

# Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews

## Chapter 12

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### I. Introduction:

Having given the Jerusalem congregation perhaps the most inspiring reprise of spiritual heroes to be found anywhere in scripture, Paul now tries to help the believers in that church apply these encouraging examples to their own situation. In chapter twelve, he moves on from citing examples to exhorting his listeners to actually start *following* these examples. It will be remembered that the apostle had picked many of these individuals not only for their great and consistent faith, but also for the hardships they had to endure – analogous in many ways to the travails which the Jerusalem believers had lately suffered that were causing them to flag in their faith and to stumble in their application. "You need", Paul seems to be telling them, "to do as these great believers of the past did and *not* give in just because you are presently enduring a great test of your faith". Secondly, Paul had also picked many of these individuals in chapter eleven precisely on account of some memorable failures. By recalling these examples, Paul was demonstrating to the Jerusalem believers that spiritual recovery *is possible*. While many of the great believers of the past had failed in spectacular fashion, they had *recovered* and had gone on to do great things for the Lord by responding to Him instead of turning away from Him.

That was the challenge that now faced many of those in the Jerusalem church who heard these words, namely, to humbly repent of their poor conduct, confessing their sins to the Lord, and beginning the process of spiritual growth anew, a process which would in time restore them to the spiritual heights they had once inhabited. Since this situation, that of spiritual failure and the need to recover thereafter through repentance, confession, and reinvigoration of one's walk with the Lord, is one which few believers avoid in their lives, nothing could be more important for us

in the waning days of Laodicea than to remind ourselves of these critically important principles. Because anyone who is not moving forward is or will soon be moving backwards. If we are going to give the witness the Lord wants us to give in the coming Tribulation, we will need to be walking closely with Him – and that will require quick recovery from any and all lapses we may, in the manner of all who are human, suffer along the way.

## II. Translation

(1) Since then we too [just like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us, [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep Him in mind who endured such terrible opposition against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

(4) You have not yet resisted to the point of [having to shed your] blood in your struggle against sin. (5) And you have forgotten the encouragement scripture gives us as to the sons we are: "My son, do not treat the Lord's punishment lightly, and do not lose heart when you are rebuked by Him. (6) For the Lord punishes those He loves, and flays everyone He receives to Himself as a son."

(7) So take your punishment in this spirit – God is behaving towards you as to sons. For what son has never been punished by his father? (8) And if it should be that you are not receiving punishment (in which all [true sons] share), then you are illegitimate and not sons at all. (9) Now we all had human fathers who punished us and we respected them for it. How much the more then shall we not submit ourselves to the Father of our spirits and live? (10) For while our human fathers meted out our punishment for a relatively short time according as they saw best, when He punishes us it is definitely for our own good – that we might partake of His holiness. (11) Now no punishment is a cause of rejoicing as it is being experienced, but rather of regret – only later does it bear fruit for those who have been trained through it – the fruit of [personal] righteousness that makes one whole and complete.

(12) Therefore, [going back to our race analogy] pick up those hands hanging slack at your side, put some strength back into your weak knees, (13) and make straight tracks for your feet, so that [even though you fell down] what you sprained might not be twisted completely out of joint, but might instead work its way back to health.

(14) Pursue peace with everyone, and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord, (15) exercising caution so that no one fall short of God's grace, that no bitter root grow up and impede [the spiritual progress of any brother] and through that [bitter root] many be defiled, (16) that no immoral or godless person like Esau [cause such defilement], who, for the sake of a single meal sold his birthright. (17) For you know that when he wanted to regain the inheritance [that came with Isaac's] blessing, he had no opportunity to change [his father's] mind, even though he eagerly sought it with tears.

(18) For you have not come to a mountain which can be touched, burning with fire and [obscured by] darkness and gloom and a whirlwind, (19) [ringing with] the sound of a trumpet and the roar of commands – in addition to which those who heard begged for no further word to be given to them. (20) For they could not endure the command: "If even an animal touches the

mountain, it must be stoned to death." (21) And the vision was so terrifying that even Moses said, "I am terrified and tremble."

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai which stands for the present Jerusalem (Gal.4:21-31), but] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], (23) and to the Church of the firstborn enrolled [as its citizens] in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] completed [their tasks], (24) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[']s sacrifice].

(25) See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? (26) His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (Hag.2:6; cf. Hag.2:21). (27) And this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] transformation of things which may be shaken as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. (28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear. (29) For our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:1-29

### **III. Summary and Paraphrase**

*Divine discipline is not to be despised but responded to. The disaster occasioned by failure to respond is exemplified by the difference between the grace and mercy of the New Covenant and the terrifying penalties of the Old. Better to prefer the heavenly Mount Zion and the Kingdom of Heaven which can never be shaken.*

No doubt you are being disciplined for your lack of faith shown by your failure to walk in the footsteps of the great believers of the past. And no doubt it is hard for you to admit that this pain is your fault for the wrong actions you have taken. Do not react in that way! The whole point of divine discipline is to turn you around to repentance and to motivate you to return to the faith and trust and obedience you once had. So you need to rethink how you are responding to God's reproof of you and have some humility instead. So be pleased to follow the example of all the great believers in the past who are watching us, put aside this sin that you have fallen into (of returning to the Law on the one hand and of pursuing Gnostic fantasies on the other), and instead make every effort to get back onto the course so as to win the race (cf. 1Cor.9:24-27).

Keep your eyes on Jesus Christ, our prime example and the One because of whom we are saved and in whom we trust to be saved. Do what He did in keeping His eyes on the prize, ignoring everything extraneous. He endured the unendurable – the cross – and has won the victory of victories as a result, a victory validated by His session at the Father's right hand. We are not being asked to do anything even remotely approaching what He

did, and, considering that He suffered and died for all of our sins, the least we can do is to follow Him in doing what He wants us to do in response. Keep in mind that also before the cross our Lord endured similar opposition to what you are facing – but far greater than we can presently understand. Resolve to follow in His footsteps so as not to grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet fought against this sin (of compromising with the Law and indulging in Gnostic excess) to that point of proper resistance. And you have allowed yourselves to become disheartened by the divine discipline you have received as a result. But that is because you have not repented and confessed. You have forgotten that this discipline is all for your benefit, to turn you back to the right path, just as scripture affirms (Proverbs 3:11-12).

So bear up under this discipline you are receiving in the right and godly way, accepting it, confessing and repenting, and remembering that you are receiving the correction that all good fathers give to their sons. That is just how our heavenly Father is treating you – disciplining you for your own good. Only the fatherless lack fatherly discipline, and if we received correction from our earthly fathers even though they were imperfect and only doing the best they knew how to do in punishing us, how much more should we not be willing to accept and respond aright to the perfect discipline meted out by our perfect heavenly Father – correction that rescues us from death (the sin unto death and/or apostasy) – if we do respond to it in the right way? For such godly response will lead to us being sanctified, set apart from sin and evil, and restored to fellowship with Him and with our Savior (1Jn.1:1-10).

All correction received aright and with the proper attitude and leading to genuine reform produces wonderful and necessary results, especially in the spiritual realm – even though, at the time we are receiving it, it is not pleasant to experience. So get back into the race, doing what is necessary to repair the injuries which sidelined you rather than making them worse by failing to correct your course. And along with all of your brother and sister Christians around the world, seek out day by day that moment by moment peace of fellowship with Jesus Christ (i.e., taking up your cross: your spiritual offense), along with holiness/sanctification (i.e., denying yourselves: your spiritual defense), setting aside and having nothing to do with sin and evil – because without turning away from these compromises (with the Law) and indulgences (in Gnostic excess), apostasy or the sin unto death may well result: only believers are saved and will rejoice to see the Lord face to face on His return.

All of you take pains to embrace God's grace in this matter, His love and forgiveness, by turning back to Him. The alternative is laid out very clearly in the obsolete Law you have been preferring: a bitter root of idolatry which defiles many even though it may spring from just one man (Deut.29:17-19) – and what you are doing is essentially making an idol of the defunct Law and/or the angels who merely mediated it. Stay far away from all sexual sin in particular for obvious reasons; you certainly cannot be sanctified/holy and be involved in any of that (cf. 1Cor.6:18; 1Thes.4:3-8). That indulging in Gnostic excess is also idolatry. Don't trade everything you've struggled and suffered and sacrificed for in the past for a single mess of pottage the way Esau did, because without repentance – the

repentance you are reluctant to embrace – it's impossible to get one's birthright back.

The mountain you have come to in Jesus Christ is not that terrifying Mt. Sinai – that was the frightful place identified with the Law, not with God's grace in our Savior, that was the place of the Old Covenant, not the New (cf. Gal.4:21-31). Why are you so eager to turn back to that fearful place which struck terror into the hearts not only of all the people at that time but even that of Moses? In Jesus, you have come to the heavenly Mount Zion and our eternal home, New Jerusalem, the place where the Father and Son dwell along with all the elect angels and all the saints who have gone before us – the Church of which you are still a part (even though you are turning your back on it at present). This is where our Lord is, Mount Zion in heaven, not Mt. Sinai on earth. He is the One who has mediated the New and better Covenant in which we now stand, the agreement God the Father made on our behalf to be saved by His grace and the sacrifice of His Son for us through faith. It is by that blood, the blood of Christ, not animal blood, by His work in dying for our sins on the cross with which we have been "sprinkled", so to speak, so as to be cleansed of our sins and saved. Literal blood, the kind shed in the sacrifices to which you have foolishly returned, does nothing (and neither does indulging in antinomian cult behavior termed "sacrifices" either). Christ's sacrifice is better in every way because it actually provided salvation, and is thus superior to every animal sacrifice in history, starting with that of Abel – and to an infinite degree.

So don't turn your back on the words of warning in this letter, nor the discipline you are receiving, nor the pangs of conscience which are convicting you through the Holy Spirit. You who want to be under the Law, however wrongly interpreted, remember that those who violated it and refused to repent as you are doing did not escape when given an earthly warning. But your warning is coming from the Word of God, written and living, Jesus Christ and His truth, a warning direct from heaven. Please do not think that you can escape if you continue to disregard Him.

At Sinai, God's voice shook the earth when warning the Israelites to obey Him (e.g., Ex.19:18); and later He said that the time would come when He would shake the heavens and the entire earth as well. That means this material world, a world which is passing away. That temporary world is what the Law pertained to. But we are looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth which can never be shaken. So we ought to accept the truth: we must worship Him in the right way of the Spirit, not the wrong way of the now replaced Law (Rom.8:2), or by attending to mere fantasies about angels. We need to turn away from the obsolete things of the past which only looked forward, accepting the truth with thanksgiving, serving Him properly in spiritual growth, progress and production with reverence and awe, focused on the present and future blessings which belong to us believers in Jesus Christ, and remembering that for everyone else – including those who turn back – only the fire of God's judgment remains.

#### **IV. Verse by Verse Commentary**

### Verses One through Three

(1) Since then we too [just like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us, [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Keep Him in mind who endured such terrible opposition against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as not to grow sick at heart and give up.

Hebrews 12:1-3

**Witnesses:** Chapter twelve, as mentioned, is in large part a homily on the need to apply the lessons of chapter eleven. The Jerusalem believers were, for the most part, not following in the footsteps of these great believers of the past. Instead, they were falling far short. And not only that. They were retrogressing spiritually, "backsliding" from their once strong spiritual position and doing so in a very dangerous way. Subjecting Christ "to open shame" (Heb.6:6; cf. Heb.10:29) through their reversion to the Law and/or engagement with Gnostic fantasies was putting their very salvation at risk or, at the very least, courting the sin unto death.<sup>1</sup>

(26) For if we continue to sin willfully (i.e., arrogantly) after having received full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains any sacrifice applicable to [such] sins, (27) but [only] the terrifying expectation of judgment and fiery retribution waiting to devour those who oppose [the Lord].

Hebrews 10:26-27

Such "willful sinning" as the Jerusalem church was by and large engaged in had not, as the verses above suggest, gone unnoticed by our Lord. The believers who were guilty of these offenses, returning to legalistic behaviors, engaging in sacrifice, indulging Gnostic blasphemies, had already by this time come under serious divine discipline as a result.

(27) Therefore whoever eats the [communion] bread or drinks the [communion] cup of the Lord in an unworthy way is guilty [of offense against] the body and the blood of the Lord. (28) So let [each] person evaluate himself and in this manner (i.e., following confession of all sins remembered in such reflection) let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (29) For the person who eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment for himself if he does not evaluate his body [aright] (i.e., refusing first to repent and confess). (30) It is for this [very] reason that many among you are sick and infirm – and not a few have passed away (i.e., have suffered the sin unto death). (31) But if we were evaluating ourselves [so as to repent and confess], we would not be falling under judgment. (32) And when we are being judged [for this offense], it is by the Lord that we are being disciplined, to the end that we might not be condemned (lit., "terminally judged") along with the world.

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<sup>1</sup> See BB 3B, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

## 1st Corinthians 11:27-32

While the offense Paul reproaches the Corinthians for was different (abuse of the communion ceremony meant to remember our Lord and His death on our behalf), the situation is precisely parallel and the mechanics the same namely, believers compromising the most sacred truths about Jesus Christ, His perfect Person and His perfect work in dying for our sins, *and then* refusing to repent and confess their sin with the result that they were suffering the consequences of that refusal. If anything, the sin of the Jerusalem church was even more dangerous, since it involved an entire life-style which once reaccepted constituted returning to what they had once rejected and, as a result, threatened to swamp their faith entirely. Suffering the sin unto death (as had happened to "many" in the Corinthian church) was bad enough, resulting in lost reward in eternity. Losing one's very eternal life, however, is exponentially worse. Failing to respond to the heavy divine discipline which our Lord was presently leveling on these wayward believers was thus the very worst possible response imaginable. Refusing to respond to the Lord when He chastens us always drives us away from Him, the exact opposite of the process of spiritual growth whose purpose is to bring us closer to the Lord day by day. Rejecting the discipline of those in authority over us always leads to the hardening of our attitudes against those to whom we owe response, be they parents, or bosses or governmental officials. Repudiating God's authority leads to hardness of heart, the very problem that causes unbelievers to irretrievably turn away from the gospel and eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

They knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness.

Romans 1:21

What then? What the people of Israel sought so earnestly they did not obtain. The elect among them did, but the others were hardened.

Romans 11:7 NIV

Instead of opening their hearts wide to the Lord and asking Him for forgiveness, these believers were sullenly resentful of the discipline they were receiving, and it was driving a huge wedge between them and our Lord Jesus Christ.

In order to encourage these believers as much as to shame them into proper conduct, Paul reminds them here that the great spiritual heroes of chapter eleven are "witnessing" their progress – or lack thereof. For those who were not doing what is right, that would indeed be a matter of shame. If our family is watching us play some sport and we are bringing shame upon them and upon ourselves through poor sportsmanship, their presence ought to motivate us to get hold of ourselves and behave honorably. If, on the other hand, we are playing the game the right way, then their presence can be a great encouragement as they cheer us on. So it is with us here on this earth. While we cannot see our departed brothers and sisters, great and small they are all

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<sup>2</sup> See BB 4B: Soteriology, section II.2.d, "Phase One Hardening of the Heart: Darkening of the Truth".

observing what we do – as are the angels (1Pet.1:10-12; cf. Lk.15:10; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10). And of course, *the Lord* is cognizant of all of our actions as well, being right here with us and in us. Remembering that everyone is watching ought to be a prod to us all to stop doing things which are not conducive to us winning this race and instead to embrace what is helpful for our spiritual growth, progress and production. Turning our backs absolutely to all that is spiritually dangerous would be the first step toward getting back into the competition in a decent way. That is unquestionably what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ desires from us all. That is what Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the great believers of chapter eleven would have wanted the Jerusalem believers to do. That is certainly what they and all our brothers and sisters in heaven want from us all as well.

While families for many are problematic in this life, we are part of an eternal family that will be blessed forever. Whatever ups and downs we may have with fellow believers on this side, when our great "family reunion" takes place, it will be nothing but mutual love and appreciation in the brilliant light of the glory of God forever. So whether we have loving families here in this short time or not, we can look forward to a time shortly to come where we will all "have each other" in perfect love and peace and light forever. The day will come when we will all be cheering for the rewards our brothers and sisters earned in this life and they will be cheering for us as well. And we will enjoy each others' company in New Jerusalem forever. Meantime, we should draw encouragement from the truth that we all belong to each other now and will all be one with a yet indescribable unity on that glorious day to come.

"Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life."

Mark 10:29-30 NIV

All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – *all are yours*, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

1st Corinthians 3:21b-33 NIV

(15) For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him *forever*, (16) no longer as a slave but more than a slave – a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Philemon 1:15-16 NKJV

**Every Hindrance:** The Greek word *ongkos* (from which our word "oncology" is derived), means a burden or something heavy and bulky. Burdens are difficult to carry and are especially difficult to bear when we are trying to run – as we are being encouraged to do in this passage (and Paul will pick this runner analogy back up later in the chapter: Heb.12:12-13). Burdens are not necessarily sinful, but they are problematic to be carrying for anyone trying to make progress in a race. If they are unnecessary, it is best to set them aside in order to be able to run with greater dispatch.

(3) Endure hardship with me like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (4) No one on military campaign becomes involved in the affairs of normal life. [He avoids such things] that he may please the one who enlisted him.

2nd Timothy 2:3-4

While this is obvious in principle, few of us have divested ourselves of absolutely everything that might be impeding our personal spiritual progress. Whether this be a question of seemingly necessary occupations (spending time with our families, keeping up our property, putting in enough extra time on our jobs to flourish therein, exercising and otherwise taking care of our bodies, etc.), the time and effort and energy we put into our relationship with the Lord is going to have to come from somewhere. We all need emotional support, a way to earn a living, a place to live, sufficient health to function, etc. But we do have to realize that we could easily sink every ounce of energy and every minute of time we have into any one of these areas and still not achieve what in a perfect world we might desire. Growing spiritually, passing the tests that refine and verify our faith, and ministering the truth to others (in whatever ministry the Lord has for us – and He has something for us all) requires sacrifice. And it is all too easy to allow the weeds to grow up and choke our spiritual progress, if we allow the things of this world – even legitimate and very needful things – to dominate our priorities.

"And some [seed] fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it."  
Luke 18:7 NKJV (cf. Matt.13:7; Mk.4:7)

"Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity."  
Luke 8:14 NKJV (cf. Matt.13:22; Mk.4:18-19)

**The Sin that Easily Besets:** Some distractions *are* sinful. In terms of what many of the Jerusalem believers were immersed in, it seems clear that fear of ostracism and punishment had been in large part what led them back to the Law and its now divinely abrogated sacrifices (which were putting our Lord "to an open shame": Heb.6:6). No doubt they were also justifying their actions in the face of whatever reproof their teachers were leveling at them (Heb.13:7; 13:17), so that their compound, complex sin involved mental, verbal and physical aspects, sins of the heart, tongue and hand, of thought, speech and action. Some sins are easy enough for individual believers to avoid or at least to keep under essential control, confessing and repenting immediately any and all lapses. But everyone of us has a sin nature, and we are all tempted in different and various ways, with each of us having our own areas of particular vulnerability as well as of strength.

The sin "which doth so easily beset us" is the KJV's insightful rendering of the Greek word *euperistatos*, meaning, etymologically, something which "well/easily surrounds". This area of sin to which we are most susceptible will be different for every individual Christian at different times and at different places, but it should be clear by now in our study of this epistle that for the Jerusalem believers that "easily besetting sin" was two-pronged, having to do 1) with their growing disrespect for our Lord in returning to the Law out of a desire to avoid censure and pariah status, and 2) with their being attracted back to the Law out of love for tradition or

fascination with Gnostic fantasies.

(11) For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. (12) It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, (13) while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.  
Titus 2:11-13 NIV

Whatever sinful behavior we say "yes" to instead of "no" will result in nothing good. And the more serious our violations of our Lord's will for us, the more strenuous we can expect His discipline to be – especially if we refuse to confess and repent over a long period of time. The result of such stiff-necked disobedience, if taken to extremes, is, as we have seen many times before, either the sin unto death for those who refuse either to repent or relinquish their faith, or apostasy, the loss of faith and salvation entirely for those who, reacting to the discipline they receive, abandon the Lord absolutely.<sup>3</sup> Either prospect ought to be terrifying for any believer. Hence the importance of recognizing our vulnerabilities and taking whatever measures may be necessary to guard against whatever sinful behavior "easily besets" us personally so as not to fall into the same trap the Jerusalem believers did. In the very near future, the pressures facing believers in the Tribulation will be designed by the devil to ferret out those vulnerabilities, with enticement coming from his world religion and coercion from his political and economic system. To be safe, then as now, requires believers to put the Lord first in all things and stay away from anything and everything that threatens our relationship with Him.<sup>4</sup>

Abstain from every form of evil.  
1st Thessalonians 5:22 NKJV

It will be remembered from our study of chapters three and four that the Jerusalem believers of Paul's day were steering dangerously close to the behavior of the exodus generation of Moses' day. Instead of trusting in the Lord, that previous generation failed test after test.

(1) For I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, about the fact that our [spiritual] forefathers (i.e., the Exodus generation) were all under the cloud (i.e., protected by the Glory). (2) And all of them were baptized into Moses (i.e., closely identified with him) in both the case of the cloud and of the sea (i.e., received the same protection and deliverance as he did). (3) And all of them ate spiritual food (i.e., divinely provided manna). (4) And all of them drank the same spiritual drink (i.e., divinely provided water). For all of them drank from the spiritual[ly significant] Rock which followed them – for that Rock was Christ. (5) But God was not pleased with most of them and their bones were strewn about in the desert as a result. (6) And in this they have come to serve as examples for us, so that we might not lust for wicked things as they lusted for them. (7) So do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to

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<sup>3</sup> See BB 3B, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

<sup>4</sup> See BB 3B: Hamartiology, the Biblical Study of Sin.

eat and drink, and got up to play (i.e., feasting followed by indulgence in idolatrous rites)". (8) And let us not commit fornication, as some of them committed fornication, and there fell in a single day 120,000 of them. (9) And let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them tested the Lord and [as a result] were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) All these things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall. (13) You have not suffered any testing beyond normal human [experience]. And God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your capacity, but, along with the test, He will grant you the way out, so that you can bear up under it.

1st Corinthians 10:1-13

Had these people but trusted the Lord when He put them to the test – instead of testing Him "ten times" (Num.14:22) – they would have discovered the truth of the above: they were never tested "beyond their capacity". Our Lord always graciously granted them "the way out". Whether parting the Red Sea or causing manna to fall from heaven or water to spring forth from the Rock, He never ever let them down.

God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."

Hebrews 13:5b NIV

Failing to trust the Lord as we walk through this world is the reverse of how we were saved in the first place. We were all saved "by grace *through faith*" (Eph.2:8). Instead of doubting our Savior, as the behavior of the Jerusalem believers in imitating the exodus generation was convicting them of doing, we need to "enter into His rest" (Heb.3:7-11; 4:1-11), fulfilling the post-cross true meaning of the fourth commandment, walking with Jesus in peace and trust at all times. "Faith rest" is the normal status for believers sojourning here in the devil's world. Failing to rest in the Lord leads to all manner of spiritual problems and, if continued long enough, can result in complete loss of the faith whereby we entered into our relationship with Him in the first place.

(12) Make sure, brothers, that none of you develop an evil heart of unbelief (i.e., lack of faith) in turning away (lit. "apostatizing") from the living God. (13) Rather, keep encouraging each other every day as long as we still call it "today" (i.e. we still remain in this world), lest any of you be hardened [in heart] by the deception of sin. (14) For we all have a share in Christ, as long as we hang onto that original confidence [of our faith], firmly until the end. (15) For when it says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion during the time of trial in the desert", (16) who was it that provoked Him, even though they had heard [His words]? Was it not all of those who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership? (17) And with whom was He enraged for forty years? Was it not the very people who had sinned, whose bodies fell in the desert? (18) And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His [promised place of] rest, but to those who had refused to trust Him? (19) Now we see that they were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their unbelief (i.e., their lack of faith).

Hebrews 3:12-19

**Run with Endurance:** Throughout this chapter, Paul compares the challenge his readers are facing with running a race. Just as athletic competition requires effort and commitment, so also the Jerusalem believers ought, he counsels, view their Christian lives in a similar way. Running requires discipline and a willingness to suffer through the pain: if we are fast at the start but slow down, it will negatively affect our overall time. Racing requires us to follow the rules: if we do not perform in the manner the Lord demands, we risk being disqualified. Races have to be finished in order for any prize to be won: if we quit before it is over, abandoning our faith entirely, then everything we have suffered heretofore will have been in vain. And running requires proper technique: if we misstep or fall, we need to amend that mistake and get back up (through repentance and confession), otherwise we will never finish the course. It is to this final point of comparison that Paul makes his main application in this chapter: the Jerusalem believers would never get back to proper running form until they admitted their mistakes – to themselves and even more importantly to the Lord – repenting of their terrible conduct (so as to turn away from it entirely), and confessing their sins (so as to be forgiven in order to resume their race for Jesus Christ).

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may *finish my race* with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."

Acts 20:24 NKJV

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. (26) So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. (27) I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

Galatians 2:2 NKJV

You were running well! Who knocked you off your stride so as not to believe the truth?  
Galatians 5:7

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus.

(13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I

keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus. (15) So as many as are [spiritually] mature, let us have this attitude (i.e., of focusing on our spiritual advance and reward and not getting hung up on what lies behind: vv.13-14), and if in any matter your attitude is off-center, God will reveal that to you (i.e., assuming you are mature and are advancing as you should). (16) But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!

Philippians 3:12-16

Let no man rob you of your [victory] prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels, dwelling in the things which he hath seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, Colossians 2:18 ASV

Likewise if anyone engages in athletic competition, he does not win a crown if he fails to compete according to the rules.

2nd Timothy 2:5

(7) I have fought the good fight. I have completed my course. I have kept the faith. (8) In the future there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that [great] day [of judgment] – and not only to me, but to all who have loved His appearance (i.e., who have exercised consistent love for Jesus Christ in anticipation of His return).

2nd Timothy 4:7-8

**Turning our Gaze unto Jesus:** This command, to keep our eyes on Jesus Christ, is set in this passage in direct opposition to the Jerusalem believers' failure to "set aside every hindrance" and run a good spiritual race. In other words, if we are doing what is wrong as they were, it really is impossible to be "doing right" at the same time. We cannot be keeping our focus on Jesus Christ, the One we are supposed to be loving more than life itself, while at the same time we are doing the exact opposite of what He wants us to do. They were putting Him "to an open shame" by returning to the rituals of the Law which, now that He had died for them, gave witness that somehow His great sacrifice had been invalid.

(4) For, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, and who have experienced the heavenly gift and become partakers of the Holy Spirit, (5) and who have experienced that the Word of God is good, and [who have experienced] miracles foreshadowing the age to come, (6) it is impossible to restore them to [true] repentance after having fallen away [into sin] as long as they keep crucifying the Son of God afresh and exposing Him to open shame.

Hebrews 6:4-6

(26) For if we continue to sin willfully (i.e., arrogantly) after having received full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains any sacrifice applicable to [such] sins, (27) but [only] the terrifying expectation of judgment and fiery retribution waiting to

devour those who oppose [the Lord]. (28) For anyone who set aside the law of Moses perished without mercy on the [testimony] of two or three witnesses. (29) How much greater punishment do you suppose will not justly come to someone who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, and who has considered His blood of the covenant to be unclean, the very blood by which you were sanctified, and who has violently insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 10:26-29

Resisting the truth, opposing the very clear will of God, naturally and inevitably results in the hardening of our hearts against Him. It is impossible to love the Lord truly and at the same time so disrespect Him as to think and say and do the precise opposite of what He requires. Trying to stay in fellowship with Him while at the same time effectively acting as His enemy cannot be done. Thus it is that believers who go down this dangerous road end up with ever greater hardness of heart against the truth. In the same way that unbelievers blot out the truth all around them of the existence and glory of God revealed in His creation – because they want no part of Him – in that same way believers who are unwilling to follow His truth end up denying that truth and replacing it with their own lies, the same way the devil did. That is essentially what we all do when we sin (for all sin is "lawlessness": 1Jn.3:4). We all sin (Rom.3:23). But believers who are running a good race recognize their failures, repent of them, confess their sins, and get back into the race. Sin left unconfessed has a tendency to be accepted as legitimate behavior and even to be justified by those who turn away from the truth. If this process of hardening oneself against the truth is allowed to continue unchecked, it inevitably will result in either the sin unto death (for believers who manage to hold onto their faith even while bringing reproach to their Savior), or apostasy (for those who are unwilling to admit on any level that they are wrong and despise the Lord's gracious attempts to turn them back around so as to abandon their faith entirely).

(1) For this reason, it is all the more necessary for us to pay attention to the [teachings] we have heard, lest we drift away [off course]. (2) For if the Word spoken through angels (i.e., the Law) became valid, and every transgression and violation received a just recompense, (3a) how shall we escape if we shall have forsaken such a great salvation [from the Word of Life Himself]?

Hebrews 2:1-3a

Thus, focusing on our Lord, "turning our gaze unto Jesus", constitutes the exact opposite of turning away from Him to earthly and worldly substitutes for the truth, whether religious (as in those returning to the Law) or self-indulgent (as in those embracing Gnosticism). That is necessarily so, moreover. We cannot look our Lord in the face at the same time as we are setting our gaze on what is sinful and evil. Just as in the garden of Eden, it was impossible for Adam and Eve to even look at the tree of knowing good and evil until they had first turned *away* from the tree of life, analogously for the Jerusalem believers then and for all wayward believers today, the first step in turning our backs on everything sinful and evil is to first *turn back* to the Lord and to His truth. We are always looking in one direction or the other and we are always moving in one direction or the other. Staying static in the Christian life is not only dangerous but virtually impossible for any extended length of time. Just as the recipients of Paul's letter had first turned their gaze away from Jesus and had only then turned towards the poor substitutes of

Law and "knowledge", so now they would have to respond to Paul's good advice and "turn their gaze" back to their Savior if they wished to recover spiritually and avoid the twin dangers of apostasy and the sin unto death toward which they were presently headed. Focusing our hearts on our Lord and Savior is mutually exclusive of engaging in behavior which is abominable to Him. If we do "turn", that means by definition repenting of our wrong behavior and confessing it to Him. If we do this, He is "faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jn.1:9 KJV). If we refuse, "there no longer remains any sacrifice applicable to [such] sins" (Heb.10:26).

Before going into detail about the divine discipline these believers were receiving for their sinful behavior, discipline divinely designed to turn them back to Jesus, Paul begins by encouraging them to turn their eyes back to Him, a heart-response which would require their repentance and confession, and one which, if adopted, would restore to them the joy that comes to us when we put Christ first in our lives.

I said to the Lord, "You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing."  
Psalm 16:2 NIV (cf. Ps.25:15; 37:4; 141:8)

I have kept the Lord always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved.  
Psalm 16:8

Whom do I have in heaven but you? And on earth there is nothing I desire besides you.  
Psalm 73:25

So, brothers, [being now] sanctified and partakers of the call [come] from heaven, **set your hearts** on Him whom we profess as the One sent [to save us] and the High Priest [of that salvation], [even] Jesus.  
Hebrews 3:1

For [Moses] grew strong **by seeing the One who cannot be seen** (i.e., by keeping his mind's eye on the invisible Jesus Christ).  
Hebrews 11:27

(8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, **yet you love Him**. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, **yet you have faith in Him**. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the deliverance (lit. "salvation") of your lives (i.e., personal salvation) – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.  
1st Peter 1:8-9

Instead lift up Christ as Lord **in your hearts** [above all else].  
1st Peter 3:15a

**The Originator and Completer of our Faith:** Our Lord is the One who originated our faith,

and He is the One who has brought it to completion. This is true of our personal entrance into eternal life through faith in Him as well as of the coming fruition of our salvation in resurrection and reward. And this is true of God's plan of salvation overall: it all starts with Jesus Christ and ends with Jesus Christ. From creation to the commencement of the eternal state, from the incarnation to the second advent, everything begins with Jesus Christ and concludes with Jesus Christ. In every way, He is our Alpha and He is our Omega.

(10) I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, (11) saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last."  
Revelation 1:10-11a NKJV

And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts."  
Revelation 21:6 NKJV

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last."  
Revelation 22:13 NKJV

It was important for Paul, after encouraging his readers to renew their focus on Jesus Christ, to be turning way from evil and back towards the good, to remind them as well of the reason why they should do so. Jesus Christ is our all and our everything. He is the Logos, the very plan and Word of God incarnate. As the One who originated our faith, the One in whom we first believed, and the One who is bringing it to completion, through our promised resurrection and reward if we but hold fast that faith, He is also everything to us – or at least He certainly should be.

For to me, *to live is Christ*, and to die is gain.  
Philippians 1:21

If we are living for Christ, then our death will be nothing but gain, but *only* if we are truly living for Him can we legitimately have confidence that a good reward awaits us – and certainly *not* if we are behaving so poorly that we are even putting our very salvation at risk as many of the recipients of this letter were.

For it was fitting for [the Father] to make complete through sufferings Him on whose account all things exist and through whom all things exist, namely, the Captain of their salvation, even Him who has led many sons to glory, [our Lord Jesus Christ].  
Hebrews 2:10

The word translated "Captain" in the verse immediately above is the same word which in our present context we are translating as "Originator". The Greek word, *archegos*, means, etymologically, "top leader" or "chief guide". Jesus Christ is the One who has led/guided us to salvation and made that salvation and its blessed eternal consequences possible by paying the ineffable "price of admission" for us with own His blood, His spiritual death for us on the cross. Remembering these blessed truths is important for any and all who truly do wish to set and keep their focus on the Lord of life.

(23) Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. (24) You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. (25) Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. (26) My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (27) Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. (28) But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.  
Psalm 73:23-28 NIV

**The Joy Set before Him:** There was never any greater human suffering than that which our Lord endured in dying for our sins.

(6) But I am a worm, not a man, the reproach of mankind and One rejected by the people. (7) All who see Me, mock Me. They open wide their mouths. They shake their heads [at Me]. (8) "He relies on God. Let Him rescue Him! Let Him deliver Him, if He takes pleasure in Him" (cf. Matt.27:39-43; Mk.15:27-32; Lk.23:35-37). (9) For You are the One who cut Me out of the womb. You are the One who made Me trust in You on my mother's breasts. (10) I was cast upon (i.e., made to rely upon) You from the womb (i.e., immediately after birth). [Since the moment I came] from out of the womb You have been my God. (11) Be not far from Me, for trouble is near, for there is no one [else] to help [Me]. (12) [Like] many bulls they have encircled Me. [Like] strong bulls from Bashan they have surrounded Me. (13) They open their mouths against Me [like] roaring lions about to pounce on their prey. (14) I am poured out like water, and all My bones are being stretched apart. My heart has become like wax. It is melting inside of Me. (15) My strength is evaporating like a broken piece of pottery, and My tongue is sticking to the roof of My mouth [with thirst]. For You (cf. vv.1-2) have set Me ablaze in the dust of death. (16) For they have surrounded Me [like] dogs. [This] congregation of evil-doers has encompassed Me. They have pierced My hands and My feet. (17) I can count all My bones. [While] they look on and stare at Me, (18) they are dividing up My clothes for themselves, and for My garments they are casting lots. (19) But You, Lord, be not far off! O My God, hurry to My help! (20) Deliver My life from the sword, My precious [life] from the power of [these] dog[s]! (21) Save Me from the mouth of the lion! Answer Me from amid the horns of these wild oxen!  
Psalm 22:6-21

(13) Behold, My Servant will embrace the truth. He will arise on high, be lifted up, and be greatly exalted, (14) to a proportional degree that many had [previously] been appalled at Him. For His appearance had been marred beyond human [likeness], and His form more than [that of any] other man. (15) As a result, He shall sprinkle [with salvation] many gentile [nation]s. Kings will shut their mouths at [the sight of] Him. For those [gentiles] who had not been told shall see, and those [gentiles] who had not understood shall hear. (1) [But] who has believed our report? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord (i.e., the Messiah) been revealed? (2) For He grew up before Him like a suckling plant, like a root [springing up] from dry ground. He had no [particular] handsomeness that we should take note of Him, no [obvious] charisma that we should be taken with Him. (3) [On the contrary,] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted

with suffering. Like a person people hide their faces from, He was despised, and we did not hold Him of any account. (4) For He took away our torments, and He shouldered our weaknesses. And yet we considered Him as [the One who had been] punished, smitten and afflicted by God. (5) But [in fact] He was made subject to torment on account of our transgressions, and He was crushed because of our collective guilt (lit., "guilts"). The punishment [required] for making peace [with God] on our behalf [fell] upon Him. Because of His wounding, we have been healed.  
Isaiah 52:13-53:5

Everyone who has read the gospels understands that the gauntlet our Lord had to run to get to the cross was horrendous beyond compare, and that none of us could have endured what He did in the way He did, certainly not without sin – and that was after His life of total sacrifice, suffered in complete innocence, and *before* the darkness fell. All that was *before* He paid the fiery price for all of our sins.<sup>5</sup>

And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.  
Exodus 3:2 NKJV

Christ bought us free (i.e., "redeemed" us) from the Law's curse, having become a curse on our behalf. For it is written: "Cursed is everyone [who is] hanged upon a tree" (Deut.21:23).  
Galatians 3:13

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed.  
1st Peter 2:24

None of us will fully understand this side of heaven the magnitude of the price Jesus paid for us in dying for our sins to ransom us from the power of the grave. But we should all at least come to the point of appreciating that the blood of Christ, His suffering in payment for all of our sins, is greater than anything in this temporary universe, and to an infinite degree. This truth ought to be humbling in the extreme. It ought to be ever in our mind's eye, focusing us on our Savior and motivating us to respond to Him as He would have us to do. For He gave up everything for us. The very least we can do is to respond to Him the way He wants us to.

"If you love me, keep my commands."  
John 14:15 NIV

**Endured the Shame:** What our Lord suffered on our behalf in being burned "but not consumed" as He stood judgment for the sins of the world was beyond description, greater than the entire

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed exposition of the critically important issue of Christ's spiritual death wherein He paid the price for all of our sins, see BB 4A: Christology, sections II.4, "The Blood of Christ"; and II.5, "The Spiritual Death of Christ".

world itself and infinitely so. And though nothing can compare to the pain that our Lord must have suffered as He bore all of our sins, the crucible He endured to get to the cross and in being crucified before the darkness fell on Calvary was beyond any other human suffering and beyond the endurance of anyone but the perfect God-man. Yet Paul chooses to emphasize here neither of those two aspects of Jesus' accomplishment of salvation. Instead of the physical pain our Lord endured – both that to which we can relate and were given to see as well as that which was hidden from us and exceeds our imagination – Paul calls his readers' attention to the emotional and psychological cost of our Savior's ordeal.

(12) And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. (13) Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.  
Hebrews 13:12-13 NIV

To be humiliated is painful, sometimes excruciatingly so. And so much is that true that there are many instances in history of people choosing death rather than to suffer disgrace. Humiliation is hard enough for sinful human beings to bear, even when they have it coming. How much more would that not have been true for the Savior of the world, the Messiah who came to rescue His people, the very ones who sought His crucifixion in spite of His absolute innocence? But our Lord "endured the shame" for our sake, choosing to bear it when He could easily have come down from the cross and made quick work of His adversaries. But in that case, we all would have been lost. Paul reminds his readers of this salient point because, apparently, the ostracism and the "reproach of Christ" (Heb.11:26) which they were suffering was weighing heavily on them, and was a large part of the reason for their return to the Law, namely, to take away their disgrace "among men" (Lk.1:25). But instead of worrying about what people thought of them, they should have been concerned about the only opinion that matters, that of their Savior and ours who endured the emotional as well as the physical pain of crucifixion and divine judgment in order that we might be saved. The least they could do, the least any of us can do, is to honor His sacrifice by following in His footsteps.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."  
Matthew 16:24 NIV

The Jerusalem believers had fallen back into the same destructive prejudice which had turned so many of our Lord's contemporaries against Him, that is, the desire for a conquering Messiah coupled with a complete dismissal of what scripture had to say about the need for Him to first suffer on our behalf.

Then He answered and told them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things. And how is it written concerning the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things and be treated with contempt?"  
Mark 9:12 NKJV

That prior generation had rejected the cross in their desire for the crown. but many of Paul's contemporaries had apparently now become ashamed of the cross as well, exactly the opposite of

how we who glory in being saved by the blood of Christ should behave.

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

Galatians 6:14 KJV

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels."

Luke 9:26 NKJV

**Took His Seat at the Right Hand of the Throne of God:** Our Lord endured the sacrifice of the cross for our sake, despising the shame and pushing through the pain in anticipation of "the joy set before Him". Our Savior was also "looking to His reward" and, as a result of His successful completion of the mission the Father gave Him, namely, to accomplish salvation for us all, Jesus Christ, on His ascension, "took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God" (cf. Rom.8:34; 1Cor.15:25; Eph.1:18-23; Col.3:1; Heb.3:1; 8:1-2; 10:11-14; Rev.5:7), as the Father exalted Him in recognition of His great victory.

Of David. A psalm. The Lord said to My Lord, "*Sit down at my right hand*, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet."

Psalms 110:1

(5) You too should have this attitude which Christ Jesus had. (6) Since He already existed in the very form of God, equality with God was [certainly] not something He thought He had to grasp for. (7) Yet in spite of this [co-equal divinity He already possessed], He deprived Himself of His status and took on the form of a slave, [and was] born in the likeness of men. (8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) Therefore ***God exalted Him to the highest place*** and gave Him ***the Name that is above every name*** (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

(11) And while every [other] priest has received a temporary appointment for service and for repeatedly offering the same sacrifices which are never able to take away sins, (12) this [One] offered one sacrifice for sins for all time to come, then took His seat at the right hand of God, (13) ***waiting from thenceforth until [the time when] His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet.*** (14) For with a single sacrifice (i.e., the cross) [Jesus Christ] has brought full completion to those who are being sanctified (i.e., saved us believers from our sins).

Hebrews 10:11-14

Our Lord has taken His seat "at My right hand" (Ps.110:1), having been exalted to that "highest place" (Phil.2:9), where He is "waiting from thenceforth until [the time when] His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet" (Heb.10:13). Jesus Christ has received "the Name that is

above every name" (Phil.2:9) in recognition of His great victory on the cross (Eph.1:20-23; Col.2:15; Heb.1:4-5; Rev.19:11-16).

Great rewards follow great victories, and all of the rewards we believers will receive at the Judgment Seat of Christ are a result of our Lord's portioning out of the "spoils" won by Himself through His victory at the cross (Ps.111:5; Is.53:12; Lk.11:21-22; 20:16; Eph.4:7-10; Rev.2:cf. Ps.68:12; 82:8; Is.33:23; Mic.4:13), wonderful benefits which include sharing our Lord's millennial rule (Lk.22:28-30; 1Cor.6:2-3; 2Tim.2:11-13; Rev.2:26-27; 3:21; 5:9-10 cf. Is.32:1-2; Dan.7:22; 7:27; Matt.19:28-29; 25:21; Lk.19:17; Rom.8:17; Rev.1:4-6; 20:4-6; cf. Rev.22:5).

Just as our Savior pushed through opposition, pain and suffering beyond measure, motivated by "the joy that was set before Him", so we who are charged with following in His footsteps should likewise motivate ourselves to persevere in spiritual growth, progress and production, "looking to our reward" as Moses and the other great believers of the past did (Heb.11:26; cf. Heb.11:6). Great reward is only given for great victory and great production in service to the Victor (cf. Gal.6:6-10; 2Tim.2:5-7; Jas.5:7-9; Heb.10:35-39).

(35) "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, (36) like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. (37) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. (38) It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night."

Luke 12:35-38 NIV

Facing opposition of the sort that the Jerusalem believers were, therefore, and such as we believers today are likely to face in the not too distant future, to achieve what the Lord would have us to achieve and win the rewards He desires us to have it is imperative not to adapt our perception to the circumstances of this life but instead to adopt God's perspective. If we are being persecuted or put to the test, our job is to rise to the challenge by "thinking of the things above" as our Lord did, focusing on "the joy that is set before *us*", and not on the troubles and suffering which we may be called upon to endure in this short life and in this temporary world.

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. (4) When Christ – your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be revealed in glory. Colossians 3:1-4

(2) Brothers, when you are being beset with all manner of trials, take pains to be joyful. (3) For you should keep in mind that this testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) So let your perseverance develop fully, that you may become fully mature and entitled to a full reward, having been found lacking in no respect.

James 1:2-4

**Terrible Opposition:** "Consider Him" is a command. No doubt the Jerusalem believers were indeed suffering "terrible opposition" and ostracism, even if it did not rise to the deprivation, punitive legal measures, and imprisonment that had definitely been the case in the past (Heb.10:32-34). Paul orders them here in the Spirit to recall that their Savior suffered far worse than they did previously, and far worse than they were suffering now. Jesus did not look at things with worldly eyes. He kept God the Father's plan always in His heart. He knew what He was doing and why He was doing it: to save *us*, to save *them*. And they, like we, also "knew" what this life is and why we are being opposed – and more to the point, what the reward is for enduring such undeserved suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ . . . and what the consequences are for giving up instead.

Blessed is the man who stands firm in testing, because when he has been [tested and] approved he will receive the crown of life which [God] has promised to all who love Him.

James 1:12

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with Him, we will also live with Him; (12) If we persevere, we will also reign with Him. If we disown Him, He will also disown us; (13) If we are faithless, He will remain faithful, for He cannot disown Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate and a more lasting one. (35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, "how short, how short [the wait]", and "He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay". (38) "Then my one [made] righteous by his faith will live because of his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)." (39) Now we are not possessed of cowardly apostasy which leads to destruction, but we have faith which leads to [eternal] life.

Hebrews 10:32-39

Have no fear of what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Demonstrate faithfulness unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 2:10

Remembering what our Lord did for us, the great crucible He endured to get to the cross and the fiery judgment He underwent to take away our sins, surely ought to shake any believer out of the sort of spiritual torpor that characterized the Jerusalem church at this time. He did *that* for us.

The very least we can do is the little He asks of us.

(13) *I would have lost heart*, unless I had believed  
That I would see the goodness of the Lord  
In the land of the living.  
(14) Wait on the Lord;  
Be of good courage,  
And He shall strengthen your heart;  
Wait, I say, on the Lord!  
Psalm 27:13-14

Rather than getting overly upset by what we are seeing and experiencing in this very temporary world, Paul commands us here to consider ***and then to follow*** our Lord's example. Looking at things with the eyes of the flesh will always result in losing heart when serious trouble arrives. But seeing things from God's point of view, seeing them ***as they really are*** as our Savior did and keeping in mind how He handled it, while it will not make the trouble go away if it is God's will for us to endure it, will lend itself to us being able to bear up under that trouble as we keep our focus on our Savior and all the glories to come. And ***that*** will constitute a validation of our faith rather than undermining it and tossing it aside.

(6) In anticipation of this ultimate deliverance, your joy overflows, though at present it may be your lot to suffer for a time through various trials (7) to the end that your faith may be shown to be genuine. This validation of your faith is far more valuable than gold, for gold, though it too is assayed by fire, ultimately perishes. But your faith, when proven genuine in the crucible of life, will result in praise, glory and honor for you at the glorious return of Jesus Christ. (8) Though you have never laid eyes on Him, yet you love Him. And though you cannot see Him at this present time, yet you have faith in Him. For this reason you rejoice with an inexpressible joy that bespeaks the glorious future to come, (9) when you shall carry off in victory the ultimate prize – the [eternal] deliverance of your lives – which is the very purpose and objective of this faith of yours.  
1st Peter 1:6-9

### **Verses Four through Six**

(4) You have not yet resisted to the point of [having to shed your] blood in your struggle against sin. (5) And you have forgotten the encouragement scripture gives us as to the sons we are: "My son, do not treat the Lord's punishment lightly, and do not lose heart when you are rebuked by Him. (6) For the Lord punishes those He loves, and flays everyone He receives to Himself as a son."  
Hebrews 12:4-6

**Not Yet Resisted:** After encouraging his readers not to give up and to rekindle their fire for the Lord and His truth, Paul adds now a fairly harsh rebuke, calling out the Jerusalem believers for the insufficiency of their "spiritual defense". It is right and proper for pastor teachers to take this approach when it is necessary to do so (2Tim.4:2; Tit.2:15) – even though it is certainly painful

for all concerned, often even more so for the pastor than it is for his congregation (2Cor.7:8-10).

To be successful in the Christian life, with success being measured by the Lord through the crowns of victory and other rewards we believers have the opportunity to earn by fighting the spiritual fight in the way our Lord desires, requires both offense and defense. Spiritual offense is another way to express spiritual growth through learning and believing the truth, progress in applying the truth we learn, particularly in passing the tests that come the mature believer's way, and helping others to grow through prosecution of the ministries the Lord gives us to exploit the spiritual gifts received at salvation. Spiritual defense consists of avoiding all the negative behaviors that compromise our witness and militate against conducting a good offense. Sin, to be sure, is the "short-hand" for this negative behavior, but "sinning" is perhaps a better way to express what our spiritual defense needs to control: all believers sin since we all have sin natures and will have until death or the resurrection. But believers who are advancing spiritually do not let sin control them.<sup>6</sup>

(6) No one abiding in Him continues in [a life of] sin. No one who continues in [a life of] sin has seen Him or known Him. (7) Children, let no one deceive you. The one who performs righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. (8) The one who continues in [a life of] sin is of the devil, since the devil has been sinning from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God appeared, to destroy the works of the devil. (9) No one who has been born of God continues in [a life of] sin, since His seed (i.e., the Word of truth in which we believe) remains in him, and [so] he is not able to continue in [a life of] sin since he has been born of God.

1st John 3:6-9

Simply put, believers who are fighting the fight in the way the Lord desires keep themselves well in check. They recognize their errors quickly, repent rapidly, and confess immediately, taking whatever steps they deem necessary to avoid occasional failure turning into self-destructive patterns, for that is the path to spiritual decay, the very path upon which many in the Jerusalem church had sadly proceeded a far distance by this time.

(14) Everyone is tempted by his own lust, being dragged away [by it] and enticed [by it]. Then, should lust conceive (i.e., should the person give in to it), it gives birth to sin. (15) And sin, should it be fully carried out to the end (i.e., should the person give in to a life of sin), produces death (i.e., spiritual death, the death of faith).

James 1:14-15

The particular sinning to which Paul refers here, it will be recalled, is not the sort of momentary lapse into which every believer falls from time to time. Claiming to be sinless is "making God out to be a liar", after all (1Jn.1:10), and the height of self-deception (1Jn.1:8). Far from minor behavioral anomalies, however, the congregation in Jerusalem had returned to the now defunct Law and were putting Jesus Christ to an "open shame" through their participation in sacrifices

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<sup>6</sup> Readers are strongly encouraged to review this topic of critical importance by re-reading BB 3B: Hamartiology: the Biblical Study of Sin.

that proclaimed, in effect, that the cross had been of no effect (Heb.6:4-9; 10:26-31). Others were indulging in Gnostic excess, attempting to "help God" through engaging with demons either through ascetic or hedonistic rituals.<sup>7</sup> Both approaches were so dismissive of the sacrifice of our Savior and God's grace given to us through Him as to be deadly dangerous to the faith of all so involved. Whether undertaken out of a desire for amusement (spurning the hard work of genuine spiritual growth), or out of being ashamed of Christ's suffering and fearful of the consequences of ostracism on the part of their fellow Jews, in either case or in any case, these believers were putting their very salvation at risk – *not* because of their sin and their sinning per se, but because following such dangerous paths weakens faith and only believers are saved (Jn.3:18). Being ashamed of Jesus Christ, thinking to help God as if Christ's sacrifice had not been sufficient, these are attitudes and behaviors that are inimical to the faith they had originally placed in Him as their Savior, the One who died for their sins on Calvary's cross.

Many in Jerusalem had not only not repented of these behaviors. They were continuing in them and becoming ever more hardened against the truth. Their faith was "on life support". God had indeed graciously bestowed upon them increasing divine discipline as He does for us all in order to turn us around whenever and if ever we turn down such dark paths. But instead of responding and recovering, these believers were reacting and resisting. And that is a formula for apostasy or the sin unto death.

(15) For when it says, "Today if you hear His voice, do not *harden* your hearts as in the rebellion during the time of trial in the desert", (16) who was it that provoked Him, even though they had heard [His words]? Was it not all of those who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership? (17) And with whom was He enraged for forty years? Was it not the very people who had *sinned*, whose bodies fell in the desert? (18) And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His [promised place of] rest, but to those who had refused to trust Him? (19) Now we see that they were unable to enter into this [place of rest] because of their *unbelief* (i.e., their lack of faith).

Hebrews 3:15-19

**Every Son:** The quote Paul includes in our context verse, Hebrews 12:5, is from Proverbs 3:11-12. The Jerusalem believers were being disciplined for their bad behavior and they were apparently "wearing it hard". For that reason, it was important for Paul to remind his readers of this crucial point of God's discipline being common to all believers by showing them that, regardless of what their reaction had been to him and his message so far, this truth is contained in the Old Testament and stated there in a very persuasive way. We believers are all sons and daughters of the living God (Rom.8:14-15; 1Jn.3:1). We belong to Him. He is our Father. Our relationship with Him through Jesus Christ is actually closer than that of any earthly familial relationship, whether we are currently aware of that fact or not. He bought us to be His very own at a price beyond understanding: the blood of His one and only Son, our Savior Jesus Christ.

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.

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<sup>7</sup> See Hebrews Chapter 1, section I.b, "Gnosticism".

Ephesians 1:7 NIV

(18) Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, (19) but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

1st Peter 1:18-19 NKJV

Having paid an unknowably large price for us, God the Father is not out to destroy us. If we experience hard times and are not aware of any serious malfeasance on our part, then we can be sure that we are being tested for our growth and for our good (Rom.8:23-25; Jas.1:2-4; 1Pet.1:6-9). But if we are indeed cognizant of spiritual failure, of sin and rebellion, of backsliding and falling into former bad patterns as was true of the Jerusalem believers, then we may be equally sure that God is attempting to get our attention. Just as we would discipline our own children out of love to turn them away from bad and dangerous behavior, so our perfect Father knows just the right disciplinary means to make us rue our resistance to Him and to His truth.

When we experience God's discipline, therefore, we need to understand that it is not punitive per se – although "being spanked" has never been a cause for rejoicing – but is instead being lovingly administered to deliver us from a disastrous course of action. At such times, it is imperative that we *not* react by hardening our hearts against Him – as the exodus generation did – but instead respond to Him as we should have been doing all along, abandoning all stubbornness and returning to Him with all of our hearts. If we do so, we will ever find that He receives us back with joy, just as the father did the prodigal son (Lk.15:11-32). But if we refuse, we risk not only the intensification of His discipline, but, eventually, falling into apostasy or suffering the sin unto death.

(11) Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; (12) if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; (13) if we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13 NIV

### **Verses Seven through Eleven**

(7) So take your punishment in this spirit – God is behaving towards you as to sons. For what son has never been punished by his father? (8) And if it should be that you are not receiving punishment (in which all [true sons] share), then you are illegitimate and not sons at all. (9) Now we all had human fathers who punished us and we respected them for it. How much the more then shall we not submit ourselves to the Father of our spirits and live? (10) For while our human fathers meted out our punishment for a relatively short time according as they saw best, when He punishes us it is definitely for our own good – that we might partake of His holiness. (11) Now no punishment is a cause of rejoicing as it is being experienced, but rather of regret – only later does it bear fruit for those who have been trained through it – the fruit of [personal] righteousness that makes one whole and complete.

Hebrews 12:7-11

**Punishment:** Some of the trouble the Jerusalem believers were experiencing was indeed a direct result of their abandonment of the truth. Seeking to accommodate with the world to better their lot had no doubt in many instances had the opposite effect of what they were intending. This is likely what James, one of the key leaders of that church, referenced later (cf. Jas. 1:10-11; 1:13-15; 1:27; 2:1-7; 5:1-6):

(1) Where do these conflicts, where do these fights [that are being waged] among you come from? Isn't it from your [desire for] pleasures which do battle in your [bodily] members? (2) You lust [for things], and yet you do not have [them]; you commit murder [in your hearts]; you are filled with envy, and yet you are not able to obtain [what you are envious for]; you fight and wage war – yet you do not get [what you want] because you are not asking [for it]. (3) And when you do ask [for it], you don't receive [it] because you are asking with evil intent with the purpose of squandering [what you ask for] on your pleasures (i.e., under the control and in the service of lust). (4) You adulterously unfaithful people (i.e., unfaithful to God through dalliance with the world)! Don't you know that friendship with the world means hostility toward God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world establishes himself as an enemy of God.

James 4:1-4

(13) Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; (14) whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. (15) Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (16) But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.

James 4:13-16 NKJV

The word translated "punishment" here in Hebrews 12:7 is the Greek noun *paideia*, meaning "child" and derived from the word *pais*, *paidos* (whence our English words "pedagogue" and "pediatrician"). In other words, even in the etymology of this term we see that the discipline or punishment is not the sort given out to criminals or enemies but to our very own children. So whatever punishment we are receiving from our heavenly Father is directly analogous to that which we would mete out to our own offspring. We do not punish them in rage or effect retribution (at least we certainly should not – we love them); so also we should not wrongly imagine that our heavenly Father is exacting vengeance upon us. Far from it! He is acting in love towards us for our benefit, just as we provide necessary discipline for our own children. The analogy is exact. The only practical difference is that while we are imperfect and only do "the best we can" under such circumstances, we can be sure that our Father's punishment of us is always *perfect*, calibrated precisely and designed flawlessly to have the perfect result of teaching us to turn from what is wrong and cleave instead unto what is right – if only we are willing to *respond* to that discipline by accepting it and changing our ways as He is leading us to do.

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.  
Psalm 119:67 NIV

It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.  
Psalm 119:71 NIV

I know, O Lord, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.  
Psalm 119:75 NIV

### **Sons and Fathers:**

(7) So take your punishment in this spirit (i.e., of Proverbs 3:11-12) – God is behaving towards you as to sons. For what son has never been punished by his father? (8) And if it should be that you are not receiving punishment (in which all [true sons] share), then you are illegitimate and not sons at all. (9) Now we all had human fathers who punished us and we respected them for it. How much the more then shall we not submit ourselves to the Father of our spirits and live? (10) For while our human fathers meted out our punishment for a relatively short time according as they saw best, when He punishes us it is definitely for our own good – that we might partake of His holiness.  
Hebrews 12:7-10

So bear up under this discipline you are receiving in the right and godly way, accepting it, confessing and repenting, and remembering that you are receiving the correction that all good fathers give to their sons. That is just how our heavenly Father is treating you – disciplining you for your own good. Only the fatherless lack fatherly discipline, and if we received correction from our earthly fathers even though they were imperfect and only doing the best they knew how to do in punishing us, how much more should we not be willing to accept and respond aright to the perfect discipline meted out by our perfect heavenly Father – correction that rescues us from death (the sin unto death and/or apostasy) – if we do respond to it in the right way? For such godly response will lead to us being sanctified, set apart from sin and evil, and restored to fellowship with Him and with our Savior (1Jn.1:1-10).  
[paraphrase of Hebrews 12:7-10]

Repeating the translation and paraphrase of this section here seems appropriate, inasmuch as these sentiments and the way Paul is expressing them are absolutely straightforward, no doubt painfully so to the believers to whom they were addressed. So clear is this passage that it requires little elaboration. Responding to God's discipline in the right way, that is, accepting it for what it truly is, namely, perfect, fatherly correction designed to turn us around from whatever sin and evil we have committed and/or embraced and get us moving back onto the right track, is the only safe course of action for any believer who has made him or herself subject to such punishment. Any and all reluctance, reticence or delaying of our repentance and confession only makes this worse, both the discipline and the recovery from it – as would also be the case with regard to our own parents or children if instead of humble response to punishment stiff-necked rebellion be offered in its place. Growing up in this world in a correct way requires parental discipline until we are mature enough to discipline ourselves to avoid all dangerous and wrong behavior. Growing up spiritually likewise requires all believers to adjust their behavior to the

truth of the Word of God, and when we fail to do so and receive our Father's discipline as a result, to accept it rather than fight against us, to see that the fault lies with us, not with Him and His truth. We accepted our parents' authority. How much more ought we not to accept the authority of Him who is Father God, the One who created our very spirits (while our earthly parents only begat our bodies), the One who is in absolute authority over all things and over all of His creatures? For while our earthly fathers may not have always acted on perfect information or in a perfect way, we can be sure that our Heavenly Father has known everything perfectly since before He created the world, so that whatever punishment He metes out to us fits perfectly both us and our offenses. If there is a problem, it is with us, not Him. And thus the only possible good and godly resolution to divine discipline is for us to willingly accept whatever punishment He gives us, doing so in the right spirit, remembering that He loves us and only desires our good in every way.

And we know that, for those who love God, He works everything together for good.  
Romans 8:28a

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent."  
Revelation 3:19 NIV

**That we might Partake of His Holiness:** This is the stated reason for our Father's disciplining of us, i.e., *not* to make us suffer for punishment' sake, but to bring our behavior back into the realm of the holy.

For both the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified belong to One [Father], and for this reason [Christ] is not ashamed to call them His brothers.  
Hebrews 2:11

As detailed in our prior discussion of holiness and sanctification (which are synonymous terms)<sup>8</sup>, these words have to do with our separation from all that is worldly, sinful and profane. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are "positionally" holy/sanctified, since we belong to our perfect and sinless Lord and Savior; and we will be "ultimately" holy/sanctified at the resurrection when every trace, every "spot and blemish" of our sin natures has been eliminated forever and replaced with perfect, sinless bodies; while we are here in this world, however, holiness/sanctification is an ongoing process: we are daily separating ourselves from the sin and evil of this world by growing in the truth and applying that truth to our lives, repenting and confessing when we fail (as all who are in these present bodies of sin repeatedly do). We are not perfectly holy, but we are called to embrace that as our defensive goal.

We cannot make progress in holiness/sanctification merely by trying to refrain from sin, evil and dangerous worldly influences – although we certainly should do so. Growing spiritually (our spiritual offense), learning and believing the truth, then applying it to our lives, will result in greater holiness/sanctification of its own accord (the two foci, offense and defense, are really inseparable from a practical standpoint). But the Jerusalem believers had, apparently, first

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<sup>8</sup> See Hebrews Chapter 2, Verse Eleven, under "Holiness".

become lackadaisical about the truth, and then had slipped back into the legalistic and Gnostic practices of the past. Failing to advance spiritually, they had compromised their holiness/sanctification and were indeed now involved in some very dangerous behavior. As Paul assures them (and us) here, the discipline they were receiving was designed to turn them back to the pursuit of that holiness/sanctification "without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), because if we completely abandon our positive witness for Him and embrace the profane completely, either our faith will vanish or our poor witness will necessitate our Lord's removal of us from this life (i.e., either apostasy or the sin unto death will be the result).

But just as He who has called you is holy, you too should be entirely holy in your behavior. For the scripture says: "Be holy, because I am holy".  
1st Peter 1:16 (see also Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7)

**Regret:** Paul no doubt includes this obvious concession for the sake of those readers and listeners who are hurting from the divine discipline they are receiving and very possibly resentful of it. "Of course", Paul tells them, "it hurts – it is supposed to hurt!" But just as Esau regretted not receiving Isaac's blessing but *not* his lack of faith or disdain for the truth, so also in this case only "*godly* regret" is of any benefit. The Jerusalem believers all regretted the punishment no doubt, but only those willing to come around to acceptance of their sinful behavior so as to repent and confess it would see that regret bear fruit.

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.  
2nd Corinthians 7:10 NKJV

### **The Fruit of Righteousness:**

Now no punishment is a cause of rejoicing as it is being experienced, but rather of regret – only later does it bear fruit for those who have been trained through it – the fruit of [personal] righteousness that makes one whole and complete.  
Hebrews 12:11

The fruit here is, obviously, not literal fruit but a metaphor for positive results that flow from God's discipline when it is received with the correct attitude and responded to appropriately with repentance, confession, and a renewal of spiritual forward progress.<sup>9</sup> Our Father and His Son our dear Savior dearly desire us to respond to discipline in the *right* way, and are more than eager to once again extend their loving fellowship to us when we do.

(20) And [so the prodigal son] got up and returned to his father. But while he was still some distance away, his father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion. And he ran toward him and fell upon his neck and kissed him. (21) And his son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants." (22) But his father said to his servants,

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<sup>9</sup> See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.4, "The Fact and Purpose of Divine Discipline".

"Quick! Bring a fine suit of clothes and put it on him, and put a signet ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. (23) And bring the fatted calf. Butcher it so that we may eat and celebrate. (24) For this son of mine was dead and has [now] come back to life. He was lost, but he has been found." And they began to celebrate.

Luke 15:20-24

(1) What we have seen from the beginning, what we have heard and seen with our eyes, what we have observed and touched with our hands – this is about the Word of life, [Jesus Christ]. (2) And this life appeared, and we have seen [it], and we bear witness [to it], and we proclaim to you the eternal life which was in the presence of the Father and [then] appeared to us. (3) What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you that you too may have *fellowship* with us – and indeed our [true] *fellowship* is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. (4) And we write these things to you that our joy may be complete. (5) And this is the message which we have heard from Him and report to you: that God is light and there is no darkness in Him. (6) If we say that we have *fellowship* with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we are lying and are not acting truthfully. (7) But if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we do have *fellowship* one with one another (i.e., we with the Father and the Son as well as with other believers; cf. v.3), and the blood of Jesus His Son is cleansing us from all sin. (8) If we say that we do not possess sin (i.e., a sin nature which is producing personal sins), we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just so as to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him out to be a liar and His Word is not in us.

1st John 1:1-10

Our context verse tells us that the "fruit", the positive results we are promised, comes to those who have been "trained" by God's discipline. That is to say, every believer has received, is (likely) regularly receiving, and most definitely will receive divine discipline. Only the specific manifestations of it, its duration and its intensity are at issue. Ideally, as with us and our children, we would all wish, God included, for there to be as little discipline as possible and that it be as light and short as possible. But just as no child ever reached the status of a responsible, mature adult without discipline (Prov.13:24; 22:6; 23:13-14), so also no believer has ever achieved spiritual maturity without it.

Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.

Deuteronomy 8:5 NIV

Once we have grown up to be spiritually mature sons and daughters of the Most High, our need for discipline should decrease and the instances of it be lighter and shorter, small corrections for a walk that is for the most part holy and sanctified. Once properly trained, once we have set ourselves to engage in the process of spiritual growth, progress and production, these positive results in and of themselves and everything that flows from them are the "fruit" of the training we have received and correctly responded too, that is to say, *rightly* responded too. When we have "gotten right" with the Lord, responding to His perfect righteousness by acting righteously, that

is, behaving in accordance with positional righteousness we believers all have by virtue of being in Christ, then we shall have achieved the production of "fruit" which is the purpose of our training.<sup>10</sup>

So now that we have been justified by faith (i.e., have been given God's righteousness and are now considered righteous by Him on account of being united with His Son), let us take hold of *the peace* [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus.  
Romans 5:1

We are translating the last part of our context verse, Hebrews 12:11, as "the fruit of [personal] righteousness that makes one whole and complete". A more literal (though less understandable) translation would be "peaceful fruit of righteousness". The word "peaceful" is the Greek adjective *eirenikos* corresponding to the noun from which it is derived, *eirene*, the Greek word for "peace". The peace meant here is God's peace, His *shalom* (the equivalent Hebrew word), namely, the wholeness and completeness which is only possible for us human beings through His grace in Jesus Christ.<sup>11</sup> Here in this world, everything is temporary, flawed and imperfect. But we believers are looking forward to a time when eternity comes and when there is no more imperfection of any sort. Experiencing any measure of that sort of wholeness and completion, that sort of peace and "Shalom" in this life, can only be achieved through proper response to the truth of the word of God, by trusting and believing in Him who is the very Word of God, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We believers do have that peace "positionally", that is, in principle as those who belong to the Prince of Peace (Is.9:6) who made peace between God and man by dying for our sins.

(12) Remember that you were without Christ, alienated from the polity of Israel and strangers to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. (13) But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (14) For He Himself is our *peace*, for He has made both [Jews and gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition, that is, the enmity between us, (15) by discharging the Law of the commandments and its requirements with His [own] body, so that He might re-create the two into one new Man by making [this] *peace*, (16) and might reconcile both in one Body to God through His cross, having by means of it abolished the enmity [between God and mankind]. (17) For when He had come [1st advent], He proclaimed the gospel of *peace* to you who were far away [from God], and *peace* to those who were near (Is.57:19). (18) For it is through Him that we both have our access to the Father by means of one Spirit.  
Ephesians 2:12-18

While we are still here in this world, however, our righteousness will never be perfected even though we are striving to do whatever the Lord wants from us (and to avoid whatever displeases Him). Therefore the peace we have with Him and in Him here and now, while sublimely

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<sup>10</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.8, "Justification".

<sup>11</sup> See Peter #41, in paragraph III, "Peace".

profound, will only be perfected through our resurrection. In the meantime, we are called upon to enter into His peace (Rom.5:1), His "rest of faith" (Heb.4:1-11). For all believers who have been properly trained, who have responded to God's discipline instead of reacting to it (as the Jerusalem believers were doing), this rest and peace we have in Jesus Christ is part of and said in our context to characterize what we do. Our continuing growth, our increasing steadfastness in bearing up under whatever testing comes our way, and the results of the ministries we are carrying out for the sake of our Lord's body and bride, His Church, these are all "righteous fruits" which correspond to the mature peace in which we dwell and which reflect to the world that rest and confidence we have in our Lord (Eph.5:8), even Him who is our refuge in this dark world (Jn.1:4-9; 1Jn.1:5).

(14) "You are the light of the world. A city built on a mountain cannot be hidden. (15) Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and [so] it illuminates everything in the house. (16) Let the light within you shine in this way before men, so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."  
Matthew 5:14-16

### **Verses Twelve through Thirteen**

(12) Therefore, [going back to our race analogy] pick up those hands hanging slack at your side, put some strength back into your weak knees, (13) and make straight tracks for your feet, so that [even though you fell down] what you sprained might not be twisted completely out of joint, but might instead work its way back to health.  
Hebrews 12:12-13

What should have been clear enough from Paul's comparison of God's discipline to that of human fathers to human children, given out of love with every intent of correcting behavior and certainly not meant to destroy, is also evident from these two verses. Paul clearly desires, hopes and possibly also expects the Jerusalem church to "get back into the race". That is to say, he is certainly *not* telling them that they are hopeless, doomed and damned on account of their disreputable behavior, as spiritually dangerous as it has been. They can recover, and Paul uses here his running analogy to make that point. If an athlete is faltering or even injured, the race can still be finished. It merely requires renewed determination and resumption of proper running technique, analogous to the Jerusalem believers reminding themselves of what should be most important to them and re-adopting the concomitant spiritual procedures, repenting of their "false steps" which resulted in "injury" (divine discipline) from being "off the track" (into spiritual regression). Since the whole tone and tenor of this chapter is about accepting divine discipline in the right spirit and responding to it appropriately, is sadly ironic that so many believers who have stumbled in their race have wrongly taken a few verses in this book out of context (e.g., Heb.6:4-6; 10:26-31) and have used them to advocate against themselves as if for them specially no recovery were possible. That is a warped, subjective and even arrogant misreading not only of this epistle but also of the loving and merciful character of our blessed God.

(8) The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. (9) He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; (10) he does not treat us as our

sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. (11) For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; (12) as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

Psalm 103:8-12 NIV

(8) Whoever does not have love, does not know God, for God is love. (9) In this God's love has been revealed in us, that He sent His only Son into the world that we might live through Him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atonement for our sins.

1st John 4:8-10

We recall that Paul had begun chapter twelve with the running analogy he returns to here, encouraging his readers to remember the example of the great believers of the past who are, in effect, the crowd watching us run our race. Rather than running it unnecessarily burdened, therefore, we ought instead to cast off everything that slows us down and set our sights on the goal, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who is waiting for us at the finish line, determining in our hearts to run to please Him so as not to give up and quit.

(1) Since then we too [just like the believers of chapter 11] have such a *large audience* of witnesses surrounding us, [both men and angels], let us *put off every hindrance* – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and *run with endurance the race* set before us, (2) *turning our gaze unto Jesus*, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) *Keep Him in mind* who endured such terrible opposition against Himself at the hands of sinful men, so as *not* to grow sick at heart *and give up*.

Hebrews 12:1-3

At OCS many years ago, the major in charge of our company of officer candidates challenged us to adopt an approach to running he had successfully implemented in his infantry unit before taking on his present assignment. This approach which he claimed improved the endurance and times of everyone who embraced it, involved, essentially, running with good posture, heads up, eyes ahead, tight movements, all expressing an attitude of confidence rather than of grim endurance. After many years "on the road", it is this writer's opinion that the strategy worked not so much because of any physical advantage (it might even have been detrimental to the running mechanics of some of us), but because of the attitude of mind it produced when properly adopted. Instead of running with an attitude of depression, replacing that with an attitude of confidence and determination based upon a disciplined approach had in many cases the desired effect of running better and faster.

(12) Therefore, [going back to our race analogy] *pick up those hands* hanging slack at your side, *put some strength back* into your weak *knees*, (13) and *make straight tracks* for your *feet*, so that [even though you fell down] what you sprained might not be twisted completely out of joint, but might instead work its way back to health.

Hebrews 12:12-13

The race Paul is describing in our context above, however, is the *entire* Christian life summed up in one contest. And the attitude of heart he is encouraging the Jerusalem believers to re-adopt is one of putting Jesus Christ and our goal, resurrection and reward at His evaluation of us, foremost in their minds. "Hands" represent Christian production: instead of being slack, they should re-engage with the ministries the Lord has given them. "Knees" represent spiritual progress: instead of being weak they should pass the testing that has come their way. "Feet" represent spiritual growth: instead of quitting on account of the discipline they have received, the Jerusalem believers should start doing again what they did at first: committing themselves to daily spiritual growth through attention to the truth of the Word of God, the only "straight track" which will bring them back to spiritual health and healing of the damage they have done to themselves by getting off of the strait and narrow in the first place. This threefold approach of dedicating oneself to spiritual growth, progress and production is the *only way* for any of us to finish this Christian race strong and receive the reward from our dear Savior that ought to be our heart's desire.

(12) [It is] not that I have already gotten [what I am striving for], nor that I have already completed [my course]. Rather, I am continuing to pursue [the prize] in hopes of fully acquiring it – [this prize for whose acquisition] I was myself acquired by Christ Jesus. (13) Brethren, I do not consider that I have already acquired it. This one thing only [do I keep in mind]. Forgetting what lies behind me [on the course] and straining towards the [course] ahead, (14) I continue to drive straight for the tape, towards the prize to which God has called us from the beginning [of our race] in Christ Jesus. (15) So as many as are [spiritually] mature, let us have this attitude (i.e., of focusing on our spiritual advance and reward and not getting hung up on what lies behind: vv.13-14), and if in any matter your attitude is off-center, God will reveal that to you (i.e., assuming you are mature and are advancing as you should). (16) But with respect to the progress you have made, keep on advancing in the same way!  
Philippians 3:12-16

### **Verses Fourteen through Seventeen**

(14) Pursue peace with everyone, and sanctification, without which no one will see the Lord, (15) exercising caution so that no one fall short of God's grace, that no bitter root grow up and impede [the spiritual progress of any brother] and through that [bitter root] many be defiled, (16) that no immoral or godless person like Esau [cause such defilement], who, for the sake of a single meal sold his birthright. (17) For you know that when he wanted to regain the inheritance [that came with Isaac's] blessing, he had no opportunity to change [his father's] mind, even though he eagerly sought it with tears.  
Hebrews 12:14-17

### **Pursue Peace:**

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.  
Isaiah 26:3 NIV

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."  
John 14:27 NKJV

"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace."  
John 16:33a NKJV

"Peace I leave for you; peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you."  
John 14:27

And the peace of God which surpasses every thought will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.  
Philippians 4:7

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.  
Colossians 3:15 NKJV

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.  
2nd Thessalonians 3:16 NIV

As desirable as peace between nations, peace between individuals within them, and peace between us and our brothers and sisters is, while this verse does not preclude that type of human being to human being peace, the peace we have with God and from God is what Paul is referring to primarily in our context, Hebrews 12:14 (as in the verses quoted immediately above). Only God can provide the perfect rest and peace we all should be desirous of entering (as our Church Age fulfillment of the fourth commandment), and only in Him could we ever hope to find our perfect fulfillment, the peace, the rest, the *shalom* that comes to those believers who have ceased from their own works and are relying on and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb.4:10).

(9) So [then] there does remain a "Sabbath day's rest" for the people of God. (10) For he who has entered into [God's] rest has himself ceased from his works just as God did from His own. (11) Let us therefore be eager to enter into that [continual and spiritual] rest, lest anyone fall [from grace] following the same pattern of disobedience [exhibited by the exodus generation].  
Hebrews 4:10-11

The Christian greeting of "peace" found throughout the New Testament (e.g., Lk.24:36; Jn.20:19; Rom.1:7; Tit.1:3; 2Pet.1:2; 3Jn.1:15; Rev.1:4; *et passim*), is a reminder of the blessed status of rest in the Lord to which we are all meant to aspire, a place of spiritual peace which does not come to us without spiritual growth: we have to "enter into His rest" (Heb.4:11); we have to pursue that peace.

Therefore let us *pursue* the things which make for *peace* and the things by which one

may edify another.  
Romans 14:19 NKJV

Flee also youthful lusts; but *pursue* righteousness, faith, love, *peace* [along] with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.  
2nd Timothy 2:22 NKJV

Let [every believer] *seek peace* and *pursue* it.  
1st Peter 3:11b NKJV

Paul's command to "pursue peace" with God in company with all other believers is a deliberate reminder of the earlier warnings he had given the Jerusalem congregation not to follow the example of the exodus generation (in Hebrews chapters three and four). They had failed to "enter into His rest" and had fallen away from the faith as a result. Having peace with God requires us to make peace with Him. That is only possible initially at the entrance into our Christian life through the reconciliation which the blood of Christ supplies (Is.53:5; Rom.5:8-11; Col.1:19-23; Heb.2:14-15); He removed the enmity between us and the Father by paying for our sins (Eph.2:14-18; Col.2:14). As believers, if we are at odds with God in any way, only repentance and confession can restore us to fellowship, but we are promised that restoration if only we do respond to God in the way in which He requires (1Jn.1:5-9). Building on that "peace", growing deeper in our "rest of faith", requires spiritual growth, learning, remembering, and applying the truth of the Word of God. That is the only way we can "pursue peace" with God once we have been reconciled to Him.

So now that we have been justified by faith, *let us take hold of the peace* [we have] with God [the Father] through our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Romans 5:1

(18) And all things come from God who *reconciled* us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of *reconciliation*, (19) for that God was [and is] in Christ making overtures of *reconciliation* between the world and Himself – not taking their transgressions into account – and has entrusted us with this message (lit., "word") of *reconciliation*. (20) As ambassadors of Christ, as though God were urging you through us, we beg you on Christ's behalf: be *reconciled* to God!  
2nd Corinthians 5:18-20

**Sanctification:** As we say in our discussion of verse ten above, holiness and sanctification are biblical synonyms. They both have to do with separation from all that is profane, secular, worldly, sinful and evil. As believers, we are positionally holy when we are saved and made one with the Holy One, our Savior Jesus Christ, and in resurrection we shall be eternally holy (ultimate sanctification). In between, we have received the Holy Spirit to aid us in our objective of being sanctified and holy in our behavior here and now in this world.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See also Hebrews Chapter 2, Verse Eleven, under "Holiness".

But just as He who has called you is holy, you too should be entirely holy in your behavior. For the scripture says: "Be holy, because I am holy".

1st Peter 1:16 (see also Lev.11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7)

While this mandate commanding experiential sanctification can never result in sinless perfection in this life, since we presently inhabit bodies infested with the sin nature (e.g., 1Jn.1:5-2:2), we believers are, nevertheless, charged with living godly lives, turning away from sin and evil and embracing righteousness and truth instead. Whenever we stumble, we are to get back up on our feet again immediately, repenting of our errors and confessing our sins, then resuming our forward progress with the Lord and in the truth. This process has so far been the main topic of our present study, Hebrews chapter twelve.

Now, with his command to pursue peace, Paul directs his readers' focus forward towards the mature status of faith-rest in which they should presently be abiding; with this command to pursue sanctification, holiness, he reminds them of the previous discussion: being sanctified and holy requires putting their past, sinful course of action behind them as the necessary first step in reconciliation with the Lord and resumption of their forward progress with Him and for Him so as to be not only spiritually safe but also to earn a good eternal reward that pleases our Savior. And because of their disturbing track record at this point, Paul feels compelled to add this rider to his command to engage in the peace of faith rest: they also need to pursue holiness/sanctification, "without which [holiness/sanctification] no one will see the Lord".

This does *not* mean that without being sinlessly perfect no one can be saved, but it is a disturbing thing to hear for any and all who are well aware that their present conduct is anything but holy and sanctified – which should by now in the reading of this epistle include a good number of the Jerusalem church. It is also not a matter of being "good enough" to be saved to which Paul is referring here. *All* believers are saved; only unbelievers are not saved (Jn.3:18). The resolution to this merely apparent dilemma comes in understanding Paul's concern that many of his readers are on the point of losing faith entirely. Sin, as we have affirmed many times, is not a basis for losing salvation. But sin undermines faith, and at that moment the faith of many of the Jerusalem believers was on its last legs. It is impossible to go down the road of rebellion from the Lord without diminishing one's faith. And if faith dies, a person is no longer saved.

"And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but in time of testing they apostatize."

Luke 8:13

Simply put, greater and greater sinfulness results in greater and greater turning away from the Lord, greater and greater hardening of the heart, until at some point the backsliding believer does not see Him at all. Sin is not the reason for loss of salvation; loss of faith is the reason for loss of salvation. But committing oneself to a gross, toxic, unrepentant sinful course eventually erodes faith to the point where it disappears entirely. And only believers are saved. So Paul's warning is absolutely true and timely given. For those who were determined to continue to defame Jesus Christ through their return to the Law (or their engagement with Gnostic lies), such behavior,

absolutely inimical to faith in Him, would eventually eradicate that faith altogether. For many, the process was already very far advanced, and with many no doubt already having fallen away. Paul's holiness rider is indeed meant to terrify his readers – those for whom "the shoe fit", and rightly so, for only by rekindling a pure, godly fear of the Lord were they likely to change course and save their eternal lives.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.  
Psalm 19:9 NIV

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.  
Proverbs 9:10 KJV

It is true that for those who refuse to repent of living an unholy, unsanctified life, there is also the possibility of "the sin unto death". As we have explained before, this horrifying result comes about for those whose behavior has become an insufferable reproach to the Lord and yet have refused to let go of their faith. For such unwise believers, the Lord brings about "the destruction of the flesh, so that [the] spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord" (1Cor.5:5 NIV). Such believers will have little to look forward to at the Judgment Seat of Christ, but since they were taken from life before their faith was entirely quenched, they retain their positional sanctification and thus will "see the Lord" at that time . . . and endure His reproof (1Cor.3:12-15; 2Cor.5:10-11).<sup>13</sup>

"But he who endures *to the end* will be saved."  
Matthew 10:22 NKJV

. . . but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are *if we hold fast* the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope *firm to the end*.  
Hebrews 3:6 NKJV

For we have become partakers of Christ *if we hold* the beginning of our confidence *steadfast to the end*.  
Hebrews 3:14 NKJV

**Fall Short of Grace:** God's grace is amazing beyond our comprehension. While we were yet sinners, the Father sent His one and only beloved Son to die for our sins that we might be saved (Rom.5:8; Jn.3:16; 1Jn.4:9). Jesus died for *all* of our sins that we might have life eternal through simply believing in Him (Acts 16:31; Jn.3:16; Eph.2:8-9). Grace, God's marvelous favor extended to us, His unworthy creatures, is beyond proper comprehension by us in our present state in this world. How, then, could anyone "fall short" of something so blessed and so immense?

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

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<sup>13</sup> See BB 3B: Hamartiology, section IV.6, "Apostasy and the Sin unto Death".

## Galatians 5:4

As with the Galatian believers, so the Jerusalem believers had "fallen short" by their own actions in rejecting God's grace and preferring their own works instead. Nothing could be more offensive to the Father than to suggest by word or deed that what He has done for us in the gift of His Son and what Jesus Christ has done for us in paying a debt we had no means whatsoever to discharge ourselves is somehow insufficient. But that is exactly what the Galatian believers did and exactly what the Jerusalem believers were doing in returning to the Law and embracing rituals, teachings and sacrifices which were meant to look forward to the Messiah once the Messiah had already come and had already fulfilled them. That was works, not grace. That was throwing the sacrifice of the cross right into the Father's face. That was, indeed, "falling from grace" by rejecting grace in favor of their own unacceptable works.

**Bitter Root:** With his reference to "falling from grace", Paul is cautioning all believers on an individual level to turn away from sinfully embracing works instead of grace (Eph.2:8-9). But with his reference to the "bitter root", he is warning the entire congregation to beware of the negative influences, the individuals and groups, who were leading the way and prompting other believers to abandon their solid standing in the truth and to compromise it away.

(17) You saw among them their detestable images and idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold. (18) Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no *root* among you that produces such *bitter poison*."  
Deuteronomy 29:17-18 NIV

In our context verse, Paul is deliberately referencing the passage above. As can be seen from this quotation, the "bitter root" is idolatry, the worship of false gods. And what else would the legalism of the Jerusalem church be in substituting and preferring false worship, whether legalistic or gnostic, for the reality of our Savior and His work on the cross? The Hebrew of Deuteronomy 29:18 has, literally, "poison and wormwood", a hendiadys for "poisonous wormwood", a substance known for its intense bitterness and thus a perfect analogy for behavior so vile that it has horribly bitter results. What could be more bitter than the loss of salvation and eternal life, especially for those who had once embraced the Lord and His deliverance of them from death with great joy and relief – and had already suffered so much in His cause? Any and all who were "cheerleading" for these compromises to abandon grace and truth for the sake of worldly pottage were "bitter roots" indeed. Such individuals should always be shunned.

"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."  
Matthew 7:15 NIV

Paul speaks of two other categories of sin in this context which traditionally plagued the Jewish people. The first is sexual immorality (often associated with idolatry and in the context of Hebrews, with the licentious manifestations of Gnosticism); the second is godlessness, represented by Esau, and common enough in Israel's history in their frequent honoring of God

with their lips but in truth being unbelievers – like Esau (Is.29:13; Matt.15:8; Mk.7:6).

In terms of the first of these, sexual immorality, anyone involved in this type of sinful behavior would be someone to avoid for the same reason as the need to stay away from idolaters, namely, "bad company corrupts good morals" (1Cor.15:33).

(9) I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – (10) not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. (11) But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.

1st Corinthians 5:9-11 NIV

In terms of the second category, "godlessness", while sexual immorality needs no particular illustration for us to understand what it is or why it is dangerous (1Cor.6:18), Paul does feel the need to illustrate this second type of especially dangerous sin. Esau is in fact the perfect example for Paul to use here for a "godless person", because while he was the son of Isaac just as Jacob was, it is Jacob who was the "seed of promise" – because he is of the line of faith (cf. Rom.9:13). Esau, although biologically of Isaac, was nevertheless always an unbeliever, and that is what Paul is warning his readers about. His audience must not count on their physical heritage of being Jewish for their spiritual security, since it is only the spiritual heritage that means anything to God.

"And do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones."

Mark 3:9 NKJV

The Jerusalem believers who were backsliding on the downward track to spiritual oblivion were acting like unbelievers – like Esau. And continuation on that path would result in the end in their being no different from Esau in spiritual terms. No doubt these Jewish Christians bridled at the comparison, but that was precisely Paul's objective, namely, to get them to consider their situation so as to wake up and see that, since Christ had now come and died for them, by embracing again the temple worship and shadow manifestations of the Law they were in effect proclaiming that they doubted His Messiahship and did not esteem His sacrifice. They too were selling their invaluable spiritual birthright for a mess of material pottage and comfortable tradition which had now been fulfilled and replaced.

For you know that when [Esau] wanted to regain the inheritance [that came with Isaac's] blessing, he had no opportunity to change [his father's] mind, even though he eagerly sought it with tears.

Hebrews 12:14-17

Esau, it is important to observe, was not displaying any regret here *for his unbelief* which had resulted in Jacob receiving the blessing instead of himself. He merely regretted not receiving it.

In other words, Esau never intended to accept the Lord or His authority. Like the thief who is only "sorry" that he got caught, so Esau was only sorry not to have been able to have his cake (the blessing) and eat it too (refusal to bend His knee to the Lord). No doubt many of Paul's audience were soon to be very sorry and regretful at the destruction of the temple and the loss of all they had – but how many truly rued the dangerous spiritual course that preceded it? Like the child who is not really sorry that he raided the cookie jar but is only sorry that he got caught, Esau was only sorry that he had to face the consequences of his earlier disdain for God's blessing – and his utter disrespect for the Almighty. Even with that great disappointment, he was no closer to being willing to bend his knee to the Lord.

Such is it ever with unbelievers. At the last judgment, it will be shown that none of them were ever willing to be saved at the expense of humbling themselves to point of doing things God's way, "by grace through faith, not of works" (Eph.2:8-9). Their own egos and preferences were more dear to them than the truth and they held fast to their stubbornness even to the point of death – and would continue to have done so even if the Lord had given them a thousand more years on this temporary earth. As ever, the issue is not information or opportunity. The issue is choice. Sadly, many of the Jerusalem church were turning away from their earlier acceptance of grace and emulating Esau in preferring their own works to the cross of Jesus Christ, whether through engaging in the rituals of the Law or "helping Him" through Gnostic rites. Only our present generation of Christians can be compared to that generation of believers in terms of the abundant opportunities for accessing the truth of the Word of God. Sadly, many of our contemporaries are also emulating Esau and the Jerusalem church . . . and are putting their eternal lives on the line in so doing.

(20) For if after having escaped the defilements of this world by recognizing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ [these weak believers] should be overcome [spiritually] by becoming involved again in these foul things, then they have become worse off than they were before. (21) For it would have been better for them not to have accepted the Righteous Way in the first place, rather than – once having accepted this holy command [for faith in Christ which was] committed to them – to turn their backs on it now. (22) And so in their case this proverb is true: "The dog has returned to his vomit, and the sow, though washed, to her muddy sty".

2nd Peter 2:20-22

### **Verses Eighteen through Twenty One**

(18) For you have not come to a mountain which can be touched, burning with fire and [obscured by] darkness and gloom and a whirlwind, (19) [ringing with] the sound of a trumpet and the roar of commands – in addition to which those who heard begged for no further word to be given to them. (20) For they could not endure the command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." (21) And the vision was so terrifying that even Moses said, "I am terrified and tremble."

Hebrews 12:18-21

In contrasting Mt. Sinai to Mt. Zion, Paul returns to his focus on the main problem of the

majority of the Jerusalem church, namely, their return to the now obsolete Law, legalism, which was enervating and sapping their faith. Mt. Sinai is where the Law was given and thus represents the Law. But the Law has been fulfilled by Christ's sacrifice (Rom.10:4; Heb.7:12; 8:13; 10:1-7). Why would anyone who has been freed from the Law of Moses through the Law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus ever wish to return to slavery (Rom.8:2)?

(21) Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? (22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. (23) But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, (24) which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar – (25) for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – (26) but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.

Galatians 4:21-26 NKJV

Why would any believer who is looking forward to the New Jerusalem above, to the heavenly Mt. Zion, ever wish to forfeit all of the blessings for which we hope and return instead to the Law of sin and death represented by Mt. Sinai (Rom.7:1-4; 8:1-2; 1Cor.15:56)? Mt. Sinai is terrifying. Mt. Zion is delightful. Mt. Sinai is darkness. Mt. Zion is light. Mt. Sinai is death. Mt. Zion is life, life eternal, the hope of our salvation won by the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ.

(1) Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised  
In the city of our God,  
In His holy mountain.  
(2) Beautiful in elevation,  
The joy of the whole earth,  
Is Mount Zion on the sides of the north,  
The city of the great King.  
Psalm 48:1-2 NKJV

### **Verses Twenty Two through Twenty Four**

(22) But you have come [not to Mount Sinai which stands for the present Jerusalem (Gal.4:21-31), but] to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, [that is, you have come to] the Heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of [elect] angels in assembly [before God], (23) and to the Church of the firstborn enrolled [as its citizens] in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of justified [believers] [who have now] completed [their tasks], (24) and to Jesus, the Mediator of a better covenant, and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[’s sacrifice].

Hebrews 12:22-24

### **Heavenly Jerusalem:**

"He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name."

Revelation 3:12 NKJV

Mount Zion, not Mount Sinai, is the place of "heavenly Jerusalem", "the city of the living God" (Heb.12:22). The temple which was still in place when this letter was written was but a "type" or "pattern", a "copy" and a "shadow" of the heavenly realities (Heb.8:5). It was the as yet unseen reality of heavenly Mt. Zion which the Jerusalem believers were abandoning for the sake of mere shadows bereft of any actual spiritual power, mere rituals which, since Christ had already fulfilled their symbolic meaning, were in fact less than empty shells: continuing in the Law and its sacrifices was in fact putting Christ "to open shame" (Heb.6:6) and "trampling the Son of God underfoot" (Heb.10:29). This was the worst possible bargain for any believer to make. True, we cannot yet see the blessed New Jerusalem or our Lord with our physical eyes, but our Christian faith is all about trusting God that the as yet unseen is true – and so much better than what we do presently behold.

"Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you now believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

John 20:29 NIV

(17) For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. (18) So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2nd Corinthians 4:17-18 NIV

(8) Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, (9) for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1st Peter 1:8-9 NIV

We have studied New Jerusalem itself extensively before.<sup>14</sup> In our context, Paul uses Mount Zion, the place of "the city of God", ultimately the New and not the present Jerusalem, that is, "the Jerusalem above" (Gal.4:21-31; cf. Rev.14:1), as shorthand for every blessing we believers in Jesus Christ will experience in eternity: our resurrection, our reunion as the perfect and complete Body of Christ consisting of all believers who are Christ's at His return (1Cor.15:23), the eternal rewards we will receive at the judgment seat of Christ, our blessed fellowship with our dear Lord and our dear Father and with each other and the entire family of God forever, and our eternal and perfect place of residence in New Jerusalem.

(2) "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back

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<sup>14</sup> See CT 6, section VII, "New Jerusalem and the Eternal state".

and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."  
John 14:2-3 KJV

Nothing is worth sacrificing all these wondrous blessings to come. Nothing is worth sacrificing eternal New Jerusalem, the heavenly Mount Zion – not for anything on this temporary earth.

### **Myriads of Angels:**

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them.  
Job 1:6 NKJV

Then Micaiah said, "Therefore hear the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left."  
1st Kings 22:19 NKJV

"You alone are the Lord;  
You have made heaven,  
The heaven of heavens, with all their host,  
The earth and everything on it,  
The seas and all that is in them,  
And You preserve them all.  
The host of heaven worships You."  
Nehemiah 9:6 NKJV

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him.  
Daniel 7:9-10a

"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels."  
Revelation 3:5 NKJV

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands.  
Revelation 5:11 NKJV

All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God.  
Revelation 7:11 NKJV

(9) Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, (10) he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb."

Revelation 14:9-10 NKJV

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"

Revelation 19:6 NKJV

That the host of heaven, that is, the elect angels, attend the Father in the third heaven is well known to all Bible reading Christians from these and many other passages. In order to reinforce his major point about the folly of preferring temporary, earthly things to eternal heavenly things, Paul continues here with his contrast between the earthly Mount Sinai and the heavenly Mount Zion by reminding his readers of some of the glories of the Jerusalem above. The third heaven, the current abode of God, is the present place of assembly of all of the angels. Currently invisible to us (except on very rare occasions where their appearance was necessary for the furtherance of God's plan, e.g., Lk.2:9-15), on that great day of eternity to come, they will be completely visible to us as we are to them.

Indeed, after human history has concluded, the entire family of God will assemble to worship the Father and the Lamb, our Savior Jesus Christ, in the center of New Jerusalem, and that family includes all of the elect angels, the entire resurrected Church, and all those saved during the Millennium (a.k.a. "the Friends of the Bride": Ps.45:9; 45:14-15; 1Cor.15:24; Rev.19:9; 20:9). As we have demonstrated in the past, the Church replaces the fallen angels led into rebellion by the devil, and the millennial believers constitute Christ's "double portion", His special right of inheritance as "the First Born of all creation" (Col.1:15). Thus in eternity, when the family of God assembles in New Jerusalem, the number of elect angels and saved human beings will be equal, perfectly balancing God's household with something better than what obtained before, precisely the way God always works things out (Gen.50:20; Job 42:12-17; Rom.8:28).<sup>15</sup>

(14) For this reason I bow my knees to the Father, (15) from whom His entire family in heaven and on earth has received its name.

Ephesians 3:14-15

But when He brings back the Firstborn into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him! (Ps.97:7b)".

Hebrews 1:6

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<sup>15</sup> These matters are all discussed in BB 2B: Eschatology. See also the Satanic Rebellion series, especially part 5: Judgment, Restoration, and Replacement; and Coming Tribulation, part 6: Last Things.

## Church of the Firstborn:

(15) [Jesus Christ] is the exact image of the invisible God, *the Firstborn* of all creation. (16) Everything in the heavens and on the earth was created by Him, things invisible as well as those visible – whether thrones, authorities, rulers or powers, everything was created through Him and for Him. (17) And He Himself is before everything, and everything subsists in Him. (18) And He Himself is the Head of the Body, [that is,] the Church. [Even] He who is [its] Ruler, *the Firstborn* from the dead, [thus resurrected] to the purpose that He Himself might become the One who occupies the first place in all things. (19) For it was [God's] good pleasure for the fulfillment [of His plan] to reside entirely in [Christ], (20) and so through Him to reconcile everything to Himself, having made peace through Him, through the blood of His cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven.

Colossians 1:15-20

Since Jesus Christ is the one and only Son of God (Jn.1:14; 1:18; 3:16; 3:18; 1Jn.4:9), His status of Firstborn refers not to any order of birth but rather to the privileges that fall to the lot of the firstborn, namely, rulership (Dan.7:13-14; Matt.22:41-45; 28:18; Col.1:18; Heb.2:10; 3:1-6; Rev.2:27), priesthood (Heb.5:6; 7:13-14), and a double portion of inheritance (Rev.19:9; cf. Deut.21:15-17). As with His priesthood and His Messiahship, Jesus' status of "firstborn" is also a meritorious privilege earned through His sacrificing of Himself for us all on the cross, for He is the "firstborn from the dead" (Col.1:18; Rev.1:5), indicating that it is His death for us that forms the basis for His receiving all of the rights and privileges of firstborn status (cf. Gen.49:4; and Heb.12:16, where it is made clear that this privilege is based upon merit), and that as the first to be resurrected on account of His successful mission, He has also opened up the door of eternal life and resurrection for us who belong to Him, His Church (Col.1:18; Rev.1:5).

For those whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to share the likeness of His Son (i.e., to have identical resurrection bodies), so that He might be *the Firstborn* over many brothers [and sisters].

Romans 8:29

In our phrase, "Church of the firstborn", the word "firstborn" is not capitalized in the translation because it is plural in the Greek and thus refers not to our Savior who is *the* Firstborn (with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto both by birth and by virtue of His victory), but to us whom He has won through that victory to be His assembly, His body, His bride, His Church.

Turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him (i.e., us, His prize), endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despite, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:2

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready."

Revelation 19:7 NIV

Yes, we belong to Him (Matt.9:15; Matt.25:1-13; Mk.2:19; Lk.5:34; Jn.3:29; 2Cor.11:2-3; Eph.1:22-23; 5:22-33; Rev.19:7-14; 21:2-4; 21:9ff.; 22:17)! And as those who are the Church of the firstborn, the Church of Him who is the Firstborn, we have been enrolled as citizens in heaven (Lk.20:20; Heb.12:23), the place of our true citizenship (Phil.3:20). And this is our hope (Tit.2:13), the arrival of that great day when He returns to take us to Himself.

(16) For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

1st Thessalonians 4:16-17 NKJV

This initial "reunion" of the entire Church, the very first time we assemble as one perfect Bride together in resurrection with our dear Savior forever, will be only the first of many. We will all be present together at the Judgment Seat of Christ to receive our eternal rewards and to cheer on all our brothers and sisters as they receive theirs. We will all be present at the great victory banquet in millennial Jerusalem to celebrate our Lord's victory and the commencement of His thousand year reign (Is.25:6-9; Lk.13:29; cf. Matt.8:11-12; 22:1-14; 25:1-13; Lk.14:16-24). We will all be present – along with the Friends of the Bride, the millennial believers, and all of the elect angels – at the Last Judgments after the conclusion of human history (Dan.7:9). And as an integral part of that complete family of God, we will all assemble at set times throughout eternity in New Jerusalem to praise and honor and glorify our Savior and our Father for all the wonderful things they have done for us.

(13) For the Lord has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: (14) "This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it – (15) I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor I will satisfy with food. (16) I will clothe her priests with salvation, *and her saints will ever sing for joy.*"

Psalms 132:13-16 NIV

And it will be said in that day:

"Behold, this is our God;

We have waited for Him, and He will save us.

This is the Lord;

We have waited for Him;

***We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.***"

Isaiah 25:9 NKJV

**God the Judge:** God the Father is ultimate and supreme authority in all things. And while the Trinity are coequal, in terms of creation, the Father is the architect of the plan, the Son is the builder, and the Spirit is the One who empowers everything, so that the Bible always teaches the Father's supremacy in this world and in the next.

(24) Then comes the end, when [Christ] delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. (25) For he must reign until he has

put all his enemies under his feet. (26) The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (27) For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. (28) When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.  
1st Corinthians 15:24-28 ESV

While God the Father is, therefore, "judge of all", as our context passage above, Hebrews 12:23, makes clear, He has delegated all judgment to the Son since the Son is *the* "Son of man" and has, by His victory on the cross, been officially endowed with that right.

(22) "For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, (23) that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him."  
John 5:22-23 NKJV

So there is no contradiction, as, indeed, the Trinity have never been at odds at any time and in any way – that would be impossible for the perfect triune God of quintessential unity. Jesus Christ, the Son, the One sent into this world to save it, has been given, both in anticipation of that sacrifice and victory on the cross (Lk.10:22; Jn.3:35; 17:2; cf. Matt.9:6; Mk.2:10; Lk.5:24), and as a result of that sacrifice and victory on the cross (Eph.1:22-23; Phil.2:8-11), all authority (Matt.28:18; cf. Dan.7:13-14; 1Cor.15:27). He is therefore "the Judge", both of the Church in time and in eternity (Rom.14:10-12; 2Tim.4:8; cf. Jas.4:12; Rev.2:5-6; 3:1-3; 3:19-20), and, at the last judgment, of all mankind, saved or unsaved (Matt.25:31-46; Acts 10:42; Rom.2:16; 2Tim.4:1; 1Pet.4:5; Rev.20:11-15).

For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.  
Romans 14:10b NKJV

For we must all stand before Christ's tribunal, so that each of us may receive recompense for what he has accomplished through this body, whether it be good or worthless.  
2nd Corinthians 5:10

Brothers, do not grumble against one another so that you may not be judged [for it]. Behold, the Judge [Jesus Christ] is standing in front of the door (i.e., His return and our final judgment are imminent)!  
James 5:9 (cf. Rev.3:20-21)

This in no way diminishes the status of the Father as "the Judge of all" in our context – which He is in every way through His delegation of that authority to His one and only Son, Jesus Christ our Savior.

On the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of mankind through Christ Jesus.

Romans 2:16 NASB20

### **The Spirits of the Justified:**

(23) For all sin and fall short of God's glory, (24) [but we are all] *justified* without cost by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.  
Romans 3:23-24

We believers are all considered just, righteous, by the Father on account of our relationship with His Son, because the Father has paid the price for that justification by judging His Son our Savior in our place. We believe in Jesus, His perfect person as the unique and sinless God-man, and His perfect sacrifice for us on the cross where He propitiated the justice of God by being judged in our place for all of our sins.<sup>16</sup>

Know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.  
Galatians 2:16 NIV

As a result of our justification, the positional righteousness we receive based not on the Law or any works or behavior on our part, we are considered just and justified by God so as to be able to live with Him in heaven after our departure from this earth. This is what is being described in our context verse, "spirits" (i.e., believers not yet resurrected but in interim bodies), who have been accepted into the third heaven after death, awaiting the day when they like we will be resurrected (if it is our lot to be on earth that long, otherwise we too will join that number). This is what the Greek participle *teteleiomēnon* indicates: literally, [spirits of the justified] "having been completed", "[believers who have now] completed [their tasks]". This is also the reason why Paul includes this description along with "the Church of the Firstborn [believers]: we who are not yet in the third heaven (which at the time of writing was the vast majority) are definitely part of that Church. But some of the Church was then and more now are present in the presence of God in heaven above in temporary, "interim" bodies, awaiting that great day when the entire Church will rise as one "to meet the Lord in the air".

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven. And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming in command of the clouds of heaven (i.e., the heavenly hosts) with power and much glory. (31) And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet, and He will gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the heavens to the other.  
Matthew 24:29-31

(50) But I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (i.e.,

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<sup>16</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.8, "Justification".

live in eternity with the Lord), nor can corruption inherit incorruption (i.e., we need the resurrection to live forever). (51) Behold, I tell you a mystery: not all of us will fall asleep, but all of us will be changed (52) in [that] moment of time, in the blink of an eye, at the final trumpet blast. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will rise incorruptible, and we too (i.e., believers still alive) will be changed [at that time (i.e., the Lord's Second Advent return)].

1st Corinthians 15:50-52

**Jesus, the Mediator:** To us who have put our faith in Him for eternal life, Jesus Christ is many things. He is our Savior, our Rock and our Redeemer. He is our King, our Lord, our Master, our God. He is our help and our hope, our big brother, our portion in this life and the next. He is the Head of our Church, the Husband to us His Bride. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Alpha and the Omega, the Lamb of God, the Light of the world, our Shepherd, the very Word of God incarnate.<sup>17</sup> In short, Jesus Christ is our all and our everything. Paul selects this one designation from among the myriad wonderful things our Lord is to us for a reason: the Jerusalem believers were in great need of being reconciled to God, and Jesus Christ is the One who first provided that reconciliation for them when they were saved (Rom.5:8-11), and the One who stands ready to advocate for any and for all of us when we are willing to come back from the "far country" of sinful disobedience (in the manner of the prodigal son).<sup>18</sup>

(1) My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. (2) And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.  
1st John 2:1-2 NKJV

(19) "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. (20) Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."  
Revelation 3:19-20 NIV

Jesus is our Daysman, our Advocate (Rom.8:34; 1Jn.2:1; Heb.7:25; cf. Job 16:19; Jn.14:13-14; 1Tim.2:5), the One who through His blood, His spiritual death for us on the cross, has provided for us all a "better covenant", one which not only symbolized what God would do for us as the Old Covenant did, but what He actually has done in saving us through the cross.

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."  
1st Corinthians 11:25 NIV

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<sup>17</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section I.4, "The Names of Jesus Christ Reflect His Perfect Person and His Perfect Work".

<sup>18</sup> See BB 4A: Christology, section II.9, "Reconciliation"; and in Hebrews Chapter 2, Verse Fourteen through Fifteen under "Reconcile".

But the fact is that the ministry which [Jesus] has now received is a more excellent one to the same degree that the [New] Covenant of which He is the mediator is better [than the Old]. For this [New Covenant] has been instituted on the basis of better promises.  
Hebrews 8:6

**Sprinkled Blood:** The blood referred to here is, of course, the blood of Christ, that is, His spiritual death in dying for all of our sins in the darkness on the cross, the sacrifice of sacrifices by which alone we are saved (which was only symbolized by the animal blood of the Levitical sacrifices). If it seems somewhat repetitive for Paul to be mentioning this again so soon, that is deliberate. For what is more important than the cross? Nothing! We believers are saved from death, darkness and judgment through the cross of Jesus Christ alone. And therefore we can never allow the cross to drop from our hearts. That is what the Jerusalem believers were doing, foolishly substituting the symbol for the reality, trading a now obsolete set of rituals for the ineffably wonderful reality of the salvation we have through our Lord who died for us.

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i.e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have God's righteousness in Him.  
2nd Corinthians 5:21

But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.  
Galatians 6:14 NKJV

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed.  
1st Peter 2:24

### **Abel:**

By faith Abel offered a more valuable sacrifice to God than Cain did, through which he received testimony of being righteous, for God Himself gave that testimony regarding the gifts [he had offered]. And through this testimony Abel still speaks to us, even though dead.  
Hebrews 11:4

. . . and to sprinkled blood (i.e., the work of Christ in bearing our sins) which speaks [far] more powerfully than that of Abel[']s sacrifice].  
Hebrews 12:24b

Paul returns in our context here to the example of Abel because Abel was the first believer to offer an animal sacrifice. Abel understood as Cain apparently did not (or did not care to) that forgiveness of sin and resultant salvation is entirely a matter of grace, provided by the Father through the (at that time) future and (at the time of writing of Hebrews and ever since) present and eternal reality of the actual sacrifice of His beloved Son Jesus Christ on our behalf. So while Abel's symbolic sacrifice "still speaks to us" through the written Word, nothing could speak

louder or more powerfully than the Living Word of God Himself. Even Abel understood what that very first animal sacrifice meant, but the Jerusalem believers had clearly forgotten, otherwise they would not have been involving themselves in such obsolete symbols now that they had the reality, blood of Christ. Thus this reference to righteous Abel now in heaven above, and to his prior sacrifice wherein he was rightly looking forward in full understanding that it was merely meant to symbolize the true sacrifice of the Messiah to come, puts the capstone on Paul's efforts to focus his readers on the eternal "things above" (where even Abel, he of the very first animal sacrifice, presently resides) rather than returning to the temporary and now superseded rituals of the past.

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. (4) When Christ – your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be revealed in glory.  
Colossians 3:1-4

Failure to redress their attitudes and reform their behavior would lead in many cases to a complete falling away from Christ (and to the dire end of the sin unto death in others). In chapter eleven, Paul had shown his readers the better way through many inspiring examples of believers of the past, mostly Jewish as were the members of the Jerusalem church. In our context, Paul endeavors to encourage them to shift their focus off of worldly things and back to the heavenly perspective of hope for the better things of eternity, the hope in which they were originally saved and for which they had already suffered greatly.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.  
2nd Corinthians 4:18 NIV

(35) So do not throw away this conviction of yours – it leads to a great reward. (36) You need to keep persevering so that you may carry off in victory what has been promised – after you have accomplished God's will. (37) For yet a little while, "how short, how short [the wait]", and "He who is coming shall come, nor will He delay". (38) "Then my one [made] righteous by his faith will live because of his faith, but if he shrinks back, My heart takes no pleasure in him (Hab.2:3-4)."  
Hebrews 10:35-38

### **Verses Twenty Five through Twenty Nine**

(25) See to it that you do not ignore the One who is speaking [to you]. For if those [of the Exodus generation] did not escape when they ignored the one who was giving them warning from the earth (i.e., Moses), how much more shall we [not escape, if we] turn away from the One [giving us warning] from heaven? (26) His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven" (Hag.2:6; cf. Hag.2:21). (27) And

this "once more" clearly indicates the [coming] transformation of things which may be shaken as things which have been made [by Him], so that the [coming] things which cannot be shaken may abide forever. (28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear. (29) For our God is a consuming fire.  
Hebrews 12:25-29

**Do Not Ignore:** Paul, we must remember, was an apostle, one of the select twelve gifted to organize and direct the Church as it expanded rapidly from a nation-centered assembly based upon the Law to a worldwide one based upon the New Covenant which had replaced the Old. Part and parcel of carrying out that mission was the privilege and duty of completing the Word of God. And the letter which these Jerusalem believers received *was and is* part of God's precious Word, the message and the good news about Jesus Christ who is the Living Word of God.

Hebrews, therefore, was a message from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, Paul being merely the vessel our Lord used to deliver it. To ignore Paul's words was to ignore Jesus Christ – precisely as the majority of this wayward church had been doing. In their return to the Law with its rites and rituals now fulfilled, symbols of the coming Messiah who had now come and accomplished salvation, they were essentially denying and ignoring our Savior's ineffably great sacrifice on their behalf and on behalf of the entire world. Paul pleads with them here in the Spirit not to ignore this gracious attempt on our Lord's part to turn this congregation around before it was too late. Absent repentance and proper response, how would the fate awaiting the Jerusalem believers not be worse than that which befell the exodus generation?

(34) "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. (35) Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'."

Luke 13:34-35 NIV

**No Escape:** Throughout this epistle, Paul has been reminding his readers of the failures of the exodus generation and encouraging them not to follow that terrible and ultimately disastrous example. As mentioned throughout these studies, "that generation" was the exemplar of everything Israel should not be, and used as such by all of Israel's prophets and also by our Lord who compared His contemporaries directly to it by calling them "this generation" (e.g., Matt.24:34; Mk.13:30; Lk.17:24-25; 21:32; cf. Deut.32:5; 32:20; Ps.12:7-8; 95:10; Prov.30:11-14; Jer.2:31; 7:29). By contrasting the earthly warnings the exodus generation had received from Moses, the Lord's intermediary, to the heavenly warnings to which his readers were privy, Paul is using an *a fortiori* argument. As bad as it was to disrespect Moses, how is it not much worse to disrespect the Lord Himself? And as bad as it was to disregard warnings from the Law given on earth, how was it not much worse to disregard the heavenly appeals from our Lord Himself, memorialized in the gospels, explained and made crystal clear in the epistles, and now being given directly to them from the Lord's apostle through the Holy Spirit?

The exodus generation had some small modicum of faith sufficient to keep the first Passover, follow Moses out of Egypt and cross the Red Sea (Ex.14:31; Heb.11:29), but they quickly and repeatedly turned away from the Lord thereafter (Ex.32:8; Num.14:22). The Jerusalem church, on the other hand, had, as we have seen, started out exceptionally well.

(32) Remember the days gone by, when you first saw the light, when you persevered through that terrible trial of abuse. (33) For you were publicly exposed to humiliation and persecution, and shared the lot of others who experienced the same. (34) You suffered from my chains and accepted the confiscation of your belongings with joy, because you knew that you possessed a more valuable estate and a more lasting one.  
Hebrews 10:32-34

The Jerusalem church had been the great light to the gentiles for many years before her precipitous slide. For that reason, her turning away from the truth and back to the Law (or Gnostic perversions of it) was all the more shocking – and all the more culpable . . . because they knew what they were doing.

"But if a righteous person turns from their righteousness and commits sin and does the same detestable things the wicked person does, will they live? None of the righteous things that person has done will be remembered. Because of the unfaithfulness they are guilty of and because of the sins they have committed, they will die."  
Ezekiel 18:24 NIV

"The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows."  
Luke 12:47 NIV

### **Shaking Earth and Heaven:**

(18) When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance (18) and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."  
Exodus 20:18-19 NIV

(18) For you have not come to a mountain which can be touched, burning with fire and [obscured by] darkness and gloom and a whirlwind, (19) [ringing with] the sound of a trumpet and the roar of commands – in addition to which those who heard begged for no further word to be given to them. (20) For they could not endure the command: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." (21) And the vision was so terrifying that even Moses said, "I am terrified and tremble."  
Hebrews 12:18-21

What the exodus generation witnessed at Mt. Sinai must indeed have been terrifying: the thunder and lightning, the mountain burning with fire, the darkness, the gloom, the whirlwind, the

sounding trumpets and the roar of commands. And it was meant to be so, in order to impress upon them that godly fear, awe, reverence and respect for the Lord that helps us all stay on the strait and narrow path.

Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."  
Exodus 20:20 NIV

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,  
And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.  
Proverbs 9:10 NKJV

But as frightening as all of these supernatural apparitions at one localized place on earth must have been (though they are difficult for us to appropriately imagine ourselves without the actual experience), how much more awe-inspiring must the end of the universe not be?

His voice shook the earth at that time [at Mount Sinai], but now He has made [us] this promise, saying, "Yet once more shall I shake not only the earth, but also heaven"  
(Hag.2:6; cf. Hag.2:21).  
Hebrews 12:26

(10) For the Day of the Lord will come like a thief, a day in which the heavens will depart with a roar, the very elements will ignite and dissolve, and the earth and everything which has been done upon it will be laid bare. (11) Since then all these things are destined to disintegrate in this way, [consider] what sort of [Christians] we ought to be, [devoted to] holy and godly conduct, (12) as we wait with apprehension and eager expectation the advent of the Day of God. For on that day the heavens will burst into flame and dissolve, and the elements will catch fire and melt.  
2nd Peter 3:10-12

For believers, that final day of history will be a day of great blessing as we are anticipating the "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13 NKJV).

(25) Of old You founded the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. (26) Even they will perish, but You endure; And all of them will wear out like a garment; Like clothing You will change them and they will be changed.  
Psalm 102:25-26 NASB

"For behold, I am going to create New Heavens and a New Earth, so that the former things will not be remembered, nor will they [even] come to mind."  
Isaiah 65:17

"For just as the New Heavens and New Earth which I am about to make are going to continue before Me", says the Lord, "so your seed and its name will continue".  
Isaiah 66:22

(1) And [then] (i.e., at the conclusion of the last judgment) I saw a New Heaven and a New Earth [appear]. For the previous heaven and the previous earth had passed away (Rev.20:11), and the sea [now] no longer existed [on this New Earth].  
Revelation 21:1 (cf. Rev.6:14)

For believers, those who stay faithful to Jesus Christ until the end (Matt.10:22; 24:13; Mk.13:13; Heb.3:6; 3:14), instead of fear, this blessed replacement of the old with the new will mark the commencement of eternal bliss. But for those who reject Jesus Christ, whether He never knew them or they abandon Him on account of the trials of this life, there will be only the "fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Heb.10:27 NIV).

(11) This is a faithful saying:

For if we died with Him,  
We shall also live with Him.

(12) If we endure,  
We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him,  
He also will deny us.

(13) If we are faithless,  
He remains faithful;  
He cannot deny Himself.

2nd Timothy 2:11-13 NKJV

### **The Unshakeable Kingdom:**

(21) For since death [came] through a man, resurrection of the dead also [had to come] through a man. (22) For just as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ, shall all be made alive. (23) But each [will be resurrected] in his own echelon. Christ [is the] first-fruits (i.e., the initial person and echelon of resurrection). Next [will be] those belonging to Christ at His coming (i.e., all believers at the 2nd Advent). (24) Then the end [of human history – the resurrection of millennial believers], when He will hand the Kingdom over to the Father, after He has brought an end to all rule, all power, and all authority (i.e., hostile human and angelic control). (25) For He must rule until He has placed all His enemies under His feet.

1st Corinthians 15:21-25

At the conclusion of Christ's millennial reign, after all enemies have been put under His feet, after the plan of God has been completely fulfilled at the hand of Him who is that very Logos, that Word, that plan, at that time the present universe, the old heavens and earth, will be completely destroyed and replaced by the new heavens and the new earth, a place where only "righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13), with all sin and evil removed forever, with all who rejected God and His mercy sequestered in the lake of fire. At that blessed time, there will be no more darkness, only light, as God the Father returns to the new earth and New Jerusalem descends, the blessed place of our eternal habitation as those who have chosen to be with Jesus Christ forever.

"Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world."

John 17:24 NKJV

As the eternal kingdom will be unshakeable, so we who are its future citizens will likewise receive an unchangeable, eternal body, one which will be capable of enjoying and appreciating all of the eternal blessings our Lord is poised to shower upon us forever and ever.<sup>19</sup>

(20) For our [true] citizenship has a heavenly existence, and it is from there that we expectantly await our Savior, Lord Jesus Christ, (21) who will transform this humble body of ours into one that matches His glorious body through His powerful ability to subordinate everything to Himself.

Philippians 3:20-21

Beloved, we are already the children of God, but what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when He is revealed [in glory], we will be like Him, that we shall see Him exactly like He is.

1st John 3:2

There is much that could be said about the great benefits of our eternal life, much more that Paul could have said here (things we have described and discussed in the past<sup>20</sup>). But the Jerusalem believers should have already known all about these things (cf. 2Thes.2:5). They were the best informed believers of their day, living as they did at the epicenter of Christianity, the original home base of the other eleven apostles, many teachers and prophets, and host to all missionaries and proselytes who came there for guidance and mutual encouragement – including Paul himself (e.g., Gal.1:18-24). No, there was no excuse for this church to forget the glories to come when all that can be shaken would be shaken and bathed in eternal light – and to exchange those blessed heavenly realities for the gloom and darkness of earthly things past.

(1) Therefore since you have been resurrected [positionally] with Christ, strive for the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (2) Think on the things above, and not the things on the earth. (3) For you are already [positionally] dead [to all that], and your [true] life has been hidden away with Christ in God. (4) When Christ – your [true] life – is revealed [at the 2nd Advent], then you too will be revealed in glory. Colossians 3:1-4

(8) So as you go forward, brothers, [keep meditating on] all the many [wonderful things you have learned], things that are true, godly, righteous, holy, pleasing [to God], reverent – if you have [developed] any virtues [in your Christian walk] and if you have [any hope

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<sup>19</sup> See Peter #20: The Resurrection; and CT 6, section V.5, "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride".

<sup>20</sup> See in particular CT 6: Last Things: The Millennium and New Jerusalem.

of] praise [from God at the judgment] – these are the things you should be thinking about. (9) [All these same things] which you have learned, and have received [into your hearts by believing them], and have heard about and observed me [doing in my walk], go do likewise (i.e., grow, progress, produce). Then the God of peace will be with you.  
Philippians 4:8-9

### **Reverence and Fear:**

(28) Since, therefore, we have received a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear.

(29) For our God is a consuming fire.

Hebrews 12:28-29

There is nothing greater than the cross of Jesus Christ, nothing more worthy of our everlasting gratitude that this so great salvation we have received by grace through faith (Rom.5:8; Eph.2:8-9; Heb.2:3). Through our Savior's death for us, we have been delivered from sin and death. We have been spared from the lake of fire. We have been promised instead resurrection, eternal life, and a place with our Lord in heaven – the new heaven on the new earth in New Jerusalem – forever. In short, we have been saved from physical death, darkness, the grave . . . and the last judgment, all of the things that terrify unbelievers (or certainly should). And in place of these horrors, we have been made one with the glorious Lord who loved us enough to die for us all, who bought us with His own blood, and who has promised to keep us with Himself for all eternity in light and life and truth.

(1) "Do not let your heart be troubled. You believe in God [the Father] – believe also in Me. (2) There are many rooms in my Father's house. If there were not, I would have told you. For I am going in order to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I shall come again and take you to Myself, so that where I am, you may be also. (4) And where I am going, you know the way."

John 14:1-4

Jesus Christ is "the Way", the only truth and the only way to life (Jn.14:6). How should we who have put our faith in Him for life eternal and for deliverance from this world and its corruption not be grateful to the very bottom of our hearts to Him and to the Father who sent Him? How should we not take pains to *never* allow the cross to drop from our hearts? And how should we then respond to the great Gift of life we have been given? Just as Paul tells his listeners. We should "show gratitude so that through it we may serve God in a pleasing way with reverence and fear."

Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

John 6:29 NKJV

Serving God is doing God's will, God's work, which, first and foremost means placing our trust in Jesus Christ. Then, as we remain faithful to our Lord, learning His truth and walking in it, we

develop the inner spiritual resources to endure whatever testing comes our way, glorifying Him through trusting Him even when we face difficult trials. Finally, we are given ministry opportunities that conform to the spiritual gifts with which we were blessed at salvation. Proving faithful to all of these responsibilities is "showing gratitude", "serving God", "pleasing Him", and demonstrating that we do indeed have the appropriate respect, reverence and awe of Him that all believers ought to have – because we are doing what He requires of us. Those who truly do "fear God" respond to Him as He would have them to do. They "listen to Him". They obey Him. That is the way to show true gratitude.

"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"  
Luke 6:46 NIV

(28) "But what do you think? A man had two sons, and he came to the first and said, 'Son, go, work today in my vineyard.' (29) He answered and said, 'I will not,' but afterward he regretted it and went. (30) Then he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' but he did not go. (31) Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said to Him, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you."  
Matthew 21:28-31 NKJV

Worse than even the first son in the second passage above, the Jerusalem believers had "gone into the vineyard" to serve our Lord, but now, instead of doing His work, they were trampling the grapes, so to speak – and were thus in danger of being trampled underfoot themselves for their disrespect of our Lord and His precious work on our behalf on the cross.

(26) For if we continue to sin willfully (i.e., arrogantly) after having received full knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains any sacrifice applicable to [such] sins, (27) but [only] the terrifying expectation of judgment and fiery retribution waiting to devour those who oppose [the Lord]. (28) For anyone who set aside the law of Moses perished without mercy on the [testimony] of two or three witnesses. (29) How much greater punishment do you suppose will not justly come to someone who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, and who has considered His blood of the covenant to be unclean, the very blood by which you were sanctified, and who has violently insulted the Spirit of grace? (30) For we know the One who said, "Vengeance belongs to Me, I will repay, 'says the Lord' ", and again, "The Lord will judge His people." (31) It is a frightening thing to fall into the hands of the living God.  
Hebrews 10:26-30

All these things the Jerusalem church should have remembered and taken to heart even without Paul's Holy Spirit inspired intervention with this epistle. Having begun this chapter with encouragement, reminding his readers of God's great mercy, of the fact that divine discipline is meant for blessing, and of the forgiveness of sin which could be theirs, should they merely deign to repent, Paul is constrained here at its end to likewise remind them of the consequences of being stiff-necked and refusing to do what the Lord requires.

"A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the Lord Almighty. "It is you priests who show contempt for my name."

Malachi 1:6a NIV

Just as our Lord Jesus Christ is worthy of all gratitude for the sacrifice He made for us (Gal.6:14), so our heavenly Father who sent Him is worthy of all respect by virtue of being our Father (Heb.12:9). This is the proper, biblical "fear of God".

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.

Psalm 111:10 NKJV

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:7 NIV

Fearing God in the biblical way is not oppressive. It is a delight (Is.11:3). The fear of God which Paul is enjoining here is the same sort of respect and reverence which earthly fathers are due – only in this case the Father receiving it is perfect, all-knowing, and loves us more than we can imagine. After all, He sent His only beloved Son to die in our place.

For God loved the world so much that He gave [up] His one and only Son, [with the purpose] that everyone who believes in Him should not be lost [forever], but have eternal life [instead].

John 3:16

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1st John 4:10 NIV

Since the Father loved and loves us so much, should we not respond to that love, doing the little He has asked of us, following His Son in faith in the same way that we first put our faith in Him? That is the essence of respect. That is the reverence we are meant to show Him. Not mindless terror (as the Israelites of the exodus generation sometimes demonstrated; e.g., Num.17:12-13), for "there is no [such irrational] fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment"; and so "he who [irrationally] fears has not been made perfect in love" (1Jn.4:18 NKJV).

Moses said to the people, "***Do not be afraid.*** God has come to test you, so that ***the fear of God*** will be with you to keep you from sinning."

Exodus 20:20 NIV

The Hebrew root for both the verb (in Moses command) and the noun (which comes second) is the same (*ya'rah*). Here we see that "being afraid" of God is not good; but having a godly "fear"

and respect for Him is very good. The difference should by now be very clear. Godly fear appreciates who the Father is, how He comports Himself towards us, and what we can expect from Him as the perfect, loving Father He is if we do as He would have us to do, and knowing for certain that if we do err, He disciplines in mercy for our own good as His own dear children whom He loves. It is only those who oppose Him arrogantly, who turn completely away from Him, who, in effect, trample the sacrifice of His beloved Son under foot who have need of feeling paralyzing terror before Him. That is the difference between those who belong to Him and those who do not. For the latter, and for those who currently belong to Him but who are foolishly toying with abandoning Him and joining the latter, then indeed, "our God is a consuming fire".

(4) "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. (5) But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him."  
Luke 12:4-5 NIV

(6) Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth – to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people – (7) saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."  
Revelation 14:6-7 NKJV

"Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy."  
Revelation 15:3b-4a NIV

Praise our heavenly Father and His Son our Savior who went into the flames of fire for us to be burned but not consumed until He had taken away all of our sins and liberated us from the fear of death forever!

And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.  
Exodus 3:2 NKJV

(8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (9) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be ***saved from God's wrath through him!***  
Romans 5:8-9 NIV

(14) Therefore since "these children" (i.e., believers given to Christ by the Father: v.13) are flesh and blood, [Christ] took on the same [flesh and blood] in a very similar fashion (i.e., not identical only in that He was virgin born and so without sin), in order that through His death He might put an end to the one possessing the power of death, that is, the devil, (15) and might reconcile [to God] those who were subject to being slaves their

whole lives long by their fear of death.  
Hebrews 2:14-15