

Hebrews Chapter Twelve (vv.1-17)

The Endurance of Christ (vv.1-3)

1 Wherefore (let us also) seeing we ~~also~~ are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, ~~let us (also)~~ 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, The Christian life is pictured as an endurance race which the heroes of Hebrews 11 have successfully completed. This 'great cloud' or 'throng' of people surround and encircle us on every side, **not** as *spectators* but as those who have been witnessed to by God because of their faith. This should encourage us to seek to emulate their victorious lives. *John Brown: The deeds, sufferings and triumphs of the ancient worthies have an influence on the minds of the Hebrews. They seem to encourage: 'We once struggled as you now struggle, and you shall conquer as we have conquered. Onward! Onward!'* In order to run effectively we must lay aside and put off 'every weight' and any 'sin' which easily entangles. '**Weight**' is 'a swelling of superfluous flesh', i.e. spiritual flabbiness, too much interest in myself.¹ '**Sin**' in general will always hinder our progress but there may also be a hint here of the particular sin of *unbelief* so prevalent amongst the readers (see 10.35, 39, 11.6). Let us then 'run with endurance' the 'race marked out for us' (by Christ). This is not a 100m sprint but a steeplechase beset with obstacles. We should have a steady determination to keep going.

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

How can we 'lay aside' every weight and sin? **How** can we endure? By 'looking off' and 'away' unto Jesus where **He now is**. Let us look away from: ourselves, circumstances and the cloud of witnesses to the ultimate example Himself. **Vine:** *The eyes gaze at that which engrosses the heart. What or who transcends our gaze?* The Lord Jesus is the Author and Finisher of faith. As **Author** (note Acts 3.15, 5.31, Hebrews 2.10) He is the Pioneer and Chief Example of the life of faith. As **Finisher** (note 2.10, 5.9, 7.28) He completed and perfected the pathway of faith. Thus He *began* and *finished* the perfect race of faith. His race was marked by 'endurance', never more so at Calvary where He 'remained under cross' counting the shame as nothing for the 'joy' of being obedient to the Father's will and prospect of ending the race in fullness of 'joy' at the Father's right hand, Psalm 16.11. Here He has now 'sat down' with the result that He 'remains seated' (see also 1.3, 8.1, 10.12). He began in faith (Psalm 22.9), He continued in faith (2.13) and He finished in faith (Luke 23.46). Therefore, in order that we do not become weary in our souls and give up, we should also 'consider Him' as **He was here**; carefully *computing* and *contemplating* the opposition in **word** and **act** He endured from sinners.

The Exhortation of Chastening (vv.4-11)

4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. **5** And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto ~~children~~ (sons), My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: Though the Hebrews were persecuted for their faith (10.32-34) they had not suffered to the extent the Lord had, nor had they been called to **die** in their 'agonising fight' against sinners and 'sin' in its various forms. *David Gooding: We must expect opposition. We must expect to get hurt. But cheer up, says the writer, you're not dead yet!* Indeed, their suffering must be viewed in the light of God's purposes for them. It was necessary for their '**education**'! From Proverbs 3.11-12 they should have learned that 'chastening' is the normal expectation for those who are sons. 'Chastening' does not carry the idea of punishment, but rather spiritual training, correction and education in order to bring a son to maturity. *David Gooding: God does not choose to stop it, rather to use it. The enemy intends it for harm, but He intends to use it to discipline and perfect our Christian character.* However, chastening will not produce its desired end if we treat it 'carelessly' (despise) through complaining or questioning. We can also become 'despondent' (faint), give up and feel depressed (see Psalm 42.11). When facing difficulties we must remember that a God of love has allowed them for our spiritual good. We should be asking for grace to bear in the trial and seeking lessons to learn from the trial.

6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. **7** ~~If ye endure chastening~~ (It is for the purpose of chastening that you are enduring). As God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? **8** But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Chastening is not always a sign of God's displeasure (although it can be, cf. 2 Samuel 12.10, 14). Rather it is evidence of His **love** (v.6, Revelation 3.19) and our **sonship** (vv.7-8). Chastening or correction may come through the word of God (2 Timothy 3.16) or it can be more severe and painful in the form of persecution (as suggested by 'scourgeth'). Nevertheless, the Hebrews should seek to 'remain under' or endure (see 10.32-34) as it was not for their harm, but education. In any normal family situation it was the responsibility of the father to discipline, instruct and correct their

¹ **Flanigan:** How many saints are often hindered by weights of which they will ask: 'Is there anything wrong with it?' Of course there would likely be no law against an athlete wearing clumsy footwear, or winter clothing but such a thing is unthinkable! Why are we encumbered then by business, hobbies, sport and other pursuits which waste time, energy and interest which should be given to the race!

children (Exodus 12.26, 13.14, Deuteronomy 6.7). Every child in the family would receive such correction out of love and a desire to see them mature spiritually (Proverbs 13.24, 19.18, 22.15, 29.17). Likewise, chastening is the unfailing portion of all those in God's family. In fact, anyone who is not chastened of the Father is fictitious and illegitimate. Those of the Hebrews who remained under the chastening hand of God would prove themselves to be true sons of God. Those who renounced Christ and returned to Judaism to escape persecution would show they had never been saved.

Verses 9-11: We respected (reverenced) our earthly parents because they 'instructed' and 'taught' us in childhood (v.9). Their chastening was for a short period of time and 'after their own pleasure', i.e. as seemed best to them, even if this may have been, at times, unjust or unfair (v.10). Not so with our 'spiritual Father' (Father of spirits). He **consistently** educates us throughout life for our '**benefit**' that we might be 'sharers' of 'His holiness'! This will find *ultimate* fulfilment in the future but has a *present* development now as He seeks to cultivate His very own holiness within us. Let us therefore submit to His wisdom in the trial and enjoy spiritual life more abundantly (John 10.10). The writer acknowledges that whilst chastening 'continues' it is 'painful' or brings 'sorrow' (grievous). However, after it has finished it 'gives back' (yieldeth) a 'harvest' of 'peace' (tranquillity, wholeness, prosperity) and practical 'righteousness', i.e. right living before the eyes of God and men. Note. This can only be the case for those who are 'exercised' thereby. This is the reward of those who have been worked hard in the *spiritual gymnasium* and are living in the good of such training.²

The Expectation of Conduct (vv.12-17)

12 *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for (with) your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

Some Hebrews had become faint under such training. Now was the time to set things in their right spiritual perspective and renew their commitment to complete the race. This would require 'reinvigorating' their 'relaxed' hands (lack of energy in service) and 'paralysed' knees (failure in prayer). The source of the metaphor is found in Isaiah 35.1-4 where the faithful are encouraged to be strong in the light of a glorious future day. The believers were also to 'make straight paths' *with* their feet, i.e. walk uprightly in the paths of righteousness according to the word of God (Psalm 27.11, Proverbs 4.26, Acts 9.11), thus leaving a 'wheel track' or trail for others who 'limp' to follow. Spiritual limping is used of Israel in 1 Kings 18.21. They were halting between two opinions; Baal or Jehovah? Likewise some of the Hebrews were wavering between Judaism and Christ. There was a grave danger that these professing Christians might become altogether 'dislocated' or apostatise if true believers did not set the right course and example.

14 *(Together with all) Follow (pursue) peace with all men, and (the) holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:* The 'straight path' (v.13) should be earnestly pursued. Here the emphasis is on pursuing 'peace' and 'the (divine) holiness' (see v.10), both of which we have **positionally** in Christ and without which 'no man shall see (future tense) the Lord', that is 'truly comprehend Him' by 'dwelling in His presence'. However, what we have in **position** must be worked out in **practice**. We should seek, as far as it depends on us, to live peaceably with all men (Romans 12.18) and as those who are separated *from* sin and *unto* God ('sanctification'). This practical living is a proof of the new life within.

15 *Looking diligently lest any man fail (fall short) of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby (the) many be defiled; 16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. 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 (the blessing) carefully with tears.*

It was the responsibility of every believer to 'watch over' the flock in case any was showing signs of 'falling back' from the race or 'grace of God' (see Hebrews 4.1). Such are those who *professed* faith in Christ but were in danger of 'falling back' to Judaism (law) thus proving that they were apostates. Such a person is further described as a 'root of bitterness' (see Deuteronomy 29.17-20). This person would bring 'trouble' and spread defilement amongst the company. The believers were also to be vigilant for any characterised by 'fornication' and 'profanity' (v.16). 'Fornication' is sexual immorality, sometimes used metaphorically of spiritual unfaithfulness. 'Profane' describes a person who considers the holy things of God to be *common* or *lawful to be trodden down*; Godless! Esau is the perfect example. He sold his birth right for a single meal (Genesis 25.34). In so acting Esau was *rejecting* and *despising* great spiritual and covenant blessings to satisfy his fleshly desires. *'To satisfy the hunger of a moment, his fleshly appetite, he gave up the rights of the firstborn, the title to land and the ancestorship of the Messiah.'* Yet, some of the Hebrews were doing exactly the same. They were being spiritually unfaithful and treating the new covenant blessings of God as unholy and worthless (Hebrews 10.29). How foolish it was to barter an eternity of bliss and glory for the fleshly attractions of an old, obsolete Judaism about to vanish away. What a challenge to us! Esau placed far greater value on material and temporal things than that which was spiritual and eternal. Do we?

² **Spurgeon:** 'I am afraid that all the grace that I have got 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. Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house. It is the best book in a minister's library.'