

The Final Warning Passage (Hebrews 12:25–29)

Well, if you picked up the bulletin this morning and read the title of the sermon, you will have read that the title is “The Final Warning Passage.” The final warning passage! That sounds foreboding, doesn't it? It does. But I promise you that it is not nearly as foreboding as the warning itself. What we just read in verses 25–29 is the fifth and final warning passage in the book of Hebrews.

These warning passages are somewhat notorious in this book because many people point to them as biblical evidences or proofs that it is possible for a Christian to lose their salvation. There are five of them in Hebrews, and they are all used in various ways by people who believe that we can lose our salvation or forfeit our salvation or fall out of our salvation or give back our salvation; these warning passages are used as proof that that is possible. I mean, if it were not possible for us to not escape and be consumed by God, as verse 29 suggests, then why would the warning be given to Christians at all, if it were not possible for us to, in the language of chapter 6, fall away, or drift past, or be lost forever and perish in “the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb. 10:27), like we read earlier. And so these, I think, texts are abused in that sense.

We have studied through four of these five warning passages so far, and we have spent an inordinate amount of time working through the details and the context and following the arguments of the author in an attempt, I think, to convincingly prove that these warnings are not warnings to genuine Christians of a danger that can actually befall them. But instead they are warnings to people who are almost Christians, people who know the truth, people who can speak the truth, people who can pretend to be in the truth and pretend to walk in the truth but are not actually genuinely in the truth at all.

Eventually the work of pretending to be a Christian becomes so difficult, it becomes so onerous, that people just give up and they depart and leave and go out from among us, demonstrating that they were never of us to begin with. That's the language of 1 John 2:19, where John describes this phenomena of apostates and apostasy, and that is who I think the warning passages are describing. Even though they are addressed to a congregation of Christians, they are describing people who are not really Christians at all but they are amongst God's people. They know the truth and they can pretend to be in the truth. And that is one of the most dangerous positions to be in. And I will tell you why it is a dangerous position. Because the person who is amongst true believers and who is able to pretend to be a true believer without actually being a believer is in a

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position where the guilt of their conscience can be assuaged without the guilt of their sin actually ever being removed. So some apostates are apostates who are deceived. They think that they are believers. They have come into the church and been convinced that participation in the outward doings of a church body is in itself an actual participation into the faith of the people there in itself. And unfortunately, and you know that this is true, the bulk of Evangelicalism across our culture and across our nation, in churches, and the preaching that goes on, is not strong enough, it is not clear enough, it is not precise enough to weed out those people and to demonstrate that there is a line between the true believer and the apostate.

And people can be in churches—and some of you have come out of these churches. I know because I've talked with you. You've been in churches where for years you lived under the delusion that simply being there and doing those things and being with those people was in fact a participation in Christ. And then after coming out of that environment, you become convinced, you understand that no, I was simply going along, I was not actually a believer to begin with. And that's a dangerous position to be in because people will live decades sometimes in those churches and never be confronted with the reality of sin and the fact that the gospel demands a repentance and a faith and clear understanding of certain gospel truths.

The author of Hebrews is very concerned that there are some in his audience who remain unconverted. Even after everything he has said to them from the beginning of this Epistle all the way up, now, to almost the end of chapter 12, there are some in his audience whom he fears might still be, at this point, unconverted, pretending. They are pretenders; they are in danger of falling away from the truth, drifting past the gospel, neglecting it, not quite having it click, thinking that their participation in and amongst these people of God is itself salvation and what God calls them to. The author, without knowing necessarily who those people are, is aware that there are some people who might be listening to him or reading this letter who are in that camp. So he is warning them of the eternal consequences of playing with eternal truths.

Lest you and I think that the verities of Scripture are a thing that we can trifle with and set aside and simply embrace in a superficial way, he is sternly warning us that embracing or neglecting these truths has eternal consequences. And thus, the sternness of this warning chapter. Chapter 13 of Hebrews—and we are almost there—is filled with encouragements and exhortations addressed to genuine believers. But at the end of chapter 12, the author is giving one final appeal, one final warning to his audience that if

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you neglect these truths, if you deny these truths, if you simply come close enough to these truths to be warmed by them but you do not in fact embrace the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, then your turning away from those truths will result in your eternal damnation. He is warning the undecided, the pretender, and the uncommitted.

Now, some people would suggest that verses 18–24, which we've covered in some detail, is part of the warning passage. And I actually would be fine with that, if you consider that kind of all part of the warning passage. It does list out a number of blessings and benefits that if you turn away from these things, the author is intending to show, you're turning back to the judgment that is portended for you at Sinai. If you neglect all of these graces that have been provided in the new covenant by Christ and you walk away from this truth, then you're walking away from all of those blessings and you are going to be stuck facing the God who thunders His judgments at Sinai, (vv. 18–19). And then you have nothing to do but fear and tremble before Him. But verses 25–29 is really the heart of the warning passage. And today here's what I want to do: I want to look at the warning passage as a whole. So we're going to go through really all five of these verses here and not dive into any of the details of them. We're going to get an overview of the entire passage and see how this connects to the previous warning passages.

Now, I've been struggling with a decision that I've needed to make regarding this final warning passage. And that is, how do I take this warning passage, and without going through too much detail, go through the other warning passages to remind you of what we covered back in, yes, 2017 and '18 and '19 and '20 and '21, those years. It's easy for us—it's easy for me, and I'm studying this every week—it's easy for me to lose track of what some of the points of some of those passages were. You might think, because I know I put on a good show, that I have all of this memorized and I can remember every detail that I've ever said about every passage, but that's not the case. So I've struggled with the way to sort of tie all of this together. And I think today I'm going to take a stab at trying to do that.

Here's what we're going to do. First, I'm going to consider—we're going to consider together—the purpose of the warning passages, all five of them. What is the purpose of them? What do the warning passages do for the believer and for the unbeliever? What was God's intention in giving these stern warnings? Then second, we're going to observe the key features of this warning passage, verses 25–29. There are four key features that we're going to see that are in this warning passage. And then we're going to go back,

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and I'm going to give you a brief—I promise it'll be brief and we will get all this done before we're done today—a brief survey of the other four warning passages so that you can see how the key features of this warning passage are woven throughout the entire book of Hebrews and through all of the warning passages. And it will serve to remind you not only of what we have covered, but it will serve to help you see in stark relief how all of these warning passages play together, how they work well with one another.

So let's begin with verses 25–29. Don't turn back yet to the other warning passages. We're going to consider the purpose of the warning passages in general. And this is going to be something of a review if you've been here for the other warning passages, because I've covered this, but I just want to go through this again. Hebrews is written to a mixed audience. And as I just said a few moments ago, the author is aware that there are people in his audience—whether this was originally spoken and then written down or whether it is written to a group of people, the author is aware that there are people who are being exposed to this teaching in Hebrews who are very likely not believers. And he has them in mind. So though the entire letter is really addressed to the church, to true believers, the warning passages are these brief moments where he sort of pushes the truth home in case there are people in his audience who have not yet fully embraced Christ and are not yet true believers.

And he uses the terms *we* and *us* and *our* all the way through the Epistle while he is aware—and this is key—while he is aware that there are people in the audience who are not necessarily believers. And I do this as well, by the way. Sometimes I will use the terms *we* and *us* and *our* when I am speaking to this entire group, even though I'm well aware that in a group this size, there are people here whom I do not know, who—you may be a pretender. You may be a false convert. You've not really embraced the gospel. You're not a believer at all. You think you're a believer, but you don't understand the gospel yet, so you're not really a believer. Or you know you're an unbeliever and you're just putting on airs for whatever reason and trying to fly under the radar and enjoy the things that go with the people of God, the blessings that fall upon a body like that, but you haven't really embraced the gospel. So I will say things like, “Our hope is in Heaven. Our hope is in Christ. We have a great reward,” even though I know that—this does not describe the majority of the people here—but there are people sprinkled throughout this audience, and certainly people who would listen online, to whom those statements do not apply, at least not yet, because they have not embraced the gospel. And so the author is doing that in the Book of Hebrews. He is speaking to Christians, and every once in a while he turns a description or warning to those who might not yet be Christians.

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And these warning passages then have a purpose for the unbeliever and for the believer. And here's the purpose for the unbeliever. It's rather straightforward. It is evangelistic, because he knows that they are in danger of judgment. They know the truth, they have heard the truth, they have experienced the truth to a degree, but they have remained unconverted. And then some in his audience are toying with the idea of abandoning what they have seen and experienced and known of Christianity and going back to Old Testament Judaism, to the sacrifice and the priesthood which were at the time still even functioning in the temple. So he is aware that there are some there who are toying with that, and those are the unbelievers. They're thinking about departing.

And there's all kinds of reasons why one might walk away from the faith and abandon the truth. It might be that they thought that joining the Christian group was a cool thing, it was a great thing, their friends were doing it, and then they decided to jump on board. But then that didn't play out well when they started to have to suffer the things that Christians suffer. It's through many tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22). There are trials and tribulations, and anybody who desires to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. And the naive person who thinks that they're joining into this group might then say, "I didn't sign up for this. I'm losing my job, having people look down on me. People associate me with those people. I didn't quite sign up for that and what it would bring me culturally or socially." And so they would be considering going back and turning back and joining their former lives.

So in terms of the unbeliever, the focus is evangelistic and warning. He wants them to come all the way to Christ. Not simply to stay far enough away to be warmed and enjoy the blessings that might sort of overflow to them but to fully embrace salvation in Christ, to trust in His sacrifice, and to understand that what they have in Christ is far better than anything they could turn back to. Because everything in Christ is better. So he wants them to get off the fence and step into the reality of salvation in Christ. And he is warning them of the judgment that will come to one who knows so much and yet turns away from what they know, or neglects to embrace what they know.

Toward the believer—the warning passages are not lost on the true believer. For the believer, it is a cause of some self-examination, which can be a good thing. To examine yourselves to see if you're in the faith. So the believer would read the warning passage and then step back and say, OK, have I truly embraced Christ? Is there evidence of regeneration in my life? Is there true salvation there? What is my hope in? Am I playing a game, or am I serious about this thing? That kind of self-examination can actually aid

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in our sanctification and our growth and holiness as we look at our lives and say, OK, is there evidence in my life that indicates true, genuine salvation? Is there a turning from sin? Is there a mortifying of my flesh and of my sin? Is there a denying of myself and a turning from temptation? Is there truly a love for holiness, or do I only pretend to love holiness and then secretly love my sin?

Do I love the people of God? Do I love the Word of God? Do I love worship? Do I hunger and thirst for righteousness? Are those fruits in my life? And the believer then, seeing those fruits in their life, even if it's not perfect, will say, OK, there's evidence of salvation there. And when push comes to shove, at the end of the day, yes, truly I am trusting in Christ alone. He is my only hope and stay. He is my anchor. He is my rock. He is the One in whom I'm trusting. And I know that I am saved not because of anything that I have done but only because of what Christ has done. And the only way I can be lost is if He fails to do what He has promised to do. And then we rest. See, the warning passage can cause us to do that. That's a good thing.

Second, the warning passages for the believer explain the apostates. What do we do with the people who go through youth group, put on all of the right clothes and outward expressions of Christianity, and then go off to college, and you think, "Man, this guy is probably going to evangelize the entire campus before he gets done. He's going to have professors repenting and bowing down and trusting Christ right there in the classroom, because if our church has produced anybody, it's that guy with such a rock-solid foundation." And then they come home at Christmas, and their ears are pierced, and their hair is purple, and they're all tatted up, and they've got a gay boyfriend/girlfriend, and they've decided, "Mom and Dad, it's time for me to come out. We've been living together for the last three months." And you say, "What happened to that person? How can they walk away looking like they are so solid and then completely abandon the faith?" This is the answer to it, what you see in the warning passages. There are people among us who are not really of us.

Third, it encourages our sanctification because as we read the warning passages, we are motivated to press in and to pursue Christ and to get rid of sin in our own lives lest we be disqualified in the end. And so it is a motivation to pursue sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. In other words, we read the warning passages, and the believer says, "I don't want to be like Esau and sell my birthright for a pot of soup. I don't want to be like disobedient Israel." It kind of goes back to the race analogy in Hebrews 12:1–3. You hear the commands to put off all of the sin and the encumbrances

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which so easily entangle us and trip us up in the race. The believer looks at that warning and that motivation and says, “OK, I'm going to do that. I want to do that. I want to obey that. I don't want to run the danger of being taken out of the race.” And so they pursue, and they press in, and they mortify their sin and make sure that they're on the path. And the unbeliever says, “Meh, I'm enjoying my sin. I'm enjoying my life as it is, so I guess I'll just continue to fake it.” So there's a sanctifying effect.

And the fourth benefit of the warning passages to believers is that we are by the warning passages preserved in our faith. We are preserved in our faith by the warning passage. It is not *the* but it is *a* means that the Spirit of God uses to keep us. Because the warning passages are like guardrails on a very dangerous mountain road. When there is a cliff on both sides, those guardrails are there, and we see the guardrails, we see the warning signs, and we see the pictures of the cliff and the rocks falling, and we see the danger signs, and we hug the middle of the road lest we go near either side of that and fall off. That's what the warning passages do to the believer. The unbeliever, he doesn't care. He sees the warning signs, he hears the audible siren, he sees the pictures and the guardrail and just plows off eventually because he wants to sin. But the believer sees all those warnings, and it is a means by which the Spirit of God preserves us and keeps us in the faith, because that ultimately is a work of the Holy Spirit. So that's the purpose of the warning passages.

Second, I want you to observe some of the features of this warning passage, and there are two of them that are unique to this warning passage that I want to point out. In a moment, I'm going to give you four features of all the warning passages, but here are the two that are unique to this passage.

Number one, this is the most severe warning passage out of all five of them. It's not the longest, but you understand that long does not equal severe; longevity does not equal severity. This is not the longest; it's rather short. It's rather straightforward and to the point. But look at verse 29: “For our God is a consuming fire.” And given what he says in verses 18 and 19 and the judgment that he's talked about at Sinai, and given what he says in verse 25: “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns us from heaven”—that's stern. He has in mind there the warnings to Old Testament Israel, and when you start realizing what it is that the original audience would have been thinking about when he describes that, and

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then he ends it with “our God is a consuming fire,” you can see just how severe this warning is.

And it's very similar and a little bit more severe than Hebrews 10—the fourth warning passage—verses 26 and 27. You can look there if you want. Verses 26–27: “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.” “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (v. 31). You hear the severity of that and the severity of the one in chapter 12: “Our God is consuming fire.” These are terrifying statements, and they are intended by the Holy Spirit to scare those who need to be scared. And I promise you that as we go through this, I am not going to soft-serve this up to you and find some way to make this palatable and acceptable to a bunch of milksops with weak spines. I won't do it. We're just going to let the text say what it says. And friends, it is a severe warning because the author does not want his hearers, his listeners in this Epistle, to walk away from this truth and continue in an undecided and uncommitted state. So he is laying out here the strongest language on judgment that he can lay out.

The second feature is that this is a short warning passage. And something that is interesting about Hebrews is the first warning passage in chapter 2—which we're going to look at here in a moment—the first warning passage in chapter 2 and the last warning passage here in chapter 12, these function sort of as literary brackets in the text because they are mirror images of each other. You're going to notice that the language in chapter 2 and the language in chapter 12 is very similar, and the tone of the judgments is very similar, and the ideas that are being communicated are very similar. In fact, to give you another little nugget—this is more than what you paid for this morning, but here's something interesting about the outline of the Book of Hebrews. Chapter 1 is all about the glory of Christ, His Person. Then you have that warning passage in chapter 2 which sort of warns you not to neglect or to drift past the importance of those truths. Then you have everything in between. So you have the work of Christ, the Person of Christ, the warning passage, and then, bracketed, the work of Christ with three other warning passages. Then we get to this one. And there's just one chapter after this. One chapter before the first warning passage, one chapter after the last warning passage. These two warning passages are brackets, and the last chapter is just some concluding remarks. So it is almost as if the author with this warning passage—short, to the point, concise, echoing the first one—is intending to bring our minds back to the warning passage that started it all back in chapter 2. He wants us to remember that warning and

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all that he said about that back there when he was talking about the Person of Christ. So that's the second thing. Those are the features of this warning passage.

Now the third thing we need to look at is connecting this to all the other warning passages. There are certain things that all the warning passages have in common. There are four features that are woven like threads through all of them. They surface in the Book of Hebrews, and they particularly surface in these five warning passages. And those threads that connect all the warning passages show that the concern of the author in all five passages is the same. His purpose is the same, and his audience is the same. So here are the—I shouldn't say *the* four, but here are four of probably more, but I'm just using these four today. Here are four features of all the warning passages, and all the passages have this in them.

Number one, there is a reminder of what was said or written. A reminder of what is said or written. He's reminding them of something that they've known, something that they have heard, something that they have seen, something that they have experienced, something that they have said that they believe is true, that has been spoken to them, or that they have heard in some way, and reminding them that that is what in fact they are turning away from. You see this in verse 25 of our passage: “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking [that they're turning away from a clear revelation]. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from heaven.” Notice the reference to the voice in verse 26 that shook the earth and how He has promised. These are all references to things that they have known, things that they have seen, things that they have heard, etc. So there is the reminder of what they have been told or what they know.

Number two, there is a description of judgment, justice, and wrath. Each warning passage has a vivid description of judgment or justice or wrath. Look at verse 26: “And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.’” That is, by the way, a description of the final coming eschatological end-times judgment that he is describing there. He's quoting from an Old Testament minor prophet. And what we are reading here is just a reference to a passage that describes a cataclysmic judgment like the world has never seen. So there is that description of judgment there in verse 26: “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.” And verse 29, of course, describes a judgment too, doesn't it? “For our God is a consuming fire.” So there is a reminder of something that

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they have heard or something that has been spoken to them. There is a description of a judgment, justice, wrath.

Third, each warning passage contains a defense of God's justice in judgment. God is not unjust. When we read that there is a fire that is going to consume the adversaries, that “it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31), how much more will you expect to escape if they didn't escape, “for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29)—you read that language, you read the language of judgment, the language of wrath, and the language of justice, and it is important for us to understand that those things are true. And at the same time God is a loving and compassionate and gracious and long-suffering God. These things, they both go together, and we don't choose between these attributes of God. So yes, God is loving and compassionate, and yes, God is wrathful against sin. These two things, of course, meet at the cross, where His justice against sin is satisfied and His love toward sinners is expressed and demonstrated. But disobedience and faithlessness and impenitence and resisting God's grace and ignoring the offer of pardon and denying the truth . . . God is true and every man is a liar, and the one who does these things shall not escape judgment. That is a true reality. And there is in each warning passage a defense of God's justice as he recites the sin that is being committed that deserves the judgment, lest you and I think that God is an arbitrary God who has these emotional outbursts of anger as a sort of a precocious God with no direction in anything. He just once in a while just unleashes His anger like a volcano goes off. No warning. You just don't see it coming. All of a sudden it's just there and destruction comes. That's not how our God is. Each warning passage contains a defense of the justice of God in the judgment that is being described.

And the fourth element of every warning passage is an encouragement for the believer—oh, I failed to show you in verses 25 and 26 how the justice of God is defended here. In verse 25, he says, “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking.” Right? There is a refusal, there is a denial. There is a turning away that is in fact itself justly punished by this consuming God.

So fourth, the encouragement for the believer. There's a reminder of the things that were spoken, a description of the justice, the defense of God's justice, and then an encouragement for the believer. Look at verse 28: “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken.” Can you not be encouraged by that? Yes, our God is a consuming fire, but brethren, you and I receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken. God someday will shake everything so that only the eternal things remain, and those

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things cannot be shaken and will never be shaken. That's the encouragement for the believer.

So these features of this warning passage are also seen in all the other warning passages. And now I want you to turn back to Hebrews chapter 2, and we're going to survey the previous four warning passages, and I want you to see the reminders that are there of things that were spoken, the description of the justice, the defense of God's justice, and then the encouragement for the believer.

Hebrews chapter 2. The first warning passage is verses 1–4, and it is a warning against drifting. And I'm going to give you a neat little description for each of these warning passages. So if you're the kind of person that likes these alliterated things, I only come up with them if they actually fall into my lap during the week. So if you want that, then this is your opportunity to write these down. The first warning passage is a warning against drifting. Now I'm going to read it; it's verses 1–4. And then I'm going to highlight for you, as I read each phrase, one of these four features that we've just examined that are in our final warning passage.

1 For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard [that's the reminder of what was heard or spoken], so that we do not drift away from it.

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty [there's the defense of God's justice],

3 how will we escape [here's the description of judgment, and also that disobedience receives a just penalty] if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,

4 God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. (Heb. 2:1–4 NASB)

You'll notice there the reminder of what was heard or spoken, the repetition of that word *spoken*—“you have heard it.” They are turning away from something that they have known to be true because God has revealed it. And then there is the description of judgment: “How will we escape . . .?” (v. 3) There is the defense of that; they received a

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just penalty for their disobedience. And then there is the encouragement to the believer that they have heard something that was confirmed by signs and wonders and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit that was given to those apostles who testified of what the Lord had spoken. You can see all four of those features there in that warning passage. That is a warning against drifting.

The second warning passage is a warning against disobeying. A warning against drifting, and then disobeying. The second warning passage is chapter 3, verse 12. A warning against disobeying. You remember, this is the one that deals with the Sabbath rest and the children coming out of the land of Israel, coming into the promised land, and their disobedience and the judgment that fell on them in the wilderness, etc. Look at verse 15. And this one's too long to read the entire passage and to highlight everything in it, so I'm just going to give you two of the four features that are here, and you can read the entire warning passage if you want on your own and see all these four features. But beginning in chapter 3, verse 12, the warning passage goes to chapter 4, verse 11. So it's a longer one. Chapter 3, verse 12. Look at verse 15: "While it is said, 'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts, as when they provoked Me [that's the defense of God's justice, by the way, that God was provoked].' For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?" Look at chapter 4, verse 2, and the reference here again to things that they had heard: "For indeed we have had good news preached to us, just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." Look at verse 6 of chapter 4:

6 Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had good news preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience [there's the defense of God's justice],

7 He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (Heb. 4:6–7 NASB)

So there was the reminder there of the truth that they had heard, the good news that had been preached, and that they had heard it but had not yet been united by faith. Many who had heard the audible voice of God perished in unbelief, and many who saw the visible signs of His power and His grace also perished in unbelief because what they heard and what they knew was not united by faith. They didn't believe it or trust in it.

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Then notice the encouragement to believers. That's the second of the four features that I want you to notice. Verse 11 of chapter 4: "Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience."

Hebrews 4:14:

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.

15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb. 4:14–16 NASB)

That's the encouragement to the believer. It's attached to the warning, so that's a warning against disobedience.

Now the third warning passage is in chapter 5, verse 11. And this is a warning against departing. A warning against drifting, a warning against disobeying, now this is a warning against departing because he describes here those who have just fallen away. Notice the reminder of what has been spoken in Hebrews 5:11:

11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing.

12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food.

13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant.

14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. (Heb. 5:11–14 NASB)

They had been taught, they had heard, they had experienced. This describes the almost Christian, what they had heard. And the author is there in that passage reminding them of what they have turned away from.

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And then you're familiar with chapter 6, where he talks about those who have tasted of the heavenly gift and they have experienced the powers of the age to come. They have come right up close to the flame and been warmed by the light of Christ. And then verse 6: "And then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame." That's the defense of God's justice. What else would you expect for somebody who crucifies to themselves again the Son of God and puts Him to open shame after all that they have experienced and they know? God is just, and His justice is defended even in that phrase.

Then, I want you to notice the encouragement to the believers as part of this warning passage. Verse 9: "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way." Yes, the author says, what I said is harsh. Yes, the judgment described is harsh. Yes, it's true that they put Christ to open shame. But, he says, of you—that is, you believers—I'm convinced of better things concerning you, "things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way. For God is not unjust [notice the defense of God's justice, the defense of His wrath] so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints" (Heb.6:9–10). That is a warning against departing, against falling away.

The fourth warning passage is a warning against despising, chapter 10, verse 26. So we have a warning against drifting, against disobeying, departing, despising. Chapter 10, verse 26: "For if we go on sinning willfully"—The heart of this warning passage is verses 26–31. So we're going to read the whole thing. I want you to see the four features here of the warning passages.

26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth [remember that's a reminder of what was spoken; you received a knowledge of the truth], there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries [that is a graphic description of the judgment; that's the second feature].

28 Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses [that's a reminder of what was spoken and a defense of God's justice, since they are doing something that deserves the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries] dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

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29 How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:26–29 NASB)

That is the defense of God's justice. You trample under foot the Son of God, you insult the Spirit of grace, you turn away from that. How much severer punishment do you think you deserve than the people who had not nearly as much light as you and turned away? They were judged for it; how much more will be the punishment of those who have received such light and such revelation, have known so much truth, and yet neglected to embrace it? You see the description in verse 31: "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God." That's a description of the judgment.

Now that one, 26–31, doesn't even seem to have any encouragement for the believer. Remember, that was the fourth one? There seems to be no encouragement for the believer there. Actually, this is an encouragement sandwich. Look up before the warning passage, in verse 19.

19 Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus,

20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh,

21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful;

24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb. 10:19–25 NASB)

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That's encouragement. Then there's the warning passage. And guess what? I said encouragement sandwich, and I meant it, because it follows up with some encouragement. Look down at verse 34.

34 For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

35 Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward.

36 For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. (Heb. 10:34–36 NASB)

That's the encouragement. That's almost as if the author there is saying, brethren, we receive the kingdom which cannot be shaken. Yeah, your possessions are being taken away from you. Yes, you're being imprisoned. Yes, you're being mocked. You have endured a great conflict of sufferings. But guess what? You have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one. Therefore, don't throw away your confidence. You have need of endurance, so that when you've done what God has willed you will receive what God has promised. That's the encouragement to the believer. That is a warning against despising or trampling under foot the Son of God.

The fifth and final warning passage—and this brings us right back to where we started: chapter 12, verse 25—is a warning against dismissing. Against drifting, disobeying, departing, despising, and dismissing. “*Do not refuse*” (v. 25). Don't turn your ears away from it, don't dismiss it, don't ignore this, don't neglect it. “Do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will [you] escape if [you] turn away from Him who warns from heaven” (v. 25). See, it is the same group of people that is being described in each passage. It's the same judgment that is warned of. And the reason that is given is the same—because they are turning away from something they have heard and they have every right to believe and know is truth. Rather than embracing it, they continue to neglect it, to drift past it, to disobey it, to depart from it, to despise it, and to dismiss it. Those are the five warning passages.

So we are accountable for the truth that we have heard. And if you stiffen your neck and harden your heart and respond with disobedience . . . Friends, if you will drift and neglect the gospel, and if you will disobey and harden yourself to the gospel, and if you will depart and forsake the gospel and despise Christ and deny the gospel and dismiss

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His warnings and therefore refuse the gospel, then you cannot pretend to be surprised when the wrath of God falls upon you. You've been warned. We've all been warned. The world has been warned.

You and I will stand before Him, and we will give an account for what we have heard and what we have embraced. And that is the intention of the warning passages. They are intended to shock you. They are intended to catch your attention, to snap you to attention, to cause you to reflect, to cause you to think to yourself, "These are serious things." And while all of the carnivals of the worldly pleasures are passing around in front of my eyes and with all of the distractions of my daily life and with all the activities that I am involved in, I ought to stand up and take notice lest I fall into the hands of a God who is a living God. And that is a terrifying prospect, because our God is a consuming fire.

There is a refuge for you from the judgment of God in the Person of Christ. A refuge. He died on the cross and He rose again for sinners to pay the price for sin. And the one who comes to Him will not be rejected. He will not be neglected. He will not be cast out. You will find that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness and pardon and righteousness in abundance for you no matter what sin you have committed. That is the promise of Scripture. And if you deny that and reject that and question that, then you will experience the fury of a fire which consumes the adversaries. But if you will embrace that, you will have righteousness in place of your sin and forgiveness in place of your guilt and everlasting life in place of everlasting damnation and judgment. You come to Christ in repentance and faith and you will find that every blessing that He has ever promised you in Scripture will be yours everlastingly. And if you deny that and reject that and do not come to Christ in faith, then you will find that every loss and every punishment that He has warned you about in Scripture will also be your reality forever and forever.

The sacrifice of Christ is our hope, His death on the cross, His substitution in our place. The bad news is that you and I have sinned. And we deserve all of the wrath described in these warning passages and then some. All of it and then some. Even one of my sins deserves an everlasting punishment. But God in His love sent His Son to be the propitiation for the sins of any and all who will believe upon Him. And so He lived a perfect life in my stead and then died that perfect death in my place so that I can have eternal life and all my sin can be credited to His account and all His righteousness can be credited to my account, so that you and I can not only be forgiven, but we can be

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declared infinitely and eternally and perfectly righteous for all of eternity. That is what God has promised. That is what God has provided. And He offers it to all of us on His terms, which is repentance and faith. We turn from our sin, we recognize that we are sinners and that another died in our stead to take our punishment.

And when we do that and we come to God, humbly acknowledging we are sinners, we need a Savior, we must trust in this One, and you believe, and you cling to Christ like one clings to a parachute on a plane that is headed toward the ground, you cling to Him and you trust Him and you believe what Scripture says, that His death paid the price for my sin—I had a real debt to pay, and it was eternal debt. And that one single sacrifice on the cross paid forever all of my debt, all of my sin debt. You believe that, you trust that, you come to Him, and you will have everlasting life. That is our surety for righteousness. That is all our hope and certainty.

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