



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 10:26-31

“Willful Sin”

TRANSCRIPT

It's 7:30, let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee with gratitude for the assurance of salvation, through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and we thank Thee for the passages of the word of God that contain severe warnings because we are individuals who need severe warnings from time to time. We thank Thee for the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, who in the midst of his magnificent exposition of our great High Priest's person and work, stops from time to time to warn his readers of the danger of the rejection of the word of God and of him of who it speaks, the Son of God. We pray, Lord, that our studies may be studies that turn us more and more, lead us more and more to him who is the source of eternal salvation and the source of our salvation.

We pray, Lord, for each one present. We ask Thy blessing upon each individual and upon the families that are represented here and we commit them to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon them. And, we pray for this church; we ask Thy blessing upon it, upon its elders and upon the members and others who are interested in the things of the Lord that are proclaimed here. We pray that Thou wilt continue to bless the ministry and we especially, also, pray for those who write in and ask us to pray for them. And we do

pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon them and for their many needs we ask, Lord, that if it should be within Thy will that Thou wilt undertake to give relief and healing, and also meet the needs that are represented in those requests.

We thank Thee for the privilege of opening the Scriptures and considering what they have to say. Help us to remember how important it is that we read and ponder the word of God in this age of severe secularization, in which the church of Jesus Christ has an increasingly lesser place in the life of this country. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt reverse the flow of things, if it please Thee. But for those of us who know our Lord, deliver us from the worldliness that exists around us. We ask, Lord, that Thou wilt enable us to set such things as our television sets and our shopping, our time in the malls, our time in the life that is about us, in its proper place in our lives. And, enable us, Lord, to have our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the first place, may he have the first place, may be truly worship him and follow him in a way that will bring glory to Thy name. We ask now, Lord, that Thou wilt be with us as we study the word together.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Now, the subject for tonight is “Willful Sin,” and as the title suggests it’s an attempt to expound, again, one of the severe warnings that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews writes, for those who read his letter. We know and in fact, I think, I mentioned this fact when we were dealing with Hebrews chapter 6, which is parallel with Hebrews chapter 10; that there are two eternal truths that are intimately related to these passages that have to do with warnings.

The first of the truths is the perseverance of the saints or looking at it from the standpoint of the Lord God, the eternal security of those who have truly believed in our Lord. That’s exceedingly important, and it’s very encouraging that the word of God is plain in its teaching on that point. Most of us, when we think about the perseverance of the saints or the security of the believer, we think of John chapter 10, verse 28 and 29, in

which our Lord, himself, says, “And I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them Me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand.” And so, if we really do belong to the Lord, we have the assurance that he keeps us and he keeps us eternally.

The other truth is the reverse; and that is the truth of eternal judgment and the New Testament as well as the Old Testament speaks very plainly concerning the eternal judgment of those who do not believe. One of the most common texts dealing with it is Matthew chapter 25, verse 45 and verse 46, in which our Lord, again, says, “Then he will answer them saying, ‘Assuredly I say to you, in as much as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’” And then, he says, “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The 20th Century has forgotten both of these truths, because the truth of the security of those who have believed in Jesus Christ is largely forgotten by our society and especially has the twentieth century forgotten the truth of eternal judgment. In fact, the twentieth century has laid so little stress on the doctrine of eternal judgment that even the believing evangelicals are having serious questions about it. I won’t go into that. You know that some time earlier in our Wednesday night expositions, this subject has been taken up. And I made special reference to John Stott and some of the changes that have been taking place in this evangelical minister’s life, especially with regard to eternal judgment.

There is a story which I read many years ago, which I have occasionally referred to , and those of you that have been here a long time and that have been listening , you will remember the story, but it’s so good that I like to refer to it from time to time. And, I think, every time I read it and I have a copy of it before me, I smile.

There is a story about a man who lived on Long Island, and he was a man who loved the water as most people who live on Long Island do. And he had long wanted to

obtain from Abercrombie & Fitch a very sensitive barometer. And he finally did and when the barometer came in the mail, he opened it up and he was disappointed, very much disappointed, to see that the needle pointed to hurricane. And it did not change. And so he was very upset over it because Abercrombie and Fitch had the highest of reputations in those days. So he wrote a scathing letter to the store, and the following morning on his way to his office in New York, he mailed it. And that evening, he returned to his home on Long Island, to find that the barometer was missing. But he also found that his house was missing, too. [Laughter] The barometer was accurate. A hurricane did come and if there are some of you who remember September of 1938, you may remember that that was one of the severe hurricanes that we have experienced and it was that hurricane that destroyed the barometer and also destroyed the man's home.

Well, it illustrates for us the fact that those things that we do not think can occur, do occur. This afternoon, after I had already gone through the second time, the notes for the message and didn't have time to write anything down, I read some statements that I had not seen before, in a new book I have, concerning the reactions of some famous individuals who were facing death. And one of them was Tommy, Thomas Paine, one of the great opponents of Christianity. And it's a pathetic six or eight lines that he uttered, when he was about to die, in which he confessed that he was wrong, he was sorry, he felt horrible that he was going to face God, and so on, having been all of his life and opponent of the truth of God.

One of the others that we know so much about, Voltaire, when Voltaire was at the end of his life, there was no conversion on his part. Someone asked him what he thought of Jesus Christ, at the time, and he said, “Curse the wretch!” And so even at the end of his life, he had not changed at all. But Thomas Paine and others did.

In the church of the receivers of the Epistle to the Hebrews, some were abandoning their meetings. We read in verse 25, the text that we stopped on last time. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some.” So, in the

church of which these members were members, they were abandoning the meetings of the church and some, undoubtedly, the author thought were in danger of apostatizing from the faith. Such departure from the meetings of the church is often one of the first signs of apostasy. “They went out from us, because they were not of us,” John the Apostle said, “If they had been of us, they surely would have continued with us” or they would have continued with us, so the Apostle John said.

So a warning he felt was needed; and a warning against the peril of a willful sin, or as we’ve been saying throughout the epistle to this point, the sin of apostasy, for it seems that apostasy was really the sin that those who were receiving the Epistle to the Hebrews were in danger of committing.

So let me read, now, verse 26 through verse 31, which contains this warning. The writer says.

“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Forsaking the assembling of the believers. That’s usually, I said last time, a sign of dwindling faith or declining faith, fading hope and dwindling love. And it is true also of apostasy. That is, if a man is turning away from what he has been listening to or professing, and turns away from it, characteristic of the experience will be that he will just

as these believers here, he will be an individual who will as the manner of some is, forsake the assembly of themselves together.

That is one of the signs. It's not a necessary sign, well, let me say, it's a necessary sign of apostasy. It's not the only sign that would characterize and apostate and it's not, necessarily, the sign of one who has abandoned the faith when for a period of time he may backslide and not meet with the saints. But it surely is something to be concerned about and characteristic of apostasy.

I'd like to look at two or three of the words in a little more detail. He says, “For if we sin willfully.” Now, in the original text, this is in the present tense and so it refers not simply to an act, but it refers to the act of sinning in a durative sense. That is, it's not just an isolated act. If isolated acts were signs of apostasy, many of us, of course, will acknowledge that there have been isolated acts in our lives of which we are very ashamed that might qualify for just such a warning.

But he is talking about continuing in sin, not simply the individual one-time sin, but continuing in sin. And if we read the others of the apostles, for example, the Apostle John, and hear what he says, when he says, “Those who have been born again do not go on sinning,” then, of course, we would be inclined to think that our author is now talking about professing believers who are not genuine believers. And who are sinning willfully in apostasy.

This, in a sense, was the unpardonable sin of the Old Testament. It's the kind of sin that, in discussion about it, arises in our conversations today. A man by the name of Deems, once made the statement, “The unregenerate man lives in sin and loves it. The regenerate man may lapse into sin, but he loathes it.”

There's a story about the Scottish girl, which I have in my notes, who was meeting with the elders of the church, concerning baptism and membership in the church. And, when the time came for the questions that the elders asked her, one of them asked her, “Did you ever find out that you were a sinner?” “Well, yes,” she replied without

hesitation, “I did, indeed.” “Well,” the brethren continued, “Have you experienced a change?” “Yes, I have,” was the immediate answer. “Then, there’s another question we wish to put to you,” said the men. “Are you still a sinner?” To which she answered, “Yes, I am saved sinner.” “How would you describe the change?” The men pressed her. “Well, it’s like this,” the girl confessed. “Before I was saved, I was running after sin. But now, I’m running away from it.” And that, I think is a good description of someone who has had a change of heart. It does not mean that they are no longer sinners; we are always sinners and it can be said of us, probably, that in some measure at least from time to time, the holiest of us fall into sin. If we look at the Old Testament, we surely see that is true and when we look at the New Testament, we see it also. Some outstanding cases come immediately to mind; like Peter.

Now, these individuals are ones who are going on sinning willfully after they have received, our author says, the knowledge of the truth. The word that is used here is a word that frequently is given the sense of precise, specific knowledge and at other times, full knowledge. There are passages that seem to suggest that. It’s a term that has to do with knowledge in the experiential sense, primarily, from its root. And so these individuals have received the full knowledge or the experiential knowledge of the truth.

Now, that raises a question, just what truth is it, concerning which they have received full knowledge? If we talk about the knowledge of salvation and if we say they have experienced salvation and experienced the fullness of it, then that raises the question, is it possible for individuals who have experienced the fullness of salvation to come, ultimately, to eternal judgment? Well, in the introduction, we’ve denied that and so we’re not going to deal with that and its ramifications tonight, but it does raise that question. Is there some other possible explanation?

Well, if we remember this, that the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews is writing to Hebrew professing believers, they were obviously very familiar with the Old Testament because he doesn’t say, “Would you all look back at the Book of Deuteronomy, if you

can find chapter 32, and follow me?” The people to whom he wrote were knowledgeable in the word of God. And so he felt free from time to time, many times in the epistle, more than another other New Testament author, page by page, to refer to the Old Testament. So they were individuals who were familiar with the Old Testament.

Now, what is the truth of which he’s talking? Now, from that background, I suggest to you and obviously I’m suggesting this in the sense that I don’t absolutely know this, but I’m suggesting to you that the knowledge of the truth, which our author refers to, is specifically the fulfillment of Judaism in Christianity. That is, that’s what they’ve received. They’ve received fully an exposition of the position that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the types and the ceremonies of the Old Testament. And they have that knowledge at least in their heads.

So he’s talking then about individuals, if I am correct, who have received that specific kind of knowledge. Now, he said, if you go on sinning, after having received the knowledge of that truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sin. This, of course, raises questions about the amount of knowledge that we may have today, and still be in danger of not truly having Christianity. I think in Evangelicalism today, there is entirely too much belief that if we know the facts of the Gospel, we are saved. That is, if we know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he’s died for sinners, and that men who come to our Lord through him and in faith do this, are converted. They tend to think that because they know that pattern, they know that way to the truth so clearly, they themselves have come and do really possess eternal life. It is possible for us to know those things and not be Christians. I know that that’s true of a lot of people, because many people talk about being a Christian in the sense of, “he knows the truth.” That’s what they will say. “He knows the truth. I believe he’s a Christian, he knows the truth.” But, to know the truth, in that sense, is not sufficient, so far as Christianity is concerned. There must be more than that.

When I first became a Christian, one of the outstanding liberals was Harry Emerson Fosdick. And you can look around, he has his successors. Robert Schuller, probably, comes close to being a successor to him because they both were national figures. Dr. Schuller is a national figure and people see him on the television all the time. And people heard Harry Emerson Fosdick, he was a very great preacher of the word in the sense that he was an outstanding pulpiter preacher of the word. That’s a little “W” I guess I should say. But anyway, Fosdick was an individual who made often times comments concerning the articles of the faith, which were false. And he came to be known by Evangelicals as the “Outstanding Liberal of the Day,” because he certainly had great influence.

But near the end of his life and near the beginning of my life as a Christian and as a preacher, there used to appear a few little suggestions in the paper by individuals who because of something he said, wondered if perhaps Harry Emerson Fosdick had really changed his mind and had come to Christianity. And when Fosdick heard about it, he made some statements. When he was asked to list what he considered the great affirmations of faith, he said, “He neither could answer the question, nor did he think it important.” About two-thirds through one of his messages, he said, I’m quoting him. “I regard fundamentalism as one of the worst travesties that ever cursed the Christian thought. I’m not a fundamentalist. I want that perfectly clear. If you ever hear any rumors that I’ve become a fundamentalist, you can guess again.”

He also went on to name some of the specific doctrines that he did not believe in: the deity of Christ, the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. But he was a man who, if some new Christian, I don’t think many people in Believers Chapel who have been here for a long time and who have listened to the ministry here, would not be able to answer questions. But there are new believers, who have truly come to Christ, who shortly after they’ve come to Christ do not know much doctrine at all and the chances are that Harry Emerson Fosdick would know the Christian doctrine much better than countless simple

minded, and I don't mean that in a bad sense, simple Christians. To know the truth is not necessarily to have the truth in the sense of salvation.

So these individuals, I suggest, have received the knowledge of the truth, in the sense that they know that truth that in Jesus Christ the types and the ceremonies of the Old Testament had reached their fulfillment.

Now, he says, but a certain, verse 27, “But a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries.” Now, there's no question about what he is speaking here when he says and expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, he is talking about eternal judgment. This is truly the kind of judgment that is eternal.

Now, what he is referring to is the statement in Numbers chapter 15, verse 27 through verse 31. And, I'm going to read the passage. It's Numbers 15, verse 27 through verse 31. What this specifically says is that there is no sacrifice for willful sin. So verse 27 through verse 31. I'm sure I'm going to be able to read this better because I have new glasses. I haven't even looked at you. Do you look like that? [Laughter] Verse 27 of chapter 15.

“And if a person sins unintentionally, then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the Lord, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them. But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken his commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him.”

There was no sacrifice for willful sin in Israel. If a person sinned willfully, the only recourse for him was the mercy of God. There was no sacrifice that he could offer. And in the Old Testament we have an illustration or two of this. When an individual has sinned intentionally, he didn't try to offer any sacrifice. David, you remember, speaks that way in Psalm 40. He knew there was no sacrifice that he could offer that would cover intentional sin, his adultery. But in the Old Testament, you have some illustrations of people who rushed in and clung to the altar, in token of the fact that they had nothing that they could call upon for mercy, by the way of the sacrificial system, but the only recourse for them was the mercy of God. And that's what our author here is saying and he believes that. There is no sacrifice for willful sin. If Christ is rejected, nothing is left but judgment.

Now, that's not something he's said just here. You remember, back in chapter 2, he said, “For if the word spoken through angels proves steadfast and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed to us by those that heard him.” No sacrifice for intentional sin.

What comes to mind when we think of intentional sin? Well, when we turn to the New Testament, of course, the thing that comes to mind, I think, is the sin of Judas. In one sense, Judas is an illustration of this. He was an individual who obviously knew a great deal of what he was doing. Went out of his way in order to betray our Lord Jesus Christ and committed a sin intentionally.

We sometimes, most of us would need to reflect on the sin of Judas. Charles Lamb once said, “I would feign see the face of him, who having dipped his hand into the same dish with the Son of man, could afterwards betray him. I have no conception of such a thing, nor have I ever seen any picture, not even Leonardo's very fine one, that gave me the least idea of it.” When we look at Judas Iscariot, and look at the depths of his sin, one can only tremble.

But, you know, there are individuals who've attended evangelical churches like Believers Chapel and have sat under the ministry of the word of God for days and months and years, and after the years have passed caused their friends who are concerned for them to wonder if they've ever really come to know the Lord Jesus as their own personal savior; if they really possessed salvation. I don't think anyone who knows you and Believers Chapel would deny that there are individuals who've attended this Chapel for a long time and have heard faithful preaching of the Gospel of Christ, concerning whom we have questions of their salvation. That is, the evidences of the possession of life are just not there, so far as we can tell. We are human. I hope that is not true of anyone in Believers Chapel but it certainly is something for us to be concerned about. And not concerned about the others only, always concerned about ourselves as well.

Judas is often thought to be a sermon for outsiders. It's not a sermon for outsiders, primarily, it's a sermon for insiders. That's what Judas was. He was one of the Twelve. Can you see the headstone of Judas' grave? Judas Iscariot, Apostle of Jesus Christ. Think of it. Judas Iscariot, Apostle of Jesus Christ. That's what he was.

So when we think about Judas and we remember the Bible says that he went to his own place, we see how easy it is for a person so close to the truth of God and yet can be so far from the knowledge of the Lord God in heaven. You can see, as the wine is passed around the Last Supper, the first Lord's Supper, the Last Passover, I should say, and the apostles all saying, “Is it I? Is it I? Is it I?” And they were, of course, saying, “Lord? Is it I? Lord? Is it I? Lord? Is it I?” When it came to Judas, he couldn't utter the word Lord.

No man can call Jesus “Lord” except by the Holy Spirit. The only thing that could come out of his mouth is “Master.” There is that difference, you know, that little evidence of one who has the reality of salvation and one who does not.

I often sit at my desk and think about this and usually what happens is that I turn and thank the Lord that he has brought me to the knowledge of himself, because it's so

serious to be so close and not really, and have so much opportunity, and not really to know the Lord Jesus as Savior.

Well, our author goes on to confirm things from the Old Testament. This author loves the Bible. Have you noticed that? He loves the Bible. I wish I had asked Martha about that TV advertisement, what do you call them? Anyway, they come on and there is a fellow that comes on and he's talking real loud and forcefully and finally at the end of it he says. I love this job. Do you remember? I couldn't think of it specifically what it is. But, I love this job. And he's playing with money. I love this job. Well, this author is a fellow who would say, I love the Scriptures. I love the Bible. Because, what he writes is just full of the word of God.

Now, he's going to confirm what he's just been talking about from the Old Testament. Notice what he says in verse 28, “Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.” Well, we needn't turn to Deuteronomy chapter 17, for that because you're familiar with it. But now, he makes application. “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing and insulted the Spirit of grace?”

This is what our author means when he talks about apostasy. This is apostasy to him and it has three aspects. If you want to understand what he means by going on sinning willfully, specifically, it includes these things. And, first of all, the act of trampling upon the Son of God. This is contempt of the most flagrant kind. What it is is a person who has made profession of faith, who's been with the Christians who have professed faith and then finally he returns to Judaism, gives it all up and goes back to what he regards as the truth, leaving the true truth in order to do it. It's the kind of person who mingles with Evangelicals for months, maybe even some years, and finally decides, well, I'm going back to my Unitarian Church or something like that. That doesn't necessarily mean it has to have the name Unitarian. It might have the name Presbyterian, or

Methodist, or whatever, because Unitarianism is something that has infiltrated the whole of Christian profession. Trampling under foot the Son of God; contempt of the most flagrant kind. As a matter of fact, of course, this applies to all truth. We trample upon it when we pay no attention to it.

Let me give you an illustration, a specific illustration. I really should have called this man before I give this illustration because I could be wrong. I hope I am. When I came to Dallas Theological Seminary, there was a very intelligent student, the smartest man in the senior class, as a matter of fact, if you had asked the students and some of the faculty. And I can still remember when I came, transferred my membership from South Highlands Presbyterian Church in Birmingham to First Presbyterian Church here. My letter was transferred. And I can still remember coming out of the theological seminary and walking, I may have walked all the way to the South Highlands Presbyterian Church, but I remember walking with him, and it may have been to catch a bus to the church downtown. He was a person who played the piano for the Young Life Quintet and every impression that you had of him was that he was a Christian man.

When he left the seminary, he came into, had some difficulty with one of the professors over his thesis and, evidently, got a bit angry over the things that were happen, he went off and got a further degree at a very liberal school and for many years taught in liberal universities. He wrote in a book that he has written, “Understanding the New Testament,” these words, “The doctrine of the sinlessness of Jesus involves far more than a historical analysis of the baptism, however, in reality it is an article of faith that derives from the belief in the resurrection and lordship of Jesus, the Messiah, rather than from any evidence concerning Jesus’ own consciousness of sinlessness. Jesus never makes such a claim of sinlessness, for himself, quite the contrary. At one point, he is reported to have answered someone who addressed him as ‘Good Teacher,’ “Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.””

Now, this is a man who is a graduate of theological seminary, has taught in liberal schools for many years, denying it would seem the sinlessness of the Lord Jesus Christ, and contending that our Lord never gave indication that he stood behind that doctrine. Jesus said, remember, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?”

So when we’re talking and listen, to think four years sitting, listening to the exposition of the word of God directly in the courses in the Bible and Systematic Theology, and indirectly, very indirectly in Hebrew but, nevertheless, he was a major in Hebrews. And coming out of the institution and, evidently, evidently, having very aberrant views concerning Christian doctrine. Trampling under foot the Son of God.

This principle applies to all truth, by leaving what we see, we trample upon it. Our Lord uses this very word, “trample” when he talks about casting your pearls before swine, “who will trample upon them and then when they have turned, they will rend you.” This is the trampling under foot of the Son of God.

The second thing that he says is the attitude of the counting the covenantal blood common; counting “the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing.” In other words, he treats the blood of the covenant, the New Covenant to him, as being common blood. It’s just an ordinary sacrifice. It’s not something special. It’s just common. But for believers, true believers, the blood of the New Covenant by our Lord Jesus Christ is a sacred and holy thing, and which indicates and was the basis for our eternal salvation.

He says, “By which they were sanctified.” There’s been a great deal of discussion over that. We don’t have time to talk about all of the possibilities of rendering that. As a matter of fact, in some manuscripts, the expression is not even found. But, I think it’s probably genuine. Some of the commentators refer to Christ as a reference to his sanctification; others take the word in the sense of expiated or atoned.

John Owen, who wrote a great volume on the atonement of Christ said, “He who professes the Christian faith, professes to believe in the atoning sacrifice of Christ; that Christ shed his blood for many, for the remission of sins.”

And, of course, it's possible to take it, as many do, as being set apart for salvation. Set apart in that sense, special sacrifice by which we are set apart for salvation, in that case, it would refer, Aren't you at the end of the roll, Marilyn? [Laughter] In that case, of course, being set apart for salvation would mean that you have not necessarily received the salvation but you have been set apart for it.

The third thing that he says is “and insulted the Spirit of grace,” the assault of insolence against the Holy Spirit. You notice here we have in the first case the act of trampling on the Son, then counting the covenantal blood of the Lord God in heaven common, and then insolence against the Spirit or insulting the Spirit, and so the Trinity is involved; the Father, the Son and the Spirit, it seems.

And so the Spirit is despised in the sense that the displays of the evidences of salvation are not taken as being real. Remember in chapter 2 in verse 4, where the author writes, “God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.” These are individuals who have seen the manifestation of the power of the Holy Spirit and the preaching of the Gospel, but they've rejected it. Just like in our Lord's case, and when he had performed the miracles they said, “He does his miracles by means of Beelzebub.” And our Lord, then, talks about the eternal sin against the Holy Spirit. And, in this case, it would seem that unpardonable sin.

And, finally, our time is drawing by. There is so much to say. But we come now to verse 30 and verse 31, in which our author says, “For we know him who said, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. And again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

The “For,” of course, in verse 30, introduces the reason we can expect judgment. He does judge. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” He does judge. It’s his strange work, the Scriptures say, but it’s his judge. The greatest of privileges brings the greatest of responsibilities, and what is greater than “without mercy.”

Now, I want to say just a word about the testimony of the Scriptures that he cites here and I’m going to ask you, if you will, to turn back to Deuteronomy chapter 32, verse 35 and verse 36. 32:35 and 36. Now, this particular passage is the Song of Moses and, in a sense, it’s the divine forecast of the history of the Jewish people. We begin with Israel’s past history, we go all the way to the end in which there is an atonement made for his land and his people, and Israel receives the promises that have been promised to them. But, in the course of it, we read in verse 35 and verse 35.

“Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; their foot shall slip in due time; for the day of their calamity is at hand. [Incidentally, that is the term which means “destruction.”] For the day of their destruction is at hand, and the things to come hasten upon them. For the Lord will judge his people and have compassion on his saints.”

So what is promised is that as time goes on, Israel’s history will be characterized by disobedience, it will be characterized by being sent to the four-corners of the earth, but God has not forgotten his promises. He’s going to bring the nation back into the land. He’s going to give them the promises that have been so often given to them in Old Testament language. Read through the Old Testament, and over and over again, we not only have reference to the promises that were made to Israel by the Lord God, but we have it underlined that they were unconditional promises. That is, they were promises that God has not forgotten and that he will fulfill.

So the testimony of Scripture is to the effect that those who have turned away from him, they will suffer because “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” And

he selects that passage out of Deuteronomy 32, obviously he was well acquainted with Deuteronomy 32. And then, he says, “And again, ‘The LORD will judge his people.’” Now, we may misunderstand that. “The Lord will judge his people,” may sound as a promise to judge Israel. Isn’t that the way it sounds to you? “The Lord will judge his people.” But now, when you turn and read Deuteronomy 32, you will see that that’s not the sense of Deuteronomy 32 in verse 35 and 36. Judge, here, is the Hebrews word *diyn* which means to vindicate. And that’s the sense that it is used there in that context. You will see, if you read through the section, it has reference to vindication. In fact, we have other instances in the Old Testament in which this particular sense is given to the word. I’ll read you another passage, Psalm 54 in verse 1, the author says, “Save me, O God, by Your Name, and vindicate me by Your strength.” Judge me, by your strength, is the original text. Vindicate me. “Save me, O God, by Your name, and judge me by Your strength,” obviously vindicate me, by your strength. So here when he writes, “And again, ‘The Lord will vindicate his people,’” that’s the sense of that passage. He will vindicate his people.

Now, in the case of the original context, it’s a reference, of course, to the nation Israel. He will vindicate them and they will have their promises. And how does he vindicate them? The passage makes it very plain. He vindicates them by judging Israel’s enemies. That’s the context. He vindicates Israel by judging Israel’s enemies.

Read it and study it! We don’t have time to do it now. But that’s the force of it. So judge here, has the force of “judge for,” he will judge for his people. He will vindicate them. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” and in the case of the enemies of Israel, they will fall into the hands of the living God. He will save his people. But, today, the author says, the truth still holds. Those who turn away from the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ belong to the enemies and God will vindicate his people by judging those who oppose the truth for which they stand.

Now, let me conclude with just a few comments. What we’ve been saying is that the visible Church may possess false professors. A warning is needed. But we also know from the history of the truth in the word of God and the history of Christian profession that those individuals who are false professors in the Church may, also, after warning, turn to the Lord.

One of the most wonderful stories of conversion to me is the story of the conversion of Hugh Latimer, who was as you know, one of the great bishops who finally was burned at the stake with Nicholas Ridley. Hugh Latimer was a bishop in London Strand. He was called by people about him, “The Honest-est man in England.” What a use of the superlative. “The Honest-est man in England.” He was not a believer, that is, in the Biblical Evangelical sense. But, he was a very strong Christian man, in the eyes of the people, in the Roman Catholic Church. “The Honest-est man in England.” But, he didn’t really know the Lord. Very righteous man, highly regarded, as you can see. He had grown up in a plow-man’s cottage and had finally come to a bishop’s palace, and the popular crowds, it is said, when he passed by, whenever he passed by, they would come out to see him and occasionally people would yell at him, “Have at it!” Or, “Have at them, Father Latimer!” Well, Hugh Latimer came to Oxford some time later; exchanged a palace for a prison, and then, ultimately, the stake as a result of the Marian persecutions. And the conversion of Hugh Latimer is one of the great stories of British, or really Christianity.

There was another man who was also a minister, by the name of Thomas Bilney. He was a little fellow and so he was called Little Bilney. And he was a person who had not been converted until he came to the text in 1 Timothy chapter 1, and about verse 15, in which this is said. “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” His conversion came about this way. Bilney was a scholar; he knew about Erasmus. He knew that Erasmus had translated the Bible, that the New Testament into Latin. And, of course, he could

read Latin and so he had it in his heart he wanted a New Testament that Erasmus had translated and finally he was able to get one and in the course of reading it, he came to this passage. “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.” And, he was wonderfully converted.

Well, Latimer came to Cambridge where Bilney was and was holding some meetings. And Bilney heard him and he realized he was a very earnest man, a very sincere man, a very righteous man, but he also , righteous in the sense that people use the term , a good man, a very good man. But he recognized, also, that he was not converted. And so, he prayed, “Lord, give me the soul of Hugh Latimer.” At one of the meetings, Latimer was walking out and he almost brushed Bilney. And Bilney spoke to him and said, “I pray thee Father, may I confess to thee?”

And so, Latimer said yes. And so, Bilney came to Latimer, got down upon his knees, before Father Latimer and began to confess. But, what he confessed was how he got saved, and he went into the whole story of how he wanted that New Testament by Erasmus, and how he read it because his soul was so burdened with sin and said, finally, he came to this text where it says, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief,” and Father Latimer, as a result of that, I came to the knowledge of my salvation.

I don't, I have the details of what he said, but, that's essentially what he said and a remarkable thing happened. Hugh Latimer got off the chair before which Little Bilney was kneeling and got down by the side of him and he, himself, received Jesus Christ as his own personal savior. Both of them, of course, were burned at the stake. Bilney was burned at the stake for the simple reason that he could never stop preaching reform doctrine. He was warned two or three times, put into prison, but he couldn't help but preach reform doctrine.

That's good ol' Calvinistic doctrine, he couldn't help. That's the way it ought to be, when a man believes Calvinistic doctrine, he can't help but tell it, because it's the magnification of the grace of our great God in heaven. He couldn't help it and so, he was burned at the stake. And then, later, Hugh Latimer also, with Nicholas Ridley, and you may remember what Latimer said when he and Ridley were being burned at the stake. he turned to Ridley and said, “Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man, we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England as I trust shall never be put out.”

Well, we know that individuals who make profession of faith, like Latimer and Bilney, can come to the knowledge of the Lord, even though for a long time they may have been religious and not had the genuine faith. To refuse the light of the truth of the message of the Son, the covenant of the Father and the grace of the Spirit, is to commit willful sin. Willful sin of apostasy, if we know that truth, objectively, and expose ourselves to eternal judgment. The Gospel of the grace of God does not modify the divine character, it reveals it. The question, of course, that should be asked of all of us, and especially you in this auditorium this evening, is, what is willful sin and how may I know when I am guilt?

Andrew Murray says, “The only sure way of being kept from willful sin is to keep far from all sin. We don't know the point at which our sin may become the sin of apostasy. But the safest attitude for Christians to have is to flee from all possibilities of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit.” A precipice is a precipice. It's folly to deny a precipice. It's folly to raise a barrier of some leaves or bushes, the best way to hide a precipice and keep from falling into it is to build a wall so that one cannot get to it.

And so I call upon you, in the light of what our author has told these professing Christians, to as he warns them, to remember that if we do not cling wholly to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we are subject to eternal judgment. “It is a fearful thing,” he says, in chapter 10 in verse 31, “to fall into the hands of the living God.”

What a marvelous thing it is, however, to know that if we have truly believed in our Lord Jesus Christ, we have received eternal life and we are in the hand of a loving Father who has given his Son for us.

Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these warning passages, because they remind us how serious it is, to have the knowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, that he has on the Cross at Calvary shed blood, the blood of the New Covenant, and that he has given the Holy Spirit, during this whole dispensation to bring us to conviction and conversion. And, Lord, if there should be one person in this audience, young or old, who does not have the assurance of eternal life, may they remember the text of the Apostle Paul, which Bilney remembered and which Hugh Latimer remembered, that it's a faithful thing that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners and may we flee to him. We thank Thee for this time of study together.

In Jesus' name. Amen.