

Hebrews 12 - Divine Discipline & Suffering; Appropriating Grace; Warning #5: Indifference

II. Application Section of the Letter to the Hebrews (Heb 10:19–13:25)

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Hebrews 12

- (3) Exhortation to patient endurance (12:1-29)
 - (A) The exhortation (12:1)

1 Therefore, since we also have such a **great cloud of witnessessurrounding us**, let's **ridourselves** of every **obstacle** and **the sin which so easily entangles us**, and let's run with **endurance** the **race** that is set before us,

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

1 Therefore, having so vast a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, and throwing off everything that hinders us and especially the sin that so easily entangles us, let us keep running with endurance the race set before us,

1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

– "Therefore" - because of the lessons of faith from OT saints, believers are now seen as contestants, striving to win a prize

– "...great cloud of witnesses" - the OT saints mentioned in 11:4-40

— It is a metaphor for a large mass of people, who should serve as witnesses that the race can be won by faith and patient endurance

- While living believers are in the arena, these OT saints are sitting in the bleachers as spectators, not in the sense that they are watching the believers to see how well they are doing, but in the sense that they are witnessing to them concerning the life of faith.
- They are witnessing that, by the exercise of faith and patient endurance, the race can be won
- This verse does not teach that those in Heaven can see what is happening down here on earth
 - "...surrounding us" - the heroes of the faith in Heb 11 are to be in the minds of the contestants; the contestants (living believers) are to be aware of what these heroes accomplished through faith and the exercise of patient endurance.
 - "...rid ourselves" - anything that will keep one from freely running the race or divert attention away from freely running the race
- In the context of Hebrews, this refers to Judaism in general and the Mosaic Law specifically
- "...obstacle" - encumbrance; something that impedes progress or slows one down. Refers to the Christian "race" (Cf. 1 Cor 9:24; 2 Tim 4:7-8).
- These may not necessarily be "sins," but nonetheless make perseverance difficult
- "...the sin which so easily entangles us" - the "sin" that is being warned against is unbelief and apostasy. In view of the immediately preceding context, it might refer to "losing heart," "quitting the race," or "giving up the fight."
- This phrase has a definite article "the" indicating that the author is referring to a specific sin
- However, many different types of sin can trip us up, and we should avoid all sin for this reason: love of wealth, attachment to the world, preoccupation of earthly interests, or self-centeredness and self-importance.
- The reason for this self-discipline is so we can keep running the Christian race effectively. The real test of life is the steady, normal progress of the soul—not bursts of effort, the slacking, but constant, steady endurance.
- "...endurance" - a steady determination to keep going
- They must continue in spite of a desire to slow down or quit; they must keep running until the end of their lives
- "...race" - *agōn*, Greek root for the English word "agony"; life is an agonizing race, which must be run with patient endurance

(B) The example of Christ (12:2-4)

2 **looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has satdown at the right hand of the throne of God.**

2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

2 fixing our attention on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of the faith, who, in view of the joy set before him, endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

- "looking only at" - *aphorao*, to look away from all distractions; the readers must look away from anything that distracts and focus their eyes on Jesus Christ alone

— As we run the race, we should keep our eyes on the goal (Jesus), not the other witnesses. He should be our primary example when it comes to persevering.

— When we take our eyes off of Jesus, we begin to sink (Cf. Peter, Matt 14:22-33)

- "...originator" - Pioneer, Chief, Leader, Author

— The same Greek word is used in 2:10 when the author emphasized Jesus to be the Author of salvation. Jesus is the Author of salvation, and He is also the Author of the faith by which the readers live the spiritual life.

- "...perfecter" - *teleiotesone*, the One who carries it through to completion; the Finisher

— Not only is Jesus the "Beginner" (Author) of the faith they need to use in living out their daily spiritual life, but, if they patiently endure, He will also bring it to completion (perfection).

- "...the joy set before him" - the joy of the prospect of His reward included:

1. He would sit at the right hand of the Father and be restored to glory (John 17:5)

2. He would accomplish salvation for the lost (Is 53:11)

— His victory over death, glorification, inheritance and reign motivated Him as well (1:9,13-14; 8:1; 10:12)

— What we look forward to is very similar to what Jesus anticipated. Such a prospect—resurrection bodies, glorification, inheritance, reigning with Christ—will help us to endure suffering and shame involved in living faithful to God before unbelieving critics.

- "...sat down" - His work is finished (Cf. Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; Rev 3:21); see notes on 1:3

3 For **consider** Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

3 For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

3 Think about the one who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you may not become tired and give up.

3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

- "...consider" - *analogizomai*, to think over, consider, ponder. It was used in Greek literature for adding up a column to get a grand total.

— The writer uses this word to give the readers to complete picture of Jesus' sufferings. He asks them to "add them up," point by point, in detail, all the sufferings that led up to His death. They need to construct a mental analogy of His trials and sufferings.

— By remembering what Jesus endured—what He suffered and how much He suffered—they will realize their sufferings are quite mild

— It is natural for us to overestimate the severity of our trials; "considering" Jesus trials helps us put them into proper perspective

4 You have not yet **resisted to the point of shedding blood** in your **striving** against sin;

4 You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin;

4 In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

- "...resisted to the point of shedding blood" - the readers had not yet resisted sin to the extent that their enemies were torturing them, shedding their blood or killing them for their faith, as was Jesus' experience.

— Evidently, there had been no martyrs yet among the readers. The Church in Jerusalem had experienced death (Stephen, James, etc.), however the author was writing to churches in Judea, outside of Jerusalem.

- The writer puts his readers' sufferings in perspective, so that they might not overestimate the difficulty they faced in remaining faithful to God.

- "...striving" - *antagonizomai*, to struggle, fight (English; agony; antagonism)

— They need to be so antagonistic to sin that they are willing to die in their stand against it

(C) Exhortation to endure discipline (12:5-13)

5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE PUNISHED BY HIM;

5 and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him;

5 You have forgotten the encouragement that is addressed to you as sons: "My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline or give up when you are corrected by him.

5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

- The basic point is that the purpose of suffering is to bring about the maturity of God's children

- He first speaks of forgetfulness: these readers had forgotten that they were sons of God, and that discipline comes from a father-son relationship

- The fact that he calls them "sons" shows once again that they are believers; it is because of the fact that they are sons of God that they will suffer discipline

- He then quotes Prov 3:11-12...

- Suffering and trials come to all believers...it's part of life, but it is not easy to hear. Yet it is not quite so bad when it can be seen as meaningful.

- Believers need to remember that God allows us to experience opposition to make us stronger in the faith (Deut 8:5; Prov 3:11-12; James 1)

- It is easy to become discouraged when we encounter hard times; the Israelites gave evidence of this when they left Egypt

- This passage points out the importance of discipline, and proceeds to show that for Christians, suffering is rightly understood only when seen as God's fatherly discipline, correcting and directing us

6 FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE **DISCIPLINES**, AND HE **PUNISHES** EVERY SON WHOM HE ACCEPTS."

6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives."

6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he punishes every son he accepts."

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

- "...DISCIPLINES" - discipline is moral training to conform the son to the expectation of the father

- This is one of the works of Christ during His Present Session. See [Present Ministry of Christ](#) for details on what Jesus is doing from heaven today.

- "...PUNISHES" - punishment is retribution for evil; for the believer the punishment has already been received by Jesus on the cross

- The author quotes Prov 3:11-12 to prove two things:

1. God disciplines those whom He loves
2. He proves that discipline is a sign of *sonship*

- The progression is from a lesser degree to a greater degree, even death (1 Cor 11:30)

- *Son* and *sons* are used 6x in v5-8. The Greek word for "son" is *huios*, meaning "full-grown son"

- Another value of divine discipline is that it prepares us to reign with Christ (Cf. 2:10). God's discipline assures us that we are His "sons."

God's Children Do Suffer

- Ps 34:19: Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all...
- Job 5:7: Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward...
- John 16:33: ...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world...
- 2 Tim 3:12: Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution...

Why?

- Because of our own *stupidity* and our own sin (1 Peter 2:20)
- For *taking a stand* for truth and righteousness (1 Peter 3:14)
- We suffer for *sin* in our lives (1 Cor 11:31)
- For our *past sins* (Gal 6:7)
- Some *lofty purpose of God* (Job)
- For their *faith* (Heb 11)
- For *discipline* (Heb 12:6)

Why Do Christians Have Trials?

1. To glorify God (Dan 3:16-18,24-25; John 9:1-3)
2. Discipline for known sin (Heb 12:5-11; James 4:17; Rom 14:23; 1 John 1:9)
3. To prevent us from falling into sin (1 Peter 4:1-2)
4. To keep us from pride—Paul kept from pride by his "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor 12:7-10)
5. To build faith (1 Peter 1:6-7)
6. To cause growth (Rom 5:3-5)
7. To teach obedience and discipline (Acts 9:15-16; Phil 4:11-13)
8. To equip us to comfort others (2 Cor 1:3-4)
9. To prove the reality of Christ in us (2 Cor 4:7-11)
10. For testimony to the angels (Job 1:8; Eph 3:8-11; 1 Peter 1:12)

7 It is for **discipline** that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?

7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?

7 What you endure disciplines you: God is treating you as sons. Is there a son whom his father does not discipline?

7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

- "...discipline" - *paideia*, two primary meanings:

1. The moral training and education of children
2. Whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing passions

— However, they have all become *partakers* of sonship as evidenced by this chastisement. This is evidence that they are sons.

- The efficacy of the discipline God is giving them depends upon the spirit in which they are willing to receive it

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are **illegitimate children** and not **sons**.

8 But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

8 Now if you are without any discipline, in which all sons share, then you are illegitimate and not God's sons.

8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

- If chastening is not present, if they are never disciplined, it will show them to be illegitimate and not true sons

- "...illegitimate children" - in view seem to be genuine children of God, but not approved sons; based upon the original audience of this epistle and the larger context, there is no reason to believe this term refers simply to "professing" believers.

— Cf. Rom 8:14-17 for the contrast between children and sons

— A father would rightly spend more care and patience on the up-bringing and discipline of a true-born son whom he hoped to make a wealthy heir. During those years, the child would undergo much more irksome discipline than an illegitimate son for whom no future of honor and responsibility was envisaged.

— Ishmael is an OT example of an illegitimate child. He was a true child of Abraham, yet because he was illegitimate, he did not receive the inheritance that Isaac, the legitimate child, did (Gen 17:19-21; 21:12-14). Ishmael received some blessing simply for being Abraham's son, but did not receive the full inheritance because he was illegitimate.

- "...sons" - the "approved" sons in view are those who persevere through discipline to the end of their lives; illegitimate children do not stay the course, but apostatize

God deals with apostate believers in judgment and punishment, but He deals with persevering believers in love-motivated discipline. The writer seems to be saying that God

disciplines all Christians, but when a believer apostatizes, God may let him go his own way "without" disciplining him further, especially if he has not responded to previous discipline but has hardened his heart. God uses discipline to prepare Christians for future service, but when they apostatize, He stops preparing them for future service.

9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected *them*; shall we not much more be subject to the **Father of spirits**, and live?

9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?

9 Furthermore, we had earthly fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. We should submit even more to the Father of our spirits and live, shouldn't we?

9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

- Even human fathers discipline. In spite of that discipline, which was tough, the believers learned to revere their human fathers.

— The application of the illustration is: since the believers were willing to subject themselves to human fathers, how much more should they be willing to subject themselves to their Heavenly Father?

- A contrast between two fathers:

1. Human: temporary; sometimes makes mistakes

2. Father of Spirits: never makes mistakes; it always is for our personal profit.

- "...Father of spirits" - our spiritual Father (Cf. Num 16:22; 27:16) in contrast to our earthly fathers; emphasizes God as the Creator of the immaterial part of man, which continues to live after physical death.

This is again a *kal/ ve-chomer*, a lesser-to-greater argument: if they learned to respect human fathers when they disciplined them, how much more should they subject themselves to the Father of spirits, and live?

10 For they disciplined *us* for a short time **as seemed best to them**, but He *disciplines us for our good*, so that we may share His holiness.

10 For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He *disciplines us for our good*, so that we may share His holiness.

10 For a short time they disciplined us as they thought best, but God does it for our good, so that we may share in his holiness.

10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

- "...as seemed best to them" - the discipline of human fathers is not always perfect. They make mistakes and sometimes wrongly punish their children.
- But the Divine Father never makes mistakes; His discipline is perfect, and always for a purpose: for our good ("profit")
- "...for *our* good" - it is essential that we view our sufferings and trials as being the Lord's discipline rather than an indication of His displeasure, punishment or even worse, His hatred (Cf. Deut 1:26-27)—in order to persevere faithfully.
- There is a real and a linguistical connection between "discipline" and "disciple"
- The ultimate goal: spiritual maturity and to be partakers of His holiness!

11 For the moment, all discipline seems not to be pleasant, but painful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterward it yields the **peaceful fruit of righteousness**.

11 All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, for those who have been trained by it, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace.

11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: never the less afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

- God's divine purpose is accomplished through sorrow just as human discipline is accomplished through sorrow
- God always designs discipline for our good, even though it may not be pleasant to endure in the present
- We will cease from self-pity, resentment and rebellious complaint during suffering if we remember that there is no discipline of God which does not take its source in love, and for which our good is the ultimate goal.
- After believers endure divine discipline with the right spirit (patient endurance and faith), there will be two results:
 - "...peaceful fruit" - a rebellious spirit will change to a submissive spirit
 - "...righteousness" - practical righteousness is produced, which leads to spiritual maturity (Cf. 5:14)

12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the **knees that are feeble**,

12 Therefore, strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble,

12 Therefore, strengthen your tired arms and your weak knees,

12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;

- "Therefore" - because discipline is a sign of sonship and is necessary to develop the peaceable fruit of righteousness, there are certain obligations toward the weaker members

of the assembly

- Since discipline is necessary and painful, the stronger members should ensure that discipline becomes effectual
- The obligation is to strengthen the weaker members where possible, and remove stumbling blocks to the development of peaceable fruit as much as possible
- "...strengthen the hands" - the Greek emphasizes reinvigoration
- "...knees that are feeble" - reinvigorate the paralyzed knees
- This power comes as we draw upon our resources for strength, namely the Word of God and the grace of God (4:12-16)

13 and **make straight paths for your feet**, so that *the limb* which is **impaired** may not be **dislocated**, but rather be **healed**.

13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that *the limb* which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed.

13 and straighten the paths of your life, so that your lameness may not become worse, but instead may be healed.

13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

- "...make straight paths for your feet" - the readers also needed to level the path of discipleship by removing impediments to their progress (Cf. Prov 4:26-27)

— The stronger members should assist the weaker ones (Ex 17:10-12). The path should be made straight so they don't keep going in circles.

— This may involve, for example, avoiding contact with people or materials that encourage departure from God's will.

— The writer understood the fact that faith can be eroded by constant exposure to harsh circumstances

- "...impaired" - to be pulled out of joint

— Same Greek word used in 1 Kings 18:21 where Elijah said, "How long will you keep *hesitating* (limping) between both sides? If the LORD is God, go after him. If Baal, go after him."

— Then, the "lame" (very weak) among them might recover ("be healed") as they proceeded to walk.

- "...may not be dislocated" - *ektrepo*, be put out of joint; has the technical medical sense of a foot turning and becoming dislocated

- "...healed" - refers to spiritual healing, not physical healing; all of the illustrations in this context refer to spiritual weakness

(D) Miscellaneous ways to endure (12:14-17)

14 Pursue peace with all people, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

14 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

14 Pursue peace with everyone, as well as holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.

14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

- "Pursue" - *diōkō*, to make an eager pursuit; to press on as one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal

- "...peace" - *eirēnē*, harmony; we need to live peaceably with all men, as much as we can (Cf. Matt 5:9; Mark 9:50; Rom 12:18; 2 Tim 2:22) because peaceful interpersonal relationships fosters godliness (James 3:18)

- "...all people" - one to another; notice this is a horizontal, not vertical, relationship between me and other people (believers and unbelievers, no distinction made), not between me and God

- "...holiness" - *hagiasmos*, sanctification; since we will one day see the Lord, we should especially pursue "holiness" (practical sanctification)

- Those who have believed have already been positionally sanctified, but now they must make it practical in day-to-day living

- "...no one" - does not refer to the person who doesn't pursue peace with all people, or holiness, but rather to other people (outsiders) who are looking at your life

- These people, believers and unbelievers, will not see the Lord in your life if you are not pursuing peace and demonstrating holiness

- "...see the Lord" - this speaks of others "seeing the Lord" through the believer's life and witness. It's not talking about you seeing God one day in heaven. It's talking about other people seeing the veracity and truth of your Christian witness through your life, through your pursuit of peace with all men, and holiness.

- It's talking about my horizontal witness to others, not my vertical relationship with God. We know this from the context: "all people," (v14); "no one," (v14,15).

- So if someone says, "I don't want to pursue peace with others because I'm really upset at them, and I don't want to pursue holiness because I like my sin." Ok, but then people cannot see Christ through you. When they look at your life, you look like everyone else and you don't shine the light of Christ toward them. Unbelievers will not see the reality of Christianity through you.

- The popular (Calvinist) interpretation of this verse is that this verse lays out things that will characterize a believer, and if they don't characterize a believer, that person is not a believer.

— Calvinists use this verse to teach that if you're not pursuing peace and holiness, then you're not going to see the Lord (make it to heaven). Meaning, if your good doesn't outweigh your bad, you're going to get to heaven and hear the words, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

— And because you didn't persevere in pursuing peace and holiness, when the data on you is reviewed in heaven, you will come up short. And because you didn't persevere, you never really had authentic faith to begin with, meaning you were never really saved.

Here are some quotes from prominent Calvinists who invoke this verse with the wrong interpretation:

Michael Horton says:

*"The NT lays before us a vast array of conditions for final salvation. Not only **initial repentance and faith**, but **perseverance in both, demonstrated in love toward God and neighbor**, are part of that **holiness** without which no one will see the Lord (Heb 12:14)."*

So Michael Horton, a noted Calvinist, gives us the conditions for salvation: #1: initial repentance + #2: faith + #3: perseverance in both repentance and faith + #4: love toward God + #5: love toward neighbor + #6: holiness. And if you don't have all six, from the time of your salvation to the time you die, then you will not see the Lord.

John Piper says:

"Essential to the Christian life and necessary for final salvation is the killing of sin (Rom 8:13) and the pursuit of holiness (Heb 12:14)."

So Piper is gives us his conditions for "final salvation": #1: killing of sin (whatever that means) + #2: holiness

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;

15 See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up and causes you trouble, or many of you will become defiled.

15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled;

- "See to it" - *episkepeo*, means "to see" in the sense of having oversight by someone in the position of authority

— There must be constant spiritual oversight by each person over their life and attitudes

— There is a danger of a three-stage progression downward if the readers fail to keep on the lookout as to where they are spiritually. That three-stage progression is:

1. "no one comes short of the grace of God" (v15) - a failure to progress; it is the failure of a believer to apprehend or appropriate grace when something negative comes into their lives. Believers stumble spiritually because they fail to appropriate the grace that is available.
2. "no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble" (v15) - the failure to appropriate grace during suffering or trial leads to bitterness, which eventually results in the defilement of many others.
 - This is how the root manifests itself: bitterness in the heart leads to murmuring with the tongue; murmuring with the tongue means murmuring against other people. Others are defiled by the murmuring, which all began with the root of bitterness.
 - This phrase is found in Deut 29:19c: "...that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood." There it is used of the Israelites' idolatry. It had become a root that produced poison.
 - People with a root of bitterness cause divisions and split churches. They defile others by talking against the leaders of the church. The first step affects only the individual, but the second step begins to affect others as well. They fail to have peace with all men.
 - *Our most dangerous hurts are the justified ones!*
 - "...many" - refers to the people who aren't seeing the authentic work of God in your life because you aren't pursuing peace and holiness

- 16 that *there be* no sexually immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal.
- 16 that *there be* no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a *single* meal.
- 16 No one should be immoral or godless like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.
- 16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.
 - The final step downward is the open contempt of duty and privilege. Esau was not a fornicator (although he did marry two foreign wives, Gen 26:34-35; 27:46), but he was a profane person (Gen 25:27-34). The Greek word for "profane" applies to one who tramples on spiritual matters. Esau was a profaner.
 - Esau did more than just sell his birthright: he despised it (Gen 25:34). He was aware of the blessings available to him, but he cared nothing about being used by God.
 - There are two obstacles to holiness in everyday living: personal impurity (fornication), and our failure to lay hold of the blessings that are available
 - Esau is an example of the second. He had blessings available to him because of his birthright, but he failed to take hold of them. Instead, he sold it and the blessings along

with it. The fact that he sold it for "one morsel of meat" shows how little he thought of God's blessings and his own privileges.

— Esau lost his inheritance, and could not regain it later when he wanted it. His decision had permanent consequences; he could not repent (Cf. 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:26). His inability to repent was not a matter of forgiveness, but of consequences.

— David is another example of a person who had to bear the consequences of his sins, even though God forgave him for those sins

— Esau was godless in that he relinquished his covenant rights for the sake of immediate gratification. He is the prototype of all who throw away the heavenly reality for the sake of the earthly one.

— The Jewish believers to whom Hebrews was written could also barter away the blessings available to them in favor of going back to the Temple service

17 For you know that even afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, **he was rejected**, for he found no place for **repentance**, though he sought for it with tears.

17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

17 For you know that afterwards, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected because he could not find any opportunity to repent, even though he begged to repent with tears.

17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

- Later Esau recognized that by selling his birthright he sold both material and spiritual blessing, so he wanted his birthright back. Jacob did not steal the blessing from Esau... Esau sold it to him.

— When Isaac was getting ready to bless Esau, Esau should've told his father the blessing no longer belonged to him, since he sold it to Jacob. Esau wanted the blessing he had sold off, so he tried to steal it from Jacob.

— Esau attempted to get the blessing back without dealing with his sin. Esau wanted the blessing, but he was not willing to repent.

— The lesson is that natural birth does not bring blessing, faith does

- "...he was rejected" - because he made an irrevocable decision. Since he was rejected, there was no undoing the sin of despising his birthright because he did not repent

- "...repentance" - *metanoia*, a change of mind; a reversibility of a purpose or of something to be done

— Esau was an example of a son who was rejected on the basis of a decision he made, and that decision was irrevocable. The readers are in similar danger of making an irrevocable decision that would cut them off from blessings.

- The issue here is divine blessing, not salvation. Esau didn't have faith or patient endurance, and was cut off from the place of blessing.

The application to these Jewish readers is that they, too, can make a once-and-for-all irrevocable decision by going back into Judaism. This will mean that they, too, will be cut off from the place of blessing; they will lose blessings available in this life and rewards in the age to come. In chapter 6, the writer already pointed out that, if they return to Judaism, they will make an irrevocable decision and they will be under the sentence of death in the 70 AD judgment. The author is dealing with the temporal consequences of sin and with the fact that it is possible to forfeit future rewards for present security.

Bypass of Firstborn

Favored —> First Born

Abel —> Seth / Cain Shem —> Japheth Isaac —> Ishmael Jacob —> Esau Ephraim —> Manasseh Judah/Joseph —> Reuben Moses —> Aaron David —> all his brothers (Eliab = firstborn) New Covenant —> Old Covenant Last Adam (Jesus Christ) —> First Adam (Adam)

Why did God interrupt the concept of the "first born" for all of the patriarchs? To demonstrate Jesus as the "firstborn" who brings the hopes and promises of the nation to realization. He is the firstborn who redeems the world (Cf. Ex 4:22). He is the firstborn who rules His Kingdom (all creation) as the son of David (Cf. Ps 89:27; 2 Sam 7:12-14). All previous history pointed to him and waited for him. The "firstborn" is the promised Savior Messiah of Israel who rules and reigns over His creation. When Paul called Jesus the "firstborn" in Colossians he was declaring Jesus to be the long hoped for Messianic Savior. In Jewish history, the birthright belonged to the firstborn son in a family simply by right of birth and consisted of three things: (1) ruler of the household under and for the father, (2) priest of the family, and (3) the reception of a double portion of all the father's goods. Although a firstborn son did nothing to come into possession of the birthright, he could conduct his life in such a manner so as to forfeit the birthright. He could not forfeit his position as firstborn in the family, but he could forfeit the rights of the firstborn.

The Superiority of the New Covenant

The writer proceeded to reiterate the superiority of the New Covenant by comparing it with the Old Covenant, using the figure of two mountains: Sinai and Zion (Cf. Gal 4:24-26). The emphasis in this comparison is on the holiness of God, and the fearful consequences of incurring His displeasure (Cf. Judges 13:20; 1 Kings 8:12; 18:38; Nahum 1:3; Matt 24:30-31; 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16).

(E) The believer's refuge (12:18-24)

18 For **you have not come** to a *mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

18 For you have not come to a *mountain* that can be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

18 You have not come to something that can be touched, to a blazing fire, to darkness, to gloom,

18 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,

- "...you have not come" - the author contrasts the believer's position, where they are not (v18, "ye are not come") and where they are (v22, "but ye are come")

— To summarize: if these Jewish believers go back to the old system, they are returning to a place that was inaugurated by terror (v18-21). In contrast, they leave a place of privilege and grace, as demonstrated by the heavenly city (v22-24).

- "...a *mountain*" - describes Mt Sinai, where the Old Covenant was given (Cf. 2:2-4; Ex 19:9-23; Deut 4:11; 9:8-19)

19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words, which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.

19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which *sound was such that* those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them.

19 to a trumpet's blast, or to a voice that made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them.

19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more:

- The readers have not (yet) come to a place of terror. They have not come to a mountain which cannot *be touched* as had the Israelites (Ex 19:12-25). The author hearkens back to the Exodus and Mount Sinai experiences to make several points:

- They have not come to a mountain burning with fire (Ex 19:18)
- They have not come to a place of *darkness, blackness, and tempest* (Ex 19:16-18; Deut 4:11; 5:22)
- They have not heard *the sound of a trumpet* (Ex 19:16-19; 20:18)
- They have not heard *the voice of Words of God*, which were such that the Israelites begged not to hear *the voice of God* again (Ex 19:19-20; Deut 4:12)

20 For they could not cope with the command, "If even an animal touches the mountain, it shall be stoned."

20 For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned."

20 For they could not endure the command that was given: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death."

20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart:

- The author quotes Ex 19:12-13 to show that Mount Sinai, where the Law was given, was *untouchable*

21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I am terrified and trembling."

21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."

21 Indeed, the sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear."

21 And so terrible was the sight, *that* Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

- God was far from the Israelites, and even Moses felt terror (more than anyone else). Even Moses was repelled by the scene on Mount Sinai and was not attracted to it (Deut 9:19).

— The Mosaic Law was inaugurated in the context of terror. To go back to the Law was to go back to a place of terror.

— Paul teaches that going back to the Law is returning to a ministry of death and condemnation (2 Cor 3:2-18)

Positively

As believers, they are *not* at Mount Sinai under the system of Law. They have come to a system of grace: *but ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*. This is the city in Heaven that is destined to be the abode of all the redeemed.

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

22 Instead, you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to tens of thousands of angels joyfully gathered together,

22 But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

- As believers, they are not at Mount Sinai under the system of Law; rather, they have come to a system of grace, embodied by a city in Heaven that is destined to be the abode of all redeemed

- The giving of the New Covenant and the things associated with that covenant are more impressive because they comprise heavenly realities
- Three names for this City: Mount Zion, City of the Living God, and the Heavenly Jerusalem

Pervasive Mention

Jesus spoke about this city where He is now preparing a place for us (John 14:2-3). Paul spoke of this Jerusalem of God as being a city that is free and not in bondage (Gal 4:26). This is the city that Abraham sought (11:10). The writer will mention it again in 13:4. John describes this city as the abode of all the redeemed of all time who enter it either by resurrection or translation (Rev 21:1—22:5). See [Eternal State](#) for a complete description. See also comments/notes on Rev 21.

23 to the **generalassembly** and **church of the firstborn** who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the **spirits of the righteous made perfect**,

23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,

23 to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, to a judge who is the God of all, to the spirits of righteous people who have been made perfect,

23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

- "...general assembly" - *paneguris*, a festive gathering
- "...church of the firstborn" - may refer to all Church Age saints, or possibly a special reference to Jewish believers in the first century
 - While these Jewish believers comprise only a part of the Church, they are the firstborn ones registered in Heaven (Cf. James 1:18)
 - The Greek construction suggests these are both one group, and probably refers to all believers who died but will receive their full inheritance because they followed the Lord faithfully and did not apostatize
 - "...spirits" - the author calls them *spirits*, which points out that they are not yet united with their bodies because the resurrection of the OT Saints has not yet taken place (Cf. Dan 12:1-3)
 - It should be noted that the author makes a clear distinction between OT Saints and Church Age saints
 - "...the righteous made perfect" - OT Saints
 - These are "just men" because they were justified and saved when they believed. They are like Abraham. When he believed God, it was reckoned to him for righteousness and, at that point, Abraham was clearly a justified man just as the believers today are justified.

— Nevertheless, the OT saints could not be perfected by the blood of animals. When Jesus died, He died for and removed their sins (9:15). Only then were the OT saints “made perfect.”

This verse points to a continued Jewish distinctive in the Eternal State, but Scripture doesn’t specify a continued functional difference. Verse 23 pictures the Eternal State (Heaven), and distinguishes the “general assembly” and “church of the firstborn” from the “spirits of just men made perfect.” They were “just” in their day because of justification by faith (Gen 15:6), but they were “made perfect” at Christ’s death. Israel’s 12 tribes provide the names for the 12 gates of New Jerusalem (Rev 21:12-13), and through these gates, righteous Gentiles will bring their glory into the city (Rev 21:25-26).

24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a **new** covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood of Abel*.

24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood of Abel*.

24 to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better message than Abel’s.”

24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

- Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant (Heb 8)

- “...new” - *neos*, there are two Greek words for “new”:

- *kainos*, new in quality or new in nature
- *neos*, (used here) recently born, new in point of time

— The New Covenant was recently made because Jesus had recently died. It emphasizes the fresh and recent revelation that came through the Messiah.

— Jesus’ is the only blood that can bring one into God’s presence (Cf. 9:11-12,23-24)

- “...Abel” - Abel was the first person to offer a blood sacrifice

— Jesus’ blood is “better” than Abel’s because Jesus’ blood did not cry out for justice, retribution and revenge as Abel’s did (Cf. 11:4; Gen 4:10)

— It “speaks better” because it cries out to God for mercy and pardon on behalf of those for whom Jesus shed it

— This is a testimony that, even though Abel is now dead, blood is still the only acceptable way to God. But now, there is better blood in a better place, and this better blood in this better place continually speaks to men. This is the blood of Jesus. His is the only blood that can bring one into God’s presence; therefore, it is the only blood that is the means of acceptance and approach to God.

These Jewish readers, as believers, are identified with the Heavenly Jerusalem where these six occupants are living. If the readers go back into Judaism, they will not lose their citizenship in the New Jerusalem as such because of their position and their association with the New Jerusalem. Nevertheless, they will lose out on the blessings of this life. They will suffer the terror with which the Old Covenant was given while they are on earth. More specifically, they will suffer the terror of the judgment of the 70 AD destruction.

Five Major Warnings

1. Drifting (2:1-4)
2. Disobedience (3:7—4:13)
3. Failing to Mature (5:11—6:20)
4. Willful Sin (10:26-39)
- 5. Indifference (12:25-29)**

Great loss awaits those who fail to persevere: loss of reward and honor in Christ's coming Millennial Kingdom.

(F) Hebrews are warned against denying the gospel (12:25-29)

Warning #5: Indifference (Heb 12:25-29)

The background reference is Ex 19-20. The people did not want to speak to God directly (Ex 20:19). This was not what God wanted: He wanted a nation of kings and priests (Ex 19:5-6). This final climactic warning compares the shortcomings of the Exodus generation with the shortcomings of Christians. Paul elsewhere referenced those things as written for the benefit of Christians (1 Cor 10).

In the warning, the readers are called to heed *Yahweh*, for an eschatological shaking is coming in which the earthly material order will pass away, leaving on an eternal kingdom. The faithful readers who endure will have a part in the eschatological kingdom—the millennium and the New Jerusalem as “companions” of Jesus, the Messiah-King (1:9,13-14). This kingdom will become an eternal kingdom.

25 See to it that you do not refuse **Him who is speaking**. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns us* from heaven.

25 See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will we escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven.

25 See to it that you do not ignore the one who is speaking. For if the hearers did not escape when they ignored the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we turn away from the one who is from heaven!

25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven:

- "See" - the word is in the emphatic position; the Greek is stronger than the English: "Beware, lest." It emphasizes an obligation they have in light of what he previously said (v18-24).

— The readers were in danger, like their forbearers under Moses, of stopping their ears to the voice of God (Cf. v19)

— This voice shook the heavens as well as the earth!

- "...Him who is speaking" - refers to God when He spoke from Mt. Sinai; the verb is in the present tense, showing that God is speaking even now

— The application is for the readers to not plug their ears to the voice of God as the Israelites did at Mount Sinai. Beware, lest you refuse or lest you reject Him

The author once again uses a *kal ve-chomer* argument: if the Son is greater than Moses, then those who would reject Him now (those who are rejecting the present voice) are guilty of greater sin than are the Israelite fathers of the Exodus. Again, he is not dealing with loss of salvation; he is dealing with temporal, physical punishment in this life. He is dealing with physical death. Those living under the Law did not escape temporal punishment for disobedience to the Law; therefore, how can one turn away from the New Covenant and hope to escape temporal punishment?

26 And His voice **shook the earth** then, but now He has promised, saying, "**YET ONCE MORE** I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN."

26 And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."

26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also heaven."

26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

- "...shook the earth" - there was a shaking in history (at Mount Sinai, Ex 19:18; Judges 5:4-5; Ps 68:8-9; 77:18; 114:4,7), but there will also be a future shaking

— The author points out that the shaking on Mount Sinai was symbolic of the future, final shaking of the heavens and earth

- "...**YET ONCE MORE**" - the writer quotes Haggai 2:6, referring to the shaking that will occur before the Second Coming and the judgments of the Great Tribulation that precede the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom

- In the past, God shook only the earth but, in the future, God plans to shake both the heavens and earth. This will occur in conjunction with the Second Coming.
- From Haggai 2:6, the author draws a present application because there is a shaking, which is soon to come. This shaking would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD.

27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

27 This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

27 The expression "once more" signifies the removal of what can be shaken, that is, what he has made, so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

27 And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

- He re-quotes a phrase from Haggai 2:6 to draw the application that those things which are unshakable are eternal. The temporal things that can be shaken will be removed.

— The shakable things will be destroyed so that those things which are not shaken may remain

— The Greek implies the shaking has already begun, but the current shaking is merely the prelude to the shaking that will bring an end to the present system

— He was anticipating a very imminent destruction of Jerusalem

This epistle was written sometime between 64-66 AD, and the First Jewish Revolt against Rome would break out in full force in 66 AD. In the two years preceding 66 AD, there were several mini-revolts in various cities located in the Land of Israel. These mini-revolts were a prelude to the big revolt. In this verse, the writer implies the shaking has already begun, but the current shaking is merely the prelude to the shaking that will bring an end to the present system. He anticipated a very imminent destruction of Jerusalem.

28 Therefore, since we **receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let's show gratitude**, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

28 Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and worship God in reverence and fear in a way that pleases him.

28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

- "Therefore" - the author now draws a conclusion: since the readers are destined to receive "a kingdom which cannot be moved," we need to have (appropriate) grace (4:16)

- These believers are in the midst of these trials, and this is no time to think about returning to Judaism; it is the time to think about appropriating grace.
- "...receive" - *paralambanō*, present tense verb; this verse gives the impression that believers have presently received a kingdom
- This is another example of the *de jure* (legal) / *de facto* (factual) distinction
- When this verse says that we have (already) received a kingdom, it's referring to the *de jure* (legal, positional) ownership of the kingdom, not that it is a *de facto* (present) reality
- It is not unusual for Scripture, on behalf of believers, to assert ownership of certain blessings even before they are possessed in Christian experience (Cf. 1 Cor 3:21-22, where 'all things' are said to belong to the believer, yet among these things are some that are 'yet to come'. The ownership is legally certain, but the experience of possession may be future.
- "...kingdom which cannot be shaken" - the Messianic Kingdom, which will give way and usher in the Eternal Order (Rev 20-22)
- "...let's show gratitude" - again, he reemphasizes a point he made more than once—the need to appropriate grace (Heb 4:16)
- Incidentally, grace is Paul's primary imprint in all his epistles...

29 for our God is a consuming fire.

29 for our God is a consuming fire.

29 For "our God is an all-consuming fire."

29 For our God is a consuming fire.

- Quoted from Deut 4:24...

- Many associate this metaphor with His judgment of unbelievers in hell; however, this metaphor is also used in the OT with reference to God's judgment of His people (Cf. Ex 24:17; Lev 10:2; Num 16:35; Deut 4:24; 1 Cor 3:15)

— They need to appropriate grace because the alternative is divine judgment

— This phrase points out that, while God is a God of grace, He is also a God of judgment for those who fail to appropriate grace

— The point is the character of God, not the destiny of those judged