

The Book of Hebrews

מֵאַנֶשׁ מִנֶּמֶד דָּא מִן תְּ אִקְלָא
צִמְאֵל לְ נִתְאַתְצֵרְחָ דְרִתְסֵנִ סְק
אֵת פִּקְלָא תְ סֵנִ סֶרְבָּאֵל
רֵד תֵּא סֶדְ תֵּאקְסֵנִצְ דִּמְמִצְ
תֵּאֲתַפְלֵשׁ נִ תְרִדְנֵהֲרִפֵּר נִ רִלֵד
תֵּאֲגֵשׁ רִלֵד מִלְלֵצ סֵס תֵּלֵשׁ



Outline of Hebrews

“Jesus is Better”

- I. Jesus Is Better Than the OT Prophets (1:1-4)
- II. Jesus Is Better Than the Angels (1:5-2:18)
- III. Jesus Is Better Than Moses (3:1-4:13)
- IV. Jesus' Priesthood Is Better Than the Levitical Priesthood (4:14-10:18)
- V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)**
- VI. Epilogue: Final Exhortations (13:1-25)

Outline of Hebrews

- V. Concluding Exhortations and Warnings (10:19-12:29)**
 - A. Exhortation to Draw Near, Hold Fast, and Encourage One Another (10:19-25)
 - B. Warning: No Hope of Forgiveness for Those Who Turn from Christ (10:26-31)
 - C. A Call to Persevere (10:32-12:17)
 - 1. Don't Abandon Confidence but Persevere in Faith (10:32-39)
 - 2. The "Hall of Faith" – Description and Examples of Persevering Faith (11:1-12:3)
 - 3. Endure Discipline as Sons (12:4-11)
 - 4. Persevere in the Pursuit of Holiness (12:12-17)
 - D. You Have Come to Mount Zion Instead of Mount Sinai (12:18-24)
 - E. Final Warning: Don't Reject God's Word! (12:25-29)

Persevere in the Pursuit of Holiness (12:12-17)

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

¹² *Therefore* lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

- The author opens verse 12 with the word “*therefore*” connecting what he is **about** to say with all that he **has** said up to this point. Namely, that:
 - Since Jesus, the champion and pioneer of your faith, has endured the hostility of sinners (Heb 12:1,3)
 - Since your suffering is not as severe as many who have gone before you (Heb 12:4 cf. Heb 11:35bff)
 - Since your suffering, **far** from proving that God does **not** love you – **to the contrary**, a **total lack** of such suffering would have given you reason to **doubt** that you were his children (Heb 12:8)
 - Since these afflictions come from your spiritual Father and are intended for your spiritual benefit and if rightly received by you, will result in the “*peaceful fruit of righteousness*” (Heb 12:10-11)
- “*Therefore* lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet...”

¹² *Therefore lift your **drooping hands** and strengthen your **weak knees**,* ¹³ *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*

- Here the author returns (briefly) to his earlier use of **athletic** imagery (see Heb 12:1-2) and he draws his material from a passage in **Isaiah** and from another passage in **Proverbs**.
- The picture of “*drooping hands and... weak knees*” conveys the idea of (spiritual and emotional) **fatigue** on the part of his readers – something which the author has already expressed concern about earlier in this chapter:
 - *Consider [Jesus]... so that you may **not grow weary or fainthearted**.* (Heb 12:3)
 - *My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, **nor be weary** when reprovved by him* (Heb 12:5)

¹² Therefore **lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees**, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

- The language that the author uses here is taken from a prophetic passage of **encouragement** from the book of **Isaiah**.
- In this passage, Isaiah challenges **his** readers – exiled Jews who were beginning to feel like the deliverance and restoration that they had been promised would never come – to put their hope in God’s deliverance and justice, and to look to his way of **holiness**:
 - **Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you...” And a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness...** (Isaiah 35:3-5,8)

¹² Therefore **lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees**, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

- In other words, those who are discouraged because of their dire situation are called to put their hope in the coming, the justice, and the blessings of God (cf. Heb 10:37).
- The “lifting” of the “*drooping hands*” and the “strengthening” of “*weak knees*”, therefore, is a figurative way of saying: “take heart and hope in the Lord!”
- This message has obvious implications for original readers of this letter who were growing weary and discouraged in their persecution.

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and **make straight paths for your feet**, so that what is **lame** may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

- Verse 13 continues with a quote from Proverbs 4:26, which talks about choosing a right path: *“make straight paths for your feet.”*
- The *“straight”* or *“level”* path is a common image in wisdom literature for God’s way of right living:
 - *Teach me your way, O LORD, and lead me on a level path* (Psalm 27:11)
 - *The path of the upright is a level highway* (Prov 15:19)

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and **make straight paths for your feet**, so that what is **lame** may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.

- So what the author is doing here is exhorting his hearers to **take courage** in the Lord's promised **future deliverance** and, in the meantime, **choose** the Lord's **way of holiness** so that their spiritual and emotional condition might be **strengthened**.
- The reference to "**what is lame**" is another figurative description of exhaustion or the crippling effect of **spiritual discouragement**.

¹² *Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,* ¹³ *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*

- Running a race on an uneven path full of bumps and potholes is not only ***inconvenient*** but also ***dangerous***, especially for a person who is not in good physical condition to begin with.
- In other words, if the hearers choose the ***wrong path***, their spiritual condition will get ***worse***.
- In the ancient world the word translated “***put out of joint***” was used in technical medical contexts to refer to dislocation.
- Therefore, the readers are called to follow the Lord’s “***straight paths***” of holiness so that their current spiritual condition will result in spiritual ***healing*** rather than in a more serious spiritual malady.

¹⁴ *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

- The athletic imagery is now abandoned, and the same teaching is expressed in straightforward ethical terms.
- “*Strive for peace with everyone.*” We recall our Lord's benediction on the peacemakers, “*for they shall be called sons of God*” (Matt. 5:9), and Paul’s exhortation to the Roman Christians: “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*” (Rom 12:18).
- It might **not** be possible for the original readers, for their persecutors might refuse to live in “peaceful coexistence” with them
- But they themselves must remain peaceable in attitude and conduct and never take the **initiative** in stirring up strife.
- If this was their duty with regard to **mankind in general**, how much more was it their duty to “*be at peace with one another*” (Mark 9:50).

¹⁴ *Strive for peace with everyone, and for **the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.***

- “*The holiness without which no one will see the Lord*” is, as the words themselves make plain, **not** an “optional extra” in the Christian life but something which belongs to its **very essence**.
- It is only the “*pure in heart*”, and no one else, who shall see God (Matt 5:8).
- The author refers here, as in verse 10, to practical holiness in the Christian life.

¹⁴ *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

- We are reminded of Paul's words to the Thessalonians: *“For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**...For God has not called us for impurity, but in **holiness**.”* (1 Thes 4:3a,7)
- The scriptures are clear: those whose lives are characterized by habitual sinful behavior will **not** inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9ff).
- Those who are called to be partakers of God's holiness must be holy themselves; this is the recurring theme of the OT law of holiness, and echoed again in the New Testament: *“You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”* (Lev 11:45 cf. 1 Pet. 1:15ff).
- To *“see the Lord”* is the highest and most glorious blessing mortals can enjoy, but such a sight is reserved for those who are holy in heart and life.

¹⁵ ***See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;***

- “*See to it*” translates a Greek verb that in other contexts refers to oversight of others (2 Chron 34:12; 1 Pet 5:2).
- Here, as in Heb 3:13, the ***entire congregation*** is called to be vigilant.
- We must be on the lookout for ***three*** types of people whose sinful example and influence threaten the unity and purity of the Christian community:
 - One who “*fails to obtain the grace of God*”
 - A “*root of bitterness,*” who defiles others
 - One who is immoral and profane, like Esau
- Failing to “*obtain the grace of God*” is the same as that warned against in the earlier warning passages (Heb 4:1; 6:4-6; 10:26-31), namely, the state of ***rejecting the gospel*** and missing the forgiveness offered by virtue of Christ’s sacrifice.

¹⁵ *See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;*

- The believers are to see to it that “*no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled.*”
- Here the author alludes to Deut 29:18, which reads:
 - *Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. **Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit.***
- The context of this Old Testament text is **significant**, since it deals with **idolatry and apostasy** from the covenant community.
- Those among Hebrews’ original recipients who were jettisoning their confession of Christ were causing “*trouble*” within the community.

¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no “*root of bitterness*” springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become **defiled**;

- The verb translated “*defiled*,” communicates the idea of **contamination**.
- It is used in the New Testament to speak of:
 - Ceremonial impurity (John 18:28)
 - A person who lives in impurity or has a corrupt mind (Titus 1:15)
 - A person who is sexually immoral (Jude 8)
- Here the author is warning that a “*root of bitterness*” (i.e. **apostasy**) has introduced an insidious, spiritually corroding element into the church.

¹⁶ *that no one is **sexually immoral** or unholy **like Esau**, who sold his birthright for a single meal.*

- The readers are to see to it that no member of the church falls into the pattern of immoral Esau
- That Esau was “*sexually immoral*” is somewhat problematic since the biblical text does not mention sexual promiscuity on his part.
- However, some strands of Jewish interpretation describe him as sexually suspect because of his marriage to the Hittites Judith and Basemath (Gen 26:34), and our author may be picking up on this tradition.

¹⁶ *that no one is sexually immoral or **unholy like Esau**, who sold his birthright for a single meal.*

- The word translated “*unholy*,” speaks of something that is unholy, ungodly, or base.
- Hebrews describes Esau in this way because of his ***misplaced values*** that led to his unwise decision to give up his inheritance.
- For something as valueless as a meal— simply a means of gaining immediate gratification for physical hunger pangs— he foolishly gave up his rights as the firstborn, that is, the double portion of his father’s inheritance.

¹⁷ *For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, **he was rejected**, for he found no chance to repent, **though he sought it with tears**.*

- Here the author of Hebrews describes what happened **later** in the Genesis account, when Jacob actually **stole** Esau's blessing (Gen 27:30-40).
- Having given up his inheritance and being rejected from receiving the blessing, Esau, weeping, **pleaded** with his father to **reverse** the situation, but the patriarch could not do it.
- The author of Hebrews wishes to drive home the point that only "**tears**" and **rejection** await those who sell out the inheritance that God promises to his children.

¹⁷ *For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.*

- The application is plain; it is a reinforcement of the warnings given earlier in this letter, that in ***apostasy*** there can come a point where no repentance is possible:
 - *For it is **impossible**, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Heb 6:4-6)*

Class Discussion Time



*Class Discussion Time

- In our passage today (and in passages that we cross referenced) we have seen some **strong** warnings concerning the **importance** of Christians living lives that are characterized by holiness
- Or to state it another way, a person who **claims** to be a Christian while living a life that is **characterized** by ongoing sinful behavior – is living **contrary** to their Christian profession and has good reason to question whether his faith is a **genuine** Christian faith.
- On the other hand, while our lives should not to be **characterized** by sin, **all** Christians **do sin** from time to time:
 - *For we all stumble in many ways.* (James 3:2)
 - *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (1 John 1:8)
 - *Peter came up and said to [Jesus], “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but **seventy times seven.**”* (Mat 18:21-22)
- How do we balance these two ideas?

*Class Discussion Time

- Is it possible to become so comfortable with the fact that all Christians do sin, that we become *lax* about sin?
- If so, what can we do to avoid falling into this trap?
- On the other hand, is it possible to become so focused on the necessity for holy living that we despair and lose heart when we *do* sin?
- Do you think that genuine Christians can go through periods in their life when they may be more susceptible to sin, and therefore may find themselves needing to repent more often?
- Are there sometimes other remedies to temptation besides “believe and repent”?
- Consider this statement by the Apostle Paul:
 - *To the unmarried and widows I say that it is best for them to remain as I am. But **if they do not have self-control, let them get married. For it is better to marry than to burn with sexual desire.*** (1 Cor 7:8-9 NET)