

HEBREWS 10:32-39

Sequence

- Hebrews 10:32-39
- Within the letter
- Wider context
- Commentary
- Conversation

Heb 10:32 But remember the former days when you endured a harsh conflict of suffering after you were enlightened. **33** At times you were publicly exposed to abuse and afflictions, and at other times you came to share with others who were treated in that way. **34** For in fact you shared the sufferings of those in prison, and you accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you certainly had a better and lasting possession. **35** So do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward. **36** For you need endurance in order to do God's will and so receive what is promised. **37** For *just a little longer* and *he who is coming will arrive and not delay*. **38** *But my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, I take no pleasure in him.* **39** But we are not among those who shrink back and thus perish, but are among those who have faith and preserve their souls.

Within the Letter

- Remembering the faithfulness of earlier days (10:32–39)
 - The former days (10:32–36)
 - Living by faith (10:37–39)
- 10:32–39 - Endurance
- 11:1-40 - Faith
- 12:1–11 - Endurance
- In 10:32, the author reaches the final summation, or *peroratio*, of his sermon. The *peroratio* was critical for the effectiveness of the speech, for it was the speaker's last chance to persuade the audience to take the right course of action.
- It was the occasion for summarising earlier parts of the speech, appealing to the emotions, and refreshing the memory of the audience (Quintilian, Inst. 6.1.1). Consequently, the author breaks no new ground but recapitulates what he has already said.
- The task now is to urge the wavering church to endure until it obtains the promise that the author has held before the community throughout the homily (4:1; 6:12, 17; 10:23).
- In the exhortation in 10:32–12:13, the author addresses the community's present experience of suffering, speaking directly to their situation in 10:32–39 and 12:1–13 and offering examples for imitation in chapter 11.
- The dominant theme is endurance (*hypomenein/hypomonē*) in the midst of pain (10:32, 36; 12:1–2, 7; cf. the opposite, *hypostolē*, "shrinking back," in 10:39), which the author illustrates with the heroes of faith (*pistis*) in chapter 11.
- The close relationship between faith and endurance is indicated in 10:36–39, where the author equates the two qualities.

Wider context

- The exhortation in 10:32–39 provides the most specific indication of the history of the community in the entire homily. Soon after their conversion (*phōtisthentes*, "enlightened"; cf. 6:4), they "endured a hard struggle with sufferings." Undoubtedly, they suffered the fate that Christians experienced everywhere.
- Paul warns new converts in Thessalonica that they are destined for afflictions (1 Thess 3:3), and he encourages the Philippians not to be intimidated by their adversaries (Phil 1:28).
- Long before the emergence of persecutions sponsored by governmental authorities, Christian communities met local opposition everywhere because of their absolute loyalty to Christ and withdrawal from civic life (cf. 1 Pet 4:4).
- Greco-Roman society, because of its polytheistic nature, was tolerant of various deities and religious practices. Christians, however, denied the gods and claimed that the God of Israel alone was worthy of worship. Thus they disturbed the peace of ancient communities, often

undermining family cohesion by converting members of the household (cf. 1 Pet 1:18; 2:18–3:7). “In their eagerness to save the world, Christians did not shy away from shattering the unity and sanctity of the family, the basic unit of society and thus of the state”.

- Consequently, Tacitus (born ca. AD 56) called the Christian movement a “deadly disease” (Ann. 16.5) and accused the Christians of “hatred of the human race” (Ann. 15.44). Pliny (ca. AD 61–112) described it as a “wretched infection” (Ep. 10.96). Minucius Felix, a third-century Christian apologist, [Heb, p. 216] records the complaint, “You do not go to our shows, you take no part in our processions, you are not present at our public banquets, you shrink in horror from our sacred games” (Oct. 12.).

Wider context: Tacitus

- But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called "Chrestians" by the populace.
- Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.
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- Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Annals, 15.44

Wider context: Pliny

- It is my practice, my lord, to refer to you all matters concerning which I am in doubt. For who can better give guidance to my hesitation or inform my ignorance? I have never participated in trials of Christians. I therefore do not know what offences it is the practice to punish or investigate, and to what extent. And I have been not a little hesitant as to whether there should be any distinction on account of age or no difference between the very young and the more mature; whether pardon is to be granted for repentance, or, if a man has once been a Christian, it does him no good to have ceased to be one; whether the name itself, even without offences, or only the offences associated with the name are to be punished.
- Meanwhile, in the case of those who were denounced to me as Christians, I have observed the following procedure: I interrogated these as to whether they were Christians; those who confessed I interrogated a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; those who persisted I ordered executed. For I had no doubt that, whatever the nature of their creed, stubbornness and inflexible obstinacy surely deserve to be punished. There were others possessed of the same folly; but because they were Roman citizens, I signed an order for them to be transferred to Rome.
- They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so. When this was over, it was their custom to depart and to assemble again to partake of food--but ordinary and innocent food. Even this, they affirmed, they had ceased to do after my edict by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden political associations. Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but depraved, excessive superstition.

- I therefore postponed the investigation and hastened to consult you. For the matter seemed to me to warrant consulting you, especially because of the number involved. For many persons of every age, every rank, and also of both sexes are and will be endangered. For the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms. But it seems possible to check and cure it. It is certainly quite clear that the temples, which had been almost deserted, have begun to be frequented, that the established religious rites, long neglected, are being resumed, and that from everywhere sacrificial animals are coming, for which until now very few purchasers could be found. Hence it is easy to imagine what a multitude of people can be reformed if an opportunity for repentance is afforded.

Pliny, Letters 10.96-97

Wider context: Trajan

- You observed proper procedure, my dear Pliny, in sifting the cases of those who had been denounced to you as Christians. For it is not possible to lay down any general rule to serve as a kind of fixed standard. They are not to be sought out; if they are denounced and proved guilty, they are to be punished, with this reservation, that whoever denies that he is a Christian and really proves it--that is, by worshiping our gods--even though he was under suspicion in the past, shall obtain pardon through repentance. But anonymously posted accusations ought to have no place in any prosecution. For this is both a dangerous kind of precedent and out of keeping with the spirit of our age.

Response of Trajan to Pliny

Hebrew 10:32

Heb 10:32 But remember the former days when you endured a harsh conflict of suffering after you were enlightened.

- For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been **enlightened**, tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit, (Heb 6:4)
- ...keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set out for him he **endured** the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Think of him who **endured** such opposition against himself by sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls and give up. (Heb 12:2-3)
- **Endure** your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? (Heb 12:7)
- Athlesin: cf. 12:1-13
- The use of the athletic metaphor in connection with endurance (hypomonē/hypomonein, 10:32-34; 12:1-3) is rooted in the literature of Greek philosophy and the Jewish literature that was most influenced by philosophical discussions.
- Stoic philosophers saw endurance as a vital part of moral development. Seneca maintained that one who endures torture is employing [Heb, p. 219] all the virtues (Ep. 67.10).
- Philo employed this metaphor frequently to describe biblical heroes. "One must bear, resist, hold fast, fortify one's resolution and barricade it with firmness and endurance drawn from within, the most potent of the virtues" (Cherubim 78).
- Philo claimed that the athlete, "by the constancy and vigour of his endurance, breaks the strength of his adversary until the victory is complete" (Good Person 26)
- Truly the contest in which they were engaged was divine, for on that day virtue gave the awards and tested them for their endurance. The prize was immortality in endless life. Eleazar was the first contestant, the mother of the seven sons entered the competition, and the brothers contended. The tyrant was the antagonist, and the world and the human race were the spectators. Reverence for God was victor and gave the crown to its own athletes. Who did not admire the athletes of the divine legislation? Who were not amazed? (4 Macc 17:11-16 NRSV)
- Like the author of 4 Maccabees, the author hopes to encourage his readers to endure sufferings by portraying them as athletes in a noble contest.

Hebrews 10:33-34

Heb 10: 33 At times you were publicly exposed (theatrizō) to abuse and afflictions, and at other times you came to share with others who were treated in that way. **34** For in fact you shared the sufferings of those in prison, and you accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you certainly had a better and lasting possession.

- Remember those in prison as though you were in prison with them, and those ill-treated as though you too felt their torment. (Heb 13:3)
- Remember your leaders, who spoke God's message to you; reflect on the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith (Heb 13:7)
- For it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened, tasted the heavenly gift, become partakers of the Holy Spirit, (Heb 6:4)

Hebrews 10:35-36

Heb 10:35 So do not throw away your confidence, because it has great reward. **36** For you need endurance in order to do God's will and so receive what is promised..

- Confidence: But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. We are of his house, if in fact we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope we take pride in. (Heb 3:6; cf. 4:16; 10:19)
- Reward: For if the message spoken through angels proved to be so firm that every violation or disobedience received its just penalty (= reward!), (Heb 2:2)
- He regarded abuse suffered for Christ to be greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for his eyes were fixed on the reward. (Heb 11:26)

Hebrew 10:37-38

Heb 10:37 For just a little longer and he who is coming will arrive and not delay. **38** But my righteous one will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, I take no pleasure in him.

- Just a little longer: Go, my people, enter your chambers; shut your door; hide yourselves for a little while until the wrath of the Lord has passed. (Isa 26:20)
- For the message is a witness to what is decreed; it gives reliable testimony about how matters will turn out. Even if the message is not fulfilled right away, wait patiently; for it will certainly come to pass—it will not arrive late. Look, the one whose desires are not upright will faint from exhaustion, but the person of integrity will live because of his faithfulness. (Hab 2:3–4)
- In the original context, the latter passage responds to the prophet's complaint that the wicked persecute the righteous, promising that divine justice will come. "Look at the proud! Their spirit is not right in them, but the righteous live by their faith."
- In the LXX the passage has taken on a different nuance: "The righteous one will live by my faith."
- Thus the Hebrew Bible emphasises the faith of the people, while the LXX focuses on God's faithfulness.
- The citation in Hebrews does not correspond precisely to either reading but has elements of both. The author adds the definite article to the participle "coming" (i.e., the "coming vision"), giving it a messianic connotation (ho erchomenos, "the one who is to come," cf. Matt 11:3).
- Thus "the one who is to come ... and will not delay" continues the thought of "the day that is drawing near" (10:25). The central verse for the author is "My righteous one will live by faith," which, like the MT reading, refers to the faithfulness of the people rather than God's faithfulness.

Hebrews 10:39

Heb 10:39 But we are not among those who shrink back and thus perish, but are among those who have faith and preserve their souls.

- The "we" of a *peroratio*, to create a sense of community.
- The assurance is an effective rhetorical device for motivating the readers.
- Echoing the distinction in the citation between those who "shrink back" and those who have "faith," the author expresses confidence that they will conduct themselves in the future as they have in the past.
- Despite the frequent warnings, he concludes that the readers will make the right choice and inherit the promise.

Conversation