

• *Previous warnings are now followed by encouragements*

1. He asks us to remember our earlier days

• *First faith – 'enlightenment' that grips the soul*

• *Passive – but not meant to stay passive*

• *Then they showed great courage as they faced hardship and pain*

• *Now he urges them: be what you were at first*

2. The motivation they had and the motivation they should adopt again

• *Motivated by reward*

The writer's warnings are invariably followed by encouragements. He has high hopes for his people. They have done well in the past. They are very discouraged at the time he writes but he reckons they will recover and do well in the running of the Christian race.

1. **He asks us to remember our earlier days.** Often the early stages of our lives have some great victories in them. Sometimes it happens that our best days seem to have been when we were young or when we were new converts. The early days of these Jewish Christians had been full of faith despite great troubles. He says to them: ³²*But remind yourselves of those earlier days when you were enlightened.* He is referring to their conversion. Our first faith is largely a matter of 'enlightenment'. It is receiving the light of the gospel. It is receiving the Lord Jesus Christ because we see who he is and what he has done. Our first faith is very passive (but of course it is not meant to **stay** passive). Initially it is a case of doing nothing but believing in God who justifies the ungodly through the Lord Jesus Christ (see Romans 4:5). We are not saved by good works; we are saved by enlightenment which grips the soul. It produces good works eventually, but at the start it is not **giving** God anything. It is **receiving** Jesus, because we have seen the light of the gospel.

Then these Christians had been wonderfully strong in their faith. *Then you endured a hard struggle with many sufferings.* ³³*Sometimes you were publicly exposed to abuse and persecutions; sometimes you stood side by side with those who were being treated in that way.* They showed courage. They refused to be put off by shame and ill-treatment. They showed great love towards each other. ³⁴*For you showed sympathy for those who were in prison and you joyfully accepted the seizure of your possessions, because you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and one that would endure for ever.* Now he says to them: be what you were at first. Don't spoil your good record. Go back to the times when you were doing so well. Were they not good days, despite all that you went through?

2. **Our writer's words reveal the motivation they had at first and the motivation they should adopt again.** They were motivated by reward! They were able to persevere amidst great difficulties because they knew what was coming to them as a compensation. 'You knew that you yourselves had a better possession and one that would endure for ever.'

These words confirm that the warning of Hebrews 10:26–31 is about possible loss of reward. He does not say, 'So do not throw away your confidence which will indeed **then** gain eternal redemption' or 'So do not throw away your confidence, for then you will be sanctified for ever'. No, they already have eternal redemption. They are already sanctified for ever by the blood of Christ. His theme is inheritance, or reward. He says, ³⁵*So do*

not throw away your confidence which has a great reward. They are full believers. Their 'enlightenment' was their conversion to Christ. They had faith – confidence – assured trust – in the Lord Jesus Christ. But now they must go on believing despite difficult circumstances. This will lead to their inheriting the promises of God for their lives in this world, and their receiving yet further inheritance in the world to come. Persecution brings reward. When we are reviled and persecuted we should rejoice that our reward is great¹. Some will be 'great in the kingdom of heaven' more than others². The reason why it is inadequate to love only our friends is because then Jesus asks, 'What reward do you have?'³. Piety for reasons of self-glorification gets 'no reward'⁴, but humble generosity brings reward⁵. The same is true of prayer⁶ and true fasting⁷. There is such a thing as a righteous person's reward⁸. Whoever gives one of Jesus' little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple will by no means lose his reward⁹. There is a profit for godliness. God will repay each person according to what he has done¹⁰, good as well as bad. There is smallness and greatness in the kingdom of God¹¹. Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for the sake of Jesus' name will receive a hundredfold back by way of reward and will inherit eternal life. But there will be degrees in the inheritance. Many who are first will be last, and the last first. The parable of Matthew 20:1–16 means not that all are given an identical reward but that the rewards of God will be immensely surprising and will be given according to God's ideas, not man's ideas.

• Persecution brings reward

• Humble generosity

• True prayer and fasting

• Degrees of inheritance

• The rewards of God will be immensely surprising!

The need for endurance

• Let them not give up now!

• Let them aim for first-class honours when Jesus returns

Our writer had no doubts about the need to work believingly and trustfully for God's rewards. ³⁶ *You have need of endurance so that after you have done the will of God you may receive the promise.* They are discouraged but let them remember how well they did before. Let them not give up now! They will certainly enjoy eternal redemption (for God will not be unfaithful to them even if they are unfaithful to him) but in the fires of God's indignation they will lose an immense reward if they become unbelieving. They have eternal redemption but let them use it to be given first-class honours when Jesus comes to them.

- 1 Matthew 5:11-12
- 2 Matthew 5:19
- 3 Matthew 5:46
- 4 Matthew 6:1
- 5 Matthew 6:4
- 6 Matthew 6:6
- 7 Matthew 6:18
- 8 Matthew 10:41
- 9 Matthew 10:42
- 10 Matthew 16:27
- 11 Matthew 18:1-3



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