

Week 20: FORMED Series

Choosing Faith Under Pressure

Hebrews 10:26-39

²⁶ If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. ²⁸ Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹ How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? ³⁰ For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." ³¹ It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

³² Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. ³³ Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. ³⁴ You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. ³⁵ So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded.

³⁶ You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. ³⁷ For,

*"In just a little while,
he who is coming will come
and will not delay."*

³⁸ And,

*"But my righteous one will live by faith.
And I take no pleasure
in the one who shrinks back."*

³⁹ But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.

From this week's sermon:

In the message this week, Liz explained that this text was written to believers who were under pressure; to encourage them and to call them to endure in the faith. It includes a strong warning not to reject Jesus, but to persevere and await what God has promised. She also reminded us to pray for those who are still persecuted for their faith today.

Scholarly Insight:

Cockerill's Insight:¹

While this warning passage reminds us of 6:4–8, it plays a significantly different role. That earlier warning was tailored to rouse the hearers from lethargy so that they would grasp the pastor's teaching on Christ's high priesthood. The pastor has now instructed them in the full sufficiency of their High Priest. This he did in 7:1–10:18 when he served them the "solid food" (5:12, 14) of the mature. His summary in 10:19–22 boiled these benefits down for easy digestion. Thus, the pastor raises the alarm lest his hearers abandon the now-explained salvation provided by Christ's priesthood. The urgency of his concern has increased in direct proportion to the way in which the magnitude of this provision has become clear: there is no other way of salvation if one abandons the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. This different purpose is reflected in the pastor's use of participles. The earlier warning began with four substantive participle phrases describing the privileged people of God (6:4–5). Those privileges have been made patently clear in the intervening chapters. Thus the pastor climaxes this concluding warning with three such phrases describing the enormity of the offense perpetrated by those who abandon Christ and the privileges he bestows (v. 29). Furthermore, the pastor demonstrates his urgency by exchanging the impersonal speech of 6:4–8 ("if they fall away") for the intensely personal: "For if we" who have this experience of God's blessing and knowledge of his truth "persist in willfully sinning." If rejection or acceptance of that which anticipated fulfillment in Christ could lead to ultimate loss (3:7–4:11) or result in eternal blessing (11:1–40), how much more surely will the rejection of the fulfillment itself have eternal consequences.

The pastor may use this appeal to fear followed by words of encouragement (10:32–34) in accord with the rhetorical practices of his day as described in various ancient sources. However, his warnings are more than empty rhetoric. The sufficiency of Christ is real, and the consequences of abandoning Christ's provision are tragic. The pastor recounts these realities because they provide valid and compelling motivation for perseverance. He has no intention of establishing norms for church discipline whereby a congregation could discern and thus excommunicate an apostate. Nor does he wish to cause sensitive believers anxiety over the possibility that they have irrevocably fallen. The apostate whom he is describing would be unmoved by his warnings.

Guthrie's Explanation:²

THE AUTHOR OF Hebrews utilizes a masterful mix of warnings, promised rewards, and human examples in encouraging his hearers to persevere in the Christian faith. In 10:26–39 he employs all three to good effect, balancing the harsh warning (10:26–31)—arguably the harshest in the book—with a gentler reminder of past success (10:32–34), then rounding out the whole by calling this struggling community back to a life lived in light of the Parousia (10:35–39). The passage follows roughly the same pattern as 6:4–20: severe warning (6:4–8), softening of the warning by a reminder of the community's past ministries (6:9–12), and an encouragement to take seriously the promises of God (6:13–20). Here again, therefore, we see the tension in the book between the dreadful dangers of rejecting the Word of God over against the glorious promises for those who endure to the end under the authority of that Word.

¹ Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans, 2012), p. 482.

² George Guthrie, *Hebrews*, (Zondervan Academic, 2009), p. 355.

For Reflection:

From the sermon, Liz asked us to consider:

- **How is my relationship with Jesus?** Am I trusting His grace, or am I tempted to shrink back?
- **Where do I feel pressure to follow Jesus?** What would standing stronger look like this week?
- **Is God stirring my heart for the persecuted church?**

For Discussion:

1. Read Hebrews 10:26-39 aloud together. As you read, which part (if any) did the Holy Spirit highlight to you?
2. The author seems to write with more urgency here than in his earlier warning (Hebrews 6), likely because his hearers now fully understand what Christ has done for them. Does understanding more about what Jesus has done raise the stakes of turning away from Him? Why or why not?
3. As Liz unpacked the text, she highlighted a clear distinction between deliberate, knowing rejection of Christ and ordinary struggle, doubt, or seasons of spiritual dryness. Why does that distinction matter, and have you (or have you known someone) who feared they had crossed the line?
4. Most people already believe in justice, or desire that our world be just; ie. we want wrongdoers held accountable. How does this common idea help us understand, rather than recoil from, the idea of God's judgment? How does the idea of God's holiness influence our understanding?
5. Throughout the biblical narrative God's judgement stands alongside His patience. He is described as slow to bring judgement because he wants people to repent. Do you more often find yourself wanting God to judge more rapidly vs extend patience and kindness (to lead to repentance)? Have you experienced God's judgement / correction and/or His patience in your life?
6. The writer tells the church to remember how they endured suffering and loss in the past, and even calls that a source of confidence for facing pressure now. Can you recall a time that God helped you endure through hardship, and how does remembering it change how you may face hardship differently today?
7. In Australia, most Christians surveyed said it's riskier to identify publicly as a believer than it was five years ago. Have you personally felt that pressure? Whether at work, with friends and family or even online? How did you respond? As you reflect back, was it a response that Honoured Jesus?
8. "Shrinking back" can be described as an intentional pulling away from Christ toward something safer or more familiar. What does "something safer or more familiar" tend to look like in your own life when faith feels costly?

Pray for each other:

Father, thank You for this passage and for the reminder from Hebrews that You are with us, even when following Jesus is difficult or comes with pressure.

Thank You for Your patience and grace toward each of us. Help us not to shrink back when our faith is challenged, but to keep trusting You and to keep our eyes on the hope and promises we have in Jesus.

Jesus, You know the pressures each of us is carrying. You know the places where we find it hard to stand for our faith. Give us courage this week to honour You in those situations, and help us to remember the ways You have been faithful to us in the past.

We also pray for Christians around the world who are facing much greater persecution than many of us experience. Strengthen them, protect them, and remind them that they are not alone.

Help us to encourage one another, to keep following Jesus, and to live by faith even when it costs us something.

We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Formation Practice:

As we exploring being Formed by Jesus this series; we want to encourage you to do this simple exercise every day for the next 2 months. It can take 5 minutes or more, whatever you are able to achieve (and as you do it more and more, you'll likely find it easier to spend longer listening and reflecting).

"Draw Near Daily" Rhythm (5–10 minutes)

- ***Come:*** Quiet yourself before God.
- ***Confess:*** Be honest about sin/struggle.
- ***Receive:*** Remember what Christ has done.
- ***Respond:*** Take one step of obedience.