

Hebrews 12

Hebrews 12:1 Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset [us], and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

Wherefore ... This is an inference drawn from the examples produced in the preceding chapter, and on this account both should be read in connection.

Compassed about ... Here is an allusion to the Olympic games: the agonistae, or contenders, were often greatly animated by the consideration that the eyes of the principal men of their country were fixed upon them; and by this they were induced to make the most extraordinary exertions.

Cloud of witnesses ... Both the Greeks and Latins frequently use the term cloud, to express a great number of persons or things; a dense cloud of shields; a cloud of spearmen. The same metaphor frequently occurs.

Let us lay aside every weight ... As those who ran in the Olympic races would throw aside everything that might impede them in their course; so Christians, professing to go to heaven, must throw aside everything that might hinder them in their Christian race. Whatever weighs down our hearts or affections to earth and sense is to be carefully avoided; for no man, with the love of the world in his heart, can ever reach the kingdom of heaven.

The sin which doth so easily beset ... The well circumstanced sin; that which has everything in its favor, time, and place, and opportunity; the heart and the object; and a sin in which all these things frequently occur, and consequently the transgression is frequently committed. I stand; the sin that stands well, or is favorably situated, ever surrounding the person and soliciting his acquiescence. What we term the easily besetting sin is the sin of our constitution, the sin of our trade, that in which our worldly honor, secular profit, and sensual gratification are most frequently felt and consulted. Whatever it may be, the word gives us to understand that it is what meets us at every turn; that it is always presenting itself to us ... by the carnal mind, surrounds us in every place; we are bounded by it, and often hemmed in on every side; it is a circular, well fortified wall, over which we must leap, or through which we must break. The man who is addicted to a particular species of sin (for every sinner has his way) is represented as a prisoner in this strong fortress.

In laying aside the weight ... there is an allusion to the long garments worn in the eastern countries, which, if not laid aside or tucked up in the girdle, would greatly incommode the traveler, and utterly prevent a man from running a race. The easily besetting sin of the Hebrews was an aptness to be drawn aside from their attachment to the Gospel, for fear of persecution.

Let us run with patience the race ... Let us start, run on, and continue running, till we get to the goal. This figure is a favourite among the Greek writers; This is a race which is of infinite importance to us: the prize is ineffably great; and, if we lose it, it is not a simple loss, for the whole soul perishes.

Phillipian 3:13-14 Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but [*this*] one thing [*I do*], forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of [*our*] faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Looking unto Jesus ... Looking off and on, or from and to; looking off or from the world and all secular concerns to Jesus and all the spiritual and heavenly things connected with him. This is still an allusion to the Grecian Olympic games: those who ran were to keep their eyes fixed on the mark of the prize; they must keep the goal in view. The exhortation implies,

- 1. That they should place all their hope and confidence in Christ, as their sole helper in this race of faith.**
 - 2. That they should consider him their leader in this contest and imitate his example.**
- The author and finisher of - faith - translated here author, signifies, in general, captain or leader, or the first inventor of a thing.**

Hebrews 2:10 For it became him, for whom [*are*] all things, and by whom [*are*] all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

But the reference seems to be here to the or judge in the games, whose business it was to admit the contenders, and to give the prize to the conqueror. Jesus is here represented as this officer; every Christian is a contender in this race of life, and for eternal life. The heavenly course is begun under Jesus; and under him it is completed. He is the finisher, by awarding the prize to them that are faithful unto death. Thus he is the author or the judge under whom, and by whose permission and direction, according to the rules of the heavenly race, they are permitted to enter the lists, and commence the race, and he is the finisher, the perfecter, by awarding and giving the prize which consummates the combatants at the end of the race.

Who, for the joy that was set before him ... The joy of fulfilling the will of the Father,

Hebrews 10:5 5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: 6 In burnt offerings and [*sacrifices*] for sin thou hast had no pleasure. 7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

in tasting death for every man; and having endured the cross and despised the shame of this vile death, He is set down at the right hand of God, ever appearing in the presence of God for us, and continuing his exhibition of himself as our Sacrifice, and his intercession as our Mediator. See the notes on

Hebrews 4:12-16 For the word of God [is] quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and [is] a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. 13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things [are] naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. 14 Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] profession. 15 For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 12: 3 For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

For consider him ... Attentively observe and analyze every part of his conduct, enter into his spirit, examine his motives and object, and remember that, as he acted, ye are called to act; he will furnish you with the same Spirit, and will support you with the same strength. He bore a continual opposition of sinners against himself; but he conquered by meekness, patience, and perseverance: he has left you an example that ye should follow his steps. If ye confide in and attentively look to him, ye shall have continual courage to go on, and never faint in your minds.

Here is a continued allusion to the contenders in the Grecian games, who, when exhausted in bodily strength and courage, yielded the palm to their opponents, and were said to be weary or exhausted; to be dissolved, disheartened, or to have lost all bravery and courage.

Hebrews 12: 4 Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood ... Many of those already mentioned in Hebrews were were martyrs for the truth; they were persecuted unto death, and lost their lives in bearing testimony to the truth. Though you have had opposition and persecution, yet you have not been called, in bearing your testimony against sin and sinners, to seal the truth with your blood.

Striving against sin ... An allusion to boxing at the Grecian games. In the former passages the apostle principally refers to the foot races.

Hebrews 12: 5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation? ... This quotation is properly from God himself to any person in persecution, affliction, or distress.

Despise not thou the chastening ... Do not neglect the correction of the Lord. That man neglects correction, and profits not by it, who does not see the hand of God in it; or, in other words, does not fear the rod and, consequently, does not humble himself under the mighty hand of God, deplore his sin, and pray for mercy.

Nor faint ... Do not be discouraged nor despair, for the reasons immediately alleged.

Hebrews 12:6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth - Here is the reason why we should neither neglect correction, nor faint under it: it is a proof of the fatherly love of God Almighty. And scourgeth every son whom he receiveth - This is a quotation from the Septuagint, of Proverbs 3:12

Hebrews 12:7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?

If ye endure chastening ... If ye submit to his authority, humble yourselves under his hand, and pray for his blessing, you will find that he deals with you as beloved children, correcting you that he may make you partakers of his holiness.

God dealeth with you as with sons ... He acknowledges by this that you belong to the family, and that he, as your Father, has you under proper discipline.

Hebrews 12:8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Then are ye bastards ... The fact is, that bastards are neglected in their training, manners and education; their fathers, who feeling little love, affection, or obligation to for them. But all legitimate children are partakers of chastisement or discipline; for the original word does not imply stripes and punishments, but the whole discipline of a child, both at home and at school.

Hebrews 12:9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected [*us*], and we gave [*them*] reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?

We have had fathers of our flesh ... our natural parents, were correctors; and we respected them, notwithstanding their corrections often arose from whim, but shall we not rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits; to him from whom we have received both body and soul; who is our Creator, Preserver, and Supporter. The apostle in asking,

Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? ... alludes to the punishment of the stubborn and rebellious son,

Deuteronomy 21:18-21: "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them; then shall his father and mother lay hold on him and bring him to the elders of the city, and they shall say, This our son is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice: and all the men of the city shall stone him with stones that he Die."

Had he been subject to his earthly parents, he would have lived.

Hebrews 12:10 For they verily for a few days chastened [us] after their own pleasure; but he for [our] profit, that [we] might be partakers of his holiness.

For ... a few days ... The chastisement of our earthly parents lasted only a short time; that of our heavenly Father will also be but a short time, if we submit: and as our parents ceased to correct when we learned obedience; so will our heavenly Father when we learn to obey Him.

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous ... Neither correction, nor gymnastic discipline, are pleasant to them that are thus exercised; but it is by these means that obedient children, scholars, and great men are made. And it is by God's discipline that Christians are made.

The peaceable fruit of righteousness ... The joyous fruits are those fruits by which we gain much, and through which we are made happy.cf:

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Exercised thereby - To the trained. There is still an allusion to the Grecian games; and in the word before us to those gymnastic exercises by which the candidates for the prizes were trained to the different kinds of exercises.

Hebrews 12:12 Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;

Wherefore lift up the hands ... The apostle refers to Isaiah 35:3. The words are an address to persons almost worn out with sickness and fatigue, whose hands hang down, whose knees shake, and who are totally discouraged. These are exhorted to exert themselves, and take courage, with the assurance that they shall infallibly conquer if they persevere.

Hebrews 12:13 And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Make straight paths for your feet ... That is, Take the straight path that is before you, do not go in crooked or rough ways, where are stones, briars, and thorns, by which you will be inevitably lamed.

Hebrews 12:14 Follow peace with all [*men*], and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

Follow peace with all men ... Cultivate peace, as far as you possibly can. Pursue peace with the same care, attention, and diligence, as animals do their prey; follow it through all places; trace it through all winding circumstances; and have it with all men.

Matthew 5: 9 Blessed [*are*] the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

And holiness ... That state of continual blessed sanctification, that life of purity and detachment from the world and all its lusts.

No man shall see the Lord ... shall never enjoy his presence in the world of blessedness. To see God, in the Hebrew phrase, is to enjoy him.

Hebrews 12:15 Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble [*you*], and thereby many be defiled;

Looking diligently ... Looking about, over, and upon; being constantly on your guard.

Lest any man fail of the grace of God ... Lest any person should come behind, or fall off from, this grace or Gift of God; this state of salvation ... The Gospel Plan is to create a new life in Christianity. It is a falling from the the Gospel System to apostatize from which they had now many temptations; and to guard them against this, the whole epistle was written.

Lest any root of bitterness springing up ... A root of bitterness signifies a poisonous plant. The Hebrews call every species of poison a bitter. The root of bitterness is here used metaphorically for a bad man, or a man holding unsound doctrines, and endeavoring to spread them in the Church.

Trouble you ... This alludes to the effects of poison taken into the body.

Bad example and false teaching have corrupted thousands, and are still making desolation in the world and in the Church.

Hebrews 12:16 Lest there [*be*] any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

Lest there be any fornicator ... Any li-CEN-tious person who would turn the Gospel of the grace of God into las-CI-vi-ous-ness.

Or profane person, as Esau ... And Esau is here termed profane, because he sold and disregarded the spiritual advantages connected with his birthright.

Genesis 25:29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he [*was*] faint:

Genesis 25:34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised [*his*] birthright.

The profane was outside the threshold of a temple or sacred E-di-fice; and was applied to those who were not faithful to God or who were despisers of sacred things, and consequently were to be denied admittance to the temple, and were not permitted to assist at holy rites.

Hebrews 12:17 For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

When he would have inherited the blessing ... When he wished to have the lordship over the whole family given to him, and sought it earnestly with tears, he found no place for a change in his father's mind.

Repentance ... Here is not to be taken in a theological sense, as implying contrition for sin, but merely change of mind or purpose; nor does the word refer here to Esau at all, but to his father, whom Esau could not, with all his tears and entreaties, persuade to reverse what he had done. Jacob said: I have blessed him, said he, yea, and he must be blessed; I cannot reverse it now.

Genesis 27:34-38 34 And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, [*even*] me also, O my father. 35 And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. 36 And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? 37 And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? 38 And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, [*even*] me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

Take heed lest, by apostatizing from the Gospel, ye forfeit all right and title to the heavenly birthright, and never again be able to retrieve it; because they who reject the Gospel reject the only means of salvation.

Hebrews 12:18-21 For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19 And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which [*voice*] they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: 20 (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: 21 And so terrible was the sight, [*that*] Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:)

The mountain where the Law was given could not be touched.

Exodus 19:12-13 And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, [*that ye*] go [*not*] up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: 13 There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether [*it be*] beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount.

19:13 shows; and the apostle himself, in Hebrews 12:20, confirms. It is called material mount, to distinguish it from the Church of Christ that spiritual mount Sion, of which the apostle is speaking. The apostle's design is to show that the dispensation of the law engendered terror; that it was most awful and exclusive. These were the things which were exhibited on that material mountain; but the Gospel dispensation is one grand display of the infinite love of God.

Hebrews 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

But ye are come unto mount Sion ... In order to enter fully into the apostle's meaning, we must observe,

- 1.** That the Church of Christ which is called here the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and mount Sion, is represented under the notion of a City.
- 2.** That the great assembly of believers in Christ is here opposed to the congregation of the Israelites assembled at Mount Sinai.

Hebrews 12:23 To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

To the general assembly ... This word is used for festive occasions. It is applied to the assembly of the Grecian states at their national games, Olympic,

The first-born ... Those who first received the Gospel of Christ, and who are elsewhere termed the first fruits: The Church of the first-born is the assembly of New Testament Christians who have³ come to God in the appointed way.

Which are written in heaven ... Christians who are enrolled as citizens of the New Jerusalem, and are entitled to all the rights, privileges, and immunities of the Church here, and of heaven above. This is spoken in allusion to the custom of enrolling or writing

on tables, etc., the names of all the citizens of a particular city; and all those thus registered were considered as having a right to live there, and to enjoy all its privileges.

The spirits of just men made perfect ... We cannot understand these terms without the assistance of Jewish phraseology. The Jews divide mankind into three classes: -

2.They receive their portion in this life, because they can have none in the life to come, and are under the influence of (yetser hara), the evil principle.

3.The intermediate are those who are influenced partly by the evil principle, and partly by the good.

In several parts of this epistle, the just man, signifies one who has a full knowledge of the Christian system, who is justified and saved by Christ Jesus; and the are the adult Christians, who are opposed to the νηπιοι or babes in knowledge and grace. See

Hebrews 5:12-14 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which [*be*] the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. 13 For every one that useth milk [*/s*] unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. 14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [*even*] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Hebrews 8:11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

Galatians 4:1-3 Now I say, [*That*] the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; 2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world

The spirits of the just men made perfect ... or the righteous perfect, are the full grown Christians; those who are justified by the blood and sanctified by the Spirit of Christ. Being come to such, implies that spiritual union which the disciples of Christ have with each other, and which they possess how far soever separate; for they are all joined in one spirit,

Ephesians 2:18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

they are in the unity of the spirit,

Ephesians 4:3-4 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 [*There is*] one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

and of one soul,

Acts 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any [*of them*] that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

This is a unity which was never possessed even by the Jews themselves in their best state; it is peculiar to real Christianity and not to false religion.

Hebrews 12:24 And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than [*that of*] Abel.

And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant ... The old covenant or testament, and its mediator, Moses, are passed away.

Hebrews 8:13 In that he saith, A new [*covenant*], he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old [*is*] ready to vanish away.

The new covenant ... the Gospel, is now in force, and will be to the end of the world; and Jesus, the Son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory, the Maker and Preserver of all things, the Savior and the Judge of all men, is its mediator.

The blood of Abel ... means here the blood that was shed by Cain in the murder of this holy man, and that the blood of Jesus speaks better things than it does, because the blood of Abel called for vengeance, but the blood of Christ for mercy and pardon.

Hebrews 12:25 See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more [*shall not*] we [*escape*], if we turn away from him that [*speaketh*] from heaven:

Take heed, that ye refuse not him ... the Lord Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, who now speaketh from heaven, by his Gospel.

Him that spake on earth ... Moses, who spoke on the part of God to the Hebrews, none being permitted to escape punishment; consequently, if ye turn away from Christ, who speaks to you from heaven, you may expect a much sorer punishment.

Hebrews 12:26 Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.

Whose voice then shook the earth ... Namely, at the giving of the law on Mount Sinai; and from this it seems that it was the voice of Jesus that then shook the earth, and that it was he who came down on the mount. But others refer this simply to God the Father giving the law. Not the earth only, but also heaven - Probably referring to the approaching destruction of Jerusalem, and the total abolition of the political, temple and religious worship of the Jews.

Haggai 2:6 For thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it [*is*] a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry [*land*];

where this event is predicted. It may also remotely refer to the final dissolution of all things.

Hebrews 12:27 And this [*word*], Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

The removing of those things that are shaken ... he whole of Judaism, which had been in a shaken state from the time that Judea had fallen under the power of the Romans.

May remain ... Be permanent; God designing that this shall be the last dispensation of his grace and mercy, and that it shall continue till the earth and the heavens are no more.

Hebrews 12:28 Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear:

We receiving a kingdom ... The Gospel dispensation, frequently termed the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, because in it God reigns among men, and he reigns in the hearts of them that believe, and his kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Which cannot be moved ... Which never can fail, because it is the last dispensation. Let us have grace - Let us have, keep, or hold fast, the benefit or gift, that is, the heavenly kingdom which God has given us.

II Corinthians 8:4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and [*take upon us*] the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

This meaning is rendered by our translators; and it is only by this heavenly gift of the Gospel that we can serve God acceptably, for he can be pleased with no service that is not performed according to the Gospel of his Son.

Acceptably - · In such a way as to please Him

Reverence - · With modesty.

Godly fear - · Religious fear.

We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, but let that boldness be ever tempered with modesty and religious fear; for we should never forget that we have sinned, and that God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:29 For our God [*is*] a consuming fire.

For our God is a consuming fire - The apostle quotes

Deuteronomy 4:24 For the LORD thy God [*is*] a consuming fire, [*even*] a jealous God.

and by doing so he teaches us this great truth, that sin under the Gospel is as abominable in God's sight as it was under the law; and that the man who does not labor to serve God in the way already described, will find that fire to consume him which would otherwise have consumed his sin.

Sources: KJV, theWord.com & Clarke's Commentary