

Hebrews:
Five
Warnings
For
BELIEVERS

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Salvation and the book of Hebrews

Salvation is a major theme seen throughout all of scripture. It is a glorious *multi-faceted* truth presented in various ways in the Word of God. As it relates to the New Testament believer, salvation has three main aspects: justification (the past aspect), sanctification (the present aspect), and glorification (the future aspect). Or to say it another way, believers currently possess salvation, are currently in the process of obtaining salvation, and in the future await salvation. Some have articulated it by saying, “I am saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved.”¹ Because salvation is multi-faceted, it is extremely important the Bible student carefully determine the mode of salvation a particular passage implies. If the proper mode of salvation is identified, an accurate interpretation and application will most likely follow.

The salvation spoken of in the book of Hebrews primarily deals with the current and future aspects of salvation—not the past aspect.² This is not to say the past aspect is totally ignored, but the other aspects are given preeminence. Additionally, the majority of the New Testament emphasizes the present and future aspects of salvation and not the past. The current and future aspects of salvation are related to the realization of rewards for faithful service. Thus, the current and future aspects of salvation involve faith and works. Believers, who have been saved by grace through faith alone, have been saved to produce good works.

The five warning passages which the book of Hebrews is structured around are written to believers. Further, the warnings do not represent any chance of loss of the past aspect of salvation (justification)—hence the eternal security of the believer. Rather the warnings admonish believers to press on and obtain all God has promised to the faithful overcomer. However, the warnings represent the very real possibility of the loss of privilege or rewards offered to a believer, which will be revealed at the judgment seat of Christ. Hence, the warnings concern themselves with the utter possibility of negative consequences for the unfaithful, apostatizing believer.

Preliminary Information about Hebrews

Much controversy surrounds the book of Hebrews. It has been said the book of Hebrews is the “riddle” of the New Testament. The authorship is in question and cannot be undeniably proven. It appears the Apostle Paul is not the author, and quite possibly, Apollos or Barnabas³ was the author. It does seem that whoever wrote the book had a vast knowledge of the Old Testament as well as a great understanding of the work of Christ. It is also evident the author of Hebrews was a Hellenistic Jew writing to Jewish believers who were under much persecution.⁴ In numerous places the author of Hebrews encourages believers to persevere. It is not disputed the admonition to persevere is a recurring message throughout the book. What is in question is

¹ Earl D. Radmacher, *Salvation* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, a unit of Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2000), 5-6.

² The past aspect of salvation, *justification*, is the gift from God of everlasting life received by faith alone in Christ alone. The present aspect, *sanctification*, is a progressive work that involves the faith and the works of the believer. The goal of this aspect is to be made more like Christ so the believer might share in Christ’s glory and enjoy a full reward (cf. 2 John 8). The third aspect, *glorification*, is a result of the previous aspects. All believers will be glorified (resurrected and given a body like Christ), but some will have more glory (i.e. reward) than others. Thus, salvation in Hebrews generally speaks of reward.

³ Zane C. Hodges, “Hebrews”, in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Colorado Springs, Co: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), 778.

⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 17-20.

the nature of the warnings, to whom they were addressed, and the danger presented for not persevering.

Views Concerning the Warnings

The five warnings occur in the following passages: Hebrews 2:1-5; 3:7-4:13; 6:4-8; 10:26-39; 12:25-29. According to Hebrews 13:22, the warnings were written to all the readers—not just part of them.⁵ Did the author of Hebrews assume some of his readers were unbelievers or did he assume all were believers? This question is the subject of much controversy. Hence, do the warnings apply to believers or non-believers?

Of particular interest is the third warning found in Hebrews 6:4-8. This passage is probably the most debated passage in all of scripture due to its strong language. According to Michael Eaton, at least sixteen different views exist concerning this passage.⁶ Of these sixteen views, three will be considered in the following analysis: the Calvinistic view, the Arminian view, and the Partaker view. These three views will be considered because they espouse the thinking of the majority of evangelical believers today.

The Calvinistic view essentially says the warnings are addressed to “spurious” believers who are really not believers at all. Hence, they are “professors but not possessors.” This view stems from the system of theology known as Calvinism which is built around five points. The points form a chain that is strengthened as each point is established. The last point is “perseverance of the saints.” In short, this point says all “true believers” will persevere until the end; they will not deny the faith intellectually nor act morally in an overall manner contrary to the faith. It is admitted many forms of Calvinism exist, and the above brief description does not completely cover all Calvinistic views. However, the above does provide an accurate overview of the Calvinistic approach, sometimes referred to as the Experimental Predestinarian approach.⁷ The heart of this view says perseverance is the grand test of reality. If one is “really” saved (justified and possessing everlasting life), his works will prove his conversion. Hence, good works do not save, but without good works, one is not saved. This view inherently denies assurance of salvation. The proof of regeneration is always in the future. No one can ever *know* if they are in possession of everlasting life according to this view.

The Arminian view says the warnings are addressed to believers. These believers are in danger of losing their salvation (justified status before God). The reason they are in danger of losing their justified status before God is a result of their sinful behavior. Thus, for the Arminian, salvation (justification) is something that can be lost. The Arminian does not affirm eternal security based on faith alone in Christ’s finished work. The believer’s eternal security rests in Christ’s work and the individual’s decision to continue in the faith and not fall away. Hence, works do not save, but they play a key role in retaining salvation.

It is interesting to note the similarities in these two views. Both acknowledge the central truth that Christ’s atoning work is absolutely necessary for salvation. Both realize the importance of works in the life of the believer. Both focus an enormous amount of importance on works for continued or “real” salvation of the individual. Yet these two systems have been at direct opposition to each other for hundreds of years. It has been observed that these two

⁵ John Niemela, “No More Sacrifice,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal*, Volume 4:4 (October 1998), 14.

⁶ Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 208.

⁷ Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Company, Second Edition, 1993), 14-20.

systems are not far apart and are dangerously close to the Roman Catholic system of salvation which emphasizes works as a means of salvation.

The Partaker view is a mediating approach with respect to the Calvinistic and Arminian systems. It is in agreement with the Arminian view where the objects of the warnings are truly regenerate believers. It is in agreement with Calvinism in that the life imparted by regeneration cannot be snuffed out. However, unlike the other views, it acknowledges the warnings are written to believers who stand in danger of losing rewards or privileges, not their justified status before God in Christ.⁸ The Partaker view does not focus on works as the proof of justification salvation or the means by which justification salvation is secured or kept. It focuses on justification salvation by grace through faith alone in the Work of Christ alone. The work or works of believers are not brought into view as it relates to the justification aspect of salvation. Hence, eternal security is a reality and assured for the individual who trusts Christ for everlasting life. All focus is on Christ's work for justification, not on any of man's work. The term "free grace" is attached to this facet of the gospel concerning justification salvation. *The Partaker view is the correct outlook for interpreting the warnings.* This view allows the text to speak and does not overlay upon the text a system ignoring the content and context.

One important key to understanding the warnings is to appreciate their unity. There are five warnings and all five are properly viewed as a unit. All of the warnings should be integrated. They go together and complement one another. Each warning builds upon the other. Also, the warnings intensify until the fifth and final warning which serves as a capstone to declare the severe consequences Christians face for failing to heed God's counsel. To complement this unified structure, the writer of Hebrews uses Israel's Exodus generation as an example of individual Christians. The Exodus generation, a redeemed people, failed to heed God's instruction and was judged for its disobedience. This Old Testament story is used throughout all five warnings to vividly describe the danger of failing to heed the admonition of God. Recognizing the unity of the warnings and the employed typology or example of the Exodus generation will alleviate much difficulty experienced by many in interpreting the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews Chapter One

It is of utmost importance the context of a book be considered when interpreting a passage or series of passages. Hebrews chapter one provides the introduction to the book of Hebrews and contains key information pertaining to all five warnings. Thus, it is extremely important to have a thorough understanding of the first chapter in order to make sense of the remainder of the book. Just as the book of Genesis is vitally important to the proper understanding of the entire Bible, so is Hebrews chapter one to the entire book of Hebrews.

Chapter one begins by stating God has spoken! His revelation to man is complete, and the final word has come directly to man in the person of His Son (verses 1-2). The Deity of the Son is emphasized in verses 2-4. Verses 5-14 consist of seven messianic quotations from the Old Testament that point to the coming millennial kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of particular import is the emphasis in chapter one on heirship and inheritance, mentioned three times in fourteen verses. The Son has been appointed heir of all things in verse 2 and has obtained a superior name to the angels by way of inheritance in verse 4. In verse 14 angels are seen as ministering to individuals who shall be heirs (lit., 'about to inherit') of salvation.

⁸ Ibid., 22-23.

“Hebrews opens with the writer’s main thesis, dealing with the superiority of Christ. Hebrews 1 describes Christ’s supremacy in revealing God over the previous revelation of God to the patriarchs by the prophets of the Old Testament (1:1-2a). It also declares the supremacy of the Son in His essential being and ongoing activities in the present (1:2b-4) as well as in the coming eschatological [future] kingdom (1:5-14).”⁹

In verse 14 a group of individuals are identified who “shall be heirs of salvation.” What is the nature of this salvation and who are these individuals? A future salvation is in view. Thus, justification with respect to everlasting life is not applicable for it is a past event.¹⁰ “What does salvation mean (in verse 14)? The most common understanding is soteriological, meaning justification or final deliverance from hell. However, this concept of salvation is never alluded to in Hebrews 1... This salvation is eschatological [in the future]. As ‘companions’ (v. 9), the readers will have a role in this deliverance over the Lord’s enemies and will participate in the millennial kingdom.”¹¹ Understanding the proper facet of salvation is crucial to properly interpreting and applying scripture. Salvation is a broad term and has a vast array of meaning. Context and syntax help determine the meaning in this verse. It is a future aspect of salvation attached to Christ’s coming kingdom, and the inheritance in that Kingdom will be afforded to the believer who *already possesses* justification salvation. Further, in order to attain this future salvation, *faith and works* of the believer are required. It is without question those who are ‘about to inherit’ are Christians.

Hebrews is a book extremely focused on prophetic truths. Chapter one’s emphasis upon the coming rule of Christ sets the tone for the book. “This chapter begins with and centers upon teachings surrounding the coming glory of Christ, and this is accomplished mainly through references to the Old Testament Scriptures...There are ‘seven quotations’ having to do with Christ and His coming glory. Seven is a number which refers to the completion of that which is in view; and these quotations present a complete, composite Messianic portrait of Christ, setting the stage for that which follows, covering the remainder of this book.”¹² The importance scripture places upon the coming millennial kingdom of Christ is immense. Paul comments on the importance of Christ’s millennial kingdom in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28. In this passage Paul points out Christ “must reign” in order to defeat all enemies. Thus, the final part of Christ’s redemptive work will occur during His coming millennial kingdom. All of prophecy points to the coming kingdom of the Messiah, and His kingdom is paramount in scripture. Notice McClain’s remarks concerning the kingdom, “The Kingdom of God is, in a certain and important sense, the grand central theme of all Holy Scripture. In approving this affirmation we are not forgetting the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ... but as we contemplate Him and His manifold glories as revealed in the Word of God, we shall inescapably come sooner or later to the Kingdom of which He is the divine center. For it is in this Kingdom that the Father’s eternal purpose in the incarnate Son shall be certainly and completely fulfilled.”¹³

⁹ Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews 1:5-2:5,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 145:577 (January 1988), 84.

¹⁰ Cf. John 3:18; 5:24; Eph 2:5, 8. Those justified **already possess everlasting life**. It is not something they inherit; but it is something they receive as a gift.

¹¹ Oberholtzer, “The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews 1:5-2:5,” 93.

¹² Arlen Chitwood, *So Great Salvation* (Norman, OK: The Lamp Broadcast, Inc. 1990), 2.

¹³ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1968), 5.

Why the Warnings

Whenever a “warning” is given, one must ask, why? Why does the author of Hebrews take the time to structure the book around five warnings? Why not just speak of the glory and superiority of Christ as grand theological truth? Several answers seem evident. Firstly, God in His love and mercy saw fit to move the author of Hebrews to warn his readers. Secondly, the author of Hebrews, along with the Lord, loved the recipients of the letter enough to warn them of impending danger. Thirdly, along with the original recipients, God wanted future readers to understand grave danger accompanies apostasy.

Establishing the original recipients were Christians is fairly easy to do. As each warning is analyzed, emphasis will be given to substantiate the fact those being warned are Christians. The late Dr. M.R. DeHaan provides some insightful common sense arguments in chapter one of his commentary on the book of Hebrews entitled, “Saved—or Half Saved,” establishing the fact the warnings apply to believers. Notice his comments: “The correct interpretation of the book hinges on the answer to this one question, Were the people addressed Christians or unbelievers, saved or unsaved?”¹⁴ Dr. DeHaan goes on to point out over two dozen times the author of Hebrews includes himself in the warnings and admonitions and also uses the pronoun “us” numerous times. He continues: “Moreover, the description of these Hebrews is one which can only fit believers... I have never heard a Bible teacher who did not apply this passage to believers (Hebrews 10:19-25). Is this admonition to believers or sinners? Does God urge an unconverted, half-saved professor to hold fast his false profession?...By what rule of interpretation can we say the next verse is addressed not to believers but to false professors?”¹⁵ The next verse begins the fourth warning, and Dr. DeHaan contends it is definitely addressed to believers. It is his conviction the entire book of Hebrews, including the warnings, was written to believers in danger of falling away.

In light of the fact the warnings are written to believers, it should be asked, “What is at stake?” What are these believers going to lose, forfeit or suffer? This question should be answered in light of the overall context of the book. Again, listen to Dr. Dehaan: “The lesson and burden of the book of Hebrews is not salvation for sinners primarily, but it has to do with rewards or loss of rewards for believers at the judgment seat of Christ. We can not escape it by applying it to others.”¹⁶ Reformed writer R.T. Kendall concurs: “In many ways, the key to the book of Hebrews is the judgment seat of Christ...I think that if there is anything the devil wants, it is to get Christians to think that all that matters is being saved or lost...There is a reward or loss to be meted out at the judgment seat of Christ.”¹⁷ Understanding this truth should be revolutionary for the believer. God has promised blessing and glory so incredible the human mind cannot conceive! He so wants to reward the believer that He moved the author of Hebrews to include five major warnings concerning the potential loss of regal status in the coming millennial kingdom of Christ. Notice what another giant in the scriptures has said concerning the burden of Hebrews: “The burden of *Hebrews* is not the rescuing of sinners from hell, nor even the blessings of *children* in the vast family circle, but it is the bringing of *sons* to *glory*. Of old Israel did not reach the enjoyment of being God’s son, His firstborn son and heir (Ex 4:22). In

¹⁴ M.R. DeHaan, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 17.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷ R.T. Kendall, *Are You Stone Deaf To The Spirit or Rediscovering God?* (Scotland, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1999), 21.

this Christians also may fail...Had this emphasis by the Writer himself upon what is his theme been generally recognized, most perhaps of what has been said upon his warnings would never have been written, thus had controversy and confusion been much reduced [emphasis his].”¹⁸

The First Warning: Hebrews 2:1-5

“Therefore we” is how the first warning begins. The word “therefore” points the reader back to the facts in chapter one concerning the coming millennial glory of Christ and the *believer’s* impending inheritance and glory in Christ’s millennial kingdom. The reader is exhorted to not let the truths of chapter one fade away from his or her mind. The author includes himself in verse 3 when he says, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” Two questions should be considered: what is meant by “great salvation” and what is the result of neglecting the “great salvation?” The great salvation refers back to the salvation in 1:14. It is the glorious privilege of ruling and reigning with Christ in His coming millennial kingdom—inheriting the kingdom! Those who are deemed worthy at the judgment seat of Christ will be allowed this privilege (cf. Rev 3:21; 21:7). This truth is in view in verse 5 when the author defines the time of which he speaks—the world to come, where angels who presently rule (cf. Dan 7:9; Eph 6:12; Rev 4:4; 12:7-9) will no longer rule but will be replaced by Christ and his companions. Christ’s companions are the *faithful* who are about to inherit salvation. The result of neglecting this salvation is serious. The author, including himself in the warning, says “we” shall not escape—escape what? The just recompense of reward spoken of in verse 2. When the Lord Jesus assumes the role of Judge, He begins His judgment with believers (cf. 1 Peter 4:17; Heb 12:30) at the judgment seat of Christ rewarding all according to their works. Colossians 3:23-25 explains: “23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.” Notice two things in this passage: the reward is an inheritance and those who do wrong (described earlier in Colossians 3) receive for the wrong they have done, which can only be a loss of inheritance (i.e. reward). *This loss of inheritance is what the author of Hebrews is warning the readers to avoid at all costs!*

The Second Warning: Hebrews 3:7-4:13

After the first warning, the author of Hebrews resumes His discussion of Christ’s glory and the marvelous work He performed on man’s behalf. What Adam lost—rulership of the earth—Christ has regained. However, His office of King is not yet fulfilled. Satan inhabits and still has dominion over the heavenly realm of the earth. The line of thought throughout chapter 2 points to the original purpose for which man was created—regality.

The second warning uses an example from the Old Testament concerning loss of inheritance. The Exodus generation of Israelites, who came out of Egypt, were a redeemed people (cf. Ex 14:31; 15:13) who saw the mighty power of God in their midst (cf. Ex 19). They were saved by the blood of the Passover lamb, delivered out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, saw Pharaoh’s army drown, fed quail and manna from heaven daily, and witnessed the goodness of the land of Canaan promised to them by God. Hence, they were witnesses of the goodness and glory of their Almighty God, *Yahweh*. When they failed to believe God and would not enter to

¹⁸ G. H. Lang, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London, England: The Paternoster Press, 1951), 58.

fight for the conquest of Canaan, the Lord in wrath banned them from entering or possessing the Promised Land. The possession or ownership of the land of Canaan was an inheritance promised for obedience (i.e. reward for faithfulness). With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, inheritance was lost by the Exodus generation due to their unbelief and disobedience. Because they had seen the glory of the Lord in such a vivid way, God judged them for spurning His love and glory: “22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; 23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: 24 But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.” (Numbers 14:22-24)

It is against this backdrop the author of Hebrews warns readers. They, like the Israelites, are redeemed by the blood. Notice the language in 3:1, “holy brethren,” “partakers of the heavenly calling” and in 3:12 “brethren.” The “rest” spoken of in chapter 4 is *not* heaven, just as Canaan is not heaven or a type of heaven. The “rest” in Chapter 4 is the believer’s meritorious ownership in the millennial kingdom of Christ (i.e. reward for faithfulness).¹⁹ This subject has been in view since the beginning of the epistle. It is a future rest that currently requires work. The work needed in order to obtain the rest is mentioned in 4:11, “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” Some will argue the Exodus generation was lost in its entirety. This is impossible for several reasons: (1) Exodus 14:31 and 15:13 state they believed the Lord, and He redeemed them. They possessed salvation but did not allow God to strengthen their faith. As a result, they began to doubt God’s promises in the midst of a hot desert. (2) How could all or some of the 600,000 people, who were said to have been saved, be unregenerate? (3) Using the same logic, were Aaron and Moses unregenerate for they failed to enter because of unbelief (cf. Num 20:12)? (4) The picture is not necessarily of individuals but of National Israel. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 10, uses National Israel in the same way as an example and warning for Christians to heed.

The Third Warning: Hebrews 6:4-8

As previously stated, the third warning is quite possibly the most controversial passage in scripture due to its strong language. However, the warning simply amplifies the previous warnings and shows how serious it is if believers fall away from the Lord. The language in verse 4, which describes the individuals for whom it is impossible to obtain repentance, has been hotly debated. The language describes a believer in no uncertain terms. Those who are described have seen more than a simple glimpse of the Lord. They have seen miracles and signs (cf. Heb 2:4) during the first century. They are on the heels of the risen Lord and have been influenced by His holy apostles who have been eyewitnesses of His majesty (cf. 2 Pet 1:16). In verse 5 it says they have “tasted the powers of the world to come.” The word “world” is the Greek word *aion* and is defined as an age or period of time—specifically the messianic age.²⁰ *Aion* never refers to eternity unless it is plural. Hence, these individuals have understood the glory that awaits Christ and Christians in the coming millennial kingdom, but they have turned away to go back to the world. They have done basically the same thing the Exodus generation did in the wilderness

¹⁹ Dillow, 63-68.

²⁰ *Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary*, (2003 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc., 1994).

when they refused to enter and fight for the Promised Land. Those Israelites angered God so thoroughly He swore on His own name they would not enter the Promised Land. God made up His mind, and He would not repent. A close reading of Numbers 14 will reveal the fact God originally wanted to “disinherit” all the Israelites, except for Moses, and start over with him to make a great nation. But Moses pleaded for Him not to do this. Thus, God obliged Moses but still would not change His mind as it related to the first generation entering the land. Subsequently, the Exodus generation decided the next day to enter the land in spite of God’s decision. *They changed their mind—repented—but God did not. Therefore, they suffered defeat when they attempted to enter.* The lesson of Numbers 14 is brought out in the third warning revealing God is jealous about sharing His glory. Those to whom He shows great and mighty works and His glory should take heed. *Thus, the repentance spoken of in Hebrews 6:6 is on God’s part, not the individual’s part.*

The strong language of Hebrews 6:8 has led many expositors to conclude the individual described is an unbeliever. “But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” The metaphorical language has been interpreted as referring to eternal punishment in the lake of fire. However, it should not be and cannot be based on the fact those addressed are believers. It should be noted God does intend to judge His people at the judgment seat of Christ with fire trying each work. Thought should be given to the following statement of scripture: “If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.” (1 Cor 3:15) The judgment seat of Christ will not be a happy, go lucky event where the Lord hands out trophies to all in attendance. The scriptures implicitly state judgment, not mercy, will emanate from the judgment seat of Christ with a just recompense of reward—positive and negative as the result. For further examples of how Jesus described both the positive and negative aspects of future judgment of believers, see the following passages: Matt 18:23-35; 24:42-51; 25:14-30; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 12:1-12; 41-48; 19:11-27.

The Fourth Warning: Hebrews 10: 26-39

The intensity of the fourth warning is greater than the previous warnings as it mentions willful sin, fiery judgment, and sorer punishment. Verse 25 of chapter 10 concludes with “the day approaching,” a reference to coming end time events. Certainly these events involve the judgment seat of Christ and the millennial kingdom—subjects that have been at the forefront of the entire epistle. Those who commit willful sin after receiving knowledge of the truth are sure to face severe judgment. The author includes himself as a potential candidate for this judgment in verse 26 when he says, “For if we.” It is still maintained the individuals in view are believers. For in verse 29, they are said to have been “sanctified,” and in verse 30, it is clear the judgment is for God’s people—not unbelievers. The previous context is clearly referring to believers since they are admonished to “hold fast.”

Willful sin should be examined; and it should be defined from the context and text itself. The willful sin is not simply a sin a believer commits willfully. For what sin is not committed by the will of a believer? The willful sin is specific and revealed in the text. It involves turning away from knowledge. The Greek word for “knowledge” used in verse 26 is the word *epignosis*. Vine defines *epignosis* saying: “denotes ‘exact or full knowledge, discernment, recognition,’ and is a strengthened form of No. 1, expressing a fuller or a full ‘knowledge,’ a greater participation

by the 'knower' in the object 'known,' thus more powerfully influencing him."²¹ Those being warned are not newcomers to the faith. They do not simply have a casual knowledge of the Lord. They have a full knowledge of His glory. In keeping with the previous warnings, the emphasis is upon the believer who has a mature understanding of the proffered blessings and glory of the coming age. To turn back is a slap in the face to God. Hence, severe judgment awaits one who willfully forsakes. To stand before the Lord, having "trodden under foot the Son of God" and "counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing" and "done despite unto the Spirit of grace," will be a terrifying experience. Paul made mention of the possibility of this experience in 2 Corinthians 5:9-11: "9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. 11 Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences." The 25th chapter of Matthew's Gospel also gives insight as to how God will judge unfaithful servants. Notice the severity of the language in Matthew 25:26-30: "26 His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: 27 Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. 28 Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. 29 For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. 30 And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." The "outer darkness" describes a place of sorrow and grief experienced by an unfaithful servant. Unfaithful servants are saved by grace but not positively rewarded for unfaithfulness. This portion of the parable describes the possible negative aspects of the judgment seat of Christ. Those in "outer darkness" have lost the reward of inheritance in the millennial kingdom.

The Fifth Warning: Hebrews 12:25-29

In Hebrews chapter 12, the fifth and final warning follows the great faith chapter (Hebrews 11) and a discussion on running the race with patience (Heb 12:1-2). A discussion on chastisement in the present life is in view along with holy living (Heb 12:3-15). Chastisement is understood not simply of correction for doing wrong. The concept of chastisement is that of child training. The example of Esau is published as a precursor to the warning proper (Heb 12:16-17). Esau was the first-born son of Isaac and in line to enjoy the rights of his firstborn status. Those rights included kingship and priesthood of the family along with a double-portion of the inheritance. However, Esau was a worldly son and saw no value in his birthright. He did not recognize the significance of the privileges he forfeited until it was too late. When he did finally realize the vast benefit attached to his firstborn status, he begged and pleaded with his father Isaac to change his mind and bless him. Isaac could not and would not change his mind for the blessing had already proceeded from his lips to his son Jacob (cf. Gen 27:30-40). The readers are admonished to heed the lesson and not forfeit the blessing in exchange for worldly cares.

The fifth warning, beginning in verse 25, is a command for Christians to listen and not refuse the Lord God Almighty's gracious offer of regal blessing beyond comprehension! "The

²¹ *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, (2003 BibleSoft, Inc., Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985).

Hebrew Christians he is addressing were in danger, like their forbearers under Moses, of stopping their ears to the voice of God himself.”²² This warning is the final summation of those previous. The appeal in verse 25 to not refuse the Lord is juxtaposed with verse 19 where the Israelites were not willing to listen to the awesome voice of God in the wilderness. This is a reference to Exodus chapters 19 and 20. In Exodus 20:19 the people request that Moses speak with God for them because they did not want to speak to God directly. This arrangement was not God’s will for He wanted a nation of kings and priests (cf. Ex 19:5-6). Again, the warning contrasts the shortcomings of the Exodus generation with the possible shortcomings of Christians. Paul made reference to the Exodus generation in 1 Corinthians 10 where he said the things written were for the benefit of Christians. The benefit is to see how not to behave, for God was not well pleased with this generation. God, who spoke through angels and Moses, has now spoken through His Son; God has spoken directly to man. If the intensity of His voice caused fear in the hearts of the people in Exodus 19, then the magnitude of His voice should produce reverence and godly fear in the hearts of Christians. Christians are reminded of the holy character of God that necessitates the need for judgment—“our God is a consuming fire.” Verse 28 speaks of a coming kingdom afforded to believers that cannot be shaken. “The kingdom the believers will receive is the millennial kingdom in which they will reign and rule as companions with the Messiah-King (Rev 20:1–6). The theme of receiving the kingdom has permeated the entire epistle (Heb 1:9, 13–14; 4:1–11; 6:9; 10:25, 37–38; 12:28). The exhortations of the book revolve around the readers’ perseverance, so that they will not lose their inheritance-rest (i.e. rewards) in this coming kingdom.

Faithful perseverance on the part of the readers will be the basis on which they will be evaluated to determine if they will receive rewards in the kingdom. There is a present sense of receiving the kingdom, in that endurance or perseverance insures a laying up of treasure in heaven (Matt 6:19–21). Reward or loss of reward in the eschaton [millennial kingdom] is determined by present faithfulness.”²³

Comfort amongst the Warnings

Even though the warnings are severe, they should produce an incentive to remain faithful. All through the book, the author encourages the readers to “go on,” “hold fast,” and “run with patience.” In chapter 6, after a stern warning, the author encourages his readers by saying he is persuaded they will not fall away. He reminds them of past labor and encourages them to *persevere*. In chapter 10, after an even sterner warning, he reminds the readers again of their sufferings for Christ. He tells them their suffering will not be in vain and will result in heavenly reward—“great recompense of reward.” Chapter 12 opens with another admonition to run the race with patience. The Lord Jesus, along with those just mentioned in chapter 11, has finished His course victoriously and is now seated in a place of prominence (cf. Phil 2:9-11). Believers are admonished to seek a similar position by running with their eyes focused on Christ and Christ alone: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” (Col 3:1) The author of Hebrews sought to admonish the readers to faith and patience (perseverance) not to discourage them with doom and gloom. He explains that

²² Phillip Edgumbe Huges, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 556.

²³ Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Failure to heed His Speaking in Hebrews 12:25-29,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Volume 146:581 (January 1989), 73.

their great High Priest is seated in the heavenly tabernacle ministering on their behalf (cf. Heb 4:14-16). However, it was imperative he warn believers of the potential negative consequences of apostasy so as to provide added incentive to strive for the crown (i.e. reward or inheritance or rest).

Conclusion

The warnings in the book of Hebrews serve as a wake up call to God's children. He has justified individuals and seeks to conform them to the image of His victorious Son. "Great Salvation" awaits those who persevere and finish their course. Great loss awaits those who fail to persevere—loss of reward and honor in Christ's coming millennial kingdom. Judgment awaits every born again individual at the judgment seat of Christ. God so wants every believer to hear the words "well done;" therefore, He moved the author of Hebrews to structure his argument around five warnings. This is a great display of love and concern on both God and the author's part. May God's children heed the warnings and strive for the crown their Father so desperately wants to award them on that glorious Day of Judgment. "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Rev 3:11)