

Godly Discipline

November 12 – Hebrews 12:4-17

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Day 315 – 50 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

After listing the Old Testament heroes and highlighting their faith (11:1-12:3), the writer of *Hebrews* returned to the topic of apostasy. The point of showcasing the saints from the past — that “great cloud of witnesses” — was to encourage his readers to endure the hardships they were facing (12:1), rather than to turn their backs on God and abandon Him. **Thus, it was important that they viewed their persecution not as punishment, but as God’s discipline (v.4-11).**

Their persecution had not yet gotten to the point where their blood was being shed (i.e., martyrdom), like those who had gone before them. What they were experiencing (although it was a sin against them) was not unbearable. So then, what was the point of their hardship and suffering? **God was allowing these things for their good. The writer called it *discipline*.**

Good parents discipline their children, not without reason, but to instruct, correct, and train them to do what is right. So, too, does our heavenly Father discipline His children for their good, not for their harm (v.9-11). A parent who does not discipline a child does not love him or care about his future (v.7, 8). But God cares deeply about who we are and what we do. **Therefore, we should not take His discipline lightly (v.5, 6). We should discern what it is that He wants us to learn.**

Therefore, knowing that God is for us and not against us, and that He is using these things for our sanctification (v.14), let us not be discouraged, but encouraged, when we encounter such trials (*Jas. 1:2, 3*). Let us also encourage others (*Heb. 12:12*), correct what needs to be corrected (v.13), and pursue peace with all people, even those who might make life miserable (v.14). Let us react with grace and kindness, not allowing a seed of bitterness, anger, or resentment to take root in our hearts, which will only cause damage to others (v.15).

Daily Reflection

The writer pleaded with his readers not to be like Esau, “an immoral and godless person, who sold his birthright for a meal” (v.16). Take a minute to read *Genesis 25:29-34*.

Esau forfeited something of tremendous value for that which was worth little. As the oldest son, he would inherit the greater portion of his father’s estate. But he threw it all away for a momentary hunger pain. Once he made the decision to reject his birthright, he could not change his mind. “There was no place for repentance” (*Heb. 12:17*).

The point is this — don’t abandon God (apostasy) because of a momentary trial (persecution). Rather see the trial for what it is, allowed by God’s hand for our good. Those who pretend to know the Lord will do what Esau did. They will not stand to endure any affliction. But those who are genuine believers will endure anything that comes their way, knowing that what they will inherit, through Christ, is worth all the pain and misery they might experience.

How do you view your afflictions, as hurtful or helpful? Why does it matter?

When Mom would discipline me, I remember her saying, “This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you. But because I love you, I must do it.” How does it help knowing that God loves you when He disciplines you?

The Unshakeable Kingdom

November 13 – Hebrews 12:18-29

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 316 – 49 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

The writer of *Hebrews* continued his themes of separating Christ from the old covenant and warning against apostasy. This time, he took aim at Mt. Sinai, the place where God met with the Israelites and gave them His Law (*Ex. 19; Deut. 4:11, 12*). The entire ordeal was overwhelming and intimidating (*Heb. 12:18-21*). It frightened the people and even scared Moses. This memorable experience was symbolic of the old covenant. It was harsh, and the Law was impossible to keep.

However, the writer contrasted their experience at Mt. Sinai (old covenant) to the scene in heaven or Mt. Zion (representing the new covenant). Zion was the high place where Jerusalem was located (*1 Kgs. 18:1; 2 Kgs. 19:21, 31*). In the New Testament, Zion refers to the Church, or to heaven, the place where the Church will gather (*Heb. 12:22-24*). Notice the writer described Zion as the general assembly, the Church of the firstborn (from the dead, Jesus) and the spirits of the righteous (past saints).

All of this — the heavenly, joyful, liberating experience of Mt. Zion — was afforded by Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant (New Testament), “whose blood speaks better than the blood of Abel” (v.24). Here is another way in which Christ is superior to that which occurred in the Old Testament. It is unclear whether the writer was referring to the blood of Abel’s imperfect and temporary sacrifice (which Christ’s sacrifice far surpassed) or to Abel’s blood that spoke to God from the ground (*Gen. 4:10*). After Cain killed Abel, Abel’s blood called for revenge, but the blood of Christ from the cross declared mercy and forgiveness.

What was the point? Again, the writer was attempting to discourage Jews from abandoning their new faith in Christ (apostasy) to return to the impossible Law (old covenant), from which Christ had saved them (*Heb. 12:25*).

Daily Reflection

Next, the writer finished the chapter with a **promise of God to shake everything He has made, just as He shook the earth at Mt. Sinai** (*Heb. 12:26, 27; Hag. 2:6*). This shaking is a reference to the last days when God will judge and destroy the current heavens and earth because of sin and replace them with new and perfect ones (*2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1*).

In other words, everything physical is temporal and will be demolished and burned up (v.29). **“Only those things which cannot be shaken will remain”** (*Heb. 12:27*). **Those things which cannot be shaken are spiritual and eternal. God’s kingdom (the gospel), to which we belong, is spiritual and eternal. Therefore, it cannot and will not be shaken** (v.28).

Re-read *Hebrews 12:28*. What should be our response to such good news?

Knowing that all things on this earth will be shaken and destroyed, what then should consume our time and effort? On what do most people spend their time and effort, that which can be shaken or not? What about you?

A Word of Exhortation

November 14 – Hebrews 13:1-25

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 317 – 48 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We finished the book of *Hebrews*. In this letter, the writer has attempted to distinguish Christ from several Old Testament icons or types. His superior position, ministry, and sacrifice have more than earned our gratitude, love, and loyalty. Thus, the writer pleaded with his readers to avoid the dangers of apostasy. Now, in just a few verses, he encouraged them to exhibit Christlike conduct. **Let's reconsider his brief "word of exhortation"** (v.22).

While this list of exhortations gives us insight into those issues with which the Jewish Christians were struggling, they are also good reminders for us today. For example, **Christ-followers should exhibit love** (v.1-3), love for fellow believers (v.1), especially those in prison or persecuted for their faith (v.3), but also love for "strangers" or non-believers (v.2). Love is a staple of the Christian faith, as it was one of Christ's final commands (*Jn. 13:34, 35*).

Second, **God's people should honor marriage as He does** (*Heb. 13:4*). Unfortunately, we are just as guilty as the world (if not more) for dishonoring marriage when it comes to adultery and divorce. Third, the love of money should not be a characteristic of Christians. Rather we should be known for our contentment, knowing that God is our helper, and that He will meet our needs (v.5, 6).

Fourth, **the writer encouraged his readers (and us) to honor their leaders**, "who keep watch over their souls" (v.17). The way we honor them is to obey or submit to them, to heed the words they've spoken (v.9), and to imitate their faith (v.7). However, the greatest leader is Christ Himself. While earthly leaders come and go, Christ never changes (v.8).

Notice the personal appeal to "let leaders do their duty with joy and not with grief" (v.17). Would your leaders say that you are a help to them, or a headache? Why is that?

Fifth, **the writer challenged his readers to bear the reproach of Christ**, meaning accept the hardship and suffering that comes with being associated with Him (v.13). To make his point, he used another Old Testament illustration (v.10-12). When priests took an animal's blood into the Holy of Holies, they left the animal's body outside the camp. Why? The sins of the people had been transferred to it. Therefore, it was unclean. Likewise, the sins of the people were transferred to Christ on the cross (*2 Cor. 5:21*), so He was crucified outside the gate of Jerusalem (*Heb. 13:12*). "Let us go out to Him and bear His reproach" (v.12).

Finally, on behalf of Christ, **we are called to offer up "sacrifices" in His honor** — the praises or fruit of our lips, our good works, and sharing what we have with others (v.15, 16). "With such sacrifices, God is pleased" (v.16). These things are not forced or difficult for us to do. Instead, they are a natural (or supernatural) outflow of what God is doing in us (v.20, 21).

Daily Reflection

As the writer closed his letter, he asked for prayer. It seems that he was in a Roman prison for his faith and was hoping that "he might soon be restored" to ministry (v.18, 19, 23, 24). He also mentioned Timothy and ended with a familiar tagline — "Grace be with you" — which, perhaps, might indicate Paul as the author.

It is fitting that the writer added this line near the end of his letter, "For here we do not have a lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come" (v.14). Of all the Old Testament types that he's mentioned, none of them were eternal, not even their beloved city, Jerusalem. All were types that were fulfilled in Christ. Therefore, we don't cling to any worldly icon but rather await our reunion with Him in that heavenly city, the new Jerusalem, there to be with Him forever.

As you look back at your reading of *Hebrews*, what were your big takeaways?

Our Living Hope

November 15 – 1 Peter 1:1-25

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 318 – 47 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We transitioned to Peter’s first letter to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor (v.1). Because of the Roman persecution under Nero, Christians were dispersed across the empire. Therefore, Peter was writing to them from Rome (called Babylon, 5:13), the agent of their second exile, like the time of Jeremiah and Daniel (*Jer. 52; Dan. 1*). Thus, the timing of Peter’s letter falls between 64-68 AD.

The purpose of this letter was to encourage those who were suffering from persecution, to remind them of the reasons to endure and how to act while they were being maligned. We see these two great themes in the opening chapter.

First, Peter reminded his readers (and us) of the great things God had done for them in salvation. He had chosen them, sanctified them by His Spirit, sprinkled them by the blood of Jesus, to be **“born again to a living hope** through the resurrection of Christ from the dead” (v.1-3). Because of Christ, we have “obtained an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled, reserved for us in heaven” (v.4). Furthermore, our salvation is “protected by the power of God, to be revealed to us in the last days” (v.5, 9).

All of this is good news, of course, and reason for us to “greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (v.6, 8). **Despite the various trials they were experiencing, they could, by faith, hold fast to that living hope.** Through faith, they loved and believed Him who they had not seen and knew He would return for them some day (v.6-9).

This great salvation, which the angels “long to look into,” was foretold many times by the ancient prophets (v.10-12). They knew the Messiah was coming, but they didn’t know when. Thus, they understood that the message they preached was not for them, but for a future generation (v.12).

Daily Reflection

What was Peter’s point for reminding them of these things? He didn’t want Christians to be discouraged in their circumstances but “to fix their hope completely on the grace to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (v.13). In other words, **whatever they were facing was momentary, and it would all be worth it when they got to see Jesus, their living hope** (v.20, 21). The seed of their salvation is like the word of God. It would endure forever (v.23-25).

However, until then, Peter challenged Christians to remain pure and honorable in their actions, despite what they were enduring. “Do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves in all your behavior” (v.14-16). He also encouraged them “to love one another from the heart, for you have been born again” (v.22). He will continue this challenge in the chapters to come.

What comes to mind when you hear the words, “Jesus, our living hope”?

How can “fixing your hope completely on the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Christ” encourage you today?

A Peculiar People

November 16 – 1 Peter 2:1-12

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Day 319 – 46 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

Peter described what it means to be a Christian, someone who has been born again (1:23). Note the transitional word *therefore* at the beginning of this section (2:1). A follower of Christ leaves his former manner of life (v.1), desires to learn and obey the Lord's instruction (v.2, 3), and begins to live in stark contrast to the world (v.4-12). Let's look at these three aspects of the Christian life.

First, Paul described those who are born again in Christ as "new creatures" (2 Cor. 5:17). The old is gone and the new has come. Peter affirmed this transition. When one's sinful heart is replaced with the indwelling Spirit of God, his views, values, words, and actions will change.

Thus, Peter wrote that Christians put aside malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander. Malice is a desire to hurt others without cause, simply out of spite or revenge. Deceitfulness is to intentionally mislead people, to cause them to believe what is false. Hypocrisy is when one pretends to be someone he is not, to conceal his real character or motives. Envy is like jealousy, believing that someone else is better for some reason (real or supposed), but envy includes an external response. Slander is a false report intended to hurt others, thereby defaming their reputation. These actions contradict Christ's command to love one another (Jn. 13:34, 35).

Second, newborn, or reborn, Christians will desire to learn and obey God's instructions. Thus, Peter challenged his readers to "long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation" (1 Pet. 2:2). Paul described Scripture as "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man (or woman) of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). In his second letter, Peter said God's Word "has everything we need for life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3), but are we thirsty for it, longing for it, and absorbing it?

Third, followers of Christ will live in stark contrast to the world (1 Pet. 2:4-12). He described Christ as "the living stone" and "the chief corner stone," which is the foundation of the Church, the rock on which our salvation is built (v.4, 6, 7). To those who rejected Him, He became "a rock of offense" (v.7, 8).

However, to those of us who believe in Him, we too are living stones, and He has built "a spiritual house" with us, referring to the Church. We comprise a temple, where we offer "spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ" (v.5). He also made us "a holy and royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (v.5, 9). These are terms that God used to describe Israel in *Exodus 19:5, 6*. **Similar to Israel, God has created a spiritual people for His own possession — the Church — comprised of people from every tribe, tongue, and nation.**

What is our purpose as God's "royal priesthood"? We are to recognize that we are "aliens and strangers" in this world (v.11). We don't belong here. This is not our home. We are bound for heaven, and we live here temporarily. As strangers in this world, we are called to live differently, "to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul" (v.11). We are also called to exhibit excellent behavior through our good works, as light in the dark world (v.9, 12).

Daily Reflection

Living stones, a spiritual house, a royal priesthood, and a chosen nation — various names for God's Church. **The King James Version refers to us as "a peculiar people"** (1 Pet. 2:9). To be peculiar refers to people who belong to someone, in this case the Lord. Peculiar also means special or particular, referring to a group that stands out from others.

Do you stand out as peculiar from those around you, as one who is reborn, thirsty for God's Word, a light in the darkness, and one who is glorifying God through good works?

In His Steps

November 17 – 1 Peter 2:13-3:12

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 320 – 45 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

At the end of yesterday's passage, Peter urged his readers to "keep their behavior excellent among the Gentiles" (the unsaved world), so that they would have nothing with which to slander them (2:12, 13). Today, Peter expanded that challenge with seven applications.

First, he instructed Christians to be submissive to civil authorities, since they exist for our good, to restrain wickedness (v.13-15, 17). God's people are to obey the rule of men until they intentionally disobey the rule of God (Acts 5:29). Second, Peter instructed Christians to act as free men, but not to use their freedom as a covering for evil" (1 Pet. 2:16). Instead, they were (and are) to use their freedom as "servants of God" (v.16). In other words, even in our freedom, Christians should be self-governed, controlled from within by the leadership of God's Spirit (v.17).

Third, Peter instructed Christians to "honor all people" (v.17). Then, he instructed them to "love the brotherhood" (v.17). While we should have a special affection for other followers of Christ, our affection should not end there. Those who are not followers of Christ should never feel slighted or dishonored in any way by our words or actions.

Fifth, Peter addressed the conduct of servants, which would apply to any employee today. They were (and are) to "be submissive with all respect," not only to good and gentle employers, but also to those who are difficult (v.18). We must remember that our behavior and performance at work relates to more than just our job or livelihood. Our reputation and testimony as a Christian are on the line. As Christians, we are always under scrutiny, watched carefully by others, to see how we will respond. We must keep in mind that we are representatives or ambassadors of Christ. Besides, to endure unjust suffering patiently "finds favor with God" (v.19, 20).

Next, Peter instructed wives to be submissive to their husbands (3:1). Their chaste and respectful behavior, that of "a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God," was (and is) meant to influence their husbands towards His Word and ways (v.2-6). A woman's internal character is more important than her external adornment (v.3, 4).

Finally, Peter instructed husbands to honor their wives, by living with them in an understanding way (v.7). They are to remember that their wives are "fellow heirs of the grace of life," that is spiritual equals in the gospel, and husbands' behavior towards their wives could hinder their prayers (v.7).

Daily Reflection

To summarize these examples of excellent behavior, Peter wrote, "Be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit, not returning evil for evil but giving a blessing instead" (v.8, 9). He then quoted *Psalms 34:12-16*, to remind them that the Lord is always watching us, and He delights in those who do good.

However, **the best example of excellent behavior was Jesus Himself (2:21-25)**. Even when He suffered at the hands of evil men, He responded in a way that glorified His Father. **His example was given to us "to follow in His steps" (v.21)**. The word *example* in the Greek is *hupogrammos*, which means "under writing." Imagine laying a clear piece of typing paper over a picture and tracing the picture onto the paper. The picture is the *hupogrammos*, the under writing.

We are called to lay our lives upon the example of Christ and trace His as closely as possible, until we look, and act, like Him. When He suffered hardship, He did not revile others but submitted to the Father's will, even to the point of giving His life for ours (v.22-25). **How well does your life reflect our *hupogrammos*?**

Blessed Suffering

November 18 – 1 Peter 3:13-22

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections NT
Day 321 – 44 Days to Go

Today in Your Reading

We read one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament. It falls in the middle of Peter's encouragement to Christians to persevere under persecution. Most persecution could be avoided, he wrote, by "proving to be zealous for what is good" (v.13). However, there are times when the enemies of Christ will look for any reason to persecute His followers, so persecution is a reality, even for the godliest among us (v.14).

However, **Peter quickly took that thought captive and reminded his readers of Jesus' teaching that, "even if they should suffer for the sake of righteousness, they are blessed"** (v.14; *Matt. 5:10-12*). Therefore, Christians should not be afraid or troubled by the world's intimidation, for **Christ has taken the worst that the enemy has to offer** (persecution, even unto death) **and used it for His glory and our good.**

In the meantime, Peter gave some clear instructions. First, we should "sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts" (*1 Pet. 3:15*). The word *sanctify* means to dedicate or set apart. Peter was calling those who were being persecuted to renew their dedication to the Lord, to set their hearts firmly to worship Him and to submit to His lordship.

Second, Peter challenged us to "be ready to make a defense and/or give an account for the hope that is in us" — Christ (v.15). But when we do make a defense of our faith, it must be done "with gentleness and reverence" (v.15). Third, we are "to keep a clean conscience before God and men, so that those who revile us will be put to shame" (v.16). In other words, when we are attacked and persecuted by the enemy, it will not be for something we've done wrong. It will be like Christ, who was persecuted for what He did right. He committed to do the Father's will and still found Himself condemned before men. That should be our experience as well (v.17).

Next, Peter explained that Christ suffered for our sake, even dying for our sins. But He was resurrected from the dead, ascended into heaven, honored with a seat at the right hand of God the Father, and given authority over all things (v.18, 22). **The point is that His suffering ended in triumph, and so will ours.**

But then, Peter wrote that Jesus "went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who were once disobedient in the days of Noah..." (v.19, 20). Knowing exactly where Jesus went (after His death and before His resurrection) and who He spoke to are unclear. "The spirits in prison" from the days of Noah either refer to the people who were destroyed in the flood or the fallen angels who manufactured so much wickedness in that age (*Gen. 6:1-8*).

Furthermore, Peter wrote, "Corresponding to that, baptism now saves you..." (*1 Pet. 3:21*). At first, this verse may seem to say that water baptism leads to salvation, but that is not what Peter was insinuating for two reasons. He first said the baptism was "corresponding to that," which refers to the water of the flood (judgment for sin). Second, Peter wrote, "Not the removal of dirt from the flesh..." which referred to water baptism. It seems that Peter was referencing the baptism of Jesus at the cross, being baptized by the Father's judgment for mankind's sin (*Lk. 12:50*). Just as Noah and his family were saved from the flood by the ark (their salvation), so are we saved from God's judgment by our ark — Christ — and His bloody baptism.

Daily Reflection

At the end of the day, **the Lord is sovereign over any animosity towards us for His sake, as well as the persecution that may follow. Though it may feel like we are taking a beating, God can turn it into a blessing — His glory.** But, before we take a beating, let us "sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts and be ready to make a defense for the hope that is in us..." (v.15).