuing sacrifices of the tabernacle show they cannot remove sins.
- V5-10 The scriptures foretold the replacement of the sacrifices through Christ's obedience.
- V11-18 Through Christ's one offering He has dealt with the guilt of sin forever.
- V19-25 Therefore let us approach God with confidence and hold fast to our hope.
- V26-31 The penalty for rejecting Christ will be far greater than the penalty was for rejecting the Law of Moses.
- V32-39 So stand steadfast on the hope of your inheritance in Christ.

Argument

The first part of the chapter concludes the author's argument that Christ fulfils and replaces Moses' sacrificial system. He reiterates his argument that repeated sacrifices indicate inadequate cleansing of sin and concludes with two quotes to show how the Hebrew scriptures bear witness to Christ's accomplishment. This concludes the lengthy argument, started

in Chapter 5, showing that the work of Christ has made the Mosaic Law obsolete. The author now returns to the theme of exhortation to faith that runs through chapters 2-4 and 6 and is perhaps the principal purpose of the letter. His repeated appeal through the rest of the chapter is to stand fast in our hope.

So here is my summary of the argument in chapter 10:

Since Christ has forever dealt with our sin, we should draw near to God with full assurance and stand fast in our hope of inheriting all that was promised to Abraham.

The Detail

We will now look more closely at the detail of chapter 10.

Heb 10:1-4

⁽¹⁾ The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ⁽²⁾ If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshippers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ⁽³⁾ But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, ⁽⁴⁾ because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

The argument

The Law, being only a shadow of the coming realities, could never deal with the problem of sin in a worshipper's life, hence the sacrifices were repeated year on year. Had it been able to properly cleanse the worshipper from sin the sacrifices would have stopped.

...a shadow...

The author does not suggest that the heavenly tabernacle existed in the time of Moses. His tabernacle was a shadow of heavenly realities *to come*. The reality is the atoning death of Christ which took place centuries after Moses built his copy.

...make perfect...

We have come across the word “perfect” already in this letter.² In fact the author uses this word ten times. As we noted before the word is best understood to mean “completely fitting for purpose”. The tabernacle was God’s temporary provision for worship – for fellowship between God and His people. But sin created a barrier, symbolised by the curtains and the need for sacrifices. The point is that these sacrifices could not make the people fit for purpose. They could not deal with sin in such a way that the worshippers could have true fellowship with God.

...cleansed once for all...

The author makes it clear that under the Law, worshippers were *not* cleansed once for all, whereas by Christ’s sacrifice we are. The author specifically contrasts Christ with the annual requirement for sacrifice in the law. It is very important we note this contrast. Many Christians have not understood this properly and have believed and taught that Christ has only dealt with our past sins, not our future sins.³ If that is so, then Christ has brought no improvement to the sacrifices, for they also obtained redemption from past sins:

² See discussion of Hebrews 2:10 “Jesus made perfect through suffering”

³ See for example, R T Kendall, “Are you stone deaf to the Spirit or rediscovering God?” p117. “The *past* is washed away, and the assumption is that from then on he is going to serve the Lord and walk in the light.” Italics his.

“In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven.” (Lev 5:13)

“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit... I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the Lord’—and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Ps 32:1-5)

“as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” (Ps 103:12)

David perhaps understood more deeply than most that it was not the actual sacrifice that obtained forgiveness, but that it flowed from God’s mercy towards those who believed Him, just as it did for Abraham. But David was not unique in enjoying forgiveness. It was available to all who brought their sacrifices by faith. God forgave them their sin.

The problem was that the sacrifices could not deal with sin *once for all* and so the worshipper’s conscience was always troubled with new guilt for new sin.

...an annual reminder of sins...

Throughout the discussion of the inadequacy of the tabernacle system, the author has made repeated reference to the guilty conscience that could not be relieved and the constant reminder of sin. He seeks to contrast this with the superior accomplishment of Christ. Our consciences are now washed clean and we no longer have the constant reminder of our sin. If this is so, what are we to make of the breaking of bread and of the practice, in many circles, of regular confession? Are we perpetuating something that is meant to have stopped?

Breaking bread

The author's whole discussion has concerned the Day of Atonement when sin was atoned for. The Day of Atonement was a solemn day of remembering and repenting from past sin:

“For any person who is not afflicted in soul on that same day shall be cut off from his people.” (Lev 23:29 NKJV)

One might have expected that the crucifixion would have taken place on the Day of Atonement in the seventh month. But it did not. The day that Jesus broke bread with the disciples was in fact the Passover. It was in the first month of the ceremonial year and celebrated new beginnings. The Israelites celebrated their deliverance from slavery and looked forward to their promised inheritance. It was not a solemn day but a day of feasting and joy followed by a further seven days of feasting called the feast of unleavened bread. Jesus offered Himself on the cross at the beginning of the most joyful week in the Jewish calendar. When Jesus broke bread with His disciples He said they were to remember His body broken for them (as the true Passover lamb) and His blood shed as the blood of the New Covenant and that they were to look forward to His coming again. He did not say they should remember their sin, or mourn for His death or cover themselves in sackcloth and ashes. The breaking of bread is not meant to be a regular reminder of our sin but of the advent of the New Covenant. It should be a joyous celebration of God's merciful provision for us. Yes, like the Passover lamb, it is mixed with the bitter herbs of the awful crucifixion, but we should be careful not to misrepresent the breaking of bread as a time of mourning. It is not intended to be reminder of sin. Jesus died to do away with that.

Regular confession

What then of regular confession? Is that a good New Covenant practice? John tells us we should confess our sins, as does James:

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defence—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1Jo 1:7-2:2)

“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” (Jas 5:16)

The passage from John’s first letter is often quoted to teach that we should confess to God whenever we are conscious of sinning. But that is not what John says. He is talking about the contrast between unbelievers who walk in darkness and deny their need for a saviour and believers who walk in the light, acknowledge their sin and receive forgiveness. This happens once at the point of conversion, not every time we sin. Chapter two tells us that when believers sin, Christ deals with it on their behalf.

James tells us to confess our sins to one another (not to God!) when asking prayer for healing. I presume that this is because sin (rebellion against God) is no basis for a confident expectation of answering prayer! But what of regular corporate confession? The New Testament does not speak of this

practice. The clear New Testament teaching is that Christ's sacrifice has dealt with our guilty consciences and washed us clean so that we may approach God with boldness and confidence. Does a believer need to confess their sins before approaching God in worship or prayer? The New Testament does not say so. On the contrary, the author of Hebrews goes directly from "there is no longer any sacrifice for sin" to "Therefore since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place..." Nowhere is there any suggestion that confession of sin has taken the place of the sacrifices or the curtain or the ritual washings, as something we need to go through in order to approach God, any of which would have been obvious choices were such a thing intended.

It is obvious that disobedience and rebellion towards God is going to hinder our relationship with Him since such behaviour is a deliberate act of pushing God away. But since the cross the problem lies not with God but with us. God does not turn away from us when we sin; it is we who turn away from God. We may *feel* guilty, but we are not *held* guilty. Christ has dealt with sin once for all.

Many of us assemble for worship with fears, shame, feelings of guilt, and deep disappointment in ourselves and others. The answer to these feelings is not confession but faith. We are to fight these accusations with courageous faith, not grovelling confession.

You may conclude from the above that I am not a great fan of either regular personal confession or corporate confession. Actually my criticism is not of confession, but of what sorts of things we confess and what follows confession.

Firstly, our confession should focus not so much on our omissions and commissions but on the issues highlighted in this letter to the Hebrews. Our sin has already been fully dealt with. The real issue for confession concerns our confidence in

the promises of God. It is our failings in believing and pursuing those promises that should be the focus of our confession and prayer for help.

Secondly, confession is usually followed by requesting God's mercy and forgiveness. I am strongly opposed to this practice as I believe it is an expression of unbelief. Why ask God to do something Jesus did on the cross 2000 years ago? Confession should not be followed by asking for forgiveness but by rejoicing and thanksgiving for forgiveness already guaranteed and for the never ending intercession of Christ on our behalf.

Heb 10:5-10

⁽⁵⁾ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁽⁶⁾ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁽⁷⁾ Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—I have come to do your will, O God.'" ⁽⁸⁾ First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). ⁽⁹⁾ Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ⁽¹⁰⁾ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The argument

The author now quotes Psalm 40, applying it to Christ. David wrote it as a hymn of praise for God's deliverance from trouble, in which He recognises that it is not sacrifices which please God but a trusting and obedient heart. The author recognises the prophetic truth of this psalm, showing how Christ has forever done away with the sacrifices that did not please God by living a life and death of obedience.

...a body you prepared for me

The phrase, “a body you prepared for me” is the Septuagint translation of the psalm which the writer to the Hebrews was following. The Hebrew literally says, “ears you have dug for me”. The Septuagint translators interpreted this as referring to God creating Adam from the dust, whereas the NIV translators interpreted this as “ears you have opened for me” which seems more in keeping with the context.

However, in the present argument the Septuagint translation seems very appropriate; in order for Christ to fulfil God’s will, He needed to be incarnate, so a body was prepared for him.

...you did not desire...

God loved Israel and wanted to encourage their faith and security in Him. To this end He provided the sacrificial system which depended upon the future sacrifice of Christ on the cross. God instructed Moses to establish the sacrifices and offerings and described them as a pleasing aroma.⁴ The heart-felt offerings of the people were a source of joy and fellowship both to God and to the people. However, it was not long before the outward rites were performed without the heart being in it. The smell of the sacrifices became a stench of insolence and presumption to God.⁵

⁴ “Then burn the entire ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the Lord, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire.” (Ex 29:18)

⁵ “But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a man, and whoever offers a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig’s blood, and whoever burns memorial incense, like one who worships an idol. They have chosen their own ways, and their souls delight in their abominations;” (Isa 66:3)

I have come to do your will

However, David was not guilty of making the offerings a stench. He loved God and sought to honour Him in all he did. When he moved the Ark to Jerusalem he maintained the daily sacrifices at Gibeon until Solomon built the temple.⁶ David understood that the sacrifices were symbolic and that faith and obedience were the things that truly pleased God. His desire was to do God's will.

...sets aside...

The word the author use here, translated in the NIV as *set aside* is very strong. It means “abolish” or “destroy”. It is in keeping with the New Testament witness that the Law of Moses has been made completely obsolete.

And by that will, we have been made holy...

Jesus came to do His Father's will, which was to make us holy. That is what the sacrifices were for, yet they could never fully accomplish this. It is what Christ has accomplished “once for all.”

Heb 10:11-18

(¹¹) Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. (¹²) But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. (¹³) Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, (¹⁴) because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for

⁶ See 1 Chron 16:1, 37-40. David built a simple tent for the Ark and seemed quite free in seeking God there: he “sat before the Lord” (1 Chr 17:16), something that even the High Priest was forbidden to do!

ever those who are being made holy. ⁽¹⁵⁾ The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says: ⁽¹⁶⁾ “This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.” ⁽¹⁷⁾ Then he adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.” ⁽¹⁸⁾ And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

The argument

In this conclusion of the central argument of the letter, the author re-quotes Jeremiah and Psalm 110, both of which he used earlier in his argument (8:1, 8-12).

The earthly priests had to stand every day performing their duties because they had no permanent solution for sin. But after Jesus made His sacrifice, He sat down because His solution was eternal. He is now waiting for all His enemies to be defeated (a reference to Psalm 110). Since, as Jeremiah prophesied, God has put His law in our hearts and He no longer remembers our sin, there is no longer a need for sacrifices.

...never take away sins...one sacrifice for sins...

We have already noted when we looked at v2 under the heading “cleansed once for all” the sacrifices did provide a means of obtaining forgiveness for sin. But they could not deal with future sin, nor with everyone’s sin, so the sacrifices had to be repeated again and again for each individual. This is what the author means by taking away sins. Jesus’ sacrifice was sufficient to remove the guilt and penalty of all the sins of all God’s people of every generation.

...he sat down...

The Roman Catholics teach that Christ offers Himself again and again through the Mass:

“The Holy Mass, then, is truly a propitiatory, a sacrifice for sin, because it is the pleading by Christ here amongst us of the Sacrifice of the Cross; a pleading that consists in a real offering of Himself again and again; a pleading and an offering in which He associates us with Himself so that our offering and His go up before God as one... It is a pleading, a representation, a setting before God of the Death of Calvary, a reproduction of the Sacrifice of Calvary by Christ in our midst.”⁷

This teaching is contrary to the clear insistence of the author of this letter who now reiterates what he stated in his opening statement (1:3) that after His sacrifice Jesus sat down at the right hand of God. No more sacrifices are offered, His blood is not re-presented whenever we sin or whenever we break bread. Jesus’ ministry is now one of intercession for us (7:25).

...he waits for his enemies...

The devil seeks to accuse and condemn every individual, but Christ has taken away the basis of accusation. Having completed his work of redemption, Jesus is now awaiting the day of his return when raging fire will consume the enemies of God (10:27). Nowhere does scripture present us with a picture of God struggling with His enemies. Certainly God is opposed, and sometimes very strongly, but God is not so weak in capability⁸ or ingenuity⁹ that there is any great struggle for

⁷ Plain Sermons by Practical Preachers, Vol. II

⁸ “They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings.” (Re 17:14)

sovereignty. God laughs at His enemies' futile schemes¹⁰ and Jesus sits until God brings things to a conclusion at Christ's return.

...he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

See comment on v1, "make perfect". The result of Christ's sacrifice is that we have been made fit for present and eternal fellowship with God. In this way we have been made *perfect*. Having been made fit for fellowship, we must now continue to enjoy that fellowship *by which* we are made holy. Fellowship with God, without the hindrance of the curtains, changes us in a way that worship under the old covenant could never do. This is Paul's point in 2Cor 3:7-18.

"And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." (2Cor 3:18)

Beholding God's glory has a power to transform us that is unmatched by any amount of teaching. So much so that when we see Him we will be transformed in an instant:

"But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1John 3:2)

Teaching Christian morals is not what changes us. Merely replacing Moses' Law with a new, more difficult one, is not the New Covenant promise. Meeting Jesus changes people; being

⁹ "For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled." (Re 17:17)

¹⁰ "The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them." (Ps 2:2-4)

filled with the Holy Spirit changes people; beholding God's glory changes us on the inside, chasing away darkness, illuminating truth, replacing our pathetic little goals with Kingdom vision.

...I will remember no more

Under the old covenant, repentant sinners were forgiven through the sacrificial system and their sins were cast as far as the east is from the west – God forgot their sins. But only their past sins were forgiven and forgotten. The New Covenant promise is that once we are born-again through the Holy Spirit all our sin - past, present and future - is forgiven and forgotten. Our sin has been “put away” as the author of this letter expresses it. God does not remember our sin; He remembers our Christ-given righteousness. When God thinks of you He does not think, “Ah yes. Rather a lot of sanctifying work still to be done on that one! Needs a good scrub before coming in here.” but “My beloved child! Come in off the street and have some refreshment with your Father.”

Heb 10:19-25

⁽¹⁹⁾ Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ⁽²⁰⁾ by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, ⁽²¹⁾ and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ⁽²²⁾ let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. ⁽²³⁾ Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. ⁽²⁴⁾ And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. ⁽²⁵⁾ Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us

encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The argument

Since Christ has made one sufficient sacrifice for all our sin, giving us free access to God, and since He now intercedes for us as our High Priest, let us draw near to God with an untroubled conscience, being assured of His welcome and blessing¹¹. Let us stay fully confident in the promises we have inherited from Abraham – to receive God’s abundant blessing and to be a blessing to the world. Let us make sure we *are* a blessing by spurring one another on towards love and good deeds.

...confidence to enter...

When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, He told them to approach God with the words, “Our Father”. This was a significant departure from the way Jews were taught to address their prayers to “O Lord our God” or other similar addresses. Rabbis usually composed a shortened version of the Synagogue Amidah prayer and taught this to their disciples.¹² This is what Jesus’ disciples asked Jesus to do.¹³ Jesus’ prayer

¹¹ In his commentary on Hebrews, Lane sees a parallel in these verses to the peace offering (Lev 3 & 7). The author may have had this in his mind, but he makes no clear reference to it in the passage, so I conclude that any such parallel is incidental rather than significant.

¹² For some typical short Amidah prayers see “*To pray as a Jew*”, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, Basic Books 1980.

¹³ “One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.” (Lu 11:1-2)

is a typical shortened Amidah except that He teaches them to address the prayer to “Our Father in heaven”. The Jews considered Abraham to be their father and would never address God with such a familiar term. It is clear that Jesus intended His disciples to enter a new intimacy with God¹⁴ and taught them not to consider Himself as an intermediary between them and God.¹⁵ However, this intimacy is not to be taken lightly, as Peter says:

“Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” (1Pet 1:17-19)

Intimacy with God and confidence in our free access does not remove the appropriateness of “reverent fear”. Reverent fear is compatible with free access and powerful love. Those who have had good fathers will find this easier to imagine than those whose fathers were intolerant, unjust or unstable. Perhaps a friend or carer or even a caring government official may provide some insight into relating to God with joyous confident freedom mixed with reverent fear and awe. We must not imagine that we can turn our back on God’s righteousness with a shrug of “Oh it doesn’t matter, God doesn’t care. He just

¹⁴ “I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.” (John 17:26)

¹⁵ “In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name... In that day you will ask in my name. I am not saying that I will ask the Father on your behalf. No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.” (John 16:23,26-27)

loves me no matter what I do.” Paul warns, “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.”¹⁶ God cares for us enough to make it matter what we do, since sin harms us. As the author goes on to say in chapter 12, God disciplines those He loves.

But let us not forget that God loves those he disciplines. He loves His children with an everlasting fervent love. Having preached a sermon on the amazing grace and love of God I was greeted by one of the congregation with the words, “Thank you so much. That was a really challenging sermon.” On asking him further about its impact on him, I discovered that what he meant was it was a really good/encouraging/on-the-mark sermon which lifted his spirit, but he had been brought up on a diet of challenges to improve his moral and spiritual discipline where a sermon was judged on how uncomfortable it left you feeling. The more a sermon challenged you to unattainable heights the higher it scored. His language for commenting on a “good” sermon was “that was really challenging”. But one has to wonder what the effect of all those challenging sermons was? Perhaps it was comparable to the experience of sweating in a sauna then rolling naked in the snow – neither activity holding much appeal to me, I must confess. I guess you come out feeling invigorated, but nothing changes on the inside.

The Gospel message is one of joyous fellowship with God our Holy heavenly Father because of the completed work of Christ on the cross. Let us have confidence to enter the most holy place.

¹⁶ Gal 6:7

...a new and living way...

Perhaps one of the hardest things for our human nature to adequately grasp is that in Christ we have a *living* way to God. All living things have the ability to both move and grow – even plants move their leaves to face the sun. This is true also of our relationship with God through Christ. It is not defined or governed by static rules and places, but by the Holy Spirit who, like the wind, has His powerful effect without being seen. Sometimes we encounter God in a barely discernable whisper in our hearts, sometimes God directs us through unassailable circumstances. Sometimes God speaks to us through the daily disciplines of reading and prayer. Sometime He answers prayers we have not even uttered and other times we obtain our request after years of patient faithful intercession. God has spoken to me many times with such clarity that it would be down right disobedient not to heed Him. One of the most remarkable times was whilst visiting a church God led me to open my Bible at a passage in Jeremiah and then told me I was to preach the sermon from it. The only problem was that I had not been invited to preach. My wife and I were simply visiting a friend. However, when the leader stood up to preach, he turned to the passage I had been led to and read it. He then said God had told him someone else was going to preach the sermon and promptly sat down. That was clearly my queue!

But usually I find God's voice barely discernible. Sometimes, over a period of time, I get a growing conviction that God is saying something to me and other times I am simply following the path that seems laid out before me. We recently felt God was saying we should move, but without knowing where to or for what purpose. Within days of starting to take this seriously everything seemed to fall into place in a truly remarkable way. Whilst visiting friends in northwest England my wife, who is an accountant in the National Health Service, discovered that the only suitable job vacancy in the country was at the same

hospital that our friend worked in. That made us wonder if God was moving us to be near these friends, so we looked to see where we could live. We fell in love with an old cottage owned by someone from their church. The following week the neighbouring cottage was put up for sale. We put our house on the market and the first people the estate agent sent to look at our house made us a near asking price offer. They had a buyer for their house who had already exchanged contracts on their sale. This seemed to strongly confirm God's leading in the move. However, things then seemed to go wrong on all fronts. My wife did not get the job, our buyers lost their buyer and the housing market crashed with news of the sub-prime mortgage crisis. Nevertheless we felt it right to continue our move in faith. My wife soon got a job at a better hospital and we moved into rented housing whilst waiting for our house to sell. During the course of the next six months we felt that the cottage we originally fell in love with was not the right place and eventually found an old farmhouse in a village much further away from our friends than we had previously considered. We viewed the farmhouse one evening and though in a poor state of repair, saw its potential and felt it was the right place. The following day I had a surprise call from someone I knew who offered to buy our cottage at a very good price. Our sale and purchase then went through without any difficulty. All along we kept praying that God would lead us to the place of His choosing for His Kingdom purposes. God seems to have led amazingly clearly through circumstances, yet at no time was I conscious of God speaking words in my spirit about the move.

We have a new and living way opened to us. God speaks, and as Jesus said, His sheep hear His voice and follow Him – but the voice does not always employ words. A number of times I have asked groups of Christians if they would prefer God to send them a note each day telling them what He wanted them to do, rather than whisper in His “still small voice.” The

unanimous reply has each time been a resounding, “Yes! That would make life so much simpler!” Most of us struggle to be sure of what God wants us to do.

Many years ago I began to feel God was leading me to build a wooden sailing boat. I thought this was ridiculous. I had grown up as a rather intense and seriously mission minded Christian since I was saved and filled with the Holy Spirit at the age of 13. The idea of building a sailing boat to enjoy holidays on was completely outside my scope of things God would ever want a disciple of Jesus to do. Yet over a period of months I became increasingly convinced God wanted me to do this. I wrestled with God over this many times until one day God asked my why He should not want one of His children to make a beautiful boat to enhance one of His beautiful sunsets on a beautiful summer evening. I had no answer and so set about building the boat, suffering the predictable jokes about Noah and did I know something they should know... During the course of making and sailing the boat we had many wonderful experiences of God’s care, protection and provision. One day, whilst working at home during the weekend, I needed a bit of stainless steel. I felt the Holy Spirit telling me to go to the boat yard and look in a particular scrap bin. I could not understand this, since I had knew this bin only had useless rubbish in it. But the Holy Spirit kept nagging me, so in the end, I drove to the boat yard, absolutely sure I was wasting my time. I turned the bin out and searched through the rubbish. As I already knew, there was not one bit of stainless steel in it. But what I did find was a piece off the boat engine that I did not know I had left on the bench. It had been swept away with the rubbish.

These kinds of experiences have taught me that God is involved in the detail of my life in a way I could never have imagined. Do I wish God would simply send an email each day with His instructions? I am beginning to realise that the new and living way opened for us is far more exciting.

Unpredictable certainly. At times frustrating. Sometimes I feel I have drifted miles from God and do not know where to look to find Him. But then He suddenly reveals His presence again in another wonderful way, communicating the unfathomable depths of His love and the unsearchable breadth His purposes.

I admire, and to some extent envy, those saints down the centuries who have lived in monasteries or in caves in the desert and devoted themselves to prayer. Indeed one of the most profound changes in me came about through reading a book about the Desert Fathers. I believe in the value of spiritual disciplines and only wish I were more diligent in observing them. But one thing I have discovered beyond doubt is that our relationship with God does not *consist* of such disciplines. They are a useful means, which should be practiced and employed to our benefit. But our relationship with God is a living thing that cannot be constrained. The model for our encounter with God is not the tabernacle of Moses, nor the sanctuary of a church. It is not a daily reading and a prayer list. It is the person of Jesus and the creation He has made. The model for our encounter with God is the smile on a child's face, the streaming tears of a bereaved mother, the power of a crashing sea, the majesty of a great mountain, the beauty of an orchid, the intricacy of a microscopic living cell and in the intimacy of making love. God speaks to us, to use the words of a proverb, through "the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a maiden." (Pr 30:19)

...let us draw near to God...

Since we have such a living relationship with God through Jesus, let us draw near to God. Let us not stand at a respectable distance. James says,

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.”
(James 4:7-8)

But how do we do this? In the context of Moses’ tabernacle it was done through the sacrifices and later, in David’s tabernacle, through prayer and worship. So, do we draw near to God simply by reading our bibles, praying and engaging in “worship”? What about during the every day activities of life?

Despite the stories I have related and the many other times when I have heard God with remarkable certainty, nearly all of these occasions have been uninvited and unexpected. God has spoken at times of His choosing rather than at the times of my asking whilst most of the time when I pray God seems a million miles away. I find this frustrating and sometimes quite discouraging. I never fall over when prayed for. I never shake or laugh under the power of the Holy Spirit or feel warm fuzzy feelings. When I speak in tongues I wonder if I am making it up and when I prophesy I wonder if it is just me. When I preach I wonder if I do it only for the feel-good factor and when I share pearls of wisdom I feel like a hypocrite. When I’m exhorted to put on the armour of God, I don’t know where to find it or how to fix it. When encouraged to drink deeply of the Spirit, the only drinking I seem to be capable of is wine or a good draught beer. I simply don’t know how to respond to my own longing to draw near to God and drink of the waters of life.

In the mid 90’s at the start of the “Toronto Blessing” I was praying about what was going on and said to the Lord, “If you want to bless me You can do it here. I don’t need to travel half way round the world so I can stand in some other place to be blessed.” But God said He wanted me to go (one of those rare clear strong impressions). I resisted this saying that if He wanted me to go, He would have to arrange it, because I was

not going to. A few days later a fellow pastor said he was going to Toronto and did I want to go with him. So I gave in and said I would go. Realising that this was clearly God's will, I was not going to give Him any excuses for not blessing me. I was the first through the door at the beginning of the meetings, and the last to leave in the early hours of the morning, having remained standing for hours on end, praying and being prayed for. This continued each day through the week. Eventually I decided that perhaps I was resisting being pushed over too much, so the next time someone prayed for me and rocked me too enthusiastically, instead of resisting their push I let myself fall over. But then I was just praying on my back instead of on my feet – which was something of a relief for my sore feet, but that was all. I flew home at the end of the week and the only thing that happened to me that I was conscious of was that I had my passport stolen.

To this day I do not know why God wanted me to go and still I do not know how one drinks of the Holy Spirit. Yet I cannot deny that I am filled with a sense of God's nearness and His love and that I only want to do His will and be in the centre of His purposes. The impact of some of the prophecies and words of encouragement I have falteringly given bear witness to God's work through me and He still seems to be leading my life in new directions. I have to conclude that my poor desires for God are themselves in some way a drawing near to God. I do what little I can to draw near to God – I read my bible and pray and attend church. I share fellowship with believers and get involved in the wider community as much as I can. But perhaps what has sustained me through many years of seeking to draw near to God has been the knowledge that that God is my loving Father and that Jesus, my faithful High Priest, is forever interceding for me. This has given me the assurance that one day I will receive the prize I have been running for –

to see Him face to face and enjoy unhindered fellowship with my Lord and Saviour forever.

...in full assurance of faith...

A repeated theme in this letter is the encouragement to maintain the full assurance of faith, not to fall short in our faith or shrink back from full confidence in Christ.

And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast... We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. (3:6,14)

For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith. (4:2)

We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure... imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. (6:11-12)

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. (6:19)

A better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. (7:19)

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith... Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (10:22-23)

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (10:35)

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see... And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (11:1,6)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.
(12:2)

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you.
Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
(13:7)

We are not being asked, in this letter, to have the faith to move mountains or walk on water, but simply to be assured of our forgiveness and God's full acceptance of us. This is easy to say but most Christians find it difficult to maintain their confidence in God's love. We are in a battle where Satan continually seeks to undermine our confidence in the work of Christ. That is why the author repeatedly tells us to consider Christ. The measure of God's love for us is not in our performance but in the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross.

Let us, therefore, have the full assurance of our faith in Christ's sufficient offering and His ongoing intercession for us.

...our hearts sprinkle...our bodies washed...

The sprinkling of our hearts is a reference to the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice on the high priest to purify him for entrance into the Most Holy place. The washing of our bodies refers to the ritual washing that the High Priest had to undergo.¹⁷ The author uses that imagery to describe the purifying effect of Christ's sacrifice. But for us, it is not our garments but our hearts and consciences that are purified. Sadly, we continue to sin, sometimes unwittingly, sometimes from weakness and sometimes in deliberate rebellion. But if we are Christians, trusting in the finished work of Christ on our

¹⁷ Some commentators say he is referring to Christian baptism. This is possible, but I feel the context points to ritual washings. In any case, Christian baptism is derived from those ritual washings.

behalf and born again by the indwelling Holy Spirit, then the guilt and punishment for our sin is already dealt with. His shed blood is eternally effective to cleanse us from a guilty conscience. We should deal with a guilty conscience by repentance and firm faith in Christ. We must not allow shame and guilt to linger in our hearts – that is not a sign of repentance or godly sorrow, but of fixing our eyes on ourselves rather than on Christ.

...let us consider...

I wonder what you consider when you attend your worship service or when your small group meets or when you have coffee with Christian friends? I might arrive hoping the PA won't be too loud and that the people doing the word projection will get the words up before the end of the songs and that the preacher will use the scriptures in his sermon. Or I might arrive hoping I will see a particular person so I can give them a message or ask a favour. Sometimes I might even have prepared my heart and be hoping to “meet with God” and perhaps I will be considering what contribution I might bring to encourage the saints. More likely, my mind will be irritatingly distracted by work. The author wants us to do something quite different and quite specific. His concern is not the worship, the preaching, or the socialising, but that we are stirred up to love and good deeds. His concern is how we live when we leave and he says we each have a part to play. It is not to be left to the worship leaders and preachers to stir us to godliness, but each of us should consider how we might spur one another on towards love and good deeds. Perhaps such an emphasis in our churches would help to steer us away from criticising the children's ministry or point scoring over doctrinal detail and help us to live renewed lives of faith, hope and love.

... spur one another on towards love....

There can be no doubt that love is important to God. When asked to sum up the Old Covenant law, Jesus said “Love God and love your neighbour¹⁸”, but when it came to giving His own commandments to His disciples He reduced it to just one command¹⁹, “Love one another”.²⁰ Yes, we must love God. There are curses for those who don’t²¹ and promises for those who do love God.²² Yet nowhere does the New Testament exhort Christians to love God. Rather, it talks of God pouring His love into our hearts – “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

The test of our love for God is firstly whether we love one another – “And he has given us this command: Whoever loves

¹⁸ Matt 22:37

¹⁹ In his letter John adds a second command, to believe in Christ. See 1 Jn 3:23,

²⁰ John 13:34

²¹ “If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him.” (1Co 16:22)

²² “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him” (Ro 8:28)

“... no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” (1Co 2:9)

“Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love.” (Eph 6:24)

“...when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” (Jas 1:12)

“Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?” (Jas 2:5)

God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:21) – and secondly whether we obey his commands – “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands” (1John 5:2-3). The Holy Spirit, inspiring the New Testament writers, teaches us that God measures our love for Him by our love for one another.²³ The writer to the Hebrews does not say, “let us consider how we may spur one another on toward loving God” but to “love and good deeds” meaning love for one another.

The one place where one might think we have an exhortation to love God is in the letter to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2. They are criticised for forsaking their first love. This is usually taken to mean their love for God, but I think this an unlikely meaning. They are exhorted to “repent and do the things you did at first.” John would not have written, “do the things you did at first” if he meant loving God in some sort of heart-felt emotional way. He meant them to do the things that they were so good at doing when the church was first established. Paul tells us what these were in his letter, where he commended them for “your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints” (Eph 1:15). The Ephesian *first love* was their exemplary love for one another, which this same John says (in 1 John, as we have seen above, which he wrote from Ephesus) was the way in which they show they love God.

When Jesus spoke about His disciples loving God He expressed it in terms of obedience:

²³ The OT prophets also preached this. See e.g. Isaiah 1:10-17 which is a study on how God is fed up with the works of worship where there is an absence of the works of brotherly love.

“If you love me, you will obey what I command...Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him... If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.” (Joh 14:15, 21,23)

Of course, those who try to obey God’s commands in a legalistic way, without their hearts being in it, Jesus condemns as hypocrites. Our obedience must spring from God’s love in our hearts. But the only biblical measure of that love is obedience. We do not have to examine our *hearts* to see if we love God. If we want to obey Him and walk in His ways then we have our answer. Our lives demonstrate our love. Love is born in our hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit and it results in the desire to trust and obey God. The command is to obey God, not to *feel* love for Him.

...and good deeds

Good works have had a bad press with evangelicals for far too long, but thankfully that is now changing and evangelicals are finding ways of engaging with the wider community to alleviate poverty and suffering and enhance communities.

Good works play a very significant role in New Testament doctrine. It teaches with unmistakable clarity that all believers in Christ will give an account of their lives to God (Rom 14:10-12). He will judge us according to our works, both good and bad (2 Cor 5:10). The result of this will be the gain or loss of eternal rewards (1 Cor 3:12-15; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Rom 14:10-12). Though we are saved by faith, without works, God has prepared works for the saints to do (Eph 2:8-10).

Good works matter.²⁴ Of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation, five start with the phrase, “I know your works”.²⁵ Indeed, in Revelation 19:7-8 we are told, “the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)” Without good works, believers will be left naked! So let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

... not give up meeting together...

The author does not give any reason why some neglected to meet together but it is a common enough phenomenon. Contrary to widespread opinion, Christianity is not a private affair, but a community affair. The New Testament does address individual piety but it is largely concerned with corporate faith and fellowship. To become a Christian is to become part of God’s people. The Body of Christ is the church, not individuals. Whatever the many imperfections and shortcomings of the church may be, Christ is committed to it and so should we be. If Christ is content to bless churches with “incorrect” doctrine or “unappealing” practices then who are we to withhold our blessing and fellowship? No doubt there are wheat and tares, but Jesus said to let them grow together and leave it to the angels on judgement day to separate the good from the bad. The command we live under is to love and to forgive one another as Christ loves and forgives us. Let us not give up meeting together.

²⁴ I strongly recommend Randy Alcorn’s book *Money Possessions and Eternity* as a biblical and challenging exploration of some of the issues arising from this fact.

²⁵ In the Greek *Received Text* followed by the AV and NKJV, all seven letters start with this phrase.

...encourage one another...

Examples of encouragement and exhortations to encourage one another are found throughout the New Testament. God is the great encourager and He wants that quality to be reflected in the church. Educationalists have discovered that encouragement works far better than stern discipline.

Encouragement arises when you believe that great potential exists. I hated history at school and never did any work. The teachers were boring and I did homework for other subjects during the history lessons. I was bottom of the class and never got any marks at all in the tests. Napoleon could have been a king of England for all I knew or cared. Then one year, the head of History took my class. During the very first lesson he walked up to me and simply said, "You could be top of the class if you wanted to be." No one had ever said anything like that to me before. I was always an "also ran", the last person to be picked for any kind of team. All my school reports said, "He could do better." That teacher encouraged me and gave me hope and for the duration of that one year I was top of the class in history. Sadly, it was not an exam year, and I got "Unclassified" for my O-level exam.

Despite this personal experience I am not a natural encourager. My natural state is to set high standards and be critical when they are not met. I so admire those who are good at encouragement and I really struggle to emulate them. I remember one day I was doing some building work at home and my son was helping the plasterer mix the cement render in a cement mixer. He was working hard and doing his best, but he had the mixer in the wrong place and it made filling it awkward. I came out to see how he was getting on and said, "Look how difficult it is for you with the mixer there. Why don't you move it so you can shovel the sand in easily? You need to think about what you are doing..." Paul, my plasterer, who was collecting a barrow load of mortar at that moment

said, “Leave off. We’re doing all right aren’t we Jonathan? You and me are doing the plastering aren’t we?”

I was so impressed with Paul’s response of encouragement, but it left me with a conundrum. I was correct. The mixer was in the wrong place, and people should think about what they are doing so that they can do a good job. But Jonathan was much happier with Paul’s encouragement than with my criticism. I wish I had thought to encourage him and then help him to get the mixer in a better position.

I see the same issues played out in church life time and again. Of course, when I see other people being critical instead of encouraging I recognise it immediately and a way of encouragement immediately springs to mind, but I so often fail to check my own impulses to criticise. It is easier when preaching because I can give more thought to what I say and I do a routine check for encouragement. Criticism and strong challenge have their place, but let us practice encouraging one another so that our eyes are focused on the blessing we already have and the potential ahead rather than the failures of the past.

...the Day approaching.

What “Day” the author had in mind is not clear. The Greek is not capitalised as in some translations. Some have suggested it was the Roman sacking of Jerusalem that Jesus warned of and which was very shortly to take place, but most commentators agree that he means the return of Christ or judgement day. In any case, the point is that when difficult days arise the church must be all the more diligent in meeting together and encouraging one another. The difficulty may be a personal one, such as marriage or family difficulties, unemployment, redundancy, debt, a miscarried pregnancy, bereavement, illness or whatever. Or there may be church difficulties such as loss of a minister, discovery of unrighteousness in the leadership,

disagreements between factions within the church, financial troubles etc. Or difficulties may arise in the wider community due to flooding or crime or social strife. Whatever the difficulty, we should resist the common tendency to withdraw and instead draw together to find strength and encouragement from the Body of Christ.

One day I noticed a member of our congregation hovering around outside. I went out to her to see why she had not come in. She told me she had just discovered she was pregnant from sleeping with an ex-boyfriend recently. She felt ashamed and unable to join us in worship. I embraced her, told her how much we all loved her and said that the place she most needed to be was with the rest of the church worshipping God for His unending love and forgiveness. She came in and never turned back. That was her Day.

We all have a Day approaching. Everyday we are a day closer to meeting Christ face to face. Every day that is past is invested for eternity and cannot be cashed in or re-lived for a better attempt. Let us encourage one another every day to believe God, believe the best of one another and to fulfil our potential in God's Kingdom.

Heb 10:26-31

⁽²⁶⁾ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ⁽²⁷⁾ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ⁽²⁸⁾ Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ⁽²⁹⁾ How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of

grace? ⁽³⁰⁾ For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” ⁽³¹⁾ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The argument

This section contains a most serious warning. The argument seems clear enough and can be paraphrased:

If we deliberately sin after becoming a Christian, our sin cannot be forgiven since by deliberately sinning we pour scorn on the cross and will face destruction at God’s hands.

Because this warning seems so clear and so harsh, Christians in the early centuries often delayed their baptism until their death bed thinking that once they were baptised no more of their sins would be forgiven.

There is clearly a serious problem with this interpretation. Most modern translations seek to alleviate this by changing the simple Greek word “sin” to “keep on sinning”. That changes the warning, applying it only to those who sin repeatedly. But that really is not much help. Many backslidden Christians have “deliberately kept on sinning” and then returned to fruitful and obedient faith. Jesus Himself taught His disciples to forgive a brother who repeatedly sinned against them seventy times seven times.

To understand the author’s meaning we need to look at this warning much more carefully, keeping the warning in the context of the passage and the whole letter.

The context

The immediate context is a comparison of the consequences for a Christian who deliberately sins with that of such a person

under the Law.²⁶ The author touched on this situation in 9:7. Those who sinned in a high-handed way, deliberately flouting the Law without repentance were to be cut off from God's people; there was no provision of a sacrifice.²⁷ To be *cut off* actually meant to be put to death as Ex 31:14 shows.²⁸

The NKJV follows the Greek more closely here than the NIV and translates the phrase, "For if we sin wilfully..." which characterises the sin as *wilful* rather than *repeated*. It is the *wilfulness* of the sin that makes it unforgivable. The sin, the guilt and the punishment are each compared with the situation under the Law of Moses. Each is considered worse for a Christian who sins wilfully.

Now we must consider the wider context. Unfortunately, the NIV leaves out the connecting word "For" with which this warning starts in the Greek. The author is not starting a new thought, but concluding the argument he has been laying out since chapter six. In fact, there is a striking parallel between this warning and that in chapter six. Both establish the genuine experience of the believers, both describe the sin in terms of treating the cross with contempt, both assert the impossibility of renewal and both speak of coming under God's judgement.

Because the NIV is rather free with leaving out connecting words and breaking up long sentences the movement of the

²⁶ There are striking similarities with the Septuagint of Numbers 15.

²⁷ "But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the Lord's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him" (Nu 15:30-31).

²⁸ "Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people." (Ex 31:14)

author's argument through these chapters may be missed. The NKJV is particularly good at retaining these connecting words²⁹ so using that translation let us trace the connections:

Let us move on to maturity if God permits (6:3), since those believers who fall away cannot progress if God curses them (6:8). But we are confident you will progress because God has sworn His promise to Abraham and Jesus is ministering as our High Priest to help us inherit his blessings (6:19-20), for this Melchizedek (7:1) ... was greater than Abraham (7:4). Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek? (7:11). Therefore He is able to save to the uttermost ... since He ever lives to make intercession for them (7:25). Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (8:1). For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second (8:7). Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary (Heb 9:1). But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation (9:11). And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death ... that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (9:15). For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect (10:1). But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God (10:12). For by one offering He has

²⁹ The NASB is quite good in this regard, but uses the word "Now" instead of the NKJV "Therefore". The connection is implied, but not quite as explicit.

perfected forever those who are being sanctified (10:14). Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith... Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering... And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works... For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins (10:19-26). It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (10:31). Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward (10:35). But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul (10:39). Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (11:1).

I hope you can see how the author is moving from his warnings in the early chapters through his discussion of the new High Priestly role of Christ directly to this warning in chapter ten. The point of chapters seven to ten is to restate his warning with even greater force. Mid way, at chapter eight, he states his purpose: "Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens." His warning is based on this point. Since we have such a great High Priest and there is no other provision for sin apart from Him, if we turn our backs on Him we are without hope. He then urges them, yet again, not to fail in their confidence in Christ and restates his confidence that they will indeed press forward. He then returns to the theme of faith, which he began to explore in chapter four.

I think we can see that the concerns expressed by the author in chapters two to six have never been far from his thoughts but rather, he has been working towards restating his concerns on a new foundation. His first warnings were based on the lessons to be learnt from Israel's distant past. But now he has

established those same warnings on the basis of the High Priestly ministry of Christ.

Put briefly, the earlier warnings were along the lines of, “Learn the lessons of history: If you do not push forward in faith on God’s promises you may lose the opportunity and find God has sworn an oath preventing you gaining your full inheritance.”

The warning of chapter 10 is along the lines of, “Now consider what Christ has achieved for you. If you throw away your confidence in Him, you have no other hope. You will face God’s wrath for unbelief.”

This then is the context of the present warning. Let us now look at the warning in more detail.

Sin and Judgement v26-27

For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (Heb 10:26-27 edited³⁰ NIV)

As noted above, the NIV, like many translations, changes the Greek “sin” to “keep on sinning” which I think is unhelpful. I have therefore reversed this change because the author has taken great pains to emphasise that Christ’s sacrifice is fully sufficient for all our sin. It is not deficient in any way, as the old system was, which could only deal with the penalty of past unintentional sin (7:27, 9:7, 10:11). But Christ “is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (7:25). Jesus’ death obtained for us “eternal redemption” (9:12) for “now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin

³⁰ In addition to the change noted in the following paragraph, I have added the connecting word “For” at the beginning, reflecting the Greek.

by the sacrifice of himself” (9:26). Therefore, “we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (10:10), “because by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy” (10:14).

In the light of this it is unthinkable that the author should now reverse his teaching by saying that sins committed after coming to faith cannot be forgiven – for that is the plain meaning of verses 26-27 taken on their own. It is clear that the author means something else. Neither does it help to suggest, as most translators do, that it is *repeated* deliberate sin that cannot be forgiven. Was the prodigal not deliberate in his repeated rebellion against his father, yet he was forgiven and received back as a son? Even under the Old Covenant, God promised to forgive repeated rebellion in any person who repented.³¹ The New Covenant and Christ’s sacrifice are better than the old. It will not do to suggest the author means that because the sin is repeated it cannot be forgiven.

We must read vv26-27 carefully. The author does not say that such a person will lose their salvation, but he does say that such a person cannot avoid judgement. This is the point. There is no sacrifice that can avert the judgement of God from a Christian who wilfully sins. This should not surprise us. A person who wilfully commits adultery can hardly expect God to avert His temporal and eternal judgement on their sin. Ananias and Sapphira wilfully sinned, received God’s

³¹ “But if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die. None of the offences he has committed will be remembered against him. Because of the righteous things he has done, he will live. Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” (Eze 18:21-23)

judgement and were literally slain by the Holy Spirit.³² Some in the church at Corinth treated the breaking of bread with contempt and were likewise judged and killed by God.³³ The New Testament does not suggest that any of these Christians who died under God's judgement lost their salvation. But certainly, they faced the fire of God's judgement. Paul warned the Corinthians, "If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world" (1Co 11:31-32). This is precisely the point being made by the writer to the Hebrews. Christ's one sacrifice has delivered us forever from judgement leading to damnation, but wilful sin remains subject to God's judgement.

We should not jump to the conclusion that because the author mentions fire he means damnation. In the OT, God's fire of judgement was experienced directly on at least two occasions during Moses time. Two of Aaron's sons were consumed by God's fire when they offered unholy fire at the altar,³⁴ and 250 men were consumed by God's fire in the rebellion of Korah.³⁵ In the OT and in particular in Isaiah, fire is used as a metaphor for the *experience* of God's judgement, not for damnation.³⁶ The author seems to have Isa 26 in mind here. This is a song about the eschatological blessing of God toward the Jews. It celebrates a future time of peace and righteousness in Jerusalem, but notes that some Jews will not recognise God's grace but turn to wickedness. About such people, the prophet

³² Acts 5:1-10

³³ 1Cor 11:19-32

³⁴ Lev 10:1-3

³⁵ Num 16:35

³⁶ See Isa 4:4, 9:19, 10:17, 26:9,11, 30:30, 33:14, 66:15-16

says (in v11), “O Lord, your hand is lifted high, but they do not see it. Let them see your zeal for your people and be put to shame; let the fire reserved for your enemies consume them.” The thoughts of Hebrews 10 and Isaiah 26 have strong parallels, highlighted by the author’s virtual quote of Isa 26:11b. His Jewish readers, who had been brought up on the Messianic expectation presented by Isaiah, would not have missed the reference. We can be confident this is a warning to Christians that if they sin wilfully it will not simply be forgiven and forgotten but they will face God’s judgement.

This should not come as a surprise to us. The New Testament writers state clearly that, though Christians have been delivered from the judgement of hell,³⁷ they still face judgement for how they have lived their lives.³⁸ For some it will involve shrinking back in shame,³⁹ but for those who continue steadfastly in faith there will be no reproach.⁴⁰

Punishment for rejection v28-29

Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more

³⁷ E.g. Jn 5:24 “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

³⁸ E.g. 2Cor 5:10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

³⁹ “And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.” (1Jo 2:28)

⁴⁰ “But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.” (Col 1:22-23)

severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:28-29)

Here, the author describes the person to whom his warning is addressed. Although the blood of Christ has sanctified him, he has since “trampled the Son of God under foot”, treated His death as unholy and “insulted the Spirit of grace”. In the light of the exhortations that precede and follow this warning, we can surmise that this person has not held fast the confession of his hope (v23) but has cast off his confidence in Christ (v35). He is an unbelieving Christian, who has drifted from the gospel he had been taught (2:1), neglected his salvation (2:3) and his heart has been hardened by sin (3:13). He has fallen short of the promise (4:1) and though he was once enlightened (6:4) he is now crucifying Christ again (6:6) and in danger of being cursed (6:8). This person has drifted away from the church (10:25) and no longer believes that Jesus’ death was sufficient for him (10:29). He has lost his confidence in Christ (10:35) and descended in a spiral of hopelessness and sin (10:39).

Sadly such things happen. No doubt we have all seen this happen to people we know. Sometimes when great difficulties arise in a person’s life they let go of their confidence in God, stop meeting with their fellow believers, lose heart and gradually drift away into unbelief and sin. The author is writing this letter to warn against this danger and to strengthen the foundations of faith and fellowship to guard against it happening. But in the end, a person who wilfully throws off their confidence in Christ will face judgement. In verses 28-29 the author argues that such a person *deserves* to be severely punished for such disdain for the death of Christ but he stops short of saying that such a person will lose their salvation. On the contrary, the next two verses reaffirm that such a person still belongs to God.

...insulted the Spirit of grace.

If we lose confidence in the work of Christ and the grace of God then we have nothing left to hope for. To sin in wilful defiance of Christ, or a return to religious rites or good works in an effort to save ourselves, is an insult to the work of Christ and the Spirit of grace. It is a rejection of God's word and His provision and invites severe punishment.

The Lord will judge His people vv30-31

For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:30-31)

The consequence for the kind of unbelieving Christian the author has in mind is that he "falls into the hands of the living God." God will judge *His* people. Will God judge that such a person, who was sanctified by the blood of Christ, should be stripped of his salvation and counted amongst the lost? Surely this flies in the face of the arguments the author has laid out. Such a one may be judged to have no inheritance accompanying his salvation, but he will be saved as through fire (1 Cor 3:15).

Putting it together

Having looked at both the context and the detail we can make the following points:

1. We reject the simple reading of this warning (that sins after conversion cannot be forgiven) since it flies against the teaching of the rest of the letter and the rest of the New Testament.
2. On the same grounds, we reject the translators' amendment (suggesting that deliberately repeated sin cannot be forgiven).

3. The context convinces us the author is addressing his warning to truly saved believers who sin in wilful and unrepentant defiance of Christ.
4. The warning is of serious and consuming judgement on Judgement Day, but it does not threaten loss of salvation – note the contrast with reward in v35.
5. The warning of chapter six leads into the exposition of the intervening chapters and concludes with this warning with which it has strong parallels.
6. Confidence and faith in Christ's work is central to the author's concern. We cast the guilt and punishment for our sins upon Christ through our faith in His sufficient sacrifice. It is by grace we are saved *through faith*.

My understanding of this warning (which continues to the end of the chapter) is that it parallels those of the earlier chapters of Hebrews and the prophecy of Isaiah 26. Christ has obtained a great salvation for us. But that does not mean we can live our lives carelessly. God has called us to walk with Him, and one another, in faith and confidence. If we deliberately defy Christ, sinning wilfully, we will face judgement. We will suffer shame and eternal loss when Christ judges believers on Judgement Day.

Let us now consider to whom the warning might apply in practice. I do not sin deliberately, in the sense of deliberately seeking to turn against God and pursue a path that I know to be contrary to His will. I sometimes make a deliberate choice to sin in small ways because of weakness of character, but I regret it and wish I were more Christlike. My basic orientation is towards obedience to God. However, I have Christian friends who have lost their confidence in Christ. They have rejected God's love and Christ's forgiveness. They sin wilfully and without repentance. They do not expect and do not want God's forgiveness. They feel God has abandoned them and have no wish to honour Him in any way. This warning applies to such people.

Other interpretations

The author is addressing non-Christian Jews

Many commentators suggest the author is addressing non-Christian Jews in this warning, saying that if they reject Christ having heard the gospel there is no effective sacrifice left. Moses sacrifices are no longer valid. The sanctification spoken of in v29 is potential, not actual.

This interpretation does not fit the context. This warning is introduced with the words “For if we sin...”. The author has been addressing Christian believers up to this point in the chapter, appealing for them to be faithful in meeting together. Also, as we have seen, the warning mirrors that in chapter 6 which is also clearly addressed to Christian believers and not unbelieving Jews.

The author is addressing Christian Jews who are continuing with Mosaic sacrifices

Bob Luginbill⁴¹ says the “purpose in writing this book is to pull Jewish believers away from continuing in the temple ritual now that that ritual had been fulfilled in the incarnation, life, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. For to continue with an elaborate system of rituals which spoke of the coming Savior and His future death on the cross was to say, in effect, that Jesus was not the Messiah and His death not valid. Continuation in the foreshadowing ritual after the real Christ had come and suffered in the flesh for real was tantamount to denying and disowning Him, and would eventually destroy the faith of those who persisted in the practice.” He goes on to say that the book

⁴¹ Associate Professor of Classics, University of Louisville. Article posted at www.ichthys.com

“explodes virtually every aspect of the argument for Jewish believers to continue in the traditional manner of worship.”

He takes v26 to mean, “by continuing in the Jewish temple ritual, these Jewish believers were committing sin, and serious sin at that. Because every time they participated in an animal sacrifice, they were saying, in effect, that Jesus died in vain. This really is "trampling" Him under foot; this really is regarding His blood, that is, His death on the cross, as "unclean", this really is "violently insulting" the Spirit who testifies to Him and to the validity of His work.”

This is an interesting interpretation of both the book as a whole and this passage in particular, but there is no direct warning anywhere in the book about the sin of continuing with Jewish temple ritual. If this were indeed the purpose of the book, and the consequences of continuing as dire as this warning suggests, then surely the issue would have been stated plainly. The author does not direct his argument *against* the temple ritual but *towards* the supremacy of Christ. The temple ritual is described as “obsolete; and what is obsolete and ageing will soon disappear” (Heb 8:13). This is hardly the language to warn that any continuation of the ritual will be met with “raging fire that will consume the enemies of God”.

The author is addressing not-quite Christians

There are a variety of interpretations by commentators who believe the warning states the impossibility of salvation for such a person. They suggest the author is addressing people who have heard the gospel and expressed faith in Christ, but who never really take it to heart and are not truly saved.⁴² They

⁴² See for example the commentaries of F. F. Bruce, P. E. Hughes, MacArthur, L. Morris, R.C. Stedman.

are the *tares*⁴³ in Gods harvest. They get drawn away by worldly things and eventually deny Christ. We met this argument in our consideration of chapter 6 and the same objections apply. The context does not even hint at the possibility of the reader's incomplete salvation. The following paragraphs exhort them to continue in their faith, not to get properly saved. Furthermore, the phrase "received the knowledge of the truth" is always used to refer to true Christians.⁴⁴

Any interpretation, which understands that a person who has become subject to this warning can never afterwards be saved, must, presumably, say that such a person has committed an unforgivable sin. The only unforgivable sin, according to Jesus, is to blaspheme the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Is that the meaning, in v29, of "insulted the Spirit of grace"? The sin, in this warning, is not directed against the Holy Spirit but is deliberate sin, which has an *incidental* consequence of insulting the Holy Spirit. I do not think one can reasonably claim this warning is directed against the unforgivable sin of blaspheming the Holy Spirit. In which case, neither can the warning be taken to pronounce the sin as unforgivable nor the consequences to mean the impossibility of salvation. The following interpretations seek to avoid this problem.

⁴³ Matt 13:24ff

⁴⁴ 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; and Titus 1:1

⁴⁵ "And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven." (Mt 12:31)

No sacrifice remains because Christ's sacrifice is sufficient

Dr. Lindstrom⁴⁶ sees v26 as an assurance that even those who wilfully sin are saved by Christ's one sacrifice. He claims the author's meaning is "even if we sin wilfully as Christians, we are still saved. There is 'no more sacrifice' or no additional sacrifice available or necessary than the one-time sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary." This novel approach ignores the following verse, which threatens the "fearful expectation of judgment". One can hardly interpret v26 as an *assurance* of the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice when it is followed by such dire warnings.

The punishment is not eternal damnation

Bob Wilkin⁴⁷ argues "eternal condemnation is not being threatened" in the warning. He argues that "There is no reference here to 'the lake of fire,' 'Gehenna,' 'hell,' 'unquenchable fire,' 'eternal torment,' or any terms commonly associated with eternal condemnation." He says that "fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries" refers to God's zeal in judging those who oppose Him (which can certainly include believers), pointing out that fire is a common biblical metaphor for temporal judgment. He believes this warning concerns temporal, not eternal judgement, pointing out that the judgement under Moses (v28) was also temporal. The author imagines the judgement experienced by a deliberately sinning believer to be worse than the death penalty under Moses. Wilkin suggests that there are many judgements we can experience in life which are worse than death and that such is

⁴⁶ Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, article on Hebrews 10:26 posted at www.biblelineministries.org

⁴⁷ "A Punishment Worse Than Death", www.faithalone.org

the author's meaning. Tanner⁴⁸ follows the same argument except that he sees the judgement as being eternal at Christ's judgement of believers.

I agree that the warning does not specify eternal damnation but follow Tanner, believing the author intended us to understand the warning as referring to the Judgement seat of Christ. The reason the punishment is worse than death is precisely because it goes beyond death.

Heb 10:32-39

(32) Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. (33) Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. (34) You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. (35) So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. (36) You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. (37) For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. (38) But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." (39) But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

⁴⁸ Essay entitled *"For whom does Hebrews 10:26-31 teach a "punishment worse than death"?* J. Tanner, Research Professor, BEE World, Tyler, Texas

The argument

The closing argument of this chapter has parallels with the argument of chapter three. Both chapters remind the readers of the past and urge them to stand firm in faith. In chapter three the lessons were negative and involved Israel's disobedience whereas here the lesson is positive and involves their own previous faith and courage. Both contain warnings about the consequence of unbelief and exhortations to faith.

In summary, the argument is "Remember the eternal hope that sustained you in the face of suffering during the early days of your walk with Christ. Do not throw away that confidence for it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere in your faith and confidence so that in the end you will receive all that God has promised for you. Those who cast off their confidence suffer loss but those who go on in faith are saved."

Remember those earlier days...

It is clear from this passage that the believers had suffered persecution in the early days of their faith, but there is no suggestion that they now face persecution. It seems much more likely that they were in a time of relative ease and in the absence of the stimulus that persecution gives, some believers were drifting in their faith even to the point of open rebellion.

...better and lasting possessions.

In the face of persecution and the confiscation of their property, these believers had confidence in the promise of an eternal inheritance. They had remembered Jesus encouragement that "everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29).

...your confidence will be richly rewarded.

It is important for us to note that our confidence in God and His promises is rewarded and that conversely loss of confidence has serious consequences (in v39 the author says those who shrink back are destroyed!). We must not confuse this reward or loss with the gaining or losing of salvation. Salvation is not a reward for confidence; it is not given or taken away depending on our daily mood. The author has made it clear that those who are being sanctified have been made perfect forever by Christ (10:14). The reward and destruction the author speaks of concern our inheritance - the experience of the promises of blessing God gave to Abraham. We can enjoy this inheritance both now in this life and eternally in the life to come. This warning, to build on the foundations of faith with confidence in Christ so we may be rewarded rather than suffer loss and destruction, follows very closely Paul's exhortation in 1 Cor 3.

...those who shrink back and are destroyed.

In view of the security that Christians are assured of in Christ, it would be wrong to understand the threat of destruction as meaning loss of salvation. The author has just quoted from Habakkuk and is no doubt thinking of God's punishment for disobedience on Israel. In the desert the punishment was to die in the desert and never enter the Promised Land and for the Jews of Habakkuk's day it was banishment to die in exile. In both cases a generation of rebellious people were "destroyed". They actually died in the normal way but were banished from the inheritance. God had effectively finished with that generation and was waiting for a new generation who would believe and trust Him. But at no time did those rebellious people become unsaved. God remained with them, watching over and protecting them. In the same way, those Christians who shrink back may end up having their prospects of

inheritance destroyed, but they face this judgement as Christians. Salvation is not taken from them.

A look at the surprises

We have dealt with all the surprises along the way.

Conclusion

The author's primary concern in writing this letter is his readers continued steadfast faith in the sufficiency of Christ and the promises of God. This chapter concludes the proof of Jesus' superiority to the Old Covenant provisions upon which their confidence is based and restates the warnings and exhortations of the early chapters.

Questions for discussion and application in Hebrews 10

- V1-4 Do you tend to focus on your failure and shortcomings or on Christ's achievement for you?
Is there something you can do to help you rejoice more in what Christ has done for you and focus less on what you lack?
- V5-10 Is there anything you feel you need to do to please God?
What do you think God really wants of you?
- V11-18 What enemies are at work in your community that God wants banished?
What ways can you get involved in transforming your community?
Do you recognise the desire to obey God in your heart?

Are you confident that God has forgotten your sins?

V19-25 Do you regularly draw near to God in prayer,
confident of your welcome?

Do you enjoy a sense of cleanness before God because
of the work of Christ?

Are you confident in God's promises, particularly of
His favour towards you?

How can you stir up your fellow believers to love and
good deed?

Do you meet with a local church regularly for
worship, fellowship and prayer?

How can you strengthen friendships with Christians
from other churches in your locality?

V26-31 Do you have backslidden friends whom you could try
to encourage?

What scriptures give hope for the return of a
backslider?

Do you know any Christian you feel is in danger of
deliberately turning their back on God?

How could you help them to recover their
confidence in God?

V32-39 Has your passion for the Kingdom of God
diminished?

Have worldly possessions and values become more
important to you?

How can you grow in your confidence in God?

Is there a verse you could memorise from this chapter that
would encourage you?