

The Endurance Of Faith – Part 2

Hebrews 12:12-29

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I want to read Hebrews 12:12-17, and then I'll set the context. Tonight I'm going to focus a lot on the outline in the section that we cover. The writer of Hebrews says, "Wherefore,"—we'll come back to that—"lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; 13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. 14 Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: 15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; 16 Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat,"—or food—"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 carefully with tears."

We've been out of the book of Hebrews for several weeks, and I don't want to belabor the background and theme of the book too much, we've done that almost every week for many, many months. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers who are being persecuted and they were getting discouraged and beginning to turn away from Christ and want to go back to Judaism. That's what's going on in simplest form. The whole book of Hebrews is a masterful epistle laid out to show these discouraged, disheartened Jewish believers that they shouldn't go back but that they should go forward. In order to get them to do that, he sets forth the superiority of the new covenant over the old covenant, of Christ over the law, over Christianity, in essence, over Judaism without Christ. Basically, he sets forth the glories of Christ.

The book of Hebrews is one of the most Christological, which means focuses on Christ, in all the Bible. It's one of the books that talks about the splendors, the majesties, and the glories of Christ because it presents a superior Person and He's the superior Priest, He's got a superior tabernacle, and a superior covenant. We've been through all that for many months, but we're coming to the end of the book in which he gave the examples of the principles of faith, that we, as new believers or believers in Christ, live by faith, chapter 11, and that when we are persecuted and go through hardships that it's many times the chastening of the Lord.

In outlining this section we see, beginning at verse 12 down to verse 17, the necessity of obedience. Again, it's a little bit hard for me because I've lost momentum—I haven't been in the book for so many weeks—but basically, in Hebrews 12, and we're going to go there in just a second, the first part of it, he has been talking about the chastening of the Lord. He says, "...despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked,"—or corrected—"of him," so he's been talking about the chastening of the Lord, and he's trying to encourage them now as to how to respond to the Lord's chastening.

If I were to give it a topic or a theme, and I'm not doing that right now on Wednesday nights, it would be, "how do we respond to the Lord's chastening." In verses 12-17 is the necessity of obedience, but there are three things that we need to do to respond to the chastening of the

Lord. We need to have right actions (I'll give you the outline for that in just a moment), we need to avoid wrong attitudes, and we need to avoid following bad examples. The good examples, the great hall of faith, are in chapter 11; and he closes in verses 16-17 with a bad example, that of Esau. You don't want to follow the path of Esau.

Go back with me to verse 12. He says, "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down,"—this is because they were discouraged, disheartened, ready to give up, and basically wanting to throw in the towel—"and the feeble,"—or paralyzed—"knees." The first thing we need to do when we've been chastened by the Lord is to have right actions, verses 12-14. Those right actions are that we need to straighten up, or stand up straight, verse 12; we need to walk in straight paths, verse 13; and we need to, "Follow,"—aggressively and pursue—"peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord," so he says, "Wherefore," in verse 12.

Whenever there's a "wherefore," what's the rule? Find out what it's there for, right? Now, we can go all the way back to Hebrews 12:1, but go all the way back to Hebrews 12:5. He says, "And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

In light of the chastening of the Lord, that is, God's corrective discipline in our lives, so He allows suffering, He allows hardships, He allows trials, He allows difficulties for different reasons, but in this case to get them back on the right path, to awaken them up to their need to follow righteousness, holiness, and peace with all men, to strengthen the hands that hang down and the feeble knees. He chastened them to bring them back.

We all know the story of the prodigal son. One of the thoughts in that parable, it's not the main message in the parable, is that the prodigal son had to come to the end of himself in the pigpen, perishing with hunger, to come to his senses. He came to his senses and said, "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father," so thank God for that pigpen. Amen? He hit that wall and came to the end of himself, thus he came to himself and saw his need and turned around and went back to the father. In the life of these believers, God chastened them, and God will chasten us.

In light of the "Wherefore" in verse 12, I want to go over this real quickly. There were five things that are brought about when the Lord chastens us, if we do what we read in verses 12-14 of the chapter. First, we realize that the chastening of the Lord, verse 6, conveys that God loves us, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," so when we are going to respond properly to chastisement, remind yourself—I know it's hard, I know it's a difficulty, I know, "...no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," but remind yourself that God is allowing it in your life because He loves you. It's for your good and for His glory.

The second thing that we need to remember is that it confirms our sonship, verse 7. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?" There are kids in the neighborhood that I'd like to spank, but I dare not do

that, right? People don't bring their kids to me and say, "Pastor John, would you spank this child?" "Gladly." Chastening is the job of a father or mother. There's relationship there. It's an evident sign, beloved, that you've been born into God's family—He loves me, I'm His child. I know that that may not bring a whole lot of comfort, but it should. It's a sign confirming our sonship.

Thirdly, it corrects our faults, verse 9. "Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection,"—that's the key—"unto the Father of spirits, and live?" It conveys His love, it confirms our sonship, and it corrects our faults. If we were without chastisement, we wouldn't repent, we wouldn't correct, we wouldn't be straightened out by the Lord. The Lord uses that to get us on the right path, to make us long for heaven, to make us have a desire for His Word. How many times have we strayed away from prayer, from the Word of God, from maybe coming to church or fellowship, and a trouble or a trial or problem comes into our life and awakens us to our need and we rush back to the Word of God, we rush back to the closet of prayer, we rush back to the church and the people of God. It corrects our faults.

Fourthly, it's for our profit, verse 10. "For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit,"—there it is—"that we might be partakers of his holiness." What a great statement. He does it for our good. He doesn't do it because He's ticked off and just wants to smack you around and is upset with you, He does it for your profit. It's good for us.

Fifthly, and lastly, verse 11, it produces spiritual fruit. "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised,"—or them that are yielded and surrendered, and as we come to verse 12, obedient—"thereby." Verse 11 ends on that note that the chastening of the Lord will produce fruit in your life if you're, and it uses the word, "exercised thereby." The Greek word translated "exercise" we get our word gymnasium from. It has the idea of surrendering and being obedient and yielding to God.

Without skipping a beat, go to verse 12, "Wherefore," this is basically how we should respond, what we should do when we're being chastened by the Lord and our hands are hanging down. When it says, "lift up the hands which hang down," it literally means straighten up. It means don't be hunched over and sad or out of order. It means straighten yourself up. "...the hands which hang down," actually means that they're paralyzed or lying by your side, "and the feeble knees." He's using medical, physical imagery here—word-picture imagery metaphors—of being beaten up, bent over, hands hanging down, your knees and legs are paralyzed, and he's saying, "Wake up."

It's like a coach giving a pep talk to his football team in the locker room at half time, "Come on, guys, shape up. Get out there and give it your best. Heads up. Let's go, let's get 'em." That's what this is. It's a pep talk. It's a pep talk for those that are being chastened and they want to throw in the towel, they want to turn backward, they want to give up. It's actually a Scripture taken from Isaiah 35:3 where Isaiah the prophet was encouraging God's people in captivity to

actually, “lift up the hands which hang down, and,”—strengthen—“the feeble knees.” He uses the picture of a paralyzed individual. Remember when Jesus raised the man who was on the mat and said, “Thy faith has healed thee. Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk,” so it’s a standing up, being strengthened, and walking. The paralytic straightened up and stood up.

The second thing we’re supposed to do is not only to stand up straight and strengthen our legs to walk, but we’re to walk in straight paths, verse 13. “And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame,”—again the picture of being paralyzed and not walking a straight line—“be turned out of the way,”—which is what they were in danger of doing—“but let it rather be healed.” Rather than going off the straight and narrow and being lame and crippled, stand up straight, lift up your hands, and walk the narrow path that God has set before you. It’s basically saying walk toward maturity, verses 12-13, “...lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

There’s a danger that when we get discouraged in chastening that we not only turn off God’s path or we give up on following the Lord, but we affect others, we discourage and hinder others. There’s this whole kind of hidden theme going through this passage that when we respond correctly to the chastening of the Lord, we encourage others to do the same. It’s not just about us, it’s about others who are watching that we get discouraged and we want to turn back and want to give up. Others are watching, and we can encourage them.

Remember that we were surrounded by this “great cloud of witnesses,” at the opening of Hebrews 12, “...and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, 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.” Jesus, our example, now we follow Christ and become examples to other believers. If they’re lame spiritually, if they’re not encouraged and wanting to give up, they see our example and they will follow it as well.

Notice that we follow something, so we straighten up, verse 12, we walk a straight path to maturity in Christ, and then we follow aggressive. When it says, “Follow peace,” the word “follow” speaks of an aggressive pursuit. It doesn’t mean just a casual meandering, it means a purposeful, intentional, aggressive pursuit. Two things, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,” so he says you are to follow peace and holiness.

As believers, we’re to do our best to live peaceable with all men as much as lies in us. We’re to want to get along—we’re not be be aggravating people, we want to get along with people. But notice that it couples peace with holiness. I think that’s important. It’s not peace at any price, it’s not peace at the price of purity, it’s peace and holiness. Sometimes we will compromise purity for peace. We ought never to do that. Yes, we want peace; yes, we want to get along; yes, we don’t want to be divisive, but we don’t compromise purity, which is sound doctrine and living in holiness, so he ties it in with holiness.

Holiness is the idea of being set apart unto God. There are different kinds of holiness or sanctification for the believer. The moment you are born again, you are sanctified or set apart unto God positionally and declared holy. This is what's called your position in Christ. Every believer is in Christ, is declared holy and righteous. Do you know the Bible tells us as Christians, we're all saints, right? The word saint, sanctify, and holy all come from the same root word and means the same thing. It means set apart unto God. The moment you're born again, you're positionally in Christ, His righteousness is imputed to you by faith, and you're holy.

I don't know what kind of holiness the author has in mind here, but any other kind of holiness must flow out of that positional holiness because you can't walk in sanctification, which is practical holiness, unless you're positionally in Christ. What first starts with positionally, you're holy, and you must stand in that realizing that it's imputed to you by faith and it doesn't change. You can't improve on that. It doesn't get more holy. That starts what we normally use the term for the sanctification process, and sanctification, that practical aspect, is a lifelong process and is progressional.

Get these two points: positional holiness, all Christians equally the same, the righteousness of Christ imputed to you doesn't change; practical holiness, or sanctification, is a lifelong process, and some Christians are further along and more advanced in holiness than others, but it is a lifelong pursuit. Just because I've been positionally declared righteous is no excuse for actually being passive, not pursuing godliness and righteousness. That would be a big mistake. Having been saved, Paul says to the Philippians, "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." We're to live holy, righteous lives. He says, back in Hebrews 12:14, "...without which no man shall see the Lord." When I am chastened, I need to stand up straight, walk straight following Christ, and then I need to, "Follow,"—or pursue—"peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

There are two ways you can interpret that. I don't know which one the author has in mind, but they're both biblical; that is, that we have clear vision of Christ, we see Him and fellowship, we love Him and fellowship with Him, or one day, and this is true as well, we'll go to heaven and be with the Lord and we'll see Him—how?—face to face. It's telling us how we ought to live and respond as believers in walking, following Him.

We have to have right actions, the necessity of obedience, verses 12-17, but the first point is straighten up or right actions, verses 12-14. The second is in verse 15, we need to avoid wrong attitudes. This happens when we're chastened by the Lord quite often. He says, "Looking diligently,"—again, it's being eager and an intense desire—"lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled." Not everyone follows peace and holiness. Not everyone stands straight and walks a straight path. Not everyone are exercised when it comes to chastening. Sometimes there's a bitterness that comes into their heart—they get mad at God, they get mad at others, they get mad at their circumstances, and the root of bitterness comes in and troubles them. "Looking diligently,"—we must have the right attitudes.

I want you to note these three things. The danger when we're chastened and we don't respond properly is that we can, "...fail the grace of God." What does he mean by that? Let me tell you what I'm convinced he doesn't mean. He doesn't mean that you can lose your salvation. That's not what the author is talking about. I do believe he means that you won't experience the blessings, the benefits, the joys of the chastening hand of the Lord, and the maturing, growing, and the walking straight paths in the Lord, if you don't do what he just said. Do you know that you can have a saved soul but a wasted life? He's talking again about being sanctified—growing positionally—in Christ, and you're not relying on God's grace, you're not drawing from the grace of God. You're saved by grace, but you're not living and enjoying the blessings and the benefits of being in the grace of God. It's so very important.

There's saving grace, there's sanctifying grace, there is grace for suffering. Remember Paul in 2 Corinthians 12 prayed that God would take away his thorn in the flesh? God basically said, "No, but I'll give you something to endure and bear it, my grace." And God said to Paul, "My grace will be sufficient," everything that you need, God's all-sufficient grace; and God said to Paul, "My strength shall be made perfect in your weakness." Paul said, "Okay, if that's the case, I'll glory in my weaknesses." You say, "Paul, you've lost it. Glory in your weaknesses?" He said, "Yeah, because when I am weak, then am I strong," that's the good thing. I believe that when we fail the grace of God, we fail in our suffering and our chastisement to experience God's grace sustaining us, strengthening us, and helping us through that time. When you're really being chastened and you're really suffering, what do you need? You need God's grace. Amen? You certainly need God's mercy.

I tell you, I've been praying for God's grace and mercy in my own life a lot lately, "God, be gracious to me. God, give me Your strength. God, help me with Your mercy. Be merciful unto me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness and multitude of thy tender mercies," and we cry out to the Lord for grace and strength. Be careful when you're being chastened that you don't fail to rely upon the grace of God. We're saved by grace, we're sanctified by grace, we serve by grace, and by grace will lead us home to heaven one day. Salvation is all the grace of God, but we must, "Follow peace...and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."

Secondly, we can fail in that we allow a "...root of bitterness springing up trouble you." The word "trouble you" was used in other places in the New Testament for demons vexing people. Some of the gospel stories when people were afflicted by demons, they were vexed by a demon, the Bible says. It's the same concept. It's a sad day when we let bitterness or anger... some people as Christians get just a bad attitude toward others, toward God, toward their circumstances. They sour, they don't rely upon God's grace and, rather than becoming better, they become bitter. Let me tell you, one of the secrets of life in the Christian life and growing in maturity is experiencing bitterness but not becoming bitter yourself, is experiencing hardships but not hardening your heart, is going through life's difficulties, but not letting it embitter you but rather make you sweeter.

The same sun that would melt wax can also harden clay. Two individuals can go through the same situation, one becomes hard and bitter and they fail the grace of God, they don't grow in

grace and in knowledge, and they don't pursue after righteousness and holiness; the other one allows the Lord to work in his life, they're exercised thereby. Remember verse 11, it doesn't, "...seemeth to be joyous, but grievous," but "yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness," if you yield to it, and God produces that good work in our life. Notice the, "...springing up trouble you." It's a picture of a weed in the soil of your heart springing up and choking out your Christianity, your walk with God. Maybe tonight this might be the point that convicts you or speaks to your own heart. Maybe you've been troubled or bitter, upset that God would allow some of the sorrows and suffering in your life, and you're in danger of becoming troubled and bitter.

Notice, lastly, "...many be defiled." The phrase there "defiled," all the Greek scholars that I consulted said it's clear, it's reference to moral defilement. What happens is you fall into sin and sinful behavior, so it's a moral lapse or moral defilement. This is the wrong way to go—we fail God's grace, we turn bitter, and we become defiled, moral defilement. Notice it says, "many." First, verse 15, "...lest any root of bitterness," and now, "many be defiled." You can interpret that in two ways: Many individuals are defiled because they don't respond correctly, or that we, if we don't respond correctly, defile many other people around us. We have an ill effect on many other people, and we defile them morally.

Right actions, verses 12-14; straighten up, walk straight paths, aggressively pursue or follow peace and holiness; avoid wrong attitudes, verse 15; and thirdly, verses 16-17, an example. Everything we've just talked about, we have an example, a bad example. You know, the Bible gives us not only good examples to follow, but bad examples to avoid. Some of the most powerful lessons in the Bible are bad examples to avoid.

This is the example of the Old Testament character, Esau, "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau." The story that he's alluding to is all recorded in Genesis 25 and is a reference to Esau selling his birthright and then afterwards praying that he could be blessed when the blessing went to his brother Jacob, but there was no way he could repent and get the blessing. "Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat,"—my King James Bible has, which means food—"sold his birthright. 17 For ye know how that afterward,"—after he sold his birthright—"when he would have inherited the blessing,"—he came in to his father and found out that Jacob had been there first and stole the blessing—"he was rejected,"—why?—"for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." His tears weren't genuine repentance, he was just sad that he'd lost the blessing.

The birthright, because Esau was the older of the two brothers Esau and Jacob, meant a double inheritance. It meant that he would become the priest of the family and that there would be spiritual blessings that would be his lot, but he came home from a hunting trip, we know the story, and was hungry. He thought he was going to starve to death, like some of the guys, and I've been there myself, "When do we eat? I'm starving! Really!" I can't tell you how many times I've grabbed a bag of chips and ate half of them before the dinner is served, which is probably in like three minutes. "Three minutes? I'll be dead on the floor of the kitchen!" I go home from church some Sundays when I get home before my wife, and I know she's got a good

meal all prepared for me, she'll come in the house and I'm sitting on the couch eating chips, "When's dinner?" "Five minutes." "Okay, I'll just keep eating my chips until it's ready." I feel like Esau.

Jacob was cooking a pottage or soup, and Esau smelled it, "Mmmm! Man, that smells good. Oh, I'm hungry. Give me some of your soup." "No, no, no," Jacob says. "Sell me your birthright." He answers, "What good is my birthright if I'm dead? You can have it." "Sign on the dotted line, 'You can have my birthright.'" Esau gave up his birthright, and gobbled up his stew. He gave up his birthright. The message is that if you turn away from Christ and let a root of bitterness come in, you become defiled. You go back to the old system and there's no way you can really repent, that you have sacrificed your birthright. You have forfeited your spiritual blessings for all eternity for a temporal, fleshly, earthly satisfaction. You have basically sold your soul for a material blessing, and you've given up your spiritual inheritance.

If you're being tried and tested and chastened, don't forget there's an inheritance waiting for you. Don't forget you're on your way to heaven. Don't forget that the riches of the Spirit are more valuable than the material wealth, "For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected,"—why?—"for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

I don't know that I should even mention it, but for you Bible students I thought I would point out, this is an interesting picture here which I think can shed some light on Hebrews 6:4-6 where it talks about, "...those who were once enlightened...And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away,"—it's impossible to do what?—"to renew them again unto repentance." This is the same picture of what we read about in Hebrews 6:4-6, that it's too late. You forfeited your right of blessings. The message is: Don't forfeit spiritual blessings for present, physical, temporal pleasures. Don't forfeit spiritual blessings for physical, temporal pleasures. Remember that. No matter what you're going through right now, is nothing can compare to the weight of glory that awaits you. Keep your eyes on the prize. Don't be like Esau.

I just passed over it, but Esau is called a fornicator, verse 16. That can be physical fornication, sexual immorality, which many Bible scholars believe was Esau's case, he married a couple Hittite women. It can also mean spiritual fornication, and he's called a "profane person," verse 16. The word "profane" means that he had no regard for the things of God. He placed no value or worth or weight on spiritual things. It would be like, "All I want is a lot of money, a lot of pleasure, and a good time, a nice house, nice car. I want nice clothes. I want nice things. I don't care about the things of the Spirit. I don't care about eternal values, I want the temporal," so it's a profane meaning.

We would use the term secular. It's actually tied in with the concept of being secular, which means without God. We live in a world today that is secular. America has become so secular. I don't even want to get started on that. We have so fallen away from God that we are a secular society. We say on our money, "In God We Trust," but we don't trust in God. We don't obey

God. We're profane, that God is not important. A profane person is the one who is all physical, material, temporal, all the mundane, nothing of any eternal value, "...as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright." Don't be that person. Don't follow that example.

Now, we're going to keep going here. I know I probably have gone slower in that section than I should, but we'll move along. Verses 18-24, we won't need to go very slow, is a picture of a contrast between two mountains, Mount Zion and Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai, verses 18-21, is an earthly mountain symbolic of the old covenant. It's contrasted with Mount Zion, which is the heavenly city, which is the new covenant. Verses 18-21, the imagery or the picture of the old covenant in Mount Sinai where God came down, met with Moses, and gave him the Law, he's trying to say, "You don't want to go back to the old covenant, that's Mount Sinai. There's no provision for forgiveness or coming to Christ or access to God," so we don't want to do that. We want to come to Mount Zion, which is the heavenly, verses 22-24.

Begin following with me in verse 18. "For ye are not come unto the mount,"—notice the contrast and then I'll come back to it, that's Mount Sinai. Then, jump down to verse 22, "But ye are come unto mount Sion,"—so there's an intended contrast between the two mountains representing the old covenant and the new covenant. Go back to verse 18. "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,"—thank God for that. Then he says—"And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: 20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain,"—that's Mount Sinai where the law was given—"it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: 21 And so terrible,"—or frightening—"was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake,"—so Moses was a Quaker. There's no need to go into any depth to this. It is basically recorded in the book of Exodus 19. You can make a note of that and read it tonight before you go to bed.

When God came down on Mount Sinai and gave the law to Moses, He gave very strict instructions that no one should touch the mountain, not even a beast or an animal, that everyone was to stand off. Moses would go up on the mountain. Moses would meet with God. There was a thick cloud. There was darkness. There was lightening. There was earthquake. There was thunder. It was very austere, very holy. God came down and met with him on the mountain. The application is that this is the law's condemnation that we're all sinners, that God is holy, that we cannot approach Him; and that there is no hope in the law itself, for the law simply condemns us. We don't have access to God through the law, all we had is condemnation. The purpose of the law was to drive us to Christ, so Christ finally comes.

Here's the contrast. We're not to be going back to the earthly mountain, Sinai, where the law was given, but we've come to a heavenly city, Zion. "But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant,"—there it is—"and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh,"—

don't miss this—"better things than that of Abel." He's actually just using these pictures of these two mountains.

Now, Mount Sinai is in the Sinai peninsula. We can't be absolutely sure which mountain it was. They have the traditional site of the law, the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, Mount Sinai, but we don't really know. The Israelites didn't leave a sign on the side of the mountain, "This is it." Tourism basically takes you to a mountain because there's an easy place to park and you can take your picture, and they say, "This is the mountain. Come on back in. Let's go." We don't really know. It was there, which mountain it is, we don't know. But we don't go back to Sinai, the law, we go forward to Zion.

Zion is an actual mountain in Jerusalem. It's the center of Jerusalem where the temple was built and all the other mountains surrounded it. It's a literal, actual mountain. It was also symbolic of a couple of other things. It was symbolic of the people of God; it was symbolic of the city of God, which is spiritual and heavenly and is yet future. Remember Jesus said in John 14, "...I go to prepare a place...And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also," right? That's just one aspect of the fact that we are headed for a city.

If you've never read John Bunyan's spiritual allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, every Christian should read that. You know, that book has only been outsold by one Book in all of its long history, and that's the Bible. It's an allegory of a man by the name of Christian fleeing the city of Destruction on his way to the Celestial City and all of his episodes on the way. It's a picture of the Christian life. It's a marvelous book.

This is the picture here. We're on our way to Zion. We look for a city, "...whose builder,"—Like Abraham—"and maker is God." Amen? So, don't be an Esau. Don't be profane. Don't be a spiritual fornicator loving the world. Don't sell your birthright. Fix your eyes on heaven. "...lift up the hands which hang down, and,"—strengthen—"the feeble knees,"—or lame. Find a straight path and stay on the pilgrim's highway. Don't let anything distract you or deter you because we're on our way to Zion. There's a lot of old gospel songs and hymns about marching to Zion, the wonderful city of God. I love that. "We actually are on our way to heaven," is what he's saying.

Notice as he describes it as, "...the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,"—and then he describes its inhabitants—"and to an innumerable company of angels." When we get to heaven, we will see angels; and I don't think they'll be little fat babies in diapers playing harps and shooting arrows on clouds, they will be marvelous. They will surround the throne of God. They will be worshiping God. It'll be marvelous! That's what we're going to see, "...an innumerable company of angels." The Bible doesn't tell us how many angels there are other than that they are innumerable, which means no one can number them.

Verse 23, "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn," this is a reference to the church of the redeemed. The "firstborn" is a reference to Jesus, "which are written in heaven." There's

a book in heaven with all the saints' names written in it. If you're a believer in Jesus, your name is written there. "...and to God the Judge of all,"—God the Father will be there—"and to the spirits of just men made perfect,"—this is possibly, I'm not sure, a reference to Old Testament saints. When we get to heaven, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel—ask him what it was like to hang out with the lions. What a cool place to go! Amen? We're going to be there and see these saints.

Best of all, verse 24, "And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling,"—which is the cross of Christ, which actually makes the way available, which, by the way, is not found in Mount Sinai—that's condemnation—but on Mount Calvary where Mount Zion is in Jerusalem, is Mount Calvary where the blood of the cross was shed for our salvation, "that speaketh better things than that of Abel." Notice again, "speaketh," so we want to hear and obey God's voice and realize we're on our way to the city of God.

Turn with me to verses 25-29. Some of you are saying, "John is making up for lost time. He hasn't been here in three weeks." We'll wrap it up. In verse 25, and I'm probably going to just touch it lightly and go back over it next week, but verses 25-29 is the fifth warning, the fifth and last warning passage. Hebrews is laid out with what's called warning passages—don't go back, don't give up, don't stop following the Lord, don't throw in the towel. This is the fifth and last one. It's in verses 25-29. Notice it says, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." In verse 28, "...let us have grace," so it starts with a direct command to beware, not to refuse God's voice, and then it closes with an inclusive exhortation, "...let us have grace,"—or let us rely on God's grace to go forward.

First of all, beware, verses 25-27. He says, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Remember how Hebrews opened up? "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son," so God is speaking, and we must listen. In the Bible, listening involves more than just hearing, it involves obeying—you listen with the intention of obeying. Verse 25, "For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth,"—which we just read about, Mount Sinai—"much more,"—this is an argument from the lesser to the greater—"shall not we escape, if we turn away,"—notice that—"from him that speaketh from heaven." You have two mountains, two cities—earthly, heavenly. You have Sinai and Zion. God is speaking, and we need to hear His voice and not turn from Him.

Verse 26, "Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shall shake not the earth only, but also heaven." God shook the earth at Sinai, but there's a future prophetic shaking that's going to take place. I believe this will happen during the time of the Tribulation. Peter says in 2 Peter 3 that there'll be a renovation of the earth by fire, "...and the elements shall melt with fervent heat,"—so God's going to shake the universe, the universe is shaken. The Lord is speaking, verse 25, and the universe is shaking, verses 26-27, "And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain." God is going to shake the universe, but "those things which cannot be shaken may remain."

I have a list of things that cannot be shaken. I'm going to use that as my teaser. Come back next Wednesday night and we'll go over them.

The question is, at the end of verse 27, what are you living for, this earth? It's going to be destroyed. It's going to be shaken. Are you living for that which cannot be shaken, cannot be dissolved? The eternal, the immovable?

Here's the conclusion, verses 28-29, it's an inclusive exhortation. Here's the conclusion, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved,"—praise God—"let us have grace,"—or let us rely upon the saving grace, the sustaining grace, the satisfying grace, the serving grace—"whereby we may serve God,"—that's the key. Don't go back, keep serving God. That we may serve God how? "...acceptably with,"—two things—"reverence and godly fear," so we keep serving the Lord. Don't get discouraged. Don't give up. Don't get off the path. Don't go back. Keep serving the Lord. Do it, "...with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is,"—what?—"a consuming fire." So, Christian, keep on serving Jesus Christ. Amen?