

Hebrews

Chapter 12

Jesus, Founder and Perfecter of Our 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, 2 looking 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.

12:1 *since we are surrounded by so a cloud of witnesses.* The imagery suggests an athletic contest in a great amphitheater. The witnesses are the heroes of the past who have just been mentioned (ch. 11). They are not spectators but inspiring examples. The Greek word translated “witnesses” is the origin of the English word “martyr” and means “testifiers, witnesses.” They bear testimony to the power of faith and to God’s faithfulness. (CSB)

The many saints (ch 11) show that we are not alone in the struggle to confess Christ. Like a cloud, the saints’ examples are visible, though we cannot touch those who went before us. Cf Mt 17:1–5. *witnesses*. Gk *martys*, from which “martyr” comes. God commended those who bore witness to their faith, and they are examples of right faith and good works. (TLSB)

Like a massive cloud those OT heroes of faith surround the readers, giving vivid example of the endurance and eventual triumph of faith. “Don’t give up!” those heroes would shout from the pages of Holy Scripture, “Keep on running? You’re on the right track!” (PBC)

The phrase *kai hēmei* is emphatic: “We, too, on our part.” It places us beside all the glorious believers mentioned in chapter 11. Our faith, our strength, our conflict, and our crown is the same as theirs. Their past life still speaks to us about what faith really is. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The verbal adjective *heuperistato* does not occur elsewhere in Greek literature, and the exact meaning is uncertain. The most likely meaning is “easily ensnaring,” but “dangerous” is also possible. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The “great cloud of witnesses” refers to the many great persons of faith enumerated in chapter eleven: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets. You may wish to cite a Biblical story illustrating how one or more of these persons fixed their eyes on the Lord. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The first three words of this verse range us along side of the OT believers mentioned in chapter 11. Even the believers in the OT are a countless host. They are witnesses in the sense that they are examples to us of faith and endurance. They surround us. God has placed them all about us in our thinking to encourage us. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

lay aside..hinders – Paul is using the metaphor of a runner. Runners must put off every encumbrance. *kai* is plainly expegetical. Illustration becomes application. *euperistaton* occurs only here in NT. It is variously rendered “which so easily besets us, which clings so closely, which holds on to us so tightly, which we easily fall into, that so readily entangles our feet.” Don’t limit this to besetting sin. It denotes the flesh, the old Adam. Read Romans 7. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

Believers here still have sin clinging closely. Though justified, we are also sinners until we reach heaven. (TLSB)

A runner in a race naturally wants to carry no excess weight and tries hard to avoid obstacles that would trip him. Sin will hamper us in the race of life unless we confess it and resist it. Giving in to sin will make us stumble. The present subjunctive of *trevev* implies that the readers have been running and still are now. It may be translated “let us keep on running.” Perseverance (*hupomonē*) connotes holding out under a severe strain. The runners are not to let down under the strain, to slow up, or even to stop for any reason. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

run with endurance. See Ac 20:24; 1Co 9:24–26; Gal 2:2; 5:7; Php 2:16; 2Ti 4:7. The Christian life is pictured as a long-distance race rather than a short sprint. Some Hebrew Christians were tempted to drop out of the contest because of persecution. (CSB)

The Christian life, as a long-distance race, demands staying on the path and finishing. Cf 2Tm 4:7. Luther: “Therefore sin remains in the spiritual man for the exercise of grace, for the humbling of pride, for the repression of presumptuousness.... Only to those who manfully struggle and fight against their faults, invoking the grace of God, does God not impute sin. Therefore he who comes to confession should not think that he is laying down his burden so that he may lead a quiet life, but he should know that by putting down his burden he fights as a soldier of God and thus takes on another burden for God in opposition to the devil and to his own personal faults” (AE 25:339). (TLSB)

Running a race is strenuous work. The writer calls it *agona* which denotes strenuous conflict. We are told that it is laid before us. God has placed a mighty host around us and has laid the strenuous race before us. God encourages Christians through their mutual and reciprocal encouragement. On this verse Guthrie says: “These witness bear witness to the faithfulness of God in sustaining the.” Bengel identifies sin here with unbelief. Lenski: “their past life and their death still speak to us about what faith really is.” Bruce: “it is not so much they who look at us as we look to them – for encouragement.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

“Don’t give up!” those heroes would shout from the pages of Holy Scriptures, “Keep on running! You’re on the right track!” (PBC)

12:2 *looking to Jesus.* Just as a runner concentrates on the finish line, we should concentrate on Jesus, the goal and objective of our faith (Php 3:13–14). (CSB)

We do this by looking exclusively to Jesus. The word means to rivet one’s attention on one person or thing. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

The participle *aforōnte* introduces the motive for running with unfaltering perseverance. It may be translated “ever looking away (durative present) to the author and perfecter of our faith.” Along the way, we may see many things that could dishearten us or even bring us to a halt. But by always fixing our eyes on Jesus, our speed will increase and our stamina will grow. Christ is the source of our faith, and he sustains it through the Word and Sacraments, and leads us to the heavenly goal of our faith. All along the way he is the object of our faith. Rom 1:17 says, “In the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last” (NIV; NIV note: “from faith to faith”; RSV: “through faith for faith”). The faith was defined in 11:1, so it is specific: “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The competition in the race is not between believers. Rather, each believer struggles against his or her sinful nature and against the snares of sin met along the course. In addition, the believer struggles to pursue by faith the things hoped for, which are not seen. There is a competition between the allure of the visible things of this world, and the blessings of Christ and riches of heaven which are perceived only by faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

The author uses the present tense in the Greek to remind us to keep fixing our eyes on Jesus. (PBC)

founder. Jesus opened the way to salvation, and His new covenant will never be superseded. He creates our faith through the Gospel and Sacraments, and His Spirit brings us to the consummation of our salvation. (TLSB)

Westcott notes that Chrysostom said of the word *archagon*: “He Himself placed faith in us. He Himself gave the power.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

He’s the one who authors, continues and brings our faith to perfection in heaven. From A to Z He is both the object and the cause of our faith, giving us something to believe and the faith to do so. (PBC)

perfecter of our faith. Our faith, which has its beginning in him, is also completed in him; he is both the start and the end of the race. He is also the supreme witness who has already run the race and overcome. (CSB)

Beck renders it: “who gives us our faith from start to finish.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

joy set before him. His accomplishing our eternal redemption and his glorification at the Father’s “right hand” (see note on 1:3; cf. Isa 53:10–12). (CSB)

The joy of bringing others to heavenly glory by way of the cross. (TLSB)

endured the cross. See Php 2:5–8. (CSB)

despising the shame. As with Christ, the humiliation of our present suffering for the gospel’s sake is far outweighed by the prospect of future glory (see 11:26; Mt 5:10–12; Ro 8:18; 2Co 4:17; 1Pe 4:13; 5:1, 10). (CSB)

Christ was not afraid to redeem us, despite the humiliation He experienced. (TLSB)

Guthrie remarks: “An attitude which does not ignore the shame, but holds it to be of no consequence in view of the joy.” Bruce: “This disgrace Jesus disregarded, as something not worthy to be taken into account when it was a question of His obedience to the will of God.” (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

seated at the right hand of the throne of God – The point here is that His suffering came to an end, He was victorious and now reigns forever. That should hearten us in our daily battles with sin as we run the race. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

Christ, the object of our faith, is our role model since he has already finished the race. He is the one “who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” The “joy set before him” is the glorification that followed his sufferings, his kingship over all believers, and the joy of redeeming fallen humanity. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

12:1–2 The Christian life is an endurance race, run with remembrance of the saints who have already finished. But most of all, we look to Jesus and His cross. In Him, our race is already won. • Lord Jesus, save me from my sin, which clings so closely, and give me endurance to do Your will. Amen. (TLSB)

Do Not Grow Weary

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? “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.” 7 It 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? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. 9 Besides 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? 10 For 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. 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, 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, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. 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.

12:3 *Consider him.* He suffered infinitely more than any of his disciples is asked to suffer—a great encouragement for us when we are weary and tempted to become discouraged. (CSB)

We are to look Him over well and check Him from all sides. When feet fell like lead and we think we can't run another step, when hearts are as heavy as our legs and souls are ready to give up, then it's time to consider Jesus. (PBC)

sinners. Leaders and crowds in Jerusalem who opposed Jesus. (TLSB)

not grow weary. See Isa 40:28–31. (CSB)

From Him comes not only an example of how to run, but power for faith to pick up the pace and lengthen the stride on the track to heaven. (PBC)

It is a picture of an athlete relaxing before his goal is reached. That is a pitiful sight. We dare not give up. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

12:4 *not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* Though they had suffered persecution and loss of possessions (10:32–34), they had not had to die for the faith. (CSB)

Though they had suffered (10:33), they had not yet died for confessing Christ. This may refer to persecution under Emperor Nero. (TLSB)

The inspired writer here adds another thought to his appeal, namely, that his readers have by no means tasted the worst form of persecution yet: Not yet unto blood have you resisted, striving against sin. The

Hebrew Christians of Judea were indeed suffering to some extent, both by reason of their isolation from others and by reason of the scorn which was heaped upon them. The fact that they were striving against sin in every form, especially against that of unbelief in Christ Jesus the Messiah, brought them many enemies. But the persecution had not yet reached the point that a great many of them had suffered death in the cause of Christ, the church in Judea had not yet become a martyr church as such. They might expect still worse conditions for them to endure. (Kretzmann)

12:5–6 Luther: “If so many judgments, pains, deaths, martyrdoms, crosses, swords, fires, and beasts, with which the saints are chastised, are fatherly rods and loving chastisements, what will be the wrath of the Judge over the ungodly?... And if His judgment begins at the house of God, what will be the end of those who do not believe the Gospel?” (AE 11:467–68). (TLSB)

2:5 *the Lord’s discipline*. Suffering and persecution should be seen as corrective and instructive training for our spiritual development as his children. (CSB)

Another thought is here in for the consideration of the readers: And you have altogether forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons, My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, nor faint when being corrected by Him; for whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and scourges every son whom He receives. The Christians are here reminded that their sufferings are tokens of God’s fatherly love and care. They must never forget the exhortation and comfort which is contained in the words of the Lord, Prov. 3, 11. 12. These words are addressed to sons, to children, and that in itself is a distinction, to be called sons of God. The believers should not make light of, should not despise, the discipline of the Lord, His entire method of training and educating His children, particularly through the necessary chastising. There must be no fainting, no despondency, no failure of faith when He reproves by word or deed. (Kretzmann)

12:6 *discipline*. The Greek for this verb means “to whip.” God chastens us in order to correct our faults. (CSB)

For it is necessary that all the children of God be subjected to the same discipline; it is a token of God’s love, a treatment which He accords only to such as He receives into His heart and cherishes with all the wonderful love of His fatherly mercy. (Kretzmann)

12:7 *treating you as sons*. God’s discipline is evidence that we are his children. Far from being a reason for despair, discipline is a basis for encouragement and perseverance (v. 10). (CSB)

The author now presents his conclusion: It is for discipline that you are enduring, as sons God is dealing with you. For what son is there whom the father does not discipline? (Kretzmann)

Suffering actually proves their discipleship. (TLSB)

12:8 *illegitimate children* – But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then are you bastards and not sons. This is the view which the believers should hold: their sufferings are evidence that God considers them His sons and treats them as such; they need such training in order that their sonship may be maintained. In fact, if there were a child in the house and the father would not take his chastening, disciplining, into his hand, a person might draw the inference that such a child is not a genuine son, but a bastard, one that is not accorded the same treatment as the true sons. In the same way believers, far from resenting the disciplining which God lays upon them, should rather be thankful for this evidence of their heavenly Father’s regard and interest. (Kretzmann)

Born out of wedlock or to a slave. Cf Gal 4:21–31. (TLSB)

12:9 *Father of spirits* – Another consideration of the argument is here introduced: Further, fathers of our flesh we had to discipline us, and we gave them reverence; should we not much rather subject ourselves to the Father of spirits and live? The conclusion is from the smaller to the greater. We Christians, with the average run of humanity, had human fathers, parents of our own flesh and blood, who had charge of our training, including the necessary chastening, which cannot be omitted without disastrous results. To these fathers we gave honor and respect according to the Fourth Commandment. But if we did so much for our earthly fathers, who were, after all, merely human, does it not follow that our attitude toward the heavenly Father, the Father of spirits, whom we worship, with whom we come in contact, in the spirit, should be one of cheerful and obedient subjection? For in doing so, aside from the fact that the duty seems so obvious, this obedient relation toward God, flowing out of faith as it does, gives us the true spiritual life. (Kretzmann)

God is a Father to the souls of those who are baptized (Rm 8:15; 1Co 12:13). Cf Nu 27:16; Jn 3:6; Rv 22:6. (TLSB)

12:10 *disciplines us for our good*. Luther: “It seems to us as though we were forsaken by God on the cross, but precisely then we are loved and cared for most” (AE 12:296). Cf Rm 8:28. (TLSB)

share His holiness. Through hardship, the Holy Spirit quenches lust and kills the flesh, to prepare us for eternal life (Rm 8:18–27). Cf Heb 12:14; 1Pt 4:1–2; see SC, Baptism, Part 4, p xl. (TLSB)

That this thought is altogether reasonable, and should appeal to all readers at once, the author now shows: For they, indeed, for a few days disciplined us as it seemed best to them, but He for our advantage, that we may be partakers of His holiness. The truth of the comparison is obvious. The earthly fathers had charge of our training for only a short while, during the short period of childhood and youth, and the training which they gave during this time was certainly done in accordance with the ideals which they had set before them, subject nevertheless, however, to mistakes, especially as to the means employed and the degrees of severity used in various instances. But the discipline of God is without fail, always to our advantage; He never makes a mistake in the kind and in the amount of suffering which He has us endure. For it is by this training that we are brought to that degree of holiness which He desires us to possess. His chastening constantly reminds us of the duty which we owe Him, and we are thus trained in His discipleship more and more. (Kretzmann)

12:11 *it yields the peaceful fruit righteousness*. When received submissively (see v. 9), discipline is wholesome and beneficial. (CSB)

A peaceful conscience and righteous heart. (TLSB)

The author here answers an objection which some reader may make: All discipline, indeed, seems for the time to be not joy, but grief; but afterwards it yields, to those that are disciplined by it, the peaceable fruit of righteousness. The writer has throughout spoken of God’s discipline in a most enthusiastic strain, and his ardor is not dampened by the objection which will tend to arise, at least in the hearts of such as are still weak in faith, that suffering of all kinds is a most unpleasant experience. That, indeed, is true: while the discipline lasts, while God permits the suffering to strike us, it certainly is a matter of pain and not of joy. But without training, correction, wholesome restraint, strict regulations, and an occasional punishment the aim of God cannot be accomplished with regard to His children. It is therefore solely in our interest that He uses this method. The result invariably is that those who are exercised and trained by it will be able to bear such peaceable fruit of righteousness as is well-pleasing to the heavenly Father. It is through this training of the Lord that our faith is rendered pure, true, precious, that we ourselves are

thoroughly prepared, strengthened, founded unto eternal salvation, 1 Pet. 1, 6-9; 5, 10; Rom. 8, 25; 5, 3-5. (Kretzmann)

12:12 *drooping hands* – This being true, the appeal may be made with full force: Wherefore lift up the listless hands and the paralyzed knees, and make the paths straight for your feet to walk in, that the lame be not turned out of the way, but rather be healed. Listless, nerveless hands and weak, paralyzed knees are not the members which should be found in true Christians, Is. 35, 3. Knowing that the Lord always has thoughts of peace with regard to them, they can rely upon His promise, which He will keep without fail, Is. 40, 29-31. (Kretzmann)

12:13 *Make straight paths*. A call for upright conduct that will help, rather than hinder, the spiritual and moral welfare of others, especially the “lame” who waver in the Christian faith. (CSB)

Instead of walking with unsteady feet, as under the weight of a heavy load, which tends to bear him down to the ground, every Christian should let his feet go straight before him along the path of sanctification as prepared by Christ, swerving neither to the right nor to the left, Prov. 4, 26. 27; Is. 30, 21. If this is the case, then also the lame and limping, those Christian brothers that are still weak in the faith, will not be discouraged and turned quite out of the way, but will be given an opportunity of being healed of their spiritual infirmity. If the stronger believers are always firm and steadfast in all matters pertaining to sanctification and the discipleship of Christ, then their example will serve as an aid to the weaker brethren, causing them to follow the Master without doubt and without flinching until they reach the goal above, Is. 35, 5. 6. (Kretzmann)

not be put out of joint. Just as a sprained ankle must be protected, discouraged Christians must be cared for and protected by their fellow believers. (TLSB)

12:14 *strive for peace* – The passage in Proverbs, to which the author has just referred, Prov. 4, 26. 27, the author now takes another thought, namely, that of maintaining peaceful relations with others: Follow peace with all and holiness, without which no one shall see the Lord. It seems that the characteristics of the Hebrews made them impatient of weakness, a feeling which might easily bring on alienation and lead to quarrels. But God wants His Church to be built up in peace, Rom. 12, 18; 2 Tim. 2, 22, a peace based upon the unity of faith and making for holiness in general, for true consecration to the Lord and His cause, Eph. 5, 5; Matt. 5, 8. (Kretzmann)

Do not wait for peace. Actively seek it, without compromising confession of the truth (cf Zec 8:16–19). (TLSB)

holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Cf. 1Pe 1:15–16; 1Jn 3:2–3. (CSB)

Through Christ’s sacrifice, Christians are already considered “holy” in God’s sight (Heb 3:1). Just as Christians will actually be holy in heaven, they should strive to become holy on earth.

see the Lord. Seeing God face-to-face and enjoying His gracious presence (1Co 13:12; 1Jn 3:2–3; cf 1Co 6:9–11). (TLSB)

Sanctification grows out of faith from the same seed, the Word of God, and without this holiness it is impossible to see the Lord, to be accepted by Him as His child. Only he that has accepted the vicarious sacrifice of Christ in such a spirit as to make him a partaker of the mind which lived in Christ will finally stand in the presence of the Lord and see Him face to face. (Kretzmann)

12:15 *fails to obtain the grace of God.* † “Falls short of ” or “fails to lay hold of ” God’s grace. Such a possibility is described in 2:1–4; 6:4–8. (CSB)

By delaying repentance. Cf Mt 25:1–13. (TLSB)

This is not a matter to be taken lightly, for the author continues: Watching lest any man fall short of the grace of God, lest some root of bitterness growing anew trouble you and thereby many be defiled. Christians must ever be on the alert, always watch carefully, lest one of their number fall away from the grace of God. (Kretzmann)

root of bitterness. Pride, animosity, rivalry or anything else harmful to others. (CSB)

Someone who brings forth the evil fruit of false doctrine or of godless living. (TLSB)

The danger is always there that the one or the other may turn aside to some sin. But the believers should always be a closed company, held closely together by their faith and fellowship in Christ. That one of their number should turn aside, should miss the grace of God, must be a matter of grave concern to them all. And as they thus keep to the path together, they also guard against such pollution, such defilement, as follows the springing up in their midst of roots of bitterness. The words at this place are borrowed from Deut. 29, 18. The introduction of evil, sinful practices in their midst would be much like that of a poisonous root and plant, through whose pollution they would not only be troubled, but through which they would also be rendered unfit to approach to God and to enter into fellowship with Him. Cp. Gal. 5, 9. (Kretzmann)

12:16 *sexually immoral.* Or, “a fornicator.” (TLSB)

unholy like Esau. See Ge 25:29–34. He had no appreciation for true values and was profane in his outlook on life (cf. Php 3:18–19). He “despised his birthright” (Ge 25:34) by valuing food for his stomach more highly than his birthright. (CSB)

He was “unholy” or profane, cut off from divine things. (TLSB)

12:17 *he was rejected.* Because he only regretted his loss, and did not repent of his sin (Ge 27, especially v. 41). His sorrow was not “godly sorrow” that “brings repentance that leads to salvation,” but “worldly sorrow” that “brings death” (2Co 7:10). (CSB)

In just what way this might happen the author now states: Lest there be any fornicator or a profane person, like Esau, who for a single meal sold his birthright; for you know that afterward, though he wished to inherit the blessing, he was repudiated, for he found no room for a change of mind (in his father), although he sought it earnestly with tears. Here are examples of the bitter roots, of the poisonous plants of sin and evil, as they may spring up in a Christian congregation. There may be some one that will be overcome and stricken down by the sin of fornication, against the Sixth Commandment. Or some person may be tempted and fall into the sin of profaning such things as are sacred in the eyes of God. (Kretzmann)

the blessing. Of the firstborn. The readers were thinking of compromising their faith in order to gain relief from persecution. But to trade their spiritual birthright for temporary ease in this world would deprive them of Christ’s blessing. (CSB)

When the rich feast of God’s grace and mercy is spread in the same congregation for one or two generations, there is always danger that some one may become surfeited and barter away his salvation for

the enjoyment of sin for a season. That was the sin of Esau, who considered the right of the first-born, though it included the fact that the first-born was also the bearer of the Messianic blessing, so lightly that he sold his birthright for a single meal, for a mess of pottage, Gen. 25, 29-34. His case illustrates the danger of missed or rejected opportunities. (Kretzmann)

no chance to repent. Luth: “It is clear how the passage in Heb. 12:16–17 is to be understood.... God, who does not deceive or lie, has offered His mercy to all men who truly repent; and repentance for sin always finds room before God.... But there is another repentance that is ... false ... namely, when I repent in such a way that I am not ashamed of having offended God but am ashamed because I have done harm to myself” (AE 5:151–52). (TLSB)

with tears. See Ge 27:34–38. (CSB)

For when Esau afterwards made an attempt to get the blessing of the first-born for himself, he did not succeed, Gen. 27, 30-40. He made a very serious effort to get the blessing which had been given to Jacob for himself, beseeching his father with tears to change his mind. But Isaac remained firm; he realized that it was the will of God that Jacob should have the blessing of the first-born and the Messianic promise and therefore refused to change his decision. (Kretzmann)

12:3–17 God sees you as holy through Christ’s sacrifice and disciplines you to struggle against sin. The unpleasant discipline shows that the Lord loves you as a true child. Put your faith into practice by encouraging others and by doing works of service. The Lord is ever serving you, granting repentance, taking away your sins, and equipping you for a godly life. • Heavenly Father, share with me Your holiness, and let me see You face-to-face eternally. Amen. (TLSB)

A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken

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. 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, “I tremble with fear.” 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, 23 and to the assembly[a] 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, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. 25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. 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.” 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.

12:18–21 These verses describe the awesome occasion when the law was given at Mount Sinai (see Ex 19:10–25; Dt 4:11–12; 5:22–26), a description focusing on the old covenant’s tangible mountain, ordinances, terrifying warnings and severe penalties. Believers in Jesus Christ do not have such a threatening covenant, and should not consider returning to it. (CSB)

Describes the institution of old covenant services on Mount Sinai. This is contrasted with the institution of new covenant worship on Mount Zion (vv 22–24). Cf Lk 22:20. (TLSB)

12:18 *what may be touched* – Sinai was “touchable” in that it was geographically located. Zion is sacramentally located, that is, wherever the Lord’s people gather around the Word and Sacraments. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

The earthly Mount Sinai. (TLSB)

Here is another reason for the entire appeal and warning as contained in this chapter, namely, the fact that grace is the compelling motive in the Christian’s life, and not fear: For you have not approached to the mountain that can be touched and burns with fire, to darkness and gloom and hurricane, and to the sound of a trumpet and to a voice sounding in words, which they that heard earnestly begged that further speech might not be added to them. The reference is evidently to the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, Ex. 19; Deut. 4. That was a solemn, a fearful occasion, for the mountain itself was burning with fire, Deut. 4, 11, and yet the rest of the country in the neighborhood was covered with a misty gloom, with a heavy darkness, while a stormwind having the proportions of a hurricane made every heart quake, Deut. 4, 11; 5, 22. (Kretzmann)

12:19 *sound of a trumpet* – To this fearsome scene was added the sound of a trumpet, in itself calculated to make even a stout heart shrink under such conditions, Ex. 19, 16. 19; 20, 18, and then the voice of words which were spoken from the top of the mountain, Ex. 20; Deut. 5, 4-22. No wonder that the children of Israel were filled with such terror that they earnestly entreated and begged Moses to arrange in some way that this fearful voice might not sound for them any more, Ex. 20, 18. 19; Deut. 5, 23-27. The very enumeration of the various phenomena gives some idea of the terrifying character of the spectacle. (Kretzmann)

voice. God proclaiming His Law. Cf Ex 19:5. (TLSB)

no further messages. Unable to bear God’s messages directly, they wanted Moses to be their mediator. (TLSB)

12:20 *they could not endure* – Though Mt. Sinai was touchable, it was not to be approached by either man or beast under penalty of death (Ex. 19:12-13) until the long blast of the trumpet signaled the proper time. In the same was, the Most Holy Place could not be entered except by the High Priest, and just once a year (Heb. 9:7; Lev. 16:2). Sinful man may approach the holy God only on God’s terms. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

The penalty for profaning God’s holiness was death, the penalty coming to them if they disobeyed God’s Law. See note, Rm 6:23. (TLSB)

12:21 *tremble with fear* – How great the terror of the people was, is indicated in the following verses: For they could not bear that which had been ordered, If even a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, Ex. 19, 12. 13. It was a day when all hearts quaked with a fear that could not be quieted, since all nature seemed in an uproar, and the Lord Himself appeared to be their threatening enemy. So inexpressibly great was the glory and majesty of God on Mount Sinai that Moses, upon returning from the presence of God with the two tables of the Law, and finding that the people had so far forgotten themselves as to become guilty of the basest idolatry, was terrified by the very thought of God’s possible revenge upon them, and cried out: I am extremely afraid and tremble, Deut. 9, 9. 15-19. That is a picture which properly characterizes the Law with its terrible threats and curses of damnation. (Kretzmann)

Not a direct quote from the Books of Moses, but the thought can be deduced from Ex 19:19; Dt 9:19. (TLSB)

12:22–24 Describes unseen riches in Christ viewed by faith. (TLSB)

12:22 *Mount Zion*. Not the literal Mount Zion (Jerusalem, or its southeast portion), but the heavenly city of God and those who dwell there with him (see 11:10, 13–16; 13:14; Php 3:20). The circumstances under which the old covenant was given (vv. 18–21) and the features of the new covenant (vv. 22–24) point up the utter contrast between the two covenants, and lay the foundation for one more warning and exhortation to those still thinking of going back to Judaism. (CSB)

The Church, where God is graciously present in Gospel and Sacraments. Cf Gal 4:21–31; Ps 48. (TLSB)

you have come – proselaluthate – You have approached. It is perfect tense, denoting past action whose effect extends to the present time. This mountain is a present reality for the believer, not just “pie in the sky, by and by.” It is “heavenly Jerusalem” come down to us here and now, “our mother” (Rev. 21:2; Gal. 4:26), the church “that begets and bears every Christian through the Word.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

heavenly Jerusalem. Both the Church Militant on earth and the Church Triumphant in heaven. (TLSB)

innumerable angels. See Rev 5:11–12. (CSB)

Fortunate are the Christians that they are no longer under the Law, the very giving of which struck abject terror into the hearts of a whole nation: But you have drawn near to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and Church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the perfected righteous, and to the Mediator of a new covenant, Jesus, and to the blood of sprinkling, whose message is more excellent than Abel’s. The contrast between the old and the new covenant is brought out by every expression. For the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, is not an earthly, visible mountain, but a fellowship of saints, whose excellence can be but feebly indicated by attributes of human speech. Because David, the forefather of Christ, lived on Mount Zion and in the city of Jerusalem, and because the salvation of the Messiah was to take its beginning from this neighborhood, therefore the congregation and communion of saints, where God lives with His salvation in Christ, is commonly called Mount Zion, the city of God, in the prophecies, Ps. 9, 11; 76, 2; 110, 2; Is. 2, 2. 3; Micah 4, 1. 2. The ideal Zion is the place where God manifests His presence, the fullness of His grace in Christ. (Kretzmann)

festal gathering. Term used occasionally for Israel’s festivals. (TLSB)

12:23 *assembly*. Or, “congregation” (the Church). (TLSB)

the assembly of the firstborn. Believers in general who make up the church: (1) They cannot be angels since these have just been mentioned (v. 22); (2) “firstborn” cannot refer to Christ (though he is called firstborn, 1:6; Ro 8:29; Col 1:15–18; Rev 1:5), since here the Greek word is plural; (3) that their names are recorded in heaven reminds us of the redeemed (see Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 21:27). The designation “firstborn” suggests their privileged position as heirs together with Christ, the supreme firstborn and “heir of all things” (Heb 1:2). (CSB)

Because they are adopted into Christ (Col 1:18; cf Heb 11:28) and receive a special inheritance. (TLSB)

Zion is the place where the church of the firstborn is gathered, “the saved community of the NT.” Christ is the firstborn of God (Heb 1:6), of all creation (Col 1:15), and from the dead (Col 1:18; Rev. 1:5). He is the firstborn of many brothers (Rom 8:29). “Firstborn” denotes both inheritance and election in grace.

As the firstborn in the Passover were spared death by the blood of the lamb (Heb 11:28), so believers are saved by the blood of Christ (Rev. 7:14). The firstborn are not yet in heaven, but their names are enrolled there in the heavenly book of life (Lk 10:20; Rev 13:8) (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

God, the judge of all men. See 4:13; Ro 14:10–12; 1Co 3:10–15; 2Co 5:10; Rev 20:11–15. (CSB)

spirits of righteous men made perfect.† For the most part, these were pre-Christian believers such as Abel (11:4) and Noah (11:7). They are referred to as “spirits” because they are waiting for the resurrection and as “righteous” because God credited their faith to them as righteousness, as he did to Abraham (see Ro 4:3). (CSB)

Souls of departed Christians are with Christ in heaven. Although believers here do not communicate with the blessed dead (cf Is 63:16), the Church Militant on earth is bound together with the Church Triumphant in heaven as one Body of Christ (Rm 12:5). (TLSB)

It is the heavenly Jerusalem, since it is not earthly and made with hands, and yet will be the final abode of all believers, Gal. 4, 26. God has His home, the throne of His mercy, in the midst of His Church, Rev. 14, 1; 21, 2; 1 Cor. 3, 16; 2 Cor. 6, 16. Into this communion the believers have entered. They are thus united with many thousands of angels in a fellowship of bliss, heaven and earth being united through the coming of Christ, Col. 1, 20; Eph. 1, 10. We belong, by faith, to the great festival assembly, to the congregation of God’s first-born children, those that have been converted to faith in the foremost First-born, the eternal Son of God. We have come to God, the Judge of all men, and are able to stand before Him in trusting confidence by virtue of the justifying faith which has been kindled in our hearts through the Gospel. We are even one great congregation with the spirits of the saints that have reached the final perfection, the last goal, the bliss of heaven, Luke 23, 43; 2 Cor. 5, 8; Phil. 1, 23. (Kretzmann)

12:24 *mediator of a new covenant.* Jesus is present for us esp through His body and blood (cf Lk 22:20). (TLSB)

All this, however, is possible because we have come to the great Mediator of the New Testament, to Jesus, who restored mankind to the original relation of children to the heavenly Father, through His own holy, innocent blood, with which we have been sprinkled in faith. The blood of Abel may indeed act as a witness and as such have value for this life, chap. 11, 4. But the blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed us from all sins, and therefore pleads before God with a voice so loud and persuasive that it secures perfect righteousness for us. Thus the inspired writer brings home to us the fact that we have come to the pleasant, merciful, saving Gospel. What a glorious privilege! (Kretzmann)

sprinkled blood – The two other NT passages that speak of blood and the new covenant refer clearly to the Lord’s Supper (Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25). Cf Heb 10:25; 12:28; 13:9–16. (TLSB)

aimati rantismou – Literally, “to blood of sprinkling,” Ex. 24:8; Heb 9:18-21. Blood was shed for the atonement of sin (Lev 17:11; Mt. 26:28). In the old covenant the blood was sprinkled on the altar to appease God (Ex 24:6; Lev 16:14-19), and sprinkled on people to bring them into the covenant; therefore it was called “the blood of the covenant” (ex 24:8). Jesus draws on this language when he says, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26:28). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

“Sprinkling” also relates to baptismal terminology (Heb 10:22; 9:18-21; 10:29; 13:20; 1 Pet 1:2). Under the old covenant, the blood of the red heifer was sprinkled toward the ark, and its ashes were used in “the water of cleansing; it is for purification from sin” (Num 19:9). This water was sprinkled on the people to purify them from various kinds of uncleanness (Num 19:11-22). In the new covenant Holy

Baptism is the “washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” Titus 3:5). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

“Sprinkling” also relates to the Word of the Gospel, whose proclamation sprinkles us with the blood of Christ (Apology 24:38). Christ’s sprinkled blood proclaims “a better word than the blood of Abel.” Abel’s blood demanded expiation and justice (Gen 4:10); Christ’s blood makes atonement and justifies (Heb 9:11-22; 1 Pet 1:2; 1 Jn 1:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 5, Part 3)

a better word than the blood of Abel. Abel’s blood cried out for justice and retribution (see note on Ge 4:10), whereas the blood of Jesus shed on the cross speaks of forgiveness and reconciliation (9:12; 10:19; Col 1:20; 1Jn 1:7). (CSB)

“Abel’s blood for vengeance Pleaded to the skies; But the blood of Jesus For our pardon cries” (LSB 433:4). (TLSB)

12:25 *who is speaking.* God. (CSB)

Christ, who speaks through the Gospel and through the preaching of His servants. (TLSB)

warned them on earth. At Sinai. (CSB)

The Son of God, who revealed the Law on Mount Sinai and spoke to Israel through Moses. (TLSB)

him who warns us from heaven. Christ, who is both from and in heaven (1:1–3; 4:14; 6:20; 7:26; 9:24). Since we have greater revelation, we have greater responsibility and therefore greater danger (2:2–4). (CSB)

Christ, the Word, who revealed the Gospel on Mount Zion and still speaks through the apostles and prophets (Lk 10:16). (TLSB)

On the basis of the truths brought out in the last paragraph, of the fact that the Gospel with the fullness of God’s mercy in Christ is now preached to the world and has been given to the believers, the author launches into a final appeal: See to it that you do not try to turn from Him that speaks; for if those people did not escape who turned from Him that was uttering His oracles on earth, much less shall we, if we repudiate Him who speaks from heaven. This is a most solemn admonition, bidding the Christians by all means to heed the voice of the Lord, who is now speaking to us through His Son, through the Gospel. For if in the Old Testament they that refused to hear the Word of the Lord which He spoke here on earth, the Word of the Law, did not escape punishment, then there will be no chance whatever for the person who now, when the riches of God’s mercy are offered without stint and without condition, should refuse to hear His kind invitation. It cannot be emphasized too often or too strongly that the one sin which really condemns to everlasting damnation at the present time is the sin of unbelief, which turns from the Lord’s outstretched hand of mercy and refuses the gift of His love. (Kretzmann)

12:26-29 The predominate word in this text is “shake,” the translation of two different Greek words (forms of *saleuō* vv 26a; twice, in 27; 28; and *seiō* in v 26b). The first word (*saleuō*) is also used in Matt 11:7; 21:10; Acts 4:31; 17:13; 2 Thess 2:2. In Hebrews and Revelation the shaking of the earth refers to the last times. To be able to shake something is an indication of its tenuous makeup and its vulnerability (Heb 12:27). The present creation, tainted with sin, will be shaken and will pass away at Christ’s return. But the kingdom of God cannot and will not be shaken, and will remain (Heb 12:27–28). Jesus told the parable of the house built on rock which was not shaken (*saleuō*) by the flood, representing the person

who hears Jesus' words and acts accordingly (Luke 6:47–48). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

What is the relationship between the present heavens and earth and the new? Some passages describe the present creation as being destroyed at Christ's Second Advent (Matt 24:29; Heb 1:11; 2 Pet 3:12–13). However, other passages speak of the present order being purified and liberated from bondage to sin (Is 65:17–25; 66:22–23; Rom 8:20–21; Heb 1:12). Like our resurrection bodies, which will be our same physical bodies but dramatically changed, the new will be both similar to and different from the present creation. (See A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979] pp. 274–87.) (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

12:26 *At that time.* When the Law was first given. (TLSB)

shook the earth. See Ex 19:18; Jdg 5:5; Ps 68:7–8. (CSB)

Earthquake. (TLSB)

“At that time his voice shook the earth” refers to Exod 19:18. Mt. Sinai was covered with smoke when the Lord descended on it in fire; hence v 29, “for our God is a consuming fire.” The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. Our verse quotes Haggai, who prophesied, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land’” (2:6). Cf. Heb 1:10–12, which quotes Ps 102:25–27: “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Every time we hear of or experience an earthquake it is an experiential reminder to us that Christ is returning, and in every age it is proper for Christians to think of his return as being soon (Matt 24:29; 2 Peter 3:10–13). You will notice that our verse speaks of the second and final shaking as one of God's unfailing *promises*—for believers, the end of the world is a doctrine of comfort (Gospel), not terror (Law). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

I will shake - salyoo – To agitate and rock so much that you topple something. This is the type of shaking that took place at Sinai, only this will happen near the end of the earth. In his everlasting desire to save all people God uses this “shaking” to wake up as many as possible so that they may turn to him.

Haggai 2:6 ““This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land.’”

Every believer should remember: Then His voice shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. When the Lord gave His Law from Mount Sinai, the ground was shaken by mighty earthquakes, Ex. 19, 18. But that was as nothing beside another manifestation of His power which He has promised for the time of the New Testament, saying that He would shake heaven and, earth once more, Hag. 2, 7. Cp. Is. 64, 1-3; Micah 7, 15; Hag. 2 22. 23. For, as the author says: That word “once more” indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken as of things that have been made, in order that those things which are not shaken may remain. Only once more does God intend to reveal Himself before the world in the splendor of His almighty majesty, on the last

day of the world. On that day, when God will shake the foundations of earth and heaven, all created things will be removed, will pass away in the form which they had for this present world. Then will only that which is not shaken, namely, the kingdom of Christ, the inheritance of the Christians, abide in all eternity, 1 Pet. 1, 4; Luke 1, 33; Is. 65, 17-19; 2 Pet. 3, 13; Rev. 21, 1-5. (Kretzmann)

12:27 *once more.* † At the second advent of Christ. (CSB)

The created world, set to pass away. (TLSB)

that cannot be shaken. The kingdom (v. 28). (CSB)

God Himself, His gifts, and the people He has joined to Himself by grace. (TLSB)

The contrast is made between what perishes (the heavens and the earth) and that which never perishes, God and his kingdom. Cf. Heb 13:8, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever,” and Is 66:22, which indicates that the new heaven and the new earth will never be shaken. Note also John’s description of the new heavens and earth in Rev 21:1–5, and Heb 11:10, which say that this new city is designed and built by God. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

This being true, that the perishable things of this world must pass away: Wherefore we, receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by means of which we may acceptably serve God, with reverence and fear; for indeed our God is a consuming fire. Ours is an immovable kingdom, the kingdom of His grace and glory; in it we shall reign with Him as kings, Rev. 1, 6. By virtue of our membership in this glorious communion, the festival assembly of all angels and saints, we are assured of the grace, of the merciful love of God in Christ Jesus. In possession of this grace we can serve God in the proper manner, as it is well-pleasing to Him, with devout reverence and fear, Col. 1, 12. (Kretzmann)

12:28 *let us be grateful* – Let us is echo which means to have the ability to have. The word for thankful is *karis* which means a favor bestowed on someone without that person having earned any part of it. Since it is undeserved, it most assuredly brings about an attitude of thankfulness. For Christians this can well be expressed in our worship.

a kingdom that cannot be shaken. The kingdom of heaven. (TLSB)

God acceptabl worship. See Jn 4:19–24; Ro 12:1. (CSB)

Possible only through grace in Christ, directed only to the triune God, and conducted with respectful wonder. (TLSB)

This verse highlights the proper energizer for true worship of God: gratitude for God’s grace in our Savior, Jesus Christ. Not only will we enter this permanent kingdom some day, but we are now members of this kingdom. We recognize that through his fiery presence God is able to destroy not only heaven and earth, but also us poor sinners. Therefore, we approach him with “reverence and awe,” the latter word having a strong connotation of fear (cf. Prov 1:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

with reverence and awe. Not frivolous, nonchalant, or trivial. God’s presence calls for serious hearing, genuine repentance, and extraordinary joy. Cf Ps 2:12. (TLSB)

12:29 *God is a consuming fire* – God destroys whatever is useless and contrary to Himself. Cf 10:27. (TLSB)

katalisko – To consume in such a way as to leave absolutely nothing behind. This scary scenario is not meant to drive people away but to draw them to the Lord and be yet one more opportunity for them to repent. Jesus never stopped reaching out the Judas or the Jewish leaders.

In Scripture, the fire of God can be either Law or Gospel. As a Gospel fire, God generally does not consume, but instead refines and purifies his people (Mal 3:2–4). Ex 3:2 says the bush did not burn up when God appeared to Moses to begin the salvation of the Israelites. Likewise, the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit did not burn the Christians on Pentecost (Acts 2:3). (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

But as Law, the fire of God consumes unbelievers as chaff or dross in judgment (Gen 19:24; Matt 1:10, 12). Our verse describes God as a consuming fire, implying judgment on the last day for those outside the kingdom. This fact, coupled with the Gospel (v 28), leads to our worship in “reverence and awe.” The fear of God produced by the Law is still necessary for believers in this life because we are *simul justus et peccator*. (Concordia Pulpit Resources - Volume 1, Part 4)

Deuteronomy 4:24 “For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.”

And let no man forget that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for our God is a God whose wrath is a consuming fire, Deut. 4, 24, upon all those that reject His mercy and repudiate the remission of sins in Christ Jesus. Thus the author lays upon all believers the greatest obligation to live a godly life and not to let the saving faith in Jesus leave their hearts. (Kretzmann)

12:18–29 The Son of God’s speaking and presence are the center of worship. When God the Son spoke the Law, His people were terrified. But His sprinkled blood speaks better things to us: forgiveness, life, and salvation. • Lord Jesus Christ, sprinkle us with Your blood and fill us with Your Spirit, that through. (TLSB)