

Hebrews 10

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[0 : 00] Please turn back with me to Hebrews chapter 10. Hebrews chapter 10. I'd like to look at this passage with you under the title, A Call to Persevere.

A Call to Persevere. I'd like to introduce you this evening to Glyn and Pete.

Glyn and Pete were members of my college Christian union. Glyn had been brought up in a Christian home.

He'd gone to church from his earliest years. And so when he came up to university, it was the natural thing for him to identify with a small group of Christians in the college who met regularly for prayer and Bible study.

Pete had a quite different background. He wasn't from a Christian home. He was converted around the time he started university.

[1 : 10] He was a really enthusiastic Christian. He threw himself into Christian activities and he was an inspiration to us all. That was, believe it or not, in the 1970s.

Now let's wind the clock forward to the year 2000. In the autumn of that year, we had a college reunion. It was good to catch up with people we hadn't seen for many years.

Glyn and Pete were both there. But 20 plus years on, neither Glyn nor Pete had an active church connection.

Glyn had drifted away from any Christian commitment. Pete was still sympathetic to the Christian faith, but he too had no real church connection.

He'd become a barrister in London. He was living with a woman he wasn't married to. And his Christian commitment had, in the meantime, taken a back seat.

[2 : 30] Both Glyn and Pete had drifted from their Christian moorings. It's something that can so easily happen.

It can happen all too easily. And none of us can say it could never happen to us. It's a problem which features prominently in this epistle to the Hebrews.

The writer is addressing Jewish Christians who are in real danger of giving up on their Christian faith. They're finding the Christian life hard.

They face persecution. Judaism appears much more comfortable, much more congenial. And so the writer to the Hebrews repeatedly urges them not to give up.

We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard, he writes, so that we do not drift away. See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.

[3 : 38] Let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. And here in chapter 10, he exhorts his readers, do not throw away your confidence.

You need to persevere. The writer recognizes that his readers are tempted to turn their backs on their Christian faith, and he wants to give them pastoral advice.

I'd like to look with you this evening at what he says in this 10th chapter of the epistle. We shall look at the passage under three headings. Realities to consider, risks to weigh, and responsibilities to discharge.

Realities to consider, risks to weigh, and responsibilities to discharge. First of all then, let's look in verses 1 to 18 at realities to consider.

In these verses, the writer emphasizes that Christianity is the real deal. It is ultimate reality.

[4 : 48] He draws a contrast between Christianity and Judaism. He is, after all, writing to Jewish Christians who are thoroughly familiar with the Old Testament and its worship.

He draws their attention here to the repetitive nature of Jewish worship. The same sacrifices were offered endlessly year after year, he points out in verse 1.

And then in verse 11, he says, Day after day, every priest stands and performs his religious duties. Again and again, he offers the same sacrifices which can never take away sins.

Old Testament worship involved sacrifice after sacrifice, day after day, year after year. It was an endless ritual.

Why does the writer emphasize the repetitiveness of Old Testament worship? It's because that highlights the fact that the sacrifices of the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, were at best provisional.

[5 : 56] Yes, God had commanded that they be offered. The writer acknowledges that in an aside in verse 8, the law required them to be made. The sacrifices were an ongoing reminder of the need for sin to be atoned for.

They reminded the Jews that they were sinners, that death was the penalty for sin, and that only if that penalty was paid, could sin be atoned for.

But animal sacrifices couldn't actually atone for sin. They couldn't meet the underlying need to which they pointed.

They couldn't deal effectively with the problem of human sin. All they could do was provide a certain degree of ceremonial purification. The worshippers didn't receive full and free forgiveness.

They continued to feel guilty for their sins. They lived, as it were, from one sacrifice to the next. That was why sacrifices kept being offered.

[7 : 00] As the writer points out in verse 2, if the worshippers had been cleansed once for all and had no longer felt guilty for their sins, the sacrifices would have stopped being offered.

But no, there was no effective sacrifice. An effective sacrifice was awaited of which the temple ritual was only a pale reflection.

It was in order to make that full and final sacrifice that the Lord Jesus came into the world. He fulfilled the will of his Father for our salvation.

He alone could offer a sacrifice of infinite worth, a sacrifice that matched the gravity of the offense our sin caused, a holy God.

bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood.

[8 : 01] Hallelujah, what a Savior! Guilty, vile, and spotless and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was he.

Full atonement can it be? Hallelujah! What a Savior! The writer to the Hebrews is in no doubt that full atonement is what Jesus Christ achieved.

Look at verse 10. We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Verse 14. By one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. And perhaps most telling of all is verse 12.

When this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God. After Christ offered himself as a sacrifice he returned to heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.

[9 : 11] He sat down because his work was done. His work had been completed. It had been completed successfully and was fully effective. There was nothing more to be done.

The events of Easter which the church throughout the world has been celebrating today represent ultimate reality. Jesus' death finally and decisively atoned for sin.

The sin which divides men and women from a holy God. The penalty of sin has been met.

Forgiveness is freely available on the basis of a finished salvation.

salvation. The Christian gospel is the real deal. There is no substitute. There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Christianity offers real forgiveness and acceptance with God. And the writer to the Hebrews wants his readers to reckon with the reality of the gospel.

[10 : 18] They must reckon with its reality. reality. And so must we. There are realities to consider. But let's look now at the risks to weigh, realities to consider, and now risks to weigh, which the writer highlights in verses 26 to 39.

The risks essentially flow from what he has had to say about the reality of the gospel. If the gospel is the only way we can be put in the right with God, it follows that to drift away from it is a potentially serious matter.

The writer makes no bones about it. But his purpose isn't to fill his readers with alarm and take from them any assurance they have that their sins have been forgiven. When you teach your children how to cross the road, you point out to them how dangerous traffic is. You do so not to put them off ever summoning the courage to cross the road, but to enable them to cross roads safely.

They need to be aware of the dangers if they are to be safe. And for much the same reasons the writer to the Hebrews wants his readers to know about the risks as well as the realities.

[11 : 45] But his purpose is essentially positive. That's highlighted by the closing words of the chapter. After all he says about the risks of abandoning the faith, he concludes, but we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe.

and are saved. It's in that context we must understand his warnings. If the gospel is ultimate reality, if there's nothing beyond it, just what are the consequences of rejecting it?

Well, if we give up on the gospel, if we give up on the only means by which our fundamental problem, the problem of sin, can be dealt with, we are faced with a difficulty.

The only way to be made right with God is through Jesus Christ. And so if we give up on him, there is no one and nothing to shield us from the judgment which our sins deserve.

That's why the writer says in verses 26 and 27, if we deliberately keep on sinning, after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

[13 : 20] The writer isn't saying that if a Christian sins, there's no possibility of forgiveness. forgiveness. If that were the case, there would be no hope for any of us.

Christians continue to sin. It's a fact to which we can all testify. It's also something which the Bible recognizes. Doesn't the Apostle John say, if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

And he goes on, if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

The writer is not saying here that a Christian doesn't sin. The situation which he is addressing is one where someone who has professed to be a Christian opts for a lifestyle which implies willful rejection of the gospel.

I think the NIV has correctly translated the verb in verse 26 as a continuous present if we keep on sinning. The passage is speaking about a pattern of behavior and it's a pattern of behavior that is deliberately chosen if we deliberately keep on sinning.

[14 : 42] The sinning he has in mind may not be flagrant in flagrantly immoral behavior so much as willful rejection of the gospel itself. for let's make no mistake that is the greatest sin of all to reject God's offer of salvation in Christ.

This is the judgment that light has come into the world but men have loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

The writer is warning his readers here that if they turn their backs on the gospel the risks are serious. There is no other way to be made right with God.

There is no other sacrifice for sins left. Judgment must fall on the person who in the words of verse 29 has trampled the Son of God under foot, has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him and has insulted the spirit of grace.

That is a risk to be weighed. none other land, none other name, none other hope in heaven or earth or sea, none other hiding place from guilt and shame, none beside thee.

[16 : 11] Is the writer suggesting that it is possible for a person to lose his or her salvation? That it is possible to be saved one day and to lose it all tomorrow?

I don't think so. The Bible makes clear elsewhere that Christians cannot lose their salvation. Once saved, always saved.

Jesus said, all that the Father gives me will come to me and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. This is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

In Romans chapter 8, Paul the apostle describes an unbreakable chain of actions. Those God foreknew he also predestined, those he predestined he also called, those he called he also justified, those he justified he also glorified.

And he assures the Christians in Philippi that where God has begun a good work, he will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 24] So I don't think the writer can be saying here that it's possible for a Christian to lose his or her salvation. salvation. But if those who are saved will persevere, it's also true that it's by persevering that I know I am saved.

Let me say that again. If it's true that those who are saved will persevere, it's also true that only by persevering will I know I am saved.

I think that's essentially what this passage is saying. If I am not holding firmly to the gospel, I have no reason to assume that I am saved.

A minister I know puts it like this. The mark of past conversion is present convertedness. the mark of past conversion is present convertedness. It's not enough to point to an experience in the past, however significant it may have been at the time.

[18 : 41] The question is, are you living as a Christian now? If your grasp of the gospel is weakening, if you're not holding firmly to the faith you once professed, you need to take that seriously.

You need to do something about it. You need to weigh the risks. The writer to the Hebrews knows there are many reasons why those to whom he's writing may be tempted to give up on their Christian faith.

These people have been through the mill. They've faced hardship and unjust treatment. Look at verses 33 and 34. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution.

At other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You sympathised with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property.

Those Jewish Christians had faced real pressures and Christians today also face real pressures. We live in the real world.

[19 : 48] We live in a fallen world. And the pressures to soft pedal on our Christian commitment are real. that's why we need to weigh the risks.

But while we must weigh the risks, we must not be weighed down by them. This passage is not intended to rob Christians of their assurance.

Anyone who is sensitive to the risks that are highlighted here is unlikely to be deliberately sinning in the sense in which that expression is used in verse 26.

But there is a word here for those of us who are becoming complacent and who need to be shaken out of our complacency. Realities to consider, risks to weigh.

Finally, in verses 19 to 25, we have responsibilities to discharge. Responsibilities to discharge.

Given that the gospel represents ultimate reality, and that there are serious risks in rejecting it, what can we do to ensure by God's grace that we hold firmly to the gospel?

[21 : 10] The writer tells us here there are several things we can and must do. I would like to highlight three of the responsibilities he mentions. First of all, in verses 19 to 22, he highlights the responsibility to live in the good of all that the gospel offers.

We need to live in the good of all that the gospel offers. Verse 19, Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the most holy place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is his body.

And since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water.

You see what he's saying here? He has outlined the greatness of the sacrifice that Jesus has made. He has pointed out how Jesus is the priest, above all other priests.

His sacrifice is the sacrifice that has brought to an end the entire sacrificial system. And in verse 19 he says, Therefore, brothers, in the light of these great realities, there's something you must do.

[22 : 36] You must live in the good of all that these realities hold out to you. the writer exhorts us in the light of these great realities to draw near to God.

Jesus has offered a perfect once-for-all sacrifice for sin. He has opened up the way to God. He offers us access to God and guarantees us an audience.

Well then, let's take advantage of these things. We must live in the good of them. we must take advantage of the privileges that Jesus has secured.

And so we must come before God with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith. Are we doing that?

Are we doing that day by day, coming before God in full assurance of faith? We can know what it's like to have our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience.

[23 : 40] We can know peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. If so, are we keeping short accounts with God? Are we experiencing these things on a daily basis?

If we are, then we're unlikely to give up on the gospel. That's the first responsibility. We must live in the good of all that the gospel offers.

Then in verse 23, the writer urges us to hold on to our hope. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Christian hope focuses on the one in whom our hope is placed. The God who has promised in his word to secure our present and our future is faithful.

He who promised is faithful. He can be relied on to keep his promises. Our responsibility then is to trust him.

[24 : 53] So what do we do day by day? Do we focus on our circumstances? do we rely on our feelings? Or do we trust the God who is faithful?

If we hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, knowing that God is true to his word, we are unlikely to give up on the gospel.

we need to live in the good of all that the gospel offers, we need to hold on to our hope. And then in verses 24 and 25, we are to encourage one another to live out the gospel.

The writer encourages us to consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds. As Christians, we need one another.

We cannot exist in isolation. And we are responsible in a very real sense for one another. And so the writer tells us here that we should consider, we should think through how we can help one another live lives that commend the gospel and display its values.

[26 : 11] I wonder if that's something that's happening in this fellowship. Are you doing all you can to help one another live lives which are characterized by love and good deeds?

If you are, it's less likely that people will drift away from the gospel. people. And if we're to encourage one another, we need to meet together regularly to do so.

And so in verse 25, the writer says, let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing. Apparently, some of the Jewish Christians were not making fellowship with other Christians a priority.

they needed to see the importance of Christian fellowship and so must we. If we don't meet regularly with our Christian brothers and sisters, we defy them of our fellowship and we also make it easier for ourselves to slip our Christian moorings.

realities to consider, risks to weigh, responsibilities to discharge.

[27 : 37] I introduce you at the start of this sermon to Pete and Glyn. May I ask you as I ask myself, what are you doing if you're a Christian to avoid giving up on the gospel as they appear to have?

Are you persuaded that the gospel is ultimate reality? Are you concerned about the risks involved in turning your back on it?

And are you discharging the responsibilities opportunities which will enable you by God's grace to keep on keeping on in the Christian life?

Shall we pray? Amen. O Lord, we pray that we may heed the warnings of your word and also heed its commands.

may we come before you, may we draw near to you on a regular basis in full assurance of faith.

[28 : 55] May we live in the good of all that the gospel offers us and may we seek to apply the gospel in our lives and to encourage others to do so.

And if we are not Christians, if we have not as yet committed ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray that we too may respond in the light of the risks, but also and more importantly in the light of the great realities, because a once for all sacrifice for sin has been made, and forgiveness is freely available on the basis of Christ's death.

May we respond to that, and may we know peace with you through our Lord Jesus Christ. We ask it in his name and for his sake.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.