

STUDIES IN THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

STUDY NUMBER TWENTY-TWO - Hebrews 12:14-29

TEXT:

v.14 Be pursuing peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

v.15 Be seeing to it that no one is coming short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up is causing trouble, and by it many be defiled;

v.16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for one meal.

v.17 For you know that even afterwards, when he was desiring to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

v.18 For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

v.19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words, concerning which sound those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them.

v.20 For they were not able to bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned."

v.21 And so terrible was the spectacle, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."

v.22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

v.23 to a festal gathering and church of the firstborn who have been registered in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men who have been brought to perfection,

v.24 and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which is speaking better than the blood of Abel.

v.25 Be seeing to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who was warning them on earth, much less shall we escape who are turning away from Him who is speaking from heaven,

v.26 whose voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."

v.27 And this expression, "Yet once more," is indicating the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of things which have been made, in order that those things which are not being shaken might remain.

v.28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be having grace (showing gratitude), by means of which we may be serving God in an acceptable manner with reverence and awe;
v.29 for our God is a consuming fire.

INTRODUCTION:

(Aladdin Factor, The by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen)

A fellow came into a diner and said to the waitress, "I want a club sandwich with one slice of white bread, one of pumpernickel, and one of whole wheat, toasted medium. Put the bacon and cheese on the bottom layer, the chicken, lettuce, and tomato on the top layer. Put mayonnaise on each layer. Trim the crusts and cut it up into fourths, with a sliced pickle on each part, and a toothpick to hold each part together. Got it?"

"Gotcha," said the waitress. Then she yelled into the kitchen, "One club--for an architect. I'll be right in with the plans."

--*The Best of Bits and Pieces*

p. 141

(All I Know About Animal Behavior I Learned in Loehmann's Dressing Room
by Erma Bombeck)

***Prairie dogs are social animals who greet one
another by sniffing, snuggling, and kissing.***

I have been saying hello and good-bye for a lot of years and I still don't have the hang of it.

No matter how hard I try, I still cannot figure out who kisses, who shakes hands, who hugs, and who just waves or nods.

Every time I think I'm saying hello to a shaker, he's invariably a hugger, and I end up with my arms stiff at my sides, looking like a mummy who has just fallen out of the case.

On the other hand, if he's a kisser and I think he's a waver, I end up with my hand in his ear.

All I know is, you can't just say, "Hi, how's it going?" Nearly everyone today puckers and pecks.

People eating lunch will hurriedly wipe crumbs from their mouths and bury their faces in your hair to finish the job. Visitors to the sick in hospitals lean over long, pale, lifeless forms in little short gowns, and God knows what they're embracing.

The most awkward greeting in the Catholic Church's kiss of peace during the Mass. At one point in the service, the congregation is asked to turn to the people around them and offer a wish for peace, sometimes accompanied by a hug or a kiss. It's like a religious blind date.

I was never surprised when my children assumed a fetal position under the kneeler when this occurred.

For sheer drama, however, nothing compares to the talk show kiss-up. The first encounter with the host is usually in the makeup room, where you greet each other with an enthusiastic hug and kiss. Later in the green room, you encounter those who will be joining you on the show and there is another round of embraces and cheek-pecking.

When you finally emerge from behind the curtain to take your place in the hot seat, you express surprise at seeing the host whom you saw five minutes ago and kiss the air near his cheek so your makeup and hair will remain intact. You do the same for each guest.

At the end of the show, everyone stands up and proceeds to kiss one another good-bye . . . unless you meet them again in the parking lot.

Not everyone is comfortable with the kissing ritual. My husband is one of them. He refuses to press lips with anyone except his wife, mother, and dog. If someone wanted to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, he would refuse until he had been formally introduced.

He regards kissing as a clearinghouse for germs and wants no part of it. When he is confronted by a social kisser, he stands with his arms hanging limply by his sides and his body erect. It's like making a pass at a food blender.

pp. 21-23

WHAT'S INSIDE

A third-grader was asked to write an essay on the subject of the human body. He submitted this masterpiece:

"Your head is kind of round and hard, and your brains are in it and your hair is on it. Your face is in front of your head where you eat and make faces. . . . Your stummick is something that if you don't eat often enough it hurts, and spinach don't help none. . . . Your arms you got to have to throw a ball with and so you can reach the butter.

"Your fingers stick out of your hands so you can throw a curve and add up rithmattick. Your legs is what if you don't have two of, you can't run fast. Your feet are what you run on, and your toes are what always gets stubbed. And that's all there is of you, except what's inside, and I never saw that."

In a difference sense, the rich farmer in Luke 12 also was unable to see "what's inside." He thought he had "the good life." He was dead wrong. What we put in barns or closets or garages do nothing for the soul.

Does it take a grim funeral scene to demonstrate that "the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal"? (2 Cor. 4:18). Only a fool ignores "what's inside."--HWR

*Have you thought of where you're going
When this earthly life is past?
Will the seed that you are sowing
Bring a harvest that will last?--Jacobsen*

LIFE IS MORE THAN THE STUFF WE STORE.

(From *Our Daily Bread* Monday, January 8, 1996)

Let us DIRECT OUR ATTENTION now back to Hebrews 12. We are going to be picking up at verse 14 in our study.

Wiersbe makes this comment on these verses that before us:

The people of Israel had a frightening experience of law at Sinai (Exod. 19), but our experience at Mount Zion is one of grace and glory. We are citizens of the heavenly city and will one day fellowship with patriarchs and angels--and God! But this does not mean we can ignore His solemn voice to us. If God is shaking things in your life, listen to His Word. You will discover the things that cannot be shaken, and you will run the race to the end.
p. 821-2

Kistemaker says:

In clear speech and in direct commands, the pastor-author tells the readers how to live holy lives before God. In fact, he tells them what to do, what to avoid, and what to learn from history. Besides, his remarks are echoing teachings from many parts of Scripture.
p. 384

Westcott comments on verses 14-17 by calling it:

The necessity of peace and purity.

The special exhortations which arose directly from circumstances of trial and discipline lead on to directions of a general character. The duty of mutual help (v. 13) naturally suggests the consideration of the power of mutual influence (vv. 14-18); and this, in the actual state of society, gives occasion to a solemn warning as to the irremediable consequences of faithlessness (v. 17).
p. 405

Wiersbe in his little commentary, Be Confident, titles this section from verse 14-29:

The enablement of God's grace (Heb. 12:14-29)

As we run the Christian race, what is our goal? The writer explained the goal in verse 14: *peace* with all men, and *holiness* before the Lord. (Remember "the *peaceable* fruit of *righteousness*," v. 11?) These two goals remind us of our Lord's high priestly ministry--King of *peace* and King of *righteousness* (7:1-2). It requires diligence to run the race successfully lest we "fail of the grace of God" (12:15). God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to take advantage of His grace. At the end of the chapter, there is another emphasis on grace (v. 28).
p. 141

Hession says:

The closing one and a half chapters are filled with further encouragements, warnings, injunctions, and admonitions, all of them glorious.
p. 197

Richards sets the stage for this passage when he says:

Making the decision to enter the race of faith and submit to the heavenly Father is a critical decision in a Christian's life. Before going on to describe the great impact of that choice, the writer warns against three pitfalls.
p. 132

Lenski says:

The writer has more to say regarding what the readers must do to prevent anyone of their members from going wrong and perhaps contaminating many others. His admonition turns to warning and offers the sad example of Esau. Verses 14-17 should be read as a unit; when this is not done, parts of the whole are misunderstood.
p. 442

Lane makes the following observations:

In the fifth major division in Hebrews, extending from 12:14 to 13:21, the sermon is brought to a close. The concluding segment of the homily consists primarily of a series of pastoral directives. Whenever exposition is introduced, it is integrated with the parenetic instruction that precedes and follows. Its sole purpose is to provide a sound basis for the directives and an incentive for compliance with the writer's appeal to his audience.
p. 431

He calls this section (verses 14-29):

THE FINAL WARNING: THE PERIL OF REFUSING GOD'S GRACIOUS WORD (12:14-29)

p. 435

He says further:

In 12:14-29 the writer once more directs his attention to the peril to which members of the house church were exposed through careless disregard of the blessings of the new covenant. The introductory paragraph, consisting of exhortation and stern warning (12:14-17), sets the tone for the section as a whole. These verses summarize what has been said previously concerning irrevocable loss through disobedience, unbelief, apostasy, and contempt for the covenant privilege.
p. 448

v.14 Be pursuing peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

Here the author issues a TWO-FOLD COMMAND:

1. "BE PURSUING PEACE WITH ALL MEN"
2. "BE PURSUING . . . THE SANCTIFICATION WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE WILL SEE THE LORD."

FOCUS in:

1. is on OUR HORIZONTAL RELATIONSHIPS
2. is on OUR VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP.

The COMMAND HAS CHANGED from:

PERSEVERING to "PURSUING."

This is COMMAND #1 of FOUR COMMANDS that we will find in this passage that we are considering.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Peace with all men as well as personal holiness must be vigorously sought since **without holiness no one will see the Lord.**
p. 810

Just like the bloodhounds get the scent of the trail, so for us, as His children, we ought to be seeking eagerly after peace.

Psalm 119:165

Great peace have they who love your law,
and nothing can make them stumble.

Isaiah 26:3

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Isaiah 26:12

Lord, you establish peace for us; all that we have accomplished you have done for us.

Isaiah 32:17

The fruit of righteousness will be peace; the effect of righteousness will be quietness and confidence forever.

Colossians 3:15

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Acts 24:16

In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.

Lane says:

In this context "peace" is an objective reality that results from the redemptive accomplishment of Christ in his sacrificial death on the cross.
p. 449

Colossians 1:20

and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

Richards says:

It is all too easy to let competitiveness and strife mark our relationships with other people. We're to make every effort to live at peace with them . . . and in it all to be holy.
p. 132

Westcott observes:

The graces of purity and peacemaking are the subjects of two successive beatitudes: Matt. v. 8, 9.
p. 406

MacArthur says:

This verse is not easy to interpret, and has been a problem for many sincere Christians. At first glance, it seems to be teaching salvation by works--if we successfully pursue peace and sanctification, we will be saved and will see the Lord. The truth is, however, that a person who is not saved cannot pursue either peace or sanctification, at least not successfully. Only the Christian has the ability, through the Holy Spirit, to live in peace and in holiness. "'There is no peace,' says my God, 'for the wicked'" (Isa. 57:21) and any righteousness men try to produce apart from God is as "a filthy garment" (Isa. 64:6).
p. 404

Wuest makes this comment on the word "PURSUE":

The word "follow" is the translation of *dioko* "to run swiftly in order to catch some person or thing, to run after, to press on." It is used of one who in a race runs swiftly to reach the goal (Phil. 3:12 "follow after"). Used in a metaphorical sense it means "to pursue, to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavor to acquire." The word is seen, therefore, to have a sense of urgency about it, of intensity of purpose.
pp. 222-3

Delitzsch says much the same thing:

. . . by earnest, active endeavours after a good understanding, a pursuing or hunting after peace as a noble prey or object of search.
p. 329

Pink says:

"Follow peace with all men." The Greek word for "follow" is a very emphatical one, signifying an "earnest pursuit;" it is the eager chasing after something which flies from one, being used of hunters and hounds after game. The Christian is to spare no effort to live amicably with all men, and no matter how contentious and unfriendly they may be, he is to strive and overtake that which seeks to flee from him.
p. 93

Hughes says:

The application is clear: the way to finish well in life's marathon is to pursue peace and holiness--to give it our best--to "make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy." We must learn the "runner's lean," stretching ourselves forward to peace, extending our entire beings toward holiness!
p. 181

(The Living Body: The Church Christ Is Building by Dr. Richard Halverson)

I decided how I would operate. I would prayerfully look over the congregation on Sunday morning or Sunday evening as I was assisting in the service, and I would trust the Spirit to direct me to the one I would contact to be with that week.

The first time I did this, I approached the one I sensed God was leading me to as soon as the benediction was over. I asked him if I could spend some time with him that week. He invited me to be his guest for lunch at his downtown club.

On Tuesday I met him at his club at 12:30. We had a delightful lunch and a good conversation. At about twenty minutes to two he looked at his watch and said, "Dick, I have a two o'clock appointment in my office. I have only ten minutes left. What did you want?"

I said, "I didn't want anything. I just wanted to be with you."

He responded, "Come on, Halverson, I know preachers! You want something. You want me to do something for the church. You need some money."

"No," I said, "honestly, I just wanted to be with you."

He was silent for what seemed a long time, and then he said this: "Dick, this is the first time I've been with a preacher when he didn't want something from me."

pp. 66-67

(Heaven Came Down: Jesus Shows Us How to Treat One Another by Lynn Anderson)

As my friend John Chalk says, "It's not just cannibals that get fed up with people!"

p. 5

Linus, the Peanuts comic strip character, said it for all of us, "I love the world. It's people that I can't stand."

p. 6

(Seeing Through: Reflecting God's Light in a Dark World by David Roper)

There is an old story about Martin Luther and one of his detractors. It seems that he was approached one night and presented with a written litany of his sins. When he finished reading, Luther laid the list aside, sighed deeply, and said to the man, "Think a little harder. You've forgotten some." Would that God would grant me such humility.
p. 126

"BE PURSUING PEACE WITH ALL MEN, AND THE SANCTIFICATION WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE WILL SEE THE LORD."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Since no sin can stand in God's presence, Christians must--and will be--sinless when they see the Lord . . .
p. 810

1 John 3:2, 3

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, if He should appear, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary continues by saying:

That realization offers motivation for pursuing holiness here and now.
p. 810

It is the HOLINESS OF LIFE PRODUCED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD that is an EVIDENCE OF OUR RELATIONSHIP and so He is saying that this fruit ought to begin to be seen in our lives.

J. Vernon McGee says:

If that means that I have to produce holiness, then I am going to give up, because I haven't any holiness. But, oh, the peace that I have which came through the blood of Christ! "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). If I have any holiness, it is because Christ has been made unto me righteousness--*He* is my righteousness. If I get into the presence of God it will be because Christ died for me.
p. 605

Macaulay says:

GOD REQUIRES HOLINESS. If He did not, He would not go to such lengths to secure it. Why the unspeakable sacrifice of Calvary? Why the high-priestly ministry of our risen, glorified Lord? Why the divine exertions of the Holy Spirit? Why the disciplines of God in the life? All to make men holy.
p. 223

Westcott says:

Perhaps it may be most simply described as the preparation for the presence of God.
p. 406

Lane says:

The crucial importance of the pursuit of holiness is underscored by the qualifying phrase, "without which no one will see the Lord." The phrase is a sober reminder that "holiness" is that provision which alone allows one to come into the presence of God. Only those consecrated to God through the objective gift of Christ have access to God.
pp. 450-51

F. B. Meyer says:

How beautiful and solemn are these words, like the swelling cadence of heaven's own music. Evidently they do not emanate from this sorrow-stricken and warring world; they are one of the laws of the kingdom of heaven, intended to mold and fashion our life on earth. It is quite likely that those who elect to obey them may not achieve name and fame among men; but they will win something infinitely better--the beatitude of blessedness, the smile of the Saviour, and the vision of God.
pp. 46-47

Meyer says further:

"Follow after peace." The effect of righteousness is always peace. If you are holy, you will be at peace. Peace is broken by sin; but the holy soul takes sin instantly to the blood.
p. 49

Hebrews 2:11

For both He who is sanctifying and those who are being sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to be calling them brethren,

Ephesians 5:26, 27

that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless.

Jude 24, 25

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

(The Life of God in the Soul of Man by Rev. Henry Scougal)

With a pure mind in God, clean and bare from the memory of all things, remaining unmovably in him, thou shalt think and desire nothing but him alone; as though there were nothing else in the world but he and thou only together; that all thy faculties and powers being thus re-collected into God, thou mayst become one spirit with him.
p. 159

Phillips paraphrases the last few verses in:

Romans 12:18-21

As far as your responsibility goes, live at peace with everyone. Never take vengeance into your own hands, my dear friends: stand back and let God punish if he will. For it is written: Vengeance belongeth unto me: I will recompense. And these are God's words: If thine enemy hunger, feed him; If he thirst, give him to drink: For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Don't allow yourself to be overpowered with evil. Take the offensive--overpower evil by good!

2 Corinthians 7:1 (Phillips)

With these promises ringing in our ears, dear friends, let us keep clear of anything that smirches body or soul. Let us prove our reverence for God by consecrating ourselves to him completely.

1 Peter 1:15, 16 (Phillips)

Don't let your character be moulded by the desires of your ignorant days, but be holy in every department of your lives, for the one who has called you is himself holy. The scripture says: Ye shall be holy; for I am holy

v.15 Be seeing to it that no one is coming short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up is causing trouble, and by it many be defiled;

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

As a grim reminder of what can happen among believers, the writer warned that **one** who **misses the grace of God** may become like a **bitter root** whose infidelity to God affects others.

p. 810

Deuteronomy 29:18

Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.

Whereas, we had:

COMMAND #1 in verse 14.

"BE PURSUING PEACE WITH ALL MEN, AND THE
SANCTIFICATION WITHOUT WHICH NO ONE WILL SEE THE
LORD."

We now have:

COMMAND #2 here in verse 15.

"BE SEEING TO IT THAT NO ONE IS COMING SHORT OF THE
GRACE OF GOD; THAT NO ROOT OF BITTERNESS SPRINGING UP
IS CAUSING TROUBLE, AND BY IT MANY BE DEFILED;"

When times are hard 2 THINGS CAN HAPPEN:

1. YOU QUIT
2. YOU GET BITTER

1 Corinthians 5:6, 7

Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.

"BE SEEING TO IT":

1. "THAT NO ONE IS COMING SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD" and
2. "THAT NO ROOT OF BITTERNESS SPRINGING UP IS CAUSING TROUBLE, AND BY IT MANY BE DEFILED."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

An Old Covenant apostate was called a "root . . . that produces such bitter poison." Such a person would be **godless** (. . . "profane, unhallowed, desecrated") **like Esau**, Jacob's brother, whose loose and profane character led him to sell **his inheritance rights as the oldest son** for the temporary gratification of a **single meal**. He warned the readers not to yield to transitory pressures and forfeit their inheritances. If some did, they would ultimately regret the foolish step and might find their inheritance privileges irrevocably lost as were Esau's. This would of course be true of one who ended his Christian experience in a state of apostasy, which the writer had continually warned against.
pp. 810-11

F. B. Meyer says:

There may be some evil root lurking in some heart, hidden now, but which will bear a terrible harvest of misery to many. So was it in Israel once, when Achan conceived thoughts of covetousness, and brought evil on himself, and mourning on the host whose defeat he had brought about. If we can discover the presence of such roots of bitterness, let us, with much searching of our own souls, and prayer, root them out, ere they can spring up to cause trouble.
p. 51

"BE SEEING TO IT THAT NO ONE IS COMING SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD."

Westcott says:

. . . the idea seems to be that of falling behind, not keeping pace with the movement of divine grace which meets and stirs the progress of the Christian (c. v. 11).
p. 406

Hughes titles verses 15-17:

FINISHING WELL--WHAT TO GUARD AGAINST (vv. 15-17)

As the writer continues his advice about finishing well, he turns from the positive charges (regarding running tough, running tough together, and running after peace and holiness) to negative admonitions about what to guard oneself against. The warnings come in three successive clauses.
p. 181

Richards says of verse 15:

Another source of danger for us is that we might lag behind God's grace and become bitter. God's grace enables us to overcome the natural tendencies to self-pity and anger that otherwise would grow into bitterness in our personalities. If we fail to call on His grace to purge us of such feelings, that bitterness *can* grow, and it will defile us. How good to know that God's grace provides an answer to bitterness. Like Him, we can forgive, and forgiving, we can love.
pp. 132-3

Lenski, commenting on this phrase that "NO ONE IS COMING SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD," says:

Yet the readers were in danger of doing this very thing by shrinking from persecution and thus being inclined to think less and less of Christ and again falling in love with their former Judaism.
p. 444

Bruce says:

If such holiness is to be pursued, then care must be taken to detect and nip in the bud any tendency that would be inimical to it. Let them see to it that none of them fails to attain the grace of God. If it is the grace of God that sets people's feet at the entrance of the pathway of faith it is equally the grace of God that enables them to continue and complete that pathway.
p. 349

Draper says:

The text reads--"lest any man fail of the grace of God" (12:15). That does not imply concern that the grace of God might fail, since "fail" means "to lag behind." It is a picture of the race of life which we are running. In that scene, there are contestants running in a race, and one of them gives out and starts to lag behind. Our obligation is to make certain that nobody drops out of the race or lags behind or wants for energy and strength to complete the race. When that happens, we are to drop back, put our arms around them, and lift them up. We will be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another, encouraging one another, restoring one another. In our relationship with one another, we give oversight lest someone lag behind.
pp. 349-50

Hewitt says:

True devotedness to Christ by any Christian community must bring harmony and holiness, yet unless that community takes heed of the actions of its individual members both may be destroyed.
p. 197

Phillips says:

However, a person who falls from grace, in this context, is not a person who loses his salvation but a believer who fails to avail himself of the "means of grace" made available to him by God to help him in his Christian life. Such means of grace are the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper, fellowship with other believers, the Word of God, prayer, the indwelling Holy Spirit, and similar things. The believer who neglects these things falls into sin and loses, not his salvation, but his reward.
p. 198

2 Corinthians 12:9

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

The Scripture teaches us in:

Ephesians 2:8, 9

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

It is very possible to be "COMING SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD."

Someone has said:

HE MISSED SALVATION BY EIGHTEEN INCHES, THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE HEAD TO THE HEART.

What is it that causes one to be "COMING SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD?" I say it is:

1. PRIDE
2. PERFORMANCE ORIENTATION
3. PREPARATION NOT NEEDED

"BE SEEING TO IT THAT NO ONE IS COMING SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD; THAT NO ROOT OF BITTERNESS SPRINGING UP IS":

1. "CAUSING TROUBLE, AND"
2. "BY IT MANY BE DEFILED."

First, they are "COMING SHORT OF THE GRACE OF GOD" because"

1. THEY ARE PEOPLE WHO DID NOT CONTINUE TO TRUST THE ADEQUACY OF CHRIST AND
2. THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO CHRIST DID NOT MEAN THAT MUCH TO THEM.

Because of the difficult times of suffering and hardship that they are facing, they have become:

BITTER INSTEAD OF BETTER through the process.

1 Samuel 1:10

In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the Lord.

Ruth 1:20, 21

"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

Barclay says:

The phrase comes from *Deuteronomy* 29:18; and there it describes the man or woman who goes after strange gods, and encourages other to do so, and who thereby becomes a pernicious and poisonous influence on the life of the community. The writer to the Hebrews is warning against those who are a corrupting influence.

p. 208

Stedman observes:

Bitterness is always wrong. No matter how justified the cause of bitterness may be, to have a bitter attitude as a Christian is always wrong, for resentment, envy and bitterness are always of the flesh. The trouble is, they are highly contagious diseases. If one person is bitter and continues in an unforgiving, bitter spirit, others are infected by this and it spreads and defiles many. This is the problem in many a church today. So if you see someone around you that has this problem, help them to see that this is a terrible thing that will wreck their life and destroy the grace of God, thus making it impossible to grow as a Christian.

p. 220

Ephesians 4:30-32

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

Phillips says:

A person who lives an unsanctified life has a bad influence on others. Evil spreads, whether it be moral or doctrinal. It leads to bitterness between believers and to lives contaminated with the poison of gossip and resentment. People invariably takes sides.

p. 198

A. T. Robertson says of the "ROOT OF BITTERNESS SPRINGING UP" that this verb is a:

Present active participle . . . to sprout. Pictured here as a quick process.

p. 437

Draper says:

Then the writer of Hebrews says we should watch for one another "lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you." The concern here is for those hidden seeds of bitterness that spring up in our hearts. If there is one seed of bitterness, anger, or hidden resentment in our hearts, it will make us ineffective. Satan will use it to take away our strength, to destroy our joy and happiness. He will use it to undercut our ministry to others. It will trouble us and thereby many will be defiled (12:15).

There is nothing more defiling to the cause of Christ than a Christian who is consumed with bitterness. Jesus specifically warned us that it would be better for us to submit to great injustice than to have a spirit of bitterness, retaliation, and revenge (Matthew 5:38-42). We must confess secret bitterness, since it will not only defile us, but will defile many others as well. The cause of Christ is greatly distressed in many areas today because the seed of bitterness has worked against the purpose of God in his people.

p. 350

Bruce says:

But perhaps the best commentary on our author's words here is his earlier warning in Heb. 3:12: "See to it, brothers, that there is not in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, deserting the living God."

p. 350

Kistemaker says:

With this picture borrowed from the world of agriculture, the author of Hebrews looks at the church and compares a person who has missed the grace of God (and has fallen away) with a bitter root. Such a person causes trouble among God's people by disturbing the peace. With his bitter words, he deprives the believers of holiness. Says the writer, he defiles many. The verb *defile* actually conveys the idea of giving something color by painting or staining it.³⁰

30. R. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 110; J. I. Packer, *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, p. 447; and Friedrich Hauck, *TDNT*, vol. 4, pp. 644-46.

pp. 385-6

J. Vernon McGee says:

One critical, ugly saint in a church can stir up more trouble than you can possibly imagine, just like one rotten apple in a barrel spoils all the others. We need to ask God for grace to endure whatever we are going through, and not become bitter toward any one or toward any circumstances.
p. 606

Macaulay says:

Such a root of bitterness in the Christian church would be one opposed to a spiritual ministry, using every pretext to stir dissension; or one seized with jealousy, creating faction; or one aggravating an unimportant difference into a vital issue, and establishing a camp of recalcitrants. These are roots of bitterness springing up and causing trouble, till the many, the people as a whole, are defiled with contention. That is fatal to true holiness, and must be carefully guarded against.
p. 227

Westcott says:

The poisonous influence spreads corruption through the society.
p. 407

Many there are who have excluded themselves from the grace of God simply because they have seen Christians who have so poorly represented their Heavenly Father, who have found an excuse in not wanting to come to a relationship with Christ because of the bitterness, the resentment, the bad response to a disciplining act of the Heavenly Father. And also, not only this, but it is possible also, through resistance and misunderstanding, when the heavy hand of discipline is upon us that a "ROOT OF BITTERNESS MIGHT SPRING UP" and not only trouble us, but also many others would be defiled in the process.

Because Akan stole some things from Jericho and hid them in the floor of his tent, the whole nation was defeated in the battle at Ai.

And so it is with us, when we **FAIL TO RESPOND PROPERLY TO THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER**, we can cause others to be excluded from the grace of God because of what they see in our lives who name His name; and also have even trouble ourselves because of a **"ROOT OF BITTERNESS."** And that **"ROOT OF BITTERNESS"** also defiles many other brothers and sisters in the family.

A WRONG ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CHASTENING HAND OF GOD IN YOUR LIFE CAN KEEP THE SINNER FROM COMING TO CHRIST AND ALSO DEFILE YOUR BROTHER AND SISTER IN CHRIST.

I have heard that if a rattlesnake is cornered, it can become so frenzied that it will accidentally bite itself with its deadly fangs. In the same way, when a person harbors hatred and resentment in his heart, he is often hurt by the poison of his own malice. He thinks he is injuring his enemies by displaying his wrath, but the real harm is inflicted deep within his own soul.

Anger can also cause us to do and say things we may deeply regret. George W. Martin tells the following true story: "I remember a fellow who once wrote a nasty letter to his father. Since we worked in the same office, I advised him not to send it because it was written in a fit of temper. But he sealed it and asked me to put it in the mail. Instead, I simply slipped it into my pocket and kept it until the next day. The following morning he arrived at the office looking very worried. 'George,' he said, 'I wish I had never sent that note to my dad yesterday. It hurts me deeply, and I know it will break his heart when he reads it. I'd give 50 dollars to get it back!' Taking the envelope from my pocket, I handed it to him and told him what I had done. He was so overjoyed that he actually wanted to pay me the 50 dollars!"

(From Parson's Bible Illustrator 1.0)

Sunk by Own Attack

During World War II the U.S. submarine *Tang* surfaced under the cover of darkness to fire upon a large Japanese convoy off the coast of China. Since previous raids had left the American vessel with only eight torpedoes, the accuracy of every shot was absolutely essential. The first seven missiles were right on target; but when the eighth was launched, it suddenly deviated and headed right back at their own ship. The emergency alarm to submerge rang out, but it was too late. Within a matter of seconds, the U.S. sub received a direct hit and sank almost instantly.

In much the same way we can destroy ourselves by hostility towards others. The effects of holding a grudge are very serious. Modern medicine has shown that emotions like bitterness and anger can cause problems such as headaches, backaches, allergic disorders, ulcers, high blood pressure, and heart attacks, to name just a few. When we do not love our enemies but strike back at them, we are usurping God's prerogative to mete out justice. We read in the Bible, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord!" By seeking revenge, we really inflict great harm on ourselves.

(From Parson's Bible Illustrator 1.0)

LAST CHANCE

Phillips Brooks, a 19th-century preacher and hymnwriter, once spoke of forgiveness in these words: "You who are letting misunderstandings run on from year to year, meaning to clear them up someday; you who are passing men sullenly in the street, not speaking to them because of some silly spite, and yet knowing that you would be ashamed if you heard that one of these men had died. . . . If you could suddenly realize that 'the time is short,' how it would break the spell! How you would go instantly and do the thing you might never have another chance to do!"

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

"PLEASE DON'T GO TO MY CHURCH!"

A young woman who had a part in leading several people to the Lord said to a friend, "The new converts asked me what church I attended and I told them. But frankly, I felt like saying, 'Please don't go there!' You see, our congregation is sound in doctrine, but the members harbor so many petty jealousies and bad attitudes in their hearts that I'm afraid a new Christian would be hurt, not helped."

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

LOOKING FOR FORGIVENESS

Dan Schaeffer tells this story: A number of years ago in a small town in Spain, a man and his teenage son had an argument. The falling out led to deep feelings of bitterness and unforgiveness on both sides. The son soon left for the city. The father regretted the way he had treated his son and began to search for him. After several months, he still had not been able to locate the young man.

Finally, as a last ditch effort, he placed the following ad in the classified section of a Madrid newspaper: "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon. All is forgiven. I love you. Your father."

By twelve o'clock the next day, there were over 800 men named Paco gathered outside the newspaper building. Every one of them was looking for forgiveness from his father.

[Pursuit, Vol 3, No. 2, 1994. Page 10.]

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

REMEMBERING TO FORGET

Luis Palau says, "Clara Barton, the founder of the American Red Cross, was reminded one day of a vicious deed that someone had done to her years before. She acted as if she had never heard of the incident.

"Don't you remember it?" her friend asked.

"No," Miss Barton replied. 'I distinctly remember forgetting it.'"

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

KEEPER OF THE SPRING

"The late Peter Marshall used to love to tell the story of The Keeper of the Spring, a quiet forest dweller who lived high above an Austrian village along the eastern slopes of the Alps. The old gentleman had been hired many years ago by a young town council to clear away the debris from the pools of water up in the mountain crevices that fed the lovely stream flowing through their town. With faithful, silent regularity, he patrolled the hills, removed the leaves and branches, and wiped away the silt that would otherwise choke and contaminate the fresh flow of water. By and by, the village became a popular attraction for vacationers. Graceful swans floated along the crystal clear stream, the millwheels of various businesses located near the water turned day and night, farmlands were naturally irrigated, and the view from restaurants was picturesque beyond description.

"Years passed. One evening the town council met for its semiannual meeting. As they reviewed the budget, one man's eye caught the salary figure being paid the obscure keeper of the spring. Said the keeper of the purse, 'who is the old man? Why do we keep him on year after year? No one ever sees him. For all we know the strange ranger of the hills is doing us no good. He isn't necessary any longer!' By a unanimous vote, they dispense with the old man's services.

"For several weeks nothing changed. By early autumn the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools, hindering the rushing flowing water. One afternoon someone noticed a slight yellowish-brown tint in the stream. A couple of days later the water was much darker. Within another week, a slimy film covered sections of the water along the banks and a foul odor was soon detected. The millwheels moved slower, some finally ground to a halt. Swans left, as did the tourists. Clammy fingers of disease and sickness reached deeply into the village.

"Quickly, the embarrassed council called a special meeting. Realizing their gross error in judgment, they hired back the old keeper of the spring . . . and within a few weeks the veritable river of life began to clear up. The wheels started to turn, the new life returned to the hamlet in the Alps once again.

"Fanciful though it may be, the story is more than an idle tale. It carries with it a vivid, relevant analogy directly related to the times in which we live. What the keeper of the springs meant to the village, Christian servants mean to our world. The preserving, taste-giving bite of salt mixed with the illuminating, hope-giving ray of light may seem feeble and needless, but God help any society that attempts to exist without them! You see, the village without the keeper of the spring is a perfect representation of the world system without salt and light."

[*Improving Your Serve* by Charles Swindoll. Word, 1981. Pages 127-128.]

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

A BONE TO PICK

Ad in small-town newspaper: "If Jack Smith, who deserted his wife and baby twenty years ago will return, the aforementioned baby will knock the socks off him."

A burglar entered the house of a Quaker and proceeded to rob it. The Quaker heard noises and took his shotgun downstairs and found the burglar. He aimed his gun and said gently: "Friend, I mean thee no harm, but thou standest where I am about to shoot."

Bitterness and resentment are conditions of the heart which develop because a person allows an offense or disappointment to take root and grow until it affects his thoughts, actions, and his interpersonal relationships.

Billy Graham

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

(Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging by Brennan Manning)

The words of Jesus, "What I want is mercy, not sacrifice" are addressed to men and women of religion across the boundaries of time. Eugene Kennedy commented, "Whoever in history has put the law, the regulation, the tradition ahead of the suffering person stands in the same field of grain [as the Pharisees] smugly making the same accusation against the innocent."

How many lives have been ruined in the name of narrow-minded, intolerant religiosity!

p. 84

(Active Spiritually by Charles R. Swindoll)

Karl Menninger wrote with keen perception:

When a trout rising to a fly gets hooked on a line and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins with a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape. Often, of course, the situation is too tough for him.

In the same way the human being struggles with his environment and with the hooks that catch him. Sometimes he masters his difficulties; sometimes they are too much for him. His struggles are all that the world sees and it naturally misunderstands them. It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one.

p. 144

(The Book of Virtues by William J. Bennett)

The Arrow and the Song

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

In this poem, Longfellow suggests that if we offer something of ourselves to the world--a good deed, a kind word, our love--eventually we will discover its effects. It may come back to us in the form of a friend.

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend.

p. 341

(2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul, A: 101 More Stories to Open the Heart and Rekindle the Spirit by Jack Canfield & Mark Victor Hansen)

Next fall, when you see geese heading south for the winter, flying along in “V” formation, you might consider what science has discovered as to why they fly that way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in “V” formation, the whole flock adds at least 71 percent greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

People who share a common direction and sense of community can get where they are going more quickly and easily, because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.

When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone--and quickly gets back into formation to take advantage of the lifting power of the bird in front.

If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay in formation with those people who are headed the same way we are.

When the head goose gets tired, it rotates back in the wing and another goose flies point.

It is sensible to take turns doing demanding jobs, whether with people or with geese flying south.

Geese honk from behind to encourage those up front to keep up their speed.

What messages do we give when we honk from behind?

Finally--and this is important--when a goose gets sick or is wounded by gunshot, and falls out of formation, two other geese fall out with that goose and follow it down to lend help and protection. They stay with the fallen goose until it is able to fly or until it dies; and only then do they launch out on their own, or with another formation to catch up with their group.

If we have the sense of a goose, we will stand by each other like that.

Author Unknown

pp. 307-8

PURGE OUT THE POISON

My friend and I were standing in the parking lot of a restaurant where we had just finished lunch. While we were discussing the damage a bitter spirit can cause, he took out his New Testament and solemnly read Hebrews 12:15 to me: "Looking carefully . . . lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled."

In the six long decades since our conversation, the sad truth of that warning has been repeatedly verified by my experiences in pastoral ministry. Bitterness is a poison, and if not purged out by prayer, confession, and forgiveness, it does great emotional damage and destroys relationships. A little grudge that festers can become a devastating malignancy of soul. That's why the advice in Hebrews must be diligently heeded.

Have you been holding fast to the memory of some insult, some event, some criticism? As Paul put it in Ephesians 4:26, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath." Take the proper steps to resolve the problem right away.

Holding a grudge poisons our spiritual lives. With the Holy Spirit's help, let's uproot any bitterness right now. It's amazing how joyful our lives will be when we allow God to purge out the poison of bitterness.--VCG

THINKING IT THROUGH

*What are we to do when someone sins
against us? (Lk. 17:3-4). According to Jesus,
how many times are we to forgive? (Mt. 18:21-22).*

TO GET RID OF WEEDS OF ANGER, DIG OUT THE BITTER ROOTS.

(From *Our Daily Bread* Saturday, December 16, 1995)

v.16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for one meal.

This is the THIRD PART OF COMMAND #2.

The COMMAND "Be seeing to it":

1. "no one is coming short of the grace of God"
2. "that no root of bitterness springing up is causing trouble, and by it many be defiled"
3. "THAT THERE BE NO IMMORAL OR GODLESS PERSON LIKE ESAU, WHO SOLD HIS OWN BIRTHRIGHT FOR ONE MEAL."

Esau took the promise of God and said it held no blessing to him whatsoever. The Christians in view are doing the same thing.

I think it would be good for us to STOP AND MEDITATE on the:

CONTRAST BETWEEN ESAU AND THESE WHOSE NAMES WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT in the hall of faith in chapter 11.

How different is ESAU from:

ABEL,
 ENOCH,
 NOAH,
 ABRAHAM,
 SARAH,
 ISAAC,
 JACOB,
 JOSEPH,
 MOSES and

OTHERS?

TWO WORDS stand out to describe ESAU AND HIS LIFE:

1. "IMMORAL" and
2. "GODLESS."

1 Corinthians 6:9, 10

Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:8

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Esau by the right of birth had the full privilege of being in the Messiac line, of being godly, but he was a purely sensuous man, who had no regard for the privileges of his birth, and who for a bowl of chili sold his birthright and pursued the paths of godlessness and immorality.

This is a sober reminder to these Hebrews who are not wanting to endure.

They had been challenged by the apostle to:

1. ENDURE, by looking to Christ as an example,
2. RECOGNIZE the disciplining hand of a loving Father, because they are sons and daughters in His family.

They are being exhorted and challenged to:

3. STRENGTHEN the drooping hands, the WEAKENED KNEES, to make STRAIGHT PATHS for their feet, to be eagerly seeking after PEACE with all and HOLINESS, to be seeing to it that no one is being EXCLUDED from the grace of God, and "that no root of

bitterness springing up" and "THAT THERE BE NO . . . PERSON LIKE ESAU" among them.

The BIG QUESTION that comes before us is:

IS IT EVER RIGHT TO SELL OUT BECAUSE IT IS ROUGH?

Westcott says:

A man may fail by personal impurity: he may fail also by disregard of the blessings of God. Esau is a characteristic example of the latter form of sin, as one who by birth occupied a position of prerogative which he recklessly sacrificed for an immediate and sensuous pleasure. The Hebrews, on their part, might also barter their blessings as firstborn in the Church for the present outward consolations of the material Temple service. Peace and Judaism might be bought at the price of Christian holiness.
pp. 407-8

Hewitt points out:

Manson is right when he affirms that 'it was unbelief in the divine promise to his house, not mere sensuality, that led Esau to the irrevocable step of bartering away his birthright. No later repentance was able to undo this act.'
p. 198

Lane says:

The synonym, "Irreligious," "secular," describes Esau as a man who was preoccupied only with personal gratification. For such a person there are only the self and the present moment (cf. Gen 25:32): "'Look, I am about to die,' Esau said. 'What good are the inheritance rights to me?'"
p. 455

Westcott says of this same word that we have translated "GODLESS" here in verse 16 in describing Esau:

The word describes a character which recognises nothing as higher than earth: for whom there is nothing sacred: no divine reverence for the unseen.

Esau appears in Scripture as the embodiment of this character.
p. 408

Parker in his exposition says:

If you have been so foolish as to sell your birthright, I know what you got for it--you got "one morsel of meat," and nothing more. It is very desirable to impress this upon young minds, who may not yet have fully completed the momentous transaction. The devil has no more on his counter; the enemy has no more at the bank; he pays you all he can pay you when you sell your birthright,--one gulp, one morsel, one flash of pleasure, and then hell! Nothing more is possible. Then why haggle with the old serpent, the devil? Why ask for three-half-pence more for your soul? The whole transaction totals up to one morsel of meat. That is all he gave to the mother of the world. She and he struck the first bargain about birthrights. When she saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took fruit--how much can a woman hold in her hand?--and she did eat; and then she knew that she was naked. So it comes and goes, age after age, the same temptation, the same bargain, the same price, and same perdition!

p. 221

Hebrews 11:25

choosing rather to be suffering ill-treatment with the people of God,
than to be enjoying the short-lived pleasures of sin;

(Not I, But Christ by Stephen F. Olford)

Vance Havner tells of the time he brought a saintly friend of his from the deep South to New York City for a weekend “treat.” Havner showed him all the sights, as well as the shops around Rockefeller Center. At the end of the day Dr. Havner asked his friend what he thought of it all. After a moment’s reflection, the old Christian warrior simply said, “Well, I’ve seen it all; but, quite honestly, there isn’t anything I’ve seen that I can’t live without!”

p. 80

(Women of Honor: God’s Incredible Plan for Fulfillment by Jeanne Hendricks)

Eve--and history--turned a sharp corner in a flash. The serpent hissed and Eve inverted paradise. A mere question, quivering like the jab of a needle, pierced her innocence. She toppled helpless, unsuspecting before her enemy.

p. 37

Just think, a new food! Its luster and shape and fragrance! And now the prospect of gaining wisdom drew her strangely toward it. With the insistent prodding of history’s most wicked double-cross, she doubted . . . she denied . . . she disobeyed . . . and she destroyed her innocence, jeopardizing her husband and all her future children.

p. 43

(Prayer, Praise & Promises: A Daily Walk Through the Psalms by Warren W. Wiersbe)

Becoming worldly is progressive; it happens by degrees. We make friends with the world; we become spotted by the world; we love the world, become confirmed to it and end up condemned with it. Lot is an example of someone who became worldly. He looked toward Sodom, pitched his tent toward Sodom, lived there, lost everything and ended in sin.
(Day 2)

(Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives by Richard A. Swenson, M.D.)

“Within the human heart ‘things’ have taken over,” asserts A. W. Tozer. “God’s gifts now take the place of God, and the whole course of nature is upset by the monstrous substitution.”¹⁸

18. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1948), page 22.
p. 197

(Living in the Lions' Den Without Being Eaten by William Carr Peel)

The most pessimistic attitude anyone could possibly take today would be to suggest that a way of life based on materialistic values, on laying up treasure on earth in the shape of an ever-expanding Gross National Product, and a corresponding ever-increasing consumption stimulated and fostered by the fathomless imbecilities of advertising, could possibly provide human beings made in the image of their Creator, sojourners in time, but belonging to eternity, with a meaningful basis for existence.

MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE
Living Through an Apocalypse

p. 189

(Perilous Pursuits by Joseph M. Stowell)

Authentic Christianity demands that we live in the peaceful context of contentment. We pursue contentment primarily because the madness of more is such a serious threat to an authentic and prosperous relationship with God.

Covetousness is Scripture's word for our obsessive compulsion for more. Covetousness is the adversary. How serious is it? So serious that God issued a prohibition against it in His list of Ten Rules that chart the history of righteous behavior (Exodus 20:17). Throughout Scripture, covetousness is viewed as a debilitating illness that blocks the fullness of God in our lives.

As we seek more of possessions we seek less of Him. Wanting more of things that wear out and are temporal crowds out our wanting more of Him who is ever fresh and eternal. As Christ warned, "You cannot serve God and money"

(Matthew 6:24).

p. 72

v.17 For you know that even afterwards, when he was desiring to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

THERE HAS ALWAYS GOT TO BE A MORNING AFTER!

Do you know?

"THAT EVEN AFTERWARDS, WHEN HE WAS DESIRING TO
INHERIT THE BLESSING, HE WAS REJECTED"

Just like CAIN was rejected earlier, warned by the Lord in:

Genesis 4:6, 7

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

In the later part of the verse we have THE REASON for God's action toward Esau in this situation:

"FOR HE FOUND NO PLACE FOR REPENTANCE."

Then the FINAL PHRASE:

"THOUGH HE SOUGHT FOR IT [that is, the BLESSING] WITH TEARS."

The "TEARS" that he was shedding were tears over the:

LOSS OF THE BENEFITS OF THE BLESSING.

Rather than tears of:

REPENTANCE.

Westcott says:

The consequences of Esau's act reached farther than he had cared to look (*even afterward*). In spite of his impulsive disregard of divine things he retained still some sense of God's promise, and sought to secure what had naturally belonged to him.
p. 408

Stedman says:

When it says that Esau desired to inherit the blessing later but was rejected, *for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears*, please do not misunderstand that. That does not mean that he tried to repent in his own heart but could not. The repentance he sought was not his own, but his father's. Repentance means a change of mind. When he came back to his father later and said, "Now, Father, I'd like to have my birthright," his father said, "It's too late, son. You sold it for a mess of pottage and it belongs to your brother." Esau wept bitterly and tried to change his father's mind, but his father could not change his mind; it was too late.
p. 221

Barclay says:

It is better to say that it was now impossible for Esau to change his mind. It is not that he was barred forever from the forgiveness of God. It is something much simpler than that. It is just the grim fact that there are certain choices which cannot be unmade, and certain consequences which not even God can take away. To take a very simple example--if a young man loses his purity or a girl her virginity, nothing can ever bring it back. The choice was made and the choice stands. God can and will forgive, but God Himself cannot turn back the clock and unmake the choice or undo the consequences. We do well to remember that there is a certain finality in life. If, like Esau, we take the way of this world, if we make sensual, bodily things our final good, if we choose the pleasures of time in preference to the joys of eternity, God can and will still forgive, but something has happened that can never be undone. There are certain things in which a man cannot change his mind; his desire to do so has come too late; he must abide for ever by the choice that he has made.
p. 210

Kistemaker says:

Now once more the writer returns to this subject. Taking the example of Esau, he shows that Esau deliberately rejected the faith of his father and his grandfather by despising his birthright; therefore, he himself was rejected. God rejected him. Moreover, that rejection was final and irrevocable. Years after he had sold his birthright, his father Isaac wanted to give him the blessing, but was unable to do so (Gen. 27:30-40). Suddenly Esau realized that God had by-passed him, but his heart had hardened so much that "he could bring about no change of mind." Repentance was impossible for him. The author adds that Esau "sought the blessing with tears." According to the Genesis account, Esau showed no sign of penitence, only anger toward his brother Jacob. Hence with his tears he sought not repentance, but only the blessing.

The lesson is obvious. We must know that unbelief leads to hardening of the heart and to apostasy. He who has fallen away from the living God finds that God has rejected him. Therefore, we must strive for peace and holiness, avoid immorality and godlessness, and know that falling into the hands of the living God is most dreadful (Heb. 10:31).
p. 387

Phillips points out:

The repentance spoken of here was not repentance on Esau's part. It was repentance, a change of mind, on the part of his father, Isaac, that Esau wanted. Isaac had given the blessing to Jacob, and though Esau pleaded and entreated for Isaac to reverse his action and give the blessing to him, it was all in vain. Esau was forever the loser, because he had so lightly valued spiritual realities and thrown them away for a brief moment's physical comfort.

p. 199

A. T. Robertson in his Word Pictures says:

The choice was irrevocable as Isaac shows (Gen. 27:33). Esau is a tragic example of one who does a wilful sin which allows no second chance (Heb. 6:6; 10:26). The author presses the case of Esau as a warning to the Christians who were tempted to give up Christ.

p. 438

Bruce says:

The application is plain; it is a reinforcement of the warning given at an earlier stage in the argument, that after apostasy no second repentance is possible. "Let us therefore fear lest, when the promise of entering into his rest has been left open, any of you should turn out to have fallen short of it" (4:1).

p. 352

MacArthur warns us:

We must be vigilant so that no one turns from the truth, becomes bitter, or follows the course of selfish Esau, who wanted God's blessing desperately--but not on God's terms (cf. Mark 10:17-22).

p. 408

Wiersbe quotes from G. Campbell Morgan:

*"We cry too often to be delivered from the punishment,
instead of the sin that lies behind it. We are anxious to
escape from the things that cause us pain rather
than from the things that cause God pain."*

G. Campbell Morgan

p. 822

Griffith Thomas says:

A careful consideration of the original shows that the verse does not mean that Esau, in spite of his repentance, was rejected by God, but that "he found no way of changing his father's mind," though he sought *the blessing* with tears. Spiritual things were insignificant with him up to this time, and when he realized what he had done, it was too late to obtain what he had spurned.

p. 164

English says:

Our Hebrews passage tells that Esau was rejected, "for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears." The statement may be clarified if we change it slightly, conforming more to the rendition of the Revised Version: "for he found in his father no place for a change of mind, though he sought blessing zealously, with tears." It was not that Esau himself could not repent. He could have repented and he may even have done so sincerely, but it is more likely that he simply suffered remorse for what he had lost through hasty action. Neither was it repentance that he sought with tears, but the blessing. Esau desired that his father should repent, should change his mind, so that Isaac would revoke the blessing that he had given to Jacob and bestow it upon Esau after all. It was too late, however. Esau had fallen short of the grace of God, and he profaned God in despising holy things. Esau was assuredly not in the place where he was pursuing peace and holiness.

pp. 465-6

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

It was precisely this opportunity that Esau lacked. When the blessing of Isaac had been given to Jacob, there was no chance of getting this altered. It had been bestowed already upon Jacob, and so it could not be given to Esau.
p. 226

The analogy is singularly appropriate. The recipients of the Epistle must guard themselves against the danger of losing the inheritance and the blessing which God has reserved for them as his first-born among men. If they adhere to wrong priorities, they may not be for ever damned, but they will forfeit their share in the promises of God. Esau stands as a frightening example of the irreversible results of immoral or irreligious conduct on the part of the elect.
p. 226

Parker, when he is expounding on these verses, says:

A man cannot go back to his youth and repair fully and enduringly the vacancies which marked his opening days. You never can recover your youth; you never can go to school again, in the same sense in which you go when the brain is young, and all the susceptibilities are keenly alive and are responsive to every appeal; you cannot be a boy again.
p. 229

The case of Esau was the loss of an earthly blessing, an earthly relationship, a temporary supremacy, and that could not be recovered by repentance; but, blessed be God, this is the gospel of blood: "Return, O wanderer, to thy home." Do not be discouraged by the case of Esau, for that was local, temporary, and superficial. The Gospel of Christ proclaims that there is no man living who is really sorry for sin, that may not come back to his father's house, and be jewelled, and robed, and readopted, as if the apostasy had never taken place.
p. 232

Because Esau preferred worldly ease and sensual indulgence, there was no blessing for him, who was desiring it when it was too late.

Esau is like the TEN FOOLISH VIRGINS who are unprepared for the coming of their Lord, and were away making those preparations when He came.

Through:

LETHARGY,

THOUGHTLESSNESS,

BEING UNAWARE, and

PROCRASTINATION,

there are going to be a host who will miss the chance which grace brings to them.

There are certain choices that cannot be unmade, certain consequences which even God cannot take away.

When a young man gives up his purity and a young lady gives up her virginity, there is nothing that can be done to ever bring it back.

THE CHOICE HAS BEEN MADE AND IT STANDS.

When we neglect to plant the seeds in seed-time, no matter how hard we cry in harvest, nothing can be done to solve the problem.

Behold now is the accepted time; Behold now is the day of salvation. O the bitter weeping in the night, when as the result of the coming of Jesus Christ, a vast host are going to find that it's too late for repentance.

When Lyndon Johnson was thrust into the presidency as a result of the assassination of John Kennedy, he inherited a "sack full of alligators" in his administration.

During the height of the Vietnam conflict and the civil rights struggles, L.B.J. left the Whitehouse and took a trip to the Lincoln Memorial. As he was pacing back and forth before the monument of Abraham Lincoln, he was heard to be saying to Lincoln:

"Your administration was filled with strife in the civil war and you too had tremendous conflicts in civil rights. I come to you for a word of wisdom."

And L.B.J. thought he heard:

"Whatever you do, don't go to the theater!"

I wish at times that EVE and ESAU both would have heard:

DON'T TAKE THAT FIRST AND LAST BITE!

Esau, that is the most expensive bowl of chili you will ever eat!

(Christian Disciplines by Oswald Chambers)

The sense of the irrevocable wrings the human spirit with the awful suffering of "what might have been." It begins its records in the far past, hoary with the ages, when Paradise was lost, and the cherubim with the circling fiery sword branded the life of Adam and Eve with "Nevermore, nevermore." It embraces that lonely murderer Cain, who in his undying pain cried out, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (Genesis 4:13). It pauses around Esau when, too late, remorse seized that strong man and made him weep those tears of bitter repentance, all in vain; and its records of the unspeakable suffering of the wrongdoer remain till today-- . . .

p. 48

(The Christian in Complete Armour by William Gurnall)

Christian, you are a servant. All you have is not really yours, but God's. And when you fall into sin, your sorrow must be for the way you have wronged Him: "I have dishonored my God and wasted the talents He has given me; I have wounded His name and grieved His Spirit."
(July 17)

(When God Whispers Your Name by Max Lucado)

Maybe your past isn't much to brag about. Maybe you've seen raw evil. And now you, like Josiah, have to make a choice. Do you rise above the past and make a difference? Or do you remain controlled by the past and make excuses?

Many choose the latter.

Many choose the convalescent homes of the heart. Healthy bodies. Sharp minds. But retired dreams. Back and forth they rock in the chair of regret, repeating the terms of surrender. Lean closely and you will hear them: "If only." The white flag of the heart.

"If only . . ."

"If only I'd been born somewhere else . . ."

"If only I'd been treated fairly . . ."

"If only I'd had kinder parents, more money, greater opportunities . . ."

"If only I'd been potty-trained sooner, spanked less, or taught to eat without slurping."
pp. 108-9

(First Things First by Stephen R. Covey, A. Roger Merrill, & Rebecca R. Merrill)

As I was thinking, I saw my organizer, and so I opened it up and read my mission statement. Never once in all the time we were building our house had I even looked at that statement.

As I read, I realized that there was nothing materialistic in it. Everything was "be"--I want to be a good person . . . I want to be a good example . . . eventually, I want to be a good mother.

I found myself crying. I sat in my beautiful new house with the lights off thinking. I had thought this would make me happy . . . as soon as I had this car or this house or whatever it was, then I'd be happy. But I looked at all I had and I wasn't anything I wanted to be.

p. 114

(Perilous Pursuits by Joseph M. Stowell)

There is no substitute. Hence the emptiness and sense of loss when our compulsion for more is directed not at more of Him but at more apart from Him.

p. 76

(Seeing Through: Reflecting God's Light in a Dark World by David Roper)

Robert Ringer related the following anecdote:

In my early 20s I had the good fortune to be introduced to a wealthy old Wall Streeter. A Wall Streeter is used here as an investor who spends each day watching the ticker tape and maneuvering money in and out of stocks at hopefully opportune moments. Harold Hart epitomized a typical Wall Street success story. As strugglings as a youngster he was now a millionaire many times over. He had it all.

The biggie came one evening when I came to visit Mr. Hard to do a deal. When I arrived I found him resting tranquilly in his favorite chair, with servants waiting on him hand and foot. I sat there awhile waiting as he stared blankly into space. Finally he muttered, "You know, nature has played a great hoax on man. You work all your life, go through an endless number of struggles, play all the petty little games, and if you're lucky you finally make it to the top. Well, I made it a long time ago and you know what? It doesn't mean a damn thing. I tell you nature has made a fool of man and the biggest fool of all is me.

"Here I sit, in poor health, exhausted from years of playing the game, well aware that time is running out and I keep asking myself, Now what, genius? What's your next brilliant move going to be? All that time I spent worrying, maneuvering--it was meaningless. Life is nothing but a big hoax. We think we're so important, but the truth is, we're nothing."

It's important for us to understand that life does not add up for unbelievers. When that truth finally sinks in, we begin to view the world of men and women differently. We cease to be intimidated. We lose our fear and awe of people.

Some years ago I befriended a young man who rode with a motorcycle gang in San Francisco. He had been raised among the Tarhaumara Indians in Mexico and was never able to adjust to life in the United States. One terrible night he was killed in a street fight in the city. Ron Ritchie, a friend of mine, and I conducted his funeral.

I've conducted many funerals in my time, but this was by far the most memorable. It was held at the gang's request in the Santa Cruz mountains in a natural bowl surrounding a small lake. Bikers gathered in their leathers and distributed themselves around us as we shared our gospel with them.

After the service a young man walked up to me, lowered his eyes, and muttered this unexpected line: "I got a putt, a pad, and an old lady," he said, "but I ain't got no peace."

pp. 151-2

v.18 For you have not come to a mountain that may be touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind,

v.19 and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words, concerning which sound those who heard begged that no further word should be spoken to them.

The little word "FOR" applies the LESSON OF ESAU to the readers.

From a NEGATIVE PERSPECTIVE:

"YOU HAVE NOT COME."

The author OUTLINES SEVEN STATEMENTS here.

"YOU HAVE NOT COME":

1. "TO A MOUNTAIN THAT MAY BE TOUCHED,"
2. "TO A BLAZING FIRE,"
3. "TO DARKNESS,"
4. "GLOOM,"
5. "WHIRLWIND,"
6. "TO THE BLAST OF A TRUMPET," and
7. "THE SOUND OF WORDS."

The writer is taking us back to MOUNT SINAI after the giving of the Law.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary titles this remaining section in chapter 12:18-29 as:

THE FINAL WARNING ITSELF

12:18-21. Vividly the writer pictured the situation at Mount Sinai where the Old Covenant was given and its awesomeness and fearful nature were described (cf. Ex. 19:9-23; Deut. 9:8-19).
p. 811

Is this what they really want to go back to? This is what they are contemplating doing.

English says:

There is brought before us now an impressive contrast between the sternness of the Law and the benignity of God's grace. Here we see how far removed from God sinful man is in himself, and how very near man may be, through faith in Christ, in the majestic and gracious mercy of the Almighty.
pp. 466-7

MacArthur says:

This passage gives a warning of something far more fear-inspiring than what any human persecution can inflict--God's judgment. Every man will be judged on one of two bases. He will either be judged by the law or by grace, by his own works or by Christ's work, by the provisions of Sinai or by the provisions of Zion. God has two sets of books. In one set are recorded the names of those who have rejected God, in the other the names of those who have accepted Him through His Son, Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:12). The saved are in the book of life, sometimes called the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 13:8). Those whose names are in this book will be judged by what Christ has done on their behalf. Because they have trusted Him in faith, they will be measured and judged by His righteousness instead of their own. Those who have not trusted Him will be measured and judged by their own righteousness, which is of no more value before God than a "filthy garment" (Isa. 64:6).
p. 410

Bruce titles verses 18-24:

THE EARTHLY SINAI AND THE HEAVENLY ZION (12:18-24)
p. 352

Barclay titles the same section:

THE TERROR OF THE OLD AND THE GLORY OF THE NEW
p. 211

What a SOBER REMINDER to these Jewish believers who are contemplating going back under the old and forsaking the new.

What a WARNING this provides for them as the author prepares to wrap up this wonderful epistle.

Westcott titles the section (verses 18-29):

The character and obligations of the New Covenant.

This section forms a solemn close to the main argument of the Epistle. It offers a striking picture of the characteristics of the two Covenants summed up in the words 'terror' and 'grace'; and at the same time, in harmony with the whole current of thought, it emphasises the truth that greater privileges bring greater responsibility.

12:18
p. 409

Westcott says further:

The peril of disregarding the Christian privileges, which have been indicated in the last section, is proportioned to their greatness. Therefore the apostle says, 'Endure, advance, aim at the highest purity, cherish the loftiest view of divine things, *for ye are not come* to a vision of outward awfulness, *but ye are come to mount Zion*. You stand in view of heavenly glories immeasurably nobler than the terrors of Sinai. If then the people who were admitted to that revelation were charged to make very external preparation (Ex. xix. 14 f.), much more must you prepare yourselves spiritually.

p. 410

Lane says:

The arresting periodic sentence in vv 18-24 develops an extended comparison between Israel's experience at Mount Sinai and the new covenant encounter with God that takes place at Mount Zion, the city of the living God. The terrifying atmosphere that characterized the theophany at Sinai (vv 18-21) throws into bold relief the festive joy of Zion (vv 22-24).
p. 459

Hewitt says:

The introductory *for* brings out the connection between the sanctification of Gods' people under the new covenant already mentioned in verse 14 and the sanctification of the people of Israel before they could even draw near to receive the law (Ex. xix. 10).
p. 199

Lenski says:

In one grand sentence (v. 18-24) in which the writer draws a comparison with Judaism he presents to his readers to what they have come as Christians.
p. 450

DeHaan says:

These Hebrew Christians were tempted to go back to the beggarly elements of the law, and place themselves under bondage to escape a little present discomfort, reproach and persecution. In order to urge them on, a contrast between the law and grace, Mount Sinai and Calvary, is now presented: . . .
p. 180

Hughes says:

The writer addresses such thinking in verses 18-24 by contrasting where his people have come from with where they have come to and are indeed going. The contrast is between Mounts Sinai and Zion--the Old and New Covenants--terror and joy--distance and closeness.
p. 188

Romans 3:19, 20

Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.

Romans 8:3, 4

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

v.20 For they were not able to bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned."

THE REASON they:

"begged that no further word should be spoken to them" and

"THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO BEAR THE COMMAND"

is epitomized in the statement:

"IF EVEN A BEAST TOUCHES THE MOUNTAIN, IT WILL BE STONED."

Exodus 19:12, 13

Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain."

James 2:10

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all.

Galatians 3:10

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them."

v.21 And so terrible was the spectacle, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling."

Pink says:

The scope and design of the whole of our passage should now be obvious to the reader. The purpose of the apostle was to show again how inferior Judaism was to Christianity. This he here does by taking us back to Sinai, where Judaism was formally instituted by the appearing of Jehovah at the giving of the law, and where the Mosaic economy was established by a covenant based thereon. All the circumstances connected with its institution were in most striking accord with the leading features and characteristics of that dispensation. At that time the nation of Israel was in a waste, howling wilderness, standing in speechless terror at the foot of the Mount. There Jehovah manifested Himself in His awful holiness and majesty, as Lawgiver and Judge; the people at a distance fenced off from Him. How profoundly thankful should Christians be that *they* belong to a much more mild and gracious order of things!
pp. 134-5

MacArthur says:

The law is God's great mirror. When we look into it, we see ourselves as we really are--immeasurably short of God's standard of righteousness. There is not a single commandment that we have kept perfectly or can keep perfectly, in either act or attitude. The law makes no exceptions and no allowance for less than perfect obedience. The law overwhelms us, slays us. No sinner can endure Sinai. Every sinner who stands at the foot of Sinai is paralyzed with fear.
p. 412

Kistemaker says:

The accounts recorded in Exodus 19-20 and Deuteronomy 4-5 are silent about the fear of Moses. And Moses' statement on being afraid ("I feared," Deut. 9:19) occurs partially in the context of God's anger expressed against the Israelites when they had worshiped the gold calf. Possibly the author of Hebrews had access to an oral tradition, much the same as Stephen had received the information that "Moses trembled with fear" at the sight of the burning bush (Acts 7:32). . . . So Moses trembled with fear at Mount Sinai when he saw God's majesty and glory in awesome display.
pp. 390-91

v.22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

v.23 to a festal gathering and church of the firstborn who have been registered in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men who have been brought to perfection,

v.24 and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which is speaking better than the blood of Abel.

Back in verse 18, from a NEGATIVE POINT OF VIEW, the writer says:

"For you have not come."

Now in verse 22 we have the CONTRAST, the POSITIVE:

"BUT YOU HAVE COME."

He then OUTLINES EIGHT STATEMENTS that characterize that to which we have come. "BUT YOU HAVE COME TO":

1. "MOUNT ZION,"
2. "THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM,"
3. "MYRIADS OF ANGELS,"
4. "A FESTAL GATHERING AND CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN WHO HAVE BEEN REGISTERED IN HEAVEN,"
5. "GOD THE JUDGE OF ALL,"
6. "THE SPIRITS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN WHO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO PERFECTION,"
7. "JESUS, THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT," and
8. "THE SPRINKLED BLOOD, WHICH IS SPEAKING BETTER THAN THE BLOOD OF ABEL."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

The realities that pertain to New-Covenant people and to which they **have come** are even more impressive because they are **heavenly**. Not only is there the heavenly **city**, but there are also heaven-related beings, both **angels** and people, associated with it. The term **church of the firstborn** may mean the assembly of those whose inheritance rights are already won (since under the OT Law the "firstborn" was the primary heir; cf. v. 16). They have already gone on to the heavenly regions where the angels are. But above all, it is to **God, the Judge of all men**, that they have come--and there are some who indeed can stand His searching scrutiny of their lives . . .
p. 811

"TO THE SPIRITS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN WHO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO PERFECTION."

MacArthur says:

The mountain of the New Covenant is **Mount Zion**, representing the **heavenly Jerusalem**. The opposite of Sinai, it is not touchable, but it is approachable. Sinai symbolizes law and Zion symbolizes grace. No man can be saved by the law, but any man can be saved by grace. The law confronts us with commandments, judgment, and condemnation. Grace presents us with forgiveness, atonement, and salvation.
p. 413

Kistemaker says:

What a difference between the description of Mount Sinai and that of Mount Zion! What a contrast! The first scene is one of doom and dread; the second scene portrays life and joy. In the first portion of the argument Mount Sinai is not even mentioned, for the Israelites were not to stay there. In the second part, Mount Zion is described as "the heavenly Jerusalem" and as "the city of the living God."
p. 392

Wiersbe says:

What a relief it is to move from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion! Mt. Sinai represents the Old Covenant of Law, and Mt. Zion represents the New Covenant of grace in Jesus Christ (see Gal. 4:19-31). The heavenly city is God's Mt. Zion (see Ps. 110:1-2, 4 and Ps. 2). This is the city that the patriarchs were looking for by faith (Heb. 11:10, 14-17). The earthly Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the Romans, but the heavenly Jerusalem would endure forever. He described the "citizens" that make up the population of this city. Innumerable angels are there. The church is there, for believers have their citizenship in heaven (Phil. 3:20) and their names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20). "Firstborn" is a title of dignity and rank. Esau was actually Isaac's firstborn, but he rejected his privileges and lost his blessing and birthright.
pp. 142-3

(Heaven Help Us! Truths About Eternity That Will Help You Live Today by Steven J. Lawson)

In the new Jerusalem, there will be *no* funeral homes, *no* hospitals, *no* abortion clinics, *no* divorce courts, *no* brothels, *no* bankruptcy courts, *no* psychiatric wards, and *no* treatment centers.

There will be *no* pornography, *no* dial-a-porn, *no* teen suicide, *no* AIDS, *no* cancer, *no* talk shows, *no* rape, *no* missing children, *no* gay rights marches, *no* drug problems, *no* drive-by shootings, *no* racial tension, and *no* prejudice.

There will be *no* misunderstandings, *no* injustice, *no* depression, *no* hurtful words, *no* gossip, *no* hurt feelings, *no* worry, *no* emptiness, and *no* child abuse.

There will be *no* wars, *no* financial worries, *no* emotional heartaches, *no* physical pain, *no* spiritual flatness, *no* relational divisions, *no* murders, and *no* casseroles.

There will be *no* tears, *no* suffering, *no* separations, *no* starvation, *no* arguments, *no* accidents, *no* emergency departments, *no* doctors, *no* nurses, *no* heart monitors, *no* rust, *no* perplexing questions, *no* false teachers, *no* financial shortages, *no* hurricanes, *no* bad habits, *no* decay, and *no* locks.
pp. 148-9

A Philadelphia law firm sent flowers to an associate in Baltimore upon the opening of its new offices. Through some mix-up, the ribbon that bedecked the floral piece read "Deepest Sympathy."

When the florist was informed of his mistake, he let out a cry of alarm. "Good heavens," he exclaimed, "then the flowers that went to the funeral said, 'Congratulations on your new location!'"

Heaven will be a wonderful new location.
p. 158

"BUT YOU HAVE COME TO":

1. "MOUNT ZION,"
2. "THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM,"
and
3. "MYRIADS OF ANGELS."

(The Finishing Touch: Becoming God's Masterpiece: A Daily Devotional by Charles R. Swindoll)

Several years ago some high school fellas from the church I pastored in Southern California went on a mountain-climbing excursion, along with their youth leader. What began as a fun trip led to a frightening experience. Up at higher elevations the temperature can drop rapidly, covering everything in a blanket of sleet and snow in no time . . . and that's exactly what happened. The white peaks and slopes were beautiful scenes to behold. While taking in the breath-taking sights, however, the leader realized he had lost the trail. The heavy snowfall had completely covered the path, and he didn't have a clue where they were or how they could get back to the main camp. His fears weren't helped by the realization that sundown was not that far away and they were not equipped to spend the night on the craggy, windblown slopes where the temperature would soon drop even lower.

The boys became aware of their plight, which only intensified the leader's worries. In situations like that out in the wilderness, prayer flows freely. A dependence on God to rescue is not merely a convenient option; it's a foundational survival technique.

While trudging through the snow, entertaining thoughts just this side of panic, they suddenly heard someone on the slopes above them yell down: "Hey-the trail is up here!" They glanced up and to their relief saw another climber in the distance. He urged them to climb up to where he was if they wanted to get back on the trail. Without hesitation, they began to make their way up to the large boulder where the man was sitting. The climb was exhausting, but their relief in finding the way gave their adrenaline a rush.

Finally, they arrived . . . but to their surprise the man who had yelled at them was nowhere to be found. Furthermore, there were no traces in the snow that anyone had been sitting on the boulder, nor were there footprints around the rock. The trail, however, stretched out before them, leading them to safety. The boys not only learned a valuable lesson about the wilderness, but also firmed up their belief in encountering "angels without knowing it."

pp. 381-2

(The Finishing Touch: Becoming God's Masterpiece: A Daily Devotional by Charles R. Swindoll)

Many years ago one of my mentors told me a story I have never forgotten. A missionary was home on furlough, traveling by car from church to church. Late one rainy evening, facing a long and lonely all-night journey, he asked the Lord to help him stay awake and make it safely to the next place he could minister.

A few minutes later he came upon a man off to the side, thumbing a ride. Although he rarely picked up hitchhikers, he felt sorry for the man out in the rain and offered him a lift. As the two of them began to visit, the missionary was thrilled to discover that the stranger was a believer and that they also had many mutual friends engaged in the Lord's work.

Time passed rapidly as the two of them laughed and shared stories. The fellowship was so rich that the missionary hated to see the early light of dawn and hear his new-found friend say, "Well, here's where I get off." Before saying goodbye, the missionary invited him to have a cup of coffee at a roadside cafe. As they parted, they promised to pray for each other.

The rain had stopped by now, and a bright sun-drenched sky warmed the missionary's soul. Then, a couple of minutes down the road, he realized that he had failed to get the man's address and phone number, so quickly returned to the cafe. There was no sign of the man. When he asked the cook if he'd seen which way the other fella had gone, he was shocked to hear him respond, "What other fella? You came in here alone . . . I wondered why you ordered two cups of coffee."

The missionary glanced at the table where the two had sat and noticed that the other cup was still full to the brim . . . and the coffee was cold.

As he returned to his car, another surprising realization came to his mind. He remembered that when he had picked up the hitchhiker in the rain the night before, the man had gotten in the car but he wasn't wet!
p. 383

Hughes:

At other times, angels preside over the apparent earthly tragedy of God's people. Olive Fleming Liefeld in her book *Unfolding Destinies* tells how two young Auca Indians, Dawa and Kimo, heard singing after witnessing the martyrdom of the five missionaries in the jungles of Ecuador: "As they looked up over the tops of the trees they saw a large group of people. They were singing, and it looked as if there were a hundred flashlights." p. 192

v.23 to a festal gathering and church of the firstborn who have been registered in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men who have been brought to perfection,

As we continue in our LISTING of this new relationship we see:

4. "A FESTAL GATHERING AND CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN WHO HAVE BEEN REGISTERED IN HEAVEN,"

Owen says:

. . . in my judgment it is most suitable unto his mind and his dealing in particular with the Hebrews, that the whole Church of elect believers then in the world, consisting of Jews and Gentiles, should be designed by him. The collection of the elect among Jews and Gentiles into one body, one general assembly, one Church, is that which he celebrates elsewhere as one of the greatest mysteries of divine wisdom, which was hid in God and not until then revealed. (See Eph. iii. 5-10.) So is this assembly described (Rev. v. 9, 10.), "Thou hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests,"--that is, one "*general assembly and Church of the First-born*." This is that Church whereunto all the promises do belong, the Church "built on the Rock against which the gates of hell shall not prevail." p. 259

Hughes says:

Third, we come to *fellow-believers*--"to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven" (v. 23a). Jesus is the firstborn *par excellence*, and by virtue of our union with him we are firstborn. All the rights of inheritance go to the firstborn--to us who are "co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). Bishop Westcott says we are "a society of 'eldest sons' of God." there are no second or third or fourth sons and daughters in the church. We all get the big inheritance!

And there is more. As firstborn, our names are written in Heaven along with the firstborn who are already there. In other words, there is an amazing solidarity between the Church Triumphant in Heaven and the Church Militant here on earth. We are all the Body of Christ! The family is never broken. It simply keeps growing and going on and on--a bulging assembly of rich first sons and daughters.

p. 192

Draper also observes:

We at Mount Sion have come to the general assembly of the church of the firstborn.

Who are they? They are the ones whose names are written down in heaven. The word "written" (vs. 23) means "enrolled." We are enrolled; our reservations in heaven have been made. That's what salvation is. It is deliverance from judgment, and the reception of life everlasting.

p. 356

Westcott, speaking on the word "CHURCH" here, says:

The thought in each case is that of the people of God assembled to exercise their privileges and to enjoy their rights.

p. 415

Stedman says:

This is the Church, those who are born in Christ, part of the firstborn of God, sharing His life with their names written in heaven, *and to the universal judge, to God who is judge of all men*, whether they are Christians or not. All men are on the same basis because they stand alike before God.
p. 223

MacArthur concurs by saying:

The **church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven** is the Body of Christ. The first-born are those who receive the inheritance. As believers, we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ," who is "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:17, 29).

Jesus tells us that we should not rejoice in the great works that God may do through us but that our "names are recorded in heaven" (Luke 10:20). Our names are **enrolled in heaven** in "the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27).
p. 415

"TO A FESTAL GATHERING AND CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN WHO HAVE BEEN REGISTERED IN HEAVEN."

THEY HAVE BEEN "REGISTERED" IN THE LAMB'S BOOK OF LIFE.

Revelation 21:27

and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

At the time of one's new birth our names are recorded in the Lamb's book of life. At that time reservations for the marriage supper of the Lamb are made. At that time also, we have to have reservations for a place to stay in the New Jerusalem.

My reservations are at the Four Season's Resort on the Sea of Glass. I can see the throne room from there.

Seriously, the Lord is preparing a place for each of us as His children in His Father's house.

5. "GOD THE JUDGE OF ALL"

Acts 17:31

because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

6. "THE SPIRITS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN WHO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO PERFECTION"

They have been brought to this position by faith.

Hebrews 12:14

Be pursuing peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.

J. Vernon McGee says:

"And to the spirits of just men made perfect." "Perfect" does not mean complete or perfect as you and I think of it. It refers to Old Testament saints whose salvation has been made complete now that Christ has died as the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

p. 608

MacArthur says:

The spirits of righteous men made perfect are Old Testament saints, those who could only look forward to forgiveness, peace, and deliverance. When we come to heaven we will join Abel, Abraham, Moses, David, and all the others in one great household of God (cf. Matt. 8:11).

They had to wait a long time for the perfection that we received the instant we trusted in Christ. In fact, they had to wait for us (Heb. 11:40), in the sense that they had to wait for Christ's death and resurrection before they could be glorified. In heaven we will be one with them in Jesus Christ. We will not be inferior to Abraham or Moses or Elijah, because we will all be equal in righteousness, because our only righteousness will be our Savior's righteousness.

p. 416

Stedman says:

Who are these? They are the Old Testament saints we read about in chapter 11, men and women of God who lived in the days when the promise was given before the cross, who looked forward by faith and who are waiting now for us.

p. 223

(Faith Under Fire: Standing Strong When Satan Attacks by Steven J. Lawson)

In our glorified state in heaven, God will eradicate our sin nature the moment we enter His presence and behold His Son (1 John 3:2). Any capacity for sin will be forever removed when we stand before the throne (Revelation 21:27). In that day, all redeemed humanity will be *not able* to sin.

So it was with Christ during the days of His earthly life. As the Word made flesh, Jesus had no capacity to sin. As the God-man who was truly human, He was impeccable--just as glorified saints will be in heaven.

No matter how righteous, pure, and holy we will be in heaven in God's presence, we will never be any more righteous, pure, and holy than Jesus Christ during the days of His earthly life.

p. 214

(Our God Is Awesome by Tony Evans)

Sometimes we get upset because evil people seem to keep getting away with evil. No, their sin account keeps growing. Many people will never have much trouble in this life. But if you could only see the bill awaiting them in eternity! The psalmist pictured the wrath of God like a bow being drawn back (Psalm 7:12). The more sinners sin, the further God pulls back the bow.

You know the farther a bowman pulls back the arrow, the harder it will hit and the deeper it will penetrate. God says that when He lets His arrow go, it's going to penetrate the unrighteous with great agony. That's why the Bible cautions us not to become envious of the wicked. Never get all upset because bad folks have it good and good folks have it bad down here. God just hasn't let His arrow go yet.

p. 242

v.24 and to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which is speaking better than the blood of Abel.

7. "JESUS, THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT," and

1 Timothy 2:5

For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

Hebrews 8:6

But now He has attained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises.

He is a "Priest according to the order of Melchizedek."

He is a "MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT."

We have our attorney to represent us in court on that glorious day.

We have come into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator of a New Covenant.

Who wants to leave this position in Jesus Christ to go back to one of terror? Why leave the heavenly city to go back to the terror of Mount Sinai?

Hebrews 9:15

And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

DeHaan says:

Imagine these Hebrew Christians wanting to place themselves again under the law. Now notice the folly of such error when we contrast Israel under the law with the believer under grace.
p. 181

"AND TO JESUS, THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT, AND":

8. "TO THE SPRINKLED BLOOD, WHICH IS SPEAKING BETTER THAN THE BLOOD OF ABEL."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary speaking of the "NEW COVENANT" says:

. . . of a **New Covenant** whose atoning **blood** does not cry for judgment as did Abel's but secures the acceptance of all New-Covenant persons.

If the readers would contemplate these things properly, they would be awed by them and more inclined to fulfill their call to the highest privileges that the New Covenant can provide.

p. 811

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

His blood **speaks better things than the blood of Abel** in as much as Abel's blood cried for vengeance while Jesus' blood speaks reconciliation.
p. 233

Wiersbe says much the same thing:

Abel's blood spoke from the earth and cried for justice (Gen. 4:10), while Christ's blood speaks from heaven and announces mercy for sinners. Abel's blood made Cain feel guilty (and rightly so) and drove him away in despair (Gen. 4:13-15); but Christ's blood frees us from guilt and has opened the way into the presence of God. Were it not for the blood of the New Covenant, we could not enter this heavenly city!
p. 143

Stedman says:

When Abel's blood was shed it cried out for vengeance, as the book of Genesis tells us, but Jesus' blood does not speak of vengeance: it speaks of access, of invitation, of the fact there is no problem between man and God that is not settled by His blood. There is no longer any question of guilt. We can come completely accepted in the Beloved.
p. 224

MacArthur says it this way:

The sprinkled blood of Jesus far surpasses the sacrifice of Abel (Heb. 11:4) and **speaks better than the blood of Abel**. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God because it was offered in faith, but it had no atoning power—not even for Abel, much less for anyone else. Jesus' blood, however, was sufficient to cleanse the sins of all men for all time, to make peace with God for whoever trusts in that blood sacrifice (Col. 1:20).
p. 416

Let us MEDITATE and REVIEW for a just a moment all that we have as a result of the relationship which is ours in Jesus Christ.

"BUT YOU HAVE COME TO":

1. "MOUNT ZION,"
2. "THE CITY OF THE LIVING GOD, THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM,"
3. "MYRIADS OF ANGELS,"
4. "A FESTAL GATHERING AND CHURCH OF THE FIRSTBORN WHO HAVE BEEN REGISTERED IN HEAVEN,"
5. "GOD THE JUDGE OF ALL,"
6. "THE SPIRITS OF RIGHTEOUS MEN WHO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO PERFECTION,"
7. "JESUS, THE MEDIATOR OF A NEW COVENANT," and
8. "THE SPRINKLED BLOOD, WHICH IS SPEAKING BETTER THAN THE BLOOD OF ABEL."

ALL I CAN SAY IS WOW!!

IF THAT DOESN'T LIGHT YOUR FIRE, YOU ARE USING WET WOOD!

v.25 Be seeing to it that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who was warning them on earth, much less shall we escape who are turning away from Him who is speaking from heaven,

We come now to COMMAND #3:

"BE SEEING TO IT THAT YOU DO NOT REFUSE HIM WHO IS SPEAKING."

COMMAND #1 was back in verse 14:

"Be pursuing peace with all men."

COMMAND #2 was in verse 15:

"Be seeing to it that no one is coming short of the grace of God, that no root of bitterness springing up is causing trouble, and by it many be defiled."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

Since those who refused the Old Covenant **did not escape**, how could those of the New Covenant who **turn away** expect to do so? (cf. 2:3) Here no doubt the author thought of the Speaker as none other than the Originator of the New Covenant who now sits "at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (1:3).
p. 811

Hebrews 2:3

how shall we escape if we disregard so great a salvation, which was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was guaranteed to us by those who heard,

The one "WHO IS SPEAKING" then is described for us in:

Hebrews 1:3

who being the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature (real being), and who is bearing up all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;

Stedman says:

This is the fifth and last great warning passage in this book, and it reminds us that these difficult times that we go through have a special purpose.

p. 225

Kistemaker says:

Throughout this epistle, the warning against turning a deaf ear to God has sounded clearly in the ears of the addresses. Think, for example, of the direct warning: "See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God" (3:12). This admonition has been repeated in various forms in the letter, and every time it calls the readers to pay close attention.

p. 397

Hewitt says:

A final warning in verses 25-29 brings to a conclusion the writer's argument that greater privileges carry with them greater responsibilities. If the Israelites with a partial and limited revelation became liable to God's judgment because of disobedience, an incomparably severer punishment would fall upon the readers who rejected this new revelation of God and its accompanying blessings.

p. 202

Lane says:

The transition from exposition in vv 18-24 to exhortation in vv 25-29 is abrupt. It is achieved by the literary device of a "hook word." The participle, "speaking," in v 24*b* is repeated with only slight variation in v 25*a*, "the one speaking." There is a sharp change in tone as the writer resumes the expression of urgent concern that characterizes vv 14-17. In this instance, however, the sternness of the parenetic warning is justified by the detailing of the privileged status of Christians in the preceding paragraph.
p. 474

Bruce titles this section:

PAY HEED TO THE VOICE OF GOD! (12:25-29)
p. 361

Thomas says much the same thing:

THIS IS THE fifth interjected warning and fitly closes the series (2:1-4), against drifting; 3:7-14, against disbelieving; 5:11 to 6:20, against degenerating; 10:26-39, against despising. The immediate context seems to suggest the occasion for it. The "blood that speaketh" (v. 24) is now shown to be equivalent to "Him that speaketh" (v. 25), and after the glowing description of the new Society (vv. 2-24) the readers are urged to abide therein and to show themselves worthy of it.
p. 167

G. Campbell Morgan says:

THE words, "See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh" reveal the ultimate purpose for which this letter was written.

The Hebrew Christians to whom it was addressed were in danger of falling away from faith, and the danger which thus threatened them was the result of intellectual wavering as to the full and final authority of Christ.
p. 137

"BE SEEING TO IT THAT YOU DO NOT REFUSE HIM WHO IS SPEAKING."

The CHALLENGE is to:

HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS.

Rather, be OBEDIENT to:

John 1:12

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

The author then gives us the REASON for the command:

"FOR IF THOSE DID NOT ESCAPE."

We have already had that QUESTION raised in:

Hebrews 2:3.

how shall we escape if we disregard so great a salvation, . . .

"WHEN THEY REFUSED HIM WHO WAS WARNING THEM ON EARTH, MUCH LESS SHALL WE ESCAPE WHO ARE TURNING AWAY FROM HIM WHO IS SPEAKING FROM HEAVEN."

v.26 whose voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying,
 "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven."

In the past His "VOICE SHOOK THE EARTH [in CONTRAST] BUT NOW HE HAS PROMISED, SAYING, 'YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE [NEGATIVELY] NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT [POSITIVELY] ALSO THE HEAVEN."

Haggai 2:6

"This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.

Wiersbe says:

God is speaking to us today through His Word and His providential working in the world. We had better listen! If God shook things at Sinai and those who refused to hear were judged, how much more responsible are we today who have experienced the blessings of the New Covenant! God today *is* shaking things. (Have you read the newspapers lately?) He wants to tear down the "scaffolding" and reveal the unshakable realities that are eternal. Alas, too many people (including Christians) are building their lives on things that can shake.

p. 144

Kistemaker says:

It is Christ, therefore, who is at the center of this upheaval on earth and in heaven. He will cause heaven and earth to shake when he appears a second time (Matt. 24:29; II Peter 3:10).

p. 399

Matthew 24:29

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken,

v.27 And this expression, "Yet once more," is indicating the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of things which have been made, in order that those things which are not being shaken might remain.

Jesus cannot be shaken and He remains forever!

What is:

SHAKABLE is TEMPORARY,

UNSHAKABLE is ETERNAL.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

What remains after this cataclysmic event will be eternal.
p. 811

Kistemaker says:

Next, in the original Greek he reminds the readers that he used the term *removing* earlier (7:12), where it is translated as "change." "For when there is a change of the priesthood, there must also be a change of the law." An example, then, of temporary things is the Levitical priesthood that came to an end when it was replaced by the eternal priesthood of Christ. Also, the prophet Isaiah foresees the end of this present world when he transmits what the Sovereign Lord says: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind" (65:17; also see 66:22). And last, the only things that survive this world are those that are unshakable and eternal. The kingdom of Jesus Christ cannot be shaken.
p. 399

G. Campbell Morgan says:

You will remember those lines of Martin Luther written in dark and difficult days. I think they are very applicable today. Let me end with them:

"We wait beneath the furnace blast
The pangs of transformation,
Not painlessly doth God recast
And mould anew the nation

"Where wrongs aspire;
Nor from the hand
That from the land
Uproots the ancient evil.

p. 191

The KEY WORDS in verse 27 are:

"REMOVING" and

"REMAIN."

The SHAKING is for the PURPOSE of:

"REMOVING THOSE THINGS WHICH CAN BE SHAKEN."

The PURPOSE behind all of this is:

"IN ORDER THAT THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE NOT BEING SHAKEN MIGHT REMAIN."

v.28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be having grace (showing gratitude), by means of which we may be serving God in an acceptable manner with reverence and awe;

Whereas the KEY WORDS in verse 27 were:

"removing" and

"remaining."

The KEY WORD in verse 28 is:

"RECEIVING."

"THEREFORE, SINCE WE ARE RECEIVING A KINGDOM THAT CANNOT BE SHAKEN."

We come now to COMMAND #4:

"LET US BE HAVING GRACE (SHOWING GRATITUDE), BY MEANS OF WHICH WE MAY BE SERVING GOD IN AN ACCEPTABLE MANNER WITH REVERENCE AND AWE."

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

[This is] likely a final reference to the resources of grace available from the great High Priest . . .
p. 811

Hebrews 4:14-16

Since then we are having a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us be holding fast our confession. For we are not having a high priest who is not able to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore be drawing near with confidence to the throne of grace, in order that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Kistemaker says:

What a statement! "We are receiving a kingdom." If there is a kingdom, there is also a king. And a king makes his rule known to his subjects, for they are part of the kingdom. We are receiving the governing rule, the administration, so to speak, of Jesus Christ.
p. 400

Because of the royal recognition we receive, we are exhorted to give thanks--"let us be thankful." The literal translation of this clause is, "let us have grace." However, usage indicates that the words have grace form an idiomatic expression that means "give thanks." Luke uses this idiom in relating the parable of the farmer and his servant (Luke 17:9), and Paul employs it in his pastoral Epistles (I Tim. 1:12; II Tim. 1:3).

Let us live a life of thankfulness, says the author of Hebrews, and by doing so let us worship God. Giving thanks in word and deed and worshipping God are two sides of the same coin. Worship is not limited to a formal worship service on Sunday. Horatius Bonar understood this when he wrote,

So shall no part of day or night
From sacredness be free,
But all my life, in every step,
Be fellowship with Thee.

p. 401

Wiersbe raises the question:

What shall we do as we live in a shaking world? Listen to God speak, and obey Him. Receive grace day by day to serve Him "with reverence and godly fear." Do not be distracted or frightened by the tremendous changes going on around you. Keep running the race with endurance. Keep looking to Jesus Christ. Remember that your Father loves you. And draw on God's enabling grace.

While others are being frightened--you can be confident!
p. 144

Thomas says:

Based on the warning comes a fitting exhortation. They are "not to cling to what God is shaking to pieces, or they too will suffer shipwreck."
p. 170

Lane says:

The severity of vv 25-27 is momentarily softened when the writer announces that Christians are in the process of receiving an unshakable kingdom. This gift, secured on the ground of the new covenant, calls for gratitude expressed in thankful worship of the God whose awesome and holy character was disclosed in the fiery epiphany of Sinai.
p. 483

Someone has said:

"You are the prize of my dying! As my dying is the prize of your living . . ."

DEATH BENEFITS

The 18th-century English pastor Rowland Hill lived to a ripe old age. In fact, he outlived most of his friends. Missing them very much and anxious to join them on the other side, he grew more homesick for heaven with each passing day. It seemed so long since some of them had gone to glory that he would often jokingly say with a wink, "Do you think they'll remember me?" It was not unusual for him to go to some other believer well along in years with this request: "If you should go before I do, give my love to everyone. Be sure to tell them that old Rowley, although staying behind a little while, is coming on as fast as he can."

(From InfoSearch 3.51)

(Strength of Soul: The Sacred Use of Time by W. Phillip Keller)

Spontaneous, joyous gratitude really is the *elixir of life*.

There is nothing else which produces so much contentment.

The attitude of gratitude really makes us glow.

The reason for this is hidden from most of us. We wonder why thoughtfulness transforms us. There really is a secret to the glory that engulfs us.

It is this: instead of being preoccupied with our own problems, pain, protests over every petty complaint, we look out beyond ourselves to the goodness of God and others. Instead of seeing life through the narrow slot of our own self-centeredness we take the wider view of realizing all we have, all we are, all we enjoy, comes to us freely, generously from our Father's gracious heart and open hands.

p. 76

v.29 for our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 10:26, 27

For if we go on sinning intentionally after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer is remaining a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which is about to be consuming the adversaries.

Hebrews 10:31

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary says:

A believer who departs from his magnificent privileges will invite God's retribution.

p. 811

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9

and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

Leviticus 10:1, 2

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord.

Thomas says:

Thus, fire is (as elsewhere) both a symbol of divine judgment and also (as here) of the divine character of holiness.

And so the exhortation to Hope closes with a solemn appeal to live in the present as befits those who possess such a kingdom and who anticipate such a future.

p. 171

Kistemaker says:

Even though Christ has granted us unusual privileges, we must be aware of God's awesomeness and holiness. Therefore we worship him with reverence and awe.

p. 401

Montefiore in Black's commentary says:

Our author's final word to his readers here is not about the attraction of divine love but about the fearfulness of holy wrath.

p. 237

Owen says:

The holiness and purity of the nature of God, with His severity and vindictive justice, are represented hereby. The holiness and jealousy of God, which are a cause of insupportable terror unto convinced sinners, driving them from Him, have towards believers only a gracious influence unto that fear and reverence which causes them to cleave more closely unto Him.

pp. 267-8

J. Vernon McGee says:

You can take that or leave it, but it just happens to be in the Word of God. This is a solemn reminder that grace is available for you to serve God, but don't trifle with God, my friend. Don't think you can play fast and loose with God and get by with it.

I remember that when I first came to Pasadena as a pastor in 1940 I was asked by a lady to go see her husband. They were a lovely couple, but the husband was sick and in bed at home. In fact, he never got out of that bed; he died there. I went to see him, I presented the gospel to him. He heard me courteously and then said this, "Dr. McGee, I would like to tell you right now that I accept Christ as my Savior, and I will do that, but I have trifled and played with God so often down through the years that I don't even know myself when I'm sincere and when I'm not sincere."

My friend, don't trifle with God. That day may come when you won't even know where you stand with Him at all. I tell you, our God is a consuming fire, but he is also a gracious, glorious, wonderful Savior.
pp. 609-10

Barclay says:

It is a grim thought; but in it there is the eternal truth, which there is no altering, that, if a man is true to God, he gains everything; and if he is untrue to God, he loses everything. In time and in eternity nothing matters save only loyalty to God.
pp. 216-17

A. T. Robertson says this is a:

Present active participle of *katanalisko*, old compound verb, here only in the N.T. This verse is to be coupled with 10:31.
p. 443

Draper says:

The last verse in this chapter firmly underscores God's purpose--"For our God is a consuming fire" (12:29). Fire is devastating. It tests and purifies. The writer of Hebrews reminds us of this as he speaks of the reality of salvation and the certainty of the kingdom of God. He says, "God is a consuming fire." He will act in judgment. He will carry it through to its end. p. 359

Westcott says:

The significant addition of [we] extends the description of the God of the revelation from Sinai to the God of the new revelation. In other respects there may be a wide chasm between the Law and the Gospel; but the One God of both is in His very nature in relation to man as He is, and not in one manifestation only, 'a consuming fire.' He purifies by burning up all that is base in those who serve Him, and all that is unfit to abide in His Presence: . . . pp. 422-3

Hughes warns:

Note our text well! It says that "our 'God is [not was!] a consuming fire.'" The God of Zion is the same God as the God of Sinai. God has not changed. To some of us, the troubles faced by some of the great religious traditions may seem far removed. But the truth is, similar problems are common in the more independent, evangelical traditions. p. 202

(Time To Get Serious: Daily Devotions to Keep You Close to God by Tony Evans)

"Our God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:29

A TOUGH SUBJECT

Read It: Nahum 1:2-6

The story is told of a little boy whose mother got upset when he refused to eat his prunes. She told him that if he didn't eat, God was going to get mad at him. But the boy said no and took off to his room. As soon as he got there, a huge thunderstorm broke out with lots of thunder and lightning.

Thinking her son might be afraid, his mother rushed into his room and saw him staring out the window. "Mama, all this fuss over some prunes?"

God's wrath is a lot more serious than that. It's not an easy subject to talk about, but it's as integral to God's nature as His other perfections, so we need to acquaint ourselves well with this divine attribute if we want to know Him. The wrath of God is His necessary, just, and righteous retribution against sin.

The Bible has more to say about God's wrath than it does about His love. Of course God is good, kind, loving, and forgiving. But if you put a period there, you've got an incomplete story.

God is a God of wrath too. I want to give you the straight scoop because it's better to have a headache now than a "hell ache" later. The Bible's words for *wrath* indicate God's intense displeasure at sin and His judgment against it. God does not throw temper tantrums or pitch fits, but His anger against sin is intense.

In fact, God takes torrid displeasure at sin--bit sin, little sin, medium-sized sin. Because He is holy, all sin is repulsive to Him. Romans 1:18 is the most concise statement of God's wrath in the Bible, and we do well to pay close attention to it: "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness."

Notice that God is not hiding His wrath. He's not putting it under a bushel. It's part of His character. That's why I can't skip preaching about it as a pastor. He's telling us in advance that this is part of who He is. Aren't you glad God told us the truth about His wrath so we could escape it by running to Christ? I am!

-----Think About It-----

We have to adjust to God's wrath because He doesn't change (Malachi 3:6). This is God's universe, run by His rules.

Nahum 1:2-7

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him. The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him,

(The Message: Proverbs by Eugene H. Peterson)

Proverb 15

It's a school of hard knocks for those who leave
 God's path,
 a dead-end street for those who hate God's
 rules.

p. 51

(Our God Is Awesome by Tony Evans)

Do you know the worst part of hell? It will be the eternal torment of remembering that on such-and-such a day, the person sat in church, heard that preacher say this place was real, and didn't do anything about it. Hell is knowing that you could have but never did address the issue of your eternal destiny. You didn't take seriously the wrath of God.

No help came for Dives. He remained fully conscious. He had his memory, his conscience, and all of his physical senses intact, but it was all agony.

A man once told me, "I'm not into that hell stuff. I don't believe in the wrath of God. But even if hell is true, I'm going to turn the place out because all my 'homies' are going to be there. We are going to go down there, get with the devil, and boogie down."

He obviously didn't get the picture, so I said, "Do me a favor. When you go home today, turn on a burner on your stove and wait till it gets real hot. Then sit on that burner and try to get a party going at the same time. Let's see how you do."

He does not understand that hell is a place of solitary confinement. He has no fellowship, no parties, no get-togethers, no buffets. God will eternally quarantine all those who are not rightly related to Him in the pit of the universe so they won't mess up the enjoyment of heaven for those who are rightly related to Him.

p. 244

(The Message: Psalms by Eugene H. Peterson)

Psalm 50

"Time's up for playing fast and
loose with me.

I'm ready to pass sentence,
and there's no help in sight!

It's the praising life that honors me.

As soon as you set your foot on the Way,
I'll show you my salvation."

p. 74

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: We are to "Be pursuing peace" on the horizontal, and purification on the vertical.

LESSON #2: God has adequate grace for every circumstance that we face in the divine curriculum.

LESSON #3: Bitterness causes trouble and many are hurt by it.

LESSON #4: When times are hard two things can happen:
(1) you quit; and (2) you get bitter.

LESSON #5: Learn well from Esau that it is possible to sell the eternal in pursuit of the temporary.

LESSON #6: There are some decisions that are made that the consequences of such can never be changed.

LESSON #7: Has your name been registered in the Lamb's book of life as a result of your new birth experience?

LESSON #8: Jesus Christ is the Mediator of a New Covenant making it possible for us to be certain of our eternal salvation.

LESSON #9: Be seeing to it that you do not refuse Him Who is speaking.

LESSON #10: Let us never forget that "our God is a consuming fire."

Larry Richards says:

Let's hear His voice today. Let's not refuse. Let's build our lives on things that cannot be shaken and that will always remain.

And so the closing words. When we live our new identity by faith, "we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken" (v. 28). So let's be thankful. Let's worship God with reverence and awe. And let's remember who our God is.

A consuming fire.
p. 135

Lange says:

God speaks with us; then He *seeks* us in His word; afterwards He *judges* us.--Every revelation of God is accompanied *with great convulsions*, and by movements in *heaven* and on *earth*. How stands our heart in relation thereto?

p. 211

(The Seven Laws of the Harvest: Understanding the Realities of Sowing and Reaping by John W. Lawrence)

You must receive it God's way or you will not receive it at all.

I am not skilled to understand
What God hath willed, what God hath planned;
I only know at His right hand
Is One who is my Savior!

I take Him at His word indeed:
'Christ died for sinners,' this I read;
For in my heart I find a need
Of Him to be my Savior!

That He should leave His place on high
And come for sinful man to die,
You count it strange? so once did I,
Before I knew my Savior!

--Dora Greenwell

p. 22

(A Gentle Thunder: Hearing God Through the Storm by Max Lucado)

Suppose you gave me a gift. Let's say you presented me with a new tie. I take it out of the box and examine it. I say thank you and then reach for my wallet.

"Now how much do I owe you?" I ask.

You think I am kidding. "It's a gift," you say. "You don't need to pay me."

"Oh, I understand," I respond, but then show I don't by asking, "Could I write you a check?"

You're stunned. "I don't want you to pay me. I want you to accept the gift."

"Oh, I see," I respond. "Perhaps I could do some work around your house in exchange for the tie?"

"You just don't get it, do you?" you state firmly. "I want to give this to you. It is a present. You can't buy a present."

"Oh, forgive me," I hasten. "Perhaps if I promised to purchase you a tie in return."

By this time you're insulted. In trying to buy your gift I have degraded your grace. I have robbed you of the joy of giving.

How often we rob God.

Have you ever considered what an insult it is to God when we try to pay him for his goodness? God loves a cheerful giver because he is a cheerful giver. If we, who are evil, enjoy giving gifts, how much more does he? If we, who are human, are offended when people want to turn our gift into a bribe, how much more is God?

p. 135

(Heaven Help Us! Truths About Eternity That Will Help You Live Today by Steven J. Lawson)

A prominent citizen in town was dying, surrounded at his bedside by his family and physician.

As he thought of his massive wealth he had worked all his life to amass, he whispered with a note of despair, "I'm *leaving* home, I'm *leaving* home."

Across town, a similar yet very different scene took place. There lay a solitary figure in meager, bare surroundings--a poor woman who had barely eked out a living for her children. Her modest home contained only the most basic of life's essentials. But in her heart dwelt the hope of Heaven.

Before she died, she was heard to say expectantly, "I'm *going* home, I'm *going* home."

What a different perspective for those who know God and who look to Heaven!

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