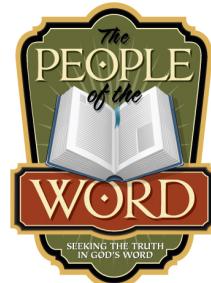


Run With Endurance
Hebrews 12:1-13:25

A Quick Synopsis (and then we'll break it down)

10:19-12:29 - Final Exhortation to Persevere

"Our light and momentary afflictions ARE PRODUCING for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all" ...2 Cor. 4:17



In the final exhortation to **endure** and **persevere** in the faith, the author's concerns emerge in the five "let us" challenges in 10:22-25, based on the sure work of Christ (vv. 19-21):

1. Let us draw near to God (we now have access to the Most Holy Place!);
2. Let us hold unswervingly to our hope;
3. Let us spur one another on toward love and good deeds;
4. Let us not give up meeting together with others; and
5. Let us encourage one another.

After a strong warning against deliberate sin (grace does not mean license; vv. 26-31), he urges perseverance (vv. 32-39 – “*when you stood your ground*”), citing Habakkuk 2:3-4.

Hab. 2:3-4, “*For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it lingers, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay...but the righteous will live by his faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.*

Gordon Fee, The exposition of the Habakkuk text that follows (Heb. 11:1-12:3) is so well known that it is easy to miss what is going on. The author's singular point is the faith (faithful perseverance and endurance) of many who did not “*shrink back*” (10:39) despite adversity and not obtaining the promised future; at the same time he insists that we are in continuity with these believers and they with us, since the promise has now been realized as we all await the glorious future. He concludes by pointing his readers once more to Jesus as an example of endurance in suffering (12:1-3).

As chapter twelve continues, he goes on (with an exposition of Prov. 3:11-12), to point out that there is an educative dimension to suffering. After a final exhortation to holy living in community (Heb. 12:14-17), he concludes with the analogy of the two

mountains (12:18-24), namely that Mount Zion is **superior** to Mount Sinai and that we are “not to refuse him who speaks from the heavenly Jerusalem.”

13:1-25 – Concluding Practical Exhortations

The final chapter emphasizes the readers’ need to love (look out for one another’s **BEST** interest) in community and to submit to their leaders. The author continues to contrast Christ with what has preceded him: The sacrificial system is out, but a sacrifice of praise – the confessions of our lips, and the sacrifice of doing good and sharing with others is in.

Romans 12:1-2 (MSG), So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. Don’t become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You’ll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Breaking It Down

Is there a foundational motivation for perseverance? Yes, being “surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses” can encourage us to mobilize our resources, clench our fists, and set our “**face like a stone**”(Isaiah 50:7). But if that is our only motivation, we’ll run out of gas. What’s at the core then? “*Let us fix our eyes on Jesus!*” **SLIDE:** Others can inspire us, but only Jesus can empower us. Remember, Jesus isn’t *out there* in the clouds, but rather *in here* (Christ **IN YOU**, the hope of glory – Col. 1:27) giving us strength to meet any challenge. Paul said it best, “*I can do everything through him who gives me strength*” (Phil. 4:13).

Christ Our Example (12:1-3)

Verse 1 - “We” links the writer to his readers. He is a competitor in the race as well as they and writes as one who is as much caught up in the contest as they are.

Who are these “witnesses?”

Leon Morris comments, “The writer is picturing athletes in a footrace, running for the winning post and urged on by the crowd. He speaks of the runners as “surrounded,” which makes it hard to think of them as looking to the “witnesses” and all the more so

since they are exhorted to keep their eyes on Jesus (v.2). Both ideas may be present. Perhaps we should think of something like a relay race where those who have finished their course and handed in their baton are watching and encouraging their successors."

With the great gallery of witnesses about us, how are we to run well? By, "throwing off everything that hinders." "Everything that hinders" is translated from the word *onkos*, meaning any kind of weight.

SLIDE: Athletes carried nothing with them in a race thus the writer is suggesting that the Christian should "travel light." He is not referring to sin, for that follows in the next clause. Some things that are not wrong in themselves hinder us in putting forward our best effort. So the writer tells us to cut it loose.

I often counsel young adults to be VERY CAREFUL of debt. It's a weight that has to potential to keep you from saying "yes" to God shaped opportunities. Less is more.

Christians must also put off every sin. Sin forms a crippling hindrance to good running. Christians then, are to lay aside all that could hinder them in their race and are to "run with perseverance." The author is not thinking of a short, sharp sprint but of a distance race that requires endurance and persistence. Everyone has from time to time a mild inclination to do good. The author is not talking about this but about the kind of sustained effort required of the long-distance runner who keeps on with great determination over the long course. That is what the heroes of faith did in their day, and it is that to which we are called.

Illust. My daughter Hannah. She trained first for a half marathon (13:1). She then trained for a full marathon (26:2). On one occasion I went with her to train. She ran. I rode a bike. What was glaring about her training was her pace. To my eyes, it was painfully slow. She wore a watch that calculated distance. She timed her miles. Each one had to be 7.5 mintues +/- . The first one to the last one. If not, she'd flame out at mile 20.

We all need to run at the pace of grace with a holy endurance.

Verse 2 - We are to run this race "with no eyes for any one or anything except Jesus." Karen and I would encourage our kids that we play for "AN AUDIENCE OF ONE." We don't play to please ANYONE but Christ alone. He is our vision. It is He toward whom we run. There must be no divided attention. Why? Because He alone is the "author and perfecter of faith." Chariots of Fire – the sprinter Abrahams lost to Liddell because he took his eyes off the tape. James 1:8; 4:8.

*James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. 8 Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you **double-minded**.*

Verse 2b - “for the joy set before him.” Jesus looked right through the Cross to the coming joy, the joy of bringing salvation as the only means of redemption for those He loves.

Verse 3 “Consider,” “take account of” Jesus. The example he set remained before the readers. He endured “opposition from sinful men” and thus was in the same kind of position the readers found themselves in. They must not think their situation unique. They were not called upon to put up with something their Master had not first endured. In chapter 13 (verse 7), the author exhorts his readers to “remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the OUTCOME of their way of life and imitate their faith.” See Josh. 14:10, the example of Caleb.

PAGE 2 – Turn Your Outline Over

Discipline (12:4-13)

SLIDE: *Prov. 3:11-12, My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.*

The ancient Greeks used this word to refer to the training of a child. It signified whatever parents and teachers did to train, correct, cultivate, and educate children in order to help them mature properly.

Leon Morris, “Suffering comes to all; it is part of life, but it is not easy to bear. Yet it is not quite so bad when it can be seen as meaningful. The author has just pointed out that Christ endured his suffering on the cross on account of the joy set before him. **His suffering had meaning.** So for Christians all suffering is transformed because of the Cross. We serve a Savior who suffered, and we know **he will not lead us into meaningless suffering.** The writer points to the importance of discipline and proceeds to show that for Christians suffering is rightly understood only when seen as God’s fatherly discipline, correcting and directing us. Suffering is evidence, not that God does not love us, but that he does. Believers are sons and are treated as sons.”

During the waning years of his life, Malcolm Muggeridge penned the following words:

SLIDE: *Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at that time seemed especially desolating and painful. I now look back upon them with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence has been through affliction and not through happiness whether pursued or attained. In other words, I say this, if it were possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo-jumbo, the results would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal and trivial to be endurable. This, of course, is what the cross signifies and it is the cross, more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ.*

SLIDE: H. Richard Niebuhr in his book, The Kingdom of God in America, wrote,

“What we want out here is a God without wrath who sent man without sin to a kingdom without justice through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.”

The cross stands as the centerpiece of the Gospel message of Christ because it recognizes the power and destructive nature of what sin is, BUT ALSO the beauty and love of what restoration and forgiveness is.

What instruments does God use to discipline His Church?

- A. Circumstances (God allows and/or orchestrates)
- B. Consequences of actions we have taken
- C. Church

Where CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE has failed, it has often been because we've had too narrow an understanding. Two aims have been the focus: the PURITY OF THE CHURCH and the RESTORATION OF THE SINNER to righteousness.

Both are important, yet two other important principles have been neglected: reconciliation and freedom. Sin brings alienation, therefore discipline must aim at RECONCILIATION AMONG BROTHERS (See Matthew 5:23-25; 18:15-20). Also, Christ died to set us FREE, FROM BONDAGE, AND FREE FROM GUILT and the paralyzing feelings of guilt.

SLIDE: NOTE: Freedom is achieved through the rejection of sinful choices and the embrace of godly choices. We do this primarily in the context of accountable relationships to the body.

Final Exhortations – Chapter 13

Life in the World (13:1-6)

- A. Keep on loving each other as brothers. They were looking after one another's best interest. How? 3:13-14, "Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first. 10:24, "Consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.
- B. Offer "hospitality" (*lit. "love of strangers"*). Eugene Peterson translates the idea, "Be ready with a meal or a bed when it's needed. Some have extended hospitality to angels without ever knowing it!"
- C. Be attentive to prisoners, and victims of abuse. Christians should have compassion on those in prison "as if you were their fellow prisoners." "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it," wrote Paul (1 Cor 12:26); and there is something of the same thought here. Believers should feel so much for their friends in prison and for "those who are mistreated" that they become one with them (see Heb. 10:34).
- D. Honor marriage, and guard the sacredness of sexual intimacy between wife and husband.
- E. Don't be obsessed with getting more material things. Be content with what you have. God assures us, "I'll never let you down, never walk off and leave you," we can boldly quote, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you. So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"

Life in the Body (13:7-19)

- A. Appreciate your leaders (13:7-8, 17; see 1 Thes. 5:12ff). *Appreciate your pastoral leaders who gave you the Word of God. Take a good look at the way they live, and let their faithfulness instruct you, as well as their truthfulness. There should be a consistency that runs through us all.*
- B. Simplicity of Belief (13:9-12). Be careful of external religious expressions (verses 9-10). The Christian is transformed by grace, not by external religious observances.

C. Bear the disgrace, look forward, sing praise, do good, share, and pray. (13:13-16,18). One commentator writes, “From the Jewish perspective, the writer is asking the believer to leave the family structure (go outside the camp) and embrace Jesus upon whom the Jewish people invoked God’s curse by hanging him on a cross (Deut. 21:23). To go to one who bears the curse of God is to share “the disgrace He bore.” By choosing Christ, the Jew rejects Judaism and thus faces expulsion, alienation, and at times persecution. What comforts the believer is the knowledge of the disgrace his ancestors bore (chapter 11), and the promise of “the city” that is to come (look forward). In doing so, he is to sing praise, continue to do good, share with those in need, and pray for others specifically to live honorable lives.”

Life at the Center (13:20-25)

A. This final benediction is the only place in the letter where Jesus is seen as our Shepherd or where the Resurrection is specifically referred to. Jesus as shepherd: There are two notable characteristics of sheep: they have no wisdom, and they have no weapons. They get lost, they can’t find their way back and if anything attacks them they are utterly helpless to defend themselves. THAT IS WHY SHEEP NEED A SHEPHERD!

The prayer is that God will “equip” the readers “with everything good for doing his will.”

Final Exhortation (13:22-25)

“*I urge you...*” These final words put a capstone on a beautiful piece of literature. God Himself will equip each one of us with everything good so that we may do His will. He is there to equip us, so we have no excuse for failure to act. When the Lord places the desire on our heart to begin a new venture, He is there urging us on all the while providing the resources to “*work in us what is pleasing to him...*

SLIDE: 1 Cor. 16:13-14, Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men & women of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.