

The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 23 January 2022. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced, and see the context for yourself. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.

The Fate of Those Who Insult the Lord

Hebrews 10:26-31

In the 1740's, before the American colonies gained their independence from Britain, there was a famous pastor who lived in the colony of Connecticut. His name was **Jonathon Edwards**. Edwards was one of the most brilliant and influential minds in American history. In addition to being a pastor, he was a scientific researcher who wrote many treatises, and who greatly influenced modern medical science. However, the thing that Edwards was most known for was for his role in the "Great Awakening" in America. Through his preaching and influence, thousands of people in the American colonies realised that their profession of "religion" was dead and lifeless, and that they were not truly saved; and by faith, they received God's gift of salvation.

Now, from a human perspective, it's a wonder that people were moved by Edwards' preaching. He was *not* a captivating, charismatic preacher! He was a powerful writer; but his oratory left much to be desired. He had a soft-spoken, monotone voice, and his delivery was dry. It also didn't help that he was extremely near-sighted. He had to hold the pages right in front of his face as he preached!

Edwards' power was *not* in his speaking ability. His power was in the Holy Spirit. It is said that the Great Awakening began in earnest in Edwards' church in Enfield, Connecticut, on 8 July 1741. The title of his sermon was *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. In his soft, dry, monotone voice, he told the people that they were sinners, and that most of them were *unforgiven* sinners, who were dangling over the pit of hell. He told them that their good works and religiosity could no more restrain them from falling into hell than could a spider web. The people were so terrified, that they began to moan and cry; and Edwards had to stop and wait for them to regain some composure. Some of them hung onto the pillars in the sanctuary, as though they would fall into hell that very moment! Soon the whole town was aflame with conversions; and a genuine fear of God spread through the colonies. Tens of thousands were saved!

Unfortunately, the fear of God is nearly forgotten in America. True fear of God is rare; and it is rare not only in America, but in every corner of the world. This is tragic: because without the fear of God, men cannot be saved. Until a person's heart is filled with the *fear* at the thought he has offended a holy God, he cannot possibly be saved from the fate of an eternity in hell. Those who have *heard* the message of salvation repeatedly, and are consciously rejecting it, stand in the worst danger of all, because God will hold them much more accountable than He will hold those who have never heard!

Edwards' sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, was based upon the very passage of Scripture that we will be reading this morning. In the last half of **Hebrews 10**, the Apostle Paul was giving one more warning to those in his audience who had claimed to be saved, but who were now turning away from their profession of Christ. Paul was addressing the "apostates"—those who were "turning away" from Christ. The title of this message is *The Fate of Those Who Insult the Lord*.

Read Hebrews 10:26-27.

I. The fate of those who insult the Lord (vv. 26-27)

What we've just read are some of the most fearful words in Scripture. In these verses, Paul almost *personifies* hell—as though it were some kind of living entity that is eagerly waiting to swallow up and devour sinners! Upon death, hell is the immediate fate of all who have not received Christ's gift of salvation. No matter how much the world mocks and sneers at the notion of a burning hell, God's Word is clear on the subject. God will not be mocked! Hell *is* real; and God's judgment on sinners is real!

Multitudes of people who believe that they are not on their way to hell *are*, in fact, going there. However, it's not merely the atheists and the pagans who are on their way to hell. In these verses, Paul is warning a particular group of people about hell: and they were people who *professed* to be *Christians*. If they had *not* been reckoned as part of the Christian community, they would not have been under the hearing of this letter!

What had these people done to make God so angry? Why was Paul warning them that the flames of hell were waiting to devour them? To answer that question, we must first look carefully at the phrase, "*if we sin.*" That word "*sin*" is in the Greek *present tense*. This indicates not a "once-in-a-while" action, but a *continual, unceasing* action. Another way we might say it is, "*If we are continually sinning.*"

God's Word says that when a person is truly saved, he becomes a "*new creature*" in Christ Jesus (**2 Corinthians 5:17**). God calls Christians "*overcomers*" (**1 John 5:4**). This doesn't mean that Christians no longer have a sin nature. As long as we are in this mortal body, our old, sinful nature will still be with us. What it does mean is that we also now have a *new* nature, which is placed in us by the Holy Spirit. Every true, born-again Christian has both the *desire*, and the *ability*, through the Holy Spirit, to obey God's commands. This is something that we did *not* have before we were saved. Though Christians often stumble and fall (sometimes gravely), they repent and get right. God's Word assures Christians that they can be "*confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.*" In other words, God will not let an erring Christian go his own way forever. The Lord will plead, rebuke, chastise, and even bring great pain into His children's lives, if necessary, to break their stubborn will, draw them back to His side.

The bottom line is that true children of God don't live *continually* in sin, with no remorse, and with no repentance. If a person say that he is saved, yet there have never been the slightest evidence of a change of direction, attitude, and behaviour in his life, we must seriously question that person's profession of salvation. Of course, we know that a person is not saved by his good works. The same Paul who wrote these words in **Hebrews** also wrote in **Romans**, "*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*" (**Romans 3:28**). However, good works will begin to manifest in a person's life after his salvation, because Christ has moved into that person's heart; and He changes that person from the inside out.

With all this in mind, let's now look at another important word in this passage. In **verse 26**, that Paul goes on to say, "*If we sin wilfully.*" (**Read Hebrews 10:26 again.**)

Allow me to pose a question: "**Is there any sin that is *not* wilful?**" Granted, there may be some sins that are committed in ignorance; but even sins that are committed ignorantly are

committed *because we didn't really want to know* whether God approved of it. For a Christian, especially, there is no excuse for sin. Not only do we have the Word of God, but we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, who reveals to us everything that we need to know in order to avoid sin, and to live for God. As **John** said, ***“But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.”*** In other words, there is no part of Scripture that a Christian does not have the ability to know and understand, if he will diligently search God's Word, and sincerely ask the Lord for guidance. God didn't *have* to spell out every single sin that we could possibly commit. (If He had, the Bible would be a mile thick!) Through the principles in God's Word, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit, a Christian can *know* that he is sinning, even if his sin be not specifically addressed in Scripture. Christian, don't ignore that sense of guilt about what you are doing. Don't try to justify it by saying, “Well, there's no Bible verse that says it's wrong.” If it be good and godly, why do you try to hide that activity from certain people? If the Lord Jesus Himself were here in the flesh, would you be comfortable to discuss that little hidden activity with Him, as though it were O.K.? Or would you shrink from His sad, piercing gaze, because you are afraid that He knows exactly what you are hiding? Believe me, I've tried the “But it's not condemned in Scripture” justification game; and it doesn't take the guilt away. When we sin, *we usually know it*; and if we don't know it, *we should* know it!

The fact is, all sin is wilful. We sin because we *want* to sin. The very essence of sin is the declaration, “*I will.*” We know God's will, yet we do what we want to do, anyway. Even sins that are committed in “ignorance” will be judged by God, because His revelation is there in His Word, for all to see. Furthermore, His laws are written in our hearts and conscience. We can't escape the knowledge of His will.

By this standard, who does *not* sin wilfully? Not one of us. Who could possibly escape God's fiery indignation, then? No one could. **That is why Christ, in love, took God's wrath in our place, on the cross!** Those who have fled to Jesus for refuge are saved from God's wrath: otherwise, God's wrath would devour them! This is why Paul said, in **Hebrews 6**, that we have ***“a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul...even Jesus.”***

Even Christians are guilty of sinning wilfully; nevertheless, we are saved from God's wrath, because Christ took all God's wrath against sin upon Himself, as He hung on the cross. Yet, this raises a question: “If even *Christians* sin wilfully, then who are these people that Paul is talking about here in **Hebrews 10:28**? Who are these people who ***“sin wilfully,”*** who stand in danger of fiery indignation? Is Paul talking about Christians? No, he isn't. **Paul is talking about lost people, who are guilty of a particular “wilful sin.”** What *is* that particular “wilful sin” that condemns people to eternal fire?

Well, we know it isn't one of the “big sins” like murder or adultery, because God can forgive even these! David, one of the greatest men of God in the Old Testament, committed *both* these sins; yet, God did not cast him away, or take His Holy Spirit from him. Though he was chastened severely in his lifetime on earth, he did not lose his salvation; and when he sincerely repented, he was restored to sweet fellowship with God again. Though murder and adultery are “wilful sins,” and though they are *heinous* sins, they are not sins that God cannot forgive.

What is it, then? What is this “wilful sin” that puts people beyond hope of salvation? The wilful sin that God cannot forgive is *rejecting Christ’s Sacrifice for our sin!*

Remember, Paul was writing to *Hebrew* people who claimed to be Christians. Undoubtedly, most of them were truly saved; yet, Paul knew that there were some in his audience who were departing from their profession of Christ, and who were going back to the empty shell of Judaism. They had *heard* the truth, and had *claimed* to believe it; but now they were turning from it. Paul is saying, “Look, folks, I’m warning you: if you turn away from Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, then there *is* no other sacrifice to which you can turn! If you go back to the sacrifices of animals in the Temple, those sacrifices *cannot* forgive your sins!”

Brethren, I cannot stress enough that Paul is *not talking to true Christians* here. He is not warning Christians that they can lose their salvation. He’s talking to people who had made a *profession* of salvation, but who were not truly saved, because they never truly trusted Christ!

Now, how can this warning be applied to us non-Jews who live in the 21st century? Who are the people of our day who stand in danger? I’ll tell you who they are: they are those who have heard the Gospel, and who have *made a profession* of being a Christian, yet who have never stopped clinging to their own righteousness. Self-righteousness is the sin that still bars most people from Heaven to this day. It is the sin that still afflicts most *Jewish* people to this day!

Read Romans 10:1-4.

You don’t have to deny the virgin birth of Jesus, or His deity, or the Trinity, or the inspiration of Scripture, to be an “apostate.” You can intellectually agree with *all* these doctrines, yet still be one who “departs” from God. All you have to do to be an “apostate” is to be “religious,” yet **reject the Sacrifice that God has provided for you.** Sometimes, an “apostate” can go all the way through life, and sit in a Bible-preaching church every Sunday, to his dying day. More often than not, though, an apostate will, sooner or later, either leave the Bible-preaching church, and go to a false church, or else abandon professing Christianity altogether. When this happens, though, you may be sure of one thing: this is *not* a one-time Christian who lost his salvation; this is a man who was *never* saved, and who is now showing his true colours.

Read 1 John 2:18-19.

We’ve seen the fate of those who insult the Lord. Let us now examine...

II. The crime of those who insult the Lord (vv. 28-29)

(**Read Hebrews 10:28-29.**) Paul is now explaining exactly what the crime of those who “*sin wilfully*” is. In order to show how serious the apostate’s crime is, Paul refers back to Old Testament Law. He says, “*He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy.*”

The worst *earthly* fate under Old Testament law was death! How could a person earn death? Well, there were *many* things for which one could be put to death. Death wasn’t merely for the “unthinkable” sins such as murder, adultery, sodomy, incest, or bestiality. A person could also be put to death for using God’s name in vain. (*That would make you think twice about how you use God’s name, wouldn’t it?*) A person could be put to death for working on the

Sabbath Day. A person could be put to death for making an exact copy of the kind of incense that was used in the Temple, and putting it to personal use. A person could also be put to death for cursing his parents, and rebelling against them, and being a lazy drunkard. (And these are only a *few* of the crimes for which people were put to death!) So, what's my point? The point is that if God demanded a *physical* death penalty for such crimes, and there was no escaping the punishment, how much worse is God's *eternal* punishment on those who reject His Son?

A person who has received the knowledge of the truth, yet who still chooses to reject Christ's sacrifice, stands guilty before God. It doesn't matter whether he have lived a life of debauchery, or whether he be a "moral, religious" person: if he reject Christ's once-for-all sacrifice for sin, then he is guilty of several crimes. What are these crimes?

First, Paul says that he has "***trodden under foot the Son of God.***" (Read Hebrews 10:29a again.) Wow! Paul didn't "water down" the message, did he? Paul doesn't say, "they've gone down a wrong path," or some weak statement like that. He says that they've trodden Christ "***underfoot***"—as though He were a piece of rubbish on the street! That serious, folks! God does *not* take it lightly when a man, or a woman, or a child, turns away from His Son!

Secondly, a person who turns away from Christ "***has counted the blood of the covenant...an unholy thing.***" (Read verse 29b again.) Again, these are serious words! Yet, what does Paul mean, exactly? Well, this is one of those passages in which it is *crucial* that you have the right doctrine about Israel! If you do not have the Bible's teaching about Israel right, you will probably end up with a heretical interpretation of this verse. Many people use this verse as a "proof text" to say that a person can lose his salvation. They say, "See, see? It says that these people *were*, at one time, "***sanctified***" by the blood of Jesus. That means that they *were* saved at one time, but then they lost their salvation, because they did something *really* bad!"

Is that what this verse is saying? Absolutely not! If it were, Paul would be preaching "***another gospel***"—a false gospel of "works salvation." He would be contradicting everything that he has said about salvation's being a free and eternal gift of God. To understand the meaning of Paul's statement, there are a couple things you need to understand.

First, you must realise that the word "*sanctified*" does not always mean "saved." Let's look at a passage where the word "sanctified" clearly does *not* mean "saved."

Read John 17:19.

Jesus said, "***I sanctify myself.***" Does this mean that Jesus is "saved"? Of course not! This means that He is "set apart"—not only from sin, but from creation itself! Christ is "set apart" in a sense that *we* will never be. He is God: and by His very nature, He is "set apart" from all created things! This is why the LORD said in **Isaiah 29:23**, "***They shall sanctify my name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob.***" God is "set apart" from all His created order, because He is God! Yet, this is not the only meaning of "sanctified." Let's look at another passage.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-14.

What does Paul mean when he says that *“the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife,”* and *vice versa*? Is Paul saying that an unbeliever is somehow “saved” just because his (or her) spouse is saved? Of course not! A person can be saved only by placing his *own* personal faith in Christ. The word *“sanctified,”* in this context, means “set apart for God’s special dealing.” The presence of a believer in a household creates a realm of spiritual protection, in which God can deal with the hearts of the unsaved family members. The unsaved family members aren’t *saved*; but they have a *better chance* of coming to Christ. They are *set apart* for God’s convicting work in their hearts, through the witness of the saved family member.

As you can see, the word *“sanctified”* doesn’t always mean “saved.” There’s something else we need to realise, as well. **We must also consider the audience.** To whom is Paul writing? He’s writing to Jews! He’s writing to the *Covenant people!* God made the *first* Covenant with the nation of Israel; and He initiated that Covenant with blood. And what did this Covenant make them? It made them *“holy.”*

Read Exodus 19:3-6 and 24:5-8.

In the Old Testament, God repeatedly said that the nation of Israel was *“holy”* (or, “set apart”) unto Himself. Did this mean that all Jews were automatically saved? Of course! It simply meant that God had set apart Israel from all other nations to be His people. Whether or not an individual Jew was *personally* saved from his sin depended on whether he placed his faith in God’s promise of salvation through the coming Messiah; yet, the *nation* was “set apart.”

Well, guess what? The *Second* Covenant—the *New* Covenant—was brought about by the blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, *“This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”* And with whom did Christ make *this* Covenant? Again, He made it with the nation of Israel!

Read Jeremiah 31:31-34.

You can’t get around the fact that the Jews are the “Covenant people.” God made the promise of a *“new covenant”* to the descendants of Abraham! Just like the Old Covenant, the New Covenant was made with the *nation* of Israel. *Individual members* of the nation of Israel must choose to accept that Covenant, or reject it; and those who choose to receive it are saved. Gentiles who believe on Jesus are *grafted into* the spiritual blessings of the New Covenant, along with believing Jews; but this doesn’t change the fact that Jews, as a nation, are the “Covenant people.” God made both the Old *and* the New Covenant with Israel.

So, what does this mean? It means that Jewish people, *as a nation*, are *“sanctified”* (or, “holy”). Not all Jews are *personally saved*; but they *are*, as a nation, *“sanctified.”* Do you see why this doctrine about Israel is so important? It helps us to see what Paul is saying here in **Hebrews 10:29**. Paul isn’t talking to saved people, and telling them that they can *lose* their salvation. He’s talking to *Jewish* people. He’s talking to the people who, *nationally*, were *“sanctified”* by the blood of the New Covenant; and he is warning those who were about to “walk away” from the Messiah that if they turn away from Him, they will end up in hell!

Those who “sin wilfully” after hearing the truth of the Gospel are guilty of three crimes. First, they are guilty of **treading underfoot the Son of God**. Secondly, they are guilty of **counting**

the blood of Christ’s covenant an unholy thing. Thirdly, they are guilty of doing “*despite unto the Spirit of grace.*” (Read Hebrews 10:29 again.)

What does it mean to “despite”? It means to “insult.” How, then, can you “insult” the Spirit of God? Well, you can insult Him in many ways! Yet, what is the *ultimate* “insult”? What is that one horrible insult that removes all possibility of being saved? Well, think about your relationships with others. What is one of the most insulting things you can do to a person? How about *ignoring* a person? If you call someone a nasty name, at least you are acknowledging his presence. However, to *ignore* him means that you do not regard him at all. You are saying that his presence, and his words, mean nothing to you. Oftentimes, this is how Christians are treated by their own family after they’ve gotten saved. Their family acts as though they were dead. This is the ultimate insult!

So it is when sinners ignore the Holy Spirit. You see, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts a person of his sin, and draws him to Christ. The Spirit reproves the world “*of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.*” He calls the sinner to repent and believe on Jesus. Without that conviction of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for a sinner to be saved. This means that the sinner has a responsibility to *respond to the Spirit* when He calls. When a sinner hears the Spirit’s call, and comes to understand the way of salvation, and *seems* to receive it, and even appears to identify with Christ for a while, but then finally walks away and says, “I don’t need Christ after all”—*that* is “doing despite to the Spirit of grace.” How long will God put up with those who have heard again and again, yet ignore Him? Well, only God knows when a person has had his “final call”: but the warning that Paul gave to the Hebrews of the first century still rings out to us today: “*Today, if you will hear His voice, harden not your heart!*”

III. The Judge of those who insult the Lord (vv. 30-31)

(Read Hebrews 10:30-31.) In these verses, Paul is quoting from a passage in **Deuteronomy**. So that we have the right understanding of what he is saying, let’s look at that Scripture.

Read Deuteronomy 32:35-38.

To whom is the LORD speaking in these verses? He’s speaking to the nation of Israel. Thus, when *Paul* quotes this verse, and directs it at *his* audience, **he is not speaking to born-again Christians.** The “*people*” that Paul is addressing is the **people of Israel**. Just as Moses was speaking to the nation of Israel back in **Deuteronomy**, so Paul is speaking to the people of Israel in his day. Particularly, he is speaking to *unsaved* Jewish people, who had heard the Gospel, and who had *seemed* to receive it, but who were now about to turn away from Christ. They were showing their rejection of Christ by forsaking the Christian assembly (by stopping going to church), and by going back to the synagogue, where Christ was despised.

God is the great and terrible Judge of those who choose to “turn away” from Christ; and there is nothing more fearful than falling into His hands! When you “fall into God’s hands,” there is no escape! There is no “worming out of it.” There won’t be a crafty lawyer to get you off the hook on a technicality. God is righteous, and cannot acquit sin. Sin *must* be paid for; and it *was* paid for, by His Son. He is the only Way of escape. Therefore, those who refuse the Son refuse their only Hope. God *will* judge, with fiery indignation, those who turn away from His Son! Truly, “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!*”

Conclusion: This is not a cheery way to end this morning's message; but Paul's warning is serious. If you are saved, you needn't fear losing your salvation; but these words should be a sobering reminder to you of what God thinks of sin! If you are playing around with sin, Christian, don't do it any longer! Get right with Him today! If you have never placed your trust in Christ *alone*, and turned your life over to Him, I urge you to do so today! The Scripture says, ***“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”***