

The Danger of Deliberate Sin

Hebrews 10:26-32

Bellevue Baptist Church

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I was talking to a man in our church the other day. He was reflecting on his childhood and said that he still remembers vividly the sound of his father pulling off his belt. Pop, pop, pop, as it passed through each belt loop.

I remember that sound.

The first spanking I recall was after a prank we tried to pull on my dad. My older brother and I were riding in the back seat of the car as my dad pulled into the driveway. This was back in the ancient days before garage door openers. Some of you say, "There was a day BEFORE garage door openers?!" Yes, and back then, to dial a phone you had to do this. Believe it.

Anyway, my dad put the car in park, got out and walked up to open the garage door. When he made that loud noise, my brother and I snuck out of the car and tried to play hide-and-seek. We found the perfect hiding spot. We crouched down behind the car.

"He'll never see us back here," we thought.

Thankfully, my father put the car in drive, not reverse. As he pulled forward, he looked in the mirror and saw two us lurking behind the vehicle. Five minutes, later, we heard the sound, "Pop, pop, pop!"

I still remember the terror of being told to go to our respective bedrooms and wait. The waiting was the worst part. Then he called us down one at a time. I heard my brother get his first. He took it like a man. And I knew I was next.

I remember being so mad at my dad, because we were just trying to play a little hide and seek, and yet I look back on that moment now and see it differently. I had put myself in a dangerous position and he wanted to ensure this never happened again.

As we look to Hebrews 10, just know that this is the spirit of the passage.

The writer is speaking to people who had publicly professed faith in Christ. They had been baptized. They were taking the Lord's Supper. They were part of the church. They were doing all the right things. And then...some of them started disappearing. Not because they were sick. Not because they were traveling. But because they were turning their backs on Christ.

And the writer says, in essence, "*You are putting yourself in a dangerous position.*"

To walk away from Christ is like crouching behind a vehicle. That's why the warning he's about to bring is so strong. He says: "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Read with me, Hebrews 10:26-31:

²⁶ For if we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, ²⁷ but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire about to consume the adversaries. ²⁸ Anyone who disregarded the law of Moses died without mercy, based on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, who has regarded as profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know the one who has said,

**Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, and again,
The Lord will judge his people.**

³¹ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
—Heb 10:26–31

In this passage, the author makes three warnings we would be wise to heed, because every person in this room is prone to seasons of ignoring God's commands. Let's heed these warnings together.

The first appears in verse 26..

Beware of:

1. Deliberate sin (vv. 26–27)

“For if we deliberately go on sinning after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment...”

The meaning here is painfully clear. If your Father in heaven tells you to do something, and you look straight at Him and say, “No,” you are asking for it.

One commentator on Hebrews tells a story that captures this perfectly. He writes:

Our two-year-old grandson, Joshua, recently climbed up on the kitchen counter to get at a forbidden stick of gum. His father said: “Joshua, you may not have the gum. If you eat that gum, I will spank you!” Joshua looked at the gum, then at his father, and back at the gum...slowly unwrapped it and put it in his mouth. Joshua got his spanking! But there was more, because a few minutes later he returned and took another stick, climbed down, ducked behind a corner to unwrap it—and got another spanking. The boy is a sinner, and so are we all. —Kent Hughes

We hear that story and shake our heads. What a stubborn child? How foolish. And yet, who among us has not noticed the apple of temptation in the corner of the eye, and reached for it—even though we know what Proverbs 15:3 says: The eyes of the Lord are everywhere.

If you have walked with Christ for any length of time, you know exactly what the writer of Hebrews is describing. There have been seasons when you knew better, but you went ahead anyway. You felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but you ignored that voice. You were warned to stop by others, but you pressed on.

You entered a relationship you were warned to walk away from, and you stayed in it. You poured money into something unwise despite counsel, and it cost you. The examples are endless.

When I was contacted by the Search Team about the possibility of coming to Bellevue, Lynley felt strongly that it was time for us to return to pastoral ministry, that it was time for me to return to the pulpit. But as we began conversations with the Bellevue, I started to feel stubborn, unwilling to make the change, not wanting to give up the CEO's salary, the benefits, the freedom of having weekends off, the comfortable relationships I had formed at Lifeway. I convinced myself that I could dig my heels in and be just fine. And I fired off a text to your Pastor Search Chairman, Chad, and removed myself from consideration.

And over the next few weeks, I started to hear the belt coming off in heaven—pop, pop, pop. I watched the light fading from my wife's eyes, because she felt sure this was of God, and her husband was convinced he should stay and write books. She was sure he should leave and write sermons.

This is why Hebrews says back in chapter 3, v. 13: see *that none of you is hardened by sin's deception*. Heb 3:13.

Sin is a form of trickery. When we fall under its spell, we convince ourselves that we are free to do as we please, and God can get with our program. As well as our wives: she needs to get on my program. God, thank you for teaching my wife submission!

And yet, I was the one He was teaching. I went through a dark season in those months, that finally ended in April, when I reached back out to Chad, and apologized for the way I had pulled my name, that I had done so cowardly, and the conversation restarted.

Here I am, today. On this side of the spanking, things are so much better.

Can you relate to my story? Perhaps this hits too close to home, because you are making the same mistake. If God has placed a call on your life, there is no happiness apart from that path. You must remain on the trail He has blazed.

Beware of deliberate disobedience. Number two: Beware of...

2. Despising the sacrifice of Christ (vv.28-29)

Notice the extreme language employed here. To turn your back on your faith is equivalent to trampling on Christ. Look at the reference to Deuteronomy in v. 28...

²⁸ Anyone who disregarded the law of Moses died without mercy, based on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Let me stop right here and explain. Back in Moses' day, in the time of the Law, your life was at stake if you did something detestable.

Deuteronomy 17:4...

If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death. Deut. 17:4

In that day, before Jesus, the Lord said toward hardened sinners: let your very life be taken from you.

Here, Hebrews is saying that even though we now live in an age of grace, we should not think for a second that God has softened his stance on sin. That we can do as we please. V. 29:

²⁹ How much worse punishment do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God...

Here is the person who says,

“God will forgive me. I can do what I want.”

“God is gracious, so I'll go where my lustful eye leads.”

This weekend, we have had our big youth event called Catalyst—over 500 students engaged in worship and discipleship. I spoke to the students Friday night on grace—how the Lord uses our mistakes to teach us powerful lessons. I had asked for students to anonymously share a big mistake they had made, and what God taught them. One student wrote:

“One of the biggest mistakes I have made in high school: lying to everyone—refusing to admit that I was deep in sin...that I had been struggling with pornography for many years. I just felt so much shame...”

It took a lot of courage to write that—even if his name would remain anonymous. It's hard to admit when we make sinful choices. But look what he wrote—here's what happened when he chose to get right with God:

The lesson learned:

I learned that there should be no shame because the Lord forgives...the dark always comes to light—it just depends on when...it has allowed me to live in full freedom knowing that the Lord has redeemed me!"

When we ignore the voice of God, Hebrews says that we take the body of Jesus off the cross—the sacrifice, and we lay his body on the ground, and we stomp on it. We turn the grace of God into a license for sin.

In Hebrews, he's warning those people. This is a serious offense, to say you know Christ, to worship with the body of Christ, to be baptized into the community of Christ, to take hold of the bread and cup of Communion, and then, for months or years, you pretend as if God's word doesn't exist. As if your word is more important than God's word.

Music icon Bob Dylan went through a born-again-Christian phase in his life, but later, turned away from Christianity. When asked, "What happened?" he responded with these words:

... Here's the thing with me and the religious thing. This is the flat-out truth: I find the religiosity and philosophy in the music. I don't find it anywhere else ... I don't adhere to rabbis, preachers, evangelists, all of that. I've learned more from the songs than I've learned from any of this kind of entity. I believe the songs. —Bob Dylan

Dylan has a high confidence in his songs, in the truth he brings from within, and shrinks back from the words of Christ, as his foundation. Ironically, the cover of *Newsweek* in which the article appears carries a large picture of Dylan's face and the proclamation, "Dylan Lives."

The irony of that cover is real. Every single day, each of us decides who we live for. Just like Dylan, my faith is only as strong as my daily commitment to the commands of Christ. For this reason, Paul said, "*I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.*

Let's look now to the next point...

3. Presuming upon God's mercy (vv. 30-31)

³⁰ *For we know the one who has said,*

*Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, and again,
The Lord will judge his people.*

³¹ *It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

The notion of hell trips a lot of people up. The argument is often made: If God is real, and God is love, there is no way that He allows those He made to suffer eternal punishment. How can the doctrine of hell be consistent with the picture of Christ who rescues the woman caught in adultery in John, the woman who was about to be stoned by the religious leaders of the day?

Take the story, for example. When it is retold, we often remember the way that Jesus stepped in and saved this woman's skin. The rabid dogs had surrounded her and he

chased them all away. But the end of the story should be included. John writes this about that circle of Pharisees:

They walked away, one by one...Only Jesus was left, with the woman in the center. Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

"No one, Lord," she answered.

"Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go, and from now on do not sin anymore."

Those four words make a difference. Do not sin anymore. He's not expecting perfection. No human is capable of perfection. He's expecting effort, spiritual growth, the saying-no-to-sin portion of our lives. We cannot say that we love God, but walk through life as if we will never look him in the eye and give account for the way we lived. There is a heaven waiting for those who follow Christ, and a hell for those who look him in the face and unwrap the gum.

Charles Spurgeon said:

Think lightly of hell and you will think lightly of the cross. –Charles Spurgeon

God will repay all those who deliberately disobey. And you don't want to be in that crowd who saw him on the cross and walked away.

So, what are we to do?

What are the clear applications of this passage?

- ***Take sin seriously***

Stop minimizing what God calls deadly. Be aware of places in your life where you are making conscious decisions to say, "I know what God says, but I'm doing this anyway." Where have warnings been ignored, convictions dulled, obedience delayed? Where are you like that little boy with the stick of gum—you know you are not supposed to be doing this, but you're doing it anyway.

Confess those things to God and turn away. Repent means to do an about face.

- ***Be fiercely committed to attending church in-person.***

Notice how this warning flows directly out of Hebrews 10:23–25. People don't usually abandon faith overnight. They stop gathering. They stop confessing. They stop encouraging. They stop being known. Recommit yourself to regular worship, not as a habit, but as a lifeline. Re-engage with Christian community where people can speak into your life. Let others provoke you toward love and good works, even when it's uncomfortable.

The church is not a social accessory. It is a God-designed safeguard against spiritual amnesia.

- ***Return to Christ with humility.***

If you hear this text and feel fear, that may be the very sign that your heart is still soft. Like the prodigal Son who had to eat humble pie and go back home, admitting he'd made mistakes, we are to keep doing the same. The grace of our Father is always open to us, but we must turn back and run home to him.

Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart. Don't unwrap the gum. Don't crouch behind the car. Do what He tells you, because He is a good Father.

Now, as we finish up, let's consider some questions that may come from this text.

A Seasoned Christian Asks:

Since people are often blind in their spiritual drift, how can I know if it's happening to me?

I am a visual person, and a picture is worth a thousand words. I want to show you three images, and ask yourself to consider where you are with the Lord in this season of your life—which of these images best describes your current relationship with God? If the dock represents the Lord, and the boat represents you:

1. A boat at the dock. (here is a person that is clinging to Christ)
2. A boat that is drifting from the dock. (Here is a person who was once in position one, but pursuing the Lord has become less important in their life.)
3. A boat at sea. (This person no longer feels the presence of God)

Let me talk deeper about each one.

Boat 1

If you are at the dock, you are in the best possible place. This is a season of revival—when you sense a spiritual electricity coursing through your body. Be thankful for these moments, because they don't last forever. Growth is seasonal and sometimes we experience a growth spike. I like to think of these moments like the Mount of Transfiguration, when the glow of God came down, and the disciples asked: Can we put up a few tents and just stay right here?

Revival is a gift. It happens to people. It happens to churches.

Back in the 1700s, America experienced what is known today as The Great Awakening—a season of unusual spiritual growth and thousands of conversions. One of pastors of that day, Jonathan Edwards, wrote this in his diary:

In the spring and summer following, 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God: it never was so full of love, nor so full of joy...

There were remarkable tokens of God's presence in almost every house. It was a time of joy in families on the account of salvation's being brought unto them...

God's day (Sunday) was a delight. Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service...

We should pray for times of revival, times of refreshment. If you're in one of those, be thankful.

But maybe you're more like this boat:

Boat 2

What does it feel like here? It feels like ordinary, everyday life. It's not revival, and it's not ruin. In this season, there are good days and bad days, and in between days. The challenge with seasons like this is that life can feel boring, predictable. You may inwardly wonder if miracles still happen, if God is actively involved across the Earth.

If you're not careful, you might find yourself battling shame: what's wrong with me—why am I not more excited about my faith?

These seasons are normal. I can assure you that even the great Adrian Rogers had seasons when he felt the intimacy with Christ wane. Read any Christian biography and you will find a section devoted to the dark night of the soul. If you're here, then just take action. Start moving back to the dock.

And here's the third boat—this is the one you want to especially avoid.

Boat 3

When you're in this boat, you feel disconnected from God. You feel like you've lost all feeling for the things of God. You're numb, and you sense that you're under the discipline of God. Think of Jonah at the end of the book, when he's sitting under a hot tent, pouting because he did not like the way God chose to forgive all those Ninevites. He wasn't in tune with the Holy Spirit. He was miserable.

Author Brennan Manning, who became wildly successful as a Christian speaker, testified to this experience, even as he was being invited to countless crowded events as the keynote, early in his career. He writes:

Shortly after ordination, I got shanghaied (by success. Applause and acclaim in the ministry muffled the voice of the Beloved. I was in demand. What a giddy feeling to have my person admired and my presence required! As my unconditional availability increased and intimacy with Christ decreased, I rationalized that this was the price to be paid for unstinting service to the kingdom enterprise. --Brennan Manning, *Abba's Child*

You can sense what He's saying here. He's saying, "When I'm too busy working for God, I am unable to actually enjoy God. And that is the warning of Hebrews 10—if you find yourself in this place, wake up, and realize that the drift is taking place, and it's going to take you further than you want to go."

I've been in all three boats, haven't you? The Christian race is a marathon, and we go through seasons. And we all need grace. It's there for you.

A second question comes from a skeptical person, about the subject of hell.

A Good-Hearted Skeptic Asks:

Don't you think all the hell, fire and brimstone preaching in the past has turned many people away from God?

To that I would say, "Yes, some of it has. And some of it hasn't."

It all depends on the spirit of the person preaching on those texts.

I mentioned Jonathan Edwards, a moment ago. He was the Puritan pastor who led the First Great Awakening in America in the 1700s. The man is most famous for his sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Many people read that sermon today and consider it atrocious because Edwards comes across so harsh as he describes the horrors of hell and damnation and fire and sin. But you have to understand his context to understand his heart. He was pastoring people whose hearts had become cold toward God. They had no need for God and felt no desperate want for grace.

And so, Edwards, up in Connecticut, preaches this famous sermon that has a harsh title: *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, his goal obviously was to scare the daylights out of these apathetic people, explaining what happens to a person who dies in his sin. Later he wrote:

"Some talk as if it is an unreasonable thing to fright persons to heaven, but I think it is a reasonable thing to endeavor to fright persons away from hell. They stand upon its brink, and are just ready to fall into it, and are senseless of their danger. Is it not a reasonable thing to frighten a person out of a house on fire?"

On July 8, 1741, he tried to scare people out of a spiritual house on fire. was to convince those people that they were in danger, that their house was on fire, urging them to look for an escape. The most memorable part of the sermon involved a spider.

He said, every unsaved person, every sinner is like a spider that dangles by a single thread over a massive open pit of fire. And it is only the merciful God that prevents that sinner from falling, that holds the spider up. It is the kindness of God that keeps a person alive even while they live in rebellion.

God is merciful to the sinner, but for how long? Edwards says that sin in our lives is like dead weight that builds and feeds the gravity which pulls a person down. It adds to the weight that will destroy us.

Because of that sermon, The Holy Spirit jumped all over those people. They started confessing sins and Edwards was not able to finish the sermon before there was moaning and crying in the pews, people calling out "What must I do to be saved?" It all started when they realized the holiness of God and the sinfulness of man.

The greatest revival in American history was fueled by a fear of falling into the fire, unsaved by God. So, in answer to your question—there have been times when preaching on hell and fire have been the very thing that scared many away from it.

A Student Asks:

I have heard about the unforgivable sin, and I don't understand how this fits with the idea that the Father is always ready to forgive us.

That's a really good question, and you're not alone in wondering about it. The phrase "the unforgivable sin" can sound terrifying at first. Chances are—you have a moment or two in your life, when you did something wrong, and you've never been able to forgive yourself for it. You wonder if God feels that way about you.

The unforgivable sin is referenced in Mt 12:32...

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the one to come. Mt. 12:32

Jesus is not speaking to confused seekers or struggling disciples. He is speaking to religious leaders who have seen Him clearly, heard Him fully, and witnessed undeniable evidence of God's power. They watched Jesus heal the sick, cast out demons, and restore broken lives right in front of them. And instead of saying, "This must be from God," they said, "This power comes from Satan."

That is the key.

The unforgivable sin is not a single bad thought, a season of doubt, or even a serious moral failure. It is willful, settled rejection of Jesus in the face of overwhelming evidence.

In other words, this is not about someone who wants forgiveness and can't find it. It's about someone who has closed their heart entirely to God.

That's why it's called unforgivable. Not because God is unwilling to forgive, but because the person has let their boat go so far from God, that they no longer see any land.

Here's the most important reassurance: If you are worried that you may have committed the unforgivable sin, you haven't. People who have committed it are not anxious, not repentant, and they are not sitting in church wondering if grace is still sufficient for them. If you feel concerned about your sin, then your heart is still responsive to the Spirit of God.

Keep repenting of your sins, keep short accounts with God, and trust him for your salvation.

As we close today, I want you to soak up the power of a song. It's an old song about the dangerous position we put ourselves in, when we start to believe that we can go forward without God.

The song begins with this lyric:

Well, it took the hand of God Almighty

To part the waters of the sea

But it only took one little lie

To separate you and me

Oh, we are not as strong as we think we are

—

Set up the invitation.

Be prayed for today if...

- You've been drifting and you know it.
- Your heart feels hardened by recent events.
- You want to join our church and start forming deeper relationships.
- You want to repent of your past and give your heart to Christ.