

## QUESTIONS ABOUT CHURCH

# How Can I Strengthen My Church?

### Warning Against Turning from God

**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 Sinai, a literal, tangible mountain that was all on fire. It was enveloped in a pall or veil that made everything seem indistinct, obscure, and nebulous. A violent storm raged around it.

**Hebrews 12:18** For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest,

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 Sinai, a literal, tangible mountain that was all on fire. It was enveloped in a pall or veil that made everything seem indistinct, obscure, and nebulous. A violent storm raged around it.

**Hebrews 12:19** and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore.

In addition to these natural disorders, there were terrible supernatural phenomena. A trumpet blasted away, and a voice thundered out so ominously that the people pled for it to stop.

**Hebrews 12:20** (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow.")

They were completely unnerved by the divine edict that "If so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned to death." They knew that if it meant death to a dumb, uncomprehending animal, how much more surely would it mean death to those who understood the warning.

**Hebrews 12:21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.”)**

The entire scene was so terrifying and forbidding that Moses himself was trembling.

All this speaks eloquently of the nature and ministry of the law. It is a revelation of God’s righteous requirements and of His wrath against sin.

The purpose of the law was not to provide the knowledge of salvation but to produce the knowledge of sin.

It speaks of distance between God and man because of sin. It is a ministry of condemnation, darkness, and gloom.

**Hebrews 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,**

Believers have not come to the forbidding terrors of Sinai but to the welcome of grace.

We do not come to a tangible mountain on earth. Our privilege is to enter the sanctuary in heaven.

By faith, we approach God in confession, praise, and prayer.

We are not limited to one day of the year, but may enter the holiest at any time with the knowledge that we are always welcome.

God no longer says, “Stay at a distance”; He says, “Come near with confidence.”

Law has its Mount Sinai but faith has its Mount Zion. This heavenly mountain symbolizes the combined blessings of grace—all that is ours through the redeeming work of Christ Jesus.

Law has its earthly Jerusalem but faith has its heavenly capital above. The city of the living God is in heaven, the city which has the foundations, whose Architect and Builder is God.

As we enter the presence of God, we are surrounded by an august gathering. First of all, there are myriads of angels who though untainted by sin cannot join with us in song because they do not know “the joy that our salvation brings.”

**Hebrews 12:23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect,**

Then we are with the general assembly of the firstborn ones who are registered in heaven.

These are members of the church, the Body and Bride of Christ, who have died since Pentecost and are now consciously enjoying the Lord’s presence. They await the Day when their bodies will be raised from the grave in glorified form and reunited with their spirits.

By faith we see God the Judge of all. No longer does darkness and gloom hide Him; to faith’s vision His glory is transcendent.

The OT saints are there, the spirits of just men made perfect. Justified by faith, they stand in spotless purity because the value of Christ’s work has been imputed to their account. They too await the time when the grave will yield up its ancient charges and they will receive glorified bodies.

**Hebrews 12:24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.**

Jesus is there, the Mediator of the new covenant.

There is a difference between Moses as mediator of the Old Covenant and Jesus as Mediator of the new. Moses served as a mediator simply by receiving the law from God and delivering it to the people of Israel. He was the go-between, or the people’s representative, offering the sacrifices by which the covenant was ratified.