

Text: Hebrews 10:32-35

Title: Encouragement to Perseverance

Truth: God encourages us to keep on believing.

Date/Location: July 10, 2011 at FBC

Introduction

God offers an encouraging word after the strong warning of 10:26-31.

10:32-39 indicates the author's confidence of the readers' salvation, along with an exhortation to them to persevere in the faith. This follows the same pattern that was used in chapter 6 where, after the dire warning in 6:4-8, verse 9 expressed confidence that the readers were in fact believers.

Remember the message of the book of Hebrews: we must have persevering faith in Jesus Christ to be saved. To be saved, we must believe, and true belief has the characteristic that it continues believing.

Diagram

- 32 But **recall** the former days in which,
after you were illuminated,
you endured a great struggle with sufferings:
- 33 [A] partly while you were made a spectacle
both by reproaches and tribulations,
[B] and partly while you became companions
of those who were so treated;
- 34 [B] for you had compassion on me in my chains,
and [A] joyfully accepted the plundering
of your goods,
knowing that you have
a better
and an enduring possession
for yourselves
in heaven.
- 35 Therefore **do not cast away** your confidence,
which has great reward.

In this section, Paul gives the readers, and us, a kind of recipe for how to handle doubts and discouragement that come from persecution.

I. Think Back, v. 32-34

The action word is *recall*. It is a command that means *remind yourselves*.

In this case, the readers are to remind themselves about the past. Maybe those times were the “good old days”! There was good in them—the salvation of the readers. But there was also bad in them—the persecution of the readers.

A. Illuminated, v. 32a

This term refers to regeneration. It has the idea of the light bulb turning on spiritually and mentally so the person sees the gospel and the glory of Christ.

John 1:9 uses the term of Jesus enlightening men; Eph 1:18 uses the term of believers who might understand more of the Christian hope; 2 Timothy 1:10 uses it about Jesus who brought life and immortality to light through the gospel; Hebrews 6:4 uses it of those who depart from the faith after having some level of enlightenment; and Revelation 21:23 and 22:5 speak of the light in heaven that comes from the glory of God and of the Lamb.

B. Great Struggle and Suffering, v. 32b-34a

A *great struggle* is a contest or challenge. This term was used of athletic competition. It would be like the competition of wrestling or boxing today. It is used of temptations and sufferings that fight against a person (BDAG). The struggles boiled down to persecution for the faith after the Hebrews became Christians and thus were different than their purely Jewish family and friends.

1. Persecution experienced personally [A in diagram].

This passage gives a clue about the recipients of the letter. They were not in Jerusalem because 12:4 says they had not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. There were early martyrdoms in Jerusalem which would preclude this possibility. The recipients could not have been in Rome after AD 65 because of the martyrdoms there at the hands of Nero in 64 AD. Perhaps this is a reference to Rome around 41 AD when Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. The reason for this was supposedly that there was an uproar about “Chrestus,” which may be a reference to Christ and the strife between Jewish Christians and Jewish unbelievers. Jewish believers among those who had to leave perhaps were afflicted. However, this referent is too broad because probably all Jews were afflicted, not just Christians. The tribulations were specifically connected to their confessing Christ and not to some more general persecution. In the end, we

simply do not have enough specific data to be sure where the recipients were located.

The tribulations involved open and public reproach and shame. The word for *made a spectacle* or *publicly exposed* is the Greek word from which we get our term *theater*. They were disgraced and disparaged and afflicted because of their faith in Christ Jesus.

The trial even extended to the pilfering of their material possessions. This could be something like what happened in Acts 17:9, or just plain thievery/looting.

2. Persecution experienced by association [B in diagram].

The readers had shared in or “fellowshipped in” the sufferings of others by being their partners or helpers through the affliction. Being associated with someone who is being persecuted is probably not the most comfortable situation! Perhaps that partnership would open you up to persecution yourself. But these people were steadfast and took a stand with their friends. An example is given in verse 34. Whether it was Paul in prison or other prisoners (compare NKJV with NIV), they showed compassion toward the prisoner(s). How did they do that? It could be that they went to them to provide food, among other things. See Matt. 25:36. Note Bruce’s comment: “Prisoners who had no means of their own were liable to starve unless their friends brought them food and whatever other form of help they required; throughout the whole age of imperial persecution of the church the visiting of their friends who were in prison was a regular, though dangerous, duty of Christian charity.”

C. Their Treasure is in Heaven, v. 34b

How could these people *joyfully* endure having their possessions taken away? It was because their treasure is in heaven where thieves cannot break in and steal (Matthew 6:19-20). They were saved people and no man could take *that* away from them.

D. The point of all of this is to remind the readers of their former steadfastness in the faith. Looking back on their early conversion, it was evident that they were convinced of their faith and willing to suffer for it. Remembering that kind of past would strengthen them to endure in the midst of present persecution.

This looking back, of course, has to be balanced with avoiding the attitude that we “arrived” and can just coast (Phil. 3:13).

II. Hold On, v. 35a

1. And so, Paul encourages the readers to hang on now like they did in the past. He tells them “do not cast away your confidence.” They had great confidence, courage, boldness in the faith, but perhaps they were thinking about chucking it. Don’t do that!!! Real believers do not throw out their faith.
2. Rather, they were to hold on to their confidence, and so should we. The same term boldness or confidence occurs in 3:6, 4:16, and 10:19. It speaks about our faith and how we can approach God now with confidence because the sacrificed blood of our high priest washes away our sin and because Jesus was tested like we are.

III. Look Ahead, v. 35b

These believers had reflected Luke 6:22-23, and despite the present difficulties, God is admonishing them to continue doing so in view of the great reward that eternal life is.

This confidence is our deep-seated conviction, our “closely held religious belief.” It will also affect our attitude. We are people that have a heavenly kind of confidence—in Christ Jesus—that passes over into our lives in the way we live and talk and behave and think. Even in the midst of trying circumstances we hang on to the faith because of how true and how great eternal life is. All things are ours (1 Cor. 3:21) despite the tests and trials of life in this sin-cursed world.

Conclusion

Some of us have experienced persecution because of our faith. Maybe it came from the workplace or family or old friends. Many of us have not really experienced this. But we can take up the cause of those who are so treated and help them. We can use our goods to promote the faith instead of hanging onto them as if they are our great confidence. And most of all, we must boldly hang on to our faith in Christ because of its great reward.

Maybe your past is not as glowing as the “good old days” were for the Hebrew Christians. But that is easy to change—hang on now, so that you will have something favorable to look back on in the future. Strive to have no regrets about your walk with the Lord—so when you look back you will see confidence in God operating in your life!

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