

XXIV. Need of Endurance

November 27/28/29, 2018

Hebrews 10:32-39

Aim: To be encouraged to keep persevering in the Christian faith despite opposition and difficulty, knowing that our great promised award awaits us.

Schreiner: The exhortation section, which begins in 10:19, can be summarized in two movements thus far. First, the readers are encouraged to draw near to God and to hold fast their confession (10:19-25). Second, they must not sin defiantly and blatantly, repudiating the good news (10:26-31). Now, third, they should remember their fervor for their faith and willingness to suffer for it in the early days of their Christian life (10:32-34). In 10:35-39, the author draws a conclusion from their willingness to suffer in the past: they must hold on to their confidence and continue trusting God until the end.

A. Recall Your Former Endurance (Hebrews 10:32-34b)

1. Exhortation to Remember (10:32a)

³²*But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened...*

MacArthur: ‘Remember’ (*anamimnēskō*) means more than simply to recall. It means to carefully think back, to reconstruct your mind.

Schreiner: The aim of the letter is to provoke the readers to persevere. The readers are encouraged (10:19-25) and warned (10:26-31), and here they are summoned to remember the former days, presumably their early days as believers. They should recall their fervor and passion for the Lord and rekindle their enthusiasm for the things of God. Their current sufferings have given them amnesia about how they responded earlier to the difficulties that beset them. The author reminds them of when they were ‘enlightened’ (*φωτισθεντες*, *phōtiothentes*). The same term was used in 6:4, designating the illumination and understanding that dawned on the readers when they first embraced the gospel.

Bruce: Like the warning of 6:4-8, so the warning of 10:26-31 is followed by words of reassurance and encouragement. Our author does not wish to discourage his readers, but to embolden them so that they will emerge victorious from the present growing test of their faith. This he does now in the first place by reminding them of how they stood a severe test in the earlier days of their life as Christians, not long after their ‘enlightenment’—an expression repeated from 6:4.

Hughes: This was a challenge to recall how they had marvelously stood some fifteen years earlier during the persecution under the Roman Emperor Claudius in 49 AD. A famous quotation from the historian Suetonius indicates the character of the Claudian persecution: ‘There were riots in the Jewish quarter at the instigation of Chrestus. As a result, Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome’ (*Life of the Deified Claudius*, 25.4). Historians believe ‘Chrestus’ is a reference to Christ and that the riots and expulsion occurred when Jewish Christians were banished from the synagogue by the Jewish establishment. No one had been killed (cp. 12:4), but it was nevertheless a wrenching time of humiliation and abuse.

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews places great stock in the use of historical examples. In chapter 11 he will make a tour de force through biblical history, but here in the last verses of chapter 10

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he turns back to the history of this particular congregation. The writer of Hebrews thought the past was an important resource for the present. He begins with a word that is one of three verbs that shape this passage. That word is ‘remember’ or ‘recall.’

Phillips: The first thing we should notice is that the author does not ‘recall’ his reader’s attention to the ‘good old days’ where faith seemed easy. It is not the times when things go well that really define our Christian lives. The really significant times, the periods that make up the highlights of our own histories, are those of trial and difficulty and danger. This tells us something about how we should approach trials when they come. Things happen, circumstances suddenly change, a great problem arises, and we think something terrible has occurred. Of course, we do not look forward to such things. But this passage reminds us that these are the occasions that make us rise up in our faith and character. It is when supports are stripped away that we find out what our faith is really made of. In this sense, we should view trials as opportunities to glorify the Lord, as positive challenges to bring out and display our faith in God. Whenever we face real trouble, we should endeavor to mine out treasures for the future, which is just what the writer does. He wants his readers to remember what Christians can do through faith, what they have been able to do in an earlier trial, and how sufficient is God’s grace for those who look to Him in trouble.

2. Evidence of Endurance (10:32b-34b)

a) *Struggle and Sufferings (10:32b)*

...you endured a hard struggle with sufferings...

Schreiner: In those days they ‘endured’ (*υπεμεινατε*, *hupemeinate*) while suffering. If they endured then, they can endure now, as long as they reignite their devotion that carried them through the ‘hard struggle’ (*αθλησιν*, *athlēsīn*) of their earlier sufferings. The term is used of athletic events where there were contests. The term could also possibly be translated as ‘challenge.’ The readers are faced with a new struggle and challenge. If they stayed true earlier, they can do so again.

Hughes: The word translated ‘struggle’ in our text is the Greek word *athlēsis*, from which we derive our English word *athletic*. The persecution was like a hard-fought athletic context viewed by a partisan crowd. There was nothing passive in their display. In fact, they showed superb spiritual athleticism as they stood their ground! Such athleticism is a beautiful thing in the eyes of God and the church.

Bruce: The readers had at one time ‘endured a hard struggle with sufferings,’ as our author puts it, using an athletic metaphor. They had met the challenge of those sufferings as good athletes of Christ, and stood firm.

Phillips: Notice the kinds of things God carried the Christians through by the power they received through simple faith in Him. There was ‘a hard struggle’ characterized by suffering. What is it that Christians fear about suffering? Most of all we fear that we will give in and that our faith will fail. But these Christians learned God’s sustaining grace. Having faced a hard struggle, verse 32 says, ‘You endured.’

b) *Reproach and Affliction (10:33)*

³³ *...sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated.*

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Schreiner: The nature of the sufferings and struggle experienced by the readers in the earlier days are now rehearsed. They were ‘publicly exposed’ (*θεατριζομενοι, theatrizomenoi*) to ‘taunts and afflictions.’ They didn’t hide their faith in Christ or commitment to the gospel, and consequently they were insulted and mistreated by others. They were the victims of verbal abuse and various sorts of discrimination. They were subject to dishonor, disgrace, and insult because of their allegiance to Christ, and such dishonor was difficult to bear in an honor/shame culture. Not only did they personally endure vituperation and criticism, but they also shared and identified with fellow believers who were treated in the same way. They didn’t shrink back from fellow believers out of fear, in the hopes that they could avoid suffering. They boldly claimed as brothers and sisters those who were afflicted, showing their devotion to Christ. The author recalls them to the courage of earlier days so that they will steel themselves to face the sufferings of the present day.

Hughes: ‘Sometimes [you were] publicly exposed to reproach and affliction.’ The idea here is that they were made public theatre, because the word for ‘publicly exposed’ (*theatrizo*) comes from *theatron*, ‘theater.’ They were ridiculed and taunted as a theatre of the absurd. Along with that, the ‘affliction’ (*thlipsis*) they endured was of the nature of being squeezed and pressured. Persecution was one thing, but sardonic, smiling, rung-dropping insults made it even more devastating. ‘Sometimes [you were] partners with those so treated.’ Here their spiritual athleticism leaps forth, because they transcended the normal tendency to be passive and actively joined in suffering together. What gallantry and honor! ‘I stand with my brothers and sisters here. If you insult them, you insult me!’ Side-by-side, with arms locked, they chose to face persecution together.

Bruce: Those of them who had not been personally exposed to suffering showed their solidarity with those who were directly attacked, and so shared the public scorn.

Phillips: In their earlier trial the recipients of the letter had been subjected to ‘reproach and affliction.’ This is the kind of thing that Christians in the West may soon experience. We worry that in response to insult and persecution we might deny our faith, or that we might be afraid to let people know we are Christians. But God enabled those believers to do the opposite, ‘being partners with those so treated.’

c) *Compassion on Prisoners (10:34a)*

³⁴*For you had compassion on those in prison...*

Schreiner: The afflictions of the readers after their conversion and their positive response to their situation are elaborated upon further. First, they ‘sympathized with’ or ‘had compassion on’ (*συνεπαθησατε, synepathēsate*) those imprisoned. This implies that the readers were not themselves imprisoned but were merciful to those who were suffering in such a way. The term for sympathy may express concern for others when one isn’t experience the same difficulties, but it may also signify the idea of participation in the same sufferings (4:15).

Bruce: When some of their number were imprisoned, the others did not shrink from visiting them, although in this way they ran the risk of being imprisoned themselves. Thus they secured a place for themselves among those to whom the Son of man says: ‘I was in prison, and you came to Me’ (Mt. 25:36). Prisoners who had no means of their own were liable to starve unless their friends brought them food and whatever other form of help they required; throughout the whole age of imperial persecution of the church the visiting of their friends who were in prison was a regular, though dangerous, duty of Christian charity.

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Hughes: ‘For you had compassion on those in prison.’ That is, they literally had a ‘fellow-feeling’ for or with those in prison. The same word is used in 4:15 of Christ’s sympathy for us as our high priest! They lived out the later exhortation in Hebrews to ‘remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them’ (13:3). Even more, this was not *imagined* sympathy—it was *real*, because they visited their comrades in prison. In the first century prisoners had no means of survival apart from the visits of friends who brought food and water and clothing. But such visiting placed one in grave danger. Yet they did it willingly.

d) *Plundering of Property (10:34b)*

...and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property...

Phillips: To this the writer adds that some were put into prison and many had their property confiscated. By faith his readers ministered to those afflicted and even accepted their own losses with joy. This, indeed, was the hallmark of the early church; not merely that they endured affliction, but they exhibited joy throughout it all. This is what faith requires; if we are not willing to endure affliction, then we simply cannot be Christians (cp. Lk. 9:23-24).

Schreiner: After their conversion they accepted the ‘confiscation’ of their ‘possessions’ ‘with joy.’ We don’t know what precipitated the seizing of their belongings, but what is remarkable is not that their property was plundered but their response to it. They were filled with joy. Here they fulfilled Jesus’ command to rejoice when persecuted (Mt. 5:12). Their delight in God and Jesus Christ could hardly be more evident.

Bruce: They had accepted this persecution, too, in a spirit of Christian cheerfulness. It was exactly in the sense of Christ’s exhortation in Luke 6:22ff. that these Hebrew Christians took the plundering of their property not merely in a spirit of equanimity but joyfully; it was for such as they, as well as for himself, that Paul spoke when he said, ‘we rejoice in our sufferings’ (Rom. 5:3).

3. **Eternal Inheritance (10:34c)**

...since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.

Schreiner: Still, there was a reason for their delight. They knew there was something better than their possessions on earth. They looked to their heavenly inheritance, for they knew the new creation that was coming, the heavenly city (11:10, 13-16; 12:22; 13:14), was a ‘better’ and permanent possession. The word ‘better’ (*κρείττονα, kreittona*), which has played such a major role in Hebrews, surfaces again. The heavenly possession is better than the earthly one. The believers rejoiced because they knew a greater joy awaited them. Further, they knew that what was awaiting them was permanent. It was an ‘enduring (*μενουσαν, menousan*) possession.’ The same word is used in 13:14 where the author declares, ‘For we do not have an enduring city here; instead, we seek the one to come.’ The author wants the readers to recall their spiritual fervor and joy and to reclaim it for the present circumstances. They have forgotten about the city to come. They have put too much hope in the city of man and have forgotten about the city of God.

Bruce: The eternal inheritance laid up for them was so real in their eyes that they could lightheartedly bid farewell to material possessions, which were short-lived in any case. This attitude of mind is precisely that ‘faith’ of which our author goes on to speak. They manifested it in those earlier days, and that is why he is so confident that they will continue to manifest it, although the trials which confront them now are different from those which they faced then, and more subtle in character.

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Hughes: They found themselves exhilarated by the loss! Why? Because they knew they ‘had a better possession and an abiding one.’ They believed Jesus’ words in Mathew 6:19-20. They were ‘seek[ing] the city that is to come’ (13:14—‘the heavenly Jerusalem’ (12:22).

Phillips: Speaking of their confiscated property, the author says, ‘You yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one.’ He might have written similarly about the threat of death: ‘You knew you had a better and lasting life.’ He might have said this about suffering, pointing to a ‘better and lasting comfort,’ and similarly about disgrace, since everyone who holds to Christ in faith has no less than eternal glory awaiting in store. This was Paul’s perspective when he wrote, ‘I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us’ (Rom. 8:18).

Hughes: What an astounding remembrance the church was called to. They had experienced amazing spiritual athleticism in the oppression that took place during the springtime of their spiritual lives during the Claudian persecution. Now they are called upon to remember it, to call to mind the sequence of events and ponder their significance. The reason for this is twofold. First, they will be challenged by their own past character. Second, they will be faced afresh with the power of God to sustain and deliver them. This works! We may have *begun* well and now want to *end* well. If so, part of the secret is to *remember* well.

B. Respond with Current Endurance (Hebrews 10:35-39)

Phillips: Hebrews 10:32-34 shows us that the goal of Christians in trials is that we stand firm. ‘You endured,’ the author says, with reference to the past. ‘Do not shrink back,’ he says as he turns to the present. This is what we are to do. Christians do not have to win the culture war, nor should we expect worldly triumphs. Our first goal is always to be true to the faith in this hostile world, standing on the solid rock of Christ.

Phillips: These were all fine things for the Hebrew Christians to remember, particularly as they braced themselves for another round of trial, as the writer expected to happen. Hebrews 10:32-34 show us the power of the past; yet if there is any one tense our writer thinks is all-important, it is the future.

1. Respond with Confidence (10:35)

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

Schreiner: The author draws a conclusion from the readers’ willingness in the past to stand for Christ and to identify with other believers (10:32-34). They must not ‘abandon’ their ‘confidence’ (*παρρησιαν*, *parrhēsiān*) or ‘boldness.’ The exhortation here fits with the central theme of the letter and thus belongs with the other warning passages in the text. The word ‘confidence’ plays a significant role in the letter. They should hold onto their ‘confidence’ until the end (3:6) and should come to the ‘throne of grace’ boldly (4:16). The exhortation demonstrates the readers have not yet committed apostasy but are tempted to do so. It is because of Jesus’ blood that they are assured that they have bold access to God (10:19). Their confidence was expressed, according to 10:32-34, in their suffering on behalf of Christ, for such suffering is rooted in a boldness willing to go public. If they retain their boldness or confidence, they will receive a ‘great reward.’ The ‘reward’ (*μισθαποδοσιαν*, *misthapodosian*) here is eschatological, and the context shows (cp. especially v. 39) that the reward is eternal life.

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Bruce: You showed your courage in those days, he says; do not abandon it now. The word he uses (*parrhēsia*) has appeared three times already in this letter. In 4:16 and 10:19 it is used of the confidence with which Christians may approach the throne of God since Christ is there as their prevailing high priest; in 3:6 it is used more generally of the courageous confession which Christians should maintain without fail. It is in this last sense that it is used here, with special reference to steadfastness in adverse and disheartening circumstances. Preserve that former confidence of yours, says our author, for it carries a great reward with it. This is the ‘reward’ of which Jesus spoke in Luke 6:23; it is the realization of the promise in the good of which people of faith already live.

Hughes: The author’s advice for responding to the present is to remain confident. The writer’s charge to ‘not throw away your confidence’ means not to cast away confident confession of Christ in the midst of opposition. The positive corollary is to proclaim confidence in the midst of opposition—like Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:13).

Phillips: ‘Do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward,’ writes our author. He draws that confidence from the past, as water drawn up from a well. He also grasps it from the future, the way wonder is drawn from the stars above. In both past and future the confidence comes from the Lord who ‘is and who was and who is to come’ (Rev. 1:8). In the past we find the gracious Lord who sustained us then and surely will sustain us now. We gain confidence from the future, because that same Savior is there in eternity, waiting ahead and coming for us in due time.

2. Respond with Perseverance (10:36)

a) Endure (10:36a)

³⁶*For you have need of endurance so that when you have done the will of God...*

Schreiner: The final reward won’t be obtained without endurance. They must persevere to the end to be saved. Endurance manifests itself in faithfully doing the will of God. God’s will is something believers are summoned to carry out for the entirety of their lives. It isn’t restricted to spasmodic periods where they are energized for God’s sake.

Bruce: What they need is patience. God will certainly fulfill His promise; they will enter into the utmost enjoyment of it; but in the meantime they must remain loyal, and not give up doing God’s will. Their Master came expressly to do the will of God, as they have been told already (10:7, 9ff.), although the doing of that will involved suffering and death for Him; His servants can expect no easier path as they in their turn do the will of God and await the promised bliss.

Hughes: Next, one’s confident response is to be followed by perseverance. What we need is an *aggressive endurance*, a doggedness or steadfastness, as is recommended in our text.

Phillips: Given a past marked by triumph and a future filled with hope, the writer of Hebrews constructs a present mandate for his Christian readers. What are we to do now? Are we to go on the offensive against the world, trying somehow to hasten Christ’s return? Are we to go into hiding, desperately hoping to hold out by becoming invisible? The answer is found in the second verb that defines this passage: ‘Endure.’

Phillips: ‘The perseverance of the saints’ is one of the defining doctrines of Reformed theology. This doctrine teaches that while we are saved by grace alone, because of God’s sovereign predestination, Christians must yet persevere until the end of their lives, or until Christ returns. Probably the clearest statement linking these two ideas of sovereign grace and the necessity to

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persevere comes in 2 Peter 1:10-11. Peter's point is not that we are to elect ourselves, as if we could, but rather to make sure that we are among God's elect people. How? By persevering in the faith, that is, by growing in grace through faith in Christ and continuing as Christians all through our lives. What are the qualities that mark a persevering Christian? In 2 Peter 1:5-7 the apostle had defined perseverance in terms of positive growth.

Phillips: The teaching that we must persevere and grow in faith should not be alarming to any Christian. Instead, it should simply remind us of the teachings of our Lord (e.g., Jn. 15:9). It is by bearing fruit that our salvation is proved. The same God who ordained the end of salvation for His elect also ordained the means by which we will get there, and that is perseverance in faith. Perseverance means acting in faith, and acting in faith means growing. We cannot sit still. To persevere, therefore, we must make use of the means of grace, especially by worshiping together, feeding upon God's Word, partaking of His sacraments, and communing with Him in prayer.

b) *Receive (10:36b)*

...you may receive what is promised.

Schreiner: If they continue to endure, they will receive the promise. 'Promise' (*επαγγελιαν*, *epangelian*) here is eschatological, as is often the case in Hebrews.

Bruce: Sometimes the promised bliss seemed close at hand, as they say 'the Day approaching'; but at other times it looked as though it would never come, and they had to be reassured, like people to whom another New Testament letter was sent, that 'the Lord is not slow about His promise' (2 Pe. 3:9). Let their hearts take courage, as they wait for their Lord.

Hughes: Such perseverance assures 'what is promised'—that is, full salvation in Christ. Perseverance does not earn salvation, but rather is prime facie evidence of saving grace.

Phillips: The third key verb that structures this passage is a single word in Greek translated into English with the expression 'you may receive.' That is what the future holds for the Christian. If the present involves suffering, we are able to know that the future involves receiving. We look forward to receiving all that God has promised those who trust in Him. Here is yet another way in which Christians are the true countercultural people today. Where the world says, 'Buy now, pay later,' the Christian says, 'Sacrifice now, receive later.' The future orientation of the Christian faith is one of the great emphases of the Book of Hebrews, and here we see why that is. The knowledge of what is stored up for us empowers us in present trials. This is the point of the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1.

3. Respond with Faith (10:37-39)

Hughes: The key to successful perseverance is faith. It is significant that in verses 37-39, as the preacher emphasizes the need of faith in order to persevere, he quotes from Habakkuk 2:3-4.

a) *Yet a Little While (10:37a)*

³⁷*For, 'Yet a little while...*

Schreiner: The promise will be realized soon, and the author quotes Hab. 2:3-4 to make his point. The first words cited 'for a little while' probably come from Is. 26:20. In Isaiah the Lord promises He will come soon and vindicate His people and judge His enemies. Judah must keep trusting the Lord in the midst of their adversity, knowing that the Lord will intervene on their behalf soon. In the same way the readers should realize that their time of being exiles and

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sojourners (11:13) is brief compared to the unending reward promised to them. The allusion to Isaiah 26 fits well with the quotation from Hab. 2:3.

Bruce: The clause with which he introduces the quotation ('for yet a very little while') is not taken from any otherwise attested text of Hab. 2:3, but it may be a reminiscence of the Septuagint version of Is. 26:20 ('a little moment').

b) *The Coming One (10:37b)*

...and the coming one will come and will not delay...

(1) Habakkuk

Schreiner: In its historical context Habakkuk refers to the vision he received from the Lord, which consists of the judgment impending on Judah for its refusal to do the will of God (Hab. 1:5-17).

Bruce: The exhortation to patience is supported by a quotation from Old Testament prophecy. The prophet Habakkuk, in the later part of the seventh century BC cried out to God because of the oppression which was rife on every hand, and wondered when divine righteousness would at last be vindicated on earth. God answered his complaint and bade him be patient: the oppressor would at least reap the judgment which his heaven-defying ways had incurred and God's purpose would be accomplished; meanwhile, the righteous man would preserve his life by his loyal trust in God.

Hughes: Originally God gave this exhortation to the prophet Habakkuk as the prophet repeatedly complained about the advances of injustice and the suffering of the righteous, God's bottom-line advice being that 'the righteous shall live by his faith' (Hab. 2:4). 'Live by faith, Habakkuk!'

(2) Hebrews

In Hebrews, however, the author sees the judgment on Judah as typological of the final judgment. In other words, there is an escalation between the historical judgment on Judah and the final judgment to come. What is coming in Hebrews, therefore, is not merely the realization of the vision in Hab. 2:3 but Jesus Himself. Hebrews turns the participle in Hab. 2:3 into a masculine substantival participle to clarify that Jesus Himself is coming in the future. The final judgment in history will occur when Jesus returns (9:27-28), rewarding those who have been faithful to Him and punishing those who have not trusted in or obeyed Him. Though the time may seem long, Jesus is coming soon, and hence believers must endure until that day arrives.

Bruce: In the Septuagint version of Hab. 2:3-4 as quoted by our author, some of the words of the Hebrew original are given a different emphasis. Here it is not simply for the fulfillment of the vision that the prophet is told to wait, but for a person, presumably an expected deliverer. When this deliverer appears, He will vindicate the righteousness of God and put down the oppressor; if, however, he draws back, that will indicate that He is not God's chosen agent. But if He does not draw back, but shows Himself to be indeed God's chosen agent, His 'righteous one,' then by His faithfulness He will win His life. In the Septuagint 'he will surely come' is literally 'coming he will come' (an imitation in Greek of a common Hebrew idiom). Our author places the definite article before the participle 'coming' so as to yield the messianic title 'The Coming One.' The deliverer in question is not called 'the Lord's anointed' in so many words, but the Septuagint interpretation of this passage is essentially messianic. Our author, then, is but dotting the i's and crossing the t's of the Septuagint interpretation when he applies Hab. 2:3b to the second coming of Christ.

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Hughes: Here in Hebrews, though the quotation from Habakkuk is taken from the Septuagint's rearranged messianic rendering of the Hebrew text, the application is still the same—*the righteous will live by faith*. The meaning here in Hebrews is this: 1) Jesus is returning soon—'The coming one will come and will not delay' (v. 37); 2) the saved will persevere by faith—'But my righteous one shall live by faith' (v. 38a); and 3) the lost will shrink back—'And if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him' (v. 38b).

Phillips: The writer of Hebrews especially locates our hope in the return of our Lord Jesus Christ. But Jesus is present to us spiritually even now. This has been the point of so much of this letter's teaching, that when Christ went to heaven, He did not become inaccessible to us, but even more accessible. He is bodily absent but spiritually present. Therefore, we wait for our King to return from a far country to reestablish His rule. We know for sure that He is coming, and we will serve Him while waiting, looking forward to the future with hope and joyful expectation.

c) *Live by Faith (10:38)*

³⁸*but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him.'*

Schreiner: Since Jesus is coming soon, the readers are exhorted to continue to trust in God and not to shrink back in unbelief. If they shrink back God will not be pleased with them, and they will face judgment. The citation of Habakkuk continues with the citation of Hab. 2:4. Hebrews reverses the two clauses so they appear in opposite order found in the LXX. Jesus is coming soon, but those who belong to God, those who are righteous before Him, live by faith. It is clear the author refers to 'faith' here and not merely 'faithfulness,' for verse 39 is part of the introduction to chapter 11, which emphasizes how faith is necessary to receive the final reward. True faith, of course, inevitably leads to faithfulness, and hence the two, though they can be distinguished conceptually, are inseparable in the lives of believers. It is persevering faith that saves, not just a one-time decision, for if one turns back from trusting, then God will not delight in him. Those who turn away from trusting God will not enjoy His pleasure but will experience His anger. They will face judgment rather than salvation.

Bruce: In his quotation of Hab. 2:4, our author inverts the two parts of the verse: 'my righteous one shall live by faith' is applied to the Christian believer, tempted to wonder if Christ will ever return in accordance with His promise; and the warning about the divine displeasure which will rest upon anyone who draws back is applied to him who yields to the temptation to relapse from His Christian profession into his earlier ways of life. The reason for the inversion is not hard to determine: by this means 'my righteous one' becomes the subject of both parts of the verse. If he perseveres in faith he will gain his life, if he shrinks back he will prove himself reprobate.

d) *Don't Shrink Back (10:39)*

³⁹*But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

Schreiner: Now the author expresses confidence in his readers. They won't shrink back and face God's displeasure. The noun 'draw back' (*υποστολης, hypostolēs*) is picked up from the verb 'draws back' (*υποστειλῆται, hyposteilētai*) in verse 38. Those shrinking back don't merely lose a reward. They are 'destroyed.' The word for 'destroyed' (*απωλειαν, apōleian*) is regularly used for the eschatological destruction awaiting unbelievers (Mt. 7:13; Jn. 17:12; Acts 8:20; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 1:28; 3:19; 2 Th. 2:3; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Pe. 2:1, 3; 3:7, 16; Rev. 17:8, 11). The converse

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of drawing back, as is also the case in verse 38, is faith. The author is confident the readers will continue to believe until the end. And they will ‘obtain life.’ More literally, they will ‘preserve (περιποιησιν, *peripoiēsin*) their souls.’ The expression means they will be ‘saved,’ and this is clear since it stands in contrast to the ‘destruction’ threatened in the first part of the verse.

Hughes: Therefore, on the basis of this argument from Habakkuk 2:3-4, we understand that the grand key for perseverance is *faith*. Knowing this, we are set up for the greatest exposition of the subject of faith found anywhere in Scripture—in chapter 11. But here we must also understand that Habakkuk’s great song of faith (Hab. 3:17-18) is precisely what the young Hebrew church had experienced during the Claudian persecution. Faith is everything. Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17 to explain that salvation is totally by faith. Here in Hebrews the writer quotes Habakkuk 2:4 to stress that the whole Christian life is to be lived by faith. It is *sola fide*, both for salvation and for Christian living.

Bruce: This verse is a further affirmation of the author’s essential confidence in them, including himself among them. They had begun their Christian career in that carefree spirit which accepts without questioning the assurance of Christ that ‘whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it’ (Mk. 8:35). Let them maintain that spirit of faith to the end, and they would certainly gain their souls and ‘take hold of the life which is life indeed’ (1 Tim. 6:19). That this will prove true with our author and his readers alike is his firm assurance.

Hughes: Think about that tiny storm-tossed church that had earlier triumphed in the Claudian persecution in 49 AD and is presently on the eve of the terrible Neronian persecution of 64 AD. The writer has chastened them with a fiery warning (vv. 25-31) and now has sweetly encouraged them to do two things: 1) remember the past; and 2) respond in the present with confidence and persevering faith. The principles for enduring in triumph are universal and eternal. *We need to remember how God has helped us in the past.* The writer to the Hebrews held up the church’s stones of remembrance one by one. Each stone told them of two things—God’s faithfulness, and the strength that had been theirs when they trusted Him. All of us have such memories. We need to replay the tapes. It is a divine duty. *Finally, we need to respond in the present.* Be confident! Do not succumb to a loss of confidence. Persevere in faith. Look back in faith. Look up in faith. ‘My righteous one,’ says God, ‘shall live by faith.’

For next time: Read Hebrews 11:1-3.