

QUESTIONS ABOUT CHURCH

How Can I Strengthen My Church?

A Father's Love

Hebrews 12:11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

At the time, all discipline seems painful. But it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Leslie Weatherhead wrote, "Like all men I love and prefer the sunny uplands of experience, where health, happiness, and success abound, but I have learned far more about God and life and myself in the darkness of fear and failure than I have ever learned in the sunshine. There are such things as the treasures of darkness. The darkness, thank God, passes. But what one learns in the darkness one possesses for ever. "The trying things," says Bishop Fenelon, "which you fancy come between God and you, will prove means of unity with Him, if you bear them humbly. Those things that overwhelm us and upset our pride, do more good than all that which excites and inspirits us."

C. H. Spurgeon wrote, "I am afraid that all the grace I have got out of my comfortable and easy times and happy hours might almost lie on a penny. But the good that I have received from my sorrows and pains and griefs is altogether incalculable. What do I not owe to the hammer and the anvil, the fire and the file? Affliction is the best bit of furniture in my house.

Hebrews 12:12 Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,

Believers should not cave in under the adverse circumstances of life; their lapse of faith might have an unfavorable influence on others.

Drooping hands should be reinvigorated to serve the living Christ. Feeble knees should be strengthened for persevering prayer.

Hebrews 12:13 and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Faltering feet should be guided in straight paths of Christian discipleship.

Warning Against Turning from God

Hebrews 12:14 Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:

Christians should strive for peaceable relations with all people and at all times. (13s)

But this exhortation is especially needful when persecution is prevalent, when some are defecting from the faith, and when nerves are frayed. At such times it is all too easy to vent one's frustration and fears on those who are nearest and dearest.

We should also strive for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. What is the holiness referred to here? To answer the question we should remind ourselves that holiness is used of believers in at least three different ways in the NT.

First of all, the believer becomes positionally holy at the time of his conversion; he is set apart to God from the world (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11).

By virtue of his union with Christ, he is sanctified forever. This is what Martin Luther meant when he said, "My holiness is in heaven." Christ is our holiness, that is, as far as our standing before God is concerned.

Then there is a practical sanctification (1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23). This is what we should be day by day. We should separate ourselves from every form of evil. This holiness should be progressive, that is, we should be growing more and more like the Lord Jesus all the time.

Finally, there is complete or perfect sanctification. This takes place when a believer goes to heaven. Then he is forever free from sin. His old nature is removed, and his state perfectly corresponds to his standing.

Now which holiness are we to pursue? Obviously it is practical sanctification that is in view. We do not strive after positional sanctification; it is ours automatically when we are born again. And we do not strive after the perfect sanctification that will be ours when we see His face. But practical or progressive sanctification is something that involves our obedience and cooperation; we must cultivate this holiness continually. The fact that we must follow it is proof that we do not fully attain it in this life.

Wuest writes: The exhortation is to the born-again Jews who had left the Temple, to live such consistent saintly lives, and to cling so tenaciously to their new-found faith, that the unsaved Jews who had also left the Temple and had outwardly embraced the New Testament truth, would be encouraged to go on to faith in Messiah as High Priest, instead of returning to the abrogated sacrifices of the Levitical system. These truly born-again Jews are warned that a limping Christian life would cause these unsaved Jews to be turned out of the way.

But a difficulty remains! Is it true that we cannot see the Lord without practical sanctification? Yes, there is a sense in which this is true; but let us understand that this does not mean that we earn the right to see God by living holy lives. Jesus Christ is our only title to heaven.

What this verse means is that there must be practical holiness as a proof of new life within.

If a person is not growing more holy, he is not saved.

When the Holy Spirit indwells a person, He manifests His presence by a separated life. It is a matter of cause and effect; if Christ has been received, the rivers of living water will flow.

Hebrews 12:15 looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;

The next two verses seem to present four distinct sins to avoid. But there is a strong suggestion in the context that this is another warning against the single sin of apostasy and that these four sins are all related to it. First of all, apostasy is a failure to obtain the grace of God.

The person looks like a Christian, talks like a Christian, professes to be a Christian, but he has never been born again. He has come so near the Savior but has never received Him; so near and yet so far.

Apostasy is a root of bitterness. The person turns sour against the Lord and repudiates the Christian faith. His defection is contagious. Others are defiled by his complaints, doubts, and denials.

Hebrews 12:16 lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.

Apostasy is closely linked with immorality. A professing Christian may fall into gross moral sin. Instead of acknowledging his guilt, he blames the Lord and falls away. Apostasy and sexual sin are connected in 2 Peter 2:10, 14, 18 and Jude 8, 16, 18.

Finally, apostasy is a form of irreligion, illustrated by Esau. He had no real appreciation for the birthright; he willingly bartered it for the momentary gratification of his appetite.

Hebrews 12:17 For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

Later Esau was remorseful at the loss of the older son's double portion, but it was too late. His father could not reverse the blessing.

So it is with an apostate. He has no real regard for spiritual values. He willingly renounces Christ in order to escape reproach, suffering, or martyrdom. He cannot be renewed to repentance. There may be remorse but no godly repentance.

12:18 Those who are tempted to return to the law should remember the terrifying circumstances that attended the giving of the law and should draw spiritual lessons from them. The scene was Mount