

Links and Contrasts

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[0 : 01] Let's turn this evening for a short time to Hebrews 10 verse 39. Hebrews 10 and verse 39.

But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith, or those who believe, to the preserving of our souls.

The message the Bible conveys to us, particularly about salvation, is very frequently conveyed to us using different links and contrasts.

And that's what we've called our study this evening, links and contrasts. Links between certain things that God himself has tied together. Other actions linked to consequences.

For example, you go back right to the beginning of the Bible, chapter 2 verse 17 of Genesis. You find God addressing Adam and Eve there as he placed them in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden.

[1 : 09] And he told them that they could eat from all the trees of the Garden except one. And in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. Action linked to consequences.

Moral action. Action that has some morality about it. Action in which our relationship with God is brought into view. And all the way through the Bible, you have that kind of linkage, or linkages, between actions and consequences.

Actions that lead to good consequences. Other actions like that one that lead to bad consequences.

And of course, you find in the same passage in Genesis by way of implication, certainly, that it's true that continued faithfulness to God would bring ongoing life.

Just as surely as eating what was forbidden by God would bring about death. So, links. But also contrasts. And you find the contrast there right at the beginning as well in that same context of Eden.

Because the thing which disobedience led to, that's death. The day you eat of it, that's the link. You will surely die. The death, that's the consequence of that action, is the very opposite of the life that they enjoyed as they were created by God.

[2 : 36] The faithfulness that tied them to life, and ongoing life, is opposite, entirely opposite, totally opposite, to what the consequence of disobedience in death is.

And that's why you find throughout the Bible these kinds of links and contrasts together. And you'll find them in this verse as well.

Just look at verse 39. Because what it's saying is, here's a link between the action of shrinking back or turning back and being destroyed.

The word is perdition. We'll come back to the meaning of the words later on. But there's the link, you can see, between the action of shrinking back. And the whole of the letter to the Hebrews,

really, is addressed to people who are being encouraged to go on, to persevere, not to go back.

Not to actually be taken in by any kind of teaching that would encourage them to go back from the life that they had begun, and the confession that they had made, to being Christians.

[3 : 43] That's the first link. But he said, we are not of those. We're not involved in that link of shrinking back and being destroyed.

But we are those who believe to the preserving of our souls. There's a second link, the link between believing, going on believing, going on in faith, and the preserving of our souls.

There's a link between that believing, specifically, and the preserving of souls that is mentioned in it.

And you have the contrast there as well, of course, because the outcome of going back, that's perdition or being destroyed again, is the very opposite of the outcome of continuing to believe, which is the preserving of our souls.

Now, it's not just that they're linked. It's not just that these links exist. What we have to be aware of is that the link is actually a causal one, or a resultant one.

There is a morality about it. There's something there that says it's more than just a link, because what you see is, it's the shrinking back that leads directly, or you might say causes indirectly, the destruction that's mentioned.

[5 : 01] And the same for the other one, the going on in faith, itself establishes or causes or brings about the preservation of life, the preservation of our souls and spiritual life, is what it means.

Now, the ESV doesn't really quite capture the way in which these words are put together in the language, original language of the New Testament.

If you look at your old translations, you'll find the word unto used twice. And that's very useful as a translation of the words, because what it says is, we are not of those who shrink back unto destruction.

We are instead those who believe unto the preserving of our souls. In other words, the action contributes to the end or the result in view.

The action of shrinking back, of going back, directly contributes. It is unto, it has its terminus in destruction. The action of believing and going on in believing has as its terminus, the opposite of destruction, the preserving of our souls.

[6 : 24] And of course, it brings before us again, as we often find in the Bible, how crucial believing really is. And we'll come back to that when we come to the second part of the verse, more detail, what is meant by this believing unto the preserving of our souls.

So there are two things. First of all, the shrinking back unto destruction, that we'll call it. We'll just keep it like that. And secondly, believing unto preservation.

Now this word, firstly, destruction, as you look at it there, we are not of those who shrink back unto destruction. Who have this causal link in our experience, in our existence anymore, between shrinking back, we're not of these people.

He's saying, we are actually the other people. Now there's a question that we have to put to ourselves, not only tonight, but all the time. As we examine our lives, as we examine things in relation to God, in relation to the direction of our life.

Where do we fit into this verse? Because every one of us is in this verse. Every single one of us is fitted into this verse, either in the first part of it, or in the second part of it.

[7 : 43] That's something we have to keep in mind as we go through the meaning of it. What he calls here, the word he uses here for destruction. We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed. What does he mean by destroyed or destruction unto destruction?

The word, the old translation, is the word perdition. And perdition is, or destruction, whatever word we use to translate the word that's there, means utter loss.

In other words, he's talking about hell. That's the loss the writer is setting before these people, these Hebrews. We are not of those who shrink back unto perdition, unto utter loss.

Because he's saying, that's the outcome, that's the link, that's how the link works. Shrinking back, going back, turning away from the things of the gospel, the things of salvation, the things that we have even come to confess if we turn back from them and leave them and turn our backs upon them and apostatize from the faith.

Then he's saying, this is the link. This is the way the link works. It is unto perdition. It is unto destruction. And there is no loss like the loss that's captured in this word perdition or destruction.

[9 : 07] The loss that hell actually is. Hell is not just the presence of something. Hell is also very much the absence of something.

Some people say, well, God is not present in hell. And that's what makes it so awful. Well, that's not quite true. God is present in hell.

It is his wrath in a sense that makes it hell. He's present condemningly. He's present in wrath. He's present as he burns against sin unrepented of, unforgiven.

But he's not present with a shred of comfort. There is no love there, no mercy, no forgiveness, no covering of sin.

it's the most painful loss of all losses. The loss we experience, I hope we never will experience, any of us, this perdition, this loss, this hell, this final, ultimate loss, the worst of all, the most painful of all losses.

[10 : 36] But that's what he's saying. That's the meaning of the word. And we can't really just say, well, that was all right for that generation. That's how they understood things.

That's how in those days people thought about life and the various issues of life and what happened after death and so on. This is God's word. This is God describing to us things that are abiding principles for human life.

Never mind what the modern world will tell you about the Bible and the pages that they tear out of the Bible just to satisfy human ingenuity or invention or preferences or prejudices.

When God says something, he says it full stop for all eternity. He's not going to take away the meaning of this verse from the Bible.

Whatever people take away from it, God is going to keep this as it is. And that's why the gospel presents these stark links and contrasts to us the way it does.

[11 : 46] We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, who shrink back unto destruction. So what does it mean by shrinking back then? Who are these people who may shrink back?

What does it mean to shrink back? How does it happen that people shrink back from what they once confessed? It's obviously something that they previously confessed because as we've read through the second half of the chapter there, you can see that he talks about people who made a confession and he's urging them to hold fast in verse 23 the confession of our hope without wavering.

shrinking back really essentially means the opposite of perseverance. It's the opposite of perseverance.

It's your life going in the opposite direction of onwards to heaven and upwards to glory. Shrinking back from what we confess is turning our back to those things that have to do with salvation, with honoring God, with being pleasing to God, with the hope of eternal life, all of these things.

Shrinking back is really apostasy. It's turning from what was once confessed. He's not addressing this to people who've never heard the gospel. He's not addressing this as a message to those who need to be evangelized, who don't know what the gospel is.

[13 : 16] He's talking to Christians, to people who've confessed themselves to be Christians.

Christians, and he's saying to them all the way through this letter, because you've got such a great high priest, there are certain things that follow on from that.

But because you have such a great privilege in your relationship with this great high priest, you have to constantly go on, he's saying, perseveringly, believably, and not go back, and not shrink back.

Because he's saying, if you do it, you're doing despite to the blood of the covenant. You're spurning the Son of God.

It's the most serious thing to go back on a confession of salvation that has been made. Because it's essentially saying, I can do without the sacrifice of Christ.

And really that's what he means down through the chapter there. When he says, if we do that, verse 26, after receiving a knowledge of the truth, if we go on sinning deliberately, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

[14 : 33] What he means is, there's no other place by which you find provision for your sin if you turn away from Christ, if you turn away from all you hope being in him.

And that's why he's saying we're not of those who shrink back. Now how does shrinking back come about then? If it's people who have confessed that they're saved, if it's people who have come to make a confession of their hope of eternal life, how does this come about?

Well, sometimes it comes about with certain events in life. Jesus himself said that the seed that falls, the seed of the gospel falls on different kinds of ground.

Sometimes it grows for a while and then testing comes along and it recedes and it shrinks back and it dies. Charles Darwin whose influence is still so pervasive in the way that evolution has developed, although it wasn't the way it is nowadays, it wasn't exactly like that when he brought out his theories of evolution, but nevertheless that's what kicked it off.

He was brought up as a Christian, brought up in a Christian home. He made a confession to being a Christian. He lived outwardly, circumspect, good living, Christian-like life.

[15 : 59] But he had started having doubts about the Bible, about what the Bible taught about creation, and then his little girl died.

like she was about seven years of age. Tragic event, something you would never want to see in your life.

And he said, more or less, that's it. I'm giving up faith in God. I don't believe in God anymore. I want no more to do with him.

apostasy. You see, apostasy is seldom sudden and instant like that. It creeps up on you gradually. It's not something that you can just do by turning on a switch in your head and saying, well, I was a Christian yesterday, but I'm going to be an atheist today. It's something that comes gradually, more often than not.

[17:04] And that's why you've got all of these exhortation passages in Hebrews. Because it warns us against just giving away a little bit here and a little bit there of what we believe, of the kind of life we're living, of how we want to be pleasing to God and all the rest of it.

We give away a bit here and a bit there and all of a sudden we realize that, well, life's not what it used to be and I don't think I believe in God anymore the way I used to. I don't really want to go to church anymore.

I don't want to go to prayer meetings anyway. And I really don't have the relish for Christian fellowship anymore. I'd rather be involved in worldly things. What's happening to that person? That person is shrinking back. That person is slowly giving up what they had once confessed. And that's why, friends, you need to keep praying.

You need to keep reading your Bible. You need to keep up your communion with God. You need to keep hearing the word, the gospel. You need to keep reading the Bible for yourself. You need to actually worship God and keep worshipping God and be with people who worship God.

[18:15] You need fellowship. You need Christian fellowship. You need to be with other Christians. You need to keep that up. You need to persevere with that. you need to serve God and you need to go on serving God.

You need to fill up your life with things which have to do with the spiritual and the moral dimension of your life in a positive way. Otherwise, you're going to be giving more and more away until perhaps one day you give yourself away altogether to the world.

Don't let it happen to you. don't think that you're too good for this to happen to you. Don't think any more than I must think. Just because I stand in a pulpit every week of my life doesn't mean that I'm beyond being prone to apostasy.

I have to know my own heart. I have to know my own tendencies. I have to know that there's still sin within me and that the sin within me, this letter to the Hebrews calls the deceitfulness of sin, that it can take me aside, that it can actually get its clutches onto me and into my mind and persuade me that there are certain things God says to me are important that aren't really important at all.

Don't let it happen to you. Don't even let your mind think about it. keep up with the things God says are important and vital elements and therefore avoid shrinking back.

[19:52] But you see what he's saying is we are not, we don't want to make too much of that part of the passage although it's important because the emphasis on the passage in the passage in the verse really is we are not of those.

And you can't come to a verse of scripture that's filled with such positive teaching and just keep looking at the negatives. Keep looking at the dark side of it as if what he's saying is well we're really not sure whether we're going back or not.

What he's saying is we're not. That's not what we're about. That's not what our life's about. We're not of those who shrink back. We're not going to give in to the devil. We're not going to actually listen to human philosophy that tries to persuade us that actually the Christian life is a bit of a fraud after all.

Or that the Bible is in many respects not true or not reliable. We're not of those who shrink back unto perdition. We don't want to end up in hell.

So we want to avoid the link between the action of shrinking back and the outcome of perdition. So believing unto preservation.

[21:03] We are of those who have faith. faith. It's better again I think to have those who believe. Because having faith is perhaps suggestive of just possessing something that you don't use too much.

You can have something and you maybe don't make much use of it. I'm sure all our homes are filled with things that we once thought were useful to us and we went out and bought them and we were going to make a great use of them.

And they're lying in a cupboard somewhere. We used them a few times. I don't want to suggest it's just kitchens that are full of them. But they are. Our house is full of things like gadgets and stuff like that.

We once thought, hey I can really use that. That's going to be very very useful. We kept it up for a few weeks and then it was well it's lying in a cupboard or in a drawer somewhere now. And faith is not like that.

Faith is not something that you come to possess and then it's lying in a drawer somewhere in your life and you bring it out when you need to and then you just put it back again. Faith is the very substance of the very substance of the Christian life.

[22 : 15] There is no Christian life without it. This believing that he mentions here is so important because for one thing you see the way the balance in the verse puts things.

We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed. You would expect him then to say we are those who go forwards to the preserving of our souls.

But what he says is instead of saying the opposite of going back which is going forwards he says we who have faith because that's what he means. What is it to have faith?

It's to go forwards. It's the forward direction of your life. It's a moral spiritual movement. It's much more than an activity of your mind.

It's not just some conclusions you've come to. Things you file away in a drawer in your soul somewhere. Believing is action. Yes your mind is involved in it.

[23 : 15] Yes there are conclusions you come to. But when you go right through into the next chapter that's where you see faith and that's where faith makes itself seen if you like.

Just look at for example verses 24 to 28 of chapter 11. This is Moses by faith when he was grown up he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt. By faith he kept the Passover.

And all the way through these verses you've got a number of what you can call action words. The action words like Moses he considered he chose not to refuse to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

The action word where you find him keeping the Passover. These are all action words. And all the way through chapter 11 of Hebrews you have in each case of the people mentioned actions.

[24 : 33] That's faith. Faith makes itself known in actions. In a person's life. In the forward movement of life.

What did Abraham do when God called him to go out from where he was brought up to a land that he was going to show him? He went out. He acted. He believed God but he didn't just say Lord I believe you.

I believe you exist and I want you to be my God. He believed with the believing that leads to action. And that's what you see in verse 38 as well.

Where he says there my righteous one shall live by faith. It's from the Old Testament. from the likes of Habakkuk. There is a famous verse there. The just shall live by faith.

Yes but what kind of faith? Is it just the faith that has come to a conclusion in your mind that there's such a thing as God? There's such a being as God? There's many people in the world that say I'm a Christian.

[25 : 45] What if you ask them why do you say you're a Christian? What makes you actually conclude that you're a Christian? Oh I believe that God exists. I believe there's a God. And I believe that this God has given us the Bible so that we can learn something about him.

The Bible tells us believing is far far more than just believing in the existence of God or certain things to be true about God. God. Because the believing that's mentioned is the believing by which your life pushes forward perseveringly goes onwards towards what you confess as the hope of eternal life.

And that's why it's saying here that we are of those who believe, who go on believing with this kind of believing, action, faith, to the preserving of our souls.

The word that's used there for preserving is actually not the word for salvation. It's salvation in the old translation, the A.V., those who believe to the saving of our souls.

But the word is not used for the saving with which God saves his people. it's a word that means literally to preserve something, to keep something safe.

[27 : 14] So what this is actually telling us is not the kind of thing that God does to us or for us when he saves us. This is something that we are required to do or to set about doing to keep our lives safe, to keep ourselves within the parameters that God has given us so that we will preserve, so that we will keep safe our life, our persons.

Of course, we depend on God. We saw that this morning. We believe in God, but this is really looking after your life, looking after your life so that you keep yourself safe in the sense that you don't shrink back, but you push on towards eternity, towards final victory.

That's what the link is about. You remember, back in Luke, it's quite a long time since we looked at Luke now, but in Luke chapter 21, verse 19, there Jesus again dealing with teaching the disciples and others, he was telling them there various things that they had to look out for, and when you come to that part of the passage, he talks about how they were going to be delivered up by people, even by their parents or relatives, and be put to death for his sake, you will be hated of all men, by all for my name's sake, but not a hair of your head will perish, and then he says, by your endurance, you will gain your lives, by your endurance, by your perseverance, you will preserve your lives, you will look after your lives, you will look after your spiritual life, by enduring, by persevering, not by shrinking back, an old

Christian woman was once asked by a very unhappy atheist, who saw that her life always had a quality of radiance or joy about it, and he came to her one day and he said, can you tell me something, please?

Just what is this gospel you believe, and how do you believe it? and this is what she said, she said, God is satisfied with the work of his son, that is the gospel I believe, and I am satisfied with him, that is how I believe, isn't that good?

[29 : 49] It's there, everything is there, God is satisfied with the work of his son, that's the gospel I believe, I don't need anything else, and I am satisfied with it, that's how I believe, I just fully accept God's acceptance of his son, and that's the secret of persevering life, that's the antidote to shrinking back, that's the answer to an unhappy, unsatisfied, atheistic, humanistic world, God is satisfied in the work of his son, that's my gospel, and I am satisfied with it, that's how I believe it, it, but let me finish with that emphasis, we are not of those who shrink back, but we are of those who believe unto the preserving of our lives, of our souls, he's joining himself, you see, with those he's writing to, he's saying we're all together on this road, we're pushing forward, what state are you in, what state am I in, are you looking after your life, is your main concern the preserving of your life, through believing, through the acceptance of what God is satisfied with in his son, are you keeping your eye on

Jesus, like you find in chapter 12, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, is he your supreme example as to how to live, is he the basis on which your life is set, is he the one in whom all your hopes are founded, are you looking to Jesus, are you going on looking to him, are you getting tired of looking to him, are you becoming weary in believing, have you gone back in your spiritual life, are you in decline, is there decay in your soul, sin, is your mind set on eternal things, do you constantly look beyond the things of this world, are you tempted just to focus on the things of the present life, and be sucked into the things of materialism, and of timeliness, are you dealing with sin, can you follow John

Owen's great statement, has Christ died, and shall sin live, is this at the heart of your life, are you losing your appetite for spiritual things, have you gone back any, from the things that you confess, that you believe in, that you commend to others, I'm asking myself the same questions, I have to, because God sets them before me, in the analysis of his word, and I can't ignore them, just because that would be my preference, just because others would persuade me, you don't need to be that serious about things, of course you do, it's the difference between hell and heaven after all, and that really matters, we are not of those, who shrink back, unto perdition, but of those who go on believing, unto the preservation, of our lives, let's pray,

Lord our God, we acknowledge your word, and the way in which it strikes so important a note, in our need to persevere believingly, against all that confronts us, against all that tempts us, against the many ways in which daily we are facing, calls upon us to leave that path of obedience and faith, Lord help us we pray, but we are ourselves weak, we are ourselves prone to stray, we confess Lord that we possess in ourselves the capacity to listen to other voices beside your own, and even to

lose sight of the sound of your voice, in the clamor of the world, Lord we pray that you would preserve and maintain us, so that we might go on believingly, to the preservation of our souls, we accept now Lord, the teaching of your word for this day, and ask that you would help us to apply it to our lives throughout this week, we pray these things in Jesus name, and for his sake, Amen.