

International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
October 30, 2016

Lesson Text: Hebrews 12:1-13

Lesson Title: The Author and Finisher of Our Faith

Introduction

In the first 10 chapters of Hebrews, the author presents a strong case for understanding Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the types, shadows, prophecies and expectations of the Old Testament. He holds the Old Testament and its system of sacrifice and worship in high regard, but clearly presents the need to move away from the shadows to the substance. While Hebrews gives us one of the most exalted pictures of Christ anywhere in the Bible, the author's primary purpose was more than just magnifying the Lord. Once the author has established the fact everything centers on Jesus Christ, he exhorts his readers to respond and act in the light of that truth.

In Hebrews 12, the author exhorts believers to fix our eyes on Jesus Christ who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. The thrust of the opening verses in the chapter is a reminder our sin, our troubles, and our frustrations are nothing but life hindrances holding us back and impeding our spiritual progress. The young Jewish believers are called to look away from the past and fix their eyes on the Author and Finisher of our faith.

The Inspiration (Hebrews 12:1a)

Verse 1a

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses...”

The word “Wherefore” refers to “a conclusion of emphasis.” It refers not only to the thought which immediately precedes it, but includes the entire evidence of the epistle.

The “cloud of witnesses” are the faithful saints listed in Hebrews 11. “Cloud” is only mentioned here in the New Testament and means “a great mass of clouds.” The metaphor is suggestive of a vast arena surrounded by tier upon tier of seats, rising as a cloud. The author calls upon the young Hebrew believers to look back to those who demonstrated faithfulness in their life.

The word “witnesses” is the Greek word *martus*, from which we get our English word “martyr.” Many of the individuals in Hebrews 11 were martyrs in the faith. The author views these “witnesses” not as mere spectators, but rather

those who out of their own experience and out of the trials can testify to the keeping power of God. These “witnesses” are not looking down cheering us on as is commonly suggested. The text indicates we are to look to them as examples. We are not running the Christian race to please the “cloud of witnesses.” We look to them as examples of faithfulness.

The Instruction (Hebrews 12:1b-3)

Verse 1b

“...Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,”

The “cloud of witnesses” had a course to run, and they ran it well until the end. “Run” is the Greek word *trecho*, meaning “to spend one’s strength in running a prescribed course.” The “race” pictured here by the author is of a relay race. Those who ran their race have passed on to us the redemptive purpose of God which must be carried forward in our generation, at the end of which we, in turn, shall pass it on to others. This thought is in keeping with the theme of this epistle. Believers are not to revert. We are to press on.

To press on we are urged to “lay aside every weight...” Using the figure of an athletic contest, each believer is to “lay aside” or put off all hindrances to run efficiently. “Weight” means “mass, bulk, or burden.” This “weight” was often harmless and innocent, yet it hindered progress. A victorious runner refuses certain things in life to be swift and sleek. The phrase “lay aside every weight” also refers to an arrogant confidence that could ultimately hinder progress and victory. All of this “weight” or “bulky stuff” must be “laid aside” if steadfast courage is to be maintained.

“And the sin which doth so easily beset us” is difficult to interpret because the word “beset” occurs nowhere else in the New Testament. Some teach this besetting sin are the weights which drag us down. Others suggests it may be the sin of unbelief. This is a strong possibility because the burden of the writer in the preceding chapters of this epistle sets forth unbelief in contrast to faith. How easily unbelief can take our eyes off Jesus and result in spiritual defeat.

While it may be difficult to properly identify what “the sin” is, the message is not difficult. We are all susceptible to sin. The phrase suggests the easiness with which sin can entangle us.

“And let us run with patience the race that is set before us” conveys the thought the “race” is one of agony and struggle. The teaching is clear the “race set before us” demands all we have. Genuine biblical faith is not a momentary burst of emotion or an occasional “spiritual pick me up” a few times a year. It is a settled course of life which consistently carries us around the first lap, the

second, the third, and so on, until we one day cross the finish line. It is the disciplined life of faith empowered by the courage of God's grace that wins.

Verse 2-3

“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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

“Looking unto Jesus” means after a passing glance at the “cloud of witnesses” believers must focus on Jesus Christ. While we are to be mindful of the faithful saints who have run this race before us, we must remember Jesus Christ is the “author and finisher of our faith...” (Hebrews 12:2). Christ is the Pioneer and Originator of our faith as “author.” He is the chief leader and chief example of our faith. He is also the “finisher” or the One who carries our faith to its completion. If a composer dies while working on a masterpiece, his work is over but never finished. When Jesus died on the cross, His work was over, finished, and perfected (John 19:30).

In His personal participation in the race of redemption Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). Crucifixion was the most painful and shameful of deaths. But in Christ's crucifixion, the pain and shame exceeded any level of shame and pain ever experienced by man. Sinless and pure though He was, He became the very essence of sin, that in His person He might “endure the cross” and experience the full wrath of God against sin.

When He finished His redemptive work, “He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2) which was His rightful place of glorification. He did all His work at Calvary “for the joy that was set before Him” (Hebrews 12:2). This “joy” included the fact that through Christ's death on the cross He would bring many sons unto glory (Hebrews 2:10). It also included the day when His enemies would be made His footstool (Hebrews 10:13). But the main thought in this “joy” was Christ doing the Father's will and seeing sinners trust Him for salvation.

Because of all Christ accomplished on the cross, believers are urged to “consider him.” “Consider” is the Greek word *analogizomai*, which means “to think it over, ponder, examine completely and from all angles.” “Contradiction of sinners against himself” refers to the hostile treatment in both word and deed Jesus received from the world. This could possibly be a much-needed encouragement for these young Hebrew believers who were on the receiving end of verbal and physical abuse for their new-found faith. Thus, the warning, “lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” was given to encourage the readers

to not grow “weary” or fatigued and worn out which would result in “fainting” or collapsing in the race.

The Implications (Hebrews 12:4-11)

Verse 4

“Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”

The “cloud of witnesses” had stood face to face with the powers of evil during their time on earth. Although they were tempted to drop out of the race and not fulfill God’s purpose and plan, they remained faithful. The newly converted Hebrew believers to whom Hebrews is written “have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.” The idea of “resisted unto blood” carries the picture of troops lined up face to face for battle. Although these Hebrew Christians had suffered much already (Hebrews 10:32), none had paid with their lives or endured what the “witnesses” had endured. In other words, they had not yet been in the thick of it as had the “witnesses.” So, they must *glance* from time to time at the “witnesses” and *gaze* continually upon Jesus when suffering and discipline came.

Verse 5-6

“And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

This exhortation is from Proverbs 3:11-12, *“My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth.”* Both writers are explaining the “chastening of the Lord” and how the sufferings Christians go through are a part of the larger context of God’s dealings with His children. It seems some of the Hebrew believers had already “forgotten the exhortation” in Proverbs 3:11-12 concerning God’s dealing with His children. It is obvious many professing Christians have “forgotten” the biblical teaching on faith and God’s chastening of His children.

The key word in Hebrews 12:5-11 is the word “chastening” (v.5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11). The Greek word is *paideia* and was used in the Greek world in reference to the upbringing and handling of a minor child. It included all parts of raising a child such as discipline, teaching, and correction. The Christian life of faith is a race but it is also a relationship. God is our Father and we are His “children.” God uses discipline, chastisement, and suffering as a means of correcting His “children” which helps us to mature, avoid sin, and grow in grace.

“Despise not” means “do not take it lightly.” We should not be surprised our loving Father allows, suffering, chastisement and hardships to come our way as believers. In fact, God orchestrates suffering and hard times to increase our faith and help us to grow.

There are also times when the “chastening of the Lord” is a result of our sin. When we are “rebuked of him” because of our sin, we are not to “faint.” “Rebuked” means “convicted and brought to light.” When God brings to light our sin or our spiritual need through His “chastening” we are not to “faint,” despair or go back. We should recognize God is in control of all things, and He uses even our discipline and chastisement for our spiritual growth.

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth” is a much-needed reminder. We cannot prove this to anyone or even ourselves. We must believe it by faith. God intentionally causes pain in our lives through the form of chastening and discipline. Why? He loves us. The Greek word for “loveth” is *agapao*, God’s kind of love. There is no reason to forget, faint, or despise what God is doing in your life because he “loves” you.

“Scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” refers to “flogging with a whip.” It was a severe and painful way to discipline and correct. The word is used here figuratively of God chastening His children. The point is proper training must include correction of faulty behavior. When the need of discipline and correction is great in our lives God’s punishment will be equal to the need.

“Whom he receiveth” refers to “those who have placed their faith in Christ.” Only those who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ are His children. We are disciplined because we are His children.

Verse 7

“If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?”

“If” means “since.” Since the Hebrew believers were being disciplined they needed to know it was evidence they truly belonged to God. “God dealeth with you as son” is a reminder God deals differently with His children than the world. Judgment upon the wicked honors God’s law. His righteous government which His chastening hand on His children shows His love.

“Chastening” while from the same root word “chastening” in verse 5, is used in a slightly different way in verse 7. In verse 5 it referred primarily to the *process of disciplining*. In verse 7, it refers to the *end or object in view*. It always helps to see the result in discipline if possible.

The writer again illustrates his point from the parental human relationship when he asked, “for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” This is an interesting question. Any “son” or child who has a “father” who does not discipline is a child unloved. It is viewed as intellectual and open minded today to not discipline children, but it is proof of the absence of love. To allow your children to go undisciplined is to prove you do not care about their physical or eternal condition. When a “father” does not discipline his child, he reveals something significant about his character. He reveals his lack of love, maturity, and integrity.

Verse 8

“But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”

A “bastard” is “one born out of wedlock who has no legal father.” In other words, a “bastard” is one who has no one willing to take responsibility for their training and discipline. To the immature and politically correct people this may seem like a happy arrangement. But the end results are tragic.

Any person who claims to be a Christian yet continues to practice sin, never reads their Bible, prays, has the intervening hand of God to convict and correct them is not truly born again. They are “bastards.” They are people without a spiritual Father to nurture them, love them, and raise them.

Verse 9

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”

It is only the loved and disciplined child who respects his “father.” “Fathers of our flesh” is speaking of the male who is the head of the home and the one primarily responsible for discipline during the childhood years (Proverbs 13:24). Fathers who attempt to delegate that responsibility to someone else will nevertheless be ultimately held accountable by God. “Fathers” are responsible for discipline, not a village, not a school system, and not grandparents.

Only a “father” who fulfills his God-given role is worthy of “reverence.” Children will respect a “father” who lovingly, biblically, and faithfully disciplines them. The surest way for a “father” to lose, or never gain the respect of his children is to never correct or punish them. Why is it so many children have little or no respect for their “father?”

“Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live” conveys the thought if we respect our earthly fathers for their faithful and

loving discipline we should “much rather” or to a greater degree “be in subjection unto the Father of spirits.” The phrase “Father of spirits” contrasts with our earthly fathers. “Live” means we are sharing the life of God through His Son, proved by His loving discipline for us just as a child “lives” and shares the life of his earthly father proved by his loving discipline and correction.

Verse 10

“For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”

This verse contrasts the discipline of earthly parents with the Lord and His children. Earthly parents referred to as “they,” only “chastened us” for a “few days.” They did so “after their pleasure.” The words “after their pleasure” does not mean they enjoyed harsh discipline. The idea is they disciplined us as best they knew which was never perfect. That is part of the reason a parent’s discipline does not last an entire lifetime. However, “he,” the Lord, “for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” has perfect discipline which continues throughout our entire lives and results in being like Jesus.

God always disciplines in perfect measure with what is “profitable,” and His methods are always wise. His goal is to make us holy which is the basic characteristic of our heavenly Father (1 Peter 1:15-16).

Verse 11

“Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

Since we are human, “no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous.” All discipline, whether inflicted by our human fathers or by God, is unpleasant while it is in progress. The Bible does not teach we must enjoy the experience of discipline, only its outcome.

“Nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” It is only “afterward” the real fruits and benefits of suffering, discipline, and chastening are seen. The product produced is called “the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” “Peaceable” is a beautiful word in contrast to the harshness of the discipline or suffering experienced by the child of God. The “righteousness” produced by all the discipline and suffering of life is a right standing with God that could have never resulted had we avoided the suffering and discipline.

It is God’s work that enables the branches to bear more fruit (John 15:2). God’s discipline is always aimed at greater, more precious fruit.

“Those who have been exercised thereby” are those who have regarded and accepted God’s discipline in the right way. “Exercised” is our English word “gymnasium.” Once again the writer refers to an athletic metaphor. Those who have allowed chastening, correction, suffering and discipline to do its work will ultimately be fruitful.

Verse 12-13

“Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

“Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees” remind us of what happens when a runner gets tired or discouraged. The “hands which hang” and the “feeble knees” are sure signs of someone about to give up (Isaiah 35:1-4). We are to “lift” or strengthen each other in this Christian race (Hebrews 10:25).

“And make straight paths for your feet” (Hebrews 12:13) refers to staying in your own lane in the race. When you get out of your lane, you not only disqualify yourself but often interfere with other runners. A runner never intentionally gets out of his lane; he only does so when he is distracted or careless, when he loses his concentration on the goal, or when fatigue robs him of the will to win.

If you and I lose heart or get out of our lane, it will affect the “lame” or the weak, limping Christians. We must not hurt our weaker brothers in the faith (Romans 14). God wants the “lame” to “be healed” or, to be saved and become like Christ.

Conclusion

Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is our Leader in the Christian race. He leads by example in His endurance, suffering, and death on the cross. He leads as our loving Father who allows us to face life’s difficulties. He leads by His loving discipline which results in our spiritual growth and maturity.

Are there any weights hindering you today? What about besetting sins? In what way is God disciplining you? Are you responding?

Amen.