

## INTRODUCTION

We've all heard the good news/bad news jokes. A chairman of the deacons of a Baptist Church visited the pastor who was in the hospital. He said, "I've got good news and bad news. The good news is that the Deacons voted to pray for your recovery. The bad news is that the vote was 30-29 to pray for your recovery. The good news is that Mrs. Jones says she is just crazy about your sermons. The bad news is that everyone knows Mrs. Jones is just plain crazy, period! And Pastor, the good news is that our attendance has doubled over the last month. The bad news is that's since you've been in the hospital. The good news is that the deacons voted to send you on a trip to Israel next year. The bad news is it's a one-way ticket."

We've been walking verse by verse through Hebrews for the past twelve months. And it is full of good news. There are many positive statements to encourage us in our walk with the Lord. Last week we looked at five "let us" statements that encouraged us. However, there are some very strong warnings—and it's only bad news for people who don't heed those warnings.

In fact there are five solemn warnings in Hebrews and we come to the fourth one in this passage. We've already looked at the warning about drifting from God's Word, doubting God's Word, and spiritual dullness. Today we're going to look at the warning about spiritual desertion. Then in chapter twelve we'll come to the final warning about denying the Word of God.

Hebrews 10:25-31. "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. 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. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' and again, 'The Lord will judge his people.' It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

It is a serious matter to be charged with military desertion during a time of war. You don't hear much about it, but during World War II, there were 20,000 American servicemen sentenced for desertion. Forty-nine received the death penalty, but only one of them was executed. The others served prison time. Toward the end of the war, Private Eddie Slovik was in the Battle of the Bulge when he deserted. General Eisenhower wanted to set an example to discourage others who were considering desertion. So on January 31, 1945, Eddie Slovik was executed by firing squad. He was the first American to be shot for desertion since the Civil War. Three months after his execution, Germany surrendered. His story has been captured in a book and movie entitled "The Execution of Private Slovik."

In 2014 Sergeant Robert Bowdrie "Bowe" Bergdahl was swapped for five Taliban prisoners in a highly publicized exchange. He has since been charged with desertion of his unit in Afghanistan and after many delays, his court-martial trial is scheduled to start this October.

The Nazis were much more brutal toward deserters. According to verified records, they executed about 20,000 soldiers for desertion. Today, many of those deserters are considered heroes for refusing to fight for Adolph Hitler. Three years ago, a memorial to these deserters was dedicated in Vienna, Austria.

Let's look at the dictionary definition of desertion. "The abandonment without consent or legal justification of a person, post, or relationship and the associated duties and obligations." There's military desertion, marriage desertion and family desertion.

Spiritual desertion is a serious matter as well. The writer of Hebrews has some strong words for those guilty of spiritual desertion. You may know someone who appears to be a spiritual deserter, or you may be tempted to be AWOL, absent without love. Let me give you four marks of someone who is guilty of spiritual desertion.

### **1. A SPIRITUAL DESERTER HAS ABANDONED THE PEOPLE OF GOD.**

"Let us not give up (abandon) meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." (Hebrews 10:25)

I mentioned last week that I would be speaking to Green Acres members who seldom, if ever, darken the door of the church building. I asked you to invite them, but I doubt there are many of them here. But take a minute and try to think of a person you know who at one time was an active member of your church here or somewhere else. And now, they are dropouts, deserters. I've known pastors, staff members, deacons, and Sunday School teachers who were once faithfully serving the Lord who have nothing to do with God's church any more.

They are what I call Alka-Seltzer Christians. They come to church, get dipped in the water, and they fizzle and bubble like crazy for a short period. And then they disappear.

This is not just a modern problem, it has been happening since the beginning of the church. It was happening in the Hebrew congregation that received this letter. The Apostle John shared a very wise insight about those people who at one time were part of the congregation, but then they walked away. It's the main reason why people desert the church.

"They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us." (1 John 2:19)

Going to church doesn't make you a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car. But one mark of a born-again believer is that he or she is in the habit of gathering regularly with other believers for worship.

When the Apostle Paul preached, he was often put in jail. When he entered a city, he didn't ask about the quality of the hotels, he asked about the jails. Paul had many companions who traveled with him and helped him with his work. One man was named Demas. Paul mentioned him in his letters to Philemon and the Colossians. Demas was right there with Paul. But then something happened. When Paul was an old man in prison writing his last letter, he asked Timothy to come quickly and bring him a coat and some scrolls.

The Dutch Master, Rembrandt, painted my favorite picture of Paul as an old man in prison. Paul wrote these sad words about Demas, "Make every effort to come to me soon, because Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world." (2 Timothy 4:9-10)

Demas left Paul because he had a love affair. He had a love affair with the wrong world. There is this present world, which is the mindset and lifestyle of people far from God. We're told in the New Testament that we shouldn't love the world or the things of the world. This was a costly love affair for Demas, because he will always be remembered as a deserter. We name our sons Luke, Paul, and Timothy, but I've never met a boy named Demas.

## **2. A SPIRITUAL DESERTER HAS RETURNED TO A LIFESTYLE OF SIN.**

"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left." (Hebrews 10:26) I don't believe this passage is talking about people who have been truly born-again. It is referring to people who heard the Gospel; they received the knowledge, but they never repented of their sins and turn to Christ. Instead, they turned back to a lifestyle of sin.

Many Christians have read this verse and become afraid for their salvation, because there is still sin in their lives. Let's face it, all sin is deliberate. I can't recall that I ever sinned accidentally. But the key phrase here is "deliberately KEEP ON sinning." A believer who walks with God will sometimes occasionally sin, and they feel terrible about it—that's the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit drives them to confess and repent of that sin. This verse is referring to someone who continues a lifestyle of sin and never experiences any remorse or conviction. A deserter can sin and enjoy it. A true believer may sin, but he or she can't enjoy it.

Through the years I've had a few Christians come to me in fear, because they read this verse and they are afraid. It doesn't make sense, but if the warnings of God give you a sense of fear, that's a good sign that you are saved and have a healthy fear of God. Those who are lost usually ignore the warnings of God.

It's like if you are visiting the Grand Canyon and there is a fence with a sign that says, "Danger, don't cross this fence!" There's usually some daredevil who'll ignore the sign and get up and balance on the fence and says, "Watch me!" But you're the kind of person who reads and heeds the warning, and you don't cross the fence. You're the one who's safe.

In the same way, if you are concerned about sin in your life, that's not a sign that you never were saved. It's a sign that you have a new nature and you don't want to sin. You hate to sin. It

bothers you when you sin. Compare that to the attitude of a lost person. They sin and laugh it off and say, "It's no big deal."

A deserter returns to a life of sin because their inner nature has never been changed. That leads us to what many believe is the grossest passage in the Bible. But it's addressing the topic of having a sin nature. Peter was talking about spiritual deserters when he wrote, "It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: 'A dog returns to its vomit.' And another says, 'A washed pig returns to the mud.'" (2 Peter 2:21-22)

You've all heard the story of the Prodigal Son who left home with his inheritance. He wasted it all and ended up in a pigpen before he realized he needed to return to his father. Well, let me tell the story of the Prodigal Pig. While the Prodigal Son was in the pigpen, he made friends with a pig named Porky. When the son came to his senses and decided to return home, he turned to Porky and said, "What are we doing here? My daddy's house is better than this. I'm outta' here. I'm getting my life cleaned up. I'm going back to my Father. Do you want to go with me?" Porky said, "Sure, why not? Let's boogie."

When they approached the son's home, the loving father ran and embraced his dear son and said, "We're going to have party! Kill the fatted calf!" And the son said, "Dad, I'm sure glad we're kosher and don't eat pork because I want to introduce you to my friend, Porky." The father said, "Welcome Porky. Now, let's get you guys cleaned up before dinner."

At dinner, the son was wearing a new robe, new sandals, and a new ring his father had given him. The servants had scrubbed Porky to remove all the dirt and grime. From the tip of his snout to the end of his tail, he was squeaky clean. The servants even tied a big blue ribbon around his neck and dabbed some Brut cologne behind his ears.

It was a touching scene. The Father only had eyes for his son who had returned, and the son said, "Dad, it's sooo good to be home again." Meanwhile, Porky was feeling very uncomfortable. He felt tense and out of place. He really didn't care for being clean, and that ribbon was chafing his neck. And how was he supposed to eat using a knife and fork?

In a flash, he came to his senses and said, "Sorry, I don't belong here. If I stay here any longer I'm going to commit suey-cide!" So, Porky jumped off the dining room chair and ran as fast as his short legs would take him. And this little piggy went "whee, whee, whee," all the way home." As he approached the filthy pigsty, he got a running start and performed a perfect swine dive, "PLOP!" right back in the mud. He was happy again in the filth.

So what's the difference between a deserter and a disciple? It's the difference between a son and a pig. A son may wander away from his father, but he will always be the child of his father and have his nature. Sons return, but pigs love the mud too much to leave. Believers sin, but we feel filthy when we sin. A make-believer can wallow in sin like a pig in mud and never feel bad.

### **3. A SPIRITUAL DESERTER HAS REJECTED THE SON OF GOD**

The Bible says, "How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot?" (Hebrews 10:29)

The deserters didn't literally trample on Jesus; they trampled on the truth about Jesus. In Matthew 7, Jesus talked about the danger of casting your pearls before pigs. They will trample them and then turn on you. Pearls represent truth. The pearl of great price is knowing Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior.

The Bible says, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23) God offers each sinner a gift of eternal life, and it's wrapped up in Jesus. But He doesn't force you to accept His gift. I could offer you a gift today, and it wouldn't become yours until you receive it. A deserter may accept a religion, a set of beliefs, and even practice some religious rituals, but they haven't received Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36)

There have been many famous spiritual deserters. Charles Templeton was a powerful evangelist from Canada who preached crusades to thousands of people. In 1945 he founded an organization called Youth for Christ and hired their first evangelist, Billy Graham. But somewhere along the way Charles Templeton became a deserter. His first step away happened when he attended Princeton Theological Seminary in 1948. They filled his mind with liberal theology that doubted the miracles of the Bible and the truthfulness of the Bible itself. Templeton stopped preaching and stopped attending church. Ten years later he declared he was an agnostic and wrote a book, *Farewell to God*.

In the last days before he died in 2001, Lee Strobel interviewed Charles Templeton, who was 85 and in poor health. He told Lee he believed that Jesus was only a man and there was nothing special about his life or his death. He said he tried to follow the ethics of Jesus. But as he talked about Jesus, Strobel said the old man got choked up. Here are Strobel's words, "Abruptly Templeton paused as if he was uncertain whether he should continue. 'Uh ... but no,' he said slowly. 'He's the most...' He stopped and then said, 'he is the most important human being who has ever existed.' Then Templeton uttered the words I never expected to hear from him. 'And if I may put it this way,' he said as his voice began to crack, 'I... miss...him!'"

With that tears flooded his eyes. He turned his head and looked downward, raising his left hand to shield his face from me. His shoulders bobbed as he wept.

After a few more awkward moments, he sighed deeply and waved his hand dismissively. Finally, quietly, but firmly he insisted, "Enough of that." He is a sad example of a deserter who rejected the Son of God.

#### **4. A SPIRITUAL DESERTER WILL FACE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.**

"It is a dreadful (fearful, KJV) thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Hebrews 10:31) It's a terrible thing to die having rejected God's free gift of eternal life. Lost people talk about hell and say something like, "Hell can't be all that bad, because of all the hell I've had to go through in my life." It is a dreadful thing. Revelation 14 says the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. We live in an age where you hear the word hell a lot. People regularly tell people to go to hell. But nobody seems to be afraid of spending eternity there.

One of the greatest preachers in Colonial America was Jonathan Edwards. On May 14, 1741, he preached a famous sermon based on this verse. It was called "Sinners in the hands of an angry God." Lest you think Jonathan Edwards was some backwoods Bible-thumper, he was a graduate of Yale College and would become President of Princeton. His preaching and that of George Whitfield launched the first Great Awakening in America. Edwards read his sermons from a manuscript with a high-pitched voice. But when he preached this sermon, people literally cried out and hung onto the wooden pillars of the church building lest they fell into the pit of hell. Grown men fell down as if a cannon had been fired at them.

You can read his entire message online, but here's one part of it: "The bow of God's wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready on the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood. Thus all of you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the Spirit of God upon your souls, all that were never born again are in the hands of an angry God."

#### **CONCLUSION**

The Bible says God is angry at sin every day. Jesus came to absorb all of God's wrath against sin on the cross. Chances are we all know spiritual deserters and we should love and encourage them to come to Christ. But let's think about each of us for a moment. If you're here today, and you love the Lord, you're not a spiritual deserter. That's good! But the temptation is always there to drift away from God's Word and the church. It seldom happens overnight. It happens gradually like the frog in the kettle. You stop reading your Bible, and stop praying regularly. You aren't diligent to attend worship every Sunday. You go to every other Sunday, and then every third Sunday, or every month. And before you know it, you're one of those CEOs. Christmas and Easter only.

So here's the final challenge for you: STAY FAITHFUL! Jesus said, "He who endures to the end will be saved." Jump ahead to the final verse. The writer has been talking about "those deserters" but he has better hopes for those reading these words. He wrote, "But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Hebrews 10:39) It IS a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But if you know Jesus you can affirm that it is a delightful thing to fall into the arms of the loving God. The choice is yours.

## OUTLINE

### A SPIRITUAL DESERTER:

#### 1. HAS ABANDONED THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

"Let us not give up (abandon) meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." *Hebrews 10:25*

Paul wrote to Timothy: "Make every effort to come to me soon, because Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world." *2 Timothy 4:9-10*

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"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left." *Hebrews 10:26*

"It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life. They prove the truth of this proverb: 'A dog returns to its vomit.' And another says, 'A washed pig returns to the mud.'" *2 Peter 2:21-22*

#### 3. HAS REJECTED THE SON OF GOD

"How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot?" *Hebrews 10:29*

Jesus said, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." *John 3:36*

#### 4. WILL FACE THE JUDGMENT OF GOD.

"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." *Hebrews 10:31*

### FINAL CHALLENGE: STAY FAITHFUL!

"But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." *Hebrews 10:39*

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes



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