

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

Hebrews 10:32–39 — *"But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."*

Here we see a look back, just like in chapter 6 where the apostle says *"But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation though we thus speak"* (Hebrews 6:9). The "warnings" come even to those that are assumed to be in the faith. That is always a good practice. Many may be thought to be in the faith, and even think themselves to be, but might not be.

Again, just looking back, from verse 18 and verse 26, we see no more offering for sin is **needed** (vs. 18), and no more sacrifice for sin **available** (vs. 26). It is Christ or judgment, and a neglect to come to Christ is not a neutral stance. Not coming to Jesus Christ as your only Savior is devaluing His blood shed for you and we want to remind all that *"it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (vs. 21).

But as we come to verse 32, we see a turn to say something to the effect of "you have come this far, keep going".

In the history in the scriptures, in the Acts, we see a persecution of the apostles, and of all the Christians (though not yet called that until Antioch, Acts 11:26), which came to a real head in chapter 7 when Stephen, speaking to the council of the Sanhedrin with the high priest (not to a mob of "lewd fellows of the baser sort") ended up being stoned, as they were cut to the heart by what he said. Remember from Hebrews 4:12 in our past lessons that when we see the word of God being quick and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword. It always cuts. When some are cut to the heart, they say "what shall we do" (Acts 2:37), while others take counsel to slay the speakers of the word (Acts 5:33, 7:54).

After this further act of rebellion saying "we will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14), there was great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem and the Christians were scattered throughout all Judea and Samaria. In chapter 11 we see that those that were scattered went as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch. It is notable too, that in Acts 9:31, after Saul (later known by his Roman name Paul) was saved, preached in Damascus and later Jerusalem, and had to leave Jerusalem, that the churches in Jerusalem had rest after this.

All this to say that this is probably the "great fight of afflictions" that we read about in verse 32. There is also likely more, as Paul told the Thessalonians that the churches of God in Judaea suffered from the Jews the same things that the Thessalonians were suffering from their countrymen. There is an affinity between all those that suffer for Christ, even if they are unknown to each other.

And here again we have in verse 34 a reference that seems to indicate that the writer, who I believe to be Paul, was known to the audience that he was writing to. "For ye had compassion of me in my bonds" indicates there was something that happened which touched the writer's heart about his past experience with his audience, and that he didn't want them to lose that compassion and confidence. He also does not want them to have this all for nought, if they are to stop short of faith. Remember that almost faith does not enter into salvation. King Agrippa in Acts 26:28 said to Paul while he was on trial "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian", where Paul replied "I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds" (Acts 26:29).

As this was not done in secret but probably well known, these could very well be the bonds that he was talking about. Perhaps not, but the next verse, 10:35, implores the recipients to "cast not away therefore your confidence", as an indicator to not stop believing, and also to those who would stop short or to draw back from truly entering into that grace through faith salvation relationship with the Lord Jesus. The reward that Christ will give, will be only given to the saved, not to those that stop short of salvation. He is not saved that is almost persuaded, but he is saved that is fully persuaded.

Verse 36 speaks of a need of patience. We can also think of this as endurance, and to keep going. Again, this is speaking of the imperative to come to full faith, and to continue to walk in faith. There is reward for the faithful, and those who walk faithfully will receive the promised reward.

A continuance in faith is always urged in all of Paul's epistles, and this one is no different. The question is often, "if one loses faith, is he still saved?"

That question and the answers that many have are not addressed in the scriptures in the terms that people use. It is better to speak as the scriptures speak. You will not see in the Bible anywhere that a Christian can stop believing and still be saved. There is also nowhere that says that a Christian *can* stop believing.

In 2 Timothy 2:11-13, we have a "faithful saying" that Paul reminds Timothy of with this:

"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."

There are a lot of "ifs" there. When we get to the third "if", we come to a place that makes us have to deal with what the text tells us. I have no doubt that once one is saved, he cannot become unsaved. The main reason is that my salvation does not belong to me. I am saved because Christ saved me and it is also his to sanctify me and to keep me. Romans chapter 8:28-39 are so powerful in that regard, as is Ephesians 1 and 2 and 1 Peter 1:4 — "kept by the power of God".

But what about this "if we deny Him, He will also deny us"?

We have to take it seriously. We do get worried about if we will deny Him, because we know what is in us. But I would urge you to not deny. We can take courage, but we don't need to be hung over hell with weak rope to get it. In verse 12, Paul first says "if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him". The next part saying "if we deny Him" is in the context of denying suffering for Him. What will He deny us? He will deny us the privilege of suffering for Him.

In Philippians 1:29, The apostle tells the saints *“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake.”* This is speaking of the privilege to suffer for Him. It is His grace that we enter into His sufferings, and we should count it all joy because it is joy. It is rough, and not joyous at the time, but suffering for our Lord is joy, knowing how He suffered for us. The consistent witness of Scripture is that the Christian will suffer for Christ, and that He allows it for our good. But here, if we deny suffering for Him, He will deny us the privilege and the blessing of it.

It next says “if we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself”. That is the closest thing that says a Christian can stop believing, but we also see that it is Christ’s faithfulness that holds the line. It says here “if we believe not”, then contrasts that with His faith, we can see that He is not depending on us to complete His word. He will be faithful, if we are or not.

But this also does not indicate a complete denial of faith in Him to the point of entirely turning our backs on the faith. This is where we have to realize that the Christian once saved is “born again” or regenerated, and is become a new creature. There is a supernatural work of God done in us, which we see in the first half of Romans 8, where we see in verse 16, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.” This is not a small thing that we can undo. He keeps us. We are kept by the power of God, and no Christian can actually undo the work of God.

Do we see some “fall away”? Yes we do, but that is where we would have to ask, “was that person ever saved?” He may have said the right things, looked the part, acted the part, and even did the right things. But was he saved? Was he actually saved. I know some seem to think that they are, but I also really think that they were saved with the wrong gospel. They may have come into a gospel of nice company, or a gospel of personal or social change, or a gospel of prosperity, or something else. But were they saved by the gospel of Christ as grace to the undeserving sinner who Christ died for and is raised again from the dead? It is faith in His blood that is salvation, and that turns on God’s grace that never turns off because it is not of us, but of Him.

Now as we get back to Hebrews, we talk of this need of patience. We often need to endure the suffering and the difficulties as we do God’s will and walk in His will. So let’s have patience. *“They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up on wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint”* (Isaiah 40:31). Again, I realize that there are aspects of this that will become especially true in the time spoken of in Revelation 12:14³⁹, but it is the very same God whose greatness is the power that holds our salvation.

Now we get to the promise of why to remain faithful. What is the hope:

“For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.”

That Christ will come should not be in doubt. How long we must wait is not told us, but He will come. It is only the scoffer who looks on that promise as though it will not come, and unfortunately, there are some Christian scoffers. Don’t be one of them. He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

In Hebrews 10:37-38, we have a quote somewhat paraphrasing Habakkuk 2:2-4:

³⁹ *“And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.”*

"And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith."

How does one wait upon the Lord? By faith, knowing that the Lord is faithful.

In verse 38, we have a quotation, or at least saying the same words as the above verses in Habakkuk. These are used two other times in the New Testament, and both by Paul. One in Romans 1:17, and one in Galatians 3:11. Both speak of how the righteousness of God is received. The righteousness of God is received "by faith of Jesus Christ", Romans 3:22.

This one in Hebrews does also, but it also adds on that if one draws back from faith, the soul of God⁴⁰ will have no pleasure in that faith. This also indicates that God does have pleasure in the soul that does turn to Him in faith, which is the witness of all the Scripture.

This drawing back is one that will not go all the way, just like King Agrippa who we discussed earlier said "almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian". That almost will just not do it. Full faith is necessary, and that full faith must be in Jesus Christ the Son of God. This doesn't mean that it must be a huge faith, but it must be an "all the way" faith.

But what comes next is the encouragement for those who have believed in Christ to keep going. And that is because we have believed to the saving of the soul.

In the next chapter we will look at the examples that the hearers would have certainly known did and accomplished much, but it was great accomplishments produced by faith. We will then look away from all these, and look unto One who is greater.

⁴⁰ That is what it seems to mean to me from the context.