

Dr. David A. deSilva, Hebrews, Session 9, Hebrews 10:19-39: Persevere unto Salvation

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The author has alternated between exposition and exhortation throughout his sermon, but he has deferred the largest blocks of exposition and exhortation to the middle and to the end. Hebrews 7:1 to 10:18 is a solid block of exposition about the priestly work of Jesus and its significance. Now, from 10:19 extending through to the end of the sermon, we come to a lengthy block of exhortation.

The first block within this exhortation, 10:19 to 25, is particularly important. The author has highlighted this for his hearers because the language of 10:19 to 24 returns very specifically to the language of Hebrews 4:14 to 16, the exhortation that preceded this central word about Jesus' priesthood. In so doing, he essentially identifies the heart of his exhortation to the hearers to hold on to the confession or profession of their hope in Christ and to keep drawing nearer with boldness to the Christian community, where the throne of grace, the throne of God, can also be approached.

Reiterating the exhortation of 4:14 to 16, Hebrews 10:19 to 25 outlines the suitable response to Christ's costly gift of access to God but adds a focus specifically on the communal aspect of this response, the importance of not forsaking the assembling of the Christians together. That gathering is also where one draws near to the throne of grace. Hebrews 10:26 to 31 supports this positive exhortation by depicting the dreadful consequences that would follow the unjust, ungrateful response of ignoring or throwing away Christ's costly gifts.

It strategically interprets movement away from the group as an intentional sin for which there is no remaining sacrifice. In 10:32 to 39, the author invites the hearers simply to continue in the path they had so nobly pursued in earlier times and were largely still pursuing and concludes with a citation of ancient authority confirming the beneficial effects, the salutatory effects of remaining loyal and firm, as well as the destructive effects of shrinking back or falling away. The author explicitly invites the hearers to identify with those who exhibit faith and remain loyal and firm rather than with those who shrink back.

Identifying faith or trust as the quality that leads to the preservation of the soul leads the author then to develop the meaning and the posture of faith in chapter 11. Thus, the famous faith chapter, the encomium on the virtue of *pistis* or faith, emerges naturally from the exhortation in 10:19 to 39. Hebrews 12:1 to 3 concludes the encomium on faith with an exhortation based on Jesus' own example, which shows faith most fully and most perfectly expressed.

It also provides a segue into a sequence of related exhortations to persevere that run throughout the remainder of chapter 12. The sermon closes in chapter 13 with moral instructions and exhortations that develop how one is to fulfill the exhortation of chapter 12, verse 28, namely that the believers hold on to gratitude through which they worship God in a well-pleasing manner. Mutual service, continued trust in the divine patron, loyalty to Jesus, and worship are all essential aspects of this manifestation of gratitude for what the believers are receiving at the eschatological shaking, namely entry into the unshakable kingdom.

Having finished the message that the preacher warned in chapter 5, verse 11 would be long and difficult to untangle, and he now applies the truths he has been unfolding to the hearer's situation. Therefore, sisters and brothers, since by means of the blood of Jesus we have boldness for entrance into the holy places by the new and living path he opened up for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the household of God, let us draw near with a true heart and a certainty of trust, having sprinkled our hearts from a bad conscience and having washed our bodies with clean water. Let us hold unwavering the confession of hope, for the one who promised is reliable, and let us consider one another unto an outburst of love and good works, not abandoning the gathering together of one another, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing nearer.

The author highlights here two essential things that the addressees now have. First, boldness is needed to enter holy places. Second, a great high priest over the household of God should impel them forward in their Christian journey.

They have been granted what people of no previous age have enjoyed, the sanctification that will allow them to cross the thresholds, not merely of the earthly, but of the heavenly holy place and the holy of holies, and to stand in God's very presence. The believers' possession now of the authorization to enter the holy places recalls Christ's earlier entrance into the holy places, specifically as our forerunner. Jesus passed behind the curtain, and the believers' hope is the tether that keeps them connected to him and to their destiny.

Now, the author celebrates the discovery of that new and living way through the curtain, the way into the holy places, which had formerly been obscured under the first covenant, and he celebrates the fact that he and his congregation have been fully prepared to cross as well. By speaking so grandly of their access to God and their embeddedness in God's household, the author seeks to engender confidence in the believers, giving them a hopeful orientation in the midst of their challenges. Their glorious destiny is assured as long as they have the confidence and the boldness to keep moving forward into it.

Given the advantages they enjoy, the author urges the believers to draw near. This is the opposite of shrinking back, the alternative course of action before them, which the author fears some hearers have in view and which he knows that some others have begun to enact as they withdraw from assembling themselves together. They have prepared themselves to come into God's holy presence by appropriating the benefits of Jesus' sacrifice, having been cleansed in both body and heart for this confident approach to God.

The blood of Jesus has, metaphorically speaking, sprinkled their hearts to cleanse them of the pollution of a bad conscience, which has been the primary topic of 9 verse 1 through 10 verse 18. The outward and visible sign of this interior cleansing is the washing of their bodies with clean water, most likely a reference to baptism, which served as a universal entrance right into the Christian community. The author's application of purity language at this point, sprinkling the heart and washing the body with clean water, will also reinforce the differences and, hence, the boundaries between those inside the Christian group and those outside, who remain defiled by the dead works that characterize their lives.

As people who have been set apart by this unique process of cleansing and consecration, the believers are not the same as their neighbors anymore but have been distinguished from their neighbors by God himself. And that is very much to their advantage, no matter how much their neighbors might seek to make them feel otherwise. Drawing near is an admittedly vague suggestion for a course of action, but at least it serves to orient the hearers toward remaining with the Christian community where God is to be found and continue to move toward the goal of their Christian pilgrimage rather than aborting their journey.

The author also calls the hearers once again to hold unwavering the confession of hope, as he had done previously in 3, verse 6, and 4 verse 14. The repetition demonstrates the importance of this exhortation to hold on to the core beliefs and expectations of the Christian culture, as well as to hold on to the public profession of this hope without vacillation, not least of all through continued visible and public association with the Christian group and through continued investment on the part of each member in one another. The rationale that the preacher supplies here for holding on is the faithfulness or reliability of God, the one who has promised.

This, of course, has been a major topic of the sermon up to this point, from the failure of the Exodus generation to recognize and honor God's reliability, developed in chapter 3, to God's assurances to Abraham to assist his trust, mentioned in chapter 6, to God's assurances to the preacher's audience to bolster their own trust in chapters 6 through 8, particularly God's oath concerning Jesus' eternal priesthood and God's oracle about the new covenant in Jeremiah 31 that Jesus inaugurated. The example of the wilderness generation has particularly prepared the hearers not to fail to recognize the reliability of the one who has promised. In addition to inner

conviction and public witness in regard to the hope that Jesus has brought them, the author urges ever-increasing investment in and care toward other Christians to assist them in their forward journey against the stream of the world's hostility.

At this point in the passage, readers of most English translations will encounter a problem. The NRSV, for example, translates verse 24 of chapter 10 as let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds. One might compare similarly the RSV, the NIV, and even the NRSVUE updated edition.

The Greek, at this point, gives us only, let us keep considering one another unto an explosion of love and good works. The purpose of considering the other is not to figure out how to get the other to show love and invest himself or herself in acts of kindness to a greater degree. This kind of translation, such as one finds in the NIV or the NRSV, requires importing the idea of how to motivate into the text between let us consider and one another.

The only verb in the Greek, though, is kata naomen. Let us keep considering. Let us keep observing and noticing one another.

One another is the object of this verb, and a paroxysm or an outburst of love and good works is the purpose or result of the action. The author calls each Christian to notice his or her fellow disciples, to look closely at them, at their struggles, at their challenges, and to really see them with the result of investing in them. This kind of seeing is the birthplace of caring, which gives birth in turn to purposeful action to help the other bear his or her load and share in the good that God desires for him or for her.

A better translation, therefore, in somewhat functional equivalent mode would be, let's continue to look, to really look at one another so that we will love and do good for one another all the more. This connects with the author's exhortations throughout Hebrews to create the sort of relationships and support structures within the Christian community that make it possible, even preferable, to put up with the snubbing and the hostility from outside rather than give up the love and fellowship and mutual regard that exists within the church. Hebrews 10 verse 25 strengthens this point, using antithesis to contrast the wrong course of action with the advantageous course of action, not abandoning the gathering together of yourselves but encouraging one another.

Now, the author knows that some, perhaps a very few members of the congregation, have begun to withdraw. Such withdrawal, however, is contrary to all sense of gratitude, which involves declaring openly one's debt to the giver and praising publicly the benefactor who has given great gifts. The withdrawal of the few also discourages those who remain, eroding their determination to hold on to their costly hope.

It also diminishes the group's overall resources for helping one another persevere. Rather than drawback, they are urged to become more forthright in encouraging one another to hold fast and to invest their energies and resources in one another more and more. The author here strategically again reminds them of the eschatological dimension of their confession.

The day, the day of Christ's second coming, the day of God's judgment, draws ever nearer. As the eschatological clock ticks on, the believer should become more fervent rather than less fervent, for this will be a day of reward for the faithful; contemplation of its proximity should help sustain perseverance, commitment, and investment in the interim. It will also be a day of punishment for the contrary, as the following passage will develop in one of the most solemn warnings that the author will present.

The author supports his positive exhortation with consideration of the alternative course, returning to a lifestyle that the unbelieving neighbors would approve of, and withdrawing from visible associations with the Christian fellowship. The preacher does this in language strongly reminiscent of Hebrews 6, verses 4 to 8. He censures a course of action as displaying paramount ingratitude, which is ultimately disadvantageous because it leads both to eternal dishonor and a fate worse than death. For if we intentionally continue to sin after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there remains no longer a sacrifice for sins but a fearful expectation of judgment and of a zealous fire that is on the verge of consuming the opponents.

Anyone violating the law of Moses dies without mercy on the word of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment will they be deemed worthy who trample the Son of God underfoot and regarded as common the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified and insult the spirit of favor? For we know the one who said, Vengeance belongs to me. I will pay back.

And again, the Lord will judge his people. A fearful thing is to fall into the hands of the living God. What the author has in mind here by sin in the clause, if we intentionally continue to sin, is conditioned by chapter 10, verses 24 and 25.

This is not a general reference to ongoing sins against which the believer might struggle, but more specifically, a reference to the actions of those who, despite knowing the truth of the deliverance and the hope that God provides, nevertheless choose the temporary benefits of hiding or abandoning their connection with the believing community and with Christ. Such people prefer the friendship of sinners and the temporary enjoyment of acceptance among sinners to the hardships that the people of God must endure in this world on account of the hostility of sinners. When the author says if we continue to sin intentionally or willfully, he's making a reference to the distinction made in the Torah, especially in Numbers chapter 19,

verses 22 to 31, between sins committed unintentionally for which there are prescribed sacrifices and those committed arrogantly or with a high hand for which there is only punishment.

Greco-Roman moralists also censure intentional wrongdoing as worthy of stricter punishment. The preacher is asserting that defecting from the Christian community is voluntarily chosen, willfully chosen, not compelled by forces from without. The defector or the cowardly believer is not allowed the comfort of thinking that he or she yields to practical necessity when he or she hides his or her connection to Jesus.

Such a course remains a voluntary, willful violation of a compact, the universal law of being just and grateful toward one's benefactors. When the author says here that there remains no longer a sacrifice for sins, he is repeating language that he just used a few verses earlier in chapter 10, verse 18. There, the affirmation that there remains no longer a sacrifice for sins provided proof of the decisive forgiveness and cleansing of the conscience offered by Jesus.

Now, however, the same language is employed to underscore the importance of maintaining that relationship with God through Jesus once formed. This is not only the case because of the once-for-all nature of Jesus' offering of himself, an offering not to be repeated, but also because of the grave affront to God and to Jesus, the mediator, and to Jesus' blood itself that would be given by the person who thinks such gifts and such a relationship not worth the cost of keeping. All that is left for such people is God's judgment, the expectation of an eager fire on the verge of consuming the adversaries, as the author puts it in verse 27.

The author uses language from Isaiah 26, verse 11, where we read that jealousy will take uneducated people, and fire will eat the adversaries. But our author has amplified this biblical language to heighten the image. Jealous now describes the fire itself as a zealous fire.

The consequences are presented as more imminent to the author's use of the Greek verb mellow with an infinitive in place of a mere future verb, a zealous fire that is on the verge of consuming the adversaries, that is about to consume the adversaries. Those who refuse the course of action proposed by the author, let us keep drawing near, find themselves then facing the grim prospect of judgment, a forthcoming reality, the severity of which is enhanced by the lesser to the greater argument that the author goes on to present in verses 28 and 29. The lesser case in this argument comes from Deuteronomy 17, verse 6, where willful infractions of the Mosaic covenant resulted in execution upon the testimony of two or three witnesses.

The unstated premise in this argument is that Jesus is worthy of greater honor than Moses, a premise that had been established quite early in Hebrews in chapter 3, verses 1 through 6. The author's conclusion, expressed in the form of a question,

posits proportionately greater punishment for willful infractions of the new bond between Jesus and the believers, implying then a fate worse than death. The author presents drifting away from firm commitment to the group in the starkest of terms in an attempt to make such a course of action so appalling as to be unthinkable. It is as if he were saying, look at what you're really doing if you withdraw from the group if you value your neighbor's acceptance more than God's favor.

This course is portrayed as a threefold assault on God's honor, particularly heinous because such an assault violates the patron-client relationship, returning not gratitude but an insult to the divine benefactor. First, the apostate is one who has trampled upon the Son of God. The reminder that Jesus' title is Son of God, which has appeared throughout the sermon, both heightens the impudence of the offense and sets the affront within the context of God's own honor and, hence, God's presumed determination to obtain satisfaction from the offenders.

It is also a strikingly ironic and inappropriate image designed to make the hearers shrink from enacting such an affront. Indeed, the one who may be scorned now and thus trampled is the one at whose feet all his enemies will soon be brought into subjection, as the author has asserted in Hebrews 1:13 and 10:13. Second, the person who drifts away has regarded as profane the blood of the covenant with which he or she was sanctified, by which believers were decisively restored to divine favor at such cost to Jesus on their behalf. Finally, the one who decides that the mediator's benefits, the greatest of which is access to God as patron, are not of sufficient value to merit bearing up with the society's abuse and scorn are bearing public testimony to this lack of value if they defect from the Christian group and thus they outrage the spirit of grace.

The contrast here between hubris and charis, between affront or insult and favor or kind disposition, could not be more striking. Indeed, meeting favor and the promise of benefaction with an insult is at once highly inappropriate and unspeakably foolish. Failure to persevere is thus shameful in and of itself since it enacts ingratitude, the basest of vices, but it also carries the most severe consequences.

As great as the advantages gained by Jesus' costly mediation are, so great is the harm that comes from spurning Jesus' favor and the favor of God. The conviction that the ingrate, and even more, the one who returns insult for a favor, merits punishment is commonplace in the first century. The challenge to the honor of God and the Son results in God's vindication of their honor in the punishment of the offender.

Amplification of the magnitude of the wrong is certainly also the effect of this triple description of the charge in chapter 10, verse 29, and the suggestion that there can be no adequate punishment for such an affront. The author supports the certainty of such punishment with recitations from Deuteronomy 32, the Song of Moses. The chief topic of Deuteronomy 32 is the fact that God avenges violations of his honor,

and so we read in Hebrews 10, verses 30 and 31, For we know the one who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay.

And again, the Lord will judge his people. Vengeance is mine; I will repay it as a recitation of Deuteronomy 32, verse 35, conflating the Hebrew and the Greek readings of the verse. In its original context, this was a promise by God to vindicate his own people after they were trodden upon by their enemies.

Here, however, it becomes a warning directed toward God's people. The next recitation, The Lord will judge his people, is taken from the following verse, Deuteronomy 32, verse 36. Again, in its original context, the sense is that God is going to vindicate his people.

The Lord will vindicate his people and will have compassion on them, is the full verse in Hebrew. The Hebrew verb for vindicate, however, is rendered judge in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of Deuteronomy. While the Greek verb *krinane* can also mean vindicate, the translation opens up the possibility of reading the verse, as does our author, namely as a warning of God's forthcoming judgment of his own people.

This conclusion then reinforces for the hearers that the ultimate danger that they face is to encounter God as judge, not to continue to endure the harassment and rejection of their neighbors, for indeed, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. As the author has alternated between an appeal to fear and an appeal to confidence before in this sermon, he also now follows up the fearsome warning of 10:26-31 with considerations that would be conducive to confidence if the addressees keep on keeping on. Remember the former days, in which, having been enlightened, you endured a great contest of sufferings, in part being made a spectacle by means of reproaches and trials and in part making yourselves partners of those thus treated.

For you had sympathy toward those in prison, and you accepted with joy the seizure of your property, knowing yourselves to have better and lasting possessions. Appeals to a group's own past achievements often served as a basis for encouragement to future endeavors. For example, at the climax of Tacitus's *Agricola*, the Roman general rallies his troops with these words: The long road we have traveled, the forests we have threaded our way through, the estuaries we have crossed, all redound to our credit and honor as long as we keep our eyes to the front.

I would quote the examples of other armies to encourage you. As things are, you need only recall your own battle honors, only question your own eyes. The rhetorical effect of such a speech is threefold.

First, the appeal instills a sense of confidence, affirming that, just as the group succeeded in performing what was required before, it would have the resources and stamina to succeed again. Second, there is a reluctance to abandon an enterprise in which so much has already been invested. Third, the general instills a sense of fear in the hearers, lest former achievements and honor be marred by failure to act and persevere in the present.

The author of Hebrews, in drawing the addressee's attention to their former endurance and faithful action, harnesses the triple power of this rhetorical device. We've already explored this passage in an introductory segment from the perspective of the actual past experience of this community. Here, we need only be concerned with the rhetorical use of the episode in which the author puts it.

It provides a stunning example of the faithfulness that God honors and rewards. It provides evidence that the audience can indeed persevere, as they have proven their capacity for faithfulness in the face of hostility before. Two elements of the passage deserve special attention.

When the author writes, you endured a great contest of sufferings; he is interpreting the hearer's earlier experience of disgrace and abuse, the experience that initially marked their marginalization, not as some unfortunate experience of being victimized but as a great contest. By means of athletic imagery, he turns an experience of disgrace and marginalization into a competition for honor, one that is won by continuing to put up a fight, not by yielding under pressure. Such athletic metaphors are common in the literature of minority cultures of the period, whether they be Greco-Roman philosophical texts, Jewish texts, or early Christian texts.

And these metaphors are a means of subverting, even inverting, the message that outsiders wish to communicate through their opposition and hostility. The author will return to this field of metaphors at greater length in chapter 12, verses 1 through 4. There, the hearers will be urged to view their life in this world as a contest against sin and against sinners, a striving to attain the prize of victory, the hope set before them, engaged in plain view of the many who have contended bravely and successfully throughout sacred history. I'm speaking here of the cloud of witnesses, which is perhaps better translated as the cloud of spectators that the author creates in his parade of exemplars of faith in chapter 11.

It is for the approval of such a cloud of spectators that the hearers will be urged to contend rather than to gratify their antagonists, their hostile neighbors, by giving in. The author also highlights here the experience that at least some of the believers suffered from the seizure of their property, recalling how they had accepted this with joy, knowing themselves to possess greater and lasting goods. The possessions that belong to the earthly visible realm are of less value than those that are afforded in

the heavenly realm precisely because only the heavenly realm will abide or survive the eschatological removal of the things that can be shaken.

As the author has hinted in chapter 1, verses 10 to 12, and will put forward again explicitly in chapter 12, verses 26 to 28. Earthly possessions afford only temporary honor and enjoyment. The believers are called, therefore, to keep their hearts set on the better and lasting wealth reserved for them in their abiding, lasting city.

The author transforms the past actions and commitment of the addressees, their former acts of courage and generosity toward one another, into causes for praise and self-respect so as to move them to continue in the same course of action. So the author goes on to urge them in verses 35 and 36. Do not throw away your boldness, which holds a great reward, for you have a need for endurance so that, after having done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

Boldness, *parrhesia* in Greek, has been thematic throughout the sermon. On the one hand, it speaks of the addressees' confidence with regard to open access to God mediated through Christ. Those who now show disloyalty and disrespect toward the Son are certainly in jeopardy of throwing away this boldness.

It also refers, in a complementary manner, to the addressees' open declaration of their hope reflected in their endurance of society's shaming techniques, of a boldness that extended even to their open association with those most singled out by their society for its deviancy control techniques. After being enlightened, they openly and confidently demonstrated in the public eye the importance of the gifts they had received from God through Christ and the benefactions for which they yet hoped. Continuing thus to demonstrate boldness in the face of their neighbor's disapproval means also keeping the boldness they have in regard to confidently approaching God and entering God's presence at the end of time.

The author thereby urges endurance, continued resolve, and courage in the face of opposition and loss so that the audience may indeed enter into the reward in which they, too, have already invested so much. The author speaks here as if the larger part of the investment to be made is already behind them. They have done the will of God and now must merely hold on till they receive their reward.

The proximity of the reward and, thus, the short length of time left in this contest is an important feature of the author's strategy throughout. Here, in Hebrews 10, verses 37 and 38, the author uses scriptural language to emphasize that the time remaining before entering into their reward has been greatly shortened. This impression will be reinforced by the lengthy parade of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, reminding the hearers of how long this contest has been going on and how far along into it they have entered the lists.

As we read then in verses 37 and 38, for yet a very little while, the coming one will come and will not delay, and my righteous one will live on the basis of faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul takes no pleasure in him. The author has engaged in some creative compilation of scripture in this passage. First, he borrows the phrase in just a very short while from Isaiah 26, verse 20, in order to heighten the sense of the imminence of the day of reward and judgment.

In their original context, these words speak of the length of time that God's people are instructed to hide away in their chambers until God's punishment of the inhabitants of the earth runs its course. In this new context, the words serve to stress the proximity of the forthcoming visitation of God or of Christ and to facilitate maintaining commitment just a little while longer. It also reinforces for the hearers the sense of being at a threshold of that inheritance, right where the wilderness generation was when it faltered and became forever a pattern of base distrust and disobedience.

The remainder of this passage is a radical recasting of Habakkuk 2, verses 3 and 4, and one can actually see a bit of a progression here from the Hebrew text of Habakkuk to the Septuagint translation of Habakkuk to the kind of rewritten version that the author of Hebrew provides, making that material from scripture even more suitable to the pastoral needs of his moment. In the Hebrew Bible, Habakkuk 2, verses 3 and 4 read, There is a vision for the appointed time. It speaks of the end, and it does not lie.

If it seems to tarry, wait for it. It will surely come and will not delay. Look at the pride.

Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous one lives by faith. If we were to read that in the Septuagint version, the Greek translation of Habakkuk 2, 3, we'd find some significant differences. There is yet a vision for the end, and it will come to light at last and not in vain.

If it or he tarries, wait for it or him, for the coming one will arrive and will not delay. In the Greek, there's a certain ambiguity in the pronouns as to whether it should be read as it, referring back to the vision, or as he, looking ahead to a figure who is coming. In fact, the Greek translation changes the language such that we are not waiting for a vision to come, but now truly for one to come, some figure in the future.

And then in the following verse, Habakkuk 2, 4 in the Septuagint, If he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him, but the righteous one will live by faith. What was in the Hebrew version of this text is that the censure of the proud is turned into a statement about the coming one, namely that if the coming one shows cowardice,

he will not be pleasing to God. The way the author of Hebrews has rendered it is different from both.

The coming one will come and will not delay. And my righteous one will live by faith. And if he should shrink back, my soul is not pleased in him.

The author of Hebrews has transposed the order of the first half of Habakkuk 2:4 and the second half of Habakkuk 2:4 as it was related in the Septuagint version. Thus, if he shrinks back, he applies no longer to the coming one but to those who wait for God's deliverance, the righteous ones. Those who await God's deliverance and trust and firmness will live.

My righteous one will live by faith, while those whose hearts fail, those who shrink back, will not please God. This transformation directly serves the author's pastoral goal. The Habakkuk text now serves to outline two courses of action: that of trusting and remaining firm and that of shrinking back.

The former explicitly leads to life, while the latter is censured by God, who takes no pleasure in those who follow that path. Hebrews 10 verse 39 then concludes this section by framing an antithesis using two key terms from Habakkuk 2, 4, shrinking back and faith. We are not of those who shrink back unto destruction, but we are of those of faith unto the preservation of life.

The author's transposition again of those two clauses in Habakkuk 2, 4 allows him to distinguish between two groups and their properties: those who show trust and firmness, who preserve their lives, and those who show cowardice and distrust, who fall into destruction because they shrink back in the face of the hostility of sinners in the manner of the wilderness generation. The author clearly positions the hearers to identify with the first group, not least of all to avoid the fate of the second group. In Hebrews 10:19 to 39, the preacher has packed great rhetorical force into a very focused portion of text.

In these 21 verses, he has packed several appeals to the emotions of the hearers. Moving between confidence and fear in 10:19 to 25, the preacher has sought to make the hearers feel confident in regard to their access to God as they hold on to and respond well to what Jesus has done for them on their behalf. The preacher follows this up strategically with an appeal to the emotion of fear in verses 26 to 31 to increase the hearers' aversion to acting in their present circumstances in any way that would show disregard or dishonor toward their divine benefactor.

He has followed this up in turn with another appeal to confidence in verses 32 to 36 by appealing to the hearers' own past example, showing that they have already done that which God values and honors, and if they simply keep on doing that, they will indeed arrive at the good end that God has promised for them. The author has also

packed this section with appeals to rational argumentation, especially under the headings of relative advantage, justice, and feasibility. The author has continued to invite the hearers to weigh the alternatives before them and determine which will be the more advantageous.

He urges them throughout these 21 verses to hold on to the eternal goods and the eternally beneficial relationships that they have begun to enjoy and to be willing to continue to sacrifice temporary goods and the friendship of those who reject God and his Son so that they will attain everlasting rewards, having made wise choices in their present circumstances. He adds considerations of justice, particularly considerations of what is due to those who have benefited one. Thus, he urges the hearers to avoid courses of action that would show disrespect toward the most honorable and powerful beings in the cosmos or ingratitude toward those who have given their all to secure eternally valuable benefits for the hearers.

The author further adds considerations of feasibility. The audience has borne up before and under harsher conditions. Their own history shows that they continue, they can continue to bear up with the amount of work and investment behind them.

Going forward to the end cannot be that much more difficult. Finally, undergirding the whole of this passage, the author has been keeping the hearers' attention focused not on their everyday challenges and what might ease those challenges, as if these were the considerations of primary importance, but on the ultimate challenge of successfully encountering God on the day of judgment as the challenge of primary importance. This, in turn, illuminates quite clearly the everyday course of action that they must take.

This section of the author's sermon also continues to speak of particular challenges to the situation of believers in every age. In particular, he reminds us of the importance of investing in the perseverance of our fellow Christians. In chapter 10, verses 24 to 25, he urges the hearers not to withdraw from fellowship but to keep investing themselves, particularly in encouraging their sisters and brothers within that fellowship in the light of the coming day.

In chapter 10, verse 34, he praises the hearers for the ways in which they have invested in one another in the past, thus hoping to stimulate their continued action into the future. This all reminds us yet again in this sermon that Christian discipleship is not a private matter, nor is it a personal matter. Individual disciples are often overcome because the pressures working against their perseverance and the drains on their perseverance are greater than their own internal individual ability to endure.

The author charges us with the responsibility of doing all in our power to support one another in the face of such pressures so that each one can endure. This challenge has application beyond our local congregations to the global church, especially churches

and nations where the Christians' neighbors and often their governments work strenuously to erode their commitment to Jesus. As we read or hear in the sermon, let us look at one another, really look at one another, until an explosion of love and good works is the outcome.

As we read this, we should always bear in mind not just the sisters and brothers near us but our family in the persecuted church, the least of Jesus' sisters and brothers, for whom our timely intervention could indeed be an answer to the prayers they have been sending before the throne of grace. The author also challenges us to live in such a way that we always honor our divine patron and his gifts. Having gained intimate fellowship with God and knowledge of what God approves, we would dishonor him if we allowed fear of the world's hostility to keep us from bearing witness to what Jesus has done for us or from pursuing whatever course of action God called us to pursue.

If we drag our feet along the way of the cross out of regret for our lost friendship with the world, we again dishonor the giver and the value of God's friendship. If we begin to think that following Christ all the way means giving up too much, we show slight regard for the privileges and the advantages that following Christ has brought us. Rather, our lives must reflect the great value of the gift we have received, which means responding to God with a gratitude that embraces heart, mind, body, and desire.

If we care more about success or respect or being wise as this world defines them, if we keep following its rules and set our ambitions on its promises, we trample upon Jesus. We set too little value on his blood if we refuse to walk in that life for which he freed us. We insult God's favor if we seek to secure the world's favor first, and then, as far as the world will let us, God's promised benefits.

If our first thought is for keeping our neighbors, our coworkers, or our fellow citizens' approval, and if we seek to live out our Christian life within the parameters of the kinds of behaviors or words that will not offend unbelievers, we show by our lives whose approval really matters to us, and we insult God. If we attend dutifully to everything else our society tells us is important and then give to religious concerns any leftover time, resources, and energy, we say to God, your gifts and call are not of the first order of importance in my life. The author of Hebrews calls us to let our choices, actions, and ambitions reflect the true value of things and to pursue God's promises with our full vigor and full trust, firm commitment, and faith, letting no worldly object detour or delay us.

The contemplation of the immenseness of the gifts we have received from God also provides a powerful medicine against temptation. In light of the cleansing Jesus has accomplished for us, the intimate access we have with God, the daily friendship of the Holy Spirit, and the destiny God has appointed for the faithful. Do we really want

to give ourselves over to whatever particular sin besets us at the moment, whatever it might be? Do we want to return bitterness to God, who has lavished only goodness upon us? This passage suggests that we weigh the value of God's gifts and the response that gratitude calls for when faced with any serious dilemma or when contemplating an action that, though easy or profitable or pleasant in the short run, is nevertheless sinful.

We are also summoned to boldness in our encounter with the world outside the Church. There are many pressures that trammel up free speech, parrhesia, or boldness in the sense of its meaning in the democratic Greek city-state with regard to both Christian witness and discipleship. In the Western world, the privatization of religion has created a culture in which speech about God is only appropriate in certain places, churches, homes, and the like.

Secularization creates a climate in which some investment in religious pursuits is appropriate, though optional, but too much investment is regarded with suspicion. Materialism, the view that the tangible world is the primary world breeds a culture in which it is far easier and more comfortable to speak of temporal concerns. Thus, weather, politics, movies, and the like are more frequent topics of conversation than our experiences of God in our times of prayer and meditation, our progress in the struggle against certain sins, and our perceptions of God's challenges and call.

Obstacles in many non-Western countries are far more daunting. In view of any and all such obstacles, the word of the author of Hebrews is clear. Do not throw away your boldness.

Or, if you have yet to exhibit your boldness, discover your freedom to bear witness in word and deed to the God who redeemed and delivered you, in every facet of your life.