

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 198

Hebrews 12

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Teacher: Dr. Michael S. Heiser (MH)

Host: Trey Stricklin (TS)

Hebrews 12 follows on the heels of the “hall of faith” in Hebrews 11. That’s important because heeding that context (and that of the rest of the book of Hebrews) will prevent us from taking certain things in Hebrews 12 out of context. The writer doesn’t follow the “hall of faith” with a treatise on how moral imperfection (sin) will result in keeping someone out of the kingdom of God. And yet many readers lapse into that thinking in this chapter. In this episode we read Hebrews 12 in light of Hebrews 11—and other preceding passages in the book—to reaffirm that salvation is about something done for us, not something we do, and about the obedience of Jesus, not our own obedience.

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 198: Hebrews chapter 12. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. How're you doing?

MH: Pretty good. Another busy week, but doing fine.

TS: Well, on our last show, Mike, we had a little side-bet, I guess (or whatever you want to call it) about you going over 50-and-a-half times saying the word "faith." I'm happy to report (thanks to Brenda) that you went way over. I counted 26 "faiths" in the chapter after we said that, so I figured it would go way over. But I think went what—65 or 70 eventually?

MH: I don't know what her count was. It was pretty high, though.

TS: Yeah, so it looks like I win that. I guess we won't do anything for it. [laughter] But for those folks out there wondering.

MH: I don't know what you got for that...

TS: Didn't want to take time to count it, but go ahead and say you went way over.

MH: Yeah, it was a lot. It was a lot.

TS: I'll take a win wherever I can get it, since I didn't win Fantasy Football.

MH: Pretty desperate, but I understand.

TS: [laughs] Mike, we want to talk about one of your speaking engagements coming up in Spokane, Washington, that we're doing. It's a Naked Bible Seminar—three days with you. You can purchase tickets on www.drmsb.com. Go to the Events page and you'll see "Spokane" there. You can buy tickets; it's \$45 a ticket. Can you give us an idea of what you're going to be covering during those three days?

MH: For people who are on the website, on the right-hand side there's a calendar. You can click on the Spokane Event (March 2-4). Like Trey said, if you get to that page, you can register. But there's also a schedule there. The first day is going to be really focused on how I look at scripture. The theme is whether we can we trust our Bible, and that sort of thing. My answer is, "Yeah, we can." But the Bible becomes a big question mark for a lot of people—even believers, even people within the Church. Largely, the problem isn't the Bible. The problem is how we're taught to think about the Bible, which has some serious flaws in it. We're taught in a very simplistic way, and we wind up making scripture vulnerable in all sorts of ways.

So we'll spend the first day talking about that kind of stuff. The second day is going to be divine council stuff—Divine Council Worldview, Two Powers in heaven, that sort of thing. The third day is going to take the material of the second day (divine council stuff) and basically relate that to the gospel, to the Christian life, to Kingdom thinking, ministry thinking, how we should now live. What should we be doing in response to that material? It'll cover the gamut—those three days. We're hoping... The church in Spokane that came up with this idea and really has promoted it is being pretty aggressive. I hear a lot from people, and it's legitimate, "My church doesn't teach this. I don't learn anything." Well, here you have a church in Spokane that has stepped up to the plate. I just think they should be supported. I'm hoping that we fill the place. It's not a huge church. I've been there and I've seen the facility. They have room for a few hundred people. I'm just hoping that this audience will fill the building as a show of support really for them and their effort to try to do something about providing not only their people with good content, but people in the area with good content. So let's stop complaining about it and do something about it! [laughs] I think that's the most blunt I can be. I'm just hoping that we really make it worth their while and that their effort is rewarded.

TS: Absolutely. We want to thank Rich Baker for organizing that. And then also, Mike, that event is on March 2-4.

MH: Yep, 2-4.

TS: We've got plenty of tickets on sale now, so please get your tickets.

MH: Head up to the website. The website is my home page: www.drmsb.com. Click on the event on the calendar and you'll get to where you need to go.

5:00 **TS:** All right, Mike. That will be a good event. I look forward to seeing everybody there. Mike, we're almost done with Hebrews. We're on chapter 12 here. Of course, we'll finish up next week with chapter 13.

MH: Yeah, we're at the tail end here. Seems like it went fast. Maybe that's because we hit all the Melchizedek stuff earlier. [laughing] But, yeah, we're here at the end—Hebrews chapter 12. Hebrews 13 is a fairly short chapter. This one we're at has a little bit of length. So we're right on the heels of finishing up, and then I'm sure we'll get to talk a little bit about what we're going to be doing afterwards. But let's just jump into the chapter here.

Hebrews 12 (here's a profound observation) follows on Hebrews 11! Hebrews 11 is the so-called Hall of Faith. I point out something so obvious because it actually *is* important for reading this chapter and understanding it. It's one of those obvious sorts of things that flies right out the window, or right out of people's heads, when they get to chapter 12. Why bring it up? Well, we need to read Hebrews 12 in light of Hebrews 11. If we do that, it's going to prevent us from taking certain things in Hebrews 12 out of context. The writer doesn't follow the Hall of Faith (chapter 11) with a treatise, then, on how moral imperfection (i.e., sin) will result in keeping someone out of the kingdom of God. He doesn't talk about faith in Hebrews 11 umpteen times and then transition in chapter 12 into saying things like, "Don't commit this sin" or "Don't do that sin too often or you're going to lose your salvation (or you're not going to be saved, or you're an unbeliever)." Those things are contradictory. So we need to read Hebrews 12 in light of Hebrews 11. A lot of readers just sort of lapse into that thinking when they get to Hebrews 12. They do it in Hebrews 6, they do it in Hebrews 12. In this episode, we're going to read Hebrews 12 in light of Hebrews 11 and, of course, other things that have come before in the book. We're going to reaffirm in Hebrews 12 that salvation is about something done *for* us, not something we do. It's about the obedience of Jesus, not our obedience. We don't earn salvation. The message here is not going to be any different for Hebrews 12 than it was for Hebrews 11 and what it's been the whole time through the book.

With that in mind, the passage is going to turn on several things. There are going to be a few key elements in the chapter that we're going to need to think carefully about and then relate them not only to Hebrews 11 (the faith chapter) but also other things that we've already covered.

I'm going to jump in here and read the first two or three verses. Let's just start with the first two verses. I'm reading from the ESV again. The first word is

important. "Therefore..." He just tells you right there, "Because of Hebrews 11, therefore..." All this emphasis on faith.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

I'll stop there. Those are the first two verses. This "cloud of witnesses thing"... He's actually going to pick up on that thought (like who are the witnesses here?) a little bit later, so I'm going to reserve comment on that. I've sort of telegraphed it in earlier episodes. The cloud of witnesses are the believers who have gone on before us—the believers whose examples are in Hebrews 11—and also other members of God's family, which includes the members of the heavenly host. So I take this as a divine council reference. We'll get back to that language.

What I want to focus on here are a few other things. The passage is going to turn on several things. We hit one right away—right up front. He says:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely...

10:00

Now, that's the ESV. "Let us lay aside sin, which clings so closely." It makes it sound like just a generic sin-reference, like, "Hey, let's stop sinning. Let's not sin anymore. If we don't sin anymore, then we're going to be in heaven—we're going to be better off." If you just translate it generically like that, you run a bit of a risk with linking moral imperfection with loss of salvation, and then moral perfection with being secure in salvation. It has nothing to do with our performance. It has everything to do with the performance of Jesus. That's verse 2. But a lot of people get stuck already in verse 1. "I have to lay aside sin. I've got to get rid of sin, and then God's going to be happy with me."

Well, we have a problem right here because in the Greek text, there's a definite article. It's the word "the." There's a definite article before the word "sin," but it's not reflected in the ESV translation. We're going to quibble with the ESV in a few places here in this episode. The Greek definite article matters here: "the sin." The writer is talking about a specific sin which clings so closely. Think about the wording. "Let us lay aside the sin which clings so closely." The writer is telling his audience to do this. Are we supposed to read this now that everyone has one of those problem sins? Everyone has one of those—that sin which clings so closely. Is that the way we're supposed to read this—like everybody's got a different one

of these? That's the way this is preached. Trust me, I've heard sermons on this, and it's very easy for preachers to look out over the crowd and start listing off sins, knowing that he's going to hit some targets here as he goes through the grocery list. That's going to prompt people who are listening to the sermon to think about a specific behavior on their part that, "Oh, I've got to get rid of that." Or, "Oh, I've got to start doing that. If I don't do that and if I do this other thing, then God's going to be happy with me. Then I can feel secure about my salvation—because my behavior has improved." That is *not* accurate. That's *not* a good reading of this idea in this passage. It links your security with your behavior. That is contrary to the theme that we have covered in Hebrews that the writer has hammered on—has tried to beat into our heads all the way to this point. We just had 40 verses of "by faith," and now we are prone mentally to make it about behavior. We're not even out of the first verse and we've run into the problem already.

This phrasing, "Let us lay aside the sin which clings so closely"... King James has, "which does so easily beset us." That kind of thinking... You take that rendering and then make it about some individual behavior problem. It presumes the phrase sort of means, "the sin that trips you up on an individual basis with painful regularity." But what if the writer is warning his audience in a different way? What if the point of the "sin which clings so closely" is this: What if the point is he's talking about the sin that's a constant threat to all my readers? The sin that's a constant threat to obstruct us (in terms of the context) in our faith, in our believing. Because, after all, this is Hebrews 12:1. Therefore... In light of chapter 11 (all that faith stuff), we need to lay aside this sin. We need to stay away from it, get rid of it, shrug it off—this particular sin that everyone is threatened by, that's a consistent, regular obstacle, that's just a lingering threat to us—to all of us. And if you take that in context that way, then the sin that he's talking about has something to do with obstructing or ensnaring—harming—our faith.

The word here, "clings so closely," that's basically what it means. It means "to ensnare," "to obstruct," "to constrict." You can look it up in BDAG or some other lexicon. That's what you're going to get. It's this thing that's just sort of always in the air. The potential is great for this to get in the way or harm or obstruct our faith. It's not a specific point of behavior for each one of us that can vary broadly. What I'm going to suggest here is that it may be more coherent to argue that the sin he's talking about is actually unbelief. He's talked about that sin before—a lot. But here's a question... Rather than me just inserting that thought, here's a question: what's his solution? What's the writer's solution to this sin that he's talking about? Well, he follows that right there in verse 1. "Let us lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely. Here's what we should do instead.

Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him

endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

He doesn't say, "Well, let's lay aside every weight and the sin which clings so closely, and let's stop sinning!" Or, "And let us perform better." Basically, what he says is, "Don't give up." Don't lose faith. Look to Jesus. He's the example, not only of the "obedience of faith"... He obeyed God. And because he obeyed, then we have salvation. Salvation is about something that someone else (i.e., Jesus) does for us, not our own moral perfection. So looking unto Jesus as both the source (point of origin, security, basis) of salvation... Let's in an enduring way keep looking to that. If you parse the first two verses that way, then the problem comes into clearer focus. The problem is losing faith. That's what's just lingering in the air all the time, especially for the people he's writing to.

We've talked about this before. They're under persecution; they're always under threat. In the last chapter (and the episode before) we talked about that. They're losing their property, they're under persecution, all sorts of things are happening to them. He's going to talk here about, "You haven't yet struggled against sin to the point of shedding your blood." Now it's martyrdom... They're just having a rough time. So I think the context, both before and in this passage (and, of course, "before" meaning chapter 11 and even more remotely before that) is really about the problem of losing faith. That is, I think, the sin he's zeroing in on here—this lingering threat to ensnare us, to obstruct us. It's just always there. His solution to it is not correcting a specific point of behavior. His solution to the sin he's talking about is running with endurance—enduring and looking to Jesus. The solution, I think, helps clarify what the problem is.

Let's look at it another way. Ask yourself which of the above possibilities—that the sin he's talking about is some moral violation I'm prone to and somebody else can be prone to a different one... If what he's talking about is some specific moral violation, as opposed to the more general sin of unbelief, which of those two options makes more sense in light of verse 4? So let's jump in. We've read the first two verses. Let's read verse 3, but then pay attention especially to verse 4. He says, "endure the race, look to Jesus," and then in verse 3 it says (still talking about Jesus):

³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.

Again, he's just like, "You've got to keep believe. Keep enduring."

⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

Let me read the first four verses together, just to get the flow.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

³Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

20:00

The reference to the shedding of your blood... Basically, "In your struggle against sin, you've not yet resisted to the point of being martyred. How in the world does that make sense if the sin he's talking about is something like stealing or lying or being sexually immoral or not sharing the gospel or embezzling? Just put in any behavior. So in your struggle to not lie, you've not yet struggled so hard that your blood has been shed. Like, who's going to kill you for that? Is somebody going to come along and say, "Boy, that guy is really trying hard not to be a liar. I'm going to kill him!" [laughs] It just doesn't make any sense. "Oh, that guy is really trying hard not to commit adultery. I hate that guy; I'm going to kill him." It just doesn't make any sense. But if the struggle—if the sin, this lingering threat—has something to do with surrendering faith, that makes a whole lot more sense because your enemies... That's what they're trying to do to you. They're trying to get you to recant. They're trying to get you to not be a Christian. What they hate is the fact that you won't worship their god, or you won't worship their way, or you don't believe that salvation comes from any other source. That's what's making them angry, not the fact that you're struggling with not embezzling or something, or watching porn or whatever (like you could do that in the ancient world). It's not a specific point of behavior.

What the writer of Hebrews is trying to get them to endure about is to stay in the faith, because that is the threat to them. It's not any specific point of moral behavior. They are being pulled and pushed and persecuted because of something they believe. That something they believe is the cross event—salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is the thing that the pressure from outside wants to destroy—wants to do away with. What the writer is saying here is, "Look, I know this is hard, but in your struggle against sin..." (And by the way, the word "sin" here is the same as in verse 1 and it also has the definite article.) "In your struggle against this particular sin, you haven't yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. You haven't given your life yet. You haven't lost your life."

That kind of language only makes sense if the thing that's threatening you (this lingering threat) is being forced to recant your faith—to give up, to turn your back on the cross. That is what he's concerned about. It's what he's been concerned about in the entire book. But instead, typically when we get to Hebrews 12 (preachers have a real easy time with this), they'll make it about some point of moral behavior. I'm suggesting that is to misuse the passage. It's frankly to *abuse* the passage. It's frankly to manipulate the people listening to you. It's frankly to take the gospel (the fact that I have salvation, not because of anything I do or anything I abstain from, but because of what somebody else did—namely Jesus—and I'm putting my believing loyalty exclusively in that)... That is the focus. That is what the enemy wants to undermine and do away with, and that is what the writer of Hebrews wants his readers to stick to—to endure.

The writer's comment about being under threat of death from some opposing force doesn't make much sense for anything else. It makes a lot of sense if he's talking about the pressure to recant faith. So I would suggest to you again that what he's talking about here—the sin that is his focus here in chapter 12—is quitting. It's quitting the faith. It's recanting. It's the sin of unbelief. It's the sin of turning their back against the gospel—becoming apostate, leaving the faith (however we want to put it).

I'm sure somebody out there is going to say, "Well, Mike (or whoever you were that wrote Hebrews), if God isn't punishing us with the threat of martyrdom for doing a specific sin, then why are we suffering?" The answer to that... Well, the writer does answer that. He does answer that. Let's just read a few more verses. I'll go back to verse 3.

25:00

³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. ⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

He's going to quote from the Old Testament.

**"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.**

**⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."**

"Son" can be translated "child," as well—both male and female. Back to the question: "We're under the threat of death and you're saying the problem that we're struggling against is not becoming apostates and clinging to our faith. It

would make more sense if God was bringing us through this kind of threat because he hated something we're doing." I would suggest that, no, that doesn't make more sense. What the writer is really getting at (and what I'm going to say) is going to hinge on a few things—how you (the listener) process a few things. Here's three of them.

1. You have to understand that chastening (trials, suffering) is not always or only due to sin. It just isn't. Job is the most obvious example. He was blameless, but he suffered like nobody's business. Better, I would say, is the passage in James 1:1-4. James and Hebrews are part of what we call the General Epistles, written broadly to believers (and likely Jewish believers) scattered in the Diaspora. Here's what James writes:

**James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.**

²Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

To process what's going on here in the first six verses of Hebrews 12, we need to remember that suffering and trials—even a trial like the threat of martyrdom—isn't dished out by God because he's angry. Sure, you could be chastened because of some sin you're doing. You could also be under threat—under chastening or just suffering (let's use the most generic term here: "suffering")... That could also be the case for other reasons. We'll get to what some of those other reasons might be. James has already hinted at it, but the writer of Hebrews is going to get into the language himself, as well. So we shouldn't interpret hardship and suffering as "God is hammering me because I have this sin problem." That might be in our lives (we could all probably point to those things), but it doesn't have to be. That's not the only way to process this kind of thing.

2. We need to understand that there is such a thing in New Testament theology as "the obedience of faith." Paul talks about this in Romans 1:5. He actually mentions this twice. I'll read both passages.

⁵through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations...

And then Romans 16:26:

²⁶ but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith...

The obedience of faith is believing the gospel. It's choosing to follow the true God and staying put with that decision. It's not a work that earns merit. The obedience of faith is believing the gospel and sticking with it. It's doing what God wants you to do in response to the whole salvation issue. God doesn't ask you to work—to do lots of works or abstain from bad works—so that at the end of the day, the scales tip in your favor and you merit salvation. "You've earned it; good job." God doesn't ask you to do that. He asks you to believe in something Jesus did for you. If you believe that, that's the obedience of faith.

30:00

3. This comes from something in verse 15. We're going to have to improve upon a point of translation in verse 15 that has something to do with all of this. If I can just telegraph it a little bit... The way the ESV puts it, it's going to sound like the writer is afraid of people... The phrase he uses is "obtaining the grace of God," which really sounds odd. (Frankly, it's a contradiction.) That is not what the text really says. We'll get to that point anyway.

So back to verses 3-6. He's getting after them: don't quit. "Look unto Jesus" (verse 2). "Consider Jesus" (verse 3)...

...who endured from sinners such hostility against himself...

Jesus was there before you. I know you're under persecution, but don't quit. Don't stop believing, don't grow weary, don't become fainthearted.

⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

Here's a thought: When God allowed these believers (or even any believers today) to suffer for their faith... There are lots of examples: Africa, churches in Egypt and elsewhere under the legitimate threat of martyrdom from Isis or whatever group who hates them for their faith. When God allows that, he's not allowing it because, "Oh, I looked down at your church and there's like two guys in there that just can't give up this sin, so I'm going to hammer you all." That is really a gross way to process this kind of threat. They're suffering because Jesus suffered. Jesus said, "Marvel not when men hate you for my name's sake."

This is going to happen. And the writer in Hebrews is addressing people who are in that situation. It's illegitimate for us to come to the letter 2000 years later and start inserting specific points of behavior. Let's try to keep it in its context. He's concerned that they're going to be pressured to the point where they surrender their faith. It's a lingering problem. It's an ever-present—clear and present—danger to them. And he says, "Look, you're God's children!"

**"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.**

**⁶For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives."**

He's talking to believers. He's not talking to unbelievers. Let's just keep reading. We'll stick with the point and add a few nuances here. Verse 7:

⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

Some thoughts. Obviously, believers are in view—God's children. He's not talking to people whose sins are resulting in the loss of salvation. Frankly, the writer never actually mentions the commission of sins in this passage. He never mentions that. He just mentions discipline.

Now here's a question for you: Did your parents only try to teach you lessons in response to rules you broke? Is that the only time you put your kids in a situation they don't like or that they need to endure? Do you only do that when they break rules? I would suggest to you that if you had decent parents (nobody's a perfect parent), sometimes they do things because you just need to learn something about life. It's not because you did anything bad. It's that you just need to learn something. "This is good for you. I know it's going to hurt, I know it's going to be irritating, I know it's going to put you in a grumpy mood. But you just need to learn this lesson." Maybe we should be reading this passage (again, since the writer never actually mentions a specific sin, other than the unbelief problem earlier—he never actually points out anything specific, like some moral violation) as something like this: "Folks, you're faced with life and death persecution now under the sovereignty of God. He is allowing this to happen to you to build you up." Notice verse 10:

he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

Verse 11. Let's just keep reading.

35:00

¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees...

Notice he doesn't say, "Therefore, improve your moral behavior. Therefore, abstain from X, Y, Z." No, he goes back to the language of endurance:

¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone...

By the way, there's another clue that the sin is connected to someone hating on them.

¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

Now, do we read, "and for the holiness that will certainly that will certainly certify that we're going to heaven?" Is that how we should read that last line? "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness that will certainly certify that you're going to heaven. You've earned it! Good job. High five." Is that how we're supposed to read that? That we're so holy God can't say we don't belong there? Is that what the writer wants them to do? "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness that when God sees it, he's just going to say, 'Look, this is a no-brainer. You're in.'" Is that really how we're supposed to read that? Well, I've heard it preached that way. That's a misunderstanding of the gospel. Maybe we should read the reference to holiness here in verse 14 (this is just a suggestion) in light of the reference to holiness two verses earlier in verse 10!

¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he [God] disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.

What does "share his holiness" mean? Does it mean to share God's living space—the aura of the spatial place where he is? Does it mean sharing his living space? God disciplines us so that we end up in heaven? Does it mean we share his character? God disciplines us so that we become more like him—or

specifically, more like Christ. To quote Hebrews 5:8, Christ "learned obedience through what he suffered." I would suggest that the holiness line here is about God's character. We won't have God's character—we won't be conformed to Christ—unless we believe.

So back to verse 14:

¹⁴ **Strive for peace with everyone...**

I just hate to keep rabbit-trailing here, but if we make the sin a specific moral behavior, "Good grief, I'm going to try not to cheat on my wife so that I have peace with everyone." Does that make any sense? It doesn't make *any* sense! If the problem, though, is that people hate you for what you believe, then it makes sense to be kind to your enemies and try to live peaceably among all men (as Paul said elsewhere). Live peaceably with all men, as you're able. That makes a whole lot more sense than some specific point of stopping doing some immoral thing or adding some moral thing to your life—this performance idea.

But anyway, back to verse 14:

¹⁴ **Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness [the character of Christ] without which no one will see the Lord.**

I'm suggesting to you that you can't have the character of Jesus—you can't have the holiness of Jesus—unless you are a believer, unless you are in Christ, unless you're a member of the family—the body of Christ.

Let's ask ourselves this question: How has Hebrews talked about and defined holiness earlier—elsewhere in the epistle? Hebrews 3:1... let's go back to ground we already covered. It comes into play here.

Therefore, holy brothers [and sisters], you who share in a heavenly calling...

Isn't that interesting? You're holy because you share in a heavenly calling.

40:00

...consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ²who was faithful to him who appointed him...

In other words, Jesus obeyed, and his obedience is the focus of our heavenly calling. Frankly, it's the only obedience God can count on! He can't count on your obedience! And salvation is not by works.

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ²who was faithful to him who appointed him...

Skip to verse 5 of Hebrews 3:

⁵Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we...

...eliminate a specific sin. If indeed, we spend X number of minutes in church a week or read our Bible enough or witness enough. Again, if indeed we perform better. That's not what it says! It says:

⁵Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, ⁶but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Who is our confidence and our hope in the book of Hebrews? How many episodes have we talked about this? Who is that? It's Jesus. Again, it has nothing to do with performance stuff. So let's try to not insert performance into Hebrews 12. Let's try not to do that.

My point here is we have to parse this holiness talk and the sin talk in light of what has preceded in the rest of the letter—all of that stuff we've been talking about for weeks now. The sin that the writer is worried about is the sin of turning your back on the gospel—becoming apostate. It is a lingering, ever-present danger in their circumstance. That's why he says what you should do instead is endure. And your example of endurance is Jesus. He walked this road before you ever got here. And you have to remember, if God allowed Jesus to suffer, even to the point of death—and he was sinless—he might be allowing *you* to suffer even to the point of death. Not because of any bad thing you've done, but so that your character becomes like his—so that you are conformed to the image of his son. That would make sense because you share in Christ's holiness. You are in him. Any holiness that you can talk about having is his, because holiness isn't based upon your moral batting average. It's based upon what Christ did.

¹Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus...

... who was faithful. In Hebrews 3 (that I just read there), the obedience of Jesus is the issue. The moral performance of Jesus is the issue. It's the only obedience,

the only performance, God can count on. He can't count on yours. But he does count on Jesus', and that's the one that matters. Because all through the book of Hebrews, he is point to him saying, "This is the basis of your salvation," because Jesus was not only God's son, he's not only your brother (Hebrews 2), he is the great high priest. In fact, he's the sacrifice! He sacrifices himself. All roads lead back to the cross event. This is the issue, not performance. So let's try to read Hebrews 12 in light of what has preceded.

If you remember back to the three things I said we need to process, here's number three. There's a point of translation that's going to show up here. Verse 15:

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¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; ¹⁶ that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷ For you know that afterward, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no chance to repent, though he sought it with tears.

The Esau issue is basically trading that which is eternal to get (if I can put it this way) relief in a temporary circumstance. They're under persecution and he's telling them, "Look, you've got to think about Esau. Esau took the easy path. He traded his birthright to 'relieve his suffering.' He was hungry. So short-sighted." He's saying, "Don't do that." Let's go back to verse 15:

¹⁵ See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;

Now we have a problem here. I can see someone listening to this saying, "Surely that kind of language has something to do with works mattering for salvation, and, therefore, our works being part of keeping our salvation." Nope. The ESV says, "See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God." But guess what? The Greek text doesn't have the words "to obtain" in it. The Greek text says, "See to it that no one fails from the grace of God." That no one falls away from the grace of God, or that no one forfeits the grace of God. You could translate the verb there several different ways. The point is that the words "to obtain" are not in the Greek text. When you put them in, it makes it sound like there's performance going on. "I've gotta work hard enough, work good enough, be more good than I am bad so I obtain, earn, merit, achieve the grace of God." All those thoughts are contrary to grace. We kind of know that, but when we see those words in this translation or other translations like it, it mars (and I would say undermines) the whole approach of faith. The Greek text says, "See to it that no one fails (or falls away from) the grace of God." Now, if you look at it that way, frankly, the whole thing just falls into place. It is not about obtaining or achieving

anything. It's about sticking with it. It's about not giving up the faith. It's about enduring. So back to verse 15 again, just to sort of get the feeling here:

See to it that no one falls away from the grace of God. (my translation)

Again, I've made that little adjustment there. "See to it that no one gives up."

See to it that no one [falls away from] the grace of God, so that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

If this root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, many become defiled. Commentators will say this refers back to the Moses episode with Miriam, *mara* ("bitterness") and all that kind of stuff. And it might. If you think about, there could be a connection point there about her attitude toward what God was doing—maybe. Again, I tend to think in the context here, though, that it's better related to falling away from the grace of God. "See to it that no one surrenders their faith." Because you can have someone that would think this way: "I had life pretty good until I became a Christian, and it sucks now. And I'm bitter. So I'm just going to chuck it all. I want to get these people off my back. I don't want to live under threat all the time. I don't want my property confiscated. I'm outta here." Again, that's not an unfamiliar thing today. In this context, that makes a lot of sense to talk about bitterness here.

See to it that no one [falls away from] the grace of God, so that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

Other believers around you hear you talking like that and see that you're doing that. It could be a real problem. They might follow you.

¹⁶**that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal.**

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He's not talking about performance. "Well, if I don't commit sexual immorality, then I'm in. That's easy. Check that box." No, he's talking about people giving up the faith and just living like the world. "I give up, so I'm going to do what I want now. I don't need to even worry about what God says about anything because I don't believe any of this stuff anymore." We all know people like this who have given up their faith and then because they're bitter, in response to this thing they're rejecting and spurning (i.e., salvation by faith), they sort of run the other direction and go off and do X, Y, or Z to sort of just prove a point. "I'm going to go enjoy myself now," like salvation by the grace of God was such a burden. Frankly, maybe it was a burden! Maybe because of the way they heard the gospel or heard it misarticulated, maybe it felt like a burden. The gospel—

something given to you freely—should be the last thing in your life that's a burden. But the way salvation gets talked about in church and the way it gets linked to performance... I know people personally that were... Just to be blunt, they were good souls. They were believers, they were sincere, they understood the gospel. And week after week after week after week of being bludgeoned by Christian talk that took sanctification... That's where the moral issues are concerned—sanctification—living a certain way because you love God and you're grateful that he saved you, because you want to be a good testimony to someone else, because you don't want to destroy your life and the lives of others. There's lots of reasons to live holy. Earning salvation isn't one of them! But that's how it gets preached. The two things get connected in the wrong way.

Living holy should be a response of gratitude and wanting to be useful to the Lord. It should be a response of gratitude for something given to you freely. It shouldn't be, "Okay, I've gotta keep remembering to do this or not do that so that God loves me now and so he loves me enough that when I die, I'll get to heaven." It is not that. Holiness is about a lot of things. Earning your ticket to heaven is not one of them, but that is the way... When those two things are preached in tandem and you don't take care to articulate their relationship correctly, they get blended in people's minds and salvation—the freest thing in the world—becomes an unbearable burden.

And that is what he's talking about here in Hebrews, in this chapter right here. He's afraid people are going to fall away from the grace of God. He's afraid that they're going to become bitter against it. And when they do—when they start talking about it like it's a burden—they're going to go off the deep end. Again, we all know people that this has happened to. It's just crushing. It's crushing to see this happen to somebody and to know why it's happening. It's because they can't mentally parse these things—the relationship between these two things in the right way. And the freest thing in the world becomes the most binding, crushing weight on them. When they quit, they just say, "I am going to go have some fun. I'm going to get rid of this burden and I'm going to please myself. I'm going to go out and do this, that, and the other thing."

That is what he's talking about. He's saying, "Don't act like that. Don't go off into immorality and this lawlessness. Like Esau, who... good grief! He sold his birthright for a single, stinking meal! All he cared about was the moment of gratification. All he cared about was having that need met. And he saw the obstacle to it—this whole birthright. That was his tool—his ticket—to get that thing that he wanted. "To get what I want, all I've got to do is trade in the gospel—all this theological mumbo-jumbo nonsense. Hey, if I just reject that, I can go off and..." This is what he's concerned about. He's not concerned that they behave in such a way that they don't earn their salvation. He's concerned about them rejecting the gospel and just going off the deep end because the gospel to them has become a burdensome thing. That is what scares the writer. Frankly, I get that. Because I've just seen that happen to people. People become

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bitter because it becomes a millstone around their neck. And it becomes a millstone instead of the light burden that Jesus talked about—"his yoke is light." Instead of that, it becomes a millstone around his neck, because people tie it. They tie a free thing to behavior. They make the free gospel about works. "Oh, you can have it for free, but to maintain it—to keep God positively predisposed to you—you've got to do this checklist, do it this many times, abstain from this, do..." Okay, that is Judaizing in its best form. In its worst form, I'd have other terms for it. That's what's freaking the writer of Hebrews out and what he doesn't want to see happen.

So it's important to see this kind of language in light of the rest of the stuff in the book. He doesn't want them to become... He doesn't want the whole thing to just sort of go to hell in a handbasket. He doesn't want it to burst into flames in front of his eyes. This community that he's trying to nurture through the letter—trying to get them through severe persecution, trying to get them to not give up—he doesn't want a domino effect here. That's what's scaring him.

Again, a lot of this goes back to Hebrews 6. If somebody abandons faith in the gospel after having understood it, honestly, as the writer has said before, there remains no sacrifice for sin. There is no other way. It's that serious. Esau's case... It's a decent illustration. In Esau's case, it was culturally irreversible. In other words, the right of the firstborn can only be given once and to one person. Isaac couldn't take it back, even after Esau regretted it. He couldn't take it back. Because then two people would have the same blessing, and you could only have one firstborn. You only have one firstborn blessing by definition. It was culturally irreversible. Here, the gospel is not quite the same, but it's still an effective illustration because its benefits aren't restricted to one person. The point being made is it's this serious.

So this whole thing about Hebrews 6, that if you have somebody who understands the gospel and believes it and then they just chuck it—they just turn from the faith and say, "I do not believe"—what else are they going to go to? There is no other way of salvation. It's just that severe, and that's why the writer says in Hebrews 6 that for people in this boat, it's nigh unto impossible to have this person come back. We talked about the impossibility language there, that it's not *totally* impossible. You can go back to listen to the Hebrews 6 podcast. But it's that big of a deal. The writer, frankly, just does not hold out too much optimism. Again, back in Hebrews 6 he doesn't shut the door entirely. There's just a crack there. And we're grateful for the crack! But he's saying it's just this serious.

Let's go back to verse 18. I don't want to rabbit-trail too long on that. The writer keeps going with Old Testament analogies or scenes. In verse 18, he says:

¹⁸ **For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest...**

These are Sinai images by the way (Exodus 19:18, 20:18, Deuteronomy 4:11 and 5:22). He's saying, "Look, lift up your drooping hand. Strengthen your weak knees. Keep going; keep enduring. Strive for peace with everybody. Try to get along, even though they hate you because of what you believe. Strive for peace with everyone and for the character of God. Have the character of Jesus, who was willing to suffer because of the glory that would come. This is what the writer of Hebrews wants them to do and how he wants them to respond. "See to it that nobody falls away from the grace of God"—becomes bitter and it infects everybody and then people just go off the deep end.

¹⁷ For you know that afterward...

For you know that afterward (after Esau did this) how it was basically impossible in his situation. It really was impossible to come back. And then he says:

¹⁸ For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest. ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.

Again, all that's Sinai language, too—the trumpet (the voice so loud as a trumpet), the listeners saying, "Please, make God stop talking because we just can't handle it." That's Exodus 19:16, 20:19, Deuteronomy 5, Deuteronomy 18. We don't need to go through all the passages. This is the Sinai scene. His point here is that you've not come to the Old Covenant. Verse 20:

²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said [*Moses said!*], "I tremble with fear."

Again, the point here isn't that when the people were commanded not to touch the mountain back at Sinai, that they just couldn't resist touching it. We don't read about people just going up there and touching it and dropping over dead in droves. That isn't the point of the wording here. When he says, "You haven't come to the old covenant situation, where you're just not able to do enough works or keep the commandments that bring salvation." That's not what he's saying. His point is about enduring. His point is not about them not being able to do enough. They just wanted it to stop.

You say, "How does that tie in with what's come to this point?" What he's going to do here is he's setting up another thought. He's setting up, "Look, you're under such duress and most of you are Jewish Christians. If you're not, you know what

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we're talking about here—this idea that they want you to recant your faith and come back to Judaism. They want you to apostasize from Christianity. But look, you're not being offered a Sinai covenant. This isn't like the old covenant, where you had this terrifying scene and you were put under a burden that if you got out of line, God was going to zap you. God was so frightening that you just wanted him to shut up." The writer of Hebrews is saying, "This isn't your situation. You know what your situation is? Verse 22... Instead of coming to the mountain and getting the you-know-what scared out of you, this is the God you're going to be related to. You have something so much better!" Verse 22:

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering...

That's kind of an interesting combination: Zion, heavenly Jerusalem, and angels. This is a bit of a rabbit-trail here, but it shows the non-literality on one hand, and how these terms really add up to the presence of God. You've come to God's own abode, with his council family. The point is that terms like Zion and Jerusalem can refer to non-terrestrial, non-literal, non-earthly realities. If you can only think about the Bible literally, you're going to be handicapped to understanding a lot of it. This is a good example. He's saying, "Look, this isn't like the old covenant that was going to make demands on you—that was fearful. You step out of line and you're going to get hammered, you're going to get zapped, you're going to die, you're going to be stoned. It's not like that.

²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering [a celebration], ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...

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This is what awaits you! What awaits you is life in the heavenly Zion—the heavenly Jerusalem—with angels, with the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. This is another divine council reference idea. He hit on some of this in Hebrews 2. "Enrolled" here is the term for "registered." It's the same word as when Joseph and Mary have to report for the census and all that—when she's pregnant with Jesus. It's the same thing. It's to be written down. It hearkens back to the Book of Life idea. We did a whole episode on that in the podcast. He's saying, "Your destiny—the covenantal relationship here that you have in Christ—is not a fearful one. It's so much better." He's using the contrast of this terrifying scene at Sinai with the heavenly realities of being a member of the family of God. He's using that to help them to not quit. He's saying, "You've got to take the long look. You have to endure this, because this is what's coming down the road: heavenly Zion, heavenly Jerusalem, innumerable angels in festal gathering. They're glad to see ya! They're rejoicing. They love it! They can't wait to see you."

²³ **and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven...**

They're registered there. Well, who are they? What's the assembly of the firstborn? The firstborn here isn't Jesus because the noun is plural. Other times in the book of Hebrews and other places, "firstborn" is a reference to Jesus. But it's plural here, and it's the same with the following participle: "those who are enrolled." It's plural. We're talking about believers here—people who have already gone on to glory. We're talking about the people in Hebrews 11 and lots of other people. He's picking up this council language. This is the "cloud of witnesses" from the very first verse. This is what's awaiting you.

I'm just going to keep going here and finish verse 23.

²³ **and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven,
and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made
perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant,**

It's not like the old one at Sinai—that's scary stuff.

²⁴ **and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that
speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.**

Look at the list in these couple verses. Here's what those who believe have to look forward to: living in the heavenly Zion (heavenly Jerusalem), innumerable angels (you live with them), being with God, those who are enrolled, the assembly of the firstborn, the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and Jesus himself. By the way, "the spirits of the righteous made perfect" is not angels. They've already been listed ("the innumerable angels"). This follows on the heels of those who are enrolled in heaven. This is believers who have made the journey before. It's redeemed souls. And by the way, "spirits of the righteous *made* perfect?" It's passive in Greek! In other words, they're righteous because something was done to them, not because they performed well. They're not perfected by their own merit. You can drill down in the text in all sorts of ways to make the same point. This is what awaits; this is why he wants them to take the long look. This is why you need to endure. Because, frankly, if you reject all this, the only people who we're going to find in heaven are believers. We're not going to find that you're here because you've achieved it because of your moral performance. And we're not going to find unbelievers, either. We're going to find believers.

In Lane's commentary in the Word Biblical set, he quotes B.F. Westcott here. I like the Westcott quote, but Westcott, of course, gets demonized by King James only people. But Westcott has a really nice thing to say here. Lane says:

What is striking, as Westcott already noted, is that here angels and the people of God are “no longer separated as at Sinai...

Remember the scene at Sinai, where the angels bear witness to the law as it's given? If you've read *Unseen Realm*, this is familiar to you.

...angels and the people of God are “no longer separated as at Sinai, by signs of great terror, but united in one vast assembly” ...

Lane goes on after he quotes Westcott there to say this:

Lécuyer has shown that the entire formulation in v 23a [verses 23-24] is rooted in the description of Israel in the Pentateuch. The Israelites are designated the ἐκκλησία, “congregation,” in Deut 4:10; 18:16 LXX (cf. Acts 7:38), while the occasion when God addressed the people at Sinai is called ἡμέρα ἐκκλησίας, “the day of the gathering,” in Deut 4:10; 9:10; 18:16 LXX. The title πρωτότοκοι, “firstborn,” was given to the Israelites when God brought them out of Egypt in order to lead them to Sinai (Exod 4:22–23 LXX cf. Jer 31:9; Sir 36:11 LXX). Moreover, their names were written in the heavenly register (Exod 32:32–33 LXX; cf. Ps 69:29; Isa 4:3; Dan 12:1 LXX)...

“Firstborn” in the plural is an apocalyptic title applied to the redeemed community (e.g., Jub. 2:20; 4 Ezra 6:58) [Second Temple Jewish texts]... The fixed metaphor of a heavenly book or register into which the names of people are inscribed or blotted out is rooted in the OT (Exod 32:33; Ps 68[MT 69]:29; Isa 44:13; Dan 12:1 LXX)

Now, we know this because we did a whole episode on this.

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...rooted in the OT and is common in apocalyptic literature (e.g. *Jub.* 2:20; *1 Enoch* 47:3–4; 104:1; 108:3) and in the NT (Luke 10:20; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12)... In v 23b the expression πνεύμασι δικαίων, “the spirits of righteous persons,” refers to those who have died (BAGD 810) but who now inhabit the heavenly city that is the goal of the pilgrimage of godly men and women under both covenants (11:10, 13–16; 13:14).

This is where everybody *wants* to wind up.

The choice of this designation for those righteous persons who have died and who now enjoy the divine presence is consistent with the writer’s use of the old

biblical expression ὁ πατήρ τῶν πνευμάτων, “the Father of spirits,” in 12:9 (cf. Num 16:22; 27:16 LXX). That description contemplates God in his character as the one to whom the heavenly realm is subject. The formulation in v 23b has a distant parallel in *1 Enoch* 39:4–8, which speaks of the dwelling of the righteous in the heavenly world together with the righteous angels under the protection of “the Lord of spirits.”

So he has this language here: “Father of spirits,” so on and so forth—all of these phrases. And even the whole concept about us living in the heavenly house of God—Zion (the mountain) and Jerusalem (the city). You’ve innumerable angels, God himself, Jesus, the spirits of the righteous made perfect that are enrolled in heaven. He’s saying all of that is going to be something that is familiar to them, both from the Old Testament and Second Temple Period Jewish literature. Again, if you’ve read *Unseen Realm*, the whole divine council thing... If you haven’t, you can go back and listen to the episode on Hebrews 2, where Jesus introduces us to God and God to us “in the congregation”—in the council! So he’s saying, “Look, this isn’t like Sinai.” [laughs] Not only is this not the scary place and the scary scene where people say, “Oh, good grief! We don’t want to be anywhere near this! Make God stop!” He’s saying, “Look, what you have to look forward to... you’re not going to have that reaction.” (Let’s get out of here! Make it stop!) “You’re never going to want it to end. It’s going to be everything that you can possibly conceive and so much more.” He’s trying to use some of these phrases and images that they are going to know from Old Testament passages that are not scary ones, but wonderful ones, and then also the Second Temple stuff. You’re going to be part of God’s family. What more could he say? Verse 25:

²⁵ **See that you do not refuse him who is speaking.**

Now he’s going to say, “Listen to God!” Listen to God.

For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven. ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”

In other words, God is telling you how to be saved—how to be part of his family. If people didn’t listen to him in the old covenant, there was a price to pay. The price to pay now is you’re going to lose it all. God is telling you how to be saved—what the basis for your salvation is. It’s not something you do, but something done for you by the mediator of the new covenant, who is Jesus. So listen! He’s warning you not to turn away or to turn to something else. There’s not only no other option, but look at what you’re going to miss. Look at what you’re going to give up. Verse 27:

“Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.”²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

It doesn't say, "Let us work hard" or "Let us be more perfect." No, "Let us be grateful."

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The first shaking of the earth (the Sinai language there—this consuming fire imagery is going to make them think about Sinai), as awesome as that was, it just proves that the earth (the old covenant) was impermanent. It didn't remain. It didn't work. It didn't stick. Israel did apostasize. We now, though, have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. In other words, there's nothing that's going to come after this that's better. See, in the Sinai situation, something did come after it that was better and set it aside—made it secondary, made it obsolete. As awesome as it was, as fearsome as it was—all the things that it was... As awesome as it was, it was obsolete. It could be replaced. We have a kingdom that cannot be shaken. It's permanent.

Let us come to God, then, with acceptable worship. Believe what he tells you! Believe that what he tells you will grant you access to his family; believe in what that is. It's Jesus. Believe that what he tells you will grant you access, and then avail yourself of it. In other words, believe the gospel. The warning still applies. God will judge those who reject the permanent salvation he offers. Again, if you reject this kingdom, there's nothing that's going to come later that's going to make this one obsolete. There won't be a better deal. This is the end of the road. Only one more time is God going to shake the earth and also the heavens. God is going to have his way one more time, and there's not going to be anything else that follows it. So if you reject *that*—if you reject the permanent salvation, the permanent kingdom, instead of being grateful for it and accepting it and taking it and believing it... If you reject the permanent salvation he offers, there's going to be a price to pay. And he is a consuming fire. There is no other way. There is no other chance.

Again, he's using this language to convey seriousness, to convey how much better they have it. Why? Because he doesn't want them to fall away from the grace of God. It's what scares him. He doesn't want them to succumb to the threat—the specific sin that is just always hanging over their heads. Namely, succumbing to the temptation—sinning in the sense of rejecting the gospel. That's the thing that he wants avoided at all costs. Again, that is the focus of

Hebrews 12, and that is entirely consistent with Hebrews 11 and the rest of the book.

TS: Mike, going back to verse 8: "Let us offer to God acceptable worship." Sum that up in 5 sentences.

MH: I think it's about response. "Acceptable worship" is to give God the credit (assign to him the worth) that he deserves. The credit here is providing a means of permanent salvation—providing the means to secure it all. This is back to Hebrews 10, where Jesus and God (the second and first person of the Trinity) have that conversation about, "Okay, if we're going to do this, you have to go there and I've prepared you a body." Recognizing all of that and worshiping God because of it. Giving God all the credit and resting in what he has done. That is what God wants in return.

TS: All right, there you go. That sounds good. One more chapter to go! Don't forget, people, go get your tickets at www.drmsb.com. Look for the Spokane event and get your tickets for the March 2-4 Naked Bible Seminar with Dr. Michael S. Heiser. And Mike, do you have anything else you'd like to add?

MH: No. Again, I'd just encourage people to come. It'll really bless the people that have put an effort in to organize everything and that really want it to be a good event.

TS: Okay. With that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.