

THE FINISHER

Hebrews—Chapter 12

Study 13

The Finisher

As Paul begins to wind down his letter to the Hebrews, his call is to focus on Jesus Christ as both the Author and Finisher of our faith. The book of Hebrews begins with Christ, and it ends with Christ. Paul brings the entire message to a grand finale:

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

We have the privilege of laying aside the sin that so easily entangles us and everything that hinders us (NIV)! How? By looking to Jesus, the Author and the Finisher of our faith! It is here that we find the solution for sin. The problem is we don't.

This verse offers the basics: Who, What, Where, When, and Why.

Who: The Who is us. You and me. Sinners.

What: The What is looking. Beholding. Spending time with God.

Where: The Where is looking to Jesus. Our Savior and friend.

When: The When is when you decide you want Jesus to cast off every weight and sin from your life. When you realize that sin is a burden we were never meant to carry.

Why: The Why is because Jesus Christ is the Author and the Finisher. He began the work of saving us from sin, and only He can see us through to the end. Jesus is the Author AND the Finisher. Jesus began the work in us, and He intends to finish it (Philippians 1:6).

Resisting unto Blood

“For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin” (Hebrews 12:3-4).

This is where we should really sense our need of Christ, when it comes to the idea of resisting sin unto blood. Most of us haven't even broken a sweat—never mind sweating blood. Of course, there are a couple of options for understanding this text. One option is martyrdom, which may look like a good fit, but martyrdom refers more to persecution whereas this verse is pointing to resisting sin.

The second option is to take the text in context as it reads recognizing that there is only one person in the Bible who actually resisted temptation to the point of sweating blood, and that was Jesus—the Author AND Finisher (Luke 22:41-44). This seems to be Paul's intended point, which is understood by his statement “you have not” in the context of looking unto Jesus who “endured the cross.” But then there is the “yet,” which could actually infer that we will, or perhaps should. I was hung up on this verse for years until I got snowed in at an airport and was led to study it. The Spirit directed me to ask the question, “How did Jesus do it?” Previously, I was asking “How do I do it?” With the focus on Jesus and how He prepared to resist sin unto blood, this once difficult text became a powerful revelation of biblical truth. Here's what God showed me.

According to Matthew 26 and the Gethsemane struggle, Jesus engaged systematically in song and praise, truth, honesty, hope, prayer, a support group,

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“God having provided something better for us.” —Hebrews 11:40

All Scripture references are from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

self confession and submission to God. Here are the actual texts describing each activity:

- 1) Song and praise—“When they had sung a hymn” (Matthew 26:30).
- 2) Truth—“for it is written” (verse 31).
- 3) Honesty—“all ye shall be offended because of me this night” (verse 31, KJV).
- 4) Hope—“after I am risen again” (verse 32).
- 5) Prayer—“I go and pray yonder” (verse 36, KJV).
- 6) Support group—“tarry ye here and watch with Me” (verse 38).
- 7) Confess weakness—“let this cup pass from Me” (verse 39).
- 8) Submission—“not as I will, but as Thou will” (verse 39, KJV).

In this context Christ was strengthened for the battle. While we may never actually resist sin unto blood as Christ did, we can, and ought to, follow His example of preparation for the battle against darkness.

The Language of Love

“And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: *‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives’*” (Hebrews 12:5-6).

Here is another element to add to Christian experience, one that we easily forget. Correction is a language of love—a foreign language to many of us, but a language of love nonetheless. I took two years of Spanish in high school, but I have definitely forgotten most of it and, therefore, I fail to understand much when it is spoken. It is the same with this language of love. Often we fail to understand the message of exhortation because it comes to us in a guise we don’t recognize as love.

Intensive Training

“If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. 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” (Hebrews 12:7-11).

The meaning of “chastening” in these verses is not only correction, but education. If we take this approach to life, we will find that our trials become powerful privileges through which God educates us in life and saves us for eternity. This was the case with Nebuchadnezzar who actually praised God for allowing him to become like a wild beast for seven years (Daniel 4). Or consider the experience of Mannaseh who did worse than the heathen in turning from God. Then, when God humbled him through severe trial by allowing him to be taken captive to Babylon, Mannaseh humbled himself. He then accepted God’s correction, prayed to the Lord and was heard and restored (2 Chronicles 33:1-20). So we are encouraged to remember that God allows us to reap the consequences of our actions in order to save and educate us for heaven. Nowadays many parents are too soft with their kids, rescuing them from all negative consequences because they themselves can’t handle allowing them to experience some of the negative consequences of life. But in His wisdom, Jesus loves us enough to discipline us.

Look Up and Straighten Up

“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:12-14).

We don't have to continually experience negative consequences in this life. It's not necessary for us to always be going through rough times. We can look up and straighten up. That is, we can foster a positive attitude about life and make some good choices instead of bad ones. These two actions alone would help us avoid a whole lot of headache.

"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" (Hebrews 12:15).

It won't always be easy to maintain this positive attitude. It will require diligence to keep looking up—to Jesus, the grace of God. Yet, diligence and effort is better than being stuck in the bondage of bitterness for the rest of our lives, defiled with negative thoughts and defiling others with our words and atmosphere. Dwelling in the darkness just makes life harder.

Selling Out Cheap

"Lest there *be* any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. 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" (Hebrews 12:16-17).

Don't sell God's love cheap. You'll only regret it. You have an inheritance coming to you and the devil wants to take it away so you'll be miserable with him. God is good and longs to see you through this life and on to the next. Don't let the devil tell you otherwise. We may lose much in this life as a consequence of sin, but our heavenly inheritance is sure if we put our trust in God. Esau sought to retrieve his temporal blessings, but could not do it; and many times we can't either. The consequence of his sin, the blessing of the birthright, was gone and he couldn't change his father's mind. Esau got so wrapped up in the blessing from Isaac that he forgot about the blessing from God.

"Afterwards, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears" (Hebrews 12:17, NIV).

"For he found not place for a change of mind in his father," says the ASV.

"For recalling the decision" is how the Berkeley version states it.

"To repair his error" is the language of the 20th Century version.

Is this text saying Esau sought to repent of his personal sin, but couldn't find repentance? No, he sought repentance for his temporal loss, and often this is our motive. The blessing of true repentance before God is available even when our temporal blessings are gone. The birthright, which he had so carelessly bartered, could not now be regained. "For one morsel of food," for a momentary gratification of appetite that had never been restrained, Esau sold his inheritance. When he saw his folly, it was too late to recover the blessing. Esau was not shut out from the privilege of seeking God's favor by repentance, but there was no way he could recover the birthright. His grief did not spring from conviction of sin; he did not desire to be reconciled to God. He sorrowed because of the results of his sin, not for the sin itself. Let's not fail the grace of God in this same way, by counting temporal blessing of more value than eternal salvation.

Power in the Blood

"For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 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. (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.'* And so terrifying was the sight *that* Moses said, *'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling'*") (Hebrews 12:18-21).

Can you imagine—the sight of God's presence is so awesome and powerful that Moses, a friend of God, was "exceedingly" scared. It reminds me of the

time I was sitting on my bed enjoying a lightning storm, until one bolt struck right outside my window. Then I hit the floor in fear. Think of all the power in this world—the armies, missiles, money, and intelligence. God has it all, and an infinity beyond. And now look at all the evil caused by the little bit of power men have. We can only imagine what it would be like if God was evil. Praise God that He is good. How do we know God is good? Read on:

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 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, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of* Abel” (Hebrews 12:22-24).

The blood of the sprinkling tells us that God is good. All the power God possesses, every ounce, has been placed in the blood of the sprinkling—not in a missile, gun or tank. We know God is good because instead of using His power to force, as we do, He used His power to sacrifice Himself for us. All the power of heaven was poured out in the sacrifice of God on Calvary’s cross. There is no army, no weapon, no power in heaven or on earth that can meet and defeat the power of the cross.

So come to the mount, to the city of the living God who died for you. Come to the heavenly Jerusalem (city of peace), to the church and to Jesus. Come to that “something better” that speaks of God’s powerful love for your soul. Don’t refuse His love for you. Instead, give your heart to God.

Consuming Fire

“See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more *shall we not escape* if we turn away from Him who *speaks* from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, ‘*Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven.*’ Now this, ‘*Yet once more,*’ indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God *is* a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:25-29).

We want God to be gracious. We want a merciful God. We want God to be love. But do we want Him to be a consuming fire? In a sense we do. From the earliest dawn of intelligence, we long for this kind of God— one who is fair as well as gracious. One who is just as well as merciful. The words of my children, “That’s not fair,” is the heart cry for a God of justice to set things right again. And He will—love must do that or be lost in its meaning and power. Sin and sinners will be consumed, not by a God who seeks vengeance like a man, but by a God who is fair to all mankind. If you don’t want heaven, if you despise God’s love, if you have so loved sin that to leave it would be torture to your soul, then God will not force you to let it go. With tears as hot as His love, God will give us over to our sin. It is the passion of His love that consumes the lost with their sin. Our heart cry will be answered. None, not even Satan himself, will fail to confess that “Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). In the end, all will confess that God is good, gracious, just and fair. All will confess that God is love.

Summary

God’s love, misunderstood but longed for, is unfolded in the person of Jesus Christ. Not only in mercy, but also in justice we find the love of God defined. When we look to Jesus on the cross dying for the sins of the world, we see God’s love in full display—both mercy and justice. And as we look diligently, we see that love consumes the bitter roots of selfishness in our own hearts, every sin and weight of evil. This involves a chastening process as these roots have taken so deep a hold that they seem to be part of our very being. But God lovingly perseveres to remove every bitter root so that we are not destroyed by the sin-consuming fire of His presence.