

***Shrinking Back or Having Faith***..... 3 January 2010  
Hebrews 10:26-39 **1001987**

These study notes are prayerfully prepared and provided to aid, not replace,  
your personal study of the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

Today brings us to the 25<sup>th</sup> study in Hebrews! Last time, we saw the three heads of “let us” – three distinct exhortations based upon the great truths concerning Jesus Christ who provides access and gives us presence in the very throne room of God Himself. We are called to draw near, to hold fast the statements of our faith in Christ, and to seek ways to encourage one another to love and good deeds. That all requires faith. and in chapter 11 we find a great hall of fame of Faith, giving us portraits of faith in the lives of people of the past. These two stand like two great mountain peaks.

Now before going in to that list of examples of faith, the writer makes a beautiful transition, like a bridge. Heb 10:26-39 sounds a warning. This is the fourth, and the most-pointed and stern of the warnings in the book of Hebrews.

Let’s recall the warnings:

2:1-4 The Danger of neglect or drifting.

3:7-4:13 The danger of cold hearts of unbelief.

5:11-6:20 The danger of not maturing or growing in Grace. He calls us to Avoid Spiritual Senility. And now the fourth., the strongest yet. Don’t shrink back.

We will see still a fifth warning in chapter 12, the danger of refusing God.

The writer has carefully detailed the superiority of Christ’s High Priestly character and ministry. He now drives home the implications of these truths with a solemn word mingled with words of comfort and encouragement. His warning is against “*shrinking back*,” which is the word *hupostello*, to “*draw in, to let down, to draw back*.” This is an interesting play on words. The word *hystasis*, which is found 5x in the NT., means confident reliance upon.

There is a contrast in the section between two sets of folks: the first are those who “*shrink back*” and the second are those who “*endure with faith*,” who hang tough, persevere, who stay true to faith. Chapter 11 then follows with a host of examples of those who endure through faith. You see, this section forms the bridge between two crucial sections in Hebrews. In 10:19-25, we have seen the “*three heads of lettuce*”. Chapter 11 presents the great parade of the Hall of Faith. And this little warning paragraph forms the bridge in the form of a warning!

Hebrews 10:26 begins with “*For*”, introducing the reason believers should avoid “*forsaking the assembling together*” exhortation of the previous paragraph.

**Heb 10:26-31 Warning to “Those who shrink back.”**

10:26,27 *The identification of those who shrink back.* These are folks who wilfully sin after acknowledging the truth. The concern here is defection from the faith. Apostasy from the faith would be such a wilful act. The writer shows by arguing from lesser to greater that defiance of the inferior covenant brought retribution, so retribution for defiance of the greater covenant will bring certain retribution.

To “*sin wilfully*” is to go on practicing sin. It is “*the leukemia of non-commitment*.” It is choosing to live for self behind a Christian veneer, refusing the claims of the Lordship of Christ.

“*Knowledge*” is the word “*epignosis*” which means a deep understanding or heart

knowledge, as opposed to “*gnosis*” which means simply “*knowledge*.”

“*Truth*” refers to the good news of the New Covenant, the story of Jesus Christ and all that is involved in redemption (salvation).

The writer is talking here about the presumptuous choice of self-living when we know perfectly well from the Word of God what the results of that choice will be.

10:28 Under the old order, if someone sinned unintentionally, a sin offering could be made (Num 15:22-29.) BUT, if intentionally or presumptuously, no sacrifice was provided (Num 15:30). To “*set aside*” means to “*annul, to reject*.” Judgment followed deliberate sin. The only hope was to plead for mercy on the basis of the Day of Atonement blood applied to the mercy seat. Recall Psalm 51 which shows David’s refuge after his presumptuous sin.

10:29 *Description of those who “shrink.”* On the basis of the principle developed in verses 26-28, a stern warning is given to those who have understood that the Law has been terminated by Christ’s death, but who are considering a return to the externals of Judaism.

Note that wilfully sinning against the Law brought death by stoning: for blasphemy (Lev 24:15-16,23); for adultery (Deut 22:21-24); for idolatry (Deut 17:2-5; Lev 20:2); for violation of Sabbath (Num 15:32-36); false prophets (Deut 13:10); spirit medium (:Lev 20:27); rebellious sons (Num 21:21-23). Two witnesses minimum were required (Deut 17:4-7).

Now note the details of the description of those who shrink:

They refuse to submit to Christ, refuse to acknowledge Christ’s right to govern life. “*Trampled under foot*” is a flagrant contempt for the Son of God.

They renounce the efficacy of the blood. This means, they approve human effort and selfish lifestyles. They treat the blood as unholy, unclean. And the one who is sanctified is the believer who is sanctified by the blood of Christ.

They rebel against the Spirit of God. They “*insult the spirit of Grace*.” These folks are indifferent to the Spirit’s promptings, pleading and leading. “*Insult*” means an assault of insolence against the Spirit.

10:30 Quoting from Deut 32:35-36, the writer shows the well-established principle. God is a righteous God, and when His holiness is violated, His character demands that the wicked be punished. Thus the conclusion of 10:31.

We may well ask, are these folks “saved” or “unsaved?” The words used indicate that the folks here in Hebrews are believers, who have received the Gospel, and then deny Christ. They practice sin, and there is no sacrifice for such a wilful apostate. Even the Old Testament speaks of the fact of judgment (Num 15:27; Isa 26:11; Deut 17:2-17). The word apostasy does not occur here in Hebrews. It is used in two passages in the New Testament: Acts 21:21 and 2 Thess 2:3. It means a departure, a falling away, and came to mean a forsaking, a defection. The problem lies in the phrase, after receiving the knowledge of the truth. Is this a genuine believer? The scholars are divided. Hodges, Pentecost, Swindoll, Stedman, say a believer. The judgment here is not a reference to hell, but of divine discipline. MacArthur says they are unbelievers who never really trusted the Lord. The context seems to point to the former. The warning is to not turn your back on Christ.

Now how can we tell a carnal Christian from an apostate? Answer: We cannot! A true believer who wilfully sins and drifts away will be bugged to death as long as he/she is out of the will of God. 2 Timothy 2:12-13 says it well. Now sometimes as believers, our faith runs low. Even when our faith runs lows, God remains faithful. The apostate however denies Christ, and Christ denies him. For the believer whose faith runs low, God is faithful. As much as we should respond in a sensitive and loving way to those who struggle with sin, we should be ready and willing to speak truthfully and plainly to those who wilfully choose a life of habitual sin. Sin always has its consequences, consequences that can be extremely unpleasant and painful for the rebellious child of God. Recall 1 Cor 11: 30.

*Causes of “Shrinking Back”*

Matt 24:9,10 First, Persecution. People shrink back because they cannot handle persecution.

Mt 24:11;

2 Tim 4:3,4 Second, False Teachers. Shrinking back comes as a result of a wrong attitude which naively accepts false teaching. False teaching only affects those who are susceptible to it due to an unwillingness to accept the truth.

Lk 8:14a Third, Temptation. We do well to remind ourselves that it may not be just one but a cluster of these factors that produce shrinking back.

2 Tim 4:10a Fourth, Worldliness. Degas (“*for Degas having loved this present world, has deserted me...*”) wanted what the world system had to offer rather than to remain with Paul.

Heb 10:24,25 Fifth, Forsaking the assembling of the saints.  
One symptom of shrinking back from the faith is when a person curtails attendance from meeting together with other believers.

Heb 2:3 Sixth, Neglect. Turning our backs and failing to live by Grace through faith.

Seventh: Religious tradition. Some folks gravitate to and hold on to old systems, Jews or Christians, with unbiblical doctrines and practices they hold on to tenaciously. There are many who shrink back into religion.

This warning in Hebrews is no idle threat. Deut 32:35,36 and 19-27 show graphically that *the people of God may suffer His divine retributive discipline*. But with this severe admonition, the writer adds a note of consolation and encouragement in verses 32-38.

**Heb 10:32-38 Appeal to Those Who Stand.**

Following this severe admonition, the writer now concludes with a note of encouragement. A reminder of how they had stood in past trials fortifies them for what they are to face in the future.

10:32-35 *The profile and identification of those who stand.* These are believers who suffer mistreatment but yet still stand in faith. The writer reminds them of the courage they had in the past trials to encourage them for future trials.

*Description of those who stand.*

- 10:32,33 They are familiar with hardship, having endured it before. “*Great conflict*” is word from which we get word athletics. Publically exposed is word from which we get theater.
- 10:34 They were concerned for others in need. Notice the companionship, compassion, sharers with those who suffered.
- 10:34b They were free from materialism.
- 10:34,35 They maintained confidence in God. (Concerning confidence, cf. 3:6; 4:16; 10:19). So, do not “*throw away*” (word means “*to fling as though it was of no value*”) your confidence.
- 10:36 *Their need: endurance.* Endurance means “*to abide under with a living hope.*” It means to hang tough knowing it leads to glory. That’s Hebrews 12:1,2. The writer quotes Habakkuk 2:3,4, to encourage them to rest assured that God will return even if His coming seems delayed.

**Heb 10:39 Summary.**

The writer says in effect, “*I am determined not to shrink back and experience the ruin which divine retribution would bring.*”

He says, “*Hang on to what you have and believe all the way, because if you want to be just, you are going to have to trust and obey.*” In the context, shrinking back would be forsaking the assembling of the saints, that we saw in 10:25.

“*Saved*” in verse 39 of some translations means “*preserving the soul*” and refers to the way persistence in the faith preserves from the calamities that overtake those who “*shrink back.*” That will be illustrated so clearly in chapter 11. “*Shrink back*” refers to withdrawing oneself in fear. This is not the usual term speaking of salvation, but deliverance or preserving. It refers to the deliverance from the consequences of unbelief – loss of reward and responsibility at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

“*Preserving the soul*” in the NASB is more accurate translation. It refers to the way persistence in the faith preserves an individual from the calamities that overtake those who shrink back. The destruction refers to temporal difficulties, and can refer also to loss of rewards and responsibilities at the judgment seat.

Col 3:23-25 helps put it all in perspective. “*Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord, rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.* You see when a person is saved, the guilt of sin is removed forever, past present and future. There is no condemnation for the believer. He has passed from death into life (John 5:24).

But note, there will be an accounting in the future as to our obedience to Him once we are saved. *It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. For he who does wrong will receive the consequences of the wrong he has done, and that without partiality.*“

What the writer is calling for is Faith, which could in our modern language be translated, “*hanging tough.*” We will see illustrations in chapter 11. And 12:1-3 defines it so clearly. It comes from fixing our eyes on the One who never changes. That is the inner toughness

that meets life steadfastly, unmovably, unshakably, and is never driven off its position of faith. NO SHRINKING BACK. It constantly meets every encounter, every challenge by resting on the Word of God, relying on what God says.

### A word for you and me.

Seeing the superiority of Christ, I must keep on keeping on in faith, no matter what happens!

The KEY to keeping on keeping on is looking to Him (Hab 3:18,19; Heb 12:1,2). We have a superior, adequate High priest, and Hebrews 4:14-16 again holds the key for us practically. He alone forgives and cleanses when we fail, to obtain mercy and He alone is able to keep us from falling again, giving grace in time of need.

A Personal and tough question: “***Where am I going in my spiritual life? Shrinking? OR Standing firm?***” Remember, “*Trust and Obey, for there’s no other way, to be happy in Jesus – just to trust and obey!*”

A pastor friend of mine often signs his letters, “hanging tough, living pure.”