

North Summit Church
Hebrews 10:26-39
Don't Shrink Back
February 15, 2026

We're continuing our journey through Hebrews: Encountering the Supremacy of Christ.

- **Chapter 10:1-25** – We have bold confidence to enter the holy places through the blood of Jesus, our great High Priest. We are to hold fast to the confession of hope, stir up one another in love and good works, and not neglect meeting together.

Now we arrive at the fourth of five warning passages in the book of Hebrews.

Oregon Trail Illustration

- **In college**, to get teaching reps in, I would go and teach at a local nursing home.
- Afterwards I loved spending time with those senior saints and hearing their life stories.
- Stories of how their parents sold everything to homestead out West in hopes for a better future for their families.
- Packing up everything they owned and loading it into covered wagons for the long journey West.
- Stories of crossing rivers and burying their friends and family along the way.
- And not one time, in all the stories that I heard, was there not a moment along the way, where they didn't question whether it was worth it. All the sacrifice, and struggle and pain.
 - There was often a moment where they pondered the question:
 - ***“What if we just turned around?”***
- It had been harder than anyone promised. The cost has been higher than anyone warned. And that farm back home suddenly didn't seem so bad compared to another mountain pass in the rain.
 - And in that moment what kept them going was the fact that they couldn't just go back.
 - Not to what they left. The farm was sold. The old life didn't actually exist anymore. Turning back wouldn't take them home. It would just leave them somewhere in the wilderness, committed to neither direction, belonging fully to neither world.

That is the situation the Jewish believers in Hebrews are facing.

- They had experienced something real. They had encountered Christ. They had tasted the heavenly gift, been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, experienced the powers of the age to come. They had seen the blood of Jesus purify their conscience. They had gathered, suffered together, endured public shame for the name of Christ.
- But now the pressure was mounting. The persecution was real. Property had been confiscated. The social cost was high. And the old covenant...the familiar priesthood, the temple system they'd grown up with...was starting to look safer, more comfortable, less costly.

What if we just went back?

- **And the author of Hebrews has to be absolutely clear:** you can't unknow what you've known. You can't return to the shadow once you've encountered the substance. There is no neutral ground here.

1. The Warning - Don't Shrink Back (vv. 26-31)

- Let's start with the most difficult part of this passage, the part that gets pulled out of context and causes real anxiety. I've seen this passage turn into a real helmet fire for sincere believers as they have wrestled with this passage.

Hebrews 10:26-27

"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries."

- When people read that, they often hear: "If I keep sinning after becoming a Christian, I've lost my salvation."

That is not what this is saying.

- We have to pay very careful attention to what "sinning deliberately" means in context.
- And the best lens for understanding it is what comes immediately before this passage—chapter 10:19-25—where the author has just described the stunning privileges of the new covenant.
- We have bold confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus. We have a great High Priest over the house of God. We are called to hold fast our confession of hope, to stir up one another to love and good works, and not to neglect meeting together.
- **That is the objective reality Christ has established.** This passage describes what it looks like to willfully, decisively abandon that reality.

- The Greek word for “deliberately” here isn't describing a believer who sins, feels conviction, and repents.
- This is describing someone who, **knowing the full truth about Christ**, makes a decisive, willful, permanent turn away from Him. Not struggling with sin. Not failing and coming back. Walking out the door and shutting it behind them.

You can see this in the three strong descriptions the author uses in verse 29:

Hebrews 10:29

“...who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?”

- **Trampling. Profaning. Outraging.**
 - That is not the language of someone who is struggling in their walk with Christ.
 - **That is the language of contempt**, someone who looks at the Son of God, looks at the cross, looks at the Spirit of grace, and treats all of it as worthless, even shameful.

John helps us understand this distinction. In 1 John 5, he talks about two categories of sin:

1 John 5:16-17

“If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death.”

- **There is sin that does not lead to death, and every believer is familiar with this.** The ongoing, sometimes agonizing struggle with temptation and failure. The battle against the flesh that Paul describes in Romans 7.
- While these sins should grieve us. They don't define us, because Christ's blood has purified our conscience, but they are real. We fight them. We confess them. We run to our High Priest who is not ashamed of us.
- **Then there is sin that leads to death.** This is the decisive rejection of Christ Himself—the only source of life.
- That's why the author says in verse 26: “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”
- This doesn't mean God has run out of forgiveness. It means there isn't another offering coming. Christ's sacrifice is once for all. If someone decisively rejects the only sacrifice that exists, if they repudiate Christ and His blood, there is simply

nowhere else to turn. Not because mercy disappears, but because they have stepped outside the only place mercy is found.

- **The author has been building this case for ten chapters.** Christ is superior to angels, to Moses, to the Levitical priesthood, to the old covenant. His sacrifice is once for all, eternally sufficient, completely finished. There is no Plan B.

Then comes verse 31...one of the most sobering sentences in all of Scripture:

Hebrews 10:31

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

- But notice this: The hands that judge are the same hands that save. The difference isn't in God, God doesn't change. The difference is posture. To draw near to God in faith is life. To resist Him, to harden yourself against Him, to repudiate the Son, that is judgment.

Let me say something clearly, because I think it needs to be said:

- **If this warning is troubling you this morning, that is actually a good sign.**
- If you are sitting here wrestling with your sin, grieving over your failures, wondering if you're good enough—hear me: that is the voice of a heart that still cares, still wants to be near Christ, still believes. That is conviction, not condemnation.
- The people this warning is aimed at aren't sitting in church wrestling with guilt. They've walked out. They've decided Christ isn't worth it. They've chosen something else.

Struggling with the flesh, struggling to renew your mind, even wandering for seasons is not the same as rejecting Christ. In fact, running to your great High Priest in your weakness is exactly what this whole letter has been calling you to do.

2. Remember What You Already Know (vv. 32-34)

After that sober warning, the author's pastoral heart breaks through completely. Look at verse 32:

Hebrews 10:32-34

"But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. 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."

This is a pastor who loves his people.

- He's not trying to destroy their assurance. The whole goal of this book is so that they would have the full assurance of the faith. The author comes back to how we can have confident assurance over 10 times in this pastoral sermon.
- He's trying to call them back to the courage they've already demonstrated. He's essentially saying: I know you. I've seen you. And you are not people who quit.

Think about what he's describing. These were believers who had:

- Endured public shame and humiliation for Christ
- Stood alongside other believers who were suffering and being imprisoned
- Watched their property be confiscated—and joyfully accepted it

Joyfully. Not grudgingly. Not resignedly. Joyfully.

- Why? Because, the author says, ***“you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.”***
- They weren't naive about the cost. They knew exactly what they were giving up.
- But they also knew what they had received, something that cannot be confiscated, cannot be destroyed, cannot be taken away.
- They had Christ. They had the inheritance. They had something eternal. That knowledge produced a settled joy even in the middle of suffering.

- **Here is the pastoral insight I want you to notice:** the author doesn't call them to something they've never done. He calls them back to something they've already proven they can do. He's not saying, “You need to figure out how to endure.” He's saying, “You already know how to endure. You've done it. Remember?”

- This is one of the reasons our past matters so much in the Christian journey. Not to live there, not to be defined by it, but to remember the faithfulness of God in it. To remember what you were willing to give up when you first believed. To remember the joy that overcame the cost.

- When you feel like you can't keep going, sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is look back—not at where you've failed, but at where God has been faithful. Not at the suffering, but at the joy you experienced even through it.

3. The Righteous Shall Live by Faith (vv. 35-39)

Now the author brings it home with a direct appeal to endurance:

Hebrews 10:35-36

“Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised.”

Don't throw away your confidence.

- That word “throw away” is striking. You don't accidentally throw something away. You pick it up. You make a decision. You put it in the trash. Throwing away your confidence in Christ is an active choice, something you do deliberately, not something that just happens to you.
- And the author is saying: don't do it. Because this confidence—this bold assurance that Christ's blood has purified you, that your great High Priest is interceding for you, that you have been given an eternal inheritance—this confidence has a great reward.
- **Verse 36: “You have need of endurance.”** Endurance. It's one thing to trust Christ in a moment. It's another to trust Him for a lifetime. The Christian life isn't a sprint. It's a marathon through difficult terrain. And what you need for the long haul isn't just the initial burst of faith, it's the steady, persistent, sometimes quiet commitment to keep trusting even when you can't see where the path is going.

Then the author reaches back into the prophets, quoting Habakkuk:

Hebrews 10:37-38

“For, ‘Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.’”

- Habakkuk wrote those words to a people watching their world collapse.
- Babylon was coming, destruction was imminent, everything they trusted in was being stripped away.
- And God's word to them was: keep trusting me. Not because circumstances were good, not because the evidence was encouraging, but because God is faithful.
- The author uses that ancient prophetic word for a very present struggle. The Jewish believers are watching their world get complicated. The cost of following Christ is rising. The familiar structures feel safer, more stable, more comfortable.
- And the word of God is the same word He spoke through Habakkuk: the righteous shall live by faith.
- **Not by sight. Not by comfort. Not by the absence of suffering. By faith.**

And then He concludes with this extraordinary statement in verse 39:

Hebrews 10:39

“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

We are not of those who shrink back.

- This isn't wishful thinking. This is a declaration of identity rooted in the work of Christ.
- The author is reminding them, and us, who we are.
- We are people who hold fast. We are people who endure. We are people who have received a better possession, and we do not trade it away for something lesser just because it costs us something.

- Notice he says “we.” He places himself alongside them. This is not a warning given from a safe distance. This is a brother in the struggle, a fellow traveler on the same road, saying: We don't quit. That's not who we are.

Application: How Then Shall We Live?

1. Identify What You're Looking Back At

- The Jewish believers in Hebrews were tempted to look back at the old covenant, the familiar priesthood and the religious structures they'd grown up with.
 - It felt safer. It felt known. It felt like home.
- We often struggle with the same temptation. Most of us aren't being drawn back toward Jewish temple worship. But we all have our version of looking back.
 - Maybe for you it's a former way of life, before you knew Christ, that had a certain freedom to it, a certain comfort, even if it was ultimately destructive.
 - Maybe it's a relationship you walked away from because it was pulling you away from Christ, and you still feel the pull.
 - Maybe it's an old identity—the way you used to define yourself, the community you used to belong to, the things that used to give you a sense of significance before you found it in Christ.
- The Israelites in the wilderness longed for the leeks and onions of Egypt, while completely romanticizing the slavery they'd been delivered from.
 - They forgot they had been in bondage. They only remembered what was familiar.
- We do the same thing. When following Christ gets costly
 - when integrity costs you a relationship,
 - when faith costs you comfort,
 - when obedience costs you status

- ...that's when the familiar old life starts to look appealing again. Not because it was actually better, but because it is known.
- **[LENT SEASON] Here is what I want you to do this week:** ask yourself honestly, ***What am I looking back at?*** What habits, relationships, identities, or ways of coping are you tempted to return to when following Christ gets hard?
 - Name them. Bring them to your great High Priest. Not to be condemned for them, but to receive the grace that trains us to renounce what doesn't belong to us anymore.

You have a better possession, and an abiding one. Don't trade it.

2. Stay in the Company of the Faithful

- Here's something easy to miss in this passage but absolutely critical to the author's argument. Look back at verse 25, just one verse before this entire warning passage begins:

Hebrews 10:25

"...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

- The warning against apostasy flows directly out of the warning against abandoning the assembly. These two things are connected. The drift away from Christ often begins with the drift away from the people of Christ.
- Some of the believers had already started pulling away. Skipping the gathering. Isolating themselves. Maybe they were embarrassed by the cost of association. Maybe they were just tired. Maybe it felt easier to maintain some private, individual faith without the complications of community.
- But the author sees this withdrawal as a dangerous first step. Because endurance is not something you manufacture in isolation. It's something cultivated, sustained, and strengthened in the community of faith.

Look back at what Hebrews 3:13 told us:

Hebrews 3:13

"But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."

- Every day. Not just Sunday. Not just small group once a week. Every day, the people of God speaking life into each other, reminding each other who Christ is, calling each other back when the drift begins.

- You were not designed to do this alone. The Christian life was never meant to be a solo journey. And when life gets hard and following Christ costs something, the instinct to isolate is one of the enemy's most effective weapons.
- Because alone, we are far more susceptible to the lies, to the romanticizing of what we left behind, to the shrinking back, to the slow drift that becomes departure.
- Stay in the assembly. Stay in your small group. Stay in the rhythms of worship, the Word, confession, and the Lord's Table. Stay in relationships where people love you enough to ask you hard questions and speak truth to you when you're drifting.

Endurance is a team sport.

Conclusion:

This is a hard passage. The author meant it to be. But notice how he ends it. Not with condemnation. Not with a list of people who failed. With a declaration:

“We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.”

- And he's saying the same thing to you today.
- Maybe you're tired. Maybe following Christ has cost you more than you anticipated. Maybe you're looking over your shoulder at something that feels safer, more familiar, less costly.
- **Hear this: Don't throw away your confidence. It has a great reward.**
 - **Our confidence is Christ - and He is our great reward**
- The sin question is settled. Your great High Priest is interceding for you right now. The inheritance is secured. And a little while...just a little while...the coming one will come and will not delay.

So hold your ground. Stay in the community of faith. Keep your eyes forward.

The righteous shall live by faith. We are not of those who shrink back.

[Prayer and Benediction]

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. Looking Back

The Jewish believers were tempted to return to what was familiar—the old covenant system they’d grown up with. Even though it was inferior, it felt safer and less costly than following Christ in a hostile world. We all have our version of “looking back”—old habits, relationships, identities, or ways of life we’re tempted to return to when following Christ gets hard.

What in my past am I most tempted to look back at when following Christ feels costly? What makes the familiar feel appealing even when I know it wasn’t better, and what would it look like this week to consciously keep my eyes forward?

2. Clarifying the Warning

The sermon drew a distinction between the sin Hebrews 10:26 is addressing, the decisive, willful rejection of Christ, and the ordinary ongoing struggle with sin that every believer experiences. 1 John 5:16-17 helps us understand that there is sin that does not lead to death, and there is sin that does. Running to Christ in failure is the opposite of what this passage is warning against.

If I’ve ever been troubled by Hebrews 10:26 as a believer who struggles with sin, how does understanding this distinction change the way I read it? When I fail, is my first instinct to run to Christ or to hide from Him, and what would it look like to change that pattern this week?

3. Remembering Your Own Story

The author doesn’t call the believers to something new, he calls them back to something they’ve already done. He reminds them of their early endurance: the public shame they bore, the compassion they showed, even their joyful acceptance of the plundering of their property. Their past faithfulness is proof that genuine faith was at work in them.

When I look back at my own journey with Christ, where can I see evidence of God’s faithfulness in hard seasons? How might remembering those moments strengthen me for the struggles I’m facing now, and is there someone in my life I need to share that story with?

4. Staying in the Company of the Faithful

The warning against apostasy flows directly out of the warning against abandoning the assembly. The drift away from Christ often begins with the drift away from the people of Christ. Some of the believers had already started isolating themselves, and the author sees this withdrawal as a dangerous first step toward hardening. Hebrews 3:13 tells us to exhort one another every day, while it is still “today.”

In what ways am I tempted to isolate when life gets hard or following Christ feels costly? Who in my life is regularly asking me hard questions and

speaking truth into me, and what would it look like to lean into Christian community rather than away from it this week?