

Hebrews 10:19-39: Persevere unto Salvation

Author: Dr. David A. deSilva

Session 9

Sponsored by Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Hebrews, Perseverance, Boldness, Judgment, Community, Faith, Patronage, Salvation

Abstract

This session focuses on Hebrews 10:19–39, examining the transition from theological exposition about Christ’s priesthood to intense moral exhortation to persevere in faith. Dr. David deSilva analyzes the key themes of drawing near to God with boldness, maintaining communal solidarity, and the severe spiritual consequences of intentional apostasy or shrinking back. He also explores the rhetorical power of recalling the community's past endurance under suffering and athletic metaphors of competition. Ultimately, the session challenges modern believers to demonstrate active, communal support for perseverance, maintain public boldness, and live lives that fully honor their relationship with the divine patron.

Outline

I. Introduction to Hebrews 10:19-39 and the Shift to Exhortation

- A. Structure of the sermon: alternation between exposition and exhortation
- B. Transition from the largest expository block (7:1-10:18 on Christ's priestly work) to a lengthy block of exhortation (10:19 to end of sermon)
- C. Rhetorical strategy: moving between confidence and fear to urge endurance

II. The Call to Draw Near and Maintain Community (Hebrews 10:19-25)

- A. Return to the language of Hebrews 4:14-16 (holding confession, drawing near with boldness)
- B. Double advantages of believers:
 - 1. Boldness for entrance into the heavenly holy places via the blood of Jesus (a "new and living path")
 - 2. A great high priest over the household of God

C. Purity language: sprinkling of the heart from a bad conscience and washing of the body with clean water (allusion to baptism and group boundaries)

D. The communal aspect of response:

1. Not abandoning the gathering together (assembling of Christians)
2. "Considering one another" (katanoeo) to foster love and good deeds
 - a. NRSV/NIV translate as "provoke/motivate," which requires importing words
 - b. Greek indicates "observing/noticing one another" closely, which leads to caring and mutual support
3. Mutual encouragement in light of the Day of Judgment drawing near

III. The Warning Against Willful Sin and Its Consequences (Hebrews 10:26-31)

A. Definition of intentional sin: choosing to hide or abandon connection with the believing community and with Christ to avoid hardship and gain secular acceptance

B. Theological background of "intentional" or "willful" sin:

1. Mosaic Law: Distinction in Numbers 15 between unintentional sins and sins committed "with a high hand" (arrogantly)
2. Greco-Roman ethics: Censure of voluntary wrongdoing as worthy of stricter punishment

C. Consequences of defecting from Christ's covenant:

1. "No longer remains a sacrifice for sins" — emphasizing the once-for-all nature of Christ's sacrifice
2. Fearful expectation of a zealous fire on the verge of consuming opponents (amplifying Isaiah 26:11)

D. The "Lesser-to-Greater" logical argument:

1. Lesser case (Deuteronomy 17:6): Capital punishment for willful infractions of Mosaic covenant based on two or three witnesses
2. Greater case: Proportionately worse spiritual punishment for willful infractions of the new covenant, implying a fate worse than death

E. The three-fold assault on God's honor (violating the patron-client relationship):

1. Trampling underfoot the Son of God (impudence toward God's own honor)
2. Regarding as profane/common the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified
3. Outraging or insulting the Spirit of grace (hubris vs. charis)

F. Scriptural backing of God's vengeance (Deuteronomy 32 / Song of Moses):

1. "Vengeance is mine, I will repay" (Deuteronomy 32:35) — originally vindication of His people, here used as a warning
2. "The Lord will judge his people" (Deuteronomy 32:36) — translating "vindicate" as "judge" (Septuagint krinei), serving as warning of judgment
3. Concluding reminder: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"

IV. Remembering Former Endurance (Hebrews 10:32-36)

A. Rhetorical power of appealing to past achievements (similar to Roman military speeches, e.g., Tacitus's Agricola):

1. Instills confidence in existing resources and stamina to succeed again
2. Generates reluctance to abandon an enterprise already heavily invested in
3. Instills fear of marring past achievements and honor with present failure

B. Nature of their former suffering:

1. Enduring a "great contest" (athletic metaphor, common in minority cultures to subvert/invert outsider hostility)
2. Public spectacles of reproaches, trials, and partnering with those treated this way (including sympathy for prisoners)
3. Accepting with joy the seizure of property

C. Underlying perspective: earthly, temporary possessions are less valuable than lasting, heavenly possessions in the unshakable city

D. Exhortation: "Do not throw away your boldness (parrhesia)," which holds a great reward and requires endurance to receive the promise

V. Scriptural Reinforcement of Faith and Warning Against Shrinking Back (Hebrews 10:37-39)

A. Use of Isaiah 26:20 ("yet a very little while") to stress the proximity of visitation/judgment

B. Creative compilation and recasting of Habakkuk 2:3-4:

1. Hebrew original: Waiting for a vision that will not lie; the proud is not right, but the righteous lives by faith
2. Septuagint version: Shifts focus from waiting for a vision to waiting for "the coming one," with ambiguity in pronouns
3. Hebrews' adaptation: Transposes clauses in Habakkuk 2:4 so that "shrinking back" applies directly to the believer who waits, rather than the coming one

C. The binary outcome:

1. Trust and remaining firm (faith/pistis) leading to life and pleasing God
2. Cowardice and withdrawal (shrinking back) leading to destruction and displeasing God
3. Final positioning: the preacher confidently aligns the hearers with those of faith who preserve their lives

VI. Contemporary Theological and Practical Applications

A. Mutual Investment in Perseverance:

1. Discipleship is not a private or individual matter, but a communal responsibility
2. Supporting other believers against hostile social and political pressures
3. Applying mutual care locally and globally (e.g., supporting the persecuted church)

B. Honoring the Divine Patron and His Gifts:

1. Avoiding the desire for secular success, respect, or approval at the cost of compromising Christian witness
2. Overcoming the temptation to relegate religious concerns to leftover time and energy

3. Embracing gratitude that encompasses heart, mind, body, and desire as a shield against sin

C. Reclaiming Public Boldness (Parrhesia):

1. Overcoming the privatization and secularization of faith in Western contexts
2. Addressing materialist cultural norms that discourage talking about spiritual experiences
3. Discovering the freedom to bear bold witness in every facet of life despite daunting