

HEBREWS *Fear to Faith*

STUDY 17

Inheritors – or illegitimate?

A. Disciplined as sons [12:3-11]

12:3,4 The best cure for discouragement (Acts 7:55,56; Rev.1:1)

[1] [12:3] If the eyes are steadfastly turned to Him ... the believer cannot fail to ponder the vision and to estimate the power of His work in relation to Life. That is sufficient in order that Christians may support their afflictions. If the leader bears the brunt of the battle the soldier can follow. **Brooke Foss Westcott**, *Hebrews* p. 399

[2] [12:4] They might yet have to meet fiercer trials than had come their way thus far; but this was no time to be discouraged, when they thought of others who remained steadfast amid sufferings much worse than theirs. They ought rather to realize that their present hardships were a token of their heavenly Father's love for them, and the means by which He was training them to be more truly His sons. **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 357

12:5,6 Hard truths for 'prosperity-minded' believers! (Matt.5:10-12)

[3] [12:5-11] At this point there seems to arise the question why it was not possible to have fellowship with Christ without all this endurance. The answer here given is that the fact of suffering, however mysterious, is inevitably associated with the education of faith. **W.H. Griffith Thomas** *Let Us Go On* p.160

[4] [12:4] The final failure comes from continuous weakening. The moral strength is enfeebled little by little ... So it may be that those who, like the Hebrews, had begun well are unable to sustain the long stress of the conflict. **Brooke Foss Westcott**, *Hebrews* p. 400

[5] Chastisement has reference not merely to sins, but God's object is to conform us to the image of Christ. God had one Son, without sin, but not without sorrow. But we are sinful, and our hearts cleave to the world and our souls to the dust. To love God truly, and to find our joy and delight in Him and in heavenly things, to give up trust and complacency in self, and to ascribe glory to God only, how far are we from this! and sometimes when we or others least think so. Was not Job upright and devoted to the fear of God? Why is David a man of sorrows, and Jeremiah a man of tears? Paul, caught up to the third heaven, and beholding the glory of the Lord,

“The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives ...”

has to bear the thorn in the flesh. John the beloved is in Patmos. God knows why. **Adolph Saphir** *Hebrews* p.816

12:7,8 The strange paradox of Divine sonship (Matt.6:9,10)

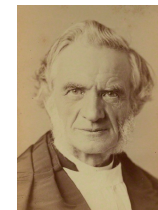
[6] Now, as childhood is to the rest of our earthly life, so is the whole of our earthly life to the future heavenly one. Let us cultivate then the spirit of daily rebuked and chastened, that our thoughts, words, and actions need constant correction and alteration; let us receive this with the docility and meekness of children, and with the trustful and sweet assurance that love breathes in all our chastening, that we are in the most tender and fatherly hands. **Adolph Saphir** *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p.819

[7] [12:5] A father would spend much care and patience on the upbringing of a true-born son whom he hoped to make a worthy heir; and at the time such a son might have to undergo much more irksome discipline than an illegitimate child for whom no future of honor and responsibility was envisaged, and who therefore might be left more or less to please himself. **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 357

12:9 What significance is there to the phrase *Father of spirits*? (Num.16:22; 27:16; Job 12:10)

[8] The Spirit, who in condescending love comes most directly into contact with us, is emphatically called “holy”. **Adolph Saphir** *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p.836

[9] [12:9] The phrase ... is quite general, the Father of spirits embodied, disembodied, unembodied. The context, which regards disobedience as possible, seems to exclude the idea that [*ta pneumata*] means only the spirits in conscious, willing, fellowship with God. The [*pneuma*] corresponds with the [*sarx*], in the narrower sense, as an integral element in man's nature. By the latter he is bound to the line of ancestors who determine the conditions of his earthly life (7:5,10 note): by the former he stands in immediate connexion with God. **Brooke Foss Westcott**, *Hebrews* p. 404

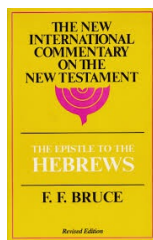


[11] [12:9-10] Here it is positive holiness of life that is meant; the emphasis is rather different from that found earlier in the epistle where the sanctification procured for believers by the sacrifice of Christ is that cleansing of conscience which fits them to approach God in worship. That was the initial gift of holiness; the holiness mentioned here is rather the goal for which God is preparing His people – that entire sanctification which is consummated in their manifestation with Christ in glory. But this consummation is not attained “sudden, in a minute”; as Paul and Barnabas told the young churches of South Galatia, “through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 359

Esau – the typical all-American male?

[10] [12:16] The incident which he does recall from Esau's career illustrates not fornication but “profaneness”, that is to say, the lack of any sense of spiritual values.

Nothing is related of him in Genesis which is positively to his discredit; he is the "hunting, shooting, fishing" type of man whose chief concerns are the material interests of the moment. When Jacob by deceit received the blessing intended for Esau, Esau fell into a towering rage, and threatened his brother's life; but he soon forgot his resentment, together (possibly) with the cause of it. Compared with such a sportsman, Jacob in some respects cuts a poor figure. Yet, even in his most disreputable moments, Jacob showed an appreciation of the heritage promised by God to his family and a determination not to miss that heritage; and at the end, as we have seen, he won his record for faith. On the other hand, so little did Esau value the birthright with which that heritage was bound up that in a moment of hunger he sold it "for a mess a pottage". **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 367



12:10,11 Why, ultimately, MUST the Father chastise all believers? (Deut.4:20; 8:5; I Kings 8:51; Hosea 11:1)

[12] [12:10] Discipline invariably appears at the time to be a matter of pain, and not of gratification. Our minds usually fail to realize anything more than the suffering of the present. But notwithstanding our short memories, God's discipline is invariably for our good, in order that there may be fruit in our lives as shown by a genuine righteousness of conduct. **W.H.G. Thomas** *Let Us Go On* p.161

**"God's discipline
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our good"**

[13] [12:11] The man who accepts discipline at the hand of God as something designed by his heavenly Father for his good will cease to feel resentful and rebellious; he has "stilled and quieted" his soul, which thus provides fertile soil for the cultivation of a righteous life, responsive to the will of God. **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 361

B. Vigilant as servants [12:12-17]

12:12,13 What, rather than our standing with God, is often the source of our failure & discouragement?

[14] [12:12-13] Reverting to his athletic figure of speech, our author bids his readers brace their flagging limbs and press on to the goal. Some of their number were feeling specially discouraged and dis-inclined to make the necessary effort; the others should do everything possible to help them. **F.F. Bruce** *Hebrews* p. 363

12:14,15 Here we have hints of 2 great failures of the church today

[15] Ask a Jew, a Mohammedan, a Rationalist, any one but a Christian, "What do you mean by your righteousness, or your holiness?" His reply is "my benevolence,

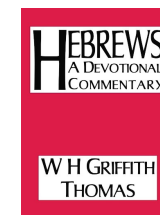
my good thoughts, feelings, and works." It is always "my." Ask a Christian "What is your righteousness?" His answer is, "Jehovah – Christ is my righteousness." "What is your holiness?" "My holiness is in heaven – Christ." "What is your life?" "My life is hid with Christ in God, and Christ liveth in me." **Adolph Saphir** *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p.839

[16] [12:15,16] The conditions of social intercourse impose upon Christians the obligation of constant watchfulness lest the unchristian element should communicate its evil to the Church. The three clauses ... are in some sense bound together by the use of a finite verb in the second only. At the same time the element of evil is presented in successive stages of development. At first it is want of progress: this defect spreads as a source of positive infidelity: at last there is open contempt of duties and privileges. **Brooke Foss Westcott**, *Hebrews* p. 408

12:16,17 What made Esau a 'profane' person? (Matt.5:3-6)

[17] [12:16] The use of *bebelos* in the N.T. is limited: 1 Tim. 1:9; 4:7; 6:20; 2 Tim. 2:16; comp. Matt. 12:5; Acts 24:6. 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. **Brooke Foss Westcott**, *Hebrews* p. 410

[18] ... the word "profane" has its old meaning of "secular," not its modern specific idea of the use of blasphemous speech. There are few words that are more suggestive by way of illustration than this. It comes from the Latin words *pro-fanum*. Outside every fane or temple there was an area of land open to every one, where people gathered, an open place without enclosure. In contrast with this was the sacred enclosure of the temple or "fane" itself. Esau had no such sacred enclosure in his life, and in this sense was a purely secular man. In the one act of selling his birthright for a "morsel of meat," he revealed his essential character as one who did not possess God in his life ... 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. **W.H. Griffith Thomas** *Let Us Go On* p.163



'Dwarf Christians' and solitary saints

[19] Christ has indeed promised to each individual, "If a man loves Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." And we can scarcely lay too much stress on the necessity of secret prayer, of solitary meditation, of each one working out his own salvation with fear and trembling. But neither can we lay too much stress on the institution of the congregation, on the communion of saints, on the special blessing, on the special presence promised to the meeting of believers in Jesus' name, on the necessity of

continuing steadfast in doctrine – that is, in the apostolic teaching as continued by God-given teachers and pastors – in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in united prayer. The individual spiritual life is to be nourished in the Church, and is again to nourish and enrich the congregation; and as no general and comprehensive philanthropy can be genuine without love to parents and children, neighbours and friends, or can be a substitute for the affection, claimed first by divine and natural law, so as a rule no Christian is in his right place, or in a healthy condition, who does not live and work in a congregation, and give his energies, beginning with his prayer and intercession, to a community of believers, united together for worship and work in one special place. When the Hebrews became cold in love and wavering in the faith, they began neglecting to assemble themselves together, and cultivate Christian fellowship. Edification in Scripture always refers to the building up of believers as a community. Fellowship and co-operation are inseparably connected with the development of many aspects of Christian life. **Adolph Saphir** *The Epistle to the Hebrews* p.829