

HEBREWS 12

Please turn in your Bibles this evening to Hebrews chapter 12 as we continue our study through the Word of God.

We just finished up last week looking at Hebrews chapter 11, that great hall of faith portion of Hebrews. In fact, we spent four weeks looking at these men and women of faith.

Also, beginning in Hebrews chapter 11 and continuing on through Hebrews chapter 13, the end of this letter, Paul is showing us the superiority of Jesus over the principle of faith.

Keep in mind that encouragement was needed for these Jewish believers in Jerusalem, as they were being drawn back to Judaism, back to the Law because of persecution, because it is what they grew up with and seeing the Temple and the sacrifices, they were being drawn back.

And so, Paul shows them how the Old Testament saints lived, looking ahead to the promise of the Messiah and how they, as Christians, can now look back at the finished work of the Messiah, and thus, live accordingly, walk by faith!

Now we broke this section on ***THE SUPERIORITY OF JESUS OVER THE PRINCIPLE OF FAITH*** down into three divisions.

We have seen in Hebrews chapter 11 ***THE EXAMPLES OF FAITH***, as Paul listed the Old Testament saints who lived a life of faith.

Paul put it this way in Hebrews 11:13, **“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”**

And now, tonight, we will look at Hebrews chapter 12 and we will see ***THE ENDURANCE OF FAITH***, how we are to run in this race that is set before us.

And next time, as we conclude this letter in Hebrews chapter 13, we will see ***THE EXHORTATION OF FAITH.***

Let's face it, we all need encouragement, especially when we are going through a difficult time.

If that is where you are at this evening, listen carefully to what Paul is saying and then run that race that is set before you with endurance.

If you are not going through a difficult time right now, use this to help you when you do, because you will and when it does, run that race that is set before you with endurance!

With that said, let's begin reading in Hebrews chapter 12, starting in verse 1 and see what the Lord has for us this evening as we study His Word.

HEBREWS 12

VERSE 1

As some read what Paul wrote here in Hebrews 12:1 they feel he is speaking of these witnesses in heaven cheering us on in the race we are in!

I don't believe that is what Paul is speaking of, not at all.

You see, Paul opens up Hebrews 12:1 with this word, "**Therefore.**" In other words, it links us back to all that Paul spoke of in Hebrews chapter 11 and he is now going to make an application to that here in Hebrews chapter 12.

What Paul is speaking of here is that he wants these Jewish believers who were struggling with their faith because of the persecution that they were facing, to look at the examples of these men and women of faith and let that encourage them to continue on with endurance!

In fact, the word “**witnesses**” in the Greek does not mean *spectators* but it is a Greek word from which we get our English word *martyr* from!

Look at what these Old Testament saints endured, the faith that they had and use that to spur you on.

I hope you have seen as we have gone through the Old Testament Scriptures how many of them lived with adversity, endured all kinds of hardship and yet, through it all they trusted in God’s promises. In other words, they lived by faith as they kept their eyes on the eternal and not the temporal. And because of their faith, it can encourage us, and I hope they have. I hope that as we have spent those four weeks looking at Hebrews chapter 11 that it has encouraged you in the faith to keep moving forward, not to give up!

Make no mistake about it, many of the people of the Old Testament lived by faith and they finished their journey strong, may we do the same!

It is as Paul said in Hebrews 11:2, “**For by it [their faith] the elders obtained a good testimony.**”

Also, in Hebrews 11:4 Paul wrote, “**By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.**”

The witness of Abel still speaks to us today, his faith in the Lord is speaking to us and encouraging us.

Again, Paul is speaking to these Jewish believers who were struggling with their faith, as the Holy Spirit is speaking to us as well, and He is saying, *“Look at the example of faith these Old Testament saints had, all they endured and then run accordingly. It can be done – they did it and they had less light to run by than you do and yet they were victorious. Thus, so can you!”*

And again, the Holy Spirit is showing this to us as well. May we run accordingly!

It is as Paul said in Hebrews 11:39-40, **“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.”**

We have all that going for us, and that is great. But there is another problem and that is this issue of what is stopping us from running this race, what is hindering us from running in this race!

Paul mentions two things.

First of all, he speaks of **“weight”** or OGGKOS, (ong'-kos) in the Greek.

This is not bad or evil necessarily but they speak of things that get into our life and weigh us down so we can't finish the race that God has set before us with that endurance, we can't finish strong.

You know how it is, the more weight we put on in our physical lives, the harder it is to do the things we did when we didn't have all that weight on.

Let me give you this example and you will see what I mean. And it is a little over the top you might say, but you will get the point.

Imagine a marathon runner who is pulling a refrigerator behind him in the race. He needs food so he thought he would bring some along.

Also, it is a long race so he can catch a movie, so he brings his portable DVD player with him.

To catch up with the news he brings along a newspaper and a favorite book to read along the way.

Now, are any of those things wrong, are any of those things evil?

No, none of these things are bad, they are not wrong or evil.

Then what is the problem?

The problem is this. They will hinder him from finishing the race, they will weigh him down.

We as Christians cannot win or run well if we are carrying excess weight around. For us it can be anything that distracts us from Christ, that keeps us from doing what He has called us to do.

For these Jewish believers it was legalism, the old religious ways that kept them from going forward!

What is holding you down, what is holding you back? What is weighing you down so that you cannot run?

Secondly, Paul speaks of “**sin**” or HAMARTIA, (ham-ar-tee'-ah) in the Greek and it speaks of missing the mark, of coming up short, an offence before God.

Any sin will hinder our progress and specifically here, it is “**the sin**” which I believe is unbelief. And this is not a salvation issue, this is an issue of believing that God will accomplish what He has promised, that He will see you through whatever you are going through!

You see, unbelief will hinder us in this race of faith, and it will give the enemy room to trip us up.

But make no mistake about it, all sin will be a hindrance to you!

And the big question is this. *“What can we do about it?”*

We don’t have to guess because Paul tells us that we are to **“lay aside”** or APOTITHEMI, (ap-ot-eeth’-mee) in the Greek and it speaks of casting off, to put away.

In other words, we have choices to make in this life and the choices we make will either hinder us or propel us forward. They will either keep us apart from where Christ wants us to be or move us closer to the finish line, where He is standing!

You see, these things are trying to **“ensnare us”** or entangle us. They are like an ambush to our faith, but they don’t have to be!

We can run the race with endurance, with joy, with patience, with consistency.

The word for **“endurance”** translates the ancient Greek word HUPOMONE, (hoop-om-on-ay’) *“which does not mean the patience which sits down and accepts things but the patience which masters them . . . It is a determination, unhurrying and yet undelaying, which goes steadily on and refuses to be deflected.”* (Barclay)

Make no mistake about it, the Christian life isn’t a jog down a rose lined path! It is a life of trials, struggles, suffering and adversity that makes our race difficult and painful at times, but we must keep going.

What is interesting to me is that the word for **“race”** is a Greek word from which we get our English word **“agony”** from.

This life is one that will face many conflicts, many struggles.

Have any of you experienced that?

I know, we all have, and some may be experiencing it right now in their life.

And what can happen is we stop dead in our tracks, we no longer move forward in the race that is set before us. Let me explain it like this. We are told,

In a day when so many things and people vie [fight] for our attention, we can experience a paralysis of personal energy. John Maxwell explains this “frozen feeling” that can easily overwhelm us:

William H. Hinson tells us why animal trainers carry a stool when they go into a cage of lions. They have their whips, of course, and their pistols are at their sides.

But invariably they also carry a stool.

Hinson says it is the most important tool of the trainer. He holds the stool by the back and thrusts the legs toward the face of the wild animal.

Those who know maintain that the animal tries to focus on all four legs at once. In the attempt to focus on all four, a kind of paralysis overwhelms the animal, and it becomes tame, weak, and disabled because its attention is fragmented.

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And that can happen to us as well. So many things coming at us and we are trying to focus on all of them, and we become paralyzed and frozen, we don't move forward any longer.

And thus, the big question is, ***“What can we do about that? How can we fix that problem so that we can run this race with endurance?”***

Well, Paul told us to lay aside that extra weight you are carrying around with you. He told us to lay aside the sin that traps us.

And there is something else we need to do as well, and Paul is going to tell us in the next verse. Look at what he says.

VERSE 2

Make no mistake about it, when you are in a race you need to stay focused, you can't get distracted by anything or anyone because, if you take your eyes off the goal, you will trip, you will stumble, you will lose the race!

I remember in a playoff game several years ago, as one of the Bears players intercepted a pass and was running it all the way back for a touchdown, he wasn't paying attention. He took his eyes off the goal line.

Then, all of a sudden, someone who ran him down from across the field, knocked the ball out of his hands at the 1- or 2-yard line. He missed the mark of a touchdown because he let up, he was not paying attention!

And our focus, well, Paul tells us, "**looking unto Jesus . . .**" I like the way that The New American Standard Version translates this. It says, "*fixing our eyes on Jesus.*"

That means it is a willful effort on our part. In fact, listen to what Spurgeon had to say about this. He wrote, "*The Greek word for 'looking' is a much fuller word than we can find in the English language. It has a preposition in it which turns the look away from everything else. You are to look away from all beside to Jesus. Fix not thy gaze upon the cloud of witnesses; they will hinder thee if they take away thine eye from Jesus. Look not on the weights and the besetting sin-these thou hast laid aside; look away from them. Do not even look upon the race-course, or the competitors, but look to Jesus and so start in the race.*"

And look at how important this is.

Paul tells us to keep our eyes upon Jesus because He is the "**author**" or ARCHEGOS, (ar-khay-gos') in the Greek and it speaks of the chief leader.

In other words, He leads the way for us to follow and thus, we need to keep our eyes upon Him! Which should just make sense since Paul said that we are to be **“looking unto Jesus.”** He is the forerunner of the faith that has been set before us, that perfect example that all Christians are to follow!

Notice what we are told in Hebrews 4:15 as we see this played out for us, **“For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.”**

There is our example, follow after Him because Jesus pioneered the path of faith that we as Christians are to follow after!

And Jesus is not only the author of our faith, but He is the **“finisher”** of our faith, TELEIOIOTES, (tel-i-o-tace’) in the Greek, which speaks of completing the work.

Jesus will carry our faith through to completion or as Paul said in Philippians 1:6, **“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”**

The Amplified Bible puts it like this, **“And I am convinced and sure of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will continue until the day of Jesus Christ [right up to the time of His return], developing [that good work] and perfecting and bringing it to full completion in you.”**

Yes, Jesus began the work, He guides us in the work we are doing, and He will complete the work in each of us as we follow Him.

The problem comes when we take our eyes off of Jesus, when other things in our lives distract us, as I have said.

Listen to this true story and you will see what I mean. We are told,

On August 7, 1954, during the British Empire Games in Vancouver, Canada, one of the greatest mile-run matchups ever took place. It was touted as the “miracle-mile” because Roger Bannister and John Landy were the only two sub-four-minute milers in the world. Bannister had been the first man ever to run a four-minute mile. Both runners were in peak condition.

Dr. Bannister, who is today Sir Roger and master of an Oxford college, strategized that he would relax during the third lap and save everything for his finishing drive. But as they began the third lap, John Landy poured it on, stretching his already substantial lead. Immediately, Bannister adjusted his strategy, increasing his pace and gaining on Landy. The lead was cut in half, and at the bell for the final lap they were even.

Landy began running even faster, and Bannister followed suit. He felt he was going to lose if Landy did not slow down. Then came the famous moment (replayed thousands of times in print and celluloid) as at the last stride before the home stretch the crowds roared. Landy could not hear Bannister’s footfall and thus compulsively looked back – a fatal lapse of concentration. Bannister launched his attack, and Landy did not see him until he lost the lead. Roger Bannister won the “miracle mile” that day by five yards.

Landy’s lapse serves as a modern visualization of what the writer of Hebrews implicitly warned against in his earlier charge to “run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:1, 2, NASB). Those who look away from Christ – the end goal of our race – will never finish well. And this was exactly what was happening to some treading the stormy waters mounting around the early church. They had begun to take their eyes off Christ and to fix them instead on the hardships challenging them.

. . . They were, in fact, a microcosm of many in the modern church who have lost their focus through hardship – who say, “It all began so well. But I didn’t expect this. I had problems before I became a Christian, but nothing like this. Thanks for the offer of the abundant life, but I’ve got an abundance of problems already! You go ahead. I think I’ll take a breather.”

- R. Kent Hughes, Hebrews Volume Two, An Anchor for the Soul, pp. 167-168

Make no mistake about it, we will only finish well in the Christian race when we fix our eyes upon the goal, Jesus Christ! If we take our eyes off of Him, if we become distracted by other things, we will not finish well. I realize that some may disagree with that but hear me out.

That is what the Holy Spirit is saying through Paul and God is not wrong, we are if we are thinking that way!

And notice that Jesus did this for **“the joy that was set before Him.”**

What was **“the joy that was set before Him”**?

It wasn’t the cross, he endured the cross because of this joy.

You see, Jesus looked past the cross to the joy that was beyond it, what a great lesson for us!

Now what was that joy?

I believe it is being seated at that right hand of the Father, being restored to glory once again.

Jesus said in John 17:4-5, **“I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.”**

All the shame, all the pain, all the mocking's and beatings He laid aside because He saw the end results - seated in glory once again as the work He was sent to do was finished.

What was that work?

To redeem sinful man and thus, in a sense, we too are that joy that was set before Him, part of the work that He completed!

Now, how does that help us?

Because one day we will be glorified with our Lord, we will be with Him in glory.

Thus, let us look past the things we are going through because they are temporary!

May we look to Jesus, keep our eyes focused upon Him as this race heats us, so that we may finish the race, not a sprint but a marathon you might say, with joy in our hearts, looking past these things and unto Jesus!

And think about how hard that is, looking past the hard things in our life and looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith and understanding the joy of coming before Him one day, we endure these times for an eternity with Him!

VERSES 3-4

This has been Paul's point throughout this letter to these Jewish believers who were struggling with their faith, to **CONSIDER JESUS**, to look at His example to be an encouragement in their walk, what they were going through!

Yes, they faced social and economic persecution, and even some physical persecution, but not to bloodshed, at least not yet!

And maybe this is a little rebuke by Paul against these believers, as he tells them, and I am paraphrasing, *“Stop feeling sorry for yourselves, you don’t have it so bad. You haven’t been abused like Jesus who suffered a lot more than any of you. You haven’t even shed a single drop of blood by standing up for your faith.”*

Look at what Jesus endured for us. Jesus has died for us, shed His blood for us and He was persecuted, having done nothing wrong, He was righteous.

Thus, because we are His servants will also will face tough times as Paul said in Romans 8:17, **“and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”**

Folks, Jesus doesn’t ask more of us than we are capable of handling with Him, more than what He experienced in the Incarnation!

He knows what we are going through, and He will strengthen us through those times if we would only keep our eyes fixed upon Him. Don’t grow weary, don’t become discouraged, look to Jesus!

Paul said in I Corinthians 15:58, **“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”**

And in Galatians 6:9-10 Paul said, **“And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”**

May we not grow weary but finish the race that God has set before us. Let us not be discouraged but have faith in the One who is guiding our lives to the finish line!

VERSES 5-6

Paul is quoting from Proverbs 3:11-12 and this is so important for us to understand, especially in the days we are living in.

I think one of the problems we have, especially when we are going through difficult times, is we forget what God has said in His Word and we go by emotions and feelings instead, and that gets us off course.

We see here that Paul is speaking of “**chastening**” or discipline. It is the Greek word PAIDEIA, (pahee-di’-ah) and it speaks of the training of a child so that they may grow and mature.

Now we tend to think of discipline in a way that a young child gets disciplined, maybe spanked on the bottom to punish them for their disobedience, or the wrong that they have done.

But, again, that Greek word carries with it the idea of instruction, of correction, of training, and of education!

It really is not punishment, but loving discipline by God!

And this is important for us to understand, that God’s chastening is not punitive or retaliatory, but it is corrective to His children, to believers.

Yes, outside of Christ there is judgment, it is punitive, but not in Christ!

Paul said in Romans 8:1, “**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.**”

Thus, Paul, in quoting out of Proverbs 3:11-12 is showing us that God’s chastening is not a sign of rejection but of love towards us, and folks, none of us are above this kind training!

I like the way Arthur Pink comments on this. He said, ***“Remind yourself of how much dross there is yet among the gold and view the corruption of your own heart and marvel that God has not smitten you more severely. Form the habit of heeding His taps, and you will be less likely to receive His raps.”***

I like that, and it is true. May we be sensitive to what He is showing us as we are going through situations, learn those lessons so we can move on!

And we have to remember that we are in training you might say, and all the things we go through is not because we have done something wrong.

But many Christians today just don't understand that, they just don't get that God is teaching them lessons of faith to equip them and to make them more like Jesus!

Two great examples of this in the Bible are Joseph and Job. They went through incredibly difficult circumstances and it was not because they did something wrong. It was not because God was disciplining them. It was because God was teaching them, instructing them and helping them to grow.

And what happens many times for Christians is that when these difficult things come upon their lives, they think God is punishing them, they become discouraged and they feel like giving up and dropping out of the race, and many times they do!

CONSIDER JESUS AND FORGE AHEAD IN THE RACE THAT GOD HAS FOR YOU!

VERSES 7-8

God does not chasten us as punishment, as I have said, why is that?

Because our sins have already been paid in full by Jesus.

Thus, God chastens us for correction and because we are His children.

Think about it. You don't discipline your neighbor's children, even though you may want to, but you do discipline your own children because they are yours!

That is the idea here.

Listen to what Warren Wiersbe had to say regarding this. He wrote,

Chastening is the evidence of the Father's love. Satan wants us to believe that the difficulties of life are proof that God does not love us, but just the opposite is true.

Sometimes God's chastening is seen in His rebukes from the Word or from circumstances. . . .

Whatever the experience, we can be sure that His chastening hand is controlled by His loving heart. The Father does not want us to be pampered babies; He wants us to become mature adult sons and daughters who can be trusted with the responsibilities of life.

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – NT, p. 840

Now, if you can sin, do as you please without any consequences from God, without chastening, then you are not a child of God!

VERSES 9-10

Now I don't know about you, but you probably felt the same way when you were growing up, that you didn't always agree with the discipline your father or mother gave you, I didn't. But I did respect them even though I didn't always agree with them.

And when I became a father, I saw the wisdom in what they were doing, that their desire was not to hurt me but to help me to grow and mature.

Now, as earthly fathers' go, as earthly mothers' go, our discipline is not always perfect, sometimes we discipline for our own good, our own benefit.

You know, bedtime at 6:00 PM, why, so I can relax.

No, it wasn't that bad, but you get the idea.

But our heavenly Father, His discipline is perfect, and it is always for our profit, so that we will be more like Him.

It is as Peter admonishes us in I Peter 1:13-16, **“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”**

God is working in us, purging that dross from our lives, the garbage that is in there and in the end, we will look back and see the wisdom of His actions in our lives!

Praise the Lord He is working in us, even though we might not like it now, in the end, we will see it is worth it.

Paul put it like this in II Corinthians 4:17, **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”**

God is working in us, training us, teaching us, helping us to grow and mature in the faith and, as Paul said, when God is done working in us there are the results, **“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.”** II Corinthians 3:18.

GOD IS WORKING AND WE SHOULD BE SO THANKFUL THAT HE IS AND THAT HE DOES NOT GIVE UP ON US!

VERSE 11

This almost seems funny, of course discipline is not something we rejoice over.

I can honestly say that when my dad was disciplining me, I never said, ***“Thanks dad, I needed that!”***

But, like I have said, looking back I see the wisdom of his actions, and we see that even more with God as He disciplines us, obviously.

Paul wants us to look beyond the process of chastening and look to the results of the chastening.

Now why don't some see the **“peaceable fruit of righteousness”** in their lives?

Because they are not trained, they either are rejecting what God is saying or they are not listening to what He is saying to them. Thus, they will go through the trial, the chastening until they learn the lesson!

Listen to these statements regarding chastening and what we should gain from them. We are told first of all from Leslie Weatherhead,

Like all men I love and prefer the sunny uplands of experience, where health, happiness, and success abound, but I have learned far more about God and life and myself in the darkness of fear and failure than I have ever learned in the sunshine.

There are such things as the treasures of darkness. The darkness, thank God, passes. But what one learns in the darkness one possesses forever. “The trying things,” says Bishop Fenelon, “which you fancy come between God and you, will prove means of unity with Him, if you bear them humbly. Those things that overwhelm us and upset our pride, do more good than all that which excites and inspirits us.”

- Leslie Weatherhead

And listen to what C. H. Spurgeon had to say. We are told,

I am afraid that all the grace I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and the anvil, the fire and the file? Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house.

- C. H. Spurgeon

Think about how a diamond is formed. Under intense pressure and heat and I think we lose sight of that when the pressure and heat are turned up, but God is working, never forget that!

Now, starting in Hebrews 12:12 Paul is going to tell us that not only running this race of faith well will bring glory to God and help us to grow, mature but it will also help our weaker brothers and sisters to run the race well, it will encourage them!

Look at what Paul says.

VERSES 12-13

For these Jewish believers, they allowed unbelief to discourage them and their physical appearance reflected what was going on in their heart.

Thus, Paul is telling them, ***“Hey guys, since all that Christ has done for you, since He has given you His example to live by, since you have His truths, stand up and move out!***

Follow those paths the Lord has set for you!”

The word “**paths**” or TROCHIA, (trokh-ee-ah’) in the Greek speaks of the tracks left by the wheels of a cart or chariot and then later on, those paths are used by travelers, they would follow those paths.

Folks, as we follow the path of Jesus, may others follow behind us, may we be examples to them moving in the right direction, not the wrong!

And how wonderful it is to have brothers and sisters in the Lord encourage you to continue on in the race, to spur you on. May we do that!

It is as Proverbs 4:25-27 says, “**Let your eyes look straight ahead, And your eyelids look right before you. Ponder the path of your feet, And let all your ways be established. Do not turn to the right or the left; Remove your foot from evil.**”

In other words, Paul is calling for them to *STAND STRONG!*

VERSES 14-17

Paul has told us to *STAND STRONG* and now he tells us to *GET RIGHT!*

You see, Paul is admonishing them to live at peace with their fellow man, not to let bitterness grow because it will infect those around you. Instead, let the love of God flow from your life and let that infect those around you!

You see, you can produce bitter fruit or good fruit; the choice is yours if you want to *STAND STRONG* and *GET RIGHT!*

Now this troubles some. Is Paul speaking of a works righteousness here, a works salvation? It seems like he might be! If we don't do certain things, we can fall short and not make it in, right?

Not at all! You see, positionally we are in Christ, but practically speaking we need to live out our faith if we desire to have a close relationship with God.

You *CANNOT* be bitter, fighting with your fellow man and be close to the Lord. I have seen people do this and it is not pretty, and it doesn't really fool anyone!

You may not believe me, you shouldn't, but just listen to what John tells us in I John 2:9-11, **“He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.”**

You see, our practice needs to match our position!

Please understand that there is a positional holiness and a practical holiness.

Positional holiness is what Christ has done and imputed into our lives. The Father sees us as perfect.

But that is not what Paul is speaking of here, he is speaking of a practical holiness or living out our faith. And this does not earn us salvation but becomes a fruit of salvation. You see, we desire to separate from the world and to live a life of purity and separation to God and that is a mark of genuine saving faith in a person's heart.

And the example that Paul shows them is that of Esau who sold his birthright for a morsel of food, to satisfy his body appetite and many Christians do the same by selling their birthright of intimacy with God for the temporary, satisfying their body appetite, what pleases them instead of the Lord!

Now Esau didn't get this birthright back even though he cried out to God, why?

Because his cry was based on what he lost, and he was not willing to repent. Esau wanted the blessing of God, but he didn't want God! It doesn't work like that!

Thus, ***GET RIGHT*** with your fellow man!

VERSES 18-21

Paul is admonishing those Jews who were tempted to return to the Law to remember the terrifying scene that took place at Mount Sinai when God first gave the Law to Israel under Moses.

And in this Paul is going to compare the Law to Grace, the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, the inability to speak with God to **THE BOLDNESS** to come into His presence.

First of all, as you know, the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai and you can read about it in Exodus 19:10-25, what it was like back then, what transpired, what they needed to do! It truly was terrifying.

In fact, Moses tells us what it was like and Paul also tells us.

The mountain was fenced off, there was no trespassing, no touching the mountain of God for if you did you would be put to death!

The people were told to wash their clothes and abstain from sexual relations during this time.

They saw the mountain burn with fire, blackness overshadowed it, gloom like a cloud covered it, the wind blew strong!

There was thunder and lightning and the sound of a trumpet calling forth the nation to meet with God.

Yes, God spoke to Israel from Sinai, but He wanted them in every way possible to stay away!

And in Exodus 20:18-21 we are told, **“Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, ‘You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’ And Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.’ So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was.”**

That is what the Law does, it shows us our sin and prevents us from coming before God. And the people were terrified because they saw their sin.

Now, let me also say this. Did fear prevent them from sinning?

Not at all for in 40 days after this they molded a calf and said that this is the god that brought them out of Egypt, they were involved in immoral sexual relations as they worshiped this golden calf.

Now, if fear doesn't work, then what does?

The Grace of God as we see Paul speak of that next!

VERSES 22-24

For those who want to go back to the Law, are you kidding me?

Make no mistake about it, we don't meet with God on Mount Sinai in Arabia but on a different mountain, Mount Zion in Jerusalem!

So what is the difference? Is there a difference?

You bet there is. Let me show you the difference and then you can choose for yourself where you want to meet with God.

Look at this contrast between Mount Sinai and the heavenly Mount Zion!

Mount Sinai was marked with fear and terror while Mount Zion is a place of love and forgiveness.

At Mount Sinai only Moses could approach God, but on Mount Zion there is an innumerable company that can draw close to God.

At Mount Sinai Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant, the Law, while on Mount Zion Jesus is the mediator of the New Covenant!

Mount Sinai is all about the Law while Mount Zion is all about Grace!

Mount Sinai is in the desert. Mount Zion is in heaven.

Mount Sinai spoke of earthly things. Mount Zion speaks of heavenly things.

Mount Sinai was characterized by guilty men in fear. Mount Zion features just men made perfect.

At Mount Sinai, Moses was the mediator. At Mount Zion, Jesus is the mediator.

Mount Sinai brings an Old Covenant, which was ratified by the blood of animals. Mount Zion brings a New Covenant, which is ratified by the blood of God's precious Son.

Mount Sinai was all about exclusion, keeping people away from the mountain. Mount Zion is all about invitation.

And, as I have said, Mount Sinai is all about Law. Mount Zion is all about grace.

Thus, Paul is saying to these Jewish believers, ***“Don’t approach Mount Zion as if you were approaching Mount Sinai. Don’t be afraid, put away your hesitation, and GET BOLD coming to God!”***

Now here in Hebrews 12:24, when Paul speaks of the blood of Abel being sprinkled, he is not talking about his martyrdom, his murder by his brother Cain. Paul is speaking of the blood sacrifice that Abel presented to God by his obedient faith and God accepted it as it was consumed in the fire from heaven!

Why is the New Covenant better than the sacrifice made by Abel?

Remember what Paul told us in Hebrews 9:11-15, **“But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”**

Also, in Hebrews chapter 9 we are told, **“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission. . . . And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”** Hebrews 9:22, 27-28.

You see, the sacrifice was completed; Jesus finished the work on the cross of Calvary for us. There does not need to be any further sacrifice and thus, the shed blood of Christ speaks to us of better things than the sacrifice made by Abel.

And maybe the question some may have is “*What does it speak to us?*”

The blood sacrifice that Abel made to the Lord, and was accepted by the Lord speaks of *JUSTICE, JUDGMENT* and *REVENGE*.

You see, sin separated man from God and payment must be made for man’s sin, justice put forth – the blood of the innocent shed for the guilty!

On the other end of the spectrum is the shed blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God who has come and taken away the sins of the world.

And His shed blood speaks to us of *MERCY, FORGIVENESS*, and *GRACE!*

Therefore, why go back to something that is imperfect when we have that which is perfect and can cleanse us from all unrighteousness, the blood of Jesus Christ received into our lives by faith!

It would make no sense to go back, and Paul wants them to understand that, and he has been saying this over and over again in this letter in many different ways!

VERSES 25-28

Here’s the thing. If there were consequences for rebelling at Mount Sinai, how much more will there be consequences for rejecting God’s greater work at Mount Zion!

Jesus put it this way in John 8:24, “**Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am [He], you will die in your sins.**”

And here in Hebrews 12:26 Paul is quoting out of Haggai 2:6 which speaks of the coming Tribulation Period and into the Millennial Kingdom.

Yes, on Mount Sinai the earth shook but there is coming a day when God will not only shake this earth, but heaven also, He is going to create a new heaven and a new earth one day!

But why is God going to do this?

Because all that is not of Him, will be removed!

Yes, God's Kingdom will stand but all else will be gone!

Too often we as Christians place all of our energy into those things that are going to be shaken and will not stand, instead of focusing on the Kingdom of God, those things that will last!

Spurgeon put it like this, *“Glory be to God, our kingdom cannot be moved! Not even dynamite can touch our dominion: no power in the world, and no power in hell, can shake the kingdom which the Lord has given to his saints. With Jesus as our monarch we fear no revolution and no anarchy: for the Lord hath established this kingdom upon a rock, and it cannot be moved or removed.”*

Over the last several months I guess for many, their world has been shaken. And I want you to understand that if you are shaken, you are looking in the wrong direction, look up for our redemption is drawing near.

I like what Warren Wiersbe wrote regarding this and hopefully this will give you a correct perspective of things. He wrote,

What shall we do as we live in a shaking world? Listen to God speak and obey Him. Receive grace day by day to serve Him “with reverence and godly fear.”

Do not be distracted or frightened by the tremendous changes going on around you. Keep running the race with endurance. Keep looking to Jesus Christ.

Remember that your Father loves you. And draw on God's enabling grace.

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – NT, p. 840

And look at how Paul closes out this chapter.

VERSE 29

Now as some read that, they may be thinking, ***“I thought God was a God of love, peace, grace, mercy, forgiveness? If that is true, which it is, then why is He a consuming fire?”***

Because you can't approach God any way you want, only through Christ.

Thus, if you stand before God in your own righteousness, which are like filthy rags, you will be consumed in His fire of judgment!

You don't have to be, but if you reject Him you will!

If you don't approach Him in Christ, His fire will consume you!

Those are choices every person will make, to approach God by our works or by His Grace.

As we place our faith in Jesus Christ His blood will cleanse us from all unrighteousness!

Make no mistake about it, our God is a God of love, but may we never forget the fact that **“... our God is a consuming fire.”** Hebrews 12:29.