

Hebrews 12:14-29

In Chapter 11, the Holy Spirit encourages us with the heroes of faith in bygone ages.

First we read about the faithful who lived in antediluvian times.

Then we saw the testimony of the patriarchs and the rulers in Israel, and, finally, the latter prophets.

And now, in Chapter 12, the Holy Spirit begins to make the application.

V 1-2 **"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us 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,

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."

Not only were these Hebrews to consider the heroes of faith in their Jewish history, but especially they were to consider the Lord Jesus Christ.

Also they were reminded of the fact that adversity and discipline, administered by their Heavenly Father, was ultimately for their good.

So, with this brief review, let's begin at verse 14 of Hebrews 12.

**"Follow peace with all men, and holiness,
without which no man shall see the
Lord."**

This verse should not be read . . . *without holiness no man shall see the Lord* . . . for that is not actually what it says.

Some have done that and built a whole doctrine on this misinterpretation.

They say that holiness is an experience called the second work of grace, and then maintain that those who do not obtain that experience, even though they were born again, will eventually lose their salvation and never see the Lord.

This is an incorrect interpretation of this text, for, in fact the very opposite is true.

The verse says to "**follow**" peace and to
"**follow**" holiness.

Now, we can only follow that which is in
front of us.

For example, if we have fully obtained
holiness, then we will no longer be
following it, because we will have
overtaken it.

Now in this verse we are exhorted to
"**follow**" two things.

One is man-ward, and the other is God-ward.
We need to pursue them, but it is not
possible for us to fully obtain them
down here.

First of all, this verse says we are to--
"**Follow peace with all men.**"

And we should sincerely try to do that.
It should be what we strive for in our
dealings with our fellow man.

But we cannot be sure that this will always
be possible.

Even our Lord Himself, though He came
preaching peace, did not find all men
at peace with Him.

So then, no matter how earnestly we might
seek peace, we might find that our
neighbour will not be at peace with us.
And also, we must be careful not to seek the
first one at the expense of the second.
That is, we should not obtain peace with our
neighbour by compromising holiness
before God.

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The second thing that we are to follow after
is God-ward in nature.

We are to follow after holiness.

This also should be the aim of our life.

Yes, we should seek to become more like
Christ everyday.

And as we seek after holiness, we will find
that we have an ally, for the work of
the Holy Spirit is to conform us to
Christ.

And scripture tells us that when we finally
reach heaven by His grace, we will be
like Him.

1 John 3:2 **"Beloved, now are we the sons of
God, and it doth not yet appear what we
shall be: but we know that, when he
shall appear, we shall be like him; for
we shall see him as he is."**

In the meantime, we should follow after
holiness, but we will not completely
obtain it until we are **"like him."**

So the admonition in verse 14 is to
"follow."

God realizes it is the best we can do under the circumstances.

And He does expect us to do it.

If this is not our desire, if this is not our aim, we will not **"see the Lord,"** that is, we will not experience His presence and His fellowship in our daily walk.

Jesus told Peter, **"If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me."**

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Immediately after this exhortation, we find a solemn warning.

V 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."**

In reading various commentators, I found that there wasn't a general agreement on the interpretation of this verse.

Dr. McGee says that apostasy is definitely not the subject here.

H.A. Ironside thinks these verses describe an individual in a Christian assembly who has failed "**of the grace of God**" in the sense that he has not followed peace with all men and holiness toward God.

However, in reading his commentary, I was not sure whether he was referring to an unsafe person or a backslidden child of God.

On the other hand, Matthew Henry, who is a diligent student of the Word, is thoroughly convinced that apostasy is indicated here.

For my part, I cannot be entirely sure, but I tend to think Matthew Henry is correct.

His interpretation seems to fit in with the rest of Hebrews, as one of the main reasons for writing this book was to combat the problem of apostasy in the early Hebrew Christian Church.

However, we know that a bitter attitude can exist among Christians as well as apostates.

And without doubt, such an attitude among Christians has caused a great deal of damage to the bride of Christ.

However, in my opinion, apostasy is the subject of V 15.

So here is the gist of what Matthew Henry is teaching concerning verse 15.

V 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."**

He says that the very nature of apostasy is described here.

It is a failing **"of the grace of God."**

It is to completely fail in faith for want of a good foundation and any proper care or diligence in the Word.

It is to have drunk of the grace of God, and then to have borne no fruit, and so to have come short of the love and true grace of God now and hereafter.

And then he says we see a description of the consequences of apostasy.

A root of bitterness will spring up, and will produce bitter fruits for the apostate himself, and, if he remains in

the church, he will cause untold harm with his corrupt principles and practices.

Let's go on.

V 16-17 **"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 carefully with tears."

A few lessons back, we saw the deceitfulness of Jacob and his mother in their method of obtaining the blessing.

However, these verses shed some light on the character of the brother who was cheated.

In these verses, Esau is held up as a prime example of the ungodly person described back in verse 15.

His predominant trait was a total lack of appreciation for the spiritual.

Esau was a man of the world, and only valued physical things.

He sold his birthright for a bowl of food because he considered it of no special value.

But in truth, it was of great value.

It meant that Esau would have been in the line that led to Messiah, and it meant that he would be the priest of the family.

But he cared nothing for these things. He was not interested in spiritual blessings.

In verse 16 where Esau is called a "**profane person**," it doesn't mean that he cursed a great deal.

The root of the word profane indicates something that is against God.

So it simply means he was a godless fellow.

He saw no need of any recognition of God, any relationship to Him, or responsibility toward Him.

So he despised his birthright and counted it something of no value.

And there are also those today who have no time for God or for His Son.

They put their trust in many false gods, such as education, political ideologies and philosophies, but they are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, one day, all men will be believers,
and they will be believers in Jesus
Christ when it is too late.

Philippians 2:9-11 **"Wherefore God also hath
highly exalted him, and given him a
name which is above every name:**

**¹⁰ That at the name of Jesus every
knee should bow, of things in heaven,
and things in earth, and things under
the earth;**

**¹¹ And that every tongue should
confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to
the glory of God the Father."**

And so the unbeliever and the apostate, like
Esau, will see the day when they awaken
to their folly.

However, it will then be too late to obtain
the blessing that once seemed so
valueless to them.

V 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."**

Esau despised his birthright because he had no appreciation for spiritual things, but missing the *blessing* was quite another matter.

The eldest son would have inherited twice as much stuff, and that interested him.

Without a doubt, Esau was interested in physical prosperity, for it says, "--**he sought it carefully with tears.**"

Yes, he cried like a baby, but it was too late.

So, the solemn warning here is this.

When life is over, the unbeliever will find
"no place of repentance."

Yes, if you have despised God's offer of salvation, there is no second chance.

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V 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."**

In verse 18 right down to verse 24, the Holy Spirit vividly contrasts the dispensation of Law and the dispensation of grace, as symbolized here by two mountains.

Under the Old Covenant, man, because of his sin, was cursed.

Galatians 3:10 says, --"**Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.**"

That is what God's righteousness and man's sin add up to.

V 18-20 **"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest,**

¹⁹ 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, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart."

This is a description of Mount Sinai at the time of the giving of the Law.

Could there be stronger words written to show the absolute futility of man

trying to approach God under the fiery circumstances of the Law?

The very awesomeness of God revealed in Mount Sinai should have impressed Israel with their utter inability to meet His requirements.

Indeed V 21 says, **"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake)."**

So this revelation of God should have caused them to realize their unworthiness.

It should have caused them to cast themselves upon God's mercy.

However, Israel, although terrified by His Words, still self-confidently declared, **"All the words which the LORD hath said will we do."**

By that statement, they made themselves responsible to keep every commandment

of the Law as a condition of His blessing.

Even Moses, who was the best of them, trembled at the thought of drawing nigh to God under such circumstances, so what possible hope could there be of any ordinary man standing before Jehovah on the grounds of his own legal righteousness?

So, by standing on their own righteousness as the basis for acceptance, they willingly accepted God's Law rather than God's grace.

And when Christ came to dwell with that nation, they were still at.

Christ said of their legalistic religious leaders, *They strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.*

They strived for blessing but found only a curse, for **"Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."**

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But under the New Covenant of Grace, all who accept Christ's sacrifice come into a marvellous circle of blessing, not based on works, but on God's love

The Law says---"**Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them,**" but Christ has -- "**redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.**"
Galatians 3:13.

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So then, having read these terrifying words describing Mount Sinai, we are prepared to compare that mount with Mount Zion.

V 21-22 **"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)**

22 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,"

--- "ye are come unto mount Zion."

Now, the earthly Mount Zion is a very special place indeed.

It is there that the city of Jerusalem is located.

And it is where King David's throne was set up, and, most importantly, it is where the temple was built.

I say *most importantly* because in Old Testament times, the temple was the dwelling place of God.

Also in the millennium, Israel will be the centre of the earth, and Jerusalem on Mount Zion will be the earthly residence of Jesus Christ.

From there He will rule the whole earth.

Isaiah 59:20 **"And the Redeemer shall come to Zion."**

So that is the significance of Mount Zion in world events.

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But verses 22 to 24 do not refer to the earthly Mount Zion, or the earthly Jerusalem, as important as they are, but rather to the heavenly Jerusalem.

V 22 **"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and
unto the city of the living God, the
heavenly Jerusalem."**

And this Mount Zion in type speaks of the
new covenant of grace in Jesus Christ.
So what is the point of the message in these
verses?

First of all, we must consider the fact that
the book of Hebrews was written to the
Jewish Christians.

Yes, in the early days, the Christian Church
was almost 100% Jewish.

They had accepted the Lord Jesus as their
Saviour, but still held onto the Old
Jewish traditions.

And they still lived in a Jewish community,
so their friends and neighbours were
Jewish.

However, because they were now Christians, they needed to separate themselves from the temple and the priesthood and all that they had grown up with.

It was a difficult transition.

So the writer of Hebrews points out to them that Mount Sinai, rather than being a place of refuge, was a fearful place for man because of the power and righteousness of God.

"And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.)"

So their separation from the Law, symbolized by Mount Sinai, was not to be compared with the blessing that they now had in Mount Zion, which is in heaven.

And, the physical Mount Zion and physical Jerusalem that they were so familiar with could not be compared with the

heavenly Jerusalem that would someday be their home as God's dear children. And even though they were not presently residents of that heavenly Jerusalem, they could still **"sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,"** as an earnest of what was to come, and so can we.

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So let's look at this heavenly Jerusalem, the future home of the redeemed.

V 22-24 **"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, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

We are here concerned with the heavenly Mount Zion which is the real estate upon which the heavenly Jerusalem is built.

As V 22 says, **"But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem."**

Our proper place as the bride of Christ is in that heavenly Jerusalem.

But in that heavenly place, we will find not only the bride of Christ, but all the saints from all the ages.

All those who have died in the faith throughout the centuries, all who in

every dispensations have believed God and were therefore quickened by His Spirit, will be there.

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So let's take a little walk to see who are there in that heavenly place.

First we see "**an innumerable company of angels,**" who, of course, were always in heaven.

While on earth, mankind is "**a little lower than the angels,**" but Christ tells us in Luke 20:36 that when we get to heaven, we will be "**-- equal unto the angels.**"

So we need not fear their company.

Then we find "**--the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.**"

This is the bride of Christ which is
composed of every believer saved in the
age of grace.

Oh what marvellous grace that has placed
sinners, and former enemies of God, in
such a privileged company!

And then we are told that God Himself is
there--"**and to God the Judge of all.**"

There is now no separating veil, no cloud of
darkness between Himself and His
children.

And then we see another company "-- **the
spirits of just men made perfect.**"

If these are in heaven in the presence of
God and still counted *just*, then they
must be those who were justified by the
blood of Christ.

And the word *perfect* found here is in the
sense of being complete.

So this is undoubtedly the saints of former dispensations.

In various God-given ways, they have looked forward by faith to the coming of a Deliverer, and have put their trust in God's salvation.

You might say God saved them on *credit*.

But now they are made perfect, or complete, for the Saviour has come.

The blessed Son has finished the work of redemption, and they are complete in Him.

And then we see "**Jesus the mediator of the new covenant.**"

Jesus the mediator, the go-between God and man, will be there also.

He will be the only God-man in heaven, and He will be there with His redeemed.

"Behold I and the children which God hath
given me." Hebrews 2:13

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--"and to the blood of sprinkling, that
speaketh better things than that of
Abel."

God said to Cain, "the voice of thy
brother's blood crieth unto me from the
ground."

The blood of Abel, the first martyr, cried
out from the ground for vengeance, but
the blood of Christ has a different
message.

He did not die as a martyr at the hands of
sinful man, no. He offered Himself
voluntarily as a sacrifice for sin to
obtain our redemption.

When Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, He
said, "**For this is my blood of the new**

**testament, which is shed for many for
the remission of sins."**

That precious blood "**speaketh better things
than that of Abel.**" It speaks of His
perfect spotless life poured out as a
sacrifice on our behalf.

And in the value of that precious blood,
**"the general assembly and church of the
firstborn"** stand in the heavenly
Jerusalem.

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♪ *And now we draw near to the throne of
grace,*

*For His blood and The Priest are there;
And we joyfully seek God's holy face,
With our censor of praise and prayer.*

*The burning mount and the mystic veil,
With our terrors and guilt, are gone;*

*Our conscience has peace that can never
fail,*

'Tis the Lamb on high on the throne."

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Such is the heavenly scene.

And by it the writer of Hebrews is trying to persuade the Hebrew Christians to take their eyes off the temple, off the sacrifice, off the rituals, and onto the person of Christ.

As verse 3 says, he is trying to get them to

**"consider him that endured such
contradiction of sinners against
himself."**

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The chapter ends with a warning in V 25.

To those Hebrews who were familiar with the claims of Christ, but who might not

have really received Him as their Saviour, the Spirit says:---"**See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.**"

The greater the privilege, the greater the sin of rejecting God's message.

These Hebrews understood, from their own Jewish history, the seriousness of rejecting God's Law.

What would be His indignation with those who refused His gift of grace in Jesus Christ?

And V 26 says, "**Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.**"

At the giving of the Law, there was an earthquake, and at the crucifixion of Christ, there was an earthquake.

But God says that the day is coming when He will shake *everything*.

And why is He going to shake the earth and heaven?

Verse 27 gives us the answer. **"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."**

All that man has trusted in will be gone, and only that which cannot be shaken will remain.

God will remain, His Word will remain, and the eternal kingdom to which believers belong will remain.

V 28-29 **"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:**

29 For our God is a consuming fire."

As believers, we are moving toward a heavenly kingdom.

However, as we move toward that kingdom, we need to serve God on earth.

And how are we to serve Him?

We are to serve Him **"acceptably."**

And how are we to serve Him acceptably?

The verse says we are to serve God **"with reverence and godly fear."**

Yes, the unbeliever needs to fear God, **"For our God is a consuming fire."**

But also those who are His children must not play games with God.

He is a consuming fire by His very nature.

His holiness is manifested in judgment. He will burn up anything of the flesh, and for the Christian, that will ultimately result in absolute conformity to Christ when we finally arrive at the heavenly Jerusalem.

In the meantime, let's not spend our time on that which God must burn up.

"Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is."

