

The Book Of Hebrews
Part III
Practical Application of Doctrine to Life (10:19-13:25)
Lesson 11: (12:1-29)

Outline thus far.

Part I - Jesus, The Incarnate Son Of God (1:1-4:13).

I. God's Final Word Spoken Through His Son (1:1-2:18).

II. The Need For The Incarnation Explained (2:5-18).

III. First Digression - Exhortation To "Hold Fast" And Warning Against Unbelief (3:1-4:13).

Part II - Jesus, Our Great High Priest (4:14-10:18).

I. Jesus Qualified For Priesthood (4:14-5:10).

II. Second Digression - Warning Against Apostasy And Encouragement To Perfection (5:12-6:20).

III. Jesus A High Priest After The Order Of Melchizedek (7:1-28).

IV. "A Ministry More Excellent" (8:1-10:18).

Part III - Practical Application of Doctrine to Life (10:19-13:25)

I. The impact this teaching is to have (10:19-39).

a. Practical consequences that should follow (10:19-25).

B. Warning against apostasy (10:26-31).

C. Encouragement to Endure Drawn from Remembrance of Former Days (10:32-39).

II. Illustrations Of The Power Of Faith (11:1-40).

A. A description of faith (1:1).

B. Faith at the dawn of time (11:2-7).

C. The faith of Abraham and his family (11:8-22).

D. Moses' parents, Moses and the first returning Israelites (11:23-31).

E. More triumphs, too numerable to innumerate (11:32-40).

IV. Exhortation Resumed (from Chapter 10), With Climactic Conclusion reached in 12.

Run of thought.

The last few verses of ch. 10 (35-39) with its call to patience under severe trial, provides the basis for linking ch. 11 into the same thought. Previously the writer had referred to faithful endurance exhibited during past persecution and encouraged them "to show the same diligence to the full assurance of faith until the end..." (6:10-11). Those testing times appear to have been close and so the call is "do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward" (10:35).

They were to "imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promise" (6:12). Chapter 11 comprises a record of many who did that; and their example of spiritual toughness under extreme affliction provided great motivation for these Hebrew Christians to remain firm and exercise a similar faith in the testing times that lay ahead.

A. Hortatory Inference Drawn from the Illustrations of Faith (12:1-4).

The circumstances in which the Christian life is led (1).

"surrounded by so great a cloud (nepos) of witnesses" (1a).

Nephtali describes "A cloudy, shapeless mass covering the sky", a cloudbank as opposed to a single cloud. Consequently attention is drawn to a great multitude/throng of past heroes who trusting their future to God patiently endured and testified to the power of faith.

"therefore we also, since... let us". These examples are used to encourage the readers that in the difficulties to come by exercising faith they could also last it out and triumph.

The preliminaries to successful living and an analogy to the athlete (1b). The race in question is a marathon rather than a sprint. Participants in the Christian counterpart are to lay aside two things – every "weight" or unnecessary encumbrance and "sin which so easily ensnares".

The ultimate inducement to perseverance – the most complete model for those who live by faith (2-4).

"Looking unto Jesus" (2).

1. Considered separately, His perseverance under such trials set Him apart from and above those who went before.
2. He is described as the "author (archegos) and finisher of our faith". Archegos denotes "He who takes a lead in, or provides the first occasion of, anything" (Vine). As Barnes put it "he is the first and the last as an example of faith, or of confidence in God."
3. That which enabled Him to endure and despise the shame was "the joy that was set before Him". The Father's will having been done, "He has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God". A similar anticipation of better things to come gave the Hebrew Christians courage in their ordeal years afterwards (10:34).

The antidote to faint-heartedness (3-4).

1. "For consider (analogizomai) Him..." (3). Analogizomai means "to think over, consider, ponder" (Thayer).
2. Great as their trials may have seemed, they had not been called to lay down their lives (4). The writer continues to borrow language from the games but likely the allusion is to the mental conflict waged within the mind of the Messiah in Gethsemane when the struggle against sin was so great that He shed blood-like drops of perspiration (Lk 22:39-45).

B. The mature View of Affliction (12:5-13).

The design of trials (5-6; Prov 3:11-12).

The admonition (5). The readers had not only overlooked the fact that their afflictions had so far been limited but they had also forgotten the exhortation not to think lightly of the Lord's discipline nor be discouraged when exposed to it.

The reason for cultivating this attitude - the experience of these trials was an evidence of the paternal care of God (6). The very fact that God corrects and seeks to restrain from a path that would lead to ruin manifests His concern and so much so is this true that He disciplines every son whom He receives/acknowledges.

The application to be drawn (7-8).

If called upon to receive correction then God is dealing with you as a son but if discipline is not administered then you are illegitimate and not sons. Those who have not been chastened have not had fathers; fathers who do not love their sons enough to discipline them are not worthy to be called fathers. The assertion refers to the fact that discipline is administered and not to the manner with which it is borne.

God to be respected more than human fathers (9-10).

The reason (9-10a). That administered by fleshly fathers is coloured by the limitations of human judgement and weakness, the benefit being short-lived whereas that of the heavenly is always properly directed.

The Divine purpose is that we might share in His holiness (10b).

The immediate and future impact of chastening contrasted (11; cf. Psa 119:67, 71).

Application of these insights with regard to the reader's circumstances (12-13).

Stripping away the figurative dressing of the language, the admonition is - recognising that affliction is sent from God and is an evidence of His "paternal watchfulness" do two things (Barnes):

1. "Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees" (12 ESV; cf. Isa 35:3). Fatigue and loss of hope in the strife of battle causes the hands to hang limp and knees to tremble but the prospect of victory does much to renew strength. Therefore invigorated by these truths gather your strength ...
2. "And make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed" (13). The encouragement is to, by every proper means, make the path to heaven as easy as possible.

C. The Pursuit of Holiness (12:14-17).

A two-fold instruction (14). Follow -

1. "Peace with all men." Particularly relevant at a time when a renewed exposure to trials at the hands of persecutors was expected (cf. 10:34-36). Rather than give way to retaliation and desires for vengeance, seek peace including with those who mean you harm! Yet it is not a peace to be made at any price. Perhaps this is why it is linked with holiness.
2. "And holiness (hagiasmos)." Hagiasmos – "consecration, purification... sanctification of heart and life" (Thayer).

It is critically important that these two things be developed because without them no one will see the Lord.

Caution to be exercised in the pursuit of holiness (15-17).

Things to be guarded against (15-16a).

"lest... fall short of the grace of God" This could happen if the Christian turned his back on Jesus - apostatized.

"Lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble and by this many be defiled." A reference to idolatry in which context these words are used (Dt 29:18).

"Lest there be any fornicator or profane person (bebelos) like Esau..." Allusions were made to Esau's licentious character in the OT narrative (Gen 36:2; 26:34-35).

The warning concerning his profanity re-enforced (16b-17; Gen 25:29-34).

1. Bebelos means "primarily, 'permitted to be trodden, accessible' (from baino, 'to go,' whence belos, 'a threshold'), hence, 'unhallowed, profane' (opposite to hieros, 'sacred')...."
2. For a trifle and without thought he gave away the highest blessing he could have possessed and treated it as on a par with the most common and mundane things of life (comp. Moses Heb 11:24-26; Mt 7:6).
3. Esau had made an ill-considered decision carrying irreversible consequences and we are warned against doing the same as we pursue holiness (Gen 27:34-40).

V. Spiritual Realities of the New Age Reinforcing the Call for Holiness (12:18-29).

A. A contrast made with the Revelation of God at Sinai (12:18; cf. Ex 19; Dt 9:6-2).

The nature of the mountain set it in contrast – it was something that could be touched.

Its terrifying aspects summarised.

B. The superior Position of Christians (12:22-24).

The significance of their position (22a).

The contrast (22) is with the heavenly realities of which the earthly is only a shadow or type. The Temple had been built on Mount Moriah; Zion was another hill within the city and became the term that described the whole area where God had His presence. When the Israelites came to Mt Sinai their journey was not completed. Even when they occupied Jerusalem and built the Temple they were only partially there. But now Christians have arrived in the heavenly abode - at least by faith (cf. Gal 4:21-31) and have their citizenship in heaven.

The details of what is to be found (22b-24).

"an innumerable company of angels" (22; Rev 5:11-12; 7:11-12).

"The general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven" (23).

1. Scholars disagree as regards the application of the general assembly. Some apply it backwards and argue that it is connected with the church others hold that it is said in reference to the "firstborn" ones (plural).
2. Remember that Esau's birthright was the right of the firstborn (Dt 21:15-17). The church is described here as citizens of heaven all having the right of firstborn ones but in contrast to Esau, rejoicing in it (Lk 10:20; Phil 4:3).

"to God the Judge of all" (23; cf. 4:13; 9:27; 10:30-31; & 4:16).

"to the spirits of just men made perfect" (23). To be explained by previous passages (7:11, 19; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40).

"To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant" (24). At Sinai the Israelites looked to Moses but Christians look to Jesus who is the mediator of a better covenant (8:6) (R. Harkrider).

"To the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (24). The reference is to the offering of Abel and the message he sent through the ages by virtue of it (4). Yet the blood of Jesus speaks better things than Abel did of which sacrifice Abel's was only a type. Note that the original Grk. contains no reference to Abel's blood.

C. The practical Conclusion from the Contrast (12:25-29).

The imperative (25-27).

The admonition and reason for compliance (25). Since the position of the Christian is so superior there is even greater reason to listen. Similar arguments were made in respect of angels and Moses (2:1-4; 10:28-29).

The power of God's word (26-27).

Then His voice shook or made Mt Sinai and the surrounding area quake. Through Haggai God promised a future upheaval which is expressed in the likeness of an earthquake: "yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven". The writer applied the thought to the even greater changes which would take place with the coming of the Messiah (26; Hag 2:6-7).

In this great agitation, "Now this, "Yet once more"" indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made. This has reference to the temporary things of the old order and this shaking will continue till all that can be removed, is removed "that the things which cannot be shaken" - all that is not fixed on a permanent and immovable footing - "may remain". These things that remain are what we have in Christ, the New Covenant and all of the things associated with the heavenly Jerusalem.

Behaviour appropriate to the new order (28-29).

Its character and demands (28). The kingdom to be received by Christians "cannot be shaken" i.e., unlike the old order of things it is to give place to no other, is permanent, unchanging and never to pass away. Ours is "a city which has foundations" sought by the patriarchs and prepared by God (11:10, 13-16). It is the "continuing city" which "is to come" (13:14). Consequently we are to seek God's grace that we may serve Him acceptably "with reverence and godly fear".

The reason - God "is a consuming fire" (29; 10:30-31).