

12:1 '...let us lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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 has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.'

Laying aside the weights and encumbrances... the things that can weigh us down and also the sin that so easily entangles us. Sin can easily get hold of us... it can be something that starts out small, seemingly insignificant... but like ivy climbing up a tree and eventually strangling it to death... eventually every sin ends in death. James says, 'Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.' James 1

For the unbeliever, sin ends in physical and spiritual death, eternity in the Lake of Fire. For the child of God, sin, if not dealt with, will eventually lead to physical death.

After we have dealt with sin and every encumbrance, he tells us to run with endurance... to keep going, to never give up...to stay with it... to run the individual race that God has set before each of us... but we can get discouraged, we can be distracted by sin or the things of the world. That's why he tells us to 'look unto Jesus.' He is our example of how to run the race with endurance but even more... He is the One to look to for strength and courage and endurance. It's easy to look at other believers or even unbelievers. If we look at those who we think are 'stronger' Christians than ourselves, we can become discouraged... 'I'll never be good enough, I'll never measure up.' If we look at those who we think are 'weaker' Christians than ourselves, we can become proud and think, 'I'm good enough, at least I'm better than them.' Either way, those to whom we look cause us to have a skewed view of ourselves and how our lives should be. Only when we look to Jesus alone can we see the true model of faith, the One into Whose image God is working to conform us.

Jesus Christ, by faith, saw beyond what awaited Him at the Crucifixion. He clearly understood all that He would have to go through but He was willing to do it because of the reward that He would receive from the Father. In His flesh, He did not want to be crucified. He prayed earnestly, 3 times, that if there could be any other way... but when His Father made clear it was His will... Jesus Christ willingly went forward.

We are the reason He was willing to go through the shame and the pain of crucifixion. We are His joy... we are His reward... we are the reason He was willingly crucified. He didn't do it for glory or for power or for a throne or for a kingdom. Those had always been His from eternity past... none of those were anything new... you and me... we are the reward that is most valuable to Him in all of time, eternity and creation... we are the joy that was set before Him so that He was willing to despise the shame and the pain... to see it as nothing in comparison to the joy of having us, His Bride, to be with Him forever and to share His Kingdom with Him... to rule and reign with Him forever. Before time began, He chose each of us for Himself and created His plan for how to legally redeem us and then He determined to do all that was necessary to have us for Himself.

Then, after the Crucifixion, He sat down at the right hand of the Father, looking forward to when His Father would tell Him that the time had come to go down, in the clouds and retrieve His Bride. He is looking forward to that moment every bit as much as we are, in fact even more so because He knows and understands all that is waiting for us together with Him. All we can do is try to feebly imagine all that God has in store for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Verse 3: 'For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.'

He is saying, 'keep your heart and mind on things above and on the Lord Jesus Christ.' We cannot be perfect

like He is... not yet... even though God sees us as holy and righteous and has imputed the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ to us... we will still fail, we will doubt, we will fear, we will sin but... at least we can be willing. We can be willing to continue on in the race that God has set before us enduring hostility and persecution... that we can do... and we can resist sin even if it means harm or death to us. He is saying, 'You can do it. Press on. You can make it; the Holy Spirit will strengthen you.' We can always take just one more step... and then one more step. But never forget... even if we can go through a season of resisting and not sinning, not failing... it does not in any way make us more acceptable to God. In Christ, we are completely loved and accepted always... no matter what.

Verse 5: And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

Remember, Paul (again, I'm just assuming that Paul is the writer... we don't really know) he is writing to a group of Hebrews. They know exactly what he is saying. They grew up learning and knowing the Word of God, memorizing it. Probably every one of them would have known that Paul is quoting from Proverbs 3:11 and they would also have immediately thought back a few verses to Prov 3:5,6: 'Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.' Trust Him... looking unto Jesus... He shall direct your paths in the race that He has set before you.

He knows we will fail, that we will sin but He will always draw us back to Himself, disciplining and correcting us as necessary in order to day by day, more and more, form us into the image and likeness of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. God does not rebuke or scourge any of us just for the fun of it, any more than any of us would do that to our own children.

He is saying, to those in this group of Hebrews, 'Look at yourself. If you are not being disciplined by God, it may be because you are part of that group who have not yet really trusted the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. If you are not really His child, He doesn't discipline you. At the same time... don't assume that if 'bad' things are happening to you, then you must be His child... you may be just experiencing the natural results of sin in your life.

Many unbelievers may, at times, look like genuine Christians and, sometimes children of God may appear to be not children of God at all but if there is a child of God who is caught up in sin, running from God... he can be assured that God's discipline, His correction and scourging is on the way.

There is another very important point: we can mistakenly think that 'bad' things which come into others' lives are God's discipline because of sin when that is not true at all. Jesus said that we would always have trials in our lives. James writes, 'Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.' James 1

He is always bringing trials into our lives... not because we are sinning but because His purpose is to continue His ongoing, never ending work in our lives to create in us the fruit of the Spirit, especially patience.

When we sin, God brings discipline and correction. When we're doing well, He brings trials to further polish and form us more and more into the image and likeness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is something to think about: I know... it seems I pick on some **TBN types** but some of them are such easy targets that it doesn't take a prophet or soothsayer to recognize the truth about some of them... some of these multi-millionaire charlatans don't seem to experience the discipline of God which is a mark of a true child of God, and they don't seem to experience trials from God which is another mark of a true child of God. Jesus talked about the blind leading the blind so that they all fell into a pit... perhaps a bottomless pit. In the end, they'll plead, 'But Lord, didn't we do many wonderful things in Your name?' And Jesus will say, 'Depart from Me, I **never** knew you.'

Not, I used to know you... I **never knew you**.

If some of them are really children of God... then they're in for some serious discipline from their Father. If, however, they aren't children of God, then we can expect their father, the devil to continue to bless their ministries beyond measure.

Paul is saying, 'Welcome the discipline of the Lord... it proves that you are His beloved child.'

Verse 7: 'If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. ⁹ Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰ For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. ¹¹ Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.'

Some people will be trained by God's chastening while others will not.

Again, when they heard that, they would have thought back to Psalm 32, where David is recounting God's love and faithfulness after his own unfaithfulness with Bathsheba... after he had been disciplined and the child had died. David wrote, ' How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! ² How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit! ³ When I kept silent about *my sin*, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away *as* with the fever heat of summer. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I did not hide; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD"; and You forgave the guilt of my sin. ⁶ Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found; surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him. ⁷ You are my hiding place; You preserve me from trouble; You surround me with songs of deliverance. ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. ⁹ Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, *otherwise* they will not come near to you. Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.

God chastened David, He scourged him and David recognized God's love and faithfulness in His discipline. God loved David and called him a man after His own heart even though he was a murderer and an adulterer.

Verse 12: 'Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.'

He's talking about a runner again... when a runner begins to tire, he begins to drop his arms; without the driving rhythm of his arms pushing him forward, his knees begins to buckle and his feet begin to stumble.

He says, Lift up **the** hands and **the** feeble knees, not **your** hands and **your** knees... he's talking about strengthening and encouraging others... one another... helping each other.

Therefore, he says, in light of all that I've just written to you... here is what you should do. Here is how you should live out the doctrine I've been teaching you. Strengthen yourself and each other in the Lord. Remember back in Chapter 10, he said, Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works... don't neglect meeting together' When we see someone who hasn't been to church in awhile, we should call them up and say we've missed you.

We should do that in this group if we don't.

Encourage and strengthen each other. Remind each other, The Lord is my strength; as I walk with Him, He will strengthen me. He will direct my paths and guide me but I am the one who must walk on that path; I am the one who must choose to walk straightly or to turn to the right or the left. And if I do choose to turn to the right or to the left, He will do whatever is necessary to turn me back onto the path that He has set for me. That's why He says, don't be like the mule or the horse that need a bit and bridle to keep them in check. His discipline, His scourging is meant to heal what is broken in me... to act a bit and bridle.

We have been freed from the Law; Paul writes about the 'glorious liberty of the sons of God.' We're now into his 12th chapter of convincing this little group of Hebrews that the Old Covenant has been done away with and replaced with the New Covenant; now God's laws are written on our hearts, no longer on tablets of stone.

See the picture of a horse running along the path set by its Master. There used to be a high fence on either side of the path; that was the Law, it was meant to hedge us in. Sometimes the horse chose to jump over the fence and the Master would use bit and bridle to bring it back to the path. Now, with the New Covenant, the Master has removed the fence but the horse still has the memory of where the fence used to be. Now the horse can see the hills and green pastures which the path runs through and he is allowed to run free. As long as he runs free within the confines of where the fence used to be or into the green pastures which the Master has ordained, he is free. If he chooses to go where the Master used to have a fence, the Master will once again use bit and bridle to rein him in. If he runs out onto rocky ground, where he knows he is not supposed to go, he will become injured and lame. When he chooses to return to the Master's path, he will become healed. He is free to go wherever he wants, as long as he wants to go where the master wants him to go.

The bit and bridle that the master uses are consequences of the horse's going out beyond the fence... the consequences of his sin. If the horse is wise he will come to recognize that crossing the lines where the fence used to be is not worth the consequences those crossings incur.

Some horses recognize who their Master is, know what He has said and grudgingly follow the path within the confines of the former fence lines but they never run free out in the green pastures. They mistakenly believe that the Master will only accept them if they rigidly run within the narrow confines of the old fence. Other horses, however, know their Master, love His Word and joyfully run according to the will of their Master, both within the lines and also out in the beautiful green pastures; they are not restricted at all because they choose to find their freedom and joy in running with their Master in the wide path He has set for them.

When he says, make straight paths for your feet. He is saying run your race but run straight ahead. Don't become weary and turn to the right or the left; others are watching and others are following. If we choose to leave the path and sin, it will invariably affect others; others will be harmed by our sin. We are free from the Law and its constraints but if we live by the perfect law, the law of liberty, that we love God and love others, we will recognize that if we sin, we are harming others and not loving them.

When he says, 'so that what is lame may be healed...' he is talking about our effect on others. As we strengthen and encourage others while we ourselves 'walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we've been called,' others can be healed. They can see our example and conclude that if we can do it... if we can walk worthy of our calling, maybe they can too. We are a cloud of witnesses surrounding each other.

Paul wrote, 'Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.' 1 Cor 11:1 We are to be those who can be imitated.

If we walk in a manner unworthy of our calling which, as children of God, we have the freedom to do but it's not in our good interest or anyone else's... but if we do... two things... we can cause a weaker brother to stumble but even more than that... remember that he is writing to believers but also to unbelievers in this group, those who understand but have not yet come to saving faith in Jesus Christ... if we are not walking circumspectly, not watching out for ourselves and for them... not walking in wisdom but rather walking in sin... we could be the determining factor causing one who is not yet a true believer deciding to go out and leave, to go out into apostasy... to be lost forever. 'If that's what a Christian is... I don't need it... I'm out of here!'

In Proverbs 4 it says, I have taught you in the way of wisdom; I have led you in right paths. When you walk, your steps will not be hindered, and when you run, you will not stumble.... Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on... But the path of the just *is* like the shining sun that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day... 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.

Paul, we assume Paul, is now in the middle of his final exhortation and warning to this group of Hebrews. To some, he is warning, 'Wake up! Come all the way to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To others, he is telling them how to run, with joy, the race that is set before them, voluntarily running free within the confines of God's will for their lives.

He is saying, 'Yes, I know there is persecution, I know your friends and family are rejecting you but be strong; run the race God has set before you. God will strengthen you. Run the race and wait on the Lord.

'But those who wait on the LORD Shall renew *their* strength; They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary, They shall walk and not faint.' Isa. 40:31

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ' For which cause we faint not, but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.' Our physical bodies are perishing. Our physical bodies are perishing. If you don't believe it... just look around you... we are a group of perishers but our spirits and souls are being renewed day by day. Our souls and spirits are eternal as will be our new glorified bodies at the Rapture.

Verse 14: Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: ¹⁵ looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; (I'm talking to you who have not yet fully come to faith in Jesus Christ... don't fall short of God's grace before it's too late) lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, (I'm talking to you whose family and friends are rejecting you... don't become embittered) and by this many become defiled; ¹⁶ lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. (don't allow the things of this World to distract you, never think anything of this World has any value in comparison to the things of God) ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. (Come in faith to Jesus Christ before it's too late! If you die or He returns, there'll be no more chance!)

He is strongly warning those scattered among this group of Hebrew Christians, those who have not come to faith in Jesus Christ. They have heard the truth, they have even understood the truth but they have remained outside of truly believing and committing their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. They are in danger of apostatizing, of being lost in apostasy. Some, when persecution came, would retreat back into Judaism, they would give up, they would decide it was too hard; they would leave, which is apostasy and once they did that, there would no longer be any hope for them. He had told them back in the 6th chapter: 'For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, ... if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.' Like Esau, who knew the truth of the value of his birthright but despised it, thought of it as nothing and sold it to Jacob for a bowl of stew, they have come to know the truth of the Gospel but then turn away back to Judaism. They were in danger of falling away because they *knew* the truth but they were not *in* the truth. They knew of Jesus Christ but they were not in Jesus Christ. They knew the body of Jesus Christ but they were not in the body of Jesus Christ. They were not anchored within the sure foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To the true believer he is saying, 'Continue on, be diligent, stay with it. God is at work in you to accomplish His best in your life. Run the race with endurance. God's correction is for your good; He loves you and has only your best in mind.'

Run the race God has set before you for your own sake, that when you stand before Him He will say, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, you've been faithful over a few small things, I will put you in charge of many great things.' but also run the race for the sake of those who are watching you. Weaker believers can fall into sin because of your sin and those who are coming to Church or at your work or in your neighborhood who understand the truth but have not come to full faith in Jesus Christ for salvation might see your sinful life and turn away from the truth altogether... going into apostasy.

However... always remember... someone else's salvation is not yours or my responsibility. Whom God chooses, He will call and draw to Himself but if our lives stand as a stumbling block to anyone, saved or

unsaved, we will answer for it when we stand before Him... we will suffer the loss of eternal rewards for our unfaithfulness.

Verse 18: For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire and to blackness and darkness and tempest, ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard *it* begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. ²⁰ (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.")

Now he is once again contrasting the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. The Old Covenant came through Moses at Mt. Sinai in the wilderness. It was harsh, it came with fear and trembling; it was life and death, blessing and cursing... even Moses was afraid.

Verse 21: But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn *who are* registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel.

No longer do we come to God by way of Mt. Sinai and the Law with Moses. Now we are citizens of New Jerusalem, the city of God. We are made perfect by the New Covenant. Now we are surrounded by God's angels, we are part of the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. That same great cloud of witnesses, along with us, were made perfect by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, His blood has bought us, He is now our Great Heavenly High Priest.

Abel's sacrifice was the first blood sacrifice. It was made in faith so that his faith was accounted to him as righteousness but it took the blood of Jesus Christ to finally make Abel perfect so that he could be taken to Heaven into the presence of God when the Lord Jesus Christ went to Sheol, the place of the dead, to retrieve all of the Old Testament saints after His Crucifixion.

Most of this book has been written to believers but all throughout he has given warnings to those who know the truth and even understand the truth but have not come all the way to faith in the truth. He has warned against the things that keep some from coming to faith in the truth of God's Word. One reason is neglect, so in chapter 2 he said, 'How shall we escape... if we neglect...' Another reason is unbelief so in chapter 3 he warned of an evil heart of unbelief. Another reason is their traditions of false religious systems. He warned about that in chapters 5 and 6, the traditions and rituals and symbols of Judaism. Another reason is fear, fear of persecution, fear of rejection, even fear of the unknown and here he is warning against fear.

The worst thing a preacher can do, the evil fallacy and heresy of the word of faith movement, is to tell his audience that God's will is for you to be healthy and wealthy and happy and blah blah blah.

At the invitation, they come forward to get saved, believing that life will now be a bed of roses. But as soon as persecution comes, as soon as trials come, they decide it was all a fairy tale because no one really explained to them what it means to come to Jesus Christ in faith for salvation. They leave, they fall away, they apostatize and that phony preacher will answer for it when he or she stands before God.

A true pastor, a shepherd tells the truth. He will quote God's Word. In the World you will have tribulation. Count it all joy when you encounter various trials, the Lord chastens and scourges His children, He disciplines us for our good... but the trying of our faith produces endurance. After you've suffered a little while God will perfect you. The pain and trials of this life are nothing in comparison to eternity.

If God is drawing someone to Himself, they will come and He will save them and seal them and keep them. Here he is saying, you have nothing to fear. The New Covenant is not like the Old. There is no burning mountain; there is no death for just touching the mountain. Come now, today before it's too late.