

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: HEBREWS 10:32-39**

To better understand how to endure persecution as a Christian.

Read the Text:

But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, 33 sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. 34 For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. 35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. 37 For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; 38 but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls. (Heb. 10:32-39, ESV)

Study the Text:**Do Not Throw Away Your Confidence**

While there is not a catchy saying for "but" as there is with "therefore" (as in, "*what's the therefore there for*"), it is still important to understand where the author started in order to see what he is describing here at the end of chapter 10. Remember, Hebrews 9 was about Jesus "entering" the heavenly sanctuary, and the beginning of Hebrews 10 was about Jesus "offering" himself as a sacrifice, while the later half has been about the confidence (or boldness) believers have to enter the heavenly sanctuary. Then, in verses 26-31 (right before today's text), the author describes the witnesses (Son, blood, Holy Spirit) who will provide evidence to the Judge (the Lord) of the deliberate sin of those who have received the knowledge of the truth. And it concludes by reminding us: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). Having set the stage in this way, the author opens up this section with the word "but" in verse 32. Below is a breakdown of some of the key words and concepts in this passage.

Recall The Former Days

After the warning in verses 26 through 31, the author shifts to positive encouragement in verse 32. However, notice that in both verses the audience has either “received the knowledge of the truth” (v.26) or “were enlightened” (v.32). Just as the author did not shrink away from the warning of the judgment of the Lord, he now will not downplay the experience of the believer in a fallen world. He calls them to “recall the former days.” This is not merely just thinking back quickly, but a plea to remember specific events from the past. The author has a purpose in the specifics of what he asks his audience to remember.

What You Endured

The book of Acts provides examples of this kind of “looking back” in Paul's life (though Stephen [Acts 7], James, the brother of John [Acts 12], Peter [Acts 4], etc., are also examples in the book of Acts). In Paul's life, he both physically suffered (in Acts 14:9 he was stoned and in Acts 16:22 he was beaten with rods) and situationally suffered (in Acts 27 he was shipwrecked), as well as publicly exposed to reproach and affliction (Acts 13:50, 16, 17, 18, 19... really just all of the end of the book of Acts). But church history also provides example after example of those who are enlightened and subsequently endure hard struggles in the same way. Paul himself describes his internal struggle with suffering in 2 Corinthians 12:8-10: “Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this (a thorn, a messenger of Satan to harass Paul), that it should leave me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” Not only that, but Scripture also reminds us that sometimes it is not *you* who suffer, but *those who are partners with you in the mission of Christ*. This brings to mind Onesiphorus, who is described in 2 Tim. 1:16-17 as often refreshing Paul and not ashamed of Paul's chains, but that he searched for Paul earnestly in Rome. These are the types of events that the author wants his audience to remember.

What You Had

As the author continues to walk his readers through their former days, he shifts from what they endured because of their faith to what they had because of it: *compassion* and *joy*. Both are easily counterfeited—compassion is compromised for mere pity, and joy for the empty happiness of earthly things. In light of this, Hebrews anchors each to a situation where its counterfeit could never be found. Pity is what we feel from a safe distance outside of the prison, but compassion is the one who visits those inside of the prison. Grindheim writes, “This verb (compassion / *sympatheō*) describes the act of putting oneself in someone else's situation in order to serve as moral support in one's suffering... The author uses it only twice, in his portrait of Jesus as high priest, and in this picture of the Christian community.”¹

In other words, we become like Christ as high priest when we have compassion on those in low circumstances. And remember, his audience did not deserve Christ's compassion (for, “all have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God”), but he still came and dwelt among men. Similarly, his audience should remember how countercultural it is to have compassion on those in prison. Likewise, worldly happiness typically depends on favorable circumstances or things, but his audience needs to remember that their joy survived the

¹ Sigurd Grindheim, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 523.

plundering of their property. And this type of joy can only come from knowing that they “had a better possession and an abiding one” (Heb. 10:34b).

Therefore!

Hebrews 10:36 continues: “For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.” Up to this point in chapter 10, the author has reminded the community of believers to let “us” (*the author and his readers*) draw near (10:22), let “us” hold fast (10:23), let “us” consider (10:24); that “we” should not go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth (10:26); and to recall the former days (10:32). He has given a list of actions that sometimes can be used as “works” to earn salvation, but this list does not name actions that gain salvation but are meant rather to build confidence in the salvation we have received. And so he drives this point home by saying: “Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward” (Heb. 10:35). And this confidence is tied directly back to Hebrews 10:19: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus.” Our confidence is in the blood of Jesus, which has a great reward. While the call of verses 20 through 34 is centered around remembering works of endurance, do not lose the forest (Jesus completed work) for the trees (our works of endurance).

What About Now?

Chapter 10 reminds us to draw near, hold fast, consider, and recall to endure. And it is easy to sometimes feel that these works gain us salvation. For we draw near in confidence to God as high priests, kings, brothers/sisters, sons/daughters! But we must remember it is not by works that we are saved, but the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Jesus spoke similarly (Matt 11:28-30). We are called to take up this yoke—drawing near, holding fast, considering, recalling—which is light compared to the yoke of slavery to sin, which carries the weight of death. Another takeaway is that when the author says believers “endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction,” he does not mean that because you have not suffered physically like Paul, you have any less of a struggle to recall. In just a few chapters, the author of Hebrews will tell his readers that “in your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood” (Heb. 12:4). Your testimony of overcoming addiction, losing a friend, or facing tension in a relationship—because you refused to shrink back from confessing what God calls sin in your life as unacceptable—is worth recalling.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Hebrews 10:32–33. What does the author ask his readers to recall?

2. Read Hebrews 10:32–33. What does it mean that they were *enlightened*?

Day Two

1. Read Hebrews 10:34. How did they respond to those in prison? Or to losing property?

2. Read Hebrews 10:34. What enabled them to accept the plundering of your property joyfully? What does this reveal about where they placed their ultimate hope?
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Day Three

1. Read Hebrews 10:35-37. Why does the author say we have need of endurance?
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2. Read Hebrews 10:35-37. What promise do you see in his quote?
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Day Four

1. Read Hebrews 10:39. Why do you think the author chooses to say “we” here?
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2. How does his relating to his readers encourage *you*?
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Discuss the Text!

Session 25 Discussion: Recall the Former Days

We all have a testimony worth remembering. We found ourselves dead in our trespasses and sins in which we once walked, following the course of this world. But God made us alive together with Christ! This is good news, but our old self had friends, family, and experiences that needed to be set aside, and this often comes not only with internal struggle, but also with real external struggle, reproach, and affliction. Talk as a group about this part of your testimony.

1. Icebreaker: When you think back on your life before Christ, what’s one memory that reminds you just how “dead in trespasses” you actually were?
2. Who or what was hardest for you to walk away from (a friendship, habit, place, etc.)?
3. Have you experienced reproach or affliction from others because of the change?
4. Have you ever felt compassion or joy for someone or a situation that didn’t feel normal?
5. Do you gain confidence in these situations by knowing you are doing the will of God?
6. Kid Talk: Has a friend ever made fun of you or left you out because you chose to do the right thing? Talk about how following Jesus sometimes means old friends or old habits no longer fit. Remind them that God promises to never leave us, even if others do.

Takeaways:

1. Recalling the former days gives endurance.
2. We are those who have faith and preserve our souls.